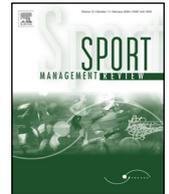




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Emergent models of sport development and delivery: The case of triathlon in Australia and the US



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ABSTRACT

Sport development is a core concern for all nations as they seek to enhance elite performance and cultivate opportunities for mass participation. In the sport of triathlon, new models for sport development have been shown to exist where third party organisations have a critical role in the delivery of it. Using institutional theory as a framework, the purpose of this study was to explore the emerging models of sport development in triathlon. A case study of triathlon in Australia and in the United States was used. The results illustrated emerging models of sport development in both the US and Australia. Third party organisations as well as local councils have become increasingly involved in the creation and implementation of programmes and activities that would normally be the responsibility of a governing body. As such, the organisational fields and institutional logics in triathlon are rendering governing bodies irrelevant. Governing bodies are grappling with finding relevance and legitimacy in triathlon. Implications for sport management research, practice, and education are discussed.

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Sport development has become a core area of concern for all levels of governments internationally as they seek elite level sporting success and/or high levels of participation for their respective nations (Green & Collins, 2008; Shilbury, Sotiriadou, & Green, 2008). As such, sport development has become institutionalised as part of the business of sport governing bodies. That is, sport development has become embedded in the structures and operations of governing bodies (Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008). Further evidence of its institutionalisation is that sport development is an increasingly viable career for individuals throughout the sport industry (Chandler, 2010; Job outlook: sports coaches, instructors and officials, 2012), and it has become a discipline area of specialised study (Shilbury et al., 2008) where scholars have sought to understand the similarities and differences between sport development systems and processes globally (De Bosscher, De Knop, van Bottenburg, Shibli, & Bingham, 2009a). Newland and Kellett (2012) note that sport development has also become a lucrative business for commercial organisations that exist outside the recognised traditional and institutionalised sport development pathways. Their research shows that in the sport of triathlon, profit-driven event management companies (third party organisations or TPOs) provide efficient and effective sport development activities for high performance where the governing body in triathlon has been unable (Newland & Kellett, 2012). Further, they can generate profit from doing so and use their profits to further develop their own businesses and services in sport development. In this way, many new and emerging stakeholders in the sport industry have vested interests in the development of sport, thus indicating that new

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models are emerging that challenge the institutionalised nature of existing practices. However the relationships between the organisations in traditional institutionalised sport development systems and the new entrants, the impact that they have on each other or the impact they have on the sport(s) in which they operate have not yet been explored. This research seeks to fill that knowledge gap. Specifically, the purpose of this study is twofold. First it seeks to understand how TPOs have infiltrated institutionalised sport development practices, and second, it seeks to determine the impact of the emergent models of sport development and delivery on the sport of triathlon in both the US and Australia.

Ideological beliefs about the utility of sport in any society drive the resulting sport organisation and delivery structures and ultimately institutionalisation of sport systems. That is, taken-for-granted intellectual reasoning about sport underpins social behaviour and exchanges and gives rise to systems that become self-sustaining and standard practice (Greenwood et al., 2008). In other words, such practices become culturally supported ways of operating and doing business. For example, in some nations, the emphasis of sport systems is for the development of elite athletes (Green & Oakley, 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008). That is, activities and organisations that support high performance have become socially constructed and accepted. In other nations, the focus of sport systems is for development of mass participation (Green & Collins, 2008; Palm, 1991) whereby the activities and organisations that support sport for the masses have been socially accepted. Increasingly, an interest for many nations is the importance of the sport system in the development of social capital (Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). Tension has resulted in some countries as institutions are encouraged to provide for high performance *as well as* mass participation and social impact (De Bosscher et al., 2009a). As sport managers grapple with the tensions inherent in institutionalised systems, and the conflicting outcomes required of them, opportunities can sometimes be created for or sought out by other stakeholders (from both inside and outside sport systems) to gain cultural acceptance through providing components of sport development that traditional stakeholders are unable to deliver (e.g., Newland & Kellett, 2012).

There has been a growing body of research that seeks to compare and contrast sport development systems in different countries (Green & Collins, 2008; Green & Oakley, 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008), which has helped to highlight which stakeholders are involved in sport delivery systems, why, and how. In essence, the research has shown that there are a range of viable practices that involve a variety of stakeholders in the successful delivery of sport development programming and activities. Newland and Kellett (2012) have noted that different models of sport development are emerging. They demonstrated that in the sport of triathlon in both Australia and the US, third party organisations (TPOs) such as private for-profit event management and marketing companies operate outside the traditional and institutionalised governing body (GB) structures in triathlon. In each country, TPOs have become the core providers of sport delivery at all levels of the sport, including the elite.

Newland and Kellett (2012) noted that due to their ability to respond quickly to consumer needs, their expertise in event management and delivery as well as ready access to financial resources, TPOs were becoming increasingly accepted as an important part of triathlon to the point where national GBs were rendered irrelevant in elite sport development in the sport in both Australia and the US. In other words, TPOs were seen to have greater legitimacy than governing bodies for the sport. This research seeks to expand on this area of study in order to further explore how TPOs have become central to the sport and therefore to better understand the emergent models of sport development in the sport of triathlon and the impact they have in two nations – Australia and the US.

1. Triathlon: context and key stakeholders in sport development

Triathlon is a unique setting to explore sport development as it is made up of three well-established single sport disciplines – swimming, cycling, and running (Newland & Kellett, 2012). Each of the sports that make up triathlon have highly developed and institutionalised structures and processes for sport development in both Australia (Shilbury & Kellett, 2011) and the US (Bowers, Chalip, & Green, 2011). What is interesting about triathlon, and the focus of this study, is that despite its seemingly obvious ties to its core sport disciplines, triathlon has developed independently as a sport. That is, it does not share or align with any of the national GBs from the single sport disciplines, nor does it align sport development practices with them. Moreover, this is true for both Australia and the US (Newland & Kellett, 2012).

In this way, triathlon is not subject to the same institutional pressures and traditions as the core disciplines from which it is derived. There are two important indicators that, at least conceptually, illustrate the way in which triathlon is different from other sports in traditional settings in both Australia and the US. Like many other sports, triathlon has a range of organisations that support the sport such as travel agencies that can arrange for entry and travel for participants, sponsors, equipment suppliers and the like. However, these organisations do not directly deliver the sport in the same way that TPOs (defined as event management and marketing companies in this study) do and therefore are not part of the focus of this research.

In both Australia and the US, triathlon has come to depend on TPOs for the delivery of its events, and to play a key role in the development of sport at least at the elite level (Newland & Kellett, 2012). This is not the case in the single-sport disciplines from which it is derived as they are embedded in traditional club and education systems in both Australia and the US, respectively. Second, triathlon requires the use of public spaces including roads, water reserves, and public parks for the staging of events in ways that drastically differ from the single sport disciplines. The infrastructure required for the sport is dependent on the local councils (LCs) for permits and approval of use. While it can be argued that other sports rely on the provision of facilities and public spaces, these sports most often occur within a venue rather than traversing through community spaces. Therefore, reliance on LCs to coordinate the staging of events in open spaces is much more taxing for the

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