The Landscape of Participation Sport in a Community: Profiling the Goals of Sport Delivery

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This study was part of a larger project conducted in collaboration with a municipal partner in London, Ontario, Canada (population 350,000). Framed by the work of Elson and Hall (2012) and Twombly et al. (2000) on organizational mapping in a given geo-political region, the project sought to "take stock" of the sport organizations and opportunities that represent the landscape of participation sport for residents of this city. The project involves profiling the size, scope, spatial distribution, goals, and other characteristics of sport organizations and clubs (n = 185). The purpose of this study was to analyze the goals indicated by sport clubs and organizations in that community, in order to understand the range of goals and their components, and consider any variation by non-profit and for-profit status. Data were collected from the websites of private and member-based sport organizations (public or municipal entities and programs were not captured in the project).

Thematic, inductive analysis was used to identify patterns and ultimately themes (and sub-themes) derived from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Investigators developed independent coding frameworks that were reconciled for a final framework. Seven main themes or goals across the sport organizations were uncovered: Sport participation in general (promoting active lifestyle and benefits of sport), Sport delivery (variety of quality programs, facilities, and events), Values-based sport (e.g., inclusive, safe, respectful), Sport development (advancing the sport), Participant development (sport skills and performance, life skills), Organizational relationships (with partners, governing bodies), and Governance. Preliminary analyses indicate that the most common goals focus on sport delivery (variety of programs, fun and safe environment) and participant development (skills, character). Valuing inclusion, accessibility, fair play, and respect are more prominent among non-profit sport clubs and organizations than their for-profit counterparts, as are the goals of providing competitive opportunities and coach development.

The common and disparate goals highlight the emphases, and possible gaps, in sporting opportunities (and sport development) for residents and the focal community. The findings may be used for broader community planning to address gaps (and perhaps over-emphases) in sport delivery, as well as serving as a guide for opportunities for sport organization and club growth. The project design will be shared as an example of mapping the sport landscape in a region.