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Sport Policy in Canada

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Introduction

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The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive overview of current Canadian sport policy. More than ever, in order to understand the role and meaning of sport in society, it is important to recognize the inter-relations between the sport system and the state, to realize that numerous sport issues are indeed also public policy issues in which the state has a key role to play. Given the current international trend toward devoting increasingly large sums of money to 'produce' Olympic medalists, to what extent should governments support high performance athletes, and through which channels? To what extent should municipalities provide access to sport infrastructures, free of charge or through user fees, to their citizens and community clubs? Should the federal government financially support national sport organizations (NSOs)? At what level? Under which conditions? Should governments establish public administrative bodies to control doping in sport, or should they mandate non-governmental organizations to do so? These are only a few examples of issues that first come to mind when one considers the role government plays in sport.

There have been prominent developments in sport in recent decades that reinforce government's central role in the field. Canadians remember the success of Canadian athletes at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, as well as the massive investments of the federal government, the province of

British Columbia and the city of Vancouver which made the hosting of these games successful. Canadian sport leaders, with funding from the government and sponsorships from the private commercial sector, launched the creation of Own the Podium, an initiative that continues to establish specific performance targets and strategies to achieve these targets for upcoming Summer and Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Greater Toronto Area is preparing to host the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games in 2015. As the lifespan of the 2002 *Canadian Sport Policy* was about to expire, a new Canadian Sport policy was adopted by sport ministers in June 2012. At the time of this book's writing, Canada is also preparing to host the Women's 2015 FIFA (Fédération internationale de football association) World Cup. Meanwhile, public health authorities are growing increasingly concerned over the alarming trend of Canadians' decreasing participation in sport, and as a result, a renewed vision of the role of community sport, as both a public good and a tool for social and economic development, has emerged as a central issue of the new 2012 *Canadian Sport Policy*.

The scene itself is rather commonplace: smiling politicians posing in front of media cameras alongside successful athletes in the hope of improving their own political capital; but there are various and more significant reasons why government should be involved in sport. As outlined by Harvey (2008, p. 227), governments perceive "sport as an instrument of social cohesion" whereby people from different backgrounds are brought together through sport's uniting force. As well, sport is considered "an instrument of economic development" where hosting international events, for example, is believed to contribute to the tourism sector and stimulate infrastructure development (e.g., transportation, technology, accommodations, sport facilities) in communities where events are held. Involvement in sport and sport policy are also considered to be important instruments of "foreign policy" and "international co-operation" (Harvey 2008, p. 227). Specifically, sport has often served as a strategy to foster economic and political relationships and generate goodwill among countries. Given sport's mass appeal and ability to transcend borders, culture, language, gender, race, religion and socio-economic status, sport may be considered an ideal medium to facilitate exchanges between various nations (Andrews & Grainger, 2007; Miller, Lawrence, McKay, & Rowe, 2001; Wertheim, 2004). Conversely, sport can be used as an instrument of political pressure against foreign governments, as

was the case with the international boycott of the former apartheid regime in South Africa. Another reason why governments choose to invest in sport is based on its perceived contribution to “social development and the promotion of social inclusion” (Harvey, 2008, p. 228). Sport’s connection to education and health and to the general well-being of individuals and communities would suggest that it serves an important function in society; however, as pointed out by Bloom, Gagnon and Hughes (2006, p. ii), “there is little evidence to support the anecdotal claims that high performance sport leads to social benefits such as building national pride, enhancing cultural awareness and encouraging healthy behaviours.” Along similar lines, Grix and Carmichael (2012) have noted:

isolated or (relatively) newly formed states, like Australia and Canada, have sought to use sport as a cornerstone of national identity creation, with the former often describing itself as a “sporting nation”, despite exhibiting many of the problems of other advanced capitalist states, for example high levels of obesity and low mass sport participation. (p. 86)

In light of these issues and motives justifying government involvement and investment in sport, this book aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the multi-faceted public sport policies in Canada, more specifically at the federal level, which we will discuss in greater detail below. In this book, we are exclusively interested in government policies (or public policies) and programs. What do we mean exactly by government policies or public policies and programs? There is currently no consensus in the literature on the definitions of these terms. As Page (2006, p. 210) has stated, “*policies* can be considered as intentions or actions, or more likely a mix of the two.”

Page (2006) argues that these intentions and actions can be viewed at four levels of abstraction. At the most general level, policy ‘intentions’ take the form of principles or general views about how to run public affairs. For example, in Western democratic countries, until the 1960s, the general view was that government should play a very limited role, if any, in what was then called amateur sports, while countries on the East side of the Iron Curtain were investing massively in their high performance system in order to demonstrate, through the Olympic Games, the superiority of their communist regime. The ‘liberal’ or non-interventionist vision of the state’s role

in sport has now overwhelmingly vanished from advanced industrialized countries. Indeed, the question is no longer should government intervene in sport, but rather what are the best policies to support such intervention. At the next level, somewhat more specific intentions take the form of policy 'lines,' or strategies about how to manage specific issues or topics. For example, a significant section of Bill C-12 is dedicated to establishing and laying out the operating rules for the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada, which is in charge of mediating disputes within the sport system. Moving, then, to the sphere of actions, "*measures* are the specific instruments [or tools] that give effect to distinct policy lines" (Page, 2006, p. 211). Among the policy instruments used by governments are, for example, subsidies, exhortation, taxes, regulations, and licensing systems operated by state agencies. Finally, "*practices* are the behavior of officials normally expected to carry out policy measures" (Page, 2006, p. 211).

Pal's (2010) definition of public policy is more encompassing than Page's insofar as it includes inactions as well as intentions and actions. Policies are "a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems" (Pal, 2010, p. 2). It is important to emphasize Pal's point that a decision by a government not to act on a specific issue is often, in itself, a policy. Finally, Pal (2010) argues that there is a fine line between programs and policies. Policies are mostly "guides to a range of related actions in a given field" (Pal, 2010, p. 2), while 'programs' are the specific courses of action taken in order to fulfill the goals of a policy. In summary, for the purpose of our work, 'public policies' are defined as intentions, actions, or inactions by public authorities. Therefore, the chapters included in this book address not only explicit policies, programs and actions taken by government, but also implicit ones.

This book is not the first to be published in the area of sport policy and Canadian government involvement in sport, but the existing literature tends to be limited and, for the most part, dated. In 1987, a book written by Donald Macintosh, Thomas Bedecki, and C.E.S. Franks entitled *Sport and Politics in Canada: Federal Government Involvement Since 1961* was published. This book was followed by other works such as: *Not Just a Game: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology* (Harvey & Cantelon, 1988), *The Game Planners. Transforming Canada's Sport System* (Macintosh & Whitson, 1990), *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy* (Macintosh & Hawes, 1994), and *Taking Sport Seriously:*

Social Issues in Canadian Sport (Donnelly, 1997, 2000, 2011) as well as numerous book chapters and articles (e.g., Cantelon, 2003; Comeau, 2013; Harvey, 1988, 2002, 2008; Harvey, Thibault, & Rail, 1995; Macintosh, 1996; Semotiuk, 1994; Thibault & Babiak, 2005). These works and others have contributed to our understanding of the nature and scope of the Canadian government's involvement in amateur sport for a period of more than 50 years. But as noted earlier, given the developments that have taken place during the past decade, almost all of this literature is now outdated.

This book provides the most recent and most comprehensive examination of sport policy in Canada published to date. Questions steering the content of the book include: What roles do various levels of government play in high performance sport and sport participation in Canada? What are the major issues facing sport policy in this country? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Canada's sport system? and What policies have been developed to guide the actions of government in sport?

Moreover, it brings together contributions from the largest selection of the best Canadian scholars in the field, providing an unprecedented depth and breadth of expertise on the various topics covered. In addition, it examines the most recent developments in Canadian sport policy, including the 2012 *Canadian Sport Policy*, which is set to cover the next 10 years. As such, this book provides readers with the most relevant and contemporary perspective on sport policy in Canada.

As is the case for all projects of such magnitude, this book is not without its limitations. First, as stated above, although this book focuses predominantly on sport policy at the federal level, some chapters address the involvement of provincial/territorial and local governments. Chapter II, for example, examines the inter-relationships in the sport policies of governments at the federal, the provincial/territorial, and local levels. Despite its comprehensiveness, however, a full account of sport policies at all levels of government was well beyond the scope of this project. To the extent that it focuses on public policies in sport, this book does not deal with the relationships between the state, professional sport and the commercial sport sector, primarily because these relationships are more relevant to industrial and labour policy rather than to sport policy. However, this delimitation does not prevent the authors in this book from making relevant observations on the impact of the private commercial sector

on sport, most notably through sponsorship, endorsement and/or the financial support of athletes and non-profit sport organizations as it may relate to their topic. Some readers may notice the absence of a single, overarching framework that might provide a unified point of analysis for all the chapters. One could perceive this as a shortcoming; however, we prefer to see it as a strength in the sense that the absence of such an overarching framework gave the authors the freedom to discuss their areas of expertise in the most effective way, affording them the opportunity to go into greater depth in their policy analysis.

The book's 13 chapters are organized into three sections: in Section I, the first three chapters of the book give an overview of sport policy in Canada. The first chapter by Lucie Thibault and Jean Harvey provides an historical overview of government involvement covering the period from 1961 to the adoption and implementation of the latest *Canadian Sport Policy* in 2012. The second chapter by Jean Harvey addresses the various levels of government involved in Canada's sport system and the bilateral agreements that have been developed to manage collaboration among governments. The third chapter, authored by Bruce Kidd, examines sport, international relations and Canada's role in sport for development.

In Section II, the major features of the *Canadian Sport Policy* are discussed. Chapter IV by Lisa Kikulis examines high performance sport and sport excellence in Canada. The following chapter, Chapter V, by Lucie Thibault and Kathy Babiak, highlights programs and services involved in the development and support of athletes. Chapter VI by Peter Donnelly investigates sport participation within Canadian sport and the role governments play in this area.

The third section of the text addresses the various policies within Sport Canada as well as policy issues affecting sport. Chapter VII by Rob Beamish discusses the history of Canada's policy against doping in sport. The following chapter, Chapter VIII, by Cora McCloy and Lucie Thibault, presents and analyzes Canada's policy and program for hosting international single sport and multi-sport events. Chapter IX is authored by Janice Forsyth and Vicky Paraschak and covers Canada's policy on Aboriginal peoples and sport. The following chapter, Chapter X by David Howe, examines Canada's sport policy for persons with a disability. In Chapter XI, Parissa Safai investigates Canada's sport policy for girls and women, while in Chapter XII Graham Fraser addresses official languages in Canada's

sport system. In Chapter XIII, Wendy Frisby and Pamela Ponice investigate the issue of inclusion in sport. In the last section of the book, we conclude with a synopsis and closing remarks and address future directions with regard to high performance sport and sport participation in the Canadian context. The book provides a comprehensive analysis of recent developments in Canadian sport policy. It also provides a solid foundation for understanding contemporary issues in Canada's sport system. We believe the current text fills an important gap in the existing literature on sport policy and provides an important overview of the involvement of both government and non-profit organizations in Canadian sport and the complex nature of the interactions between all sport stakeholders.

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