

**Creating Space, or Just Juggling?**

**Exploring the Adoption of Innovation in Community Sport**

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## Abstract

Previous research into community sport organization (CSO) has focused heavily on capacity and resource deficits and the ways in which CSOs manage under these constraints. This study explores mechanisms influencing CSOs as they adopt and implement an innovation: Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD). A critical realist, extensive-intensive design spanning 36 months was used. The first, extensive phase of the study examines the contextual mechanisms influencing the approach of CSOs to adopting the LTAD innovation. Resource dependence and institutional perspectives are integrated to describe the forces acting on CSOs, how these manifest in structures, and how the structures channel the agency of CSO leaders as they work to balance resources and deliver programs. A contextual model of CSO operation under conflicting institutional logics is presented. The second, intensive phase examines the question of how CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation. Here, an engaged case study methodology was used to focus on the efforts of a single CSO over a one-year period as it worked to implement LTAD while managing multiple resource constraints. A learning cycle was used to explore processes of embedded agency resulting in structural change.

CSOs are conceptualized as juggling resource constraints while balancing conflicting institutional logics: the communitarian logic promoted by resource controllers such as municipalities and Provincial Sport Organizations, and the individualist logic followed by CSO members. The results of the study demonstrate how CSOs compete for resources while balancing these institutional pressures and how when possible, CSOs manipulate institutional factors to gain legitimacy and contingent access to resources. In

this competitive environment, LTAD represents a new institutional pressure. CSOs determine whether to adopt LTAD in part based on whether resource controllers signal that compliance will bring legitimacy and enhance resource access. When resource-controlling organizations introduce standards like LTAD intended to improve CSO program quality, the unintended result can be inter-CSO competition for legitimacy that can lead to the systematic privileging of large CSOs at the expense of smaller ones, driving professionalization and potentially increasing costs of sport participation.

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*Explicit hoc totem;  
Pro Christo da mihi potum.*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CR</b>	Critical Realist (or Realism)
<b>CSO</b>	Community Sport Organization
<b>CS4L</b>	Canadian Sport for Life
<b>EYL</b>	Elite Youth League (of PSO3)
<b>IOR</b>	Inter-Organizational Relations
<b>LTAD</b>	Long-Term Athlete Development
<b>MYSC</b>	Millpond Youth Soccer Club
<b>NSO</b>	National Sport Organization
<b>PSO</b>	Provincial Sport Organization
<b>RDT</b>	Resource Dependence Theory

## Chapter 1 – Introduction and Overview

*"Think quickly, look for spaces. That's what I do: look for spaces. All day. I'm always looking. All day, all day. [Xavi starts gesturing as if he is looking around, swinging his head]. Here? No. There? No. People who haven't played don't always realise how hard that is. Space, space, space. It's like being on the PlayStation. I think shit, the defender's here, play it there. I see the space and pass. That's what I do."*

I'm a romantic, says Xavi, heartbeat of Barcelona and Spain. Sid Lowe, *The Guardian*, Feb 11, 2011.

In team games like basketball, hockey and soccer, where the object is to score on an opponent's goal while defending one's own, maintaining possession of the ball or puck is a primary strategy. Only by maintaining possession, usually through a series of passes, can a team build an attack. Rather than winning a series of one-on-one encounters to maintain possession, players on a proficient team are continually finding "open" teammates positioned to receive a pass, a process which demands players anticipate the movements of defenders and constantly, often deceptively, move to where the defenders are not. In soccer, this method of constant anticipation and movement to open positions is called "creating space".

Entire systems of play are built around this strategy: a notable example in soccer is "total football" used by the Dutch to dominate successive European Championships and reach the finals of the 1974 World Cup. Total football was a repudiation of the previously dominant Italian defensive system of "catenaccio" or "trap" play. In total football, players are in constant motion, drifting in and out of assigned positions, overlapping and passing to maintain possession and build up the attack. Adoption of the

total football style required a rethinking of the entire game, a willingness to give players freedom to leave fixed positions and innovate, and the development of players equally proficient in offensive and defensive play. In its time, total football was a revolutionary transformation of the game.

In contrast is the soccer pastime of juggling, or playing "keep up" with the ball. This is not a central tactic of the game, although players do use it from time to time in game situations. Juggling consists of standing more or less still while keeping the ball off the ground, bouncing it alternately off the toes, instep, ankle, knee and sometimes the head and chest as well. While juggling builds coordination and control and can be used to handle a difficult pass or fool a defender, it is primarily a pastime: a training activity, and sometimes a means of friendly competition to see how long one can control the ball. The ability to juggle the ball is admired, but juggling has not been and is unlikely to become the basis of an entire system of play. In soccer, creating space is essential, juggling relatively trivial.

Creating space and juggling are metaphors for committed action or wasted motion. Innovation requires ingenuity as well as investment of human and financial resources (Walker, Schlosser, & Deephouse, 2014). Organization leaders must become aware of and understand the innovation, and crucially, must figure out how to deploy it in their particular context. Deployment may entail education and training of coaches and other leaders, communication and promotion to organization members, modification of equipment or reconfiguring of facilities, the rescheduling of activities or reconfiguration of teams, and other activities, all of which cost time and money. To commit to such a process requires the organization to create space: to find a way to put off or put down

other activities, to free up scarce resources, to find time to understand, discuss, debate, plan and evaluate. The alternative is to “juggle” - to delay, to rationalize inaction by fabricating excuses, simulating action, making empty claims or, perhaps, to be so occupied by events that creating space is impossible. The “juggling” organization may try to appear innovative without being so, take up a position of active opposition to the innovation or simply refuse to make the attempt. Confronted with an innovation, leaders must choose to adopt, reject, or delay; to create space, or to juggle.

Canada's CSOs are currently at such a decision point with regard to an innovation called Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD), now integrated into Canadian sport policy (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012). LTAD is an athlete development system with implications for all Canadian sports at all levels of organization; governments and national sport organizations (NSOs) have positioned it as a new paradigm for sport delivery (Norris, 2010). As sport organizations of all levels - national, provincial/territorial and community- have worked for up to ten years on the introduction and integration of LTAD principles and programs it has become clear that some organizations are working authentically to integrate this new way of delivering sport programs- they are creating space- while others are juggling. Why?

This research study was driven by the following overarching research interest: *Why do community sport organizations adopt, and how do they implement, an innovation?* Following a critical realist approach (Edwards, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2014; Sayer 1992), it was necessary to understand the structural context for change to answer a first research question (RQ1): *How do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?* Then, using an intensive case study methodology, the

interplay of structure and agency were explored in an individual CSO, addressing a second research question (RQ2): *How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?*

### **Community Sport Organizations in Canada: A Quality Sport Dilemma**

CSOs, which include sport clubs and leagues, are non-profit volunteer-led organizations that exist to organize sport programs for their members (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Community sport is valued by many as a venue for healthy physical activity, social development, particularly among children and youth, and active citizenship through volunteering (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Nagel, 2008; Sharpe 2006), and in Canada as in other nations public funding is provided to sport to obtain these social benefits (Bloom, Grant, & Watt, 2005; *Canadian Sport Policy 2012* 2012). In Canada in 2010 about 75% of children aged 5 to 17 years and about 54% of youth 15 to 19 years participated in organized sport, while 5% of adults volunteered as coaches and 7% as administrators (Canadian Heritage, 2013). Sport and recreation organizations are the single largest group among Canada's not-for-profit and voluntary organizations: of Canada's 161,000 not-for-profit and voluntary organizations, 21% or 33,649 are in sport and recreation and over 90% operate at the community and regional levels (Hall et al., 2004; Misener & Doherty, 2009).

Compared to other types of not-for-profits such as education, health or environmental organizations, Canada's sport and recreation organizations are among the least reliant on government-sourced revenue, with 65% of revenue coming from non-governmental sources (Hall 2004). They also have only 6% of the voluntary sector's employees; CSOs, which typically receive no government funding, are even less likely to

have employees than are NSOs or Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations (PTSOs). Overall, 73% of Canadian sport organizations have no paid staff, the second-highest percentage among all not-for-profits, and of those with staff, 57% had four or fewer paid employees (Hamdad, Joyal, & Van Rompaey, 2004). Thus sport is comprised of a small group of government-funded and professionally managed NSOs and PTSOs amid a comparatively vast number of self-funded, volunteer-managed CSOs. Yet, large organizations can be found within the ranks of CSOs as well: just over 100 clubs account for approximately 70% of the Ontario Soccer Association's 519,000 participants, an average of over 3,600 participants per club within that cohort (G. Bradbury, personal communication, March 27, 2011).

Studies of CSOs have focused on limitations of organizational capacity and how this affects the delivery of sport programs. A major stream of CSO research focuses on resource scarcity, lack of capacity, and the ways in which CSOs operate with and adapt to these deficits. Many CSOs have limited human, infrastructural and financial capacities (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sharpe 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011) requiring them to engage in interorganizational relationships to access needed resources (Misener & Doherty, 2013). At the same time CSOs have been shown to work in "silos" with loose network ties due to power/dependence rivalries (MacLean, Cousens, & Barnes, 2011), and to engage in passive manipulation of their environments to manage resource dependencies (Patterson, 2014).

A second important theme in CSO research concerns volunteer participation, relations and motivations, including trends in volunteer commitment, professionalization, leader-member relations, and governance. Rates of sport voluntarism are declining

(Cuskelly 2004; Hall, 2003), and the challenges small to medium-sized Canadian non-profits report in recruiting and retaining volunteers (Gumulka, Hay, & Lasby, 2006) are also evident in CSOs in the United Kingdom (UK), Belgium, and Germany (Nichols et al., 2005; Wicker & Breuer, 2011; Wicker, Vos, Scheerder, & Breuer, 2013). The decline in volunteering has been related to findings of inconsistent management due to volunteer turnover (Misener & Doherty, 2013), poor planning with ambiguous goals and unclear outcomes (Thiel & Mayer, 2009), and internal conflict triggered by human resource insufficiency (Van Bussel & Doherty, 2015). CSO performance can be also be limited by a tendency to highly centralized, informal decision-making by small groups of insiders (Papadimitriou 2002; Schlesinger, Klenk, & Nagel, 2015; Soares, Correia, & Rosado, 2010), which persists even when the organization has the size and resource capacity to develop more formalized, specialized structures (Papadimitriou, 2002). As a result CSO decision-making may be ad hoc, lacking sufficient evidence and driven by imitation and “bandwagon” effects rather than thorough independent analysis (O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Skille 2011).

Studying Canadian PTSOs Kikulis et al. (1989) found a wide diversity of governance and decision-making capabilities ranging from fully professional bureaucratic structures to informal governance. By comparison typical CSOs have few or no employees (Statistics Canada, 2004) and smaller organizational structures than NSOs and PTSOs, and would be expected to have relatively primitive governance practices. Various studies of CSO governance have illustrated the diverse personality qualities necessary to be a Board member (Balduck, Rossem, & Buelens, 2009), the needs for a “governance quality checklist” (De Knop, Van Hoecke, & De Bosscher, 2004) and the role of political

manoeuvring and influence of upstream organizations (e.g. the NSO) in decision-making (Soares et al., 2010). One implication of volunteer scarcity and declining volunteering rates, combined with steadily increasing demands on CSOs to meet higher standards (Nichols, Taylor, Barrett, & Jeanes, 2014; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991) is a drive toward professionalization, reflected by the entry of paid managerial employees into previously volunteer positions (Dowling, Edwards, & Washington, 2014). Horch (1998; Horch & Schutte, 2009) calls this a “self-destroying” process which may undermine values of volunteerism and community participation and with them the claims sport makes for the building of social capital (Coalter, 2007a). Horch and Schutte (2009) noted that while professionalization is increasing and not seen by CSOs as damaging to volunteerism, the effect appears to be self-reinforcing: CSOs that pay staff tend to continue to do so. Nichols et al. (2005) reported that pressure on CSOs in the UK to professionalize was increasing.

A potentially related effect is the influence of commercialism on CSOs. Commercialism in community sport has several faces, including a growing tendency of CSOs to turn toward sale of products and services to mitigate resource deficiencies (Enjolras, 2002), a broad shift from a volunteer-led amateur sport paradigm toward a professional sport orientation (O'Brien & Slack, 2003), or the ways a co-existing professional sport paradigm can influence and shape community sport and CSOs (Barnes, Cousens, & MacLean, 2015). The latter authors found a proliferation of for-profit coaches, camps, and tournaments at the community level created growing tension and values conflict with existing volunteer-led amateur CSOs, resulting in a restructuring of programs and athlete recruitment and retention efforts by CSOs to compete in the



increasingly commercialized space. They also noted attempts by the governing NSO and PSO to advance professionalization by CSOs, presumably to improve program quality and enhance competitiveness.

Low organizational capacity, declining volunteerism, a consequent turn toward professionalization and commercialization, along with increasing standards set by external, resource-controlling agencies raises questions about the quality and viability of community sport. The preponderance of findings suggest that CSOs struggle with resource scarcity, especially a shortage of experienced, capable volunteers, having a negative impact on the capacity of CSOs to govern and plan their operations, generate additional resources, and offer programs that provide uniformly positive experiences to participants. A 2008 report by True Sport, a Canadian program promoting ethical, values-based sport concluded,

(Canadians) are also very concerned that sport is falling far short of its potential.

They are worried about too much aggression, cheating and unfair behaviour. They are worried about win-at-any-cost attitudes and that too many young people are leaving sport for the wrong reasons. They are worried about the negative behaviour of a fraction of parents who make it difficult for everyone else...

(Mulholland, 2008).

There is also belief that youth sport ought to “build character” and support positive youth development (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). It is therefore not surprising that there is concern among sport policy makers and funders about the quality of sport, particularly youth sport, and that in response a number of “quality sport” organizations and programs have formed. In the UK, Sport England’s Clubmark program, and in

Canada the Club Excellence program, offer CSO accreditation based on meeting a set of governance, operations and program delivery standards. There are training programs for volunteer and paid staff: in Canada, the National Coaching Certification Program and HIGH FIVE for coaches and recreation leaders, respectively, and in the United States, coach and volunteer training offered by the National Alliance for Youth Sports.

These programs operate outside sport's traditional organizational hierarchy of single-sport International Federations, NSOs, PTSOs and CSOs. In Canada they have been supported by public funding, often as "multi-sport service organizations" or MSOs (Canadian Heritage, n.d.). The institutionalization of quality programs appears to arise from a collective understanding among policy-makers that left to itself, sport is subject to a number of ills, and that external intervention is needed to ensure Canadians get "the sport we want", to coin the title of a report produced by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES, 2004). This poses a dilemma for "quality sport" organizations and programs. There is systemic pressure, due to a belief among policy-makers and sport leaders that community-based youth sport is not delivered to a high enough standard enough of the time. Based on a 2005 survey, True Sport reported that:

ninety-two percent of Canadians believe that community-based sport can have a positive influence in the lives of youth, and rank it second only to families as a highly positive influence in the lives of young Canadians. On the other hand, community sport is increasingly being pulled toward the values of commercial sport, potentially undermining benefits which can only be fully realized when sport is conducted in a positive and intentional way – when it is inclusive, fair, fun, and fosters genuine excellence. (Mulholland 2008)

At the same time this “undermining” is often linked to lack of CSO capacity, particularly the lack of capable volunteers in leadership and coaching roles, as well as to cultural norms supporting “win at all costs” competition. A lack of capacity seems to render CSOs largely incapable of improving the quality of their programs, whether by engaging in coach training, integrating positive youth development values, adopting quality standards, or revising programs according to the LTAD framework. How, then, to effect quality improvement in community sport when CSOs seem to lack the capacity to improve themselves?

### **Innovation: Long-Term Athlete Development**

The question of how CSOs can adopt a program intended to improve program quality is central to the success of Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L), a movement dedicated to “quality sport and physical activity” (*Canadian Sport for Life- Long-Term Athlete Development 2.0*, 2014). In leading system-wide implementation of the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) framework, CS4L has triggered a significant evolution of Canadian sport. LTAD is a model that proposes a progressive pathway of physical, technical, tactical and psychological preparation according to the athlete’s developmental maturity and level of experience in sport. The LTAD framework describes “a seven-stage training, competition, and recovery pathway guiding an individual’s experience in sport and physical activity from infancy through all phases of adulthood.” (*Canadian Sport for Life- Long-Term Athlete Development 2.0*, 2014). Goals for participants include improved competence, personal satisfaction, and retention of the participant in sport activities, as well as success in competition (Balyi, Cardinal, Higgs, Norris, & Way, 2005).

Since 2005, as mandated by Sport Canada, all 58 Canadian NSOs have developed sport-specific LTAD models, and LTAD principles are entrenched in the Canadian Sport Policy 2012-2022 (*Canadian Sport Policy 2012*, 2012). The CS4L movement has also branched out to engage school-based sport and activity, municipal recreation, and public health sectors as well as a number of other organizations. The overall goals for the year 2020 proposed in the draft CS4L publication “CS4L Moving Forward: Collaboration Paper, 2010-2013” (Way, 2010) includes the full integration of CS4L into Canadian sport, recreation, education and health organizations at municipal, provincial/territorial and national levels. The CS4L vision is of radical change to sport values, structures, and processes, resulting in a nation-wide reformation of sport aimed at improving the quality of program delivery.

The rapid penetration of LTAD is due in part to support by Sport Canada and the Provincial/Territorial (P/T) governments, and their influence upon government-funded NSOs and PTSOs. LTAD originated in the 1990’s as an initiative by Istvan Balyi and Richard Way to adapt Eastern European sport development models and articulate them in a simplified accessible way for Canadian coaches and sport leaders (Dowling, 2014), with the aspiration of correcting what they described as the “shortcomings and consequences” (Balyi et al., 2005) of existing sport delivery methods. Their efforts to promote LTAD coincided with the development of the first Canadian Sport Policy in 2002, which called for a “systematic, analytical and collaborative approach to the development of high performance athletes” (*Canadian Sport Policy, 2002*) and subsequent work to operationalize the Policy through the development of joint federal and P/T action plans (Dowling, 2014). LTAD was integrated into these plans, and

between 2008 and 2014, Sport Canada invested over \$8 million into LTAD development and implementation by NSOs (Dowling, 2014). However, as noted, NSOs and PTSOs together constitute only a small percentage of Canadian sport and recreation organizations, so LTAD integration across the entire system depends on the willingness and ability of CSOs to understand, adopt and implement a relatively complex set of principles and practices (Beaudoin, Callary & Trudeau, 2015).

LTAD theory is based on sport science research and empirically derived sport-coaching practices (*Canadian Sport for Life- Long-Term Athlete Development 2.0*, 2014) which, loosely summarized, mean that (a) sport leaders should recognize and tailor their programs to the stage of physical, mental and emotional development of athletes, particularly child and youth athletes; (b) the long-term success and lifetime physical activity of athletes is more important than their short-term success, and should be safeguarded by encouraging multi-lateral development and discouraging early specialization, over-training and over-competing; (c) athletic development takes time, and should not be rushed in ways prejudicial to the athlete's physical or emotional health; (d) sport, recreation, education and other related organizations should align around these principles to deliver consistent programming and minimize gaps or overlaps prejudicial to athletes; and (e) "quality sport and physical activity, combined with proper lifestyle, result in better health, disease prevention, enhanced learning, enjoyment and social interaction, leading to improved wellness" (*Canadian Sport for Life- Long-Term Athlete Development 2.0*, 2014: 13). While the LTAD framework is focused primarily on technical aspects of human growth and sport development rather than social norms, it is nonetheless values-based and aimed at achieving social outcomes including increased

participation in sport and improved population health and wellness. The movement is based on a fundamental and explicit critique of current methods of sport delivery, evident in the “shortcomings and consequences” section of the first LTAD guide, which listed 13 ways in which participants fail “to reach their genetic potential and optimal performance level” when LTAD is not followed (Balyi et al., 2005).

In practice integration of LTAD into CSO programming implies coach education, adapted training programs and competitions, modifications to sport venues and equipment, redeployment of volunteer staff, and reorganization of participants and teams. For example, in soccer it is recommended that U7 players (i.e. youth players under seven years of age) compete in teams of four with no goalkeeper rather than on teams of 11 as in adult soccer, use mini-fields with small goals and a small ball rather than adult-sized fields and equipment, and play for a maximum of 40 minutes rather than the usual 90 minute adult games. Similar changes are required for each age division (*Game Organization Guide: Physical Literacy (U4-U12)*, 2012). While the adoption of smaller fields and smaller goals for smaller players seems intuitive, in operation such changes, multiplied by dozens of playing fields in thousands of communities across a nation, become immense- and soccer is only one of 58 Canadian sports adopting LTAD.

As LTAD is relatively recent, research on its implementation at the CSO level is limited. Frankish (2011), studying adoption by cross-country ski coaches in three clubs, found that while most coaches were following most LTAD principles they were doing so in idiosyncratic ways, limited by the complexity of the model, lack of resources, lack of understanding or support from the parents of young athletes, and failure of the NSO to modify its competitive formats to match LTAD principles. Beaudoin, Callary and

Trudeau (2015) reported similar findings in a larger study of adoption and implementation by Canadian coaches. Lang (2010) focused on LTAD as a normative model, used as a surveillance tool to enforce conformity and discipline among youth swimmers while simultaneously depriving their coaches of fulfilling interaction with athletes.

Community sport is asserted to possess transformational powers for both individuals and society itself:

There is now evidence that sport's benefits go far beyond the positive health effects of physical activity... A growing body of research points to community sport's fundamental role as a primary generator of social capital and related benefits across a broad spectrum of societal goals including education, child and youth development, social inclusion, crime prevention, economic development and environmental sustainability. Perhaps most significantly, no other domain of community life has demonstrated sport's capacity to connect so many young people to positive adult role models and mentors, opportunities for positive development, and help in acquiring critical life skills. (Mulholland, 2008)

The intersection of these lofty aims and expectations, the demonstrated lack of capacity of CSOs to meet them, and the entry of CS4L-LTAD as the pan-Canadian initiative supported by federal and provincial/ territorial governments to address many aspects of the "quality gap", creates a metaphoric confrontation between the quality-sport David and the massive, intractable CSO Goliath. Considering the scale and scope of community sport and its importance in the lives of Canadians, gaining a better understanding of CSO social and organizational contexts, how they operate within them, why they respond to

innovations including quality-in-sport initiatives, and how (or if) they manage to integrate those initiatives is of great interest and importance; hence the central focus of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms influencing community sport organizations as they adopt and implement an innovation.

### **Conceptual Framework: Innovation and Change in Community Sport**

Themes and theories of innovation and change are ubiquitous in organization studies (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Innovation is defined as “an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 2003: 32), and the adoption of innovation is typically viewed as strategic “responses to changes in internal and external environments, or as preemptive actions taken to influence the environment” with the intent of “contribut(ing) to the performance or effectiveness of the organization” (Damanpour, 1992: 376). In this research, the process of adoption of innovation and organizational change is conceptualized as the result of the interplay of structure and agency, as a product of agential response to multiple, often conflicting contextual structural powers, which in turn condition those structures and future iterative cycles. Change is evident as the modification of existing or generation of new structures (morphogenesis) (Archer, 1995). This research study depended on an extensive design to build a picture of the contextual and structural mechanisms that condition CSO action and provide insight into why CSOs adopt innovation, and a subsequent intensive case study to understand how agents (i.e. CSO leaders) attended to, made sense of and responded to these mechanisms as they followed a learning cycle in attempting to implement LTAD. The emerging modifications



to local structures, including policies, disposition of resources, and personnel are empirical evidence of change.

The study followed a critical realist paradigm, which implies use of retrospective analysis of contextual structures to build theories of the generative mechanism(s) that drive the structural conditioning of agency, as well as an intensive examination of how that conditioned agency leads to innovation and change. Initial observation and abductive reasoning yields a basic conceptualization of possible mechanisms derived from the researcher's experience, stance, and grounding in the pre-existing literature. Existing theoretical perspectives drawn from a review of existing literature are used to identify theoretical frames that may contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms at work (Edwards, 2014). In this way existing theory operates as a guide, not a limit, for the critical realist researcher. As Bhaskar (2014: vii) points out, the purpose of CR research is “typically to identify, discover, uncover (and in more engaged participatory research, test the limits of) structures, blocks and (generally) *causes*...whereas for positivists and constructivists it is typically to prove/disprove and justify *propositions*, theories and so forth.” Therefore the aim here is not to confirm or disconfirm existing theory, but to use that theory as a frame or lens to explain the ‘why’ of organizational transformation, or more specifically, to conceptualize structures and mechanisms and help illuminate the “transfactual, hidden and often universal mechanisms” (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014: 18) underlying innovation and change.

Consistent with evidence of resource scarcity among CSOs, resource dependence theory (RDT) (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) is frequently used as a theoretical frame for CSO research (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Patterson 2014; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013;

Wicker et al., 2013). Briefly, RDT holds that organizations, seeking stable access to essential resources, face uncertainties due to their interdependence with other organizations. These uncertainties make survival and continued success uncertain, so they attempt to manage the interdependencies, often through mergers, partnerships and other forms of interorganizational relations (IOR) in order to maintain or extend resource access. The patterns of dependence produce inter- and intraorganizational power, which in turn affects organizational behavior (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). The corollary is that IORs among not-for-profits, including CSOs, are driven by resource scarcity (Hall et al., 2003; Oliver, 1990; Wicker et al., 2013).

The application of RDT in the analysis of CSO behaviour is tied to the nature of the exchanges between the CSO and resource providers. Essentially, CSOs are member-serving organizations existing to deliver *programs* including participatory, developmental and competitive sport opportunities to *members*. CSO capacity to deliver programs is theoretically limited by access to essential resources: *venues* for participation (e.g. gymnasia, swimming pools, soccer fields) or competition (e.g. events, leagues), and *leaders* (e.g. instructors, coaches, coordinators) who organize and deliver programs. CSOs typically affiliate with national, provincial or regional organizations to access competition venues, and in many cases also rent facilities at a subsidized cost from local government authorities and school boards (Barcelona & Young, 2010; MacLean et al., 2011), although some CSOs access communal facilities at no cost (e.g. road use by running clubs). Venue dependence varies with the type of sport, competition for venue use, and nature of exchange between CSO and owner; it is context-dependent and falls on

a continuum between power imbalance and mutual dependence (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005).

When local authorities rent facilities to CSOs, they frequently have a mission to encourage and support sport participation (Barcelona & Young, 2010), and a mandate to generate revenue to offset tax-based subsidy (Benson & Henderson, 2005), factors that should increase mutual dependence. However, the same authorities often have monopoly control over access to affordable, subsidized facilities, resulting in power imbalance. In a mutually dependent relationship partners often negotiate agreements to absorb constraints, while under conditions of power imbalance the more powerful actor is able to dictate terms; the less powerful actor may use cooptation as a strategy, for example by agreeing to meet accreditation standards to obtain access to the resource (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005). Where this type of relationship exists, local authorities and CSOs are simultaneously united by the communitarian interest in providing low-cost sport opportunities to residents and divided by market forces positioning the authority as a landlord with the ability to selectively control a resource essential to CSO existence.

CSO dependence on a second key resource, leaders, is more complicated. Many CSOs depend largely or exclusively on volunteer leaders (Cuskelly, 2004; Doherty, 2006), although a trend toward professionalization including use of paid administrators and technical leaders such as coaches is frequently observed in sport organizations (Dowling et al., 2014; O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Thibault et al., 1991). Volunteers in youth-dominant sports are often the parents of members, who typically pay fees on behalf of their children (Doherty, 2005). Thus CSOs seldom engage in an open labour market for leaders, but instead must balance potentially conflicting parent-child and leader-member

relationships in their effort to recruit enough volunteers to manage programs (Doherty, 2005), sometimes mixing volunteer and paid leadership. In addition, the role of CSO members is ambiguous: members are both a demand and resource factor as they generate the need for programs, are the primary source of revenue, and are a potential source of volunteers.

A purely RDT-based view of organizations fails to consider important mechanisms including normative pressures, regulatory requirements, and isomorphic tendencies within organizational fields. Consequently RDT has been integrated with institutional theories to better explain organizational behaviour (Sherer & Lee, 2002; Tolbert, 1985). Scholars frequently take institutional perspectives on sport organizations (Kikulis, Slack, Hinings, & Zimmerman, 1995; O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Skille 2011; Stevens & Slack, 1998; Wright & Zammuto, 2013), and link the hierarchical structure of sport and top-down influence by NSOs or government funders to isomorphism among lower-tier sport organizations, including CSOs (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013). Integrated resource-institutional approaches expand on this by illuminating how the search for resources can drive behaviours intended to establish organizational legitimacy, whether through compliance with regulatory standards, adoption of specified organizational forms, or mimicry of practices or technologies implemented by competitors (Meyer & Goes, 1988). An example relevant to Canadian CSOs is the adoption of accreditation standards. The enforcement of standards by dominant actors confers legitimacy on those dependent actors able to meet the standard, but may also drive resource scarcity (Sherer & Lee, 2002). For example if CSOs must employ more highly trained coaches to meet a quality standard such as LTAD, such coaches become a relatively scarcer commodity.

Institutional theory traditionally views innovation as a disrupter of institutions (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991); early adopters gain competitive advantage, and the technology becomes a “best practice” or standard with which others must comply, or risk loss of legitimacy. Thus LTAD adoption may advantage a CSO if it can afford to adopt (i.e. can successfully compete for resources needed for adoption) and leads to increased legitimacy, yielding increased attractiveness to members and preferential access to venues or other resources endowed by the NSO, PSO or city. Conversely, if dominant actors are indifferent to adoption, legitimacy is not conferred and there may be no incentive to expend resources to adopt, even if the innovation is a putative standard. Even if CSOs adapt to institutional pressures using processes of acquiescence and compromise (Oliver, 1990; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013) the need to meet heightened standards tends to drive professionalization and commercialism (Sam, 2009). Normative pressures to deliver “quality sport” to a greater number of participants may have the unintended consequence of higher-cost, professionally managed sport programs delivered to fewer participants by a smaller number of high-capacity CSOs.

Resource and institutional pressures or constraints faced by organizations can be conceptualized as the basis of logics, the “principles of organizing encoded in the minds of organizational actors (or agents) who create institutions” contributing to “an iterative and reciprocal process between logic and organizational structuration; each one shapes, contains and births the other” (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 2004:165). The theory of logics has evolved from the initial concepts of dominant logic (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995), “the way in which managers conceptualize the business and make critical resource allocation decisions” to more complex theories of interacting, multilevel logics, including

institutional logics acting across entire organizational fields, if not societies (p. 490). Given this, “society, then, is constituted by multiple, different, and sometimes conflicting institutional logics; for instance, capitalism, the state, democracy...” (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 2004: 165). Conflicting institutional logics may work to influence organizational logics and trigger change, or else be reconciled to coexist within organizational fields (Reay & Hinings, 2009). Conflicts of amateur vs. professional/commercial logics have frequently been observed in sport (Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Wright & Zammuto, 2013; Barnes, Cousens, & MacLean, 2015) and can be viewed as the manifestation of two dominant institutional logics: communitarianism, the exercise of volunteer effort through which sport claims to generate civic engagement and social capital, and individualism, through which sport organizations and their members seek to maximize personal benefit from fee-based programs (Coalter, 2007b; Jarvie, 2003). Skille (2010) has commented on the myths and ideologies of competitiveness and health surrounding community sport in Norway, concluding that CSOs respond to these often-conflicting social-institutional logics by picking and choosing elements as necessary to attain instrumental outcomes, sustain symbolic compliance, and maintain legitimacy.

Such conflicting institutional logics are common (Reay & Hinings, 2009) but as they exist in the real domain they are not necessarily evident to actors, who experience them in the empirical realm as policies or regulations that appear to work at cross-purposes. These conflicts are resolved through various processes: alignment to dominant logics, compromise, negotiation, collaboration (Reay & Hinings, 2009; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013), or exploitation (Leca & Naccache, 2006). Implicitly, resolution of conflict results in organizational learning and change (Drazin et al., 2004).

This study, then, is driven by a desire to understand first *why* CSOs adopt innovation, based in an understanding of their context and the mechanisms and structures that condition their action, and second, *how* they adopt and implement innovation in that context. The implementation of LTAD provides a useful case of innovation with broader implications for issues of quality, capacity and change in community sport. Considering the scale and importance of community sport in Canadian society, and the resources dedicated to improving the quality of sport, these questions merit investigation.

### **Format of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized as follows:

1. *Introduction and Overview (this section)*

This chapter serves to introduce the problem and research questions, and provides an overview of Community Sport Organizations, Long-Term Athlete Development, research methodology and conceptual framework for the research. This overview, which stands in place of a traditional review of literature, is elaborated in the following chapters where data, literature and theory are integrated to present methods and findings.

2. *Research Methods*

The second chapter provides a more extensive presentation of the research purpose and questions and the critical realist meta-theoretical framework used for the study. Research phases, sampling strategies, methods, and timelines, and data analysis strategies for the extensive and intensive research are presented, and questions of trustworthiness are addressed. Although the two phases of the

research study proceeded with a degree of overlap, each had a distinct data set and methodological approach and addressed separate research questions. Therefore phase findings and discussion are integrated within each of Chapters Three and Four.

3. *Extensive Phase: Birth of a League, Death of Community Sport? A Contextual Analysis.*

The third chapter addresses the first research question (RQ1), “*How do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?*” Following a brief re-introduction and overview of the problem and methods, the findings of the extensive phase research are presented, and a contextual model of CSO function is discussed.

4. *Intensive Phase: Creating Space, or Just Juggling? Innovation in Community Sport.*

Chapter Four presents the results of the second, intensive phase of the research study, exploring the second research question (RQ2), “*How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?*” This was a year long, micro-level study of a CSO implementing an innovation while managing multiple resource constraints. The chapter begins with a brief re-introduction and overview of the problem and methods. The findings of the intensive phase are provided, and in the subsequent analysis and discussion the cycle by which conditioned agency produced structural change is presented.

5. *Conclusions, Limitations and Future Directions*

Finally, the research findings are summarized and the theoretical and practical



contributions are considered in light of Greenwood, Hinings and Whetten's (2014) challenge to return from the study of institutions to the study of organizations. How, specifically, do CSOs differ from other kinds of organization, and why? CSOs are conceptualized as caught between conflicting institutional logics of communitarianism and individualism, which manifest in institutions and channel the agency of CSO leaders in particular situations. These forces condition inter-CSO competition and learning. The overall limitations of the research, future research questions, and recommendations for practitioners are presented.

## Chapter 2 – Research Methodology and Methods

This chapter presents the research methodology and methods used to explore the research questions, *how do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?* (RQ1) and *how do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?* (RQ2). The chapter is divided into two parts. Part One of the chapter provides an initial exploration of the critical realist (CR) approach and methodology. In Part Two, the specific sampling strategies, timelines, methods and data analysis for each of the extensive and intensive research phases are presented, and finally, questions of research trustworthiness or “goodness” are addressed.

Noting the prevalence of the institutionalist perspective in recent organization research and the tendency towards functionalism when considering how institutionalized structures and practices impact organizations, Suddaby et al. (2010) challenged the research community to “get back ‘inside’ organizations” and account for the role of agency which they claimed was “effectively being attributed to a black box. Actors may well be influential elements of institutional agency, but we must also develop an understanding of how institutional pressures might affect how these actors and their actorhood are socially constructed” (p. 1238). The idea that institutions affect the construction of actorhood within organizations while the actors themselves create the institutions leads to the seeming paradox of embedded agency: “how can actors change institutions if their actions, intentions, and rationality are all conditioned by the very institutions they wish to change?” (Holm, 1995: 398). This is a matter of basic ontology: the question of how agency creates structure and vice versa does not arise in a positivist philosophy, is a paradox in constructivism, and is resolved within critical realism. An

opening discussion of CR theory is needed to frame and explain the methodological choices made for this study, the way the study methodology evolved, and how this differs from positivist or interpretivist/ constructivist paradigms prevalent in sport literature (Byers, 2013).

### **Part One: Critical Realism in Theory and Approach**

As this research study is based on a critical realist meta-theoretical framework, a description of critical realism (CR) in theory and practice may be helpful to the reader. Critical realism is a philosophy of science originally developed by Bhashkar (2013) in the 1970's and elaborated upon by Archer (1982, 1995) for use in the social sciences in the 1990's. CR has gained ground as a "third way" which avoids "the naïve claims of positivism and the exaggeratedly destructive doubts of relativism in order to synthesize a 'middle path' for human knowledge" (Munn-Giddings & Winter, 2001: 10). While allied to other forms of scientific realism and "Campbellian realism" (Hendrickson & McKelvey, 2002; McKelvey, 2005), CR is a comparatively new metatheoretical perspective compared to the well-established positivist, post-positivist, constructionist and post-modernist frames which dominate organization studies (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006; O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Reed, 2005). Methodology in CR-based research is evolving: early works on CR outlined the philosophy using relatively inaccessible language and failed to attend to the practical (Oliver, 2011) so the design and methodological aspects of CR research have been "under development", with some calling CR "a philosophy in search of a method" (Yeung, 1997: 51). Although it draws on a consistent set of principles for research design and has its own logic of discovery,

CR admits methodological pluralism and requires “eclecticism and creativity” (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014) in the selection and exercise of research methods.

So how to put CR into practice? A growing number of publications offer guidance (Houston, 2010; McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Oliver, 2011; O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Pratt, 1995; Yeung, 1997). This chapter contributes to the discussion by outlining the design process, methodological choices and questions arising in a CR-based research project focused on innovation and change in CSOs. Through its strong ontological focus, emphasis on iterative cycles of exploration and abstraction and openness to methodological pluralism, CR-based research can provide more complete and coherent insights than those generated in other paradigms. Further, CR offers a practical means to illuminate the way structure conditions agency, and how agency in turn results in structural elaboration or reproduction.

### **Critical Realist Theory**

Critical realism holds there is an objective reality that exists independently of our ability to know it, and that reality includes socially constructed facts that influence the way we perceive and understand the world. In the social realm it considers how human agency interrelates with natural and social structures to create the real. As such CR offers an alternative to both the “objective” positivist-empiricist paradigm that primarily relies on quantitative methods for knowledge generation, and the “subjective” constructivist-interpretivist paradigm aligned with qualitative methods, which currently dominate social science (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Pratt, 1995).

Critical realists view reality as a “stratified, open system of emergent entities” (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014: 6). Entities are objects having causal efficacy or the power

to “make a difference” (Fleetwood, 2005), and are irreducible to their constituent parts in the sense that the wetness of water or the power of organizations cannot be reduced to molecular structure or individual employees. Emergence, or emergent power, describes the special properties of entities that arise from the combination of, yet are greater than, the sum of parts: wetness is a property of H<sub>2</sub>O, but not a random mixture of hydrogen and oxygen. If the social world was a closed system, the relations between entities that give rise to emergent powers could be investigated and categorized as a set of law-like dependable regularities. However, the social world is an open system, characterized by multiple interacting mechanisms and unpredictable interactions, not all of which are accessible to investigation. As Bhaskar (2014) writes, “Ontologically, the social world is an emergent, concept- and activity-dependent, value-drenched and politically contested part of the natural world” (page ix). The concept of emergence is a key point of distinction between CR and other paradigms. Positivist research reduces reality to closed systems to search for constant conjunctions, while constructivist research searches for correspondence between sets of unique socially constructed realities. Where “for positivists and constructivists (research) is typically to prove/disprove and justify propositions, theories and so forth” (Bhaskar, 2014: vii) CR attempts to generate theoretical explanations by tracing empirical events back to unseen, yet real, causal social structures and mechanisms.

Critical realism holds that, ontologically, there is an intransitive, enduring and objective reality, but epistemically our knowledge of it is transitive and fallible, mediated by perception, modified by interests and biases and communicated through the imperfect medium of language. It is necessary to infer the existence and action of inaccessible

powers, distinguishing between three different ontological realms or domains that together constitute reality. This “depth” or “stratified” ontology consists of the *empirical* domain (phenomena that are experienced); the *actual* domain (phenomena that occur, but are not necessarily experienced); and the *real*, ‘deep’ structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena (Bhaskar, 2014). For critical realists, the ultimate goal of research is not to discover immutable laws or to uncover shifting patterns of social interaction in accounts of human experience, but to develop deeper understanding of the real, generative causes of phenomena (Bhaskar, 2014). The existence and action of real causal mechanisms is inferred through a combination of empirical investigation and theory construction (Yeung, 1997), working from observation of empirical events to theorize and find evidence for underlying mechanisms and causes.

In the social sciences, where the purpose is to understand the actions and interactions of humans and their effects, a CR approach is necessarily concerned with the interdependence of structure and agency. Here, “the central argument is that structure and agency can only be linked by examining *the interplay between them over time*, and that without the proper incorporation of time the problem of structure and agency can never be satisfactorily resolved” (Archer, 1995: 65). Methodologically, this depends on “analytical dualism”, the analytic device of temporally separating structure and its effect upon agency, for “...although structure and agency are at work continuously in society, the analytical elements consists in breaking up these flows into intervals determined by the problem in hand” (Archer, 1995: 168).

Failure to define structure and agency as necessarily separable and separate in time results in fallacies of conflation. Archer (1995) defines “downward conflation”,

associated with positivism and structuralism, as the assertion that action is simply a product of and constrained by structure; “upward conflation” associated with constructivism, as the assertion that structure is simply the product of discourse which is itself the product of agency; and “central conflation” or elision, found in Giddens’ (1984) synthesis, as the assertion that structure and agency are mutually defining and indistinguishable in time. Against these Archer (1995) proposes a “morphogenetic approach” through which, for a given social phenomenon, the sequence of historical structural conditioning, interaction and agency, and subsequent and resulting structural elaboration can be traced. This approach reflects a process in which “structure and agency themselves *emerge, intertwine and redefine* one another” (Archer 1995: 76). Critical realists acknowledge that choosing a time frame for such analysis is a decision for the researcher, for as Fleetwood (2005) puts it,

however agents and structures interact, it is important to be clear about one point: action is a continuous, cyclical, flow over time: there are no empty spaces where nothing happens, and things do not just begin and end. The starting point for an analysis of any cyclical phenomenon is always arbitrary: we have to break into the cycle at some point and impose an analytical starting point. (p. 203)

It is clear from this description and the emphasis placed on temporality that the focus of critical realist research is *change*, the way in which structures and actors interact over time to modify structures (“structural elaboration” or “morphogenesis”), instantiating a new cycle. However, as Bhaskar (as cited in Pratt 1995) says,

The conception that I am proposing is that people, in their conscious human activity, for the most part unconsciously reproduce (or occasionally, transform)

the structures that govern their substantive activities of production. Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear family, or work to reproduce the capitalist economy. But it is nevertheless the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is also the necessary condition for, their activity. (p. 64)

Thus change does not always result from agency: the alternate outcome is “structural reproduction” or “morphostasis” (Archer, 1995). Purposeful activity can serve to recreate structures, relations or institutions. This poses an immediate challenge for the researcher given the multiplicity of actions and outputs in a social system over time: how to set the threshold for “genesis” vs. “stasis” is a key question.

It is likely that as an outcome of even comparatively simple processes, some structural elements will change more, others less. Added to this is the challenge of understanding the contingent nature of agency and change in a particular empirical setting. Real, generative mechanisms and their influences are invisible, but when theorized their action is inferred by the mediating existence of actual entities, which are themselves only partially and imperfectly discovered in the empirical domain. Moreover, in an open system, the action of causal mechanisms is indeterminate; their powers may be possessed but unexercised, exercised but unactualized, or actualized, depending on contingencies in any specific context. Thus a tenet of CR research is that,

processes of change usually involve several causal mechanisms which may be only contingently related to one another...depending on conditions, the operation of the same mechanism can produce quite different results and, alternatively, different mechanisms may produce the same empirical result. (Sayer, 1992: 108)



Critical realist analysis has an inbuilt retrospective stance, and seeks to reconstruct the causal mechanisms that gave rise to a particular state of affairs (Yeung, 1997). Working from a phenomenon of interest the researcher first asks, “What mechanisms could have been at work to cause or influence this phenomenon?” This process of *abduction* creates an abstracted generalized explanation from a set of observations (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Since multiple explanations are often possible, a plausible abducted explanation can be considered sufficient but not of itself necessary, so a primary purpose of abduction is to initiate a process of iterative abstraction through which alternate theories can be generated. A further step in the iterative process is *retroduction*, asking the question “what must the world (or the field, or the broad context) be like for these mechanisms to be as they are and not otherwise?” (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sayer, 1992). Retroduction is a way to infer and theoretically sketch contextual mechanisms that may be operating at the actual and real levels, gather abducted mechanisms generalized from empirical observations of phenomena and assemble them into a picture of the deeper powers at work to effect structural conditioning.

### **Methodology in Critical Realist Research**

As Archer (1995) points out, in critical realism ontology acts as both gatekeeper and bouncer for methodology. Working in the CR paradigm demands, above all, commitment to a CR-based ontology, particularly the idea of stratified reality, and this implies commitment to a retrospective analysis of context using iterative abductive and retroductive abstraction in order to build theories of the generative mechanism(s) that drive the structural conditioning of agency. However, while critical realists are dogmatic

on questions of ontology they are relatively agnostic on questions of epistemology, since the philosophy is built on fallibilism of empirical knowledge and the existence of real, but inaccessible causal mechanisms. Adherents argue that the choice of methodology, meaning the general strategy for research (Jones et al., 2006), and the consequent selection of methods should be dictated by the research problem itself.

So long as the logics of abduction and retroduction are embedded in a search for stratified operant mechanisms, the possibility of using a choice or combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is open (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014; McEvoy & Richards, 2006). Open-ended qualitative methods support new insights and help unanticipated themes emerge, while potentially illuminating complex concepts and relationships in ways quantitative measures cannot. The strength of quantitative methods is in development of accurate descriptions for clear comparison, and in helping researchers identify patterns that suggest new relationships and potential mechanisms. Although quantitative methods and analysis are sometimes associated with positivism, and qualitative methods with constructionism, both are in principle consistent with CR so long as their use and the conclusions drawn from them are grounded in CR ontology (Pratschke, 2003; Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014).

As CR has been employed in more diverse empirical settings over time, methodological practice has evolved. A recent “practical guide” to using critical realism in organization studies includes chapters on discourse analysis, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, action research, probability and modeling and mixed quantitative/qualitative research (Edwards, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2014). Because the spectrum of social science research methodologies can be used or adapted for use in CR

research, choice of methodology depends on the phenomenon of interest, the research questions asked, the researcher's purpose in asking them, and the design choices stemming from these. A "transcendental question" (Houston, 2010) about the phenomenon of interest is followed by initial theorization and of course the opportunities and limitations inherent in the situation itself. Initial observation and abductive reasoning yields a first-order conceptualization of possible mechanisms that may be underlying a social phenomenon of interest. Further conceptualization is derived from the researcher's experience, stance, and grounding in the pre-existing literature and theory thought to be relevant to the case. The consonance or dissonance between the phenomenon and the literature informs an initial decision: whether the nature of the research is to extend existing knowledge by identifying and filling gaps, or, considering the fallible and conditional nature of "truth" in CR, to become an immanent critique of inadequate theory (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

This informs the second step, decision on research design, which Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014) suggest depends on two dimensions, scope (extensive vs. intensive) and positionality (detached vs. engaged). The interdependence of structure and agency in CR and the existence of real and actual entities with causal powers emergent from their relations, make it impossible to conceive social mechanisms divorced from context. The powers of an entity, a "persistent whole formed by a set of parts that is structured by the relations between these parts" (Elder-Vass, 2010: 17), depend on those relations, that is, on the specific configuration of the constituent parts in time and space and the way those parts interact. The scope-of-research decision, or the first dimension, rests on the extent to which a specific context has been explored, as well as the extent to which the

researcher intends to focus on mechanism (i.e. structure) or agency with an understanding that a coherent explanation of either cannot be made without considering both.

Metaphorically, the distinction is between “black box” and “white box” approaches.

Suddaby et al. (2010) criticize mainstream accounts of institutionalization as failing to consider the “black box” of agency, in that “actors may well be influential elements of institutional agency, but we must also develop an understanding of how institutional pressures might affect how these actors and their actorhood are socially constructed” (p. 1238), expressing precisely the relationship between structure and agency central to a CR analysis. Conversely Kazi (2003) speaks of the critical realist paradigm offering,

the potential for a ‘white box’ evaluation that not only systematically tracks outcomes, but also the mechanisms that produce the outcomes, the contexts in which these mechanisms are triggered, and the content of the interventions (or the generative mechanisms introduced by a programme). (p- 803)

In research design this plays out as a decision between the poles of *extensive* vs. *intensive* strategies. Extensive designs opt for a macro approach to gathering information about the characteristics of groups, populations, or organizational fields, focusing on abductive logics to abstract the mechanisms that may be at work across the context, leaving detailed accounts of agency “within the black box”. Intensive designs, by contrast, offer depth, opening the black box and gather “thicker” micro-level data about agency, and relying more on retroductive logics to ask what mechanisms might be at work to influence action within specific contextual conditions. The scope dimension informs methodology. Surveys and documentary reviews may be the basis of an extensive approach, while case study is a typical intensive method (Ackroyd & Karlsson,

2014). The intensive-extensive dimension is a continuum, not a dichotomy, and the challenge is to integrate the approaches in practice to explicate the contributions of structural and agential mechanisms (Pratt, 1995).

The second dimension in CR research methodology is that of positionality, ranging from detached to engaged investigative stances (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014). Some critical realists argue that engagement is central to the CR project, particularly in the early stages of exploring the phenomenon of interest and initial abduction of possible mechanisms (Sayer, 1992; Hurrell 2014). Intensive designs inevitably have greater opportunity and arguably necessity for an engaged approach. Again, the dimension is best seen as a continuum: to understand agency in structural context both detached and engaged approaches offer advantages, whether within a single research project or as a complementarity between linked projects. Sayer (1992) outlines the possibility of establishing the research design iteratively, effectively working through a network of related objects or phenomena in a field to “build up a picture of the structures and causal groups of which they are a part”, creating a basis for abstracted theory which can subsequently be evaluated using more intensive and engaged methods. Just as combining extensive and intensive approaches provides the best of both worlds (Hurrell, 2014), complimentary use of detached and engaged stances across a research agenda can add depth of understanding while meeting practical exigencies. Consequently a two-phase extensive/detached, intensive/engaged approach was taken in the current research study, as explained later in this chapter.

These dimensional choices also relate to CR’s commitment to methodological pluralism, which supports varied approaches to gathering, analyzing and presenting

findings. Use of different methods reveal different aspects of phenomena, and Downward and Mearman (2006) go so far as to describe the use of different methods of analysis as necessary to elaborate how analytically distinct structures and agents interact. This has been broadly positioned as an opportunity for mixed methods in CR research (Downward & Mearman, 2006; Hurrell, 2014; McEvoy & Richards, 2006) but extends to the use of varied or married approaches.

Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014) claim case study as “the” basic design for realist research, contrasting with its relative dismissal by positivist-influenced research (Yin, 2009). The operationalization of case study research is different than in positivist or constructionist paradigms, in that a CR case study is neither simply a ground-level test of theory (Yin 2009) nor only a way of gathering “thick description” (Geertz, 1994) of the inner workings of a particular social group. For realist purposes case study must include both a means of establishing correspondence between the actions of agents and the abducted real and actual mechanisms which act upon them, as well as a way to elucidate the deep workings inside the black box of agency, offering the possibility of an iterative, retroducted generation of new theory (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014). Therefore case study in CR does not claim to comprehensively catalog all functional aspects of the examined group, but is focused on uncovering underlying causal mechanisms. Vincent and Wapshott (2014) propose a useful typology of the mechanisms acting on a case group as including normative and/or configurational powers which work “upwardly” (i.e. from within the group) or “downwardly”(i.e. extra-organizationally). This straightforward classification offers an important insight: are the abstracted mechanisms at work found in normative cultural or institutional influences, or are they due to specific spatial/temporal

formations, such as hierarchies and networks? Are they generated within the group, or outside it? Although in any social group the likely answer is “all of the above”, the typology can help establish research focus.

### **Method in Critical Realist Research**

Whatever the scope and stance chosen by the researcher, data gathering, analysis, and reporting are matters of technique or method, rather than methodology. Here too, CR offers flexibility so long as the ontological basis of realist philosophy is respected. Familiar qualitative techniques are used and if they are modified it is with abductive and retroductive theory-building in mind.

Interview is perhaps the most used method of data collection (Smith & Elger 2014). Some CR practitioners suggest use of informal interview styles as a preferred technique (Sayer, 1992). At issue is the degree of interaction between researcher and participant; surveys rely on closed questions that preclude the possibility of probes and eliminate the possibility of attending to discursive style and physical cues, while potentially inviting different interpretation of questions than the researcher intended. Employing unstructured interviews requires the researcher to attend to and account for the underlying logic of discovery s/he intends (Pratt, 1995). This notion of “theory-driven interviewing” draws on Pawson & Manzano-Santaella (2012) and the associated question of interview sampling is dealt with at length by Smith and Elger (2014) who counsel that CR interviewing is most valuable when informed by a theoretical framework and conducted so theories can continue to develop “in process” (p. 131).

When interview data is gathered a widely used hermeneutic technique, grounded theory, can be modified for use as a CR analytical tool, and this approach was used to

analyze interview data in this study. It is often advocated and used in realist research (Downward & Mearman, 2006; Kempster & Parry, 2014, 2011; Oliver, 2011; Yeung, 1997). Grounded theory is an analytical method “that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 24). The purpose of grounded theory is to generate credible descriptions from the actions and words of individuals that “fit the area from where it has been derived and in which it will be used” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 300). As originally presented, grounded theory had a positivist-empiricist orientation, seeking to develop legitimized theory “grounded” in empirical data and free from conceptualization through observance of a relatively rigid analytic procedure. Over time the method was adapted to better reflect constructivist and postmodernist perspectives (Clarke, 2003; Jones et al., 2006; Glaser 2008).

The grounded theory process involves analysis of empirical data through use of researcher-defined codes and themes, an inbuilt hierarchy of theorization that implies a use of experience and conceptualization external to the data itself. While this presents a problem for grounded theory’s original quest for objectivity it is entirely consistent with CR’s epistemological movement from data to abstracted theory as a means of uncovering causal mechanisms. As Glaser (2008) says,

All that GT is, is the generation of emergent conceptualizations into integrated patterns, which are denoted by categories and their properties. This is accomplished by the many rigorous steps of GT woven together by the constant comparison process, which is designed to generate concepts from all data. (p. 23)



Thus the adaption of grounded theory for realist use involves integrating the ontological stratified reality basic to CR while preserving the quest for “goodness” (or in positivist terms, reliability and validity) of the outcome through step by step analysis that builds out from the empirical data. This provides the CR researcher an established, accepted technique, and makes possible the use of grounded theory to include ‘non-observable’ socially constructed phenomena (Kempster & Parry, 2011). In their work, this led to a retroductive process of identifying themes as causal powers by drawing on relevant frames found in the literature and considering them through the lens of structure and agency to theorize the causal mechanisms at work: “through numerous iterations of conceptualizations the themes became distilled into an emergent set of causes influencing leadership learning” (Kempster & Parry, 2014: 103).

The freedom to creatively adapt and integrate method to align with the CR ontological perspective and the willingness to “place primacy on ontology and reflect a sense of bricolage - using a variety of methods to help reveal the real” (Kempster & Parry, 2014: 98) can be a feature of CR-based research. At the same time, in applying this approach, the researcher needs to be aware of the danger of basing emergent categories purely on naïve descriptions taken from subjects, which are unlikely to consider structural factors or tie to causal mechanisms. Using a process similar to classical grounded theory’s “constant comparison” between data and theory integrates the multiple iterations between experience and abstraction needed for critical realist analysis. By being explicit about how conceptual categories are derived and how research questions evolve, “‘discoveries’ from the information gleaned from both intensive and extensive survey modes can then be fed back into the theoretical understanding” (Pratt,1995).

## **Positionality**

The position of the researcher in relation to the questions studied is a central issue in qualitative research:

the need for researchers to position themselves in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (why do I care about this topic?), the methodological approach (what assumptions do I carry about how knowledge is constructed?) and participants in the study (how might who I am and where I come from influence what I hear and what I observe?) (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006: 80)

In CR, an immanent critique of “objectivity” associated with positivism, and a view of the social world as “emergent, concept- and activity-dependent, value-drenched and politically contested” (Bhaskar, 2014: ix) leads critical realists to “assume that complete detachment from their research subjects is impossible...and...abjure even the attempt at detachment and acknowledge that a committed position is appropriate” (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014: 27). As noted above, the need to build a broad picture of structures and mechanisms in context through an extensive research design may imply a more detached stance, while the need to investigate the interplay of structure and agency through an intensive or micro analysis may imply a more engaged or committed stance.

In the current research study, the researcher’s background and experience was highly relevant to the case and drove the research interest. A practitioner in the Canadian sport system for over 30 years, as an athlete, coach, volunteer board member and paid manager in CSOs, PSOs and an NSO, I have a long-standing and active interest in questions of quality of sport and issues surrounding in CSO adoption of program innovations. More recently, as an independent consultant working with all levels of sport

organization on LTAD implementation, I have both special expertise in LTAD and a heightened awareness of the challenges inherent in its implementation. There is no doubt that this position affected the way I engaged with the research and the research participants and with their perceptions and my own. Working in a CR paradigm, this added an element of perspective, and in some instances might have helped direct and narrow the focus of the study.

As described, compared with prevalent positivist or constructivist paradigms, use of a CR metatheoretical frame implies differences in methodology and adaptation of methods and data analysis. The second part of this chapter demonstrates how the CR meta-theoretical approach outlined was utilized in this research study, and presents the sampling, timelines, data collection and data analysis methods employed.

## **Part Two: Methodology and Methods in This Research Study**

Overall, the research study spanned approximately 36 months. The study proceeded in two phases: an initial extensive phase that established context in order to conceptualize mechanisms at work within the research field, and a second intensive phase which developed a case study of a single CSO working to adopt the LTAD innovation in this context. While the longitudinal study of change processes unfolding in organizations is not unique (cf. Poole 2004: 12; Pettigrew 1997), a CR-based case study combining extensive and intensive data collection to situate an organization's change process in context of its proximal organizational field is less common (Hurrell, 2014).

### **Phase 1- Extensive Research**

The first, extensive research phase focused on RQ1, *how do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?*

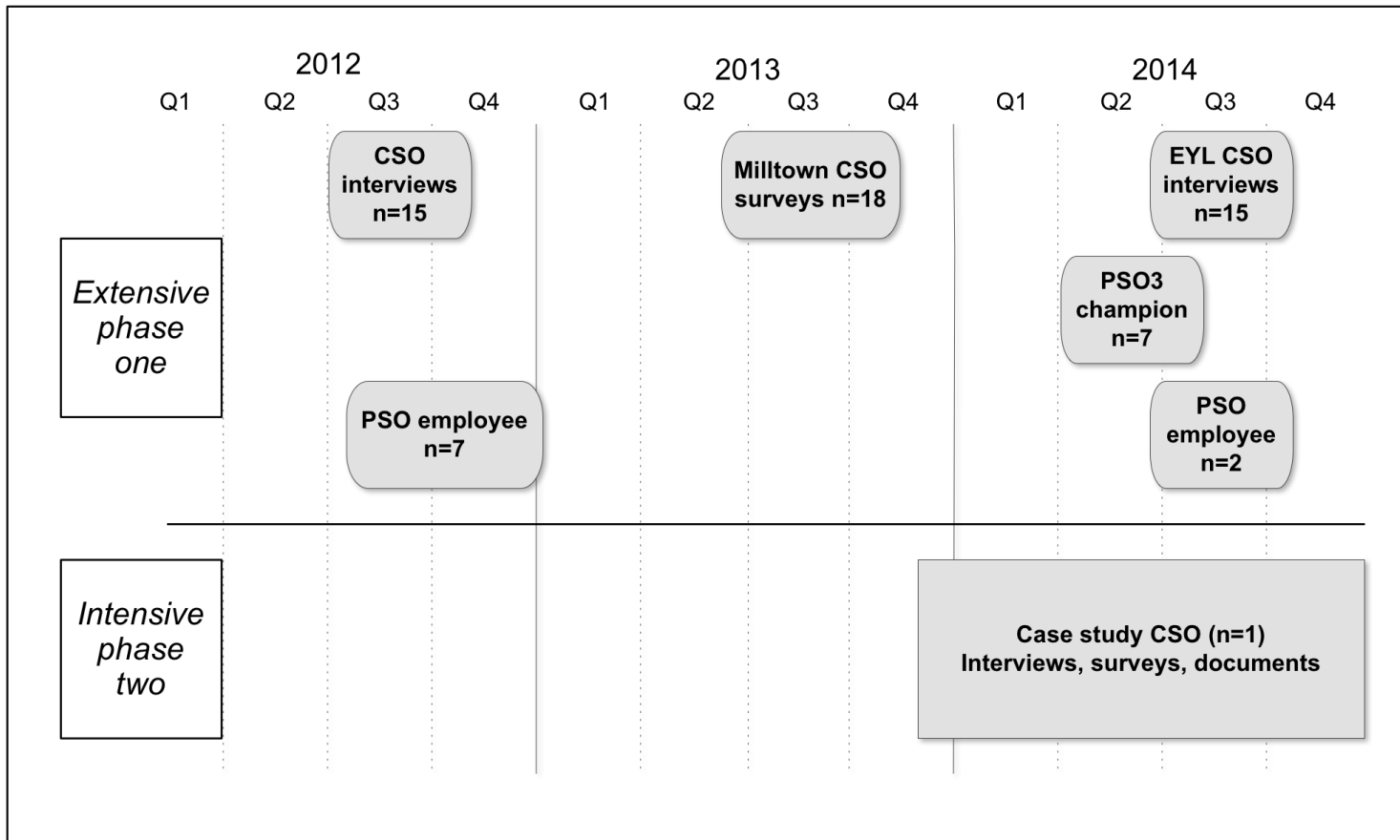
### ***Timeline and Sample***

The extensive research occurred from November 2011 to November 2014. Figure 2.1 shows sampling and timelines across both research phases. Over this period, data were collected from interviews, surveys and document analysis across a range of organizational perspectives including those of leaders within three PSOs, a municipal recreation department, and 46 different CSOs. Data gathering alternated with iterative abstraction and search for theoretical explanations of CSO behaviour. Although the initial intent was to quickly identify a few CSOs willing to participate in intensive research projects, difficulty in finding CSOs willing to engage in such research, and a series of opportunities to gather additional data from different groups of CSOs, instead resulted in an extensive study that emerged across the phase. Ultimately this generated a detailed view of the CSO context, capturing internal and external views of CSO capacities and how contextual mechanisms affect CSO decision-making related to adoption of innovations. Over the course of the phase, iterative cycles of engagement, reflection and abstraction facilitated researcher theorization, ultimately yielding a retroducted model of the potential causal mechanisms operating in this context.

Extensive research proceeded in three parts. In Part 1, three PSOs (PSO1, PSO2, PSO3) identified 21 affiliated CSOs as early adopters of LTAD, and 15 of these CSOs participated in an initial semi-structured interview designed to gather background information and identify interest in participation in subsequent intensive research. This constituted a purposeful sample (Creswell, 1998) based on the criterion of implementation of LTAD-based practice within their programming. The 15 CSOs were offered access to external expertise provided by Canadian Sport for Life consultants to

support their ongoing LTAD implementation, but ultimately, after several rounds of follow-up, CSOs were either unable to identify a project or excused themselves due to lack of time or interest. CSO inability to capitalize on the offered support provided a level of researcher insight, generating questions that informed an early round of conceptualization: why, given their initial interest and an offer of tangible support to advance their work, did none of the CSOs initiate a project to further their adoption of LTAD? What underlying mechanisms were at work?

In the second part of the extensive phase, approximately seven months after the first round of CSO interviews was completed, the recreation department in Millpond (a pseudonym), a midsized city of approximately 500,000 residents, agreed to permit the researcher to gather information and produce a report on LTAD implementation among city CSOs. This afforded another opportunity to identify CSO candidates for the planned intensive phase of this research, while broadening the scope of extensive information gathered and adding perspective into the role of a municipal parks and recreation department as a key resource controller. Eighty-one CSOs received an invitation to participate in an electronic survey to determine the state of their LTAD implementation, with 18 (n=18) subsequent completions. This again constituted a purposeful sample of CSOs affiliated with and/or renting sport facilities from Millpond, using a list provided by the city. At the conclusion of the survey, with permission of the parks and recreation department manager, the 18 CSOs were contacted with the offer of participation in the intensive phase of research for this study. Of these three responded, and one ultimately became a partner in the yearlong phase two intensive research.



**Figure 2.1:** Data collection sampling and timeline across extensive and intensive research phases.

In the third part of the extensive phase, CSOs constituting PSO3's Elite Youth League (EYL) were interviewed at the conclusion of the 2014 inaugural season. EYL CSOs must meet a set of administrative and LTAD-based technical standards and face a competitive process prior to being accepted into the league, and PSO3 contracted the researcher to conduct post-season meetings with the CSOs to assess compliance. This afforded an opportunity to conduct parallel interviews with EYL CSOs (n=15) for this research study. Four of these CSOs had been interviewed in the first part of the extensive phase approximately two years earlier, and another was situated in Millpond. These connections yielded an opportunity to add depth to the exploration of RQ1 by incorporating additional perspectives including grassroots development vs. high performance, PSO vs. CSO vs. municipality with regard to resource access (e.g. sport facilities), and inter-CSO relations within a league structure.

In addition to the CSO interviews, interviews (n=8) were conducted with technical and administrative managers from the three PSOs to capture their perspectives as PSO and parallel CSO LTAD implementation evolved. In addition, seven (n=7) "champions" trained and engaged by PSO3 to promote LTAD implementation among its affiliated CSOs were interviewed. By gathering a range of complementary perspectives from PSOs, PSO3's "champions", and CSOs, the process provided data triangulation (Creswell, 1998) while permitting a glimpse into real-time implementation across the duration of the extensive phase.

### ***Data Collection***

Table 2.1 summarizes the sample and data collection methods in the first, extensive phase of the research study. Semi-structured interviews (n=46) were conducted

with CSO presidents, head coaches and administrators, PSO technical and administrative managers, and PSO3 “LTAD champions” who were typically experienced club or district employees or coaches acting to support CSOs as implementation ambassadors. A total of nine PSO employee interviews, seven PSO3 “champion” interviews, 15 interviews of early-adopting CSOs, and 15 interviews of CSO leaders from PSO3’s EYL were performed. All interview participants provided informed consent.

The structure and content of interviews varied according to context as well as theorization arising from iterative abduction/retroduction over time. Interviews of early-adopting CSOs in the first part of the extensive phase focused on identification of opportunities for, or barriers to LTAD implementation including support provided by the PSO. Interviews of EYL CSOs near the end of the extensive phase included questions about motives for EYL application, the relation of these to LTAD implementation and internal and external influences on the CSO, and specific challenges encountered in the first season of participation the league. Interviews of PSO leaders and PSO3 “champions” focused on internal and CSO-related challenges to LTAD implementation. Interview guides appear in Appendices A to D.

Interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes on average, and were recorded and transcribed for analysis, or when recording was impractical, captured in verbatim transcription. Additional field notes capturing researcher impressions and reflections on emerging themes and patterns were also kept.



<b>Method</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Interviews (n=46)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PSO-nominated CSOs</i></li> <li>• <i>PSO employees</i></li> <li>• <i>PSO3 “LTAD champions”</i></li> <li>• <i>PSO3 Elite Youth League CSOs</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(n=15)</li> <li>(n=9)</li> <li>(n=7)</li> <li>(n=15)</li> </ul>	<i>Semi-structured interviews. In PSO interviews questions focused on factors related to PSO and CSO programs and LTAD implementation. In CSO interviews questions focused on CSO programs and LTAD implementation. For EYL CSOs the focus was factors related to decisions to apply to EYL and issues in inaugural year including LTAD and inter-CSO relations.</i>
<b>Surveys</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(n=18)</li> </ul>	<i>Electronic surveys of Millpond CSOs. Questions focused on CSO descriptive statistics and implementation of LTAD practices in CSO programs.</i>
<b>Documentation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>NSO and PSO LTAD implementation plans and guides</i></li> <li>• <i>Municipal facility allocation policies</i></li> <li>• <i>PSO3 EYL standards</i></li> <li>• <i>PSO3 EYL applications</i></li> <li>• <i>EYL CSO finance reports</i></li> <li>• <i>Researcher field notes</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(n=10)</li> <li>(n=3)</li> <li>(n=4)</li> <li>(n=16)</li> <li>(n=15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Multi-year plans for PSO implementation of LTAD; published LTAD guides for CSOs</i></li> <li><i>Millpond’s CSO affiliation and facility allocation policies</i></li> <li><i>Standards for selection of EYL CSOs</i></li> <li><i>CSO applications to EYL</i></li> <li><i>EYL CSO financial reports</i></li> <li><i>Research diary including notes, impressions, and theorizations drawn from contact with PSOs and CSOs.</i></li> </ul>

An electronic survey was used with the 18 Millpond CSOs in the second part of the extensive phase (Appendix E). The survey was not validated as a research tool, but used only to gather descriptive data about the participating CSOs. The survey asked multiple-choice questions probing the extent to which LTAD-based principles including multi-lateral development, late specialization, and intentional developmental use of competition were being followed (*Canadian Sport for Life- Long-Term Athlete Development 2.0*, 2010). The findings were the basis of a report made to Millpond's recreation department on support for LTAD implementation.

In addition to interviews and the electronic survey, a variety of documents (n= 48) were gathered and analyzed in the extensive phase, including PSO LTAD implementation plans, LTAD guides created for CSOs, municipal sport affiliation and facility allocation policies and procedures, PSO3 EYL standards and EYL CSO applications, reports and financial records. The documents provided context for the actions of the key organizational players, PSOs, a municipal recreation department, and CSOs.

## **Phase 2 – Intensive Research**

The next phase of the research addressed the second research question (RQ2): *How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?* Here, an engaged case study methodology was used to focus on the efforts of a single CSO to implement LTAD while managing multiple resource constraints within the context and under the mechanisms described in the extensive phase.

### ***Timeline and Sample***

The intensive phase was conducted over a period of approximately twelve months (see Figure 2.1). As noted above, a single CSO operating in Millpond was identified

through surveys undertaken as part of work with the Millpond parks and recreation department, and an agreement to participate in the research was secured two months later. The intensive phase began in November 2013, before the conclusion of the extensive phase in October 2014, and specifically before interviews with PSO3's youth league CSOs were completed. The contextual model theorized in the extensive phase was developed prior to collecting most of the data in the intensive phase, and informed the development of the intensive case study.

The intensive phase used a form of engaged research to develop a single case study of a CSO working to implement LTAD. Within a CR paradigm, there is need to explore the ways real and actual structures at societal, field and organization levels condition agency, and how agency in turn leads to reproduction or modification of structures. This invites an outside-inside extensive-intensive approach in which the result of extensive observation informs retroducted theory that can be tested using intensive, engaged research and case study methods (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014). Organizational participants in engaged research can be less interested in co-generation of theory than in reaping the instrumental fruits of data, so parallel and post hoc reflections and interpretations by the researcher are necessary (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009). Such reflection also facilitates the iterative cycles of engagement, reflection and abstraction necessary in CR case study (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014: 150).

In the second, intensive phase of this research study, engaged research was undertaken with CSO leaders, aimed at helping them support adoption of the LTAD innovation and identify whether LTAD implementation was affecting membership loss or retention. Information from this process was combined with subsequent analysis of CSO

documents and interviews to generate a CR case study (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014) tracing the evolution of CSO learning and action over time. This evolution was framed and informed by the multi-level contextual model developed in the extensive research phase.

### ***Data Collection – Case Study***

Table 2.2 summarizes data collection in the second, intensive phase. After informed consent was obtained, CSO leaders were interviewed periodically over the duration of the intensive phase. Semi-structured interviews were held with the CSO President (n=1), the President and Registrar together (n=1), and the incoming President at the end of the study (n=1), as well as 11 interviews with the CSO Technical Director (n=1). In addition observations and field notes were recorded at five Directors meetings, four LTAD planning group meetings, and three scheduled practices. Interviews were recorded for later transcription, or when recording was not possible were transcribed verbatim. Field notes combined verbatim quotations and researcher observations and impressions.

Documentary data were provided by the CSO and consisted of meeting minutes (n=19) and other documents including entries in the president's personal notebook (n=202). An analysis of CSO membership trends was conducted based on CSO records and local census data (Census Profile, 2011). Anonymous structured surveys of parent attitudes about CSO programs and fees were taken at three scheduled practices approximately two weeks apart, and gathered responses from 70, 80 and 63 parents respectively (some parents were interviewed on more than one occasion). These surveys

<b>Method</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Interviews (n=13)</b>		
<i>President</i>	(n=1)	<i>Semi-structured interviews. Themes focused on factors related to CSO programs and LTAD implementation.</i>
<i>President &amp; Registrar</i>	(n=1)	
<i>Incoming President</i>	(n=1)	
<i>Technical Director</i>	(n=1)	
		<i>Eleven semi-structured interviews. Themes focused on factors in progress of LTAD implementation.</i>
<b>Surveys (n=213)</b>		
<i>June 2014</i>	(n=70)	<i>Surveys of parents conducted at CSO practices.</i>
<i>July 2014</i>	(n=80)	<i>Questions focused on CSO programs and organization, and parental decision to register children in CSO programs.</i>
<i>August 2014</i>	(n=63)	
<b>Documentation</b>		
<i>Meeting minutes</i>	(n=19)	<i>Minutes of CSO Executive and General meetings</i>
<i>Researcher meeting notes</i>	(n=9)	<i>Notes taken at CSO Executive, General and work group meetings.</i>
<i>President's notebook</i>	(n=202)	<i>Diary including meeting notes and to-do items.</i>
<i>Annual membership records</i>	2006-14	<i>Registration records of CSO members including gender and age division.</i>
<i>Census data</i>	2011	<i>Statistics Canada 2011 census.</i>
<i>Researcher field notes</i>		<i>Research diary including notes, impressions, and theorizations drawn from contact with CSO.</i>
<i>E-mails with CSO leaders</i>	(n=80)	<i>Correspondence with CSO leaders related to the study.</i>

were not validated for research, but used to gather descriptive information for reporting to the CSO. CSO membership records accessed spanned the period from 2006-2014, meeting minutes from 2011-2014, and the president's notebook from January 2013 to July 2014. Further, the content of 80 e-mails with CSO leaders gathered over the study period was reviewed. Interviews and surveys were conducted during the twelve months from November 2013 to October 2014.

### **Data Analysis – Extensive and Intensive Phases**

Consistent with the critical realist framework, interview data were analyzed using a retroductive grounded theory approach (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Oliver, 2011). Similar to traditional grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the objective was to follow a systematic process of categorizing data to yield a deep, detailed analysis of phenomena, while simultaneously creating an evidence trail. Units of meaning relevant to the research in documents and interviews were identified and clustered, and the emerging themes were compared within and across data sources to identify common and unique themes. Codes and themes were organized by source in content analysis working tables (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), facilitating subsequent analysis by organization type and phase. However, distinct from the traditional approach, the retroductive method does not operate from a basis of pure induction but assumes a degree of bias and researcher pre-understanding, maintains a dialogue between existing theory and emerging meaning, and aims to generate a practical, contextual theory which reflects on the data and asks “what must be true for this to be the case?” (Oliver, 2011). This depends on use of abductive and retroductive logic to identify mechanisms that have the potential causal power to generate events. As analysis proceeds, findings in the empirical domain emerge

as themes and are abstracted following abductive logic, drawing upon possible theoretical explanations to suggest mechanisms in the actual domain that may underlie events. As a pattern of events and potential causal mechanisms emerges over time and across phases of the study, a process of retroductive logic asks what the broader context (i.e. the organizational field) must be like for actual mechanisms to operate as they do, allowing the action of higher-level mechanisms and “deep” structures in the real domain (e.g. institutional logics) to be inferred (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

As each phase progressed, interaction with PSO and CSO leaders led to deeper understanding and new questions that shaped data collection strategies in subsequent phases. Near the end of each phase, themes, sources, and resulting interpretations arising from the research were validated by providing written drafts back to key respondents for review, and by discussing the interpretations in final interviews. Where necessary, revisions to draft findings were made to correspond with respondent perspectives. In this way a longitudinal correspondence between interviews, documentary evidence, observed actions and emergent themes was established and retrospectively confirmed by the participants, providing validation and satisfying the aim of providing opportunity for analysis and reflection. In turn, the emergent themes became the building blocks for abducted theorization of mechanisms operating in the actual domain, and ultimately for retroducted theorization of causal powers (i.e. mechanisms and structures) operating in the real domain.

Document analysis was incorporated after review of the interview data in each phase to provide a parallel perspective and additional insight into emerging theory. This helped create the iterative abductive/retroductive cycles advocated in CR research

(O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). In the extensive phase, document analysis was primarily used to validate respondent interview records, adding detail about scope and scale of reported activities and filling in gaps in the researcher's understanding of organizational plans and activities. For example the content of PSO LTAD implementation plans was compared to the reports of LTAD-related activity from PSO interviews, and the content of EYL applications provided by EYL CSOs was compared to claims of activity levels from those CSOs and PSO3. In the intensive phase, as described above, membership and census records were analyzed to generate a report to the case study CSO about member retention. After the data collection period, analysis of the president's notebook and MYSC executive and member meeting minutes was performed to establish frequency of various operational tasks and determine prime areas of CSO focus.

### **Research Trustworthiness: Questions of Validity and Generalizability**

Research under any paradigm is concerned with establishing the validity of knowledge claims (Sayer, 1992; Fleetwood, 2005; Jones, 2006). The propensity of CR practitioners to draw upon existing practices in the social sciences, hybridizing or using a “beg, borrow and steal” approach (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014) while failing to specify its epistemological basis for linking the empirical to the actual and real, can lead those working in other paradigms to question the validity of CR studies (Walters & Young, 2001). The key is the realist interpretation of “validity” and its meaning under the CR ontology. As noted, CR is based in part on the belief that society is an open system, and “the relationship between causal powers or mechanisms and their effects is therefore not fixed, but contingent” (Sayer, 1992: 107). CR thus rejects the idea that regularity or “constant conjunction” is the same as causality, since “what causes an event has nothing



to do with the number of times it has been observed to occur and nothing to do with whether we happen to be able to predict it” (Sayer, 1992: 110).

With this, the focus on reliability and reproducibility found in positivistic research is jettisoned (Sayer, 1992). At the same time notions of “goodness” and “trustworthiness” in constructivist-interpretivist research (Jones et al., 2006: 27) are taken to mean something more in CR, since CR accepts the existence of real, albeit conceptually-mediated entities which do not reduce to discourse, concepts, or representations (Fleetwood, 2005). Where positivist research is judged by the accuracy of empirical findings determined by their reproducibility, and constructivist research by the reflexive pains taken by the researcher to interpret the data, in CR the test is the plausibility of the connections established between the data and the real causal powers asserted to generate them. Contu and Willmott’s (2005) critique of CR hinges not on ontology but on a tendency to revert to structuralism by privileging structural conditioning in determining agency, rather than adequately exploring the mechanisms of agency through, for example, discourse analysis. Accepting that the objective of CR research is not predictive power but adequate explanation, and that cases are necessarily contingent and context-bound while the theory derived from them is intended to be transfactual and generalizable (Bhaskar, 2014), it remains to consider the adequacy of explanation and the soundness of retroducted theory. This is first located in the depth and carefulness of investigation: the extent to which the data set is extensive or intensive enough, the methods are applied thoughtfully and rationally enough, and conclusions are grounded in the data. Basic concepts of “goodness” in qualitative research apply (Tracy, 2010), as do those specific

to methodology, including data saturation and use of varied forms of triangulation (Downward & Mearman, 2006; McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Yeung 1997).

In the extensive phase of the research described here data collection from three PSOs, seven PSO “LTAD champions”, a municipal parks and recreation department, 31 CSO interviews and a range of documentation provided breadth and depth of information with data triangulation across multiple varied sources (Creswell, 1998; Downward & Mearman, 2006). The intensive phase provided a similar range and depth of information drawn from multiple sources, including 13 CSO leader interviews, 213 parent surveys, meeting notes and minutes, and membership records. The duration of data collection in both phases, 36 months in phase one and 12 months in phase two, permitted tracing the evolution of these perspectives over time.

The second set of criteria for goodness of CR research is found in the strength of connection between retroducted theory and the data, as well as the extent to which the theoretical explanation emerging from the data is endorsed by the research community and respondents and proves useful for future research and practice. A number of checklists have been proposed to improve the usefulness of qualitative research (Gummesson, 2000; Tracy, 2010) and these typically include criteria endorsed by proponents of CR, such as checking interpretations against the views of respondents and triangulating interpretations across researchers and respondents (Sayer, 1992; Downward & Mearman, 2006; Kempster, 2014). As noted above, in this research study emerging themes and researcher interpretations were validated with key respondents, and revisions to draft findings made to correspond with respondent perspectives as needed. In particular, researcher interpretations and theorizations in the extensive phase were tested

in final interviews with PSO technical leaders, and in the intensive phase, in a final interview with the CSO President and Registrar.

Viewed more broadly, the products of CR research adhere to the description advanced by Hendrickson and McKelvey (2002) of a “critical, hypothetical, corrigible, scientific realist, selectionist evolutionary epistemology”:

On this account, the coherence process within a scientific community continually develops in the context of selectionist testing for ontological validity. Thus, the socially constructed coherence enhanced theories of a scientific community are tested against real-world phenomena. The real-world phenomena, i.e., ontological entities, provide the criterion variables against which semantic variances are eventually narrowed and resolved. Less ontologically correct theoretical entities are winnowed out. This process does not guarantee error free "Truth," but it does move science in the direction of increased verisimilitude. (p. 7289).

Ultimately, the community of science will judge theory developed through CR-based research on its verisimilitude to empirically observed phenomena over time, and the community of practice according to its utility as a guide to action.

## **Conclusion**

As Caldwell (2005) has said,

There has always been only one practical guiding principle for the exploration of agency and structure: agency without structure is blind, structure without agency is empty. Yet, there have been no successful attempts to link the micro-level understanding of agency to macro-level structural, institutional or ‘causal’ models of organizational change. (p.109)

In the current research study, the attempt was made to link agency and structure through an extensive study of contextual mechanisms followed by an intensive exploration of embedded agency under a critical realist metatheoretical framework. The findings of this study, which will be described in succeeding chapters, include a detailed account of organizational change situated in a field-level analysis, a coherent model demonstrating how institutional logics inform institutions and their consequent effects on actors, and a method for tracing the evolution of embedded agency from its antecedent structural conditioning through the revision of organizational scripts to the elaboration and reproduction of structures.

The CR approach both challenges and rewards. As described, the data collection spanned 36 months and only after half that time did several failed efforts to recruit organizations prepared to engage in the research study emerge as an opportunity. Utilizing the data already collected and extending upon it generated an extensive multi-perspective data set. The duration and multiple data sources in the extensive phase permitted iterative periods of data collection and abductive abstraction and theorization, yielding a contextual model of change in the CSO field. Although the opportunity to gather data in a more consistent way across three separate sets of organizations was lost, a degree of data triangulation and a depth of reflexive theorization was gained. The abductive and retroductive processes foundational to CR research give and take in a similar way. Each iterative cycle of abstraction yields a potential theoretical lens for the next step, but simultaneously highlights what could have been, but was not, a focus in the last. Use of an engaged research approach in the second, intensive phase of the research heightened reflexivity as researcher and organization leaders followed their parallel co-

informative paths, each striving to make sense of experience and translate knowledge into action. Commitment to a CR approach extended awareness further still, requiring the researcher to consider how the unseen levels of a stratified reality may shape and guide both their own and actors perceptions and actions, and to attend to this interplay of structure and agency in time.

Critical realist analytical dualism and attention to the interplay of causal forces in time can support richer and more comprehensive theoretical explanations than other epistemic orientations, but it would be misleading to suggest that these explanations are necessarily more “accurate”. Key methodological questions of where to set the temporal beginning and end of the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle, how to define structural reproduction vs. change, and how to interpret local contingency vs. broader causality in the way mechanisms operate, remain matters of interpretation and practical expertise. These fundamental questions drive methodological decisions, which emerge over the course of the study through iterative cycles of data collection, abstraction, theorization, and theory testing. As insight grows deeper, it necessarily becomes more context-bound: any particular cycle of interest is coincident with and co-constitutive of the multiple asynchronous learning cycles of organizational life.

Every cycle is likely to lead to reproduction of some structures and change to others, and the extent of structural change is inevitably a product of unique combinations of agency, local contingencies and field- and social-level causal forces. In the current research study, an intensive case study was generated of a single CSO as it worked to implement LTAD. The yearly cycle of the CSO itself, beginning and ending with the annual members meeting, was an appropriate timeframe: modifications to the CSO by-

laws, staffing, and member fees adopted at the annual meeting could be taken as examples of structural change emerging from the prior year's activity, although interview and documentary evidence demonstrated that the changes had roots extending back several years or more. The question of whether structures changed or were reproduced was less easily resolved; the *prima facie* structural changes adopted at year-end could also be interpreted as arising from intent to reproduce and reify the existing organizational culture. Only by considering the actions of case study CSO leaders in light of the abstracted contextual model of CSO function developed in the initial extensive phase of data collection, could patterns of structural/cultural morphogenesis/stasis be elucidated, connections to broader actual and real powers made, and transfactual theorization emerge from a particular case.

The next two chapters present the findings of the extensive and intensive phases of the research study. Chapter Three reports on findings of research into RQ1, *how do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?* Chapter Four reports on findings of RQ2, *how do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?* Both chapters provide an introductory overview of the problem and methodology as well as associated discussion and interpretation of the findings.

**Chapter 3 –  
Birth of a League, Death of Community Sport?  
A Contextual Analysis**

This chapter presents the findings of the first, extensive phase of the research study, aimed at understanding the reasons why CSOs adopt innovation and addressing the research question (RQ1), “*How do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?*”

The extensive phase generated a number of key findings, which are summarized briefly here as introduction to the chapter. CSO representatives reported a variety of resource constraints including a lack of qualified coaches to lead programs and increasing costs for facility access. CSOs competed with each other for resources and were concerned with maintaining membership levels, and particularly with not losing members and coaches to rival CSOs. Rival CSOs were frequently described as “poaching” members, or failing to adopt LTAD or provide quality services in order to offer lower membership fees. The CSOs studied also described aggressive or opinionated behaviours by parents seeking advantage for children enrolled in CSO activities, who threatened to take their children to rival clubs if their demands were not met. They reported a range of challenges associated with LTAD implementation, including parental resistance, resistance of “old guard” coaches and inability to find progressive new coaches, lack of PSO support, and inconsistencies in PSO rules and policies that worked at cross purposes to LTAD. While the three PSOs studied required CSOs to meet affiliation standards in order to access services provided by the PSO (e.g. entry into leagues and championships), and the policies of one city, Millpond, included a requirement for CSOs to meet similar

standards to access essential facilities (e.g. fields, rinks), neither PSOs nor the municipality required CSOs to meet any program quality standards, such as LTAD implementation.

Based on the findings, it is theorized that institutional pressures manifesting in the norms, rules and policies of resource controllers (i.e. PSOs and municipalities) conflict with the pressures and demands imposed by CSOs members and leaders (i.e. coaches). CSOs form interorganizational relationships with PSOs and municipalities to maintain venue access (i.e. facilities, leagues, competitions) in order to serve members. Findings from this study suggest the rules and policies of venue-controllers are linked to a communitarian institutional logic conceptualizing CSOs as non-profit, democratically operated, volunteer-led organizations existing to serve community needs. Conversely, member demands are traced to an individualist institutional logic emphasizing market forces: the need to maintain customer service and value for fee to retain members. A model of CSO function in context, juggling resource constraints while balancing conflicting institutional logics, was developed to illustrate the mechanisms influencing CSOs and how these manifest in CSO structures and in turn condition the actions of CSO leaders. Ultimately, implementation of the LTAD innovation by CSOs depends upon a number of context factors, including resource availability, leader capacity to maintain day-to-day operation, the challenges (and associated drain on capacity) of learning how to implement, costs of implementation itself, the attitudes of members and coaches, and the extent to which resource controllers confer legitimacy and contingent resource access upon adopters. When resource controllers signal they will confer legitimacy, more powerful CSOs with capacity to meet standards while juggling and



balancing these factors may be able to gain an advantage over less powerful rivals.

The chapter opens with a brief re-introduction and overview of the problem and methods. Next, the findings of the extensive phase are provided, and subsequently the contextual model of CSO function is presented and implications are discussed.

### **Research Problem, Context and Methodology**

The research study took place in the context of a project intended to support LTAD implementation among CSOs in a Canadian province. As described in Chapter Two, research proceeded in three parts unfolding over approximately 36 months. In part one, three PSOs nominated 21 affiliated CSOs identified as early adopters of LTAD, and 15 (n= 15) of these participated in interviews designed to gather background information and identify areas for potential project participation. In the second part, information was gathered on behalf of the parks and recreation department of Millpond (a pseudonym), a midsized city (population approximately 500,000), for the purpose of generating a report on LTAD implementation among city CSOs. Eighty-one CSOs affiliated with and/or renting sport facilities in Millpond received an invitation to participate in an electronic survey, with 18 (n=18) subsequent completions. In the third part, CSOs (n=15) constituting PSOs Elite Youth League (EYL) were interviewed at the conclusion of the inaugural season of the new League. The EYL CSOs met a set of administrative and LTAD-based technical standards to be accepted into the league (EYL Technical Manual, 2012)<sup>1</sup>, and the interviews were conducted to assess compliance and gather information about the experience of league participation. Four of the CSOs had been interviewed in phase one approximately two years earlier, and another was situated in Millpond. In

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<sup>1</sup> The citation has been modified to maintain the anonymity of the source.

addition, across the 36 months of the extensive phase, PSO administrative and technical staff, and seven of PSO3s “LTAD champions” (i.e. LTAD implementation ambassadors to PSO3s affiliated CSOs) were interviewed. In all parts of the extensive phase, parallel and subsequent document analysis contributed to building an understanding of the context.

This process created an opportunity to explore the field from several perspectives. Extensive-phase interviews with PSOs, PSO3’s “champions” and CSOs, together with analysis of PSO LTAD plans, informed the mechanisms affecting early-adopting CSOs, and how the degree of PSO support affected CSO implementation of LTAD. Review of Millpond CSO surveys and Millpond’s affiliation and facility allocation policies provided insight into the way CSOs access a key resource, sport facilities, and how CSO-municipal relations might influence LTAD adoption. Interviews and documents from PSO3 and the EYL CSOs provided perspective from CSOs operating a high performance league and the inter-CSO relations within a league structure. LTAD implementation across CSOs evolved considerably over the study period and this three-part process provided data triangulation (Creswell, 1998; Downward & Mearman, 2006) while permitting a glimpse into real-time implementation.

Consistent with the critical realist framework, a series of iterative cycles across the 36 months of the research study helped maintain dialogue between data collection, emerging meaning and consequent theory development. As the extensive data collection phase progressed, interaction with PSO and CSO leaders led to deeper understanding and new questions that shaped data collection strategies in subsequent parts of the phase. Document analysis was incorporated after review of the interview data in each phase to

provide a parallel perspective and additional insight into emerging theory. This methodological approach helped create the iterative abductive/retroductive cycles advocated in CR research (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

### **Extensive Phase Findings**

Extensive phase findings are presented as follows. First, findings from the three PSOs studied across the extensive phase are reviewed. Then, findings from CSOs are provided: first, early LTAD-adopting CSOs nominated by the three PSOs; second, findings from a survey of Millpond CSOs and review of Millpond parks and recreation policies related to CSO facility access; and finally, findings from a study of PSO3's Elite Youth League (EYL) CSOs conducted late in the extensive phase. Themes and sub-themes emerging from interviews are presented with representative quotations in the text and in tables, as in some other qualitative and critical realist articles (Byers, 2013; Misener & Doherty, 2013).

### **PSO Support for LTAD Implementation**

Within the overall extensive phase goal of discovering contextual mechanisms influencing CSO adoption of innovations (RQ1), three PSOs were studied to understand the extent to which they were supportive of LTAD and prepared to assist the CSOs. It quickly became evident that each PSO had a different orientation and assessment of its own capacity to support LTAD implementation. Based on the record of substantive PSO initiatives undertaken to implement LTAD, drawn from a comparison of interview records to published PSO implementation plans as well as the attitudes of PSO staff derived from interview records, the orientation of PSO1 to LTAD implementation was characterized as passive, PSO2's orientation was characterized as inactive, and PSO3 was

characterized as active. Table 3.1 shows themes and illustrative quotes from PSO interviews.

While the Canadian sport system has been described as consisting of silos (Barnes, Cousens, & MacLean, 2007) the influence of NSOs and PSOs on CSOs is widely assumed (Stevens & Slack, 1998). The PSO is responsible for organizing provincial competition frameworks and provincial championships, training coaches and officials, and maintaining a development pathway for high performance athletes through provincial team programs. All CSOs in this study were affiliated with the PSO either directly or through regions or districts. Given this, it would be expected that PSO communication, regulation, and functional integration of innovations such as LTAD would directly affect uptake by CSOs, while the receptive or dismissive attitude of CSOs toward such innovations would reciprocally influence the PSO.

Over the 36 months of the study period, all three PSOs created LTAD implementation plans, promoted LTAD on their web sites, and introduced related several rule modifications for young players. For example, PSO1 launched a new boys division playing a modified development game, and PSO2 attempted to introduce a skill development program for youth. PSO3 went much further, implementing an extensive communications strategy, developing numerous coach resources and modified game formats, mandating LTAD delivery through policy and rule changes, training

**Table 3.1: PSO Themes and Illustrative Quotes by PSO Orientation**

<b>PSO Theme</b>	<b>PSO Sub-theme</b>	<b>Illustrative Quote from PSO</b>
<b><i>PSO 1 – Passive Orientation</i></b>		
Costs of investment in LTAD integration	Cost of activity	“I think we’ve implemented LTAD as far as we can go without costing any more money. I think it’s dollars and cents that are where we stop. We’re still looking for ways to tweak things.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO1)</i>
	Rationale for athlete development	“Oh we’re much higher ranked in the world than soccer. Much higher.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO1)</i>
View of CSO capacity	Lack of CSO capacity/coach capacity	“I would say that clubs feel as though they’re always begging coaches to do things, and the less you require of coaches, the easier it is for them. When we increased the (coach) certification standard...they view it not as, oh it’s a great thing for coaches to know. They see it as how am I gonna get him to do that this year, too, and like we said LTAD means training more, and that’s a demand that only ambitious or very motivated coaches want to fill.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO1)</i>
View of PSO capacity	Staff workload/capacity	“Our full-time staff right now plates are beyond full. Things are falling off our plates.” <i>(Executive Director, PSO1)</i>
Political climate for change	CSO criticism or non-support of PSO initiatives	“Our AGM last year, town hall, there seemed to be a lot of irritation about the prospect of meeting more standards.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO1)</i>
	PSO board capacity or understanding	“...just as a quick example, (our) board of directors (has) six regional presidents who’d rather talk about the color of uniforms for the (provincial) summer games than think visionary and strategically.” <i>(Executive Director, PSO1)</i>
<b><i>PSO 2 – Inactive Orientation</i></b>		
Costs of investment in LTAD integration	Need evidence of functional value of LTAD	“Like why is this a valid theory? Why should we be following long term athlete development?” <i>(Coordinator 2, PSO2)</i>
View of CSO capacity	Knowledge of CSO practice or compliance	“You do get some clubs or... teams within those clubs and within those different teams some coaches buy-in to what we do and some coaches don’t. I mean we don’t know if they’re implementing the right practice model or young player rule. We don’t know if they’re doing that.” <i>(Director, PSO2)</i>
View of PSO capacity	Staff workload/capacity	“Just in terms of (PSO 3’s) capacity versus our capacity I mean they’re able to implement all these festivals because they’re so much more bigger than we are.” <i>(Coordinator 1, PSO2)</i>

	PSO technical capacity or knowledge	“I think because we lack in understanding of this model so there’s not full buy-in and understanding in the staff then we’re not making the necessary changes to make it clear that we actually do follow this mission, vision and values and therefore you have clubs who are saying OK... this doesn’t make sense.” <i>(Director, PSO 2)</i>
Political climate for change	Senior manager or board support	<p>“From the leadership we were told we needed to write a 10-page proposal on why (these) shots shouldn’t be allowed ... there’s no way we can write a 10-page proposal on every technical thing that needs to be changed,...we need the people in this office to believe in this model before it’s gonna go anywhere. <i>(Coordinator 1, PSO2)</i></p> <p>“So our board consists of all club members. So their motives and their decisions are based on their motives and on their primary biases. A lot of our board members come from established clubs ...so to get buy-in on certain things ...is challenging because it might compromise their established reputation.” <i>(Coordinator 1, PSO2)</i></p> <p>“Like no matter what we believe in for some reason if certain people who I don’t think I can even name, I think I’m kind of in the dark of who these political players are, but unless we get buy-in by them we can’t do anything. Even though we’re the governing body. And I think that mentality drips down too right. Don’t rock the boat.” <i>(Coordinator 1, PSO 2)</i></p>
<b>PSO 3 – Active Orientation</b>		
Costs of investment in LTAD integration	Estimated CSO compliance	“I’m guessing 75% awareness of what quality programming should look like, maybe 25% are delivering quality, maybe 25% more think they are delivering quality but are missing some areas, and some of the rest are just masquerading.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO 3)</i>
View of CSO capacity	Lack of CSO capacity/coach capacity	“Where there is more technical ability they are more fully engaged. In small clubs probably less so, they can’t even keep up with basics of handling registration and putting teams together.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO 3)</i>
	CSOs need support to integrate LTAD	“They did not know what this was all about, one they didn’t know how to implement it, two and then they didn’t think it was really all their responsibility.” <i>(Champion 2, PSO 3)</i>
View of PSO capacity	Priority of LTAD	“It’s my number one priority, so I see this as...being able to influence the structure (of the sport) and how it’s played, administered, managed...I’d say probably 50% to 70% on a week of my time would be going into LTAD-related initiatives.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO 3)</i>
	PSO resources available	“I actually haven’t got a lot of resources, even though we’re a big organization, to work with directly in regard to LTAD.” <i>(Technical Director, PSO 3)</i>
Political climate for change	Senior manager or board support	“What’s been very good is that the President and E.D. are very supportive of Long Term Athlete Development so they see that this is...very much what’s needed in our sport. The

	<p>CSO criticism or non-support of PSO initiatives</p> <p>CSO rivalry</p>	<p>board has approved everything I've taken to them." (<i>Technical Director, PSO 3</i>)</p> <p>"There's certainly been a few individuals in certain places that have been loudly spoken in opposition... where I'm at (city), there is more small soccer clubs in (city) than any other region, and they don't get along, It has everything to do with who's going to be in charge when it all settles down and what clubs are going to be the powerful clubs and so when that's the issue, when they're fighting over power, there's not a lot of sense or reason that you can bring into the argument." (<i>Champion 4, PSO 3</i>)</p>
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“champions” to educate and mentor CSOs, and creating several new league structures including a flagship elite youth league built on LTAD principles and standards.

Analysis of extensive phase interviews with PSO staff and PSO3 “LTAD champions” yielded four major themes: (1) views on the internal costs of LTAD integration, (2) views of internal capacity, (3) views of CSO capacity, and (4) perceptions of the internal political climate for the change.

*PSO Costs for LTAD Implementation:* Within the main theme of PSO costs, two sub-themes emerged from PSO interviews: awareness of the financial and human resource costs of supporting LTAD implementation, and questioning or rationalization of the investment. In PSO1 the technical director stated, “I think we’ve implemented LTAD as far as we can go without costing any more money. I think it’s dollars and cents that are where we stop” and then suggested that other sports may have more reason to invest in LTAD than his own: “Oh we’re much higher ranked in the world than soccer. Much higher” (*Technical Director, PSO1*). In PSO2, an employee questioned whether investment in LTAD implementation was justified: “Like why is this a valid theory? Why should we be following long term athlete development?” (*Coordinator 2, PSO2*) In contrast, PSO3, was devoting significant resources to LTAD implementation: “It’s my number one priority... I’d say probably 50% to 70% on a week of my time would be going into LTAD-related initiatives” (*Technical Director, PSO3*). Among other initiatives, PSO3 had trained and deployed LTAD “champions” to work with its CSOs on a regional basis. PSO3’s technical director explained that this high level of investment was necessary to continue to advance the adoption of LTAD in CSOs:



I'm guessing 75% awareness of what quality programming should look like, maybe 25% are delivering quality, maybe 25% more think they are delivering quality but are missing some areas, and some of the rest are just masquerading. *(Technical Director, PSO 3)*

*PSO Capacity:* PSO views of cost and rationale for LTAD implementation were connected with estimates of the capacity of the PSO to conduct its operations, particularly the degree to which PSO staff could perform tasks associated with LTAD while fulfilling existing responsibilities. Identified sub-themes were (a) PSO staff time and capacity, (b) PSO staff technical expertise, and (c) LTAD priority within existing PSO plans. PSO1 and PSO2 cited internal reorganization and the need to align LTAD implementation to other planned initiatives. The executive director of PSO1, with a staff of 15 employees, indicated, "...our plates are beyond full" *(Executive Director, PSO1)* and employees of both PSO1 and PSO2 (12 employees) felt that the larger PSO3 was able to advance LTAD more quickly due to abundant resources: "...they're able to implement all these festivals because they're so much more bigger than we are" *(Coordinator 1, PSO2)*. However organization size did not necessarily translate to capacity for LTAD implementation. The technical director of PSO3 (32 employees) said, "I actually haven't got a lot of resources, even though we're a big organization, to work with directly in regard to LTAD" *(Technical Director, PSO 3)*. Additionally, a PSO2 interview indicated that some newly hired technical staff lacked the basic understanding needed to defend LTAD, and this may have impacted CSO adoption:

I think because we lack in understanding of this model so there's not full buy-in and understanding in the staff then we're not making the necessary changes to make it clear that we actually do follow this mission, vision and values and therefore you have clubs who are saying OK... this doesn't make sense.

*(Director, PSO 2)*

*Views of CSO Capacity:* While PSO employees differed on the capacities of their own organizations and the extent to which the additional work and cost of LTAD implementation could be justified, they were in broad agreement about the capacities of their affiliated CSOs. Identified sub-themes were (a) lack of CSO capacity/coach capacity, (b) CSOs need for LTAD implementation support, and (c) lack of PSO knowledge of the extent of CSO implementation. Interviews indicated that staff of all three PSOs felt that CSO volunteers were often overwhelmed and that many CSOs lacked knowledge or human resource capacity for LTAD implementation. PSO staff suggested that CSO professionalization, particularly the hiring of coaches, would be beneficial. They were also aware of CSO concerns about the potential costs of implementation and requests for practical information on how to operationalize LTAD.

*Internal PSO Political Climate:* All three PSOs acknowledged the existence of internal "silos", difficulty in understanding how to operationalize the LTAD framework document provided by the NSO, and challenges around developing an implementation plan. There were salient differences in the perceptions of PSO employees about the climate of political support for LTAD from PSO senior managers or boards of directors:

So our board consists of all club members. So their motives and their decisions are based on their motives and on their primary biases. A lot of our board members come from established clubs ...so to get buy-in on certain things ...is challenging because it might compromise their established reputation. *(Coordinator 1, PSO2)*

In contrast, PSO3 had a strong internal climate of support for LTAD:

What's been very good is that the President and E.D. are very supportive of Long Term Athlete Development so they see that this is...very much what's needed in our sport. The board has approved everything I've taken to them. *(Technical Director, PSO 3)*

Although the themes of PSO budget constraints and perceptions of limited CSO capacity emerged as important, the interviews suggested that PSO staff calculated the extent to which they should advocate, plan and budget for LTAD implementation primarily on the basis of internal PSO capacity and political climate. The internal political climate emerged as a particularly powerful consideration: interviewees from all PSOs referred to structural obstacles, inter-organization silos, and fence-sitting behaviour by staff, senior managers and board members as impediments:

I think I'm kind of in the dark of who these political players are, but unless we get buy-in by them we can't do anything. Even though we're the governing body. And I think that mentality drips down too right. Don't rock the boat." *(Coordinator 1, PSO 2).*

In PSO3, belief that sweeping improvement in player development was necessary and strong support for LTAD by the PSO president, senior management, and board of directors contributed to an activist approach. In PSO1 a passive approach was taken, explained by the Executive Director as a belief they were “at the head of the curve in terms of provincial sports that live and breathe LTAD principles” (*Executive Director PSO1*), that additional initiatives would come at unacceptable financial cost to the PSO and CSOs, and that PSO staff were already overworked. In PSO2 many of the technical staff had been recently hired and without understanding of or belief in the value of LTAD, and perceiving lack of support from senior management and board, did not effectively advance LTAD in their PSO. The ways passive, inactive or active PSO orientation may have affected LTAD adoption by CSOs is of interest when considering findings about CSO implementation of LTAD presented in the following sections.

### **CSO Implementation of LTAD: Issues of Capacity and Competition**

#### ***Part One: Early LTAD-adopting CSOs***

The CSOs interviewed in part one of the extensive phase (n=15) were identified by their PSO as leading in LTAD implementation, even though two of the three PSOs did not assertively promote LTAD themselves. Analysis of part one interview records indicated that CSOs faced similar challenges with regard to LTAD implementation, emerging in four theme areas: (1) inter-organizational relations, (2) member interests, (3) leadership, and (4) knowledge, evidence and validation. Table 3.2 shows themes and illustrative quotes from CSOs interviewed in the first part of

the extensive research phase, with CSO responses grouped according to the orientation of their respective PSO.

*CSO Inter-organizational Relations:* CSOs represented themselves as experiencing multiple resource constraints, especially shortage of human resources in the form of volunteer administrators and coaches. One sub-theme was competition from other CSOs for members, coaches and access to facilities: "...we have a rival club across the street and the parents will take their kids to them" (CSO1). A second sub-theme was sport rules and structures, such as league structures. Here CSOs commented that the "system" of tournaments, leagues and related rules, managed in large part by the PSO, created a barrier because it was based on pre-LTAD concepts that were at odds with LTAD implementation:

What I want to get out of this is to change the competition model, to reduce the number of games. Younger kids get three-minute shifts...they barely touch the ball. I don't see that as development. Can we not as clubs all sit down with [PSO2] and say, we need to change the model? (CSO6)

Or,

...the nature of the sport and rules, don't help...when players rotate out they can't go back in, so if you try to rotate equally then you might not win and in the parent's eyes, winning is everything. The rules don't work in our favour.

(CSO1)

**Table 3.2: CSO Interviews: Themes and Illustrative Quotes Grouped by PSO Orientation**

<b>CSO Theme</b>	<b>CSO Sub-theme</b>	<b>Illustrative Quote from CSO</b>
<b><i>PSO 1 (Passive PSO) (n=3)</i></b>		
Inter-organizational relations	Inter-club competition	“(Sport 1) is a late entry sport, the kids have been in other sports, girls come from gym and skating and dance, the boys from hockey, so the parents have preconceived notions about how a rep program should be run...and we have a rival club across the street and the parents will take their kids to them.” (CSO1)
	Sport rules and structures e.g. league structures	“So why do we still have these distractors? Like equal play rules, kids are sent to sit in the stands...if we believe in these goals why doesn't (PSO1) fully mandate it? All my frustrations aren't with (PSO1), they're not going to throw out the whole competition structure, (major city) wouldn't stand for it.” (CSO2)
Member interests	Members (parents) opinionated/aggressive Loss of members	“Last year we had two 15U teams that were very equally balanced, but parents wanted to be on the 'number one' team or they were walking. We have to do a lot of work with the parents on what we are trying to do.” (CSO1)
Leaders	Availability/demands of volunteer coaches Resistance or support from coaches	“We can get players, not coaches or gyms...the kids we turn away.” (CSO3)  “I think we've been aspiring to use LTAD but we are fighting an old school mentality, coaches and parents who want to win a championship.” (CSO2)
Knowledge, evidence, validation	Evidence, validation, external support	“There could be a lot more that we are missing...having the opportunity to see what others are doing could help.” (CSO1)
	Operationalization of LTAD theory	“I had a conversation with a (sport) coach, I showed him, and he said 'yes I am doing this 90%' and he wasn't! It's easy for me, I have a degree in human kinetics, I teach it...but it is complicated for the average person.” (CSO2)  “The (sport 1) LTAD document does not necessarily provide clear guidance. It's difficult to adapt something philosophical to the club reality.” (CSO1)
<b><i>PSO2 (Inactive PSO) (n=7)</i></b>		
Inter-organizational relations	Inter-club competition	“Kids shop around, if they are cut they go to others...locally a new club just formed in (city), now there are more clubs to fight over space, more places for parents to take

	Sport rules and structures e.g. league structures	their kids. How do we stop this?" (CSO6)  "We also see kids playing seven days a week, we limit practice but they play for school teams, provincial teams, it's not good for the athlete. Parents are always pushing." (CSO9)
Member interests	Members (parents) opinionated/aggressive  Loss of members	"The parents are crazy. They used to drop them off and know nothing. Now they stay and know everything." (CSO8)  "We would rather lose an unhappy parent than a coach or a team by trying to change our philosophy." (CSO9)
Leaders	Availability/demands of volunteer coaches  Resistance or support from coaches	"We don't have enough second teams, not enough coaches." (CSO6)  "I would say it's coaches, we are at their mercy because there are not enough of them, sometimes we're held ransom to what they want." (CSO7)
Knowledge, evidence, validation	Evidence, validation, external support  Operationalization of LTAD theory	"I'm not so certain I'm as knowledgeable as I would like to be, from reading it. I thought our club has taken some strides but we need some people from outside saying 'this could help' and it's not one man leading the charge alone." (CSO7)  "There's a lot of interpretation around it. We're trying to stay on line with the different levels but as a club, as a small group, we can't always come to consensus about stages and ages. We don't allow playing up until age 15, I'm not sure even if that is the right age but that's what we do. We look at LTAD, is that the right time, are we doing the right thing?" (CSO7)
<b><i>PSO3 (Active PSO) (n=6)</i></b>		
Inter-organizational relations	Inter-club competition	"We need the backing from (PSO3) and (NSO) because people are saying, 'We are going to move clubs, or move sports.'" (CSO15)  "But small clubs in the region... have no technical staff, they don't understand why this is important and that causes us pain (lost members) and at a board level the loss of revenue means fewer coaches. But if we can't coach the player we can't help the player." (CSO15)
Member interests	Members (parents) opinionated/aggressive	"The problem is getting it to the masses. The parents aren't reading it (LTAD guide) so they are still harping on immediate success." (CSO13b)

	Loss of members	“We’ve had parents leave because the kids didn’t get jerseys, they don’t play tournaments.” (CSO12)
Leaders	Availability/demands of volunteer coaches	“ A weak point in our club, is having volunteers to deliver it. We only have a few paid coaches. We need volunteers to deliver it, coaches, conveners...” (CSO18a)
	Resistance or support from coaches	“The competitive program has changed to a more stage-appropriate program. I did a lot of work with parents and coaches and when that didn’t work I basically said ‘This is what we’re doing, tough shit!’” (CSO13)
	Resistance or support from executive	“It was hard to get it by the board at first, ‘we don’t need this, why do we need this’ but now 70% like it...it’s a success.” (CSO14)
Knowledge, evidence, validation	Evidence, validation, external support	“We can’t be the ones sending out the information. We need support from the PSO, the NSO...hold a town hall, you guys, the experts, give a presentation to parents from all sports.” (CSO15)
	Operationalization of LTAD theory	“The LTAD manuals are great but you can’t always follow it to the T...if we have something that fits the ages and regulations, the different tracks or streams...” (CSO12)



*Member Interests:* A second theme emerging from CSO interviews was the power of member interests in influencing CSO decisions. Here, sub-themes were related to opinionated or aggressive parent-members, and fear of loss of members to rival CSOs. This was clearly related to the sub-theme of competition with rival CSOs reported above. Considering parent members, one CSO leader said, “The problem is getting it [LTAD] to the masses. The parents aren’t reading it [LTAD guide] so they are still harping on immediate success” (CSO13b). CSOs reported that dissatisfied parents frequently threatened to take their children to rival CSOs, particularly when those CSOs had not adopted LTAD:

The first thing that comes to mind is alignment on key principles from all sports...if everyone in all sports was focusing on technical development, and not keeping score, then parents wouldn't be taking their kids to other clubs or sports.

We get downright nasty emails, like "if you don't keep score you're making softies out of our kids". (CSO15)

*Leadership:* Comments about the role of CSO leadership were predominantly concerned with coaches, and fell into three sub-themes: the availability and demands of volunteer coaches, and resistance or support from coaches for LTAD, and resistance or support of executive members for LTAD. Considering the availability of coaches, CSO sources reported that the shortage of good coaches, particularly volunteer coaches, constrained their ability to implement LTAD and, in fact, to deliver programs in general: “We can get players, not coaches or gyms...the kids we turn away” (CSO3). In terms of coach resistance, the pressure created by coaching shortages made it difficult for CSO leaders to

replace coaches who did not support LTAD. In one example a CSO leader commented on his response:

The competitive program has changed to a more stage-appropriate program. I did a lot of work with parents and coaches and when that didn't work I basically said 'This is what we're doing, tough shit! (CSO13)

The issue of resistance by executive leaders, i.e. volunteer directors, to LTAD was less prevalent, possibly because in most instances interviews were with, or in the presence of, such leaders. However one CSO technical director acknowledged, "It was hard to get it by the board at first, 'we don't need this, why do we need this' but now 70% like it...it's a success." (CSO14)

*Knowledge, Evidence and Validation:* CSOs presented ideas for remedying constraints to LTAD implementation identified in the first three theme areas. Two sub-themes emerged, a need for evidence, validation, and external support, and a need for greater support on how to operationalize LTAD theory. Examples under the first sub-theme included identifying a need for education of parents and coaches, preferably delivered by credible external NSO, PSO and CS4L experts, to help them understand the advantages of LTAD. In the second area, a number of respondents commented on the need for improved internal, technical understanding to help CSOs operationalize the generic LTAD resources provided by the NSO and PSO, for example,

There's a lot of interpretation around it. We're trying to stay on line with the different levels but as a club, as a small group, we can't always come to consensus about stages and ages. We don't allow playing up until age 15, I'm not sure even

if that is the right age but that's what we do. We look at LTAD, is that the right time, are we doing the right thing? (CSO7)

Across theme areas, the CSO interviews showed greater homogeneity than those of PSOs. Where some PSOs were doing conspicuously more or less to advance LTAD, the interviewed CSOs professed a common desire to implement LTAD, and faced a common set of challenges mitigating against implementation. The PSO orientation did not seem to greatly affect the challenges as experienced by the early-adopting CSOs. However, the CSO sample was identified by PSOs as being early leaders in LTAD implementation, and the effect of PSO orientation on other affiliated CSOs that had not substantively adopted LTAD is not known.

Given a relative lack of support from two of three PSOs, what mechanisms led these CSOs, particularly those affiliated with PSO1 or PSO2, to become early adopters? Early-adopting CSOs, including CSOs that had implemented LTAD programming prior to the beginning of this study, often identified a single head coach or technical director as the impetus for their initial LTAD implementation. These idiosyncratic technical innovations were felt to confer a competitive advantage, in that a reputation for better-prepared and more successful athletes was believed to attract new members to the CSO: "It helps build our reputation, helps cement our role and mission as one of the leading LTAD clubs in (the city)" (CSO16) However in succeeding years the broad national advance of CS4L-LTAD proved to be double-edged for innovating CSOs. They had established leadership, but this advantage evaporated as other CSOs adopted and resistance emerged. Some media stories ridiculed LTAD-based "no scores-no standings" policies implemented by PSOs to reduce competitive pressure and increase emphasis on

skill development in youth leagues (Kennedy, 2013). LTAD was becoming a liability, and early adopters appealed for external validation from their NSO, PSO and other credible sources. Others advocated for accelerated adoption of LTAD as a standard and even offered to assist other CSOs in implementation. The effect of pressure applied by parents was evident in the CSO interviews. Parental desire for their child to win at all costs were reported by 11 of 15 CSOs, and threats to take their child to another CSO if they were not satisfied were reported in 8 of 15 CSOs. In response, five CSOs advocated parent and coach education about LTAD, which would presumably reduce internal conflict and risk of losing members and coaches to rival CSOs.

### ***Part Two: Municipalities and CSOs***

The second data collection period of the extensive phase illuminated the relationship between a municipal parks and recreation department and CSOs, and added information about CSO perceptions of LTAD implementation. The City of Millpond, like many municipalities in the province, owns and manages sport facilities including gymnasias, sport fields, arenas and swimming pools and rents them at a subsidized rate to CSOs. In addition the sport development department provides small development grants and supports athlete and volunteer recognition events. The department thus regulates CSO access to an essential resource (facilities), and CSOs are highly sensitive to issues of facility access, cost, quality, and associated rules and procedures (Barcelona & Young, 2010; Misener & Doherty, 2013; Sharpe 2006). In this case the municipal parks and recreation department requested a survey wishing to better understand city CSOs and identify potential areas for support, including support for LTAD implementation. Table 3.3 provides a summary of responses to key questions from the Millpond CSO survey.

The 18 CSOs surveyed varied widely in size, with 15-1300 members (average 388) and annual budgets ranging from \$5,000 - \$900,000 (median \$82,500). Two CSOs had full-time staff and seven clubs reported having part-time staff. Sixteen CSOs of 18 indicated their main program focus was youth development. Over 80% reported their leaders or coaches had a solid understanding of LTAD, however responses to key questions about LTAD program compliance, coach qualifications, and use of LTAD-based athlete development curricula suggested a gap between perceived *understanding* of LTAD and *de facto implementation* in many CSOs. In light of PSO and CSO interview results from the first part of the extensive phase, the moderate levels of implementation among some Millpond CSOs may have reflected the desire to conserve resources given lack of external pressure/support (i.e. from passive or inactive PSOs), perceived risks, or lack of technical know-how to bridge the theory-practice gap.

Although the opportunity for data collection in part two came about through the parks and recreation department's interest in advancing the quality of CSO programs and LTAD implementation by CSOs, the municipal-CSO relationship was predicated on the rental of facilities to CSOs and the affiliation and allocation policies governing those transactions (Barcelona & Young, 2010; MacLean, Cousens & Barnes 2011). Both PSO and municipal requirements for affiliation represent *regulatory thresholds*, defined here as a standard which must be met to access key resources. Increasing administrative demands to meet standards set by governing organizations has been identified as a drain on limited CSO capacities (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013). The need to protect scarce human and material resources may contribute to CSO decisions not to implement an

**Table 3.3: Millpond CSO Survey Results**

CSO - Sport	Primary Focus	Annual Budget	Registered Members	Affiliated to PSO or PSO district?	Legally incorporated?	Leaders & coaches have solid LTAD understanding?	Programs compliant with LTAD? (1 – 5)	Coaches qualified by LTAD stage? (1 – 4)	Programs use LTAD curriculum? (1 – 4)
Basketball	Youth	\$900,000	1200	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2	2
Hockey (league)	Youth	\$750,000	950	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	3	3
Hockey (league)	Youth	\$250,000	300	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	2	2
Soccer	Youth	\$200,000	1300	Yes	Yes	No	3	3	3
Football	Youth	\$194,000	140	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	4	4
Soccer	Youth	\$150,000	900	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	4	4
Figure Skating	Youth	\$140,000	350	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	4	4
Soccer	Youth	\$125,000	825	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	3	3
Volleyball	Youth	\$90,000	90	Yes	No	Yes	4	3	3
Soccer	Youth	\$75,000	350	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2	2
Baseball (league)	Youth	\$60,000	425	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1	1
Softball (league)	Youth	\$50,000	780	No	Yes	No	2	1	1
Baseball (league)	Adult rec	\$47,000	170	Yes	Yes	No	1	1	1
Athletics	Youth	\$35,000	75	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	4	4
Tennis	Adult rec	\$29,000	523	No	Yes	Yes	3	1	1
Baseball (league)	Youth	\$20,000	1200	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	3	3
Speed Skating	Youth	\$15,000	34	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	4	4
Basketball	Youth	\$5,000	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1	1
		<i>Mdn= \$82,500</i>	<i>M=388</i>	16/18	17/18	15/18	<i>M= 2.9</i>	<i>M= 2.6</i>	<i>M= 2.6</i>

innovation such as LTAD, but certain extrinsic requirements, such as the regulatory threshold of affiliation to a municipality to qualify for facility access, must be met as an operational necessity.

In Millpond, city affiliation policies privilege larger, better-organized and incorporated organizations. Millpond’s recreation department provides preferential access to facilities for CSOs affiliated with the city, which requires applicant CSOs to provide copies of by-laws, annual meeting minutes, financial statements and proof of liability insurance (Millpond Affiliation Policy, n.d.)<sup>2</sup>. Similar documentation is required for affiliation with the PSO in many sports, which is mandatory if CSOs wish to participate in PSO-managed competition structures such as leagues and championships. Additionally Millpond imposes residency restrictions on affiliate CSOs, specifying that a high proportion of CSO members must be Millpond residents (Millpond Affiliation Policy, n.d.)<sup>3</sup>. Nearly all Millpond CSOs surveyed met these thresholds; all but one was legally incorporated and all but two PSO-affiliated, and when surveyed the Millpond CSOs reported well-developed administrative practices. The availability of administrative capacity may have contributed to the decision of Millpond CSOs to participate in the survey.

Failure to meet or maintain these thresholds makes it extremely difficult for smaller, informally-organized CSOs to “stay in the game” by obtaining resources needed to attract and retain members, including access to sport facilities from municipal recreation departments and access to competitions and leagues via PSO affiliation. In contrast, adoption of program innovations such as LTAD was a discretionary matter.

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<sup>2</sup> The citation has been modified to maintain the anonymity of the source.

<sup>3</sup> The citation has been modified to maintain the anonymity of the source.

Neither the affiliation policies of the three PSOs studied nor the Millpond affiliation policy require adoption of LTAD. This suggests that scarce CSO resources are preferentially allocated to meeting the requirements of interlocking resource-controlling organizations such as PSOs and municipal parks and recreation departments. Meeting the regulatory thresholds in place limits CSO resource availability for adopting innovations such as LTAD, even when CSOs report a high degree of awareness and profess support for those innovations.

### ***Part Three: Elite Youth League CSOs***

The focus of the final part of the extensive phase one of this research study was an initiative undertaken by PSO3 to improve athlete development through creation of an Elite Youth League (EYL). By basing EYL standards on LTAD, PSO3 aimed to improve development of its high performance youth players and to influence affiliated clubs by promoting LTAD as the framework for development of elite players. Interviews and document analysis from the EYL CSOs provide a third perspective into the context and mechanisms driving adoption of LTAD, of CSOs that had invested heavily into LTAD and now anticipated a return on that investment.

EYL CSOs were initially selected through a competitive process and selection was based on CSO ability to meet published standards (Technical Manual, 2013)<sup>4</sup>. EYL CSOs were interviewed at the close of the inaugural season of the League in order to assess CSO administrative systems within these standards as the basis for a report to PSO3. The season-end evaluation afforded a research opportunity to explore the motives of these CSOs in joining the EYL, the link to their implementation of LTAD. As this data

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<sup>4</sup> The citation has been modified to maintain the anonymity of the source.



was collected near the end of phase one, further insight into the evolution of LTAD implementation within PSO3 across the extensive phase was provided.

The executive director and technical directors of fifteen of the 18 EYL CSOs were jointly interviewed; four of these CSOs had been previously interviewed in the first part of phase one. In addition to the EYL CSOs, one Millpond CSO outside but directly affected by the creation of EYL was interviewed. Interview questions focused on how the CSO had made the decision to apply for EYL, challenges that had been encountered prior to and after confirmation of acceptance, relations with nearby EYL and non-EYL clubs, and costs and benefits of EYL participation. The interview guide for the EYL interviews appears as Appendix D. As implementation of LTAD was a prerequisite for EYL entry, these interviews did not greatly illuminate the process of adoption of an innovation, but rather the extent to which CSOs expected to benefit from meeting a high entry standard that included LTAD and how competition between CSOs drove CSOs to meet those standards.

The results from the semi-structured interviews of EYL CSOs were subsequently analyzed along with documents and records from the EYL CSOs and plans and records from PSO3. Themes emerging from the interviews were similar to those from the CSOs studied earlier in the phase. Themes of inter-organization relations, member interests, and leaders were the same, while the theme of legitimacy, validation and prestige differed somewhat in that EYL CSOs were not seeking support for LTAD adoption, but rather for their position relative to other CSOs. Table 3.4 summarizes themes and illustrative quotes from the EYL interviews.

The 18 EYL CSOs were large and well resourced. Annual budgets ranged from

\$800,000 to \$3.9M (average \$1.76M), and the CSOs had cash reserves of up to \$1.75M. Annual member registration ranged from 1200- 8000 (average 4880), predominantly youth under 18 years. The CSOs had access to extensive indoor and outdoor field facilities leased from their municipality, or jointly owned by the CSO and municipality. Facility rental costs were considerable, consuming approximately 34% of the overall CSO budget in one case, and access to sufficient facilities was an ongoing focus, “our most critical day-to-day need” (*CSO13*). All EYL CSOs had offices and paid, dedicated administrative staff.

When the 18 EYL CSOs were selected, 12 were tightly clustered around one large metropolitan area, four around another large center, and two near a third. EYL CSOs found themselves competing to recruit from the same player pools, and some admitted to finding it difficult to recruit players (see Table 3.4, sub-theme inter-club competition). At the same time, parents were questioning the player fees, which PSO3 had estimated at approximately \$4500 per player. Compared with interviews of early-adopting CSOs from early in the extensive phase, themes of inter-CSO competition and own-CSO reputation and legitimacy were more evident, and the specific challenges of LTAD implementation much less evident among EYL CSOs. Among the most frequently mentioned comments in the 15 EYL interviews were competition with other EYL CSOs for players (n= 14), poaching of players by coaches (n= 4), misconduct by other CSOs (n= 11), lack of even-handedness by the PSO when dealing with EYL CSOs (n= 9), and the pride and reputation of the CSO (n= 9). The extent of LTAD implementation was not mentioned as a challenge but rather was a point of pride among the EYL CSOs (n= 6).

**Table 3.4: Themes and Illustrative Quotes From Elite Youth League CSO Interviews**

<b>EYL Theme</b>	<b>EYL Sub-theme</b>	<b>Illustrative Quote from EYL CSO</b>
Inter-organizational relations	Inter-club competition  Relationship with PSO: need for fairness	It's not a friendly environment. If we put our strat plan or coach standards on the web they steal it." (CSO16)  (Re: cooperation with other CSOs) "Shot down is a nice way of saying it. They tell their players not to come to us." (CSO14)  "We developed a lot of players who were grabbed up by other clubs...we hoped EYL would make us more visible." (CSO16)  "The (PSO) has to stop this 'It's my way or the highway' way they work...a lot of time it's not in the interest of the child." (CSO14)  "We've always tried to comply with all standards, but we want to know others are, too." (CSO27)
Member interests	Members (parents) interests/demands  Loss of members	"It's hard to convince parents (about LTAD)...taking away everything fun for the parent and kid is killing the game." (CSO20)  "Parents felt we didn't know what we were doing so they went elsewhere." (CSO14)  "We should have a rule that when a coach leaves he or she can't take players with him. We will agree to that today. If we're going to invest thousands of hours and dollars to have that, I'm not interested in EYL." (CSO27)
Leaders	Cost/scarcity of coaches  Resistance or support from coaches	"There will be wage inflation." (CSO22)  "I'm paying my head coach a lot because he's National A. If we were just giving parents a bag of balls we could make more money, too. It's not a level playing field." (CSO 16)  "Coaches have the power to blackmail you- 'I can take all the kids with me when I go to another club, so pay me more.'" (CSO14)
Legitimacy, validation, prestige	Validation, legitimacy  Role or value of LTAD	"It's survival- we have to be in the top run of clubs." (CSO22)  "We're like the Holt Renfrew of soccer...we have to differentiate ourselves, be an elite club for our existence." (CSO24)  "It (EYL) gives us a tool to develop other (LTAD) programs: 'here's what we are building toward.'" (CSO26)  "It's a tough program to implement...we lost people as a result...but people are coming back...parents are really liking LTAD now." (CSO24)

In the interviews, EYL CSOs gave four main reasons for league entry. First was reputation and prestige: most felt they were among the best, if not the best club in the province and that their reputation would be questioned if they were not in EYL. Second was competitive advantage: six CSOs commented that they would lose players if they didn't become EYL clubs, that it was an issue of "survival" (CSO22), that they "couldn't afford not to, in our market" (CSO17), or that becoming an EYL club would position them as pre-eminent in their region: "We have to differentiate ourselves, be an elite club, for our existence" (CSO24). Related to this was the desire to capture their entire local market: eight CSOs said they wanted to offer a program that offered an opportunity to move from entry into the sport "right to the highest level" (CSO23) in-house so players would not have to leave. This was presented as a technical issue, the argument being that players would have consistent quality coaching at one CSO throughout their development. Finally, six of the EYL CSOs indicated they "already had the pieces in place" (CSO14) having already implemented extensive LTAD-based programs. Despite pride in their reputation and technical expertise, however, most immediately dropped their EYL player fees below the \$4500/year initially suggested by the PSO when the extent of local competition became evident. In the dense cluster around the largest metropolitan area, six of nine CSOs charged under \$3000, requiring them to subsidize the program from other budgets. Many of these CSOs admitted this was unsustainable and planned to increase fees in the following year. Several stated that, had they known the EYL CSOs would be distributed in close proximity, they might not have applied. Some also accused other EYL CSOs of manipulating the rules by offering various perquisites such as travel subsidies to parents.

EYL inception triggered increased competition for coaches and related wage inflation. League standards dictated advanced coach accreditation and gender equality, and some EYL CSOs found it difficult to recruit qualified female coaches. In 12 of 15 interviews coach scarcity, and in 14 of 15 the cost of coaches was raised. Some stated coaches were demanding higher pay, while others said they had voluntarily increased coach pay in light of higher than anticipated coach workloads. This also raised the specter of poaching, a possibility at least one CSO recognized in its detailed pre-application analysis, and one arising in many interviews:

Some other EYL clubs spread lies and poach players instead of developing them. We should have a rule that when a coach leaves they can't take players with them... We lost 75% of last years' girls team to that, poaching... We have parents and coaches dictating to us based on this. (*Technical Director, CSO27*)

In Millpond district, which had the greatest per capita number of PSO3 CSOs in the province, CSOs took a unique approach to EYL application. Rather than run the risk of multiple competing but relatively weak applicants in their small geographic area, the three largest CSOs proposed a single, united EYL team and invited all district CSOs to enter discussions on joint participation. Talks stalled until the largest clubs demanded a \$25,000 deposit at which point the smaller CSOs withdrew from discussions, leaving the largest three to form the united team. Some other CSOs viewed this as a power play by the big three to realign the district and eliminate smaller clubs, an agenda confirmed in the interview with the united team. In the following months this bid for hegemony played out again when PSO3 instituted a new sub-EYL regional league structure; it was announced Millpond district's Central League would be replaced by a new multi-district

South Region League (SRL) and a new political battle broke out over the eligibility of teams from the various districts. The president of one smaller, non-EYL CSO that appeared to be targeted by the new league restructuring said:

A committee was struck... The chair was president of the EYL club, and he proposed that the EYL club would (also) hold the SRL team...The committee was stacked. I presented a minority report based on that the EYL club was (accepted) on the condition they would only run EYL...now they were getting regional teams too. It was a conflict of interest for them; secondly it would harm the other clubs whose mandate was to offer full programs...a club like mine. They basically took the youth aspect out of my program. All our boys' teams...now they will no longer exist. If (they) have to go to (the EYL CSO) those teams will cease to exist, and coaches with kids on the teams may go too. So we will lose the coaches that we trained, and the teams themselves. (*President, CSO29*)

In summary, the creation of the EYL met PSO3's goal of entrenching LTAD as requisite for high performance athlete development within their flagship youth program. By creating a set of performance standards for league entry and using a competitive process for CSO selection, the PSO created a new regulatory threshold. Accordingly, CSOs aspiring to maintain or improve their status, competitive position and resource access were driven to apply. EYL CSOs concluded that their dominant size, success and technical capacity including prior investment in LTAD implementation increased the likelihood of acceptance, whereas failure to apply would diminish their reputation and frustrate their goal of long-term member retention. Despite the costs and challenges they had faced to gain entry, EYL CSOs were unanimous that they would remain in the league

and add new age divisions each year according to the league rollout plan, while the three united CSOs in Millpond district leveraged their EYL status to further their strategy of local hegemony.

### **Discussion: CSO Adoption of Innovation in Context**

The first research question was, *how do contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?* By gathering and analyzing data from three diverse sets of CSOs, three PSOs, and a municipal parks and recreation department across a 36 month period, a number of important themes and sub-themes emerged from the extensive phase of the study. Following an iterative, abductive/retroductive process, these then became the foundation for a theorized contextual model of structures and mechanisms acting on CSOs.

The findings indicate that CSO perceptions of their resource positions and constraints including the competitive threat from rival CSOs, the need to meet requirements imposed by interlocking resource-controlling organizations to access resources, and institutional expectations of those organizations and CSO members, together created contextual mechanisms that influenced how CSOs adopted the LTAD innovation. CSOs must balance conflicting institutional logics to enable them to access key resources, while continuously juggling resource dependencies to maintain their operations. Their capacity for and success in doing so, along with the signals given by resource providers about the value of adopting LTAD as a factor in maintaining organizational legitimacy and continued access to resources, contribute to the CSO decision to adopt innovation.

## **Resource Dependence/Institutional Views of the CSO**

Much CSO research, particularly that on CSO capacity, proceeds from definition of CSOs as community-based, member serving sport organizations (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Like all organizations, CSOs exist in complex multi-level networks (MacLean et al., 2011; Misener & Doherty, 2013) consisting of external resource holders such as the PSO and the municipality; resource competitors including same- and other-sport CSOs; sponsors, donors and suppliers; and internally the CSO board, committees, paid and volunteer staff, and members. More broadly CSOs exist in context of social and institutional norms and structures including regulations on not-for-profit function, expectations for the social contribution of volunteers, the role of youth sport in communities, and sometimes conflicting member-parent expectations for youth sport including winning, skill development, and simple participation and fun (Sharpe, 2006).

Resource dependence theory (RDT) (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) is often used as a theoretical frame for CSO research (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Patterson, 2014; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013; Wicker et al., 2013). Briefly, RDT holds that organizations, seeking stable access to essential resources, face uncertainties due to their interdependence with other organizations. These uncertainties make survival and continued success uncertain, so they attempt to manage the interdependencies, often through mergers, partnerships and other forms of interorganizational relations (IOR) in order to maintain or extend resource access. The patterns of dependence produce inter- and intraorganizational power, which in turn affects organizational behavior (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009). The corollary is that IOR among not-for-profits, including



CSOs, are driven by resource scarcity (Hall et al., 2003; Oliver, 1990; Wicker et al., 2013).

The application of RDT in the analysis of CSO behaviour is tied to the nature of the exchanges between the CSO and resource providers. Essentially, CSOs are member-serving organizations existing to deliver *programs* including participatory, developmental and competitive sport opportunities to *members*. CSO capacity to deliver programs is theoretically limited by access to essential resources: *venues* for participation (e.g. gymnasia, swimming pools, soccer fields) or competition (e.g. events, leagues), and *leaders* (e.g. instructors, coaches, coordinators) who organize and deliver programs. CSOs typically affiliate with national, provincial or regional organizations to access competition venues, and in many cases also rent facilities at a subsidized cost from local government authorities and school boards (Barcelona & Young, 2010; MacLean et al., 2011), although some CSOs access communal facilities at no cost (e.g. road use by running clubs).

Venue dependence varies with the type of sport, competition for venue use, and nature of exchange between CSO and owner; it is context-dependent and falls on a continuum between power imbalance and mutual dependence (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005). When local authorities rent facilities to CSOs, they frequently have a mission to encourage and support sport participation (Barcelona & Young, 2010), and a mandate to generate revenue to offset tax-based subsidy (Benson & Henderson, 2005), factors that should increase mutual dependence. However, the same authorities often have monopoly control over access to affordable, subsidized facilities, resulting in power imbalance. In a mutually dependent relationship partners often negotiate agreements to absorb

constraints, while under conditions of power imbalance the more powerful actor is able to dictate terms; the less powerful actor may use cooptation as a strategy, for example by agreeing to meet accreditation standards to obtain access to the resource (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005). Where this type of relationship exists, local authorities and CSOs are simultaneously united by the communitarian interest in providing low-cost sport opportunities to residents and divided by market forces positioning the authority as a landlord with the ability to selectively control a resource essential to CSO existence.

CSO dependence on a second key resource, leaders, is more complicated. Many CSOs depend largely or exclusively on volunteer leaders (Cuskelly, 2004; Doherty, 2006), although a trend toward professionalization including use of paid administrators and technical leaders such as coaches is frequently observed in sport organizations (Dowling et al., 2014; O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Thibault et al., 1991). Volunteers in youth-dominant sports are often the parents of members, who typically pay fees on behalf of their children (Doherty, 2006). Thus CSOs seldom engage in an open labour market for leaders, but instead must balance potentially conflicting parent-child and leader-member relationships in their effort to recruit enough volunteers to manage programs (Doherty, 2005), sometimes mixing volunteer and paid leadership. In addition, the role of CSO members is ambiguous: members represent both a demand and resource as they generate the need for programs, are the primary source of revenue, and are a potential source of volunteers. CSO members are not simply shareholders, customers or managers, but a potentially uncomfortable mix of all three.

Behaviours of the CSOs studied here were consistent with RDT (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Patterson, 2014; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013; Wicker et al., 2013). Major

themes of interorganizational relations, leaders and member interests emerging from both the early- and late-phase (EYL) CSO interviews indicate that CSOs were deeply concerned with defending their resource positions. They frequently viewed rival CSOs as predatory, and sought to assuage member and coach concerns about LTAD implementation to mitigate “poaching” of members and coaches by rivals. Interlocks with their municipalities to access facilities and their PSOs to access competition opportunities were essential, and indeed appeared as taken-for-granted. While members and coaches enjoyed the free-market option of abandoning one CSO for a rival, CSOs had no power to find alternate sources of venues for programs and competition. Consequently they appealed to dominant resource-controlling organizations for support in three ways, first, in the form of member/parent education about the virtues of LTAD, second by asking for additional resources to help with the technical implementation of LTAD, and third, by seeking modifications to competitive structures to reduce dissonance with LTAD-recommended practice. The EYL CSOs further hoped to maintain or enhance organizational legitimacy and prestige by joining the League. In so doing both sets of CSOs hoped to reduce the costs of LTAD implementation, including the risk of losing members and coaches to non-LTAD adopting rivals.

While RDT is a valuable frame for interpreting the actions of CSOs, a purely RDT-based view of organizations fails to consider other important influences including normative pressures, regulatory requirements, and isomorphic tendencies within organizational fields. Some scholars have integrated RDT with institutional theories to better explain organizational behaviour (Scherer & Lee, 2002; Tolbert, 1985). Researchers frequently take institutional perspectives on sport organizations (Kikulis, Slack, &

Hinings, 1995; O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Skille 2011; Stevens & Slack, 1998; Wright & Zammuto, 2013), and link the hierarchical structure of sport and top-down influence by NSOs or government funders to isomorphism among lower-tier sport organizations, including CSOs (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013). Integrated resource-institutional approaches expand on this by illuminating how the search for resources can drive behaviours intended to establish organizational legitimacy, whether through compliance with regulatory thresholds, adoption of specified organizational forms, or mimicry of practices or technologies implemented by competitors (Meyer & Goes, 1988).

An example relevant to CSOs is the adoption of accreditation standards. The enforcement of standards by dominant actors confers legitimacy on those dependent actors able to meet the standard, but may also drive resource scarcity (Sherer & Lee, 2002). For example if CSOs must employ more highly trained coaches to meet a quality standard such as LTAD, such coaches become a relatively scarcer commodity.

Institutional theory traditionally views innovation as a disrupter of institutions (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991); early adopters gain competitive advantage, and the technology becomes a “best practice” or standard with which others must comply, or risk loss of legitimacy. Thus LTAD adoption may advantage a CSO if it can afford to adopt (i.e. can successfully compete for resources needed for adoption) and leads to increased legitimacy, yielding increased attractiveness to members and preferential access to venues or other resources endowed by the NSO, PSO or city. This may create a Matthew effect (Ingram, 2005; Merton, 1968): CSOs with the initial capacity to adopt gain further capacity as the fruit of adoption, while others are left behind. Conversely, if dominant actors are indifferent to adoption, legitimacy is not conferred and there is no incentive to

expend resources to adopt, even if the innovation is a putative standard. Even if CSOs adapt to institutional pressures using processes of acquiescence and compromise (Oliver, 1990; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013) the need to meet heightened standards tends to drive professionalization and commercialism (Sam, 2009). Normative pressures to deliver “quality sport” to a greater number of participants may have the unintended consequence of higher-cost, professionally managed sport programs delivered to fewer participants by a smaller number of high-capacity CSOs.

Evidence obtained in this research study suggests that the legitimizing effects of innovation adoption are time- and context-dependent. Early-adopting CSOs interviewed in the first part of the extensive phase perceived LTAD as bringing a competitive advantage: “It helps build our reputation” (*CSO16a*), while offering the prospect of improved program quality and better participant experience: “I believe strongly in (LTAD), more practice, fewer games, kids getting burned out...kids that don't enjoy the game drop out in the High School level” (*CSO10*). However, against these advantages, interviews of both part one CSOs and part three EYL CSOs enumerated a range of challenges experienced by the LTAD-adopting CSOs, including time and financial costs, lack of technical capacity to operationalize LTAD, opposition from some parents and coaches, and risk of losing dissatisfied parent/members and coaches to predatory, non-adopting CSOs that did not incur the costs of adoption. Dominant resource-controlling organizations sent mixed signals about the degree to which LTAD adoption would confer legitimacy: PSO1 (passive) and PSO2 (inactive) publicly espoused LTAD, but due to perceived lack of internal capacity and political support, as well as lack of technical know-how in PSO2’s case, those PSOs offered limited support to their CSOs.

Millpond's parks and recreation department, while interested in the extent of LTAD implementation among its CSOs, did not include LTAD compliance as a standard in its affiliation or facility allocation policies. The tepid support from PSO1, PSO2 and Millpond may in part explain why the researcher's offers of support to CSOs for LTAD implementation met with such limited response; the anticipated costs may have simply outweighed the expected benefits. PSO3, in contrast, demonstrated active support for LTAD, including training and deploying "LTAD champions" to support adoption and integration of LTAD into the technical standards for admission to the EYL. In pursuit of the legitimacy conferred by acceptance into EYL and the associated expectation of competitive advantage, there was intense competition among CSOs for entry into the league despite the costs. However there was also reward, particularly for Millpond's EYL entry, which was able to take a dominant position among District CSOs and leverage that position by working to eliminate rival CSOs.

### **Organizational and Institutional Logics**

Use of RDT and institutional theories as frames help illustrate possible contextual mechanisms in CSO adoption of innovation, but do not illuminate the underlying, causal powers at work in what critical realists term the domain of the real. Actors, including the PSO and CSO representatives interviewed in this research study, have direct access to experiences in the empirical domain, but may or may not apprehend deeper structures such as institutions and interorganizational effects driven by resource dependencies; these exist in the actual domain, which is "the realm of theory building by scholars" (Leca and Naccache, 2006). In institutional theory, the multi-level resource and institutional pressures or constraints encountered by organizations in the actual domain can be

conceptualized as the basis of logics, the “principles of organizing encoded in the minds of organizational actors (or agents) who create institutions” contributing to “an iterative and reciprocal process between logic and organizational structuration; each one shapes, contains and births the other” (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 2004). Just as institutions in the actual domain shape organizational logics and behaviour in the empirical domain, institutions are themselves seen as embedded in broader institutional logics acting across entire organizational fields, if not societies: “Society, then, is constituted by multiple, different, and sometimes conflicting institutional logics; for instance, capitalism, the state, democracy...” (Drazin et al., 2004). Hence, Leca and Naccache (2006) locate institutional logics in the domain of the real: “While institutions are the rules of the game, institutional logics are the underlying principles of the game. Just as structures cannot be reduced to elements from the domain of actual, institutional logics cannot be reduced to institutions” (p. 632).

Conflicting institutional logics may work to influence organizational logics and trigger change, or else be reconciled to coexist within organizational fields (Reay & Hinings, 2009). Conflicts of amateur vs. professional/commercial logics have frequently been observed in sport (Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Wright & Zammuto, 2013; Barnes, Cousens, & MacLean, 2015). Such conflicts can be viewed as the manifestation of two dominant institutional logics: communitarianism, the exercise of volunteer effort through which sport claims to generate civic engagement and social capital, and individualism, through which sport organizations and their members seek to maximize personal benefit from fee-based programs (Coalter, 2007; Jarvie, 2003). Understanding the influence of these varied, varying, overlapping and context-specific mechanisms is essential to

understanding CSO behaviour. At the same time, the interplay of these stratified contextual structures and mechanisms cannot be understood without reference to the nature of the CSO enterprise itself: what is it that CSOs do, and what do they believe they are doing?

Evidence from the CSOs studied here suggests they equate operational success with competition results, retention of athletes and their succession to higher-level teams, and access to and stability of resources including members, leaders (including coaches) and facilities, compared to other CSOs within their networks. Interviewed CSOs consistently identified competitive rivalries with other CSOs, and fear of losing members and coaches to rivals as pressing concerns. Use of a comparative basis for evaluating their success makes CSOs vulnerable to pressure from parents of advanced athletes, who are able to exert leverage by threatening to move to other local CSOs, which would cost the CSO resources in the form of membership fees and legitimacy in the form of diminished athletic success. CSO interviewees frequently commented on the propensity of parents to “shop around” or exert pressure by such threats, and accused other CSOs of “poaching” players or offering low cost or low quality development programs to entice member movement. CSOs may in turn demand protection from the PSO: the three PSOs studied here all have transfer policies to restrict in-season athlete movement between CSOs (e.g. PSO1 Youth Competitions Manual, 2015)<sup>5</sup>.

This in turn suggests the existence of multiple organizational logics at work within CSOs. Co-existing multiple logics have been observed in various organizational fields (Mullins, 2006; van Gestel & Hillebrand, 2011) including CSOs (Skirstad &

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<sup>5</sup> The citation has been modified to maintain the anonymity of the source.



Chelladurai, 2011). At the CSO administrative level, the logic is to maintain network relationships with resource providers to enhance negotiating power, while maintaining threshold levels of compliance to ensure access to resources. At the program level, the primary task is to maintain equilibrium between resource factors: members, leaders, facilities and programs. Simplistically, if membership increases, the CSO must find more resources in the form of facilities and more leaders, especially coaches, to offer an increased number of programs. The effort required of the CSO to meet regulatory thresholds and maintain inter-organizational ties while monitoring and balancing resource availability and use consumes a high proportion of the available organizational capacity. This finding suggests why larger, higher-capacity CSOs are able to achieve dominant positions.

The mission of competition-focused youth CSOs is not to manage resources, but to develop the athletic performance of members. LTAD is an innovation that seeks to re-define program delivery, prioritizing youth skill development in the long term ahead of winning in the short term (*Canadian Sport for Life- Long-Term Athlete Development 2.0* 2010). It requires coaches to re-define program outcomes, administrators to re-distribute resources, and parents to reconsider the objectives of sport participation by their children. The adoption and implementation of an innovation like LTAD is thus subject to multiple, potentially conflicting influences and logics. Evidence presented here suggests that adoption is more likely if the innovation is perceived by the CSO to be consistent with its organizational logic, if it expects adoption will confer legitimacy and maintain or increase access to resources, and if it can adopt the innovation while continuing to meet regulatory thresholds and maintaining operational equilibrium. This is generally congruent with

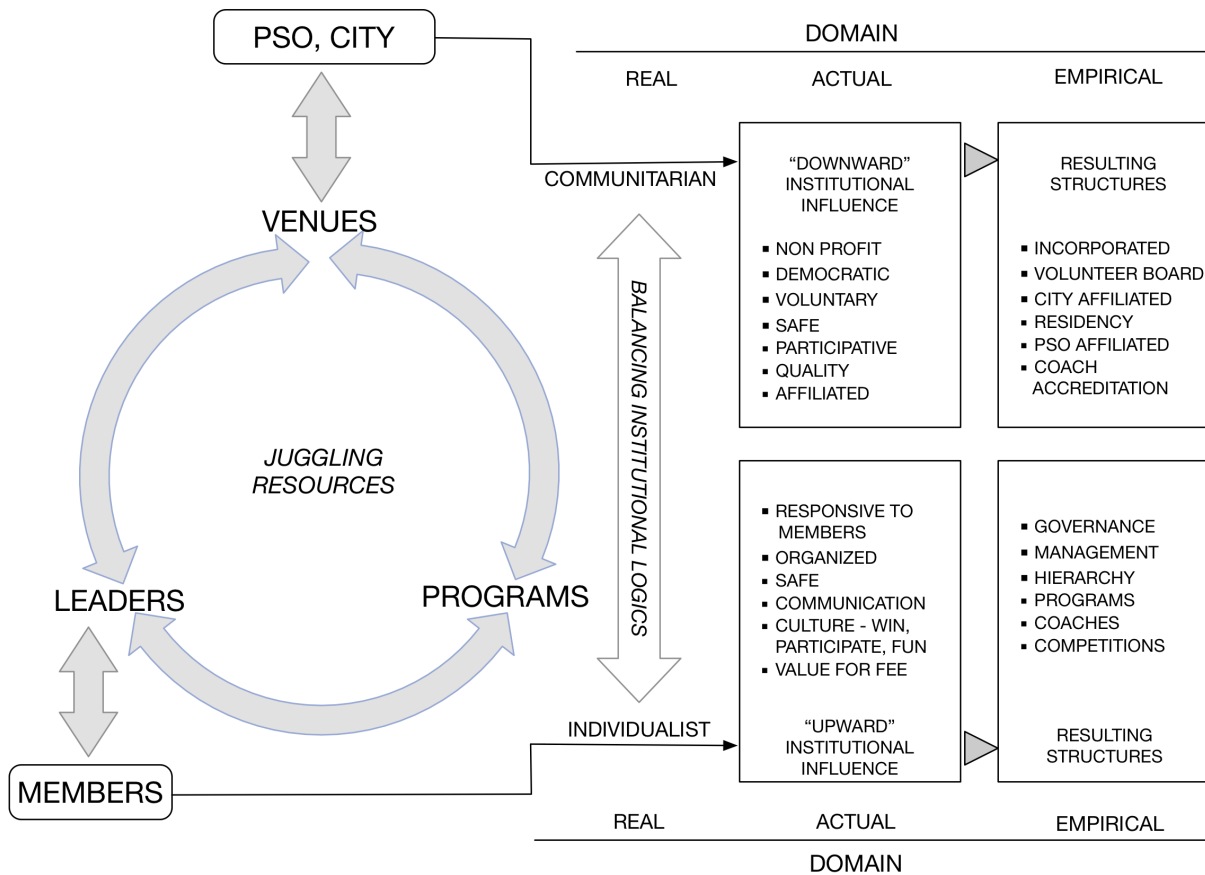
research findings showing conflicting logics trigger innovation and change (Reay & Hinings, 2008), including change related to adoption of accreditation standards (Casile & Davis-Blake, 2002), and in not-for-profits constrained by requirements of dominant funders (Mutch, 2006).

The adoption decisions of CSOs are based on numerous inter-related contextual mechanisms, many in flux, which must be read and interpreted by the CSO. These can be represented as a set of external or “downward” and internal or “upward” mechanisms (i.e. powers and potential powers) that both constrain and drive the organization (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014). These include coercive and normative powers and potentials, many reified in standards and regulatory thresholds, that drive the organization to ask, “how must we act, to succeed in our context?” The response manifests in structures, the ways a given organization must configure in order to meet the demands of its context. These powers and potentials operate across inter-organizational, organizational and intra-organizational levels, and must be managed by a CSO considering or ultimately adopting an innovation. A model depicting important powers and potentials for CSOs is depicted in Figure 3.1.

In the CSOs examined in this study, many of the downward powers and potentials were linked to institutional logics held by PSOs and municipal authorities embodying normative communitarian expectations that sport be locally based, volunteer organized, generative of community health and civic engagement, and formative of positive youth experiences and attitudes. These logics act through and are evident in institutional mechanisms including not-for-profit legislation and PSO and municipal sport affiliation policies. These appear to CSOs as a series of *regulatory thresholds*, defined as the

standards with which CSOs must comply to access the resources, usually venues for training and competition, which only the dominant organizations in the hierarchy have the power to confer. A product of these institutional powers is the creation of corresponding structures: not-for-profit incorporation, member-elected volunteer boards, membership in leagues, and organized sport program delivery structures consisting of designated leaders operating scheduled training and competition activities at assigned venues.

In contrast, upward or internal powers and potentials were generated by members, typically parents acting for child athletes, through contact with CSO leaders. These typically reflected an individualist logic, aimed at maximizing return on member fees. Member interests were not homogenous but included in varying degrees desires for affordable, well-organized programs, fun, winning, skill development and advancement of athletes to higher-level competitive opportunities as a function of athletic success. CSO leaders were divided between these conflicting up- and downward-acting logics as they attempted to juggle resources to deliver programs. They were compelled to seek legitimacy from dominant organizational partners through compliance with the



**Figure 3.1: A Contextual Model of Mechanisms Acting on CSOs**

communitarian logic in order to access venues for their programs. Simultaneously they used a commercial, market-mediated approach to meeting the short-term individualist desires of parent- members in order to attract and retain athletes and fees. The need to juggle resource factors while simultaneously dividing resource allocation to balance conflicting institutional expectations of resource providers is a preeminent reality for such CSOs, and a major constraint on capacity to adopt innovations.

### **Conclusion**

Driven by a desire to better understand why CSOs adopt innovation, the extensive phase of the research study illustrated some of the institutional and resource dependence forces acting on CSOs, how these manifest in structures, and how the forces and structures jointly channel the agency of CSO leaders as they work to access and balance resources and deliver programs to members. Dominant institutional logics of communitarianism and individualism generate institutions that act on CSOs through coercive and normative mechanisms, including relationships with PSOs, municipal authorities, and the CSOs members. These mechanisms give rise to, and are subsequently conditioned by structures: affiliations with PSO or District, democratically constituted, volunteer led CSO boards and committees, competitive league schedules, interlocks with other sport organizations, member rights and privileges and so on. These constitute the walls within which CSO leaders plan, organize and deliver their programs, the constraints that condition CSO operating logics and channel responses to new challenges including adoption of an innovation such as LTAD.

Skille (2010) has commented on the myths and ideologies of competitiveness and health surrounding community sport in Norway, concluding that CSOs respond to these

often-conflicting social-institutional norms by picking and choosing elements as necessary to attain instrumental outcomes, sustain symbolic compliance, and maintain legitimacy. CSOs in this study demonstrated similar behaviour. It appears that CSOs engage in a competitive culture while publically espousing the “egalitarian, participation oriented and public-health related” social values of sport (Skille, 2010) promoted by NSOs, PSOs and local government authorities. The current research study goes beyond examining the effect of diffuse policy and normative influences and shows how CSOs compete *through* compliance with specific policies and regulations. Authorities manipulate policies in an attempt to attain instrumental ends, including putative improvements in CSO program quality, in effect creating a series of regulatory thresholds that privilege higher-capacity CSOs capable of meeting them. By meeting these thresholds, stronger CSOs gain legitimacy from both dominant organizations and their members, strengthening their competitive position versus other local CSOs.

This study also demonstrates that innovations, even if technically challenging to implement or opposed by some internal actors, may be adopted by CSOs if they fit organizational logics and further the attainment of instrumental goals (Hoerber & Hoerber, 2012), particularly the quest for legitimacy and access to resources expected to stem from that legitimacy. Such adoption is time- and context-dependent, as illustrated by the different responses to LTAD evinced by the CSOs studied here. Early adoption of LTAD by CSOs examined early in the extensive phase of this research study appeared to strengthen legitimacy with members: CSOs was able to assert technical superiority and as a result expected to improve competitive position and member retention. As LTAD became orthodoxy this advantage was eroded, so PSO orientation became important:

passive or inactive PSOs encoded LTAD as a normative, discretionary standard, signaling a low potential for legitimacy gains from adoption, while PSO3's integration of LTAD into a threshold standard for elite league entry positioned LTAD as essential to maintaining legitimacy and competitive position. This underscores the importance of the legitimacy-seeking/resource-seeking nexus in CSOs (Wicker, Vos, Scheerder & Breuer, 2013; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013). The willingness of some studied CSOs to adopt LTAD in the face of member opposition, negative media stories, and undercutting non-adoption by competing CSOs hoping to steal members and coaches, represented a significant gamble that can be explained by the risk of greater loss of legitimacy should they not adopt.

The necessity for CSOs to juggle resource factors to maintain viability, while balancing pressures stemming from conflicting institutional logics in order to maintain legitimacy, can create unanticipated consequences for those intending to influence CSO actions. The municipal interest in ensuring local residents have access to sport, manifest in residency requirements in CSO affiliation policies, is undermined when policy elements privilege the most administratively-capable, technically-proficient CSOs with first rights to rent municipal sport facilities. These, like PSO policies that privilege LTAD-compliant CSOs, can drive professionalization, reduce the number of competing CSOs, increase costs and member fees, and thus reduce access to sport programs. This may arise from a simplistic assumption of the universality of communitarian logic and the allied expectation that promoting or mandating a social "good" (i.e. a quality program or innovation) will benefit the mass of participants. Instead, it may allow high-capacity CSOs to strengthen their competitive position to the detriment of smaller community-

serving organizations, and reduce the likelihood that the smaller organizations will, or can, adopt the innovation. The birth of the “standards based” EYL provided a case illustrating how attempts to enhance program quality by introducing heightened standards can exclude less-competitive CSOs and in so doing potentially, as in the example of CSO29, imperil their existence. Sport policy-makers, including those within NSOs, PSOs, and municipalities should consider this possibility when attempting to channel the actions of CSOs. Ultimately, sport leaders at all levels must consider the costs of quality and whether the ends justify the means, particularly if opportunities for affordable sport participation and volunteer engagement are lost in the quest for better sport.

Critical realist research distinguishes between extensive designs suitable for generation of descriptive studies and intensive designs generating explanation of the operation of causal mechanisms in context (Sayer, 1992). In this extensive study, data including interview, survey and document analysis was used to develop a relatively superficial picture of multiple organizations in order to map the contextual terrain and generate a theorized model of mechanisms influencing CSOs. The next chapter reports on the intensive study of a single CSO operating in this context, which provides a further exploration of the interplay of agency and structure in adoption of an innovation. The contextual model of CSO function presented here (Figure 3.1) constitutes a part of the conceptual foundation for this intensive study, which explores the second research question, *“How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?”*



**Chapter 4 -  
Creating Space, or Just Juggling?  
Innovation and Change in Community Sport**

Chapter Four presents the results of the second, intensive phase of the research study, exploring the second research question (RQ2), “*How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?*” This was a year long, micro-level study of a CSO implementing an innovation while managing multiple resource constraints. Drawing upon the findings and analysis of the first, extensive phase, the CSO is conceptualized as juggling resource factors and balancing conflicting institutional logics, manifesting in an organizational logic of professionalization (see Figure 3.1).

Key findings of the intensive phase are summarized as follows. In the year prior to data collection, the case study CSO faced a crisis precipitated by a failed merger with larger a local club, resulting in the resignation of a number of board members and recruitment of an inexperienced club president. The PSO District had mandated LTAD implementation, and faced with a loss of volunteers and declining membership, the CSO followed an operational logic of retaining volunteers to maintain member service while simultaneously attempting to introduce LTAD-based programs. Lacking technical expertise as well as sufficient volunteer resources, implementation was poorly managed and there was considerable member dissatisfaction. In response, entering the year of data collection, the CSO changed course to a logic of professionalization, hiring a Technical Director to redesign LTAD curriculum and delivery. By the end of the study year, a series

of decisions and structural changes were made to extend the professionalization of the club and entrench the Technical Director's role and power.

Through observation, interviews, parent/member surveys and document analysis, evidence was gathered of the operation of the contextual model presented in chapter 3. CSO leaders balanced conflicting communitarian and individualist institutional logics, manifest in municipal and PSO District rules, policies and standards and member interests, while simultaneously juggling resources to deliver programs. The embedded agency of CSO leaders was traced using a learning cycle to capture the accumulation of presentational, propositional, practical and experiential knowledge as they as they implemented the innovation, resulting in a modification of antecedent structures. The innovation and change process in the case study CSO is revealed as strongly conditioned by resource dependencies and conflicting institutional pressures, requiring significant energy and ingenuity, and straining the limited capacity of CSO leaders. The path of decision-making and action appeared to be based in bounded rationality, satisficing and reflexive Red Queen competitive behavior.

The chapter begins with a brief re-introduction and overview of the problem and methods. The findings of the intensive phase are provided, and the subsequent analysis and discussion presents the cycle by which conditioned agency produced structural change and illustrates the link between the learning cycle, agency, and the logics which conditioned them.

### **Research Problem, Context and Methodology**

The first, extensive phase of the research study reported in Chapter Three addressed the first research question (RQ1), "*How do contextual mechanisms influence*

*why CSOs adopt an innovation?* That phase revealed the existence of “downward” or extrinsic influences on CSOs from dominant resource controllers including PSOs and municipal authorities, as well as “upward” intrinsic influences from CSO members and leaders. Based on the findings, a contextual model of resource and institutional mechanisms and related structural constraints was proposed (Figure 3.1). The communitarian institutional logic of government and sport authorities was conceptualized as manifesting in PSO and municipal affiliation policies, which require CSOs to structure as not-for-profit corporations and demonstrate community-serving behaviours. A conflicting individualist member-driven logic dictated program structures organized around diverse values of winning, advancement of individual athletes, participation and fun. Constrained by these logics and related dependencies on access to venues and human resources, CSOs strive to maintain operational balance, managing resources to deliver programs while satisfying the divergent logics.

The purpose of the second, intensive phase was to explore how CSO leaders learn as they adopt an innovation, and how learning processes trace the effects of embedded agency - the way structure conditions agency and agency in turn conditions the reproduction or modification of the organization’s structures. As described in Chapter 2, one component of the extensive phase of the research study was a survey of CSOs conducted on behalf of the parks and recreation department of Millpond for the purpose of generating a report on LTAD implementation among city CSOs. The 18 Millpond CSOs completing the survey were subsequently invited to participate in the intensive-phase of this research study, and of these one, a soccer club, agreed to take part. The result, and the focus of this chapter, is a study of how this CSO, Millpond Youth Soccer

Club (“MYSC” or “the Club”) implemented an innovation while managing multiple resource constraints.

Over twelve months, semi-structured interviews 45 to 90 minutes long were held with MYSC’s president, registrar, technical director and president-elect. Interviews were recorded for later transcription (when recording was impossible responses were taken verbatim). Additional observations and field notes were recorded at five board meetings, four LTAD planning group meetings, and three scheduled practices. In addition an analysis of MYSC membership trends requested by the Club was conducted, based on membership records provided by the CSO and local census data (Census Profile, 2011), and structured surveys of parent attitudes about CSO programs and fees were taken at three scheduled practices (n=70, n=80 and n=63 respectively) to gather descriptive information for a report to the Club. MYSC meeting minutes (n=19) and other documents including entries in the Club president’s personal notebook (n=202) were reviewed.

### **Intensive Phase Findings**

#### ***CSO Case Profile***

Millpond Youth Soccer Club is a youth recreational soccer club situated in a mid-size city, population approximately 500,000. The Club’s home fields are situated in an upper-middle income neighborhood close to a major university, and average household income in the census tract where the home fields are located is \$106,949, or 139% of that for Millpond as a whole (Census Profile, 2011). The Club is a member of Millpond District Soccer Association (“the District”), which has 25 registered clubs, the highest density in the province. Among the district’s 16 youth clubs, MYSC is mid-sized, with an average of 750 members per year in the decade preceding this study. In the year prior to

the study, 80% of members were recreational “house league” players aged 10 years or younger, annual Club revenues were \$170,000, and membership had declined 15% from the previous year. According to its by-laws, the Club’s objectives are to provide “a safe, healthy environment that fosters the development of individual and team skills” and to “encourage equal and fair play, enjoyment...values of good sport [and mutual respect] regardless of ability” (MYSC Constitution, 2011)<sup>6</sup>.

MYSC rents playing fields from the City of Millpond under a user agreement. Affiliation agreements with the City and District require the Club to submit lists of directors, its constitution and financial statements. In essence the Club is required to be incorporated as a not-for-profit to obtain access to fields and league structures necessary for its existence. While the Club must follow the democratic principles specified for not-for-profit corporations, including holding annual members meetings and electing directors, in four years (the three years preceding the study and the study year) all directors either continued or were appointed unopposed, and there were usually several unfilled board positions.

Over the two years prior to this study, the Club had been involved in merger discussions with other clubs in the District. According to an interview with the president (hereafter referred to by the pseudonym Peter), the previous president had been a proponent of the merger and resigned one year before the study when Club members voted not to pursue a merger opportunity (*President, Oct 17*). In the same period, the three largest District clubs created a merged, “united” team in order to enter a new elite youth league (EYL) launched by the PSO. At the same time the PSO announced league

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<sup>6</sup> The titles of some references have been changed to preserve anonymity.

reorganization, and the District announced it was planning to replace the lower-tier District Youth League with a multi-district Regional Youth League. These changes, along with the agenda of the largest clubs to absorb or eliminate smaller clubs in the District, directly affected the MYSC so Peter closely monitored developments and participated in District meetings.

In the year prior to the study, Peter encountered lack of volunteer resources and significant member resistance to initial attempts to integrate an innovation, LTAD, into Club programs. In response to this opposition, the Club hired a new CSO technical director with a mandate to re-design programs and recruit new coaches. The researcher offered the Club expertise and support to advance its implementation of LTAD, and the opportunity to collaborate in practical research to better understand some of the related factors, as incentive to participate in the research study. The offer of support for LTAD implementation was not contingent on agreement to participate in research study.

### ***Interview Results: The President's Story***

MYSC's president assumed the position after the resignation of the previous president. Several directors actively recruited Peter to become the new MYSC president, claiming MYSC would collapse unless new executive volunteers were quickly found. At his first executive meeting, he found conflict among the directors: "...red faced screaming...my pulse was at 180 the whole time, and I was just thinking, what have we signed up for?" (*President, Oct 17*) To control the damage he decided:

Volunteers needed to be kept. Our volunteers were fleeing a sinking ship...the first two months that's all I could focus on...I knew as of that meeting what I needed to do 'cause I had no idea how to run a club. Meeting individually with

every member of the board who was willing to meet with me and then spending hours with them trying to figure out what it would take to make you stay for just one more year. (*President, Oct 17*)

The next major challenge was to organize for the new season. There was no budget, few written policies or procedures, a number of key volunteers had departed, and as Peter stated, “I have no soccer credibility. I never played a game in my life” (*President, Oct 17*). At the same time there was pressure from the District to introduce LTAD into player programs: “I was getting feedback from (the District), not knowing that (they) have no power, I was being told, you have to do this. So I was under the impression that LTAD implementation was going to be an absolute necessity and that we would actually be kicked out of (the District) if I didn’t accomplish this.” One volunteer agreed to act as Club head coach “if he got a complete blank cheque to do it his way...so I said...we’re giving him the ball and he’s gonna run with it, and it turns out that was a very bad decision.” The head coach failed to implement the new program effectively and as a result “There was mass chaos, confusion and anger, a lot of anger, and it’s because we were making a change and we weren’t managing it well” (*President, Oct 17*).

Peter was fully occupied learning how to manage Club programs, meeting with the City and District, and trying to establish basic administrative records and processes. The head coach’s disorganization quickly led to more shouting matches with parents and between volunteers. After a month, a new volunteer stepped in and on-field programs began to improve. By now Peter was convinced he needed to professionalize the Club to the extent resources would allow:

I spent a lot of time taking it on the chin that season...and I wasn't going to do it again...So we needed someone who was going to do that...I wanted every single week planned out for what drills you're gonna do and how you're gonna do it...and I didn't want it to be me, it wasn't going to be me. So that's where (the Technical Director) comes into the LTAD. (*President, Oct 17*)

***Interview Results: The Technical Director's Story***

After five months in his role as president Peter hired Kate (a pseudonym), the Club's Technical Director, on a short-term contract using a program grant. Kate held an advanced university degree, had been an elite soccer player, and was coaching part-time at a neighboring club. Eleven months into Peter's term Kate's contract was extended so she could work on the LTAD-based house league skills curriculum, and two months later the board approved her as permanent part-time Technical Director, working 10 hours a week.

Kate professed strong support for the LTAD model, and her primary interest was developing fun, age-appropriate soccer activities for 4 to 8 year olds. She set out to develop detailed weekly lesson plans with video examples for use by parent-volunteer coaches, who would in turn be supervised by division coaches hired from among local university players. After several months of development, the video idea was abandoned as too costly, but by the start of the season lesson plans for all divisions were in place. Kate's regular complaints were of pushy parents, a volume of work regularly exceeding the 10 hours for which she was paid, and the attitude of some Club volunteers who held an elite competitive mentality (*Technical Director #9, July 31*).



As the season progressed various challenges emerged. The new lesson plans needed revision, some paid coaches were ineffective, and there was a lack of engaged volunteers: “You can see why the Club almost disbanded, four people are carrying all the work...they made a 10 hour commitment to me but they need 30 to right this ship” (*Technical Director #3, June 16*). Peter stated he would not continue after completion of his two-year term, which created a worry for Kate: “If he goes, I’m on the Titanic...I’m not going to work this hard for a Neanderthal” (*Technical Director #6, July 7*). Membership had declined again from the previous year, and the additional costs of Peter’s professionalization, including Kate’s wage, triggered discussion about how to create a new revenue stream so Kate could be kept on. Late in the season, Kate was actively searching for a replacement president, planning an indoor winter program to generate revenue, and continuing to supervise the on-field programs of the Club. At the same time she continued to hold several other part-time jobs.

Near the close of the season, Kate found a candidate, Jim (a pseudonym), who was ready to take on the president role with Peter’s blessing:

I threw another name at him and he said, ‘Well over time that person would derail what you and I are doing.’ He said ‘[But] I think Jim would listen to you, stand up to you, enhance the process...so I support that completely’ (*Technical Director #10, Aug 5*).

As a “soccer person” with a community, house-league orientation, Jim met Kate’s criteria. A meeting was organized with Jim, Peter, Kate, and the Club registrar a few days later to arrange the transfer of power, discuss who else was prepared to stand as a

director, and to brief Jim on the new winter program and other service contracts the Club was putting in place (*Meeting notes, Aug 20, 2014*).

### ***Membership Analysis and Parent Surveys***

In 2012, Peter's first year as president, the introduction of LTAD-based programming along with a loss of volunteers and the disorganization of the Club's head coach combined to produce chaos. Board members heard from parents who opposed the new emphasis on skill development and they suspected that LTAD introduction was resulting in a loss of members. At the request of the president and in keeping with the engaged, co-operative mode of research established with the Club, an analysis of membership trends including member retention, demographic factors and parent attitudes was initiated to help the Club decide a course of action.

A review of registrations over the preceding eight years showed that fewer than 50% of MYSC players re-registered annually. The U8 (Under 8) division (children 6 and 7 years old) was consistently the largest and while overall membership was down 15% compared to the year of LTAD introduction, U8 boys and U10 girls' numbers remained stable. Conversely loss of U8 girls and U10 boys constituted almost 30% of the overall decline. Given the long-standing high rate of player turnover and the mixed registration rates in key youth divisions following LTAD introduction, it did not appear that losses were simply related to LTAD. Further, an analysis of census data showed that population in the tracts surrounding the Club's home fields declined between 2006-2011 while those surrounding the neighbouring club's fields increased in the same period. Given this, the neighbouring club had approximately twice the youth population to draw upon.

The membership analysis was followed by three surveys of Club parents, conducted field-side at house league practices and games. Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 summarize parent survey data. Surveys revealed that parents prized convenience and proximity to fields ahead of other factors in deciding to register their children, that they rated enthusiasm and positive attitude ahead of competence in teaching as the most important quality in a coach, and that good organizing ability was the most important characteristic of Club leaders. When asked about a possible fee increase, only 20% of parents were unwilling to pay more. While 22% of parents indicated a desire for more game play, the main reasons cited for possibly not re-registering their child were if the child didn't want to continue (46%) or that it was no longer convenient (31%) while only 8% cited "too much skills instruction", a hallmark of the shift to LTAD-based programs.

While the surveys were limited in several ways, including sample bias in selecting only parents able to attend their child's practices, the general conclusion was that Club parents were not greatly concerned by fee increases or the shift to skills development and LTAD-based programming. Given the notable disorganization of the head coach in the previous year it could be argued that chaotic implementation rather than LTAD itself was the prime factor, which combined with the shrinking local youth population to negatively effect player registration. These results and analysis were presented to the directors and discussed at Club executive meetings from May to August.

**Table 4.1: Responses to Selected Questions from MYSC Parent Survey**

Survey 1 – June 2014 ( <i>n</i> = 70)		
How many years have you had a child registered in this club?	First year	22.9%
	Second year	20.0%
	Third year	27.1%
	Fourth or more years	30.0%
What is the main reason you registered your child in this program?	Wanted a team sport	1.5%
	Friends	11.6%
	Exercise	21.0%
	Loves soccer	24.6%
	Convenience	36.2%
	Affordability	1.5%
	Quality program	4.3%
What is the main reason you would choose NOT to re-register your child next year?	Did not learn skills	12.5%
	Did not have fun	10.4%
	Friends won't return	0.0%
	Child doesn't want to return	45.8%
	No longer convenient	31.3%
How important is the quality of sport instruction to you, as a factor in choosing this club? For example, the quality of the coaching, skill development, and so on?	Very important	55.7%
	Somewhat important	37.1%
	Not very important	4.3%
	No importance	2.9%

**Table 4.2: Responses to Selected Questions from MYSC Parent Survey**

Survey 2 – July 2014 (n = 80)	
Of the club leaders who affect your child's experience, which would you say has the most influence on their experience?	Club Technical Director 0.0% Convenor 1.3% Head Coach 19.0% Skills (game/team) coach 44.3% Animal group coach 29.1% Other 6.3%
What personal characteristic of a coach is most important to you?	Caring & committed 10.0% Enthusiastic & positive 38.6% Firm & disciplined 12.9% Organized & effective 4.3% Good teacher of skills (technical ability) 12.9% Fun and likeable 12.9% Other 8.6%
Now thinking about the members of the Club executive, that is the volunteers who run the Club, what personal characteristic is most important to you?	Caring & committed 23.1% Enthusiastic & positive 9.0% Organized & effective 29.5% Good programmer (player curriculum and coaches) 15.4% Good communicator (clear and timely) 16.7% Good manager (finances and human resources) 3.9% Other 2.6%
Considering the value provided by this Club, meaning the combination of convenience, organization, coaching and programming for the registration fee, are you prepared to pay more next year?	Yes 44.3% No 17.7% Maybe 38.0%
If you said "Maybe", what would your willingness to pay a higher fee depend on? You can give several reasons.	If level of organization stayed same or improved 30.0% If communication stayed same or improved 0.0% If coaching stayed same or improved 30.0% If child's skills improved 17.5% If convenience of the program improved 5.0% If my child played more games/competed more 22.5%

**Table 4.3: Responses to Selected Questions from MYSC Parent Survey**

Survey 3 – August 2014 ( <i>n</i> = 63)											
What part of the Club's program this season did you value most? (This could be the way a program was delivered, a specific individual, or some other item.)	<table> <tr> <td>Coaching</td> <td>25.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skill development</td> <td>20.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Organization</td> <td>19.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fun/social</td> <td>11.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Convenience/schedule</td> <td>7.9%</td> </tr> </table>	Coaching	25.5%	Skill development	20.6%	Organization	19.0%	Fun/social	11.1%	Convenience/schedule	7.9%
Coaching	25.5%										
Skill development	20.6%										
Organization	19.0%										
Fun/social	11.1%										
Convenience/schedule	7.9%										
What part of the Club's program this season would you improve, and how? (This could be the way a program was delivered, a specific individual, or some other item.)	<table> <tr> <td>Nothing</td> <td>33.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>More games/game skills</td> <td>22.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Communication and Organization</td> <td>9.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Coaching quality</td> <td>6.3%</td> </tr> </table>	Nothing	33.3%	More games/game skills	22.2%	Communication and Organization	9.5%	Coaching quality	6.3%		
Nothing	33.3%										
More games/game skills	22.2%										
Communication and Organization	9.5%										
Coaching quality	6.3%										
Will you register a child in this Club next season?	<table> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>80.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>4.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Maybe</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> </table>	Yes	80.9%	No	4.8%	Maybe	14.3%				
Yes	80.9%										
No	4.8%										
Maybe	14.3%										
The Club has been implementing LTAD based programs for several years. Do you know what LTAD means?	<table> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>31.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>66.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No answer</td> <td>1.6%</td> </tr> </table>	Yes	31.7%	No	66.7%	No answer	1.6%				
Yes	31.7%										
No	66.7%										
No answer	1.6%										

### ***Document Analysis: Minutes and President's Notebook***

At the conclusion of the study period in October 2014, minutes of past Club members' meetings, board meetings, and the president's notebook were analyzed to better understand how operational issues related to resource access and management affected Club decision-making and the president's workload. The results illustrate how the requirements of external organizations, despite figuring into a relatively small proportion of MYSC discussion and decision time, constituted a key set of coercive and normative institutions that powerfully shaped Club decisions including those related to LTAD implementation.

In 19 sets of minutes encompassing 320 discussion items and sub-items, 35% were related to program delivery, including program planning, logistical arrangements, equipment purchases, and progress reporting. A further 29% of discussion items were devoted to human resources, including recruitment, hiring, training, and standards. Facility issues such as disposition and maintenance of fields accounted for 13%, general administration including financial management another 13%, and member issues including registration updates and resolution of complaints took 10%. The president's notebook, in which Peter recorded to-do items and important points from meetings and discussions, follows a similar pattern. Over 19 months and 202 entries, 46% of the president notebook entries were devoted to program items, and about half of these to program-related equipment including purchases and inventories of jerseys, balls and other items. Facility-related issues including field maintenance and meetings with City staff accounted for 21% of entries, while human resource and administrative items are each 15% of entries. A small remainder of entries deals with member issues.

Dealings with external organizations, primarily the City, District, or PSO, were prominent, appearing in 19% of MYSC meeting items and 21% of president notebook entries. As the president was primarily responsible for interactions with external agencies, the meeting minutes often included his reports and requests for decision following such interactions. District and PSO matters are typically reported as operational information or as promulgation of rules with which the Club must comply, for example the necessity to obtain police criminal record checks for coaches. Although the Club spent an average 10.7% of its overall budget on affiliation fees with the District and its leagues in the study period, there are no instances of the Club's directors protesting District or PSO actions. Perhaps this omission was related to a perception that the District and PSO priorities were so different from the Club's mission that protest would be futile. The Club's registrar described the relationship:

Complete lack of support. It was clear...that (the PSO) and (the District) to a lesser extent, has their mind on the top 20 players in every age group...they have no interest whatsoever in supporting anything like community soccer...they have no sense of how to make a good experience for those kids. (*Registrar, Oct 17*)

However, District politics had important collateral effects on the Club, as in the case of the proposed future elimination of the District Youth League (DYL):

...there's a lot of politics going on there, there's a lot of very upset people...of course the downside of that is like, my treasurer for instance is a mom of one of the girls on the DYL team. Do we lose that? If so, do I lose my treasurer? If you look at who is on the board and who typically run clubs, it's the competitive people...you have to be very careful when you're making decisions that affect



competitive teams because by removing the pool of dedicated volunteers that come with the competitive teams you can be hurting your own house league.

*(President, March 8)*

City relations were primarily concerned with Club use of playing fields. When negotiations with City staff were unsatisfactory the president was likely to take political action. The Club had paid \$85,000 to the City to reconfigure its home fields in exchange for right of first refusal on use, and on average spent 11.4% of its overall budget on field rental and maintenance in the study period. When the Club was unable to get permits for a field-side food truck, or when the City downloaded the cost of painting lines on fields, the president asked the local City councilor to intervene. These meetings with City staff and politicians are noted in both the notebook and Club minutes.

Information about other local sport clubs is found in 7% of MYSC meeting items and 2% of president notebook entries. There were a number of interlocks: the children of volunteers playing for, or Club volunteers active in other clubs, as well as the Technical Director working part time for another club. Information about other clubs is presented in meeting records as a basis of comparison, from which a degree of inter-CSO competition can be inferred. Typical entries include “PSO Club Excellence Award- we will be looking at attaining Bronze status this year...[local club A] and [local club B] are Bronze” (*Minutes, Feb 20 2013*) or “We are in the middle of the price pack [vs. other clubs]” (*Minutes, Mar 18 2014*). Other entries concern possible partners for inter-club play and the ongoing District negotiations about club mergers.

### ***Introduction and Impact of an Innovation: LTAD-based Programs***

The Club mismanaged the initial introduction of a skill development-based program. Little was known about LTAD implementation; as Peter put it, “The LTAD implementation as put forward by the PSO was almost completely undocumented ...so we really had to kinda make it up from scratch” (*President, Oct 17*). In the first year of Peter’s presidency the loss of volunteers, disorganization, lack of technical knowledge about how to implement such programs, and various other operational difficulties combined to result in poor-quality programming and dissatisfaction by volunteers and members. Peter’s response was to embark on a program of professionalization to reduce dependence on volunteers and access requisite technical capacity, leading to the hiring of the technical director near the end of the year. This initiated a crash program to develop a simplified LTAD-based program curriculum for use by volunteer coaches and reorganize the coaching structure with an emphasis on leadership by employees including the technical director and paid division coaches.

By the time the Club launched this dedicated effort to improve its program delivery, the PSO had released extensive resources to support LTAD, including new age- and division-based rules, competition formats, and practice formats including specific skills and related development drills, as well as a number of regional “champions” trained to support clubs in the transition (Grassroots Soccer-Provincial Curriculum, n.d.)<sup>7</sup>. Based on evidence gathered in the earlier extensive phase of this study, a majority of other clubs in the province and District were simultaneously introducing LTAD-based programs, and the City was supporting LTAD through small CSO grants and specialist recreation staff.

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<sup>7</sup> The titles of some references have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Despite the opportunity to draw on these resources the technical director chose to independently create a new curriculum and release it on a weekly just-in-time basis, the aim being to continuously adapt to changing conditions over the season. She was simultaneously testing elements such as games and drills at her other club and gathering additional feedback from those players and parents. Despite the methodical approach to program design, significant revisions had to be made after several weeks to increase curriculum understanding and uptake by parent coaches. There continued to be resistance to curricular emphasis on skill development by some parents and parent coaches in the older U8-U10 divisions until mid-season, when an adjustment was made to increase game play, for as Kate said:

The U8-U10 parents are screaming. The vision didn't work, remember we were going to make videos and provide lesson plans on the fly. That wouldn't work with this group. Passing and receiving is all these kids can do, that's what LTAD says, but (one critic) wants higher level play...we are going to 30 minutes of game play to shut them up...They don't understand what development really is.  
*(Technical Director #4, June 23)*

Club documents show that over the two years of Peter's presidency, 6% of meeting discussions and 8% of notebook entries included reference to LTAD. Given the Club crisis at the time Peter took over as president it would have been a reasonable decision to delay LTAD implementation, but in his self-professed naiveté he followed District direction to proceed. Given the chaos that accompanied the introduction of the LTAD innovation in the first year of his term, it would have been reasonable to abandon the skills development program, particularly when vocal parents demanded a return to a

game-based approach. Instead, the decision was made to intensify the effort through a search for additional expertise, professionalization, reorganization and an intensive pre-season curriculum development project. Peter said:

[If not for the District] I would have left things exactly as they were, to be fair. And I believe in LTAD...but that said, I would never have bitten it off had I not thought it was compulsory. [After year one] It was a complete fiasco...had I not believed in LTAD we would have shut it down and gone back...I mean the good news is, even though I felt forced to do it, I also believed in it so it made it much easier for me to sell. (*President, Oct 17*)

This is supported by MYSC meeting minutes: two years prior to the initiation of this research study, LTAD is noted as an emerging, little-understood new standard promulgated by the PSO and District. One year prior to the start of this study, LTAD is viewed as a factor necessitating revision of technical programs and policies: “in light of LTAD...a new policy is needed” (*Minutes, Feb 2013*). At the end of Peter’s first year as president, the annual meeting featured a presentation and discussion about “what we’ll keep from last year’s U4-U10 LTAD in regards to what worked and what did not” including the decision to revise the curriculum for the following year, and stating “the good news is by next season, we will have a workable model. However parents need to get re-cultured too” (*AGM minutes, Oct 2013*). At no time was there discussion of abandoning LTAD, which had been accepted as a requirement of the PSO, District and City, and therefore inevitable. Despite this, the value of LTAD-based programming in the minds of Club leaders remained tied to registration outcomes:

But if we lose all the kids who came in then that's bad... One of the reasons we wanted to do LTAD is because it was supposed to allow people who were sort of semi-indifferent players to enjoy the sport, and to stick with the sport. And if we're not successful at that, then that was a lot of work for nothing. (*Registrar, Oct 17*)

At the annual members meeting at the end of the season, a number of decisions were formalized (*AGM minutes, Oct 2014*). These represent structural elaboration or “morphogenesis” (Archer, 1995), the relatively enduring structural changes arising from the agency of MYSC leaders. Most were related to professionalization: the by-laws were changed to make the technical director a voting member of the executive, membership fees were increased and a winter program instituted to raise money to pay the technical director. The LTAD-based program curriculum developed and instituted by the technical director was not formally endorsed, but remained as Club practice. These structural changes were related to LTAD, in that the technical director was originally hired to lead a successful implementation of LTAD. However, as interview and meeting records make clear, the main objectives were to professionalize service delivery and in so doing stabilize declining membership, while reproducing the culture of the Club and preserving the legacy of the outgoing president.

## **Discussion**

The divergent communitarian and individualist-market forces that must be balanced by CSOs are conceptualized in this research study as a conflict of institutional logics. Institutional logics are “supra-organizational patterns, both symbolic and material, that order reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999 in Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 2004)

across entire organizational fields (in CR terms, the domain of the real), and in turn shape institutional norms, rules and sets of relations in the actual domain (Leca & Naccache, 2006; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013). Based on the findings of the extensive phase of this study, it appears that PSO and municipal affiliation policies and standards are informed by a communitarian, democratic, volunteer-centric, not-for-profit logic. At the same time, resource scarcity drives CSO competition with peer organizations, informing a commercial, expansionist CSO logic aimed at building prestige and legitimacy by satisfying dominant, resource-controlling partners in order to meet the individualist needs of fee-paying members. Ultimately these logics drive upward (internal) and downward (external) coercive, normative and mimetic influences that give rise to specific CSO structures. For example, elected, volunteer boards of directors consistent with communitarian norms, and an array of fee-based, competition-oriented programs offered by sport coaches to meet individualist demands and expectations were each evident in the data.

Conflicting institutional logics are common (Reay & Hinings, 2009) but as they exist in the real domain they are not necessarily evident to actors, who experience them in the empirical realm as policies or regulations that appear to work at cross-purposes. These conflicts are resolved through various processes: alignment to dominant logics, compromise, negotiation, collaboration (Reay & Hinings, 2009; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013), or exploitation (Leca & Naccache, 2006). Implicitly, resolution of conflict results in organizational learning and change (Drazin et al., 2004). In the first part of this discussion, the role of logics is considered as they relate to the adoption and implementation of the LTAD innovation and other decisions taken by the CSO Board.

### ***Tracing Institutional and Operating Logics***

The CSO's operating logic can be characterized as aimed at overcoming human resource deficiencies through a strategy of professionalization in order to improve program quality and mitigate declining membership. Under this logic, LTAD emerged as an operational challenge imposed by external dominant organizations, the District and PSO. The LTAD innovation, specifically the adoption of LTAD-based programming, was seen as an obligation that stressed the Club's already inadequate capacities.

Accommodating LTAD required a rebalancing of leader, venue and program resources, which resulted in considerable interpersonal conflict and was perceived as contributing to declining membership. Despite this the Club persisted, in effect "doubling down" by hiring the technical director, redesigning the sport curriculum and participating in this research study to gain additional expertise on LTAD implementation. This behaviour can be explained in part by recognizing the effects of conflicting institutional logics on the Club, and Canadian CSOs more generally.

Skille (2011) has examined the ways in which legitimizing myths (i.e. institutional logics) are translated through policy into practice in community sport. The shared myths "are 'truths', not because they are rational in the sense that they are objectively tested and confirmed, but because everybody within the field believes they are true" (Skille, 2011: 81). Parallel to the findings of this research study, Skille found a preoccupation of CSOs with competitiveness and provision of sport programs, a propensity to imitate the actions of other CSOs perceived as similar without in-depth analysis to actually establish the degree of similarity, and a general disregard for communitarian premises of sport promoted by central policy-making authorities. In the

current study, it is theorized that the MYSC's operating logic was conditioned by two broader, conflicting institutional logics. The first, communitarian logic broadly construes sport as a means to include youth participation and health-related outcomes. The second individualist logic values sport as a market for prestige accrued through competitive success and advancement of top-performing athletes to higher levels of competition. While institutional logics exist in the real domain and are not directly accessible to actors, it is possible to infer their existence by working back from empirical events (e.g. records of CSO decisions) through institutions in the actual domain (e.g. norms for charitable giving or volunteer development). In so doing one asks, "what forces must be at work in the real domain for this to be the case"?

To test this theory of conflicting institutional logics, MYSC decisions recorded in meeting minutes were analyzed for communitarian or individualist themes. Examples of decisions potentially linked to the influence of communitarian or individualist institutional logics in the real domain and institutions in the actual domain are shown in Table 4.4. In 15 board meetings over the president's two-year term, there were 28 discussion items related to community service and development, including support for low-income participants, community infrastructure, volunteer development, or Club activities supportive of social participation and cohesion. As an example, the technical director was originally hired by the Club to work on a small project to provide soccer to a low-income group. While of course there was no overt mention of "communitarianism", these decisions potentially arose from a collective belief in pervasive communitarian norms for sport (Jarvie, 2003; Coalter, 2007a; Skille, 2010). By contrast 41 items related to market-focused decisions, emphasizing service to paying member/customers,



competition with other sports and clubs, commodification of volunteers programs and services, sale of services, increasing return on investment, and hiring or contracting for services once provided by volunteers. These are taken as arising from individualist norms, and ultimately from an individualist institutional logic.

It is theorized that conflicting institutional logics in the real domain underlie institutional (downward) powers including District insistence on LTAD implementation, and the (upward) desire of some parents for their children to play more games and spend less time on LTAD-based skill development. These mechanisms manifested to MYSC leaders in the empirical domain as policies and regulations that appeared to work at cross-purposes to member priorities, and occasionally triggered overt conflict between members and Club leaders. A simple count does not conclusively determine the relative importance of the two institutional logics, but along with the content of interviews, suggests that the individualist institutional logic drove a dominant organizational logic aimed at improving program quality in order to retain members. At the same time the regular discussion of communitarian-linked issues indicates that both, logics needed to be balanced to sustain the Club's ethos and legitimacy.

The second part of this discussion examines the way institutional structures and logics conditioned the agency of CSO leaders, how a cycle of learning and change was used to explore the processes of agency under these conditions, and how agency in turn lead to structural elaboration and change. This returns us from consideration of contextual and structural mechanisms to the research question (RQ2), "*How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?*"

**Table 4.4: MYSC Decisions Linked to Institutional Logics**

Real domain: Institutional Logic	Actual domain: Institution	Empirical domain: Example from MYSC Minutes <sup>8</sup>
Influence of Individualist Logic	Inter-club competition	“Possible for next year- We are in the middle of the price category (vs. other clubs). We need to migrate away from volunteer base- maybe we can look at charging more.” (Executive, March 18 2014)
	Service to paying members	“House League... They want parents to be able to sign up kids with friends and it was explained to them that this caused a great deal of work and a great deal of hurt feelings.” (Executive, Dec 5 2013)
	Professionalization	“I move that we contract (Kate) for Technical Director to develop and produce on-line, branded soccer modules for a fee of \$10,000 and these on-line modules will be open-sourced.” (Executive, Nov 14 2013)
Influence of Communitarian Logic	Community service	“MYSC Financial Assistance – (Peter). We would like to see a new policy for how we handle MYSC financial assistance... We would like to allow the club to match what the city allocates via the Millpond Fee Assistance Program via MYSC Fee Assistance.” (Executive, Jan 28 2014)
	Community service	“Impoverished kids- city provides \$150k- Ward 3 is the focus...(Peter): we’re not territorial and would be happy to help out getting kids playing downtown.” (Executive, Apr 16 2014)
	Volunteer development	“Volunteer Pathway to Employment... I move that we create a policy of employment for high school students, that after 40 hours of volunteering with us they will be employed.” (Executive, March 18, 2014)
	Social cohesion	“Volunteer Dinner, Aug. 24 <sup>th</sup> - Food and DJ lined up, no venue yet” (Exec.July 18, 2014)

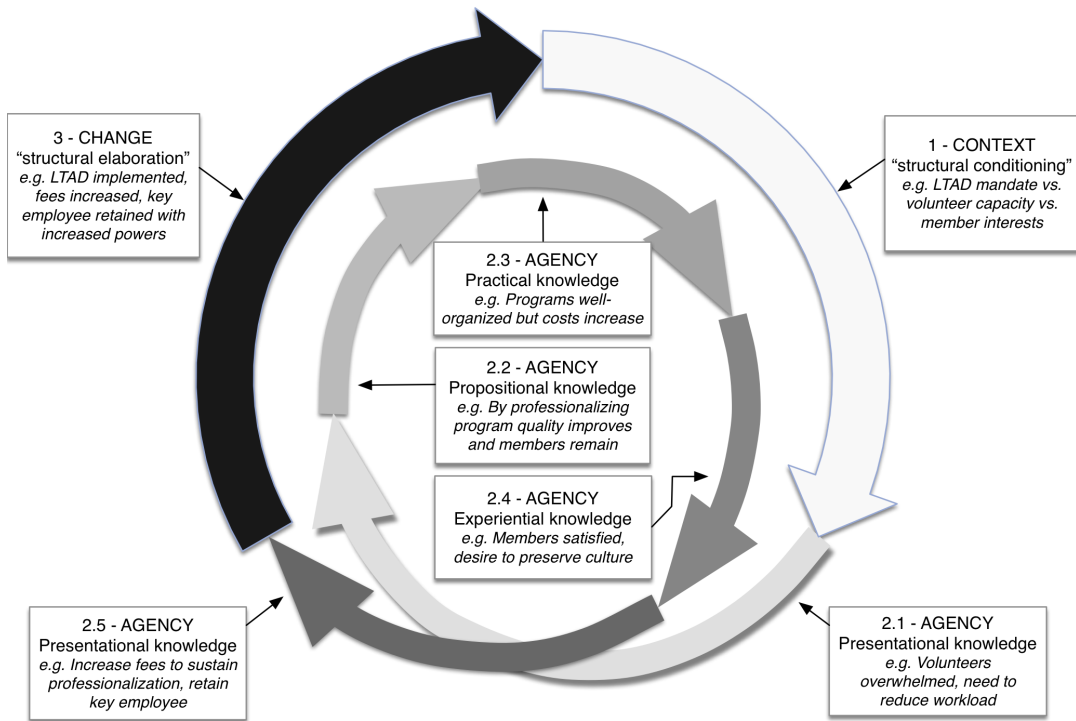
<sup>8</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity.

### *Learning Cycles and CSO Change*

Abstracted theories of resource dependence and institutions acting within conflicting institutional logics provide a conceptual framework of mechanisms acting on CSOs, but fail to illustrate how leaders make real decisions in this context. Suddaby et al. (2010) criticize mainstream accounts of institutionalization as failing to consider the “black box” of agency, in that “actors may well be influential elements of institutional agency, but we must also develop an understanding of how institutional pressures might affect how these actors and their actorhood are socially constructed” (p. 1238). In this intensive phase of the research study a learning cycle (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997) was used as a framework for understanding LTAD adoption and change within a Canadian CSO. The cycle represents the ways existing structures informed perceptions of resource and institutional constraints, how these were woven into scripts, logics, and ingenious solutions by CSO leaders, and how these in turn evolved into the action and learning that drove structural change, or morphogenesis (Archer, 1995).

Generally, a learning cycle constitutes a series of recursive steps: an initial experience or observation that triggers reflection and abstraction, leading to the development of a hypothesis, the testing of the hypothesis in practice or imagination, and the resulting conclusions and learning which are the basis for a new cycle (Kolb, 1984). Barley and Torbert (1997) used a similar cycle to describe the interplay of antecedent institutional structures and agency in change, tracing the evolution of organizational “scripts” including routines and narratives as they were encoded, enacted, replicated or revised and externalized or objectified. In the current research, this process of script evolution was followed using a cycle proposed by Heron (1996; Heron & Reason, 1997).

According to this perspective, the initial observations and reflections of actors lead to development of narratives (presentational knowledge) and plans (propositional knowledge), which are then tested in practice generating practical knowledge including tacit know-how, and experiential knowledge grounded in emotional and axiological understanding. For organizational learning and change to occur these knowledges must be encoded in narratives and routines, forming the basis for the next cycle of presentation, proposition and action. Use of this cycle in an engaged, intensive research setting, such as this case study of change in a Canadian CSO, offered the opportunity to map diverse, rich information including participants' past experiences, biases and emotions, rational propositions and logics, and practical knowledge onto the cycle of planning, action and reflection. A model representing this learning cycle as agency embedded within the morphogenetic cycle, with illustrative examples from the MYSC case study is presented as Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1: Learning Cycle as Agency Within the Morphogenetic Cycle**

Developed from Archer (1995) and Heron (1996; Heron & Reason, 1997)

### ***Linking Logics to Learning Cycles***

Concepts of sensemaking and narrative construction (Weick, 1995) and Barley and Tolbert's (1997) "scripts" were integrated with Heron's learning cycle of presentational, propositional, practical and experiential knowledge (Heron, 1996) to frame learning by MYSC leaders. The content of interview and meeting data along with documentary evidence of pre- and in-study discussions and decisions, was analyzed for themes relating to the gathering and sharing of knowledge created within the Club. These were mapped onto phases of the learning cycle to demark the evolution of knowledge and how it was codified into structure.

Institutional logics acting in the real domain "unfold in the domain of actual as institutions. Institutions are the results of the ways in which actors transpose these institutional logics through precise scripts, rules, and norms in specific contexts" (Leca & Naccache, 2006). These scripts and norms are encoded into actors' knowledge of the world, and shared in what Heron and Reason (1997) call *presentational knowledge* (see Figure 4.1- step 2.1): the ways we present our worldview in words or images. These in turn are incorporated into operating logics, which manifest as plans, or *propositional knowledge* (Figure 4.1- step 2.2). Plans embodying logic-based propositions (i.e. "If we do X, the result will be Y") are put into practice, and feedback is utilized to revise or replicate the scripts, generating tacit or explicit *practical knowledge* (Figure 4.1- step 2.3). In turn these knowledges are combined with subjective impressions and discussion to generate *experiential knowledge* (Figure 4.1- step 2.4) and ultimately synthesized to generate a revised *presentational knowledge* (Figure 4.1- step 2.5). The accretion of knowledge through this planning, doing and learning cycle can be traced in the ways

scripts are modified over time (Barley & Torbert, 1997), with structures being reproduced or modified as one learning cycle ends and a new one is initiated. Although change within organizations is ongoing and cyclical, this framework helps enable the identification of transition points as learning is encoded into change via scripts, logics, and empirically observable actions, and through these into structures.

To begin the cycle of learning and change in the case presented in this research study, *presentational knowledge*, the depiction of “what is” by the actors involved, was observed in the early narratives of Club leaders as they explained the necessity for change to the researcher and each other. The narratives and logics of the leading organizational actors have already been outlined: for Peter, the primary objective was to rescue and stabilize the Club by retaining and if possible increasing the number of members. They followed the logic of professionalization to counter the limited and declining pool of competent, committed volunteers, measuring short-term success as smooth predictable delivery of Club programs and longer-term success as member retention and growth. Kate, as technical director, understood herself to be an instrument of this organization-level logic while holding to her own program-level logic- the need for design and delivery of a sport curriculum resulting in the engagement and enjoyment of youth players in the short term, and their skill development and retention in the sport in the longer term. While logics of both sets of actors were directed at the same ultimate goal of player/member retention, the organizational logic was directed in the short term primarily toward means (i.e. good organization) and the program logic toward ends (i.e. happy players). This was demonstrated in the choice of feedback attended to by the respective actors; the president monitored member registration, intra-organizational conflict, and

timely completion of program tasks while the technical director primarily attended to orderly program delivery, coach effectiveness, and player happiness.

The commonalities and divergences of these parallel logics became evident during the LTAD curriculum redesign process, which can be construed as revision of a key organizational routine through the development and testing of *propositional knowledge*. Through a series of group meetings and individual work, largely by the technical director, new program content was developed and a plan for delivery created. The design of content and delivery elements was founded on the worldviews of the actors (i.e. presentational knowledge) and was shaped through transactional processes into plans, or propositions (i.e. “If we deliver this lesson in this way, we will improve player outcomes and mitigate operational risks).

Parental dissatisfaction was an underlying concern and negative perceptions of parents were frequently raised early on, as a plank of presentational knowledge: “the parents just want to sit there with their Blackberries and judge” (*Work Group, Jan 16*). Another perceived necessity was to minimize potential criticism by establishing the expertise of the technical director. Seven weeks later when the LTAD curriculum for U4-U10 had been finalized, Peter stressed the importance of the project in establishing the credibility and legitimacy of the technical director to ensure continuity after the end of his term:

I don't intend to continue, so what we're trying to do right now is cultivate the next generation...to make sure that we have the right people ready to step forward because we all know there are the wrong people ready to step forward. We have a couple of people right now who are very old school and the Club could regress



under that leadership, so Kate right now...I really want to integrate her as much as possible into the culture of the Club. (*President, March 8*)

Satisfying parental demands and building legitimacy for the Club's leaders through effective, professionally managed and well-organized programs was paramount. Three days later Kate commented on her own priorities: "When the parent sees their kid having joy, pure joy, when they're screaming and goofing around then I think the parent gets engaged and that's where I'm going with MYSC" (*Technical Director #1, Mar 11*). These parallel logics were established as mutually supporting through processes of meeting and consensus. It had been clearly communicated to Kate that her job, as a highly experienced soccer coach and Club employee, was to develop programs to a higher level than the volunteers were capable of; Kate's contribution was to envision and design programs which were fun and engaging for children as the primary means of winning over parents, who would then pay fees and volunteer to support their children's participation.

The transition from the initial presentational and propositional phases of learning to the practical was marked by the opening of the soccer season in May. From this point plans were put into practice, and Kate could assess the effectiveness of new programs by considering elements including coach engagement and ability to interpret and deliver the curriculum, parent and parent-coach feedback, and direct observation of player skills and enjoyment. An early adjustment was made to the format of the lesson plans. She explained:

The push back is, people won't read it...even the people we pay, the head coaches, won't read it. I just got up at 5 am and spent 3 hours paring it down...In

our original curriculum there was, 'here's the theme, here's the progressions,' like a lesson plan...now there's just 'do this' and we took out all the reasoning and other stuff. (*Technical Director #2, June 2*)

Initially players participated in skill-based groups of similar ability, and later in the season team game play was introduced. While this was effective for the younger players, some parents of older players were critical of the lack of game play and demanded modifications to the curriculum. Despite these setbacks and with further adjustments, by mid season (approximately eight months after the start of data collection with MYSC), the hybrid skills/game approach was judged successful: "It's the first time I'm pleased with U8 U10" (*Technical Director #6, July 7*), however the paid coaches were not all performing well, requiring a further intervention. After this, few modifications were made through the end of the season.

The accumulation of *experiential knowledge* cannot be tied to a specific phase of activity. Experiential knowledge is "participative knowing, through empathy, resonance, attunement with what is present, in and with the process of radically imagining it, perceptually and in other ways" (Heron, 1996: 54). In contrast with the "well-rehearsed and competent skill" (p. 54) of practical knowledge, the knowing that comes from doing, experiential knowledge can be described as a knowing that results from being, integrating the narrative-presentational, the conceptual-propositional and the practical, along with the interpretation of the experiences of fellow travellers (Heron, 1996). Experientially, Club leaders remained highly attuned to both verbal and non-verbal feedback about LTAD-based change from players, parents and coaches. Kate explained, "I watch more than I talk. People who are unhappy tell me with their body so I look for that...my greatest

indicator is the children, if they are happy and running around.” (*Technical Director #8, July 28*) Conflict and external criticism also played a role in reinforcing bonds among the group, as when an argument occurred between a Club parent-volunteer named Henry (a pseudonym) and Peter during an executive meeting; a week later Kate said:

Peter, they are bloody lucky to have that guy...Henry just bitches all the time, ‘this is wrong please fix it for us’ and Peter says ‘help us fix it!’ Wow, was he out of line...now all of us are hanging by the skin of our teeth (for fear Peter might resign). (*Technical Director #4, June 23*)

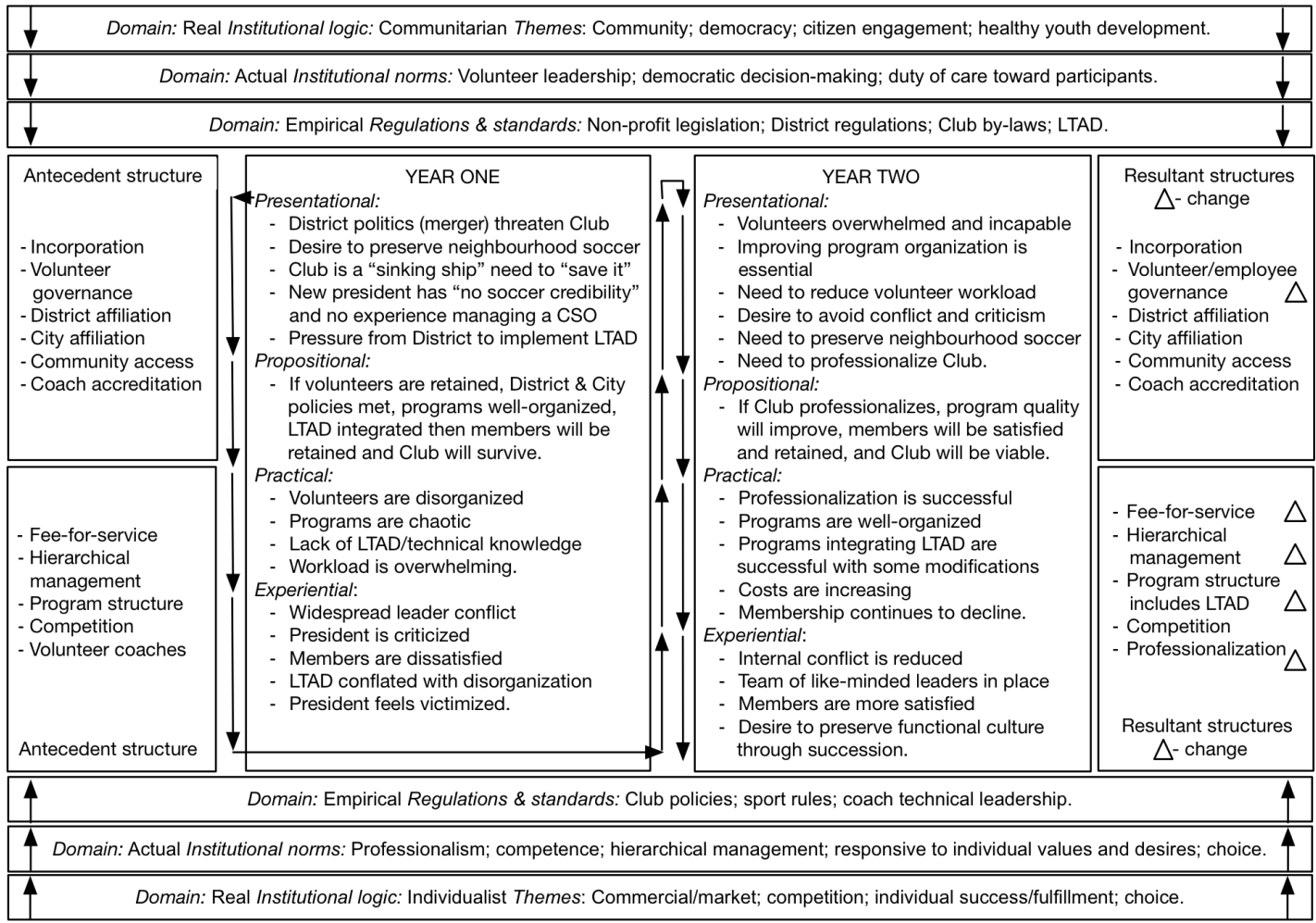
While instances of open conflict were rare, parental criticism carried disproportionate weight as an experiential influence, and program adjustments were made “to shut them up” (*Technical Director #4, June 23*). As further evidence of the experiential impact of parent/member criticism, parent receptivity to a member fee hike and introduction of a winter program, needed to pay for professionalization, were tested extensively by Club leaders including through use of the surveys reported earlier. However, larger questions of *whether* to integrate LTAD into programs or *whether* to professionalize the Club were never tested by MYSC’s leaders.

### ***From Learning to Change: Structural Elaboration***

Agency represents a paradox for neo-institutionalism: “How can actors change institutions if their actions, intentions, and rationality are all conditioned by the very institutions they wish to change?” (Holm, 1995). Agency is embedded in structure, and vice versa; the problem is to distinguish between them. The CR response is analytical dualism: the separation of antecedent structures, agency, and consequent reproduction/elaboration of structures in time. This creates the practical challenges noted

in Chapter 2: where to set the temporal beginning and end of the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle, and how to define structural reproduction vs. change.

Use of a learning cycle as a frame to define cues and transition points in the exercise of agency helped resolve these challenges. Barley and Torbert (1997) have suggested institutions are transmitted through “scripts” including procedures and narratives, and that a cyclical process of script modification can be taken as evidence of agential revision of institutional structures. By mapping the temporally evolving knowledge of Club leaders onto a learning cycle proposed by Heron (1996), the ways structure conditioned agency through initial, institutional scripts, and the ways learning led to modifications of scripts and ultimately structures, could be more readily seen. The cycle of learning and change in Year One was reconstructed from interview and documentary data, while the cycle in Year Two was observed and recorded by the researcher during the twelve months of data collection. A diagram of the evolution of Club structures over a two-year period in context of theorized real, actual and empirical, upward and downward powers, is presented as Figure 4.2. In this diagram, institutional logics in the real domain, institutional influences and resource dependencies in the actual domain, and consequent rules, regulations and standards evident in the empirical domain are depicted as upward (member-driven) and downward (dominant resource controller-driven) powers. These help create the antecedent structures appearing at left, which were the Club’s operating systems existing one year prior to the study period. The antecedent structures condition the agential learning and change cycles in Year One and Two; these in turn result in resultant structures (structural elaboration) and change, as indicated.



**Figure 4.2: Embedded Agency and Elaboration of CSO Structures**

Some elements of this structural elaboration took place in highly informal ways. Absent objective evidence other than parent surveys, Club leaders relied primarily on subjective impressions to evaluate program success. Knowledge development was tightly linked to the beliefs and biases of the in-group and few attempts were made to broaden inquiry. At the end of the season there was no formal review or analysis of the efficacy of the LTAD-based program curriculum in improving player performance or enjoyment, and the lesson plans created prior to the season simply remained on the Club web site. However, end-season decisions by Club leaders indicated approval of Kate's work and by extension, of her LTAD-based programs; specifically, the Club by-laws were modified to make the technical director a voting member of the board, and she was given the lead role in recruiting a new president, in effect selecting her own boss. These decisions signaled the importance Peter placed on retaining her, as did further decisions to increase member fees and initiate a winter program in order to extend and pay for Kate's contract. At the end of his term Peter said:

I don't want the next board to look at her and go, oh, cut, 'cause she is the easiest thing to cut. It would be oh, no Kate, no deficit. That simple, she is the deficit...my feeling is there are two positions in the Club that matter, and none of them are on the board. Or I guess now one will be, the technical director. And the administrator, and that's the Club. (*President, Oct 17*)

LTAD was never formally adopted by the Club executive but rather was seen as a de facto standard imposed by dominant organizations and was integrated into programming. This action was taken by MYSC despite initial confusion, resistance by coaches, the material expense of equipment and field reconfiguration, the human resource

cost of engaging multiple volunteers in re-visioning, and the cost of Kate's employment, none of which the Club could easily afford in view of declining membership revenue and decreasing volunteer contribution. In view of the high costs incurred by a CSO with a weakening resource base, adoption and implementation of the LTAD innovation may be seen as maladaptive. As the Club president admitted, "I would never have bitten it (LTAD) off had I not thought it was compulsory...(but) even though I felt forced to do it, I also believed in it" (*President, Oct 17*). The president felt the Club was coerced into adopting LTAD to meet the aims (e.g. improved program quality for young players) of PSO and District; although these aims were congruent with the president's own beliefs, they diverged from the need to satisfy the individualist desires of some parent/members and coaches who, at least initially, opposed LTAD introduction. The ensuing struggle exacerbated the Club's resource woes, particularly those related to retaining volunteer leaders. Consequently the structural modifications emerging from the Club's learning cycle were intended to ensure stability, continuity and reproduction of the outgoing president's logic: to professionalize the Club by reducing volunteer load, improving the quality of program delivery and retaining members, and only secondarily to provide enhanced programs to young players within a LTAD-based framework.

One of the most dramatic changes to the Club's structure, and one of the most important findings of this research study, was the transfer of power to the technical director in order to preserve the logic and direction of the outgoing president. This amounted to structuration by succession: a reproduction of culture through modification of structure. The tendency of CSOs to maintain informal leadership cliques has been noted (Papadimitrou, 2002), as has the general concept of reproduction of organizational

culture in the face of structural change (Archer, 1995). This research study is one of the first to explore the mechanisms by which structural change in a CSO can be used to perpetuate its culture. Similarly, Skille (2010) has noted the propensity of some CSOs to use the “myths of sport” such as promotion of health instrumentally to justify their activities, while internally translating the policies of dominant policy-making organizations to suit their own dominant logic. A similar effect was seen in this study. Not only were the Club by-laws amended to give the technical director a voting role on the board of directors, the new volunteer president was handpicked by the technical director based largely on perceived compatibility with the culture established by the outgoing president. This decentering of volunteers and consolidation of the technical director’s power and authority was essentially contrary to the communitarian logic the PSO, District and City sought to enforce, yet was positioned as necessary to sustain program quality embodied in LTAD.

At the annual members meeting which ended the Club’s season in October 2014, the treasurer reported that the Club’s financial position was \$46,000 worse than the previous year, and the registrar reported membership was down 35% “as predicted... a lot was reaction to the product we offered the summer of 2013” (*Researcher note, Oct 20*). At the same meeting the technical director was confirmed as a voting member of the executive and membership fees were increased. Ironically, by pursuing an agenda of professionalization member fees had to be raised, potentially decreasing participant access to the sport. Paradoxically, this balance was struck with community soccer, LTAD, and the joy of children in mind.



## **Chapter 5 – Conclusions, Limitations and Future Directions**

The final chapter presents integrated conclusions from the research study, and offers a reflexive consideration of the critical realist approach utilized in this study. The chapter opens with a brief re-introduction and overview of the research problem and questions. After further discussion the conclusions drawn from the findings of the extensive and intensive phases are provided, and the contributions and limitations of the research, future research questions, and recommendations for practitioners and policy makers are presented.

### **Research Problem and Questions**

This research study springs from the transcendental question (Houston, 2010: 83), “what must the world (specifically the CSO organizational field) be like for things to be as they are, and not otherwise?” Awareness of the scope and importance of community sport, the debate over quality in CSO programs, ignorance of how and why quality innovations such as LTAD are adopted by CSOs, and evidence of the challenges of innovation in organizations, together inspired and framed the research. To be more specific, why do some CSOs “create space” for an authentic attempt to implement the LTAD innovation, while others “juggle” by aggrandizing efforts, excusing inactivity, making failed or limited attempts, or simply ignoring LTAD altogether? Hence the overarching research interest was *why do community sport organizations adopt, and how do they implement, an innovation?* Following a critical realist approach (Sayer, 1992; Edwards, 2014a), it was necessary to first understand the structural context for change and answer the initial research question (RQ1): *How do*

*contextual mechanisms influence why CSOs adopt an innovation?* Then, using an intensive case study methodology, the interplay of structure and agency were explored, addressing the second research question (RQ2): *How do CSOs plan, learn, and consolidate learning into structure as they integrate an innovation?*

### **A Context for Innovation**

Chapter Three presented the findings from the extensive phase of the research study. This phase included interviews of representatives of three PSOs and 30 CSOs, a survey of 18 Millpond CSOs, and an analysis of PSO and municipal parks and recreation documents to generate a picture of CSO context. Use of integrated resource dependence and institutional theories helped illuminate the competition between CSOs under resource constraint, and how the policies and practices of resource holders including PSOs and municipal authorities created “downward” or external institutional pressures on CSOs even as they faced “upward” internal pressures from CSO members aiming to maximize value for membership fees. CSOs are challenged to satisfy member demands for “value”, which may include achievement of sporting success and advancement of participants, and/or skill acquisition, enjoyment, and fun (Nagel 2008; Thiel & Mayer, 2009) . Both sets of pressures must be satisfied, as a CSO cannot function without members, access to facilities obtained from municipal authorities (in the CSO sample for this study) and, for CSOs with sport performance goals, the competition league structures accessed through affiliation with the PSO.

The CSOs studied were conceptualized as caught between the conflicting institutional logics of communitarianism and individualism functioning in the real domain, which appear in the actual domain as institutions (Leca & Naccache, 2006), and

manifest in structures including scripts, programs and practices which channel experience and action. To maintain legitimacy with both external and internal resource providers, CSOs adopt and create structures representing both sets of institutional logics. A model (see figure 3.1) was presented depicting how CSOs balance these conflicting logics while juggling the maintenance of key resources: leaders, venues, and program structures.

The image of CSOs emerging from the literature as constrained by resource deficiencies, particularly human resources, and generally subject to the whims of members and external resource-controllers including municipalities and PSOs, was powerfully illustrated in the CSOs studied here. Recurrent interview themes included pressure from parents and threats to move to rival CSOs if demands were not met, fears of “poaching” coaches and members by rival CSOs, and a desire for greater support by credible external agencies including NSOs, PSOs and CS4L to legitimize the positions taken by the CSO, particularly through parent education. When the LTAD innovation was introduced into this resource-avid and adversarial environment CSOs faced the question of how to manage the complicated technical transition, which implied a retraining of coaches, revision of programs, and changes to venues including practice facilities and competition game and league structures. First, however, the CSO had to decide *whether* to adopt the innovation, and this depended on an even more complex calculus related to organizational legitimacy and the probable return on investment in terms of resource access.

CSOs can only maintain their existence if they have members *and* a sufficient supply of venues and leaders for program delivery to satisfy those members. This in turn depends on maintaining legitimacy with members and their individualist logic, as well as

venue providers, including PSOs and municipalities, with their communitarian logic. Early LTAD-adopting CSOs nominated by their PSOs and interviewed at the beginning of the extensive stage of this study claimed that they believed LTAD was a better way to develop athletes. However, they also expected that LTAD adoption would enhance their reputation as a leading club in their region; that is, they expected that LTAD adoption would confer a competitive advantage over local rivals. When resistance to LTAD appeared, frequently from recalcitrant “old guard” coaches and parents who argued that values of fun or competition were diminished under LTAD, the CSOs sought the legitimizing support of credible partners.

Here the orientation of the PSO to LTAD became pivotal: PSO3’s wholehearted support for LTAD signaled legitimization, while the passive or inactive orientations of PSO1 and PSO2 did not. In the same way the municipal parks and recreation department of Millpond, while nominally supporting LTAD adoption among its facility permitting CSOs, did not substantively change its affiliation or facility allocation policies to incent LTAD adoption. Where legitimization was signaled, as PSO3 did by incorporating LTAD into EYL standards, CSOs conformed so they could compete for prestige and gain advantage. In conditions of low legitimization, CSO decisions on LTAD adoption were driven largely by resource considerations and when cost appeared to outweigh benefit, adoption languished. A salient example was the lack of interest among the CSOs interviewed early in the study, when the researcher offered expertise to support further LTAD implementation.

Skille (2008, 2010, 2011) traces the ways in which legitimizing myths are translated through policy mechanisms into practice at the community level of sport and

how this translation process underpins processes of institutionalization. He argues that the effects of sport policy developed by the state or national sport federations cannot be understood without considering them *from the perspective of the sport club* (Skille 2008:182). In this theorized process of translation, new ideas are combined with existing institutional practices through a process of active modification that enables them to fit the local organizational context. A later in-depth examination of three Norwegian CSOs (Skille, 2010, 2011) revealed the preoccupation of CSOs with competitiveness and provision of sport programs, a propensity to imitate the actions of other CSOs perceived as similar without in-depth analysis to actually establish the degree of similarity, and a general disregard for the communitarian premise of sport for health despite the overt emphasis on health as a product of sport by central policy-making authorities.

In this way the role of sport for health, important to policy-makers (Coalter, 2007; Skille, 2008), is relegated at the CSO level to an unintended consequence of little import. There is parallel in the findings of the current research. In Canada, quality initiatives including coach training (e.g. National Coaching Certification Program), anti-abuse (e.g. Respect In Sport), ethical sport (e.g. True Sport) and LTAD are funded by national and provincial governments and entrenched in the sport policies of governments (*Canadian Sport Policy*, 2012) but in the absence of direct funding to CSOs by those agencies, only the relatively weak levers of education and moral suasion can be used to influence CSO adoption of quality initiatives. Neither the three PSOs nor the municipal recreation department studied here made LTAD compliance compulsory for CSOs, although all publicly supported it in some form; only PSO3 made compliance essential for entry into its Elite Youth League (EYL). Absent incentive, many CSOs, for example those surveyed

in Millpond, demonstrated slow or limited LTAD adoption even though they claimed to understand and support LTAD principles. As they juggled quotidian resource shortages, the challenges of “creating space” for adoption seemed to outweigh the potential benefits.

The exploration of conflicting institutional logics as a fundamental tension driving CSO structures and behaviours is relatively recent. Barnes, Cousens and MacLean (2015) examined the growing conflict of commercial and voluntary logics in community basketball and comment on the weakness of central policy as a regulatory factor in resisting commercialization. Skille (2008, 2010, 2011) notes the conflict between what policy makers want CSOs to do (i.e. support mass participation leading to improved public health) and what CSOs want to do (succeed in sport competitions). Stenling (2013), building on Skille’s analysis, examined the non-integration of “drive in sport” in Sweden. “Drive in” programs are fun (not skill) based, provide open (not member) access, and professional- (not volunteer-) delivered youth sport programs intended to meet a communitarian social policy need, and are fundamentally contrary to the existing culture of Swedish CSOs. Observing that CSOs tended to reproduce their existing practices leading to failure of drive-in initiatives, Stenling (2013) speculated, “an idea aligned with processes of professionalization and commercialization might have been received differently, since these are processes which have been noted as under way in Swedish sports” (2013, p. 505). In other words, if the LTAD innovation had been presented as compatible with commercial individualist interests rather than communitarian social purposes, there might have been greater success. From this perspective decisions to adopt “drive-in” sport, LTAD or other innovations are largely conditioned by institutional logics and the corresponding institutional structures that

influence CSOs.

Other theoretical perspectives have been used to explain CSO change processes. Several studies of innovation in sport organizations (Newell & Swan, 1995), including LTAD implementation (Beaudoin et al., 2015; Frankish, 2011) have used the diffusion of innovations model (Rogers, 2003) as a framework. The model posits a linear, five-stage process in which an individual or organizational actor becomes aware of an innovation, is persuaded of its value, decides to implement, implements, and confirms or discontinues the innovation. Network effects and power relations play a major role in determining how individual actors are persuaded that an innovation is worth pursuing but ultimately the decision stage rests on analysis and rational choice (Rogers, 2003). Beaudoin, Callary and Trudeau (2015) focus on how coaches analyzed LTAD in terms of five innovation attributes *relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability*; the attributes are positioned as tests an innovation must pass to trigger a decision to adopt.

While this approach illuminates some of the cognitive processes of individual actors, it fails to consider the influence of “invisible” institutional pressures. The assumption is that actors are largely unconstrained by institutional influences and have access to sufficient knowledge to make a strategic choice. Skille (2011) found the opposite, an uncritical willingness of CSO leaders to copy the practices of referent peer CSOs without gathering sufficient evidence of true correspondence between the organizations. Studies of sport organizations have postulated similar “bandwagon effects” driving isomorphism (O'Brien & Slack, 2003). “Bounded rationality” (i.e. insufficient information) has been shown to drive mimicry as a form of satisficing behaviour (Simon,

1979, 1991). This research study found that although CSOs considered some of the decision factors in Rogers' model, especially relative advantage and complexity, many demonstrated satisficing behaviour, such as failure to gather and analyze information and willingness to jump before looking, for example when the EYL CSOs imitate peers by lowering fees to match or undercut them.

Rationalist strategic choice models also fail to consider hierarchical relations that may force a dependent organization to adopt standards or specific structures. Scarcity of resources, particularly human resources, is a constant theme in CSO research and studies have used resource dependence theory (RDT) (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Hillman, Withers & Collins, 2009) as a theoretical frame to explain the interaction between CSOs and partner organizations (cf. Misener & Doherty, 2013; Wicker, Vos, Scheerder & Breuer, 2013). Affiliation with PSO and league structures to gain access to competition opportunities, or with municipal departments to access sport facilities, are forms of interorganizational relationship consistent with RDT. However, CSO research has not fully considered the ways in which eligibility criteria act as a threshold barring low-capacity CSOs from resource access. Similarly, access to subsidies or grants provided by governments or NGOs may depend on meeting standards requiring charitable registration (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013). This study introduces the concept of regulatory thresholds, defined as the standards a dependent organization must meet to maintain access to resources and remain viable. CSOs are subject to many threshold requirements to access resources needed for survival, and the effort required to interpret and meet standards can be a significant drain on already limited capacities (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2013).



An important implication of this study is that policies intended to make a CSO conform to expectations for governance, risk management or quality sport delivery, may have the unintended consequence of acting as regulatory thresholds which only higher capacity CSOs can cross. This affords an advantage to stronger CSOs at the expense of weaker, and results in coercive isomorphism, “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 149). The case of three CSOs in Millpond District demonstrates the potential for unintended consequences arising from such policies: by creating a consolidated elite team they met PSO standards for selection to the EYL, and then were able to leverage that position to bid for hegemony in the District by taking control of local leagues and maneuvering to eliminate competitor clubs. Thus, coercive, standards-based attempts to improve CSO program quality may instead reduce choice and access by eliminating lower-capacity CSOs.

In this research, use of an integrated institutional-resource dependence perspective based in a CR metatheoretical frame provided a comprehensive view of CSO behaviour. The resulting multi-level contextual model of CSOs presented in Chapter Three (see figure 3.1) depicts an array of interdependent influences and a primary conflict between institutional logics: the communitarian myth of sport for health, social engagement and cohesion embodied in the affiliation policies of PSOs and municipal authorities, and the individualist myth of sport as opportunity for competitive excellence and personal advancement delivered in a commercial “sport marketplace”. CSO competition for members is based in the market mobility of members and their potential to choose other CSOs. Therefore CSOs strive to attract and retain members, and volunteer leaders drawn

from the ranks of members, by offering programs that meet member demands. To do so they must have access to venues including competition structures and sport facilities needed to deliver programs. To access these venues, CSOs seek legitimization through the process of affiliation to resource-providing authorities, which implies an espousal of the communitarian ideals embodied in the policies of those authorities. This in turn creates conflict with the individualist ideals of members.

In context, the decision to adopt an innovation such as LTAD is revealed as a product of the potential human and financial costs of adoption under resource constraint, the extent to which legitimacy can be gained from resource-controlling authorities (with resources gained thereby), and the potential loss of legitimacy from members (with resources lost thereby). Local contextual factors including the orientation of the relevant PSO and municipal authorities to the innovation (i.e. the potential gain of legitimacy), member attitudes, the specific resource position of the CSO, and the particular values of CSO leaders combine to help determine whether the innovation will be adopted. The findings of this study show that such decisions may be based in satisficing and mimicry rather than thorough search and careful design. Essentially, whether CSOs create space for adoption depends on their ability to juggle constraints while balancing conflicting logics.

### **Inside the Black Box: Embedded Agency and Change**

In the second, intensive phase of the research described in Chapter Four, the contextual model of CSO behaviour was explored through a case study of a single CSO attempting to integrate LTAD into its programs. The objective of this phase of the study was to examine the exercise of agency at a micro level, and show, in CR terms, how

structural conditioning per the multi-level contextual model influenced agency, and how this embedded agency either produced structural change or reproduced existing structures. Drawing upon the contextual model developed in discussion of the extensive phase, the LTAD innovation is considered as a perturbation that affected the ongoing effort of the CSO to maintain operational equilibrium and maintain balance between conflicting institutional logics. How did the leaders of one CSO understand this new pressure to innovate in context of their particular situation, and how did they act to restore equilibrium by “creating space” to integrate it?

Agency can be thought of as a self-referential process of embedded sense-making, decision and action (Wrenn, 2014) with the intent to make a difference in the world, to “reproduce, (or occasionally transform) the structures that govern their substantive activities of production” (Bhaskar, 1989, in Pratt 1995). Conceptualizing innovation adoption and integration as a process of sense-making (Weick, 1995) and learning suggested use of a cycle to mark the progress of agency. Following a CR framework, analytical dualism is used to separate structure and agency and facilitate exploration of the interplay between the two, but this raises methodological questions: where to set the temporal beginning and end of the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle, and how to define structural reproduction vs. change? Any particular cycle of interest is coincident with and co-constitutive of the multiple asynchronous learning cycles of organizational life, every cycle is likely to lead to reproduction of some structures and change to others, and the extent of structural change is inevitably a product of unique combinations of agency, local contingencies and field- and social-level causal forces. A path through this maze can be found by tracing the cycle of learning, the process by which organizations “store

knowledge in their procedures, norms, rules, and forms” (March, 1991) or “scripts” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

The case study described how Millpond Youth Soccer Club (“MYSC” or “the Club”) implemented LTAD-based programs while managing multiple resource constraints and institutional pressures. Following the learning cycle proposed by Heron (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997), the path of agency was traced through a study of how the narratives (presentational forms) of Club leaders lead to plans and if-then propositions, which were in turn tested in use, generating practical knowledge as well as experiential knowledge grounded in emotional and axiological understanding. For learning to occur, these knowledges must be encoded in narratives, routines and “scripts” to become the basis for the next cycle of presentation, proposition and action. In practice this meant tracing narratives, plans and decisions embodied in Club committee and board meetings, program curricula, verbal and written reports, contracts, and other records along the cycle, culminating in end-cycle reproductions and modifications of scripts including organization by-laws, policies, staffing types and levels, and other enduring structures.

The findings showed how institutional structures such as non-profit legislation and regulatory affiliation policies reflect in CSO organizational forms, and how those forms shape subsequent activities. From its inception the Club operated within sport rules and PSO, District and league structures, and was consequently obligated to incorporate as a not-for-profit and adopt the associated governance and financial reporting practices. Similar requirements tied to not-for-profit incorporation were necessary for affiliation with the City, in order to access playing fields for Club programs. This set of relations

constituted “an enduring shape and set of rules to follow so long as the set of relations endured” (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014: 152). In documents from the years immediately prior to and including the study period, there is no record of the CSO leaders questioning or challenging prescribed governance structures or practices, or affiliations with the PSO, District or City, which were all taken for granted. City policies were challenged at both staff and political levels when they increased costs or constrained CSO activities, but there was no question (or possibility) of affiliating with another municipality or renting sport fields elsewhere. Similarly the President understood on election that LTAD implementation was a requirement of the District, and while methods of implementation were debated, the fact of implementation was not.

A much more pressing concern was a steady decline in membership year over year. Fearing additional loss of members the CSO leaders were highly sensitive to parent and volunteer complaints, some related to LTAD implementation. Thus the question facing MYSC was not whether to adopt LTAD, but how to adopt without alienating a declining member and volunteer base. In response the Club president adopted an operational logic of professionalization (Horch, 1998; Dowling, Edwards & Washington 2014), hiring employees and contracting services in an effort to improve quality of service, facilitate LTAD implementation, and reduce load on volunteer leaders with the goal of retaining members and member revenues. Concern that members would leave to join neighbouring clubs influenced many decisions including hiring, member fees, and program design, while conflation of LTAD with member satisfaction led member retention to become a key measure of LTAD success.

Ultimately the Club made a number of end-of-season changes that may be viewed

as attempts to reproduce culture and maintain the central values and operational paradigms of the Club. Paradoxically, a Club self-defined as a community, neighborhood, “house league” (i.e. not high performance) youth-focused CSO opted for a costly program of professionalization, hiring a technical director and contracting administration to a private company. To afford this in the face of declining membership, the Club raised fees and launched a winter training program. In anticipation of resistance from some volunteer leaders, the Technical Director was encouraged to recruit a compatible successor to the outgoing President, and through a change to the Club by-laws the Technical Director became a voting Board Director. Over the course of the year the Technical Director had redesigned Club programs to integrate LTAD concepts, and by the end of the year she was given significant power and support to sustain those programs. These significant changes were seen as necessary responses to pressures including loss of members and revenues, loss of volunteers and volunteer burnout, expectations by the PSO and District to implement LTAD, political maneuvering in the District to concentrate power in the hands of the largest clubs, and various municipal, PSO and District policies governing how the Club must be constituted and governed. The Club changed to survive and to protect what it conceived itself to be, a place for neighborhood children to play recreational soccer. The interaction of resource dependencies and institutional effects created a set of structural realities Club leaders seldom if ever questioned.

The research offered an extended look inside the “black box” of embedded agency (Houston, 2010; Suddaby et al., 2010). Use of a cycle of organizational learning-as-agency in context of institutional mechanisms and resource dependencies illuminated

the movement from antecedent structural conditions to resulting structural change/reproduction. Where purely institutional or resource-dependence perspectives might have yielded a structuralist, determinist analysis, and a purely learning-centered view a voluntarist analysis, a CR-based framework combining multiple theoretical perspectives and methods across extensive and intensive studies provided the “best of both worlds” (Hurrell, 2014:244). In-depth longitudinal approach is not unique to CR-informed research, of course. Contextual or “processual” theories of change, such as those of Pettigrew (1997) aimed for more integrated, holistic understandings of how organizational events unfold over time, emphasizing study of the interrelatedness of actors and their contexts and the way in which actors, embedded in unique contexts, find different solutions despite the apparent similarity of their organizations (Pettigrew, 2012).

Other studies of organizational change have also combined multiple perspectives to consider both exogenous and endogenous influences. Typically, these works have generated a similar conclusion that assimilation of innovations depends on antecedent contextual mechanisms, the attributes of the innovation, and the way context and attributes interact (Meyer & Goes, 1988). Neo-institutional theory in general tends toward broad views of the organization in socio-cultural context and the ways institutional forces interact over time to create organizational change (Greenwood et al., 2014; Washington & Patterson, 2011). However a CR-informed approach with its inherent “analytical dualism” focuses upon the interplay of structure and agency over time (Archer, 1982,1995), demanding a methodology which can trace the way structures evolve, and why similar mechanisms can yield different results in different contexts (Sayer, 1992).

Concepts of change as based in organizational learning have been extensively

explored in organization research (cf. Schulze 2005; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). A frequent theme is the tension between the risks and rewards of learning, including the short-term efficiency but potential long-term stagnation inherent in competence. Seminal work by March (1991) established tension between exploratory search, in essence the finding of new ways, and exploitation, the optimization of existing methods. An insight is that structures (i.e. institutions, cultures) store knowledge, while agency (i.e. exploration, learning) builds knowledge (March, 1991). Similarly Van de Van and Polley (1992) examined cycles of adaptive learning in organizations and found that when innovation is accompanied by uncertainty, the conflict of organizing logics between resource managers and innovators can inhibit learning. Exploration and innovation come at a cost, and when the cost appears excessive or when existing structures and cultures tend toward risk-adverse behaviour, limited learning, organizational stasis and reproduction of existing structures become more likely.

Given the resource and capacity limitations of CSOs, which may result in inability or unwillingness to gather sufficient information to support analysis and informed decision-making, how do CSOs learn and change? Some studies find that sport organizations are resistant to technological change (Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012; Trabal, 2008). Might this be related to lack of capacity to engage in learning? One possibility is suggested by the findings of the current research. When organizations respond to local competition by satisficing rather than thorough exploration and innovation, a local cycle of incremental competition or “one up-manship” may follow, called Red Queen competition (Barnett & Hansen, 1996). Red Queen competition takes its name from the character of the same name in Alice in Wonderland, who must run as fast as possible



simply to stay still. In organizational settings, keeping up with the innovations of competitors may result in learning and improved competitive effectiveness of both parties, but over time, continued incremental competition against old rivals yields less learning. In such an instance, the Red Queen is likely to be maladaptive, consuming organizational energy for diminishing return. The pattern of Red Queen competition bears a strong similarity to the behaviour of CSOs studied here: attempts to adopt LTAD, whether motivated by an intrinsic desire to gain a competitive advantage (as in early-LTAD-adopting CSOs), or due to imposition of regulatory thresholds (e.g. the creation of the EYL by PSO3), trigger localized, incremental, “tit-for-tat” competitive activity. Here, as in other studies of CSOs (Skille, 2011) this may be undertaken in conditions of low information, without thorough analysis, and frequently using ad hoc decision-making in efforts to imitate the actions of rivals.

The current research demonstrates that one way CSOs compete is by meeting regulatory thresholds to improve legitimacy with resource controllers such as PSOs and municipalities, and thus improve access to resources. The tendency of public or “nonmarket” organizations to seek legitimacy through compliance with accreditation standards has been observed (Casile & Davis-Blake, 2002), and based on the findings of this research study, imposing a standard which appears as a new regulatory threshold can trigger a round of Red Queen-like competition for legitimacy among CSOs. However, CSOs do not compete for access to resources such as leaders and venues as ends in themselves, but rather so they can increase membership size and/or sport competitive success. Because competition has a cost it can be considered adaptive only if the return exceeds the cost, as may be the case if the CSO succeeds in gaining new members along

with the leaders, programs and venues to accommodate them. For example, in Millpond District the amalgamated EYL club threatened to eliminate rival clubs, and if successful would presumably acquire some of the members and venues of those rivals. However if the effort results in volunteer exhaustion or financial depletion such that CSO capacity is lessened without compensatory gain, then the competition is maladaptive (Barnett & Hansen, 1996). Research into Red Queen competition in manufacturing and service industries indicates the benefit of such competition is context-dependent, and initial performance gains can give way to performance decrements if rival competition increases (Derfus et al., 2008).

At MYSC, pressure to halt the loss of membership to rival CSOs and the simultaneous, but apparently conflicting need to implement LTAD, drove change. New programs were designed, the tenure of the employee who created and implemented them was entrenched, and a revised governance structure to protect that tenure was consolidated in operational and structural changes adopted at the end of the 12-month period of the MYSC study. This is consistent with findings in the literature that Red Queen-style competition perturbs the efforts of organizations to maintain steady-state resource cycles, but may, when innovations are implemented, result in learning and change. As Barnett and Hansen (1996) point out, “Red Queen evolution depicts competition as a force that continually disturbs equilibrium....If competition triggers organizational learning, then change may be occurring even when aspects of market structure, such as numbers of organizations, are stable” (p. 155). Red Queen competition in CSOs has not been explored previously and further research is needed to determine how, in what circumstances, and with what effect it occurs in the CSO field.

## Theoretical Contributions of the Research

Studies of community sport often focus on establishing the characteristics of CSO (e.g. low capacity, weak governance, silo thinking) rather than *how they work*. Accepting the challenge of Greenwood, Hinings and Whetten (2014) to return from the study of institutions to the study of organizations, an important contribution of the current research is use of linked extensive and intensive research designs to establish the interorganizational and institutional structural context for CSO behaviour and the ways CSOs operate within those structures to adopt an innovation. A model of how conflicting institutional logics in a CSO field create “downward” and “upward” forces that constrain CSOs was generated, demonstrating how CSOs balance and satisfy these forces to increase legitimacy with both members and resource-controlling authorities. Case studies of CSOs that had recently formed a new league and a single CSO working to adopt LTAD while managing intensifying resource pressures illustrated the model in action, while the second case provided an in-depth examination of agency operating as a learning cycle to yield structural change.

Similarly, studies of CSOs have shown that CSOs compete with one another (Skille, 2010, 2011) but have not explored *how* they compete. The current research has provided examples of CSO competition through legitimacy-seeking processes aimed at capturing resources, thus strengthening the CSO at the expense of rivals. This resembles Red Queen competition, a form of local, incremental “keeping up”. For the CSOs studied here, this was driven by resource controlling authorities imposing standards that act as *regulatory thresholds*. Regulatory thresholds, a concept coined here, are defined as threshold standards a dependent organization must meet to maintain access to resources

and remain competitive. The implementation of quality in sport standards consistent with the values of resource controlling authorities may result in CSO organizational learning and improved quality of program delivery, but incur CSO human resource and financial costs. The consequent increased tension between communitarian external pressures and internal individualist pressures from CSO members may further stress CSOs as they juggle resource demands to maintain their viability. For the CSOs studied here, the payoff for the costs incurred in adoption of a quality in sport program is competitive advantage relative to local rivals, if resource-controlling authorities confer the reward of increased legitimacy and improved access to resources. Absent the potential of reward, CSOs may be less likely to engage in quality in sport initiatives. This type of Red Queen-like competition for legitimacy among non-profit organizations has not, to the researcher's knowledge, been explored in the extant literature.

From the perspective of a research practitioner, this study contributes to the understanding and practice of critical realist research in several ways. First, it illustrates how the interplay of agency and structure can be investigated through sequential extensive-intensive studies to establish context and then explore the path of agency within that context. Through use of a critical realist framework, structure and agency are not conflated, and neither is privileged as explanation, helping resolve the so-called paradox of embedded action. Second, it demonstrates how the path of agency can be conceptualized as a learning cycle through which logics shape the practice and revision of "scripts" including narratives and routines, and how these in turn shape the formation of logics, and ultimately structures, within organizations. This opens the 'black box' of agency to show how structural conditioning shapes the agency of individuals within

organizational contexts. Third, by examining the practical realities of a CR-based approach, it advances the “how-to” knowledge essential to the progress of social science (Pettigrew, 2012) by offering insight into research design, methodology and practice, and the ways in which the methodological pluralism of CR necessitates and stimulates researcher reflexivity throughout the process.

### **Practical Contributions of the Research**

Despite the inevitable limitations and unanswered questions, this research has made a number of contributions to understanding the contexts within which CSOs function and the ways CSOs operate within them, including mechanisms of CSO competition for legitimacy and resources.

### ***Recommendations for Sport Policy-makers and Leaders***

The findings suggest various recommendations for sport policy-makers and leaders. First, communitarian assumptions made by NSOs, PSOs, and the governments and agencies that fund NSOs and PSOs about the purpose and benefits of community sport are not necessarily shared by CSOs. Despite the hierarchical ties that link them, CSOs may be viewed as a fundamentally different species than NSOs or PSOs, due to the nature of member interests and the revenue base and leader pool that depend on satisfying those interests (Brooks, Barnes, & Stevens, in press). The CSO imperative to meet individualist member needs may mean that attaining communitarian ends (e.g. civic engagement, enhanced social capital, youth character development, improved community health) are unintended consequences from a CSO perspective.

Consequently the policies, regulations and standards put in place by NSOs, PSOs and government agencies to channel CSO actions may themselves have unintended

consequences from the perspective of the regulating authorities. CSOs may compete for legitimacy and access to resources by meeting regulatory thresholds, and in doing so higher-capacity CSOs may be able to eliminate weaker CSO competitors. Thus standards, including quality standards such as LTAD intended to enhance the communitarian benefits of sport, may instead trigger competition, advantage stronger CSOs at the expense of weaker (i.e. Matthew effect), and ultimately attenuate the intended benefits by eliminating weaker competitors and reducing access to sport. The best advice for policy makers intending to influence CSOs, then, is to attempt to understand the business of sport delivery as many CSOs do: as an ongoing juggling of resources including leaders, programs and venues in order to meet member needs and interests, while simultaneously balancing the upward individualist and downward communitarian expectations of resource controllers. Policies and standards may be followed to the extent that an advantage is conferred, and not for the nominal purposes of policy makers.

### ***Considerations for Critical Realist Research Practice***

In practice, research presents a continuous series of challenges and decisions. In the intensive phase of this study, work with MYSC embodied two complimentary forms of practice: those of the sport facilitator and those of the academic researcher. As facilitator the task is to work with individuals and groups to situate inquiry in local context, establish the focus of inquiry, maintain a critical approach to yield insight, use insight as a basis for decision, and support the journey from decision to substantive action. As researcher, the task is to capture a record of the journey through the project, to analyze the record, extract meaning and knowledge from it, and to share that knowledge. At times this resembled the somewhat comic situation of people trying to help each other

navigate a dark room. MYSC leaders were trying to understand how to effectively implement LTAD after a false start - metaphorically, they knew that stumbling into the furniture would hurt. As facilitator, the need was to support them; as researcher, to simultaneously attend to their path-finding process, understand what cues they saw, and theorize why they saw and responded to some cues and not others. Ultimately the facilitator and researcher roles and activities were negotiated and re-negotiated over the span of the intensive phase.

A CR metatheoretical framework implies iterative cycles of researcher engagement, reflection, abstraction and abductive or retroductive theorization (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). The iteration essentially encompasses an alternation between engaged and detached modes. In this case a split focus and use of parallel, complimentary methods helped to sustain those cycles. At times the task was to support and occasionally facilitate the development of MYSC products (e.g. the LTAD curriculum) and decisions (e.g. whether to increase member fees based on registration analysis and parent surveys). At the same time, by attending meetings, interviewing MYSC leaders and collecting and analyzing documents, a number of themes relating to CSO capacities and resource management emerged, which informed and were informed by the contextual model developed in the initial research.

These intertwined as the Club membership analysis was performed and recommendations made, and continued in subsequent data analysis after participation with the CSO was concluded. The cycles were overlaid by a reflexive process of observation and reflection, searching for inflections and transitions in sensemaking and learning processes, ways in which accumulated knowledge was captured and used, and

the effects on MYSC structures including programs, policies, and formal and informal relations between leaders. These in/out, engaged/detached, empirical/abstracted cycles necessitated a reflexivity that at different times included introspection, intersubjective reflection, collaboration, and critique in the effort to trace how structural mechanisms and forces influenced agency, and how agency effected change or reproduction of existing structures.

The challenges experienced in this research study suggest the following considerations for research practice in a CR paradigm. First, this study illustrated how the interplay of agency and structure can be investigated through sequential extensive-intensive studies to establish context and then explore the path of agency within that context. Through the use of a critical realist framework, structure and agency are not conflated, and neither is privileged as explanation, helping resolve the so-called paradox of embedded action. However the use of a theoretically ideal (Sayer, 1992; Hurrell, 2014) extensive-intensive approach requires abundant time (in this case, three years) to collect data and generates a large mass of data. In other circumstances the study presented here might have been managed as a research agenda encompassing an initial extensive study followed by a series of independent intensive studies, each providing a more comprehensive analysis of the research questions which arose and are noted below.

One of the greatest challenges, first in experiencing and later in analyzing the data, was to determine what constitutes structural elaboration, or change. If change is taken to be the difference between original and resulting states, it must be said that in organizations composed of multiple actors such as a CSO states are continually changing. Ideas, narratives, and actions can change on a day-to-day basis, and actors may be



inconsistent both with each other and internally over time. Even if the yardstick is enduring change codified in structures, such as CSO rules, policies, and programs, it can be difficult to discern whether a particular revision is of significance, or whether it is consistent with a broader direction or theme. At MYSC it was concluded that structural changes were undertaken precisely to reproduce an existing culture: change and stasis in one instance. This challenge is not unique to CR, but CR's emphasis on analytical dualism as a means of separating structural conditioning, agency and structural elaboration or stasis over time (Archer, 1995) heightens the challenge of tracing and linking events and underlying forces over time.

Finally, CR as a relatively new philosophy and metatheoretical frame remains "different" from previous positivist, post-positivist, and constructionist orientations to social research (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). The CR approach continues to require explanation for those more familiar with other paradigms, which is clearly the case in sport management where positivist and qualitative methodologies prevail (Byers, 2013). In future CR may become the dominant paradigm in sport management scholarship. For now, finding a balance between glossing important differences in approach, and tedious over-explanation remains difficult.

### **Limitations of the Research**

All research is limited by constraints of time, resources, and the knowledge of the researcher and this study is no different. Some limitations of the current research are noted here.

First, the broad scope of the research study, use of multiple theoretical perspectives and the extensive/intensive design spanning about 36 months of data

collection, produced a mass of data and a set of relatively sweeping conclusions about how CSOs adopt an innovation. Compared to the narrowly focused fine-grained examinations of individual phenomena more typical in organization and sport management literature, this study may be judged to be somewhat eclectic and the conclusions based on a relatively superficial analysis. In rebuttal it may be said that the study is true to its objectives. By examining broad questions, constructing a contextual model of CSO behaviour, and assessing the resulting model intensively with one case study CSO, it was possible to “return to the study of organizations with an emphasis upon comparative analysis” (Greenwood, Hinings & Whetten, 2014) and open the “black box” of embedded agency. Whether the methodological approach and subsequent analysis are considered a limitation of the research depends on the perspective of the reader.

Second, the first phase of the study used a multi-method extensive design (Sayer, 1992; Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014) gathering varied data across three phases to generate a picture of contextual influences on CSOs. The PSOs, CSOs and municipal government were in the same Canadian province and a number were in the same community, providing regional context and data triangulation. However, access depended on PSO and municipal nomination of CSOs meeting conditions including affiliation, and in the case of PSO nominees, early LTAD adoption. The sample is inherently biased toward high-capacity CSOs in urban settings, the very CSOs, as argued here, most likely to engage in inter-CSO competition for members and resources. A study of smaller, rural or sub-threshold CSOs, for example those catering to adult social participation in sport, might yield a different model of contextual influences. Further, in Canada, most CSOs including those studied depend primarily on member-derived revenue and increased CSO costs are

passed on to members. In other jurisdictions where CSOs receive government subsidies, the resource dependencies that drove inter-CSO competition for legitimacy may not obtain.

Third, critical realist research distinguishes between extensive designs suitable for generation of descriptive studies and intensive designs generating explanation of the operation of causal mechanisms in context (Sayer, 1992). In the extensive study, data including interview, survey and document analysis were used to generate a relatively superficial exploration of each organization, and provide context and a theorized model. As noted, factors of CSO proximity, size and resources, and difference in revenue source may result in different sets of contextual mechanisms and consequently the model may operate differently. No claim is made for the universal generalizability of the “local theory” (Sayer, 1992) generated here, which is based in the particular CSOs and national/cultural setting explored.

Fourth, in the intensive case study, challenges related to grounding in a CR framework included the key methodological questions of where to set the temporal beginning and end of the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle, how to define structural reproduction vs. change, and how to interpret local contingency vs. broader causality in the way mechanisms operate, were matters of interpretation and practical expertise. Any particular cycle of interest is coincident with and co-constitutive of the multiple asynchronous learning cycles of organizational life, every cycle is likely to lead to reproduction of some structures and change to others, and the extent of structural change is inevitably a product of unique combinations of agency, local contingencies and field- and social-level causal forces. Researcher decisions on where to set cycle start and end

points and which cycles to attend to are inevitably arbitrary, and consequently the accounts of agency and structural reproduction and elaboration are incomplete. However it is not clear that this arbitrariness and incompleteness is greater than in research grounded in other ontological or epistemological paradigms.

In use, the learning cycle framework demanded continuous reflexive attention and interpretation of interactions with and between CSO leaders. Some transition points were obvious, such as movement from the presentational and propositional mode into the practical as the soccer season opened and the new curriculum was put into first use. The Club technical director quickly reported that volunteer parent-coaches were not reading the detailed lesson plans and that she had set to work to shorten and simplify them, a perfect example of practical adaptive learning. However each event salient to CSO leaders triggered its own micro cycle of sense making, presentational and propositional conception, action in response to the new situation, and reflection on lessons learned. Moreover, there were numerous parallel asynchronous micro cycles as salient issues emerged and evolved: the opposition of some coaches to reduced game play, the realization over a period of several months that club registration was continuing to decline, the growing financial pressure placed on the club versus the president's intent to professionalize, and the search for a suitable volunteer willing to become the next president. In each case, Club leaders represented the situation, constructed propositions and rationalizations, agreed on courses of action, implemented them and reflected on the proximal outcomes as well as the likely effect on their broader goals. Larger learning cycles operating over months were built on iterations of smaller cycles operating over days.

The construction of narratives (presentational knowledge) and plans (propositional knowledge) from salient events is in part a sensemaking process: retrospective, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). The continuous emergence of multiple interwoven sensemaking and learning cycles requires the researcher to participate in a parallel interpretive process of selecting and extracting cues, transitions and time frames in order to interpret the expression of agency. Thus, while the aim of research based in a CR paradigm is to shed new light on social mechanisms in action using an iterative process of abduction and retrodution to “add theory to data” (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014:18) and “offer a new and unanticipated view of things...involv(ing) a reconceptualization of the subject and the processes in which it is connected” (p.19) the resulting view is strongly based on the interpretive abilities, biases and constraints of the researcher, and cannot in itself be taken as more accurate than the products of other research paradigms.

### **Future Research**

In part related to these limitations, a number of questions for future research present themselves.

First, to what extent do resource constraints drive CSO behaviour? Access to facility venues is not limiting to some CSOs, for example where the sport utilizes common public spaces (e.g. roads) or when the CSO owns or has exclusive rights to a facility. Access to competition venues (e.g. leagues) is not necessarily constraining, in that affiliation to a rights holder (e.g. NSO) does not automatically imply meeting restrictive standards set by the rights holder. Future studies should examine whether less-constrained CSOs are still competitive with each other, and if so, in what ways.

Second, absent venue constraints imposed by resource-controlling organizations, the findings of this research suggest that the power of the communitarian institutional logic may also be diminished. Is individualism the dominant institutional logic for CSOs in this situation? If so, do these CSOs still subscribe to the legitimizing communitarian “myths of sport” (Skille, 2010)? Why, and to what extent? Sport scholarship often emphasizes the role of national level organizations and draws generalizations about the condition of the sport system as a whole from this evidence (Stevens & Slack, 1998; Brooks, Barnes & Stevens, in press). The findings of this study suggest that when NSOs or PSOs are not in a position to confer legitimacy or access to resources to CSOs, they may have relatively little influence. Analysis of how the ‘CSO condition’ is mediated by relations with NSOs and PSOs under a variety of circumstances is imperative if we are to expand our understanding of change in CSOs, and from a policy perspective, to determine when program interventions are likely to have effect.

Third, this study generates many questions about CSO innovation that merit further examination. Absent strong drivers such as the need to compete for resources, are CSOs less likely to adopt innovation? Is adoption of innovation primarily a means of inter-CSO competition, as suggested by these findings? Research focused upon the impact of competition between CSOs would provide insight into the challenges within a cohort of sport organizations already under considerable strain. For example, how does inter-CSO competition affect organizational learning? How does it affect organizational viability and stability, volunteer turnover, or the athletic development and success of members? Can it be characterized as Red Queen competition, and in what circumstances? Are CSOs subject to competency traps?

Finally, the concept of regulatory thresholds can be expanded through use of an institutional theory lens. Findings presented here show examples of coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism in different conditions by different CSOs. The creation of regulatory thresholds by resource controllers is a form of coercive isomorphism, however CSOs also appeared to mimic each other through adoption of template solutions, and to respond to social norms, in particular, the prevailing “communitarian myth”. To what extent are the different forms of isomorphic tendency present in different competitive conditions? Under low pressure to compete with rivals, is isomorphism still seen, to what extent, and in which forms?

## **Conclusions**

The broad conclusions of this research study are that CSOs compete for resources while balancing institutional pressures, which can be traced to a conflict of institutional logics in the CSO field. When possible, CSOs attempted to manipulate institutional pressures to gain advantage, including by meeting regulatory thresholds to gain legitimacy and contingent access to resources. The examples of CSO competition presented here aimed at gaining or maintaining relative advantage, absorbing or eliminating rivals, or in the case of the EYL clubs outside Millpond District, preserving relative market share (i.e. membership) in order to maintain legitimacy. In this competitive environment, LTAD represented a new institutional pressure. Adoption of the innovation had financial and human resource costs, as well as potential loss of legitimacy with individualist members. It also had potential rewards, especially when a resource controller such as PSO3 signaled that compliance with a regulatory threshold would bring legitimacy and resource access. When legitimacy was offered, the resulting

competition to adopt resembled Red Queen competition: adaptive in the short term if resources were secured and learning consolidated, potentially maladaptive in the longer term if the cost of competition was borne with diminishing results, including reduced learning. The wide-ranging changes introduced by MYSC appeared to result in extensive learning codified in programs and policies and retained in volunteer and professional leaders; the return on the investment, in terms of increased membership and the survival of the club itself, remained to be proven.



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## Appendices

**Appendix A:**  
**Interview guide: Community Sport Organizations**

This interview is for a research study about change processes in community sport clubs (CSOs). Your club has been identified by your PSO as having implemented LTAD.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and signing the informed consent form. The interview responses will be aggregated and your name will not be connected with your responses. However we would like your permission to record the interview for transcription, and to publish unattributed quotes from interviewees.

The interview will take between 30 - 45 minutes.

(Take Club name, respondent name(s))

1. Tell me about (CLUB NAME)? For example, how many members, youth members, your focus?
2. Why did your club introduce LTAD into its programs?
3. What kinds of things have you done to implement LTAD?
4. How is the attitude of parents and coaches toward LTAD?
5. Has LTAD changed anything in your club? How do you explain changes to the parents?
6. Why were you interested in the invitation to be part of this project?
7. Is there a project you want to do to advance LTAD?
8. What obstacles do you see to further LTAD implementation?
9. Does the system support LTAD implementation? For example, leagues, competition rules and so on?
10. What specifically would your club hope to gain from participation?
11. Do you have any other comments to share, or questions to ask?

**Appendix B:**  
**Interview guide: Provincial Sport Organizations**

This interview is for a research study about change processes in community sport clubs (CSOs).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and signing the informed consent form. The interview responses will be aggregated and your name will not be connected with your responses. However we would like your permission to record the interview for transcription, and to publish unattributed quotes from interviewees.

The interview will take between 30 - 45 minutes.

(Take PSO name, respondent name(s))

1. Tell me about (PSO NAME)? For example, how many members, percent of youth members? Can I get copies of your annual report and any LTAD-related documents?
2. (Review PSO LTAD implementation plan) How is progress on your LTAD implementation plan?
3. What are your current operating priorities? What is taking time at present?
4. What kinds of things are you currently working on to implement LTAD?
5. How is the attitude of the clubs toward LTAD?
6. Do you think clubs are able to implement LTAD? Speak to their ability, strengths, weaknesses?
7. How is the attitude of your coaches toward LTAD?
8. Why were you interested in being part of this project?
9. What obstacles do you see to further LTAD implementation?
10. What would you like to see as next steps, is there any information you would like to receive to advance your LTAD implementation?
11. Do you have any other comments to share, or questions to ask?



## **Appendix C:**

### **Interview guide: Champions - Working with Community Sport Organizations**

This interview is for a research study about change processes in community sport clubs (CSOs). You have been identified as an individual who has worked with one or more clubs to support a change initiative.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and signing the informed consent form. The interview responses will be aggregated and your name will not be connected with your responses. However we would like your permission to record the interview for transcription, and to publish unattributed quotes from interviewees.

The interview will take between 30 - 45 minutes.

1. What was the project you were involved with, and the dates you were involved? Is the project now complete? (If not, what stage is it in?)
2. How would you describe your role(s) within the project? Consultant? Facilitator? Presenter? Planner? Evaluator? Other?
3. Thinking back to the time you were first involved in the project, based on your first impressions or early review of the situation, with a Club or Clubs, what were the main things you felt needed to be accomplished?
4. Thinking back to your early interactions with Club representatives (staff or volunteers), did it seem they had a sense of what they needed or wanted to do? What did they want to accomplish?
5. What was the project process? Who did you meet, when did you meet, how did you meet? How was data collected? How were outcome products created, reviewed and approved?
6. As you became engaged with the Club, what emerged from them as assets/strengths and obstacles/weaknesses? Comment on their reaction to LTAD/LTPD integration in their Club, or in sport more generally.
7. What was the attitude of the Club with regard to their members? Were concerns raised about how the members, or any particular group within the membership (e.g. coaches) would react?
8. What was the attitude of the Club members with regard to their PSO?
10. To what extent did you feel the Club was fully engaged and supportive of the project? Please give some examples to substantiate this.
11. Does this level of engagement reflect what you see as overall Club attitudes toward LTAD/LTPD in your sport? Why, or why not?

12. Did there appear to be any differences or tensions between "LTAD/LTPD supporters" and "LTAD/LTPD skeptics" in the Club (if those groups existed)? How did that play out in context of the project?

13. Were there any questions or doubts about resourcing the project, or any actions planned within the project? Were any particular obstacles to LTAD/LTPD integration raised?

14. Were you ever approached in confidence by one or more Club members, who wanted to share something they didn't want the rest of the group to hear? If so, what about?

15. If you could do anything differently to make the project unfold more effectively, what would you do?

16. Do you have any other comments to share, or questions to ask?

**Appendix D:**  
**Interview guide: Elite Youth League Clubs**

This interview is for a research study about change processes in community sport clubs (CSOs). As you know I am here to conduct an assessment on behalf of (PSO3) however this interview is for my research, and is separate from the assessment.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and signing the informed consent form. The interview responses will be aggregated and your name will not be connected with your responses. I would like your permission to transcribe the interview, and to publish unattributed quotes from you. What you say is confidential and will not be shared with (PSO3) except as aggregated unattributed information.

The interview will take between 45-60 minutes.

(Take Club name, respondent name(s))

1. May I use information from the assessment to get a profile of your Club? For example, how many members, how many youth members, your annual budget size, and so on? Again it will not be attributed to you.
2. How is the EYL going for you?
3. Why did your club want to be a part of the EYL? What were some of the reasons?
4. Did your Board support it from the beginning? Your members?
5. Did you have enough players of the right level? What did you need to do to have enough quality players?
6. Did you have enough coaches at the right level/standard? What are your needs for coach development going forward?
7. Have coaches been asking for more money?
8. How about facilities? Did you have enough access? What are your facility plans?
9. How is the attitude of your EYL parents toward EYL?
10. What are your EYL fees charged to the parents? Did you change the fees from the estimate provided by (PSO3) before the application period? If so, why?
11. Have you encountered other challenges or problems?
12. What is your relationship with other EYL clubs?

13. What are your relationships with other non-EYL clubs? Early on, those clubs were supposed to be feeder clubs for the EYL clubs. Is that happening?
14. How do you feel about the way (PSO3) has managed EYL in its first season? What messages would you like to send them?
15. Are you planning to continue in the EYL next year?
16. Do you have any other comments to share, or questions to ask?

## **Appendix E: CS4L CSO Self-Assessment Survey**

### Introduction

This survey is intended to provide a snapshot of your sport organization's programs as they relate to Long-Term Athlete (or Player) Development (LTAD/LTPD). Please read each statement carefully and select the one you most agree with, or fill in the blank. Please answer honestly based on your perception of your organization- there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, as every organization is at a different stage in its development.

There are a variable number of questions depending on the primary focus of your club. When you select a primary focus you will skip the non-applicable questions. Most clubs will answer 21 questions.

Most questions have a range of optional answers. For each question, please read each option carefully, and continue to scroll down until you reach the end of the question. The progress bar will show what percent of the survey you have completed. Click "Next" to get started with the survey, and please continue to click "Next" at the end of each page. If you'd like to leave the survey at any time, just click "Exit this survey".

To complete the survey you will need detailed knowledge about your club's sport technical programs. You will also need to know how many members you have, your annual budget, and how many paid full or part-time staff you have. If you have this information the survey should take from 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

Thank you for taking part in this survey!

## Section 1 – General Questions

These questions gather general information about your club. There are 9 questions in this section.

1. Your sport? (e.g. Baseball, Figure Skating)

2. Full name of your sport club:

3. My role or position within my sport organization is (select your main or most important role):

President

Executive/Board Member

Coach

Other Volunteer

Paid Employee

Other (please specify)

4. What is the size of your organization?

Approximate number of registered members (last complete registration year):

Approximate gross organization expenses (budget) for last complete year:

Number of full time paid employees:

Number of part-time paid employees:

5. Do your leaders and/or coaches have a solid understanding of your sport's Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model?

Yes

No

6. Coach qualifications: National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), first aid, other certifications: Which statement applies?

a) We struggle to find enough coaches, so we don't insist on coach qualifications.

b) We have minimum requirements for coach qualification including NCCP training.

More than one-third of our coaches are NCCP- trained, and most senior coach positions have NCCP certification. We promote our requirements to encourage coaches to take NCCP and other training.

c) Our recommended qualifications include NCCP training or certification, and also include other accreditations and experience. More than half of our coaches, and all senior coaches are NCCP certified.

d) In addition to the above, we provide some financial support to upgrade coach qualification. We make active efforts to improve coach qualifications such as providing or supporting special workshops, education, etc.

e) We have clear rigorous standards for coach qualifications, including NCCP certification, for all coach positions. More than two-thirds of coaches, and all senior coaches are NCCP certified. We actively recruit qualified coaches with extensive experience and we provide financial and other support (e.g. mentoring) to upgrade coach qualification. We work continuously to improve the qualifications of our coaches, and

offer special workshops or education, external audit, etc. All participants and/or parents, as appropriate, are aware of our emphasis on excellence in coaching.

7. The qualifications of your Officials, or Referees: which statement best applies?

- a) We have minimum requirements for officials' qualification.
- b) Our senior officials have advanced qualifications.
- c) We have standards for qualifications of all our officials, and these go beyond basic training and include other accreditations and experience.
- d) We provide some financial support to upgrade officials' qualification. Active efforts made to improve officials' qualifications; this may include special workshops or education, etc.
- e) In addition to the above, we actively recruit qualified officials and provide financial and other support (e.g. mentoring) to upgrade qualifications. We make continuous efforts to improve officials' qualifications; this may include special workshops or education, external audit, etc.

8. Accessible programs for all, such as genders, low-income individuals, disabled individuals, and other marginalized groups: Which statement applies?

- a) We don't make a special effort to improve access to club programs to any identified marginalized groups.
- b) We provide free or reduced cost access if a special request is made.
- c) We are exploring how to give more marginalized people access, for example we have a pilot program or a short-term partnership or grant-based program. Some of our coaches or leaders have an interest in supporting access to specific groups, e.g. athletes with a physical disability.
- d) We are making a systematic effort to welcome one or more groups, e.g. low-income individuals, athletes with a specific disability etc. Some support is provided for coach training, specialized equipment if needed, and other measures to improve access. Club is exploring funding and other partnerships to improve access.
- e) We take pride in our effort to improve access to our sport. Our club policies and programs emphasize open welcoming access and modified facilities, equipment and programs are available as needed. Coaches and other leaders have specific training in working with marginalized participants, and programs meet best practice standards. Marginalized participants are formally and informally recruited and welcomed to the club.

9. What is the main focus of your sport club? (Most of your members join for this reason.)

- a) Youth development (i.e. primarily local and regional competition, for participants under 18 years old)
- b) Competition/High Performance (i.e. provincial, national, international competition)
- c) Adult/Recreational (i.e. intramural/local, "fun" competition, most participants are over 18)

## Section 2- Questions for Youth Development Clubs

These questions apply if you identified your club as primarily a youth development club. There are 12 questions in this section.

10. Programs based on Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles and practices: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Our coaches and club leaders are not aware of LTAD, or are not sure how to put it into practice.
- b) Some participant programs incorporate some LTAD principles and practices. Many coaches and club leaders are aware of LTAD but we see it as “theoretical” or we are unsure about how to put the principles into practice in our specific club context.
- c) Participant programs incorporate most LTAD principles and practices. Most coaches and club leaders are aware of LTAD in their sport. We are in transition to integrating LTAD more fully. We have identified and are resolving specific capacity issues that are delaying integration.
- d) All coaches and club leaders are knowledgeable about LTAD and our participant programs are consistently structured around LTAD principles. NSO guidelines for appropriate LTAD stages are used to structure all aspects of athlete development.
- e) In addition to (d), our participants and parents are provided with a LTAD based development curriculum for the program. We work to continuously improve athlete development through application of LTAD in training and competition.

11. Parent and participant orientation process: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) We provide only a schedule and basic program information to parents/participants.
- b) We provide a verbal description of program goals is provided at the first meeting with participants, as well as a schedule, equipment requirements, and other basic information including coach contact information. Parents/participants are contacted on an as needed basis.
- c) Both participants and parents are briefed at the initial meeting. Written and verbal descriptions of program philosophy and development goals, as well as schedule and equipment needs, are provided. A clear process for two way communication (coach participant/parent) is provided.
- d) A comprehensive ongoing effort is made to brief and orient both participants and parents. Different roles and responsibilities for the participants and the parents are outlined. The program philosophy and development goals are clearly articulated, and a written, stage appropriate curriculum is provided.
- e) In addition to (d), the links between the program curriculum and Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles are made clear. A player assessment and reporting process is described and implemented. A process for regular, ongoing communication over the course of the program is established.

12. Participant protection, including your injury reporting, assessment, return to play policies: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) In case of an injury, individual coaches decide what to do on a “common sense basis”.



- b) We have injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies but these are not widely known and/or used. Coaches and parents make these decisions in most cases.
- c) We have published, well-known injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies. Coaches report and use set criteria for assessment and return to play in most cases. Medical support such as first aid is available at competitions.
- d) We have “best practice” injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies that meet or exceed to NSO or PTSO guidelines. Our policies are posted and are part of participant/parent orientation and in season briefings. Coaches do reporting and use set criteria for assessment and return to play in all cases. Medical support is on site or accessible through use of the emergency action plan at all practices and is on site at all competitions.
- e) In addition to (d) we use additional programs such as concussion benchmarking. We continuously monitor and improve practices in the area of player safety.

13. Use of modified facilities, equipment, rules (e.g small-sided games, reduced distances etc.) to support skill development for participants in the FUNdamentals, Learn to Train and early Train to Train stages of LTAD (i.e. pre-puberty youth participants in most sports). Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Most of our programs use adult-based facilities, equipment and/or rules.
- b) Some modifications such as playing surface size are used for some age divisions, according to NSO/PSO rules or guidelines. We haven’t analyzed the number and quality of development opportunities per participant.
- c) Most age divisions have modifications to one or more of facility, equipment and rules to enhance skill development. Attention is paid to increasing the number and quality of opportunities per participant per session (e.g. ball or puck touches, or attempts at a specific skill).
- d) We use LTAD stage-based progression of facilities, equipment and rules for all participants. Development of Fundamental Movement Skills and Fundamental Sport Skills is seen as the main objective for participants and modifications are intentionally used to support this.
- e) In addition to (d) we use stage-based (e.g. ability) rather than age-based divisions to enhance skill development. The number and quality of opportunities per participant per session (e.g. ball or puck touches, attempts at a specific skill) is analyzed and is a main factor in program design.

14. Specific qualifications of your Coaches for the participant LTAD stages they work with: for example a Coach may have NCCP Fundamental Movement Skills or Community Initiation training for working with Active Start and FUNdamentals stages, or Introduction to Competition certification for working with the Learn to Train and Train to Train stages. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) There are relatively few, less than one third, NCCP trained or certified coaches in the club, and we don’t check that their training matches the stage of athletes they coach.
- b) A few. Some (less than one third) coaches have NCCP training or certification but we have checked that some of these are specifically trained in the appropriate NCCP context.

- c) Many. Most (more than 50%) of coaches are NCCP trained and more than 25% are certified in the appropriate NCCP context. The club offers professional development support to increase the number of certified coaches.
- d) Our coaches are specifically recruited or trained by the club for their expertise with the stage they coach. Nearly all coaches (more than 90%) are NCCP trained and more than 70% are certified in the appropriate program context. Some such as head coaches have extensive experience as well as expertise with these stages of development. In addition the club offers financial support, runs coaching clinics, and is continually trying to upgrade coaching knowledge.

15. Equal-play policies for young participants. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Many participants get limited opportunity to enter competitions e.g. “bench warmers” or “red-shirts”.
- b) Club or Provincial Sport Organization may have equal play rules requiring some play by all participants in each competition. Some coaches may be avoiding these rules by not dressing players for “important” competitions, etc.
- c) The club has and communicates equal play policies and there are penalties for not following these rules. Most coaches focus on developing all participants in competition settings.
- d) Club policies ensure that all participants can develop through participation in all competitions and these are communicated to participants, parents and coaches.

16. Multi-position play, in other words, not having athletes specialize in a specific discipline, role or position. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Our coaches actively encourage specialization at a young age (i.e. within 1 or 2 years of beginning the sport).
- b) Some coaches promote specialization; some promote multi-position or multi-role development. The club has no policy.
- c) The club has a policy encouraging multi-position or multi-role development for athletes in the key skill development years (up to age 12-13 in many sports). The club may not actively enforce the policy.
- d) Multi-position or multi-role participation to improve development up to age 12-13 is a key part of the club philosophy and policy. Athletes, parents and coaches are aware of this. The club actively enforces the policy.

17. Does your club you use a NSO or PTSO-approved, LTAD based development curriculum? Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) There is no development curriculum. Most coaches figure their practice structure out using tradition or learning from other coaches.
- b) Coaches receive guidelines for program structure and individual training sessions. The club does not monitor actual coach use of these guidelines.

- c) All coaches are briefed on developmental objectives and shown how to attain them. Coaches receive LTAD based templates or lesson plans. Parents are briefed on plan objectives and receive feedback at the end of the program.
- d) A NSO or PTSO-approved detailed development curriculum is in place. Coaches use approved session plans, and participant developmental progress is assessed. The result of this assessment is shared with participants and parents. Individual participant progress is part of how we review coach performance.

18. Does your club actively encourage multi-activity and multi-sport participation? Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Participants and/or parents are usually discouraged from participation in other sports. This discouragement may be active (e.g. warnings against participation in other sports as potentially detrimental to participant) or passive (e.g. through setting up programs and schedules in such a way that it is very difficult to participate in outside programs).
- b) Some within the club discourage multi-sport participation, and some passively support it, meaning they do not actually discourage it. There is no club policy in place.
- c) Club policy and parent orientation support multi-sport participation. Parents are encouraged to learn more about enhancing their child's physical literacy.
- d) Multi-activity and multi-sport participation is actively encouraged in club policy, information and orientation sessions. Participants and parents are provided with information supporting multilateral development. Programs may be structured to provide this development in-house, or partnerships with other organizations may be formed to provide coordinated programming.

19. Physical Literacy means having the fundamental movement skills, fundamental sport skills and motivation to enable an individual to read their environment, make appropriate decisions, and move confidently and with control in a wide range of physical activities. How is physical literacy developed and assessed in your programs? Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Our club programs focus on sport specific skills only. The majority of participant activity is in competitions.
- b) The practice to competition ratio is 1:1 or better (more practices than competition). A wide range of Fundamental Sport Skills are developed however these are mostly specific to our sport. We have limited assessment of skills and abilities before or during the program period.
- c) The practice to competition ratio is better than 1:1 and a wide range of physical abilities and technical sport skills is developed, including nonspecific Fundamental Movement Skills and Fundamental Sport Skills. Regular assessment of skills and abilities using the LTAD skills matrix in the sport LTAD model is performed at beginning, during and at end of the program period. A deliberate effort is made to develop comprehensive Fundamental Movement Skills.
- d) Formal assessment using the Canadian Sport for Life PLAY tools or similar tools is in place for all participants at beginning, during and end of program period. Development of Fundamental Movement Skills and Fundamental Sport Skills is seen as the main objective for participants; competition is intentionally used to support this. Club programs, or partnerships programs are in place to develop Fundamental Movement

Skills and Fundamental Sport Skills in multiple environments (e.g. more than two of land, air, water, snow/ice).

20. To what extent are open tryouts and open rosters used to ensure inclusive participation and enhanced development for all? Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) We have one-time early season tryouts resulting in simple “in or out” selection. The main objective is to form winning teams.
- b) Tryout program gives participants multiple opportunities for selection. There may be a system in place to “call up” non-selected participants for limited participation on “higher level” teams throughout the program period.
- c) A system is in place to provide individualized development to all participants, and to periodically offer enhanced opportunities to selected participants over the entire program period, for example, a performance or “A” team working with and giving opportunities to a development or “B” team. Guidance is given to all participants who try out for any program to guide their next steps and which program to enter.
- d) A system is in place to provide individualized development to all participants, and to periodically offer enhanced opportunities to selected participants over the entire program period. Teams are “open roster” so participants can move into or out of the team over the program period and this is aimed at maximizing development for the greatest number of participants, rather than to win the maximum number of competitions. All participants receive assessment and placement throughout program period we have a “no participant is left behind” philosophy.

21. Competitions are based on LTAD principles and National or Provincial/Territorial Sport Organization guidelines. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Our competitions follow our traditional model. There are few or no facility, equipment or rule modifications except for the very youngest participants. There are no benefits to competition except the value of a win or a loss.
- b) Modified competitions are in place however coaches must follow a compulsory competition schedule (e.g. league play). Our competition structure encourages a “winning every Sunday” approach so participants can maintain their standing or qualify for selection. This may pressure coaches to use only their best participants.
- c) Competition is used intentionally for participant development, such as learning competition skills or tactics, in many cases. Coaches are free to use competition-based games and practices, or club- or provincial-level competitions as appropriate for the stage and ability level of participants. The competition structure (i.e. league or Provincial/Territorial calendar) permits or supports equal-play and participant development.
- d) Competition is used intentionally for participant development in every case. Each competition has a stated developmental purpose that may include experience, specific skill or tactic development, modeling future competitions, or performance (winning). Competition structure supports athlete development by allowing coaches to tailor the use of competition.

End of the Sport Program questions for Youth Development Clubs.

### Section 3- Questions for Competitive/High Performance Clubs

These questions apply if you identified your club as primarily a Competitive/High Performance club. There are 10 questions in this section.

22. Programs based on Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles and practices: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Our coaches and club leaders are not aware of LTAD, or are not sure how to put it into practice.
- b) Some participant programs incorporate some LTAD principles and practices. Many coaches and club leaders are aware of LTAD but we see it as “theoretical” or we are unsure about how to put the principles into practice in our specific club context.
- c) Participant programs incorporate most LTAD principles and practices. Most coaches and club leaders are aware of LTAD in their sport. We are in transition to integrating LTAD more fully. We have identified and are resolving specific capacity issues that are delaying integration.
- d) All coaches and club leaders are knowledgeable about LTAD and our participant programs are consistently structured around LTAD principles. NSO guidelines for appropriate LTAD stages are used to structure all aspects of athlete development.
- e) In addition to (d), our participants and parents are provided with a LTAD based development curriculum for the program. We work to continuously improve athlete development through application of LTAD in training and competition.

23. Participant orientation process: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) We provide only a schedule and basic program information to parents/participants.
- b) We provide a verbal description of program goals is provided at the first meeting with participants, as well as a schedule, equipment requirements, and other basic information including coach contact information. Parents/participants are contacted on an as-needed basis.
- c) Both participants and parents are briefed at the initial meeting. Written and verbal descriptions of program philosophy and development goals, as well as schedule and equipment needs, are provided. A clear process for two-way communication (coach participant/parent) is provided.
- d) A comprehensive ongoing effort is made to brief and orient both participants and parents. Different roles and responsibilities for the participants and the parents are outlined. The program philosophy and development goals are clearly articulated, and a written, stage appropriate curriculum is provided.
- e) In addition to (d), the links between the program curriculum and Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles are made clear. A player assessment and reporting process is described and implemented. A process for regular, ongoing communication over the course of the program is established.

24. Participant protection, including your injury reporting, assessment, return to play policies: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) In case of an injury, individual coaches decide what to do on a “common sense basis”.

- b) We have injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies but these are not widely known and/or used. Coaches and parents make these decisions in most cases.
- c) We have published, well-known injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies. Coaches report and use set criteria for assessment and return to play in most cases. Medical support such as first aid is available at competitions.
- d) We have “best practice” injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies that meet or exceed to NSO or PTSO guidelines. Our policies are posted and are part of participant/parent orientation and in season briefings. Coaches do reporting and use set criteria for assessment and return to play in all cases. Medical support is on site or accessible through use of the emergency action plan at all practices and is on site at all competitions.
- e) In addition to (d) we use additional programs such as concussion benchmarking. We continuously monitor and improve practices in the area of player safety.

25. Specific qualifications of your Coaches for the participant LTAD stages they work with: for example a Coach may have Introduction to Competition certification for working with the Learn to Train and Train to Train stages, or Competition Development certification for working with Train to Compete stage athletes. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) There are relatively few, less than one third, NCCP trained or certified coaches in the club, and we don't check that their training matches the stage of athletes they coach.
- b) A few. Some (less than one third) coaches have NCCP training or certification but we have checked that some of these are specifically trained in the appropriate NCCP context.
- c) Many. Most (more than 50%) of coaches are NCCP trained and more than 25% are certified in the appropriate NCCP context. The club offers professional development support to increase the number of certified coaches.
- d) Our coaches are specifically recruited or trained by the club for their expertise with the stage they coach. Nearly all coaches (more than 90%) are NCCP trained and more than 70% are certified in the appropriate program context. Some such as head coaches have extensive experience as well as expertise with these stages of development. In addition the club offers financial support, runs coaching clinics, and is continually trying to upgrade coaching knowledge.

26. Periodized development plans are detailed, systematic, progressive training and competition plans based on "cycles" of training/competition and recovery. Do your programs use periodized annual development plans? Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) The annual program is primarily driven by the competition schedule and is not periodized.
- b) Teams and athletes have simple periodized plans that include training and competition schedules.
- c) All teams and athletes have annual periodized plans based upon the sport LTAD model. Plans include development beyond competition and training, e.g. multiple key performance factors such as mental preparation. Scheduled performance monitoring and testing is used to modify the plan as needed throughout the year.

d) All teams and athletes have annual periodized plans based upon the sport LTAD model. Plans include multiple development strands e.g. competitions, training for all key performance factors, and rest/recovery. Scheduled performance monitoring and testing is used to modify the plan as needed throughout the year. A multi-year (for example, quadrennial) approach including forecast competition schedules is used to chart individual athlete pathways to high performance.

27. Your athlete selection policy and process: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) The club and coaches select athletes based on their own unpublished selection criteria. Information on how this is done is not available outside tryouts and there is no appeal process.
- b) The club has a published selection policy and process based on “in or out” selection. The primary purpose is to select winning athletes.
- c) The sport LTAD model is incorporated into published selection criteria. Club has process in place to provide multiple selection or “second look” opportunities to facilitate late-entry athletes.
- d) Selection criteria are based on sport LTAD model. Club has open tryout process in place to provide multiple selection or “second look” opportunities to facilitate late-entry athletes. All non-selected athletes are provided with assessment and guidance. There is an appeal process in place.

28. Stage-appropriate competitions based on LTAD principles and NSO/PTSO guidelines. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) There is little attention to the specific competition needs of the various stages of athletes. The primary considerations for competition selection include cost, accessibility, sponsor requirements, or other non-developmental factors.
- b) Competition programs are generally compulsory (e.g. league play) or else the philosophy is to maximize the number of competitions. Winning as many competitions as possible is the prime concern.
- c) NSO/PTSO guidelines for competition type and schedule per the LTAD model are used to design periodized team and athlete schedules. Competition is intentionally used to attain multiple outcomes.
- d) NSO/PTSO guidelines for competition type and schedule per the LTAD model are used to design periodized team and athlete schedules. Competition is intentionally used to attain multiple outcomes. A multi-year (e.g. quadrennial) approach including forecast competition schedules is used to chart individual athlete pathways to high performance.

29. Your use of specialists (e.g. strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, etc.) used to support club coaches. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Club coaches try to provide as many services as possible. There is little or no contact between coaches and physicians, physiotherapists or others contacted directly by the athlete.
- b) In special circumstances coaches contact and utilize specialist support, but this is rare. Athletes are usually on their own to contact specialists.

c) The club provides contacts for a wide spectrum of specialist services for coaches and athletes to access. Athletes use specialist services intermittently as needed. There is a regular medical and physiological testing program.

d) Club coaches have developed and lead integrated support teams built in the community, or with support from regional Canadian Sport Institutes. Athletes regularly access full services from a range of professionals, from biomechanists to sport psychologists. Access to medical and performance test services is built into periodized plans.

30. Use of open tryouts and open rosters to enable late program entry. Which statement is closest to your situation?

a) One time early season tryouts result in simple “in or out” selection. The main objective is winning.

b) Tryout program gives participants multiple opportunities for selection. There may be a system in place to “call up” non-selected participants for limited participation on “higher level” teams throughout the program period.

c) A system is in place to provide individualized development to all athletes within the program. Enhanced opportunities are offered to selected athletes over the entire program period, e.g. flexible performance or “A” team working with a development or “B” team. Guidance is given to all athletes who try out for any program as to their best next steps and program to enter.

d) A system is in place to provide individualized development to all athletes, and to periodically offer enhanced opportunities to selected athletes over the entire program period. Specific provision is made for identifying “late entry” athletes. Teams permit athletes to move into or out of the team over the program period. All athletes receive assessment and placement.

31. Physical literacy assessment and remediation included in performance testing program (FMS= fundamental movement skills, FSS= fundamental sport skills). Which statement is closest to your situation?

a) Club programs focus on skills specific to our sport only.

b) We focus on perfecting our sport specific FSS. There is limited assessment of skills and performance factors before and during the program period.

c) We do regular assessment of athlete performance factors based on the LTAD skills matrix in the sport LTAD. A deliberate effort is made to identify FMS and FSS deficiencies for remediation, e.g. through movement screening.

d) In addition to (c) above, Specialist support is used to provide a pre-habilitation\* program for injury prevention. Club programs or partnerships support continued athlete development of FMS and FSS in multiple environments (e.g. more than two of land, air, water, snow/ice).

(\* “Pre-habilitation” is the development of fundamental skills and movements, including agility, flexibility, and core strength, to protect against injury.)

End of Sport Program questions for Competitive/High Performance Clubs.



#### Section 4- Questions for Adult/Recreational Clubs

These questions apply if you identified your club as primarily an Adult/Recreational sport club. There are 7 questions in this section.

32. Programs based on Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles and practices: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Our coaches and club leaders are not aware of LTAD, or are not sure how to put it into practice.
- b) Some participant programs incorporate some LTAD principles and practices. Many coaches and club leaders are aware of LTAD but we see it as “theoretical” or we are unsure about how to put the principles into practice in our specific club context.
- c) Participant programs incorporate most LTAD principles and practices. Most coaches and club leaders are aware of LTAD in their sport. We are in transition to integrating LTAD more fully. We have identified and are resolving specific capacity issues that are delaying integration.
- d) All coaches and club leaders are knowledgeable about LTAD and our participant programs are consistently structured around LTAD principles. NSO guidelines for appropriate LTAD stages are used to structure all aspects of athlete development.
- e) In addition to (d), our participants and parents are provided with a LTAD based development curriculum for the program. We work to continuously improve athlete development through application of LTAD in training and competition.

33. Participant orientation process: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) We provide only a schedule and basic program information to participants.
- b) We provide a verbal description of program goals is provided at the first meeting with participants, as well as a schedule, equipment requirements, and other basic information including coach contact information. Participants are contacted on an as needed basis.
- c) Participants are briefed at the initial meeting. Written and verbal descriptions of program philosophy and development goals, as well as schedule and equipment needs, are provided. A clear process for two-way communication (coach-participant) is provided.
- d) A comprehensive ongoing effort is made to brief and orient participants. Roles and responsibilities for the participants are outlined. The program philosophy and development goals are clearly articulated, and a written, stage appropriate curriculum is provided.
- e) In addition to (d), the links between the program curriculum and Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) principles are made clear. A player assessment and reporting process is described and implemented. A process for regular, ongoing communication over the course of the program is established.

34. Participant protection, including your injury reporting, assessment, return to play policies: Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) In case of an injury, individual coaches decide what to do on a “common sense basis”
- b) We have injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies but these are not widely known and/or used. Coaches and participants make these decisions in most cases.

- c) We have published, well known injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies. Coaches report and use set criteria for assessment and return to play in most cases. Medical support such as first aid is available at competitions.
- d) We have “best practice” injury reporting, assessment and/or return to play policies that meet or exceed to NSO or PTSO guidelines. Our policies are posted and are part of participant orientation and in-season briefings. Coaches do reporting and use set criteria for assessment and return to play in all cases. Medical support is on site or accessible through use of the emergency action plan at all practices and is on site at all competitions.
- e) In addition to (d) we use additional programs such as concussion benchmarking. We continuously monitor and improve practices in the area of player safety.

35. Specific qualifications of your Coaches for the participant LTAD stages they work with: for example a Coach may have Introduction to Competition certification for working with the Learn to Train and Train to Train stages, or Competition Development certification for working with Train to Compete stage athletes. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) There are relatively few, less than one third, NCCP trained or certified coaches in the club, and we don't check that their training matches the stage of athletes they coach.
- b) A few. Some (less than one third) coaches have NCCP training or certification but we have checked that some of these are specifically trained in the appropriate NCCP context.
- c) Many. Most (more than 50%) of coaches are NCCP trained and more than 25% are certified in the appropriate NCCP context. The club offers professional development support to increase the number of certified coaches.
- d) Our coaches are specifically recruited or trained by the club for their expertise with the stage they coach. Nearly all coaches (more than 90%) are NCCP trained and more than 70% are certified in the appropriate program context. Some such as head coaches have extensive experience as well as expertise with these stages of development. In addition the club offers financial support, runs coaching clinics, and is continually trying to upgrade coaching knowledge.

36. Stage-appropriate competitions based on LTAD principles and NSO/PTSO guidelines. Which statement is closest to your situation?

- a) Competitions follow tradition. Few or no facility, equipment or rule modifications.
- b) Modified competitions in place however coaches must follow a compulsory schedule (e.g. league play). The competition structure discourages competition outcomes beyond simply winning.
- c) Competition is used intentionally for participant development in many cases. Discretionary use of competition based games and practices, club or provincial level competitions as appropriate for the stage and ability level of participants. The competition structure (i.e. league or PTSO calendar) permits or supports participant development and fulfillment.
- d) Competition is used intentionally for participant development and fulfillment in every case. There is discretionary use of competition-based games and practices, club or provincial level competitions as appropriate for the stage and ability level of participants. Each competition has a stated developmental purpose that may include experience (including simple enjoyment), specific skill or tactic development, modeling future

competitions, or performance (winning). Competition structure supports athlete development by allowing coaches to tailor the use of competition.

37. To what extent do programs actively support and encourage mentoring, personal development) and other “giving back”, for example of coaches, officials, and managers? Which statement is closest to your situation?

a) Our club programs are primarily based on satisfying participant interests around sport participation and competition.

b) Participants are encouraged to volunteer but response is limited. No personal development support or programs in place.

c) Our club philosophy and policies support personal development and “giving back”. There are some programs in place to support participant development as coaches, officials or sport leaders. Some initiatives support giving back to the broader community, e.g. club participation in charity events.

d) Financial and human resources are allocated annually for personal development as a coach, official or sport leader. The club offers a variety of clinics and/or mentorship programs to facilitate this. There is a strong culture supporting club involvement in and contributions to community programs club members participate in multiple community projects.

38. Opportunities for informal, cultural, social, and recreational activity reflecting member interests. Which statement is closest to your situation?

a) There is little interest in or support for non-sport activity.

b) The club offers a few social and recreational programs for members.

c) A significant part of club activity is devoted to social and recreational opportunities including but not limited to sport. The club also participates in supporting some community initiatives.

d) The club offers a range of varied cultural, social, and recreational opportunities to members. There is also a strong culture supporting club involvement in community cultural, social and recreational programs.

End of survey