



# **CREATING AND MANAGING A SUSTAINABLE SPORTING FUTURE**

**ISSUES, PATHWAYS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Edited by  
Vassilios Ziakas and Aaron Beacom



# Creating and Managing a Sustainable Sporting Future

*Creating and Managing a Sustainable Sporting Future* contributes to a critical understanding of the challenges key stakeholders across the globe encounter as they seek to manage periods of transition brought about by policy change relating to the provision of sport and physical activity.

The book uncovers the global challenges in terms of managing the re-orientation of stakeholder activities and organisational strategies, in response to the aspirations for a wider range of outcomes through sport-based interventions and establishment of partnerships with non-sport sectors. It illuminates the increasingly erratic trajectory of sport development service providers, as the environment within which sport organisations operate changes – through for example, climate change, demographic shifts, changing features of local economies and alterations to the structures of local government and governance – and the responses of sport organisations to these new realities differ greatly depending on location, institutional structures and leadership. The chapters highlight the changing social, economic, environmental and policy contexts within which sports organisations operate, and explain the subsequent need for new approaches to partnership working, physical activity re-scoping and integrated education programming.

Showing that the international mandate of creating active lifestyles and subsequent re-orientation of stakeholders towards physical activity cannot only contribute to re-defining sport but also in identifying novel ways for building a sustainable sports sector, *Creating and Managing a Sustainable Sporting Future* is ideal for sports scholars, and particularly those working on Sport Policy and Sustainable Sport Development.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Managing Sport and Leisure*.

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Vassilios Ziakas and Aaron Beacom  
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Eric Legg, Gareth J. Jones and Misha White  
*Managing Sport and Leisure*, volume 23, issues 4–6 (November 2018) pp. 261–276

## Chapter 2

*Watching the pennies and the people – how volunteer-led sport facilities have transformed services for local communities*  
Lindsay Findlay-King, Geoff Nichols, Deborah Forbes and Gordon Macfadyen  
*Managing Sport and Leisure*, volume 23, issues 4–6 (November 2018) pp. 277–292

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## Re-thinking sport and physical activity: management responses to policy change

Vassilios Ziakas  and Aaron Beacom

### Purpose and scope

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

Seeking a wider range of outcomes through sport-based interventions and establishment of partnerships with non-sport sectors is characteristic of policy aspirations internationally (e.g. Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Kumar et al., 2018; Lyras & Welty-Peachey, 2011; Mansfield, 2016; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008;

Trendafilova, Ziakas, & Sparvero, 2017; Weed, 2016; Weed et al., 2015; Ziakas, 2015). This special issue, triggered by the thematic problematics emerging from the UK Sport Development Network (UKSDN) 2017 conference, seeks to uncover the global challenges in terms of managing the re-orientation of stakeholder activities and organisational strategies in response to re-alignments of sport policy. The resulting collection of papers in the special issue constitutes a balanced synthesis of contributions from those present at the conference and from academics and practitioners who form part of the wider global sport and leisure management research community.

### Issues, challenges and trajectories

Sport and physical activity have become increasingly prominent in contemporary political debate and policy development (Bloyce & Smith, 2009; Houlihan & Lindsey, 2013; King, 2014). Most commentators suggest that in the UK a ratcheting up of such engagement took place as part of the New Labour administrations (1997–2010) attempts to address a range of social, educational, health and community challenges through sport, whilst the interventionist tenets were carried through into the Coalition government of David Cameron and beyond. At the same time, the principles of sport-

based interventions associated with individual and community development initiatives, are reflected internationally, for example, through the relatively recent Sport-for-Development and Peace movement; whose principles are explored and critiqued by a series of commentators (Coalter, 2007; Darnell, 2012; Levermore & Beacom, 2012). Perhaps the greatest challenge in this process is the evaluation of the efficacy of sport and physical activity-based interventions in delivering anticipated outcomes. This has led to a growing body of literature which addresses emerging evaluative frameworks and questions the capacity of sport-for-development to achieve many of the claims made for it (Coalter, 2013; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014). The potential for such narratives to penetrate the policy domain, given the outcomes-based nature of policy making is worthy of consideration when attempting to map the future trajectory of sport and related policy areas.

The example of the UK Government's most recent public sport policy document (*Sporting Future*) is illustrative of signaling a fundamental shift in the approach to engaging more physically active lifestyles. It envisaged such engagement as predicated on forging partnerships outside the traditional sporting community as a means of promoting behavioural change amongst those alienated by the mainstream sporting culture. As in any policy shift, the management of funding streams has become a key tool in the pursuit of these new priorities. In response to this shift toward physical activity broadly defined, the role of local coordinators and providers has become pivotal for sport and physical activity provision and delivery. To respond to the changing political environment, local sport organisations must re-imagine their mission and recalibrate their objectives. This special issue is concerned in part, with a better understanding that ongoing process. From this perspective, we can examine the responses of sport organisations to the waxing and waning influence of key strategic partners and the

emerging dichotomy between "sporting" and "physical" cultures. This line of inquiry can suggest approaches to the management of these tensions and pinpoint subsequent research priorities required to better understand the emerging physical activity landscape worldwide.

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

measures in different countries limit available funding for sport organisations (Giannoulakis, Papadimitriou, Alexandris, & Brgoch, 2017; Parnell, May, Widdop, Cope, & Bailey, 2018).

The reduction in funding and the imperative to enhance capacity to secure funds from alternative sources has created increasing pressures on non-profit sport development organisations already experiencing a number of operational and strategic challenges (Berry & Manoli, 2018). As a result, these organisations have to institute re-structuring towards a more entrepreneurial model in order to align with the new realities and serve their sport-for-development, educational, wellbeing, public health, economic or environmental purpose. This raises questions about the position of non-profit sport development organisations within the sector and the extent of their operational reach. It is at such times of transition that the more unpredictable future policy priorities become, that the more transient policy networks appear as individual stakeholders responding to rapid policy changes through strategic re-positioning. At the same time, the environment within which sport organisations operate is itself changing – through, for example, climate change, demographic shifts, changing features of local economies and alterations to the structures of local government and governance. The responses of sport organisations to these new realities will differ greatly depending on location, institutional structures and leadership. There is a need therefore to illuminate the increasingly erratic trajectory of sport development service providers.

## Overview of contributions

The special issue contributions highlight the changing social, economic, environmental and policy contexts within which sports organisations operate and seek to understand the need for new approaches to partnership working, physical activity re-scoping and integrated education programming in response to

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

The third article by Dingle and Stewart expands the focus on the relationship between sport and the environment by investigating the implications of climate change for major sport stadia in Australia and their subsequent organisational responses. The study demonstrates that the primacy of commercial and operational imperatives determine organisational responses ahead of government climate policy. Given that different public policy and regulatory responses to climate change apply across the globe, this article brings to the fore the need to further understand how sport managers interpret climate risks to inform management processes and effective adaptive responses. The pragmatic connection of sport



to the natural environment is not only apparent in the context of facility management but is also evidenced in the domain of outdoor recreation. Mackintosh, Griggs and Tate in the next article look at the growth in importance and scale of the outdoor recreation sector in the United Kingdom. They establish a five component model to help understand the growth in this sub-sector of the wider sport and physical activity industry. From determining the factors that are underpinning the growing importance of the sector, the authors go on to draw implications for policy and practice in sport policy and development in the UK and beyond. In addition, they identify potential future research directions for those working in outdoor recreation and physical activity spaces and places.

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

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

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

created from the fragmented accountability between the local organising committee and the representatives of the host city. The authors argue that stakeholders should be encouraged to reflect on potential fragmented accountability and the purpose of sport-based educational programmes.

The final two papers examine the role of education to achieve sustainable sport development. Mwaanga, Dorling, Prince and Fleet focus on the management challenges associated with the implementation of the Physical Activity Teaching and Learning (PATL) pedagogy. The authors study the case of three schools on the Isle of Wight (UK) that have adopted PATL as part of a holistic island-wide intervention aimed at increasing pupils educational attainment, health and wellbeing. This has entailed a shift for some UK schools towards promoting a physical activity culture that complements traditional PE and school sports provision. Findings support PATL pedagogies as a holistic and joined-up policy response to this challenge. However, they also highlight the need for critical conversations in order to unravel and unlock collaborative solutions when discussing physical activity in schools.

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

## **Present tensions, future avenues**

The special issue sheds light on evolving responses to the management of sport and leisure at a time of changing policy priorities. The international mandate of creating active lifestyles requires the exploration of the policy trajectory, appropriate mode of governance and local service delivery models. As the papers in this special issue illustrate, the fluid nature of the contemporary sport policy domain means that its boundaries are increasingly difficult to define. Public policy areas of transport, environment, education, health, social, community and economic development all provide links to the sport and physical activity agendas. To maximise the potential of sport and physical activity discourses to penetrate these extant policy areas, stakeholders are increasingly required to operate as boundary spanners, that is to identify areas of common concern and effectively manage relationships as organisational entrepreneurs. At the same time, conceptually, there is a need to address the dichotomy between sport and physical activity, perhaps synthesised as physical culture. This involves the re-constitution of regional sport strategies centred on physical activity while re-thinking roles, responsibilities, parameters and partnership-building as shaped by the funding imperative and the subsequent partnership responses to the new sport-physical activity environment. Within complex sport policy environments, we need to find innovative means to better connect national sport-physical activity participation policies with local network entities and non-sporting sectors. On the whole, a new reality is manifesting itself in search for new skill sets and competencies. In response, sport organisations need to become more externally facing; establishing links and networks with non-sport sectors to develop strategic intelligence that traverses long-established insularities, and promoting adaptation to changing conditions. Such a process cannot only contribute to

re-defining sport but also in identifying novel ways for building and managing a sustainable sporting future.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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# Whose job is it anyway? Public–private partnerships in youth sport

Eric Legg, Gareth J. Jones and Misha White

## ABSTRACT

In the United States, youth sport programs delivered by public recreation agencies face increased pressure to either increase fees or “contract out” to private providers to compensate for budget reductions. Understanding these private–public partnerships (PPPs) is essential to the sustainability of youth sport. This study contributes to that objective by analyzing the perceptions of PPPs involving public recreation agencies and private youth sport providers. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 22 administrators in youth sport programs, including 12 from public recreation departments and 10 from outside organizations. Thematic analysis was utilized to uncover the perceptions of both sides of these PPPs. Guided by principal-agency and stewardship theory, results are organized across three partnership phases: (1) initiation, (2) management; and (3) outcomes to help inform best practices and identify barriers to effective collaboration.

## Introduction

Parks and recreation administrators must frequently navigate shifts in the social, economic, and political climate. In the United States (US), one of the most dramatic shifts came in the 1980s when models of New Public Management (NPM) introduced private sector policies and practices into public management (More, 2005). Under growing pressure from increased privatization, commercial practices such as fee-based programming (Jung & Bae, 2011) and corporate sponsorships (Pitas, Mowen, Liechty, & Trautwein, 2015) filtered into the operation of public recreation departments. In particular, contracting out, or public–private partnerships (PPPs), became a popular strategy for reducing service costs and promoting efficiency by

creating competition, economies of scale, and stakeholder choice (Hefetz & Warner, 2012; Pitas et al., 2015).

This trend is especially evident in youth sport, as PPPs have become a hallmark of the US youth sport system. Similar to other public service managers, recreation administrators must often decide between supporting direct in-house programming or contracting out to external providers. In the US there has been a trend towards the latter, as national adult-organized leagues and associations (e.g. Pop Warner Football, Little League Baseball) have become key providers of youth sport services. In addition, local travel teams and community sport clubs, many of which are designated as nonprofits, have grown dramatically (Coakley,

2010). These organizations are capable of managing all aspects of the youth sport delivery process (e.g. administration, scheduling, coaches, officials), yet often rely on publicly managed facilities to operate their programs. As a result, many PPPs have formed from the need to coalesce complementary resources.

However, there has been far less consideration of the values undergirding these partnering decisions. Youth sports delivered by public recreation departments typically reflect their institutional values including health, wellness, and community development (Bedimo-Rung, Mowen, & Cohen, 2005). Yet this differs from the broader American sport culture, which has historically revolved around elite sport systems (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2013). Evidence of this culture is seen at the youth level, as some youth sport providers have capitalized on a \$15 billion youth sport market (Gregory, 2017) by prioritizing elite player pathways and competitions. Chalip and Hutchinson (2017) suggest these programs have professionalized youth sport, “with increasing emphasis on early childhood specialization and intensified competition, despite evidence that so doing can discourage participation...” (p. 31). As the prevalence and scale of youth sport PPPs continue to grow, it is important to understand the role of sport values in the formation, management, and evaluation of partnerships.

This study contributes to that objective by analyzing the perceptions of PPPs from the perspective of public recreation departments and external youth sport providers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 key informants, and data analysis focuses on how/if sport values influenced the formation, management, and evaluation of PPPs. A principal-agent framework is utilized to guide analysis (Caers et al., 2006), focusing specifically on formative aspects of the principal-agent relationship, control and collaboration, and perceived outcomes.

## Literature review

### *Public–Private partnerships (PPPs)*

PPPs have become a hallmark of public service delivery. Driven by a belief in the efficiency of free markets, PPPs have been utilized to contract out public services in order to improve efficiency, meet the needs of increasingly diverse stakeholders, and reduce the transaction costs often associated with bureaucratic government structures (Hefetz & Warner, 2012). The rationale for integrating businesslike tactics into public sector operations is derived from assumptions regarding public choice (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). When services are decentralized and delivered through a larger number of external providers, stakeholders have more options to meet their needs. Likewise, to remain competitive in the marketplace, external providers are motivated to efficiently deliver high-quality services (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). PPPs ostensibly capitalize on these mutually beneficial market forces by redirecting funds from unilateral government programs to multiple private parties who provide services under the oversight of public managers (Connolly, 2017).

Growing interest in PPPs has contributed to a rather broad spectrum of definitions (Weihe, 2008). In many cases, this ambiguity has been strategic, as Linder (1999) describes how proponents of privatized systems have utilized a grammar of multiple meanings to gloss underlying strategies and purposes. Indeed, expressions such as “contracting out” and “privatization” tend to carry negative connotations that are rarely conducive to generating public support (Hodge & Greve, 2007). Conversely, discussing the same strategies in terms of “alternative delivery systems” or “partnerships” is more likely to sway public discourse in positive directions (Savas, 2000).

In addition to discursive variations, the exact components of PPPs have also been loosely characterized, with PPPs often referred to as a



form of governance, public policy delivery tool, and institutional arrangement between public and private sector entities (Hodge, Greve, & Boardman, 2010). Yet regardless of function, PPPs share commonalities related to their organization and purpose (Hodge & Greve, 2007; Van Ham & Koppenjan, 2001). First, most PPPs are established because they purportedly benefit the public and private sector (Vaillancourt Rosenau, 2000). Second, PPPs entail some form of risk sharing, as public and private entities are both accountable for the risks associated with their joint service production. Finally, PPPs represent long-term collaborations between partners and should be distinguished from more informal agreements (Hodge & Greve, 2007).

### ***PPPs in youth sport***

Traditionally, many recreational youth sport programs in the US were delivered public recreation departments who managed facilities and organized all aspects of programming (Crompton, 1998). Like other public services, recreation departments have detailed protocols for programming, facility use, and management, coupled with extensive documentation and multiple layers of oversight. Although these elements are essential to ensuring the transparency of publicly funded programs, some argue they introduce unnecessary red tape that creates inefficiencies in terms of time and money. Ongoing frustration with the perceived bureaucracy of unilateral government-led systems led to widespread public sector reform in the 1980s, known as NPM (Haque, 2007).

The NPM movement was characterized by the infusion of the private sector and market-based tactics into various spheres of public management (Haque, 2007). This trend was especially evident in youth sports. Facing budget reductions and resource constraints, recreation administrators outsourced many youth sport programs to a variety of non- and

for-profit providers (King, 2014). This ongoing process has created a complex web of multi-sector partners who, despite being connected through PPPs, have surprisingly little strategic coordination (Bowers, Chalip, & Green, 2011; Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds, & Smith, 2017).

Interestingly, there has been little attention paid to the values undergirding these partnering decisions, a trend which is evident in broader recreation research as well (Stone, Gagnon, Witesman, & Garst, 2016). Although the previous research indicates youth sport PPPs are most effective when there is strong value alignment between partners (Cousens, Barnes, Stevens, Mallen, & Bradish, 2006; Harris & Houlihan, 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2013), it is currently unclear how/if these values are considered during the formative stages of PPPs. Moreover, since many recreation departments have limited capacity to manage multiple partnerships (Frisby, Thibault, & Kikulis, 2004), strategies for monitoring youth sport PPPs can become lost in the complex web of delivery networks. Understanding the role of sport values in the formation and management of youth sport PPPs is key to maximizing their effectiveness (Babiak, 2009; Parent & Harvey, 2009).

### **Theoretical framework**

The principal-agent framework provides a useful lens for analyzing this aspect of youth sport PPPs. Principal-agent relationships occur when one entity (the principal) engages one or more other entities (the agents) to perform a service on their behalf (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). These entities can represent relationships between individuals (e.g. employer-worker) or organizations involved in partnerships (De Palma, Leruth, & Prunier, 2012). In the context of the current study, public recreation departments represent the principal, and contracted external youth sport providers represent the agents. Two predominant theories have been utilized to understand the formation, management, and effectiveness of principal-agent