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The Double Helix: Aboriginal People and Sport Policy in Canada

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In 2005, the federal government, through Canadian Heritage, released *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* (Canadian Heritage, 2005).¹ It was a prolonged process, set in motion by a formal declaration of support from the federal-provincial/territorial ministers responsible for sport, recreation and fitness in 2002 and concluded with the public release of the document three years later. During that time, a number of representatives from relevant sectors including Canadian Heritage, Sport Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, Aboriginal Affairs, Justice Canada, Health Canada, the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC, the national organization for Aboriginal sport development in Canada) and academe (including both authors) shared in its construction.

It was a remarkable time to be involved in Aboriginal sport. The initiation of the policy process signalled a major milestone in government support for Aboriginal sport in Canada, while the output of that process—the policy—remains, at the time of writing this chapter, the only strategy of its kind in the world. Even in Australia, where substantial human and financial resources have been allocated for Aboriginal sport development, no such policy exists.² In this regard, the Canadian government can reasonably state that it is making a genuine effort to create a “dynamic and leading-edge sport environment” (Sport Canada, 2002a, p. 4) that meets the needs and interests of its constituent groups, in this case Aboriginal people.

As one of three policies dealing with access and equity issues for underrepresented groups in sport (the other two being persons with disabilities, and women and girls), the Aboriginal sport policy is significant: it is the primary instrument guiding Sport Canada's efforts as it works with other governments and sport organizations to tackle the inequities that limit Aboriginal people from gaining access to and maintaining their involvement in sport. As a direction-setting agenda for government, the policy deserves attention if "we are to reach our destination" by "pulling together in the same direction," as cited by an elder at an Aboriginal Sport Circle presentation at the 2005 Ministers' Conference in Regina, Saskatchewan (Daniels, 2005). To do so, important questions about the background, creation and implementation of this policy need to be addressed. For instance, what broader social, political and economic factors contributed to its development? Why did it take three years to construct? What priority areas have received the most attention? What areas are missing from the strategy? Seeing as the policy was to be reviewed in 2010, and an action plan to guide its implementation was never publicly released, how would the federal government measure its success?

In this chapter, we examine the key issues surrounding the development and implementation of the Aboriginal sport policy, and through that process respond to the questions raised above. The chapter is divided into four parts. In the first section, we outline our approach to understanding Aboriginal sport and policy development in Canada. Here, we use the concept of the 'double helix' to examine the relationship between the mainstream and the Aboriginal sport system. We then link that concept to Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration to explain how individuals make decisions that enable and constrain their ability to achieve their desired goals for sport. The second section focuses on the background and objectives of the policy, and includes an overview of the key social, political, and economic factors that played a role in its development. The third section provides an analysis of the current issues and limitations of the policy while calling attention to the opportunities and challenges it presents. In the fourth and final section, we summarize our thoughts about the Aboriginal sport policy and offer some recommendations about how to improve its implementation.

Examples and reflections based on our own experiences with the development and implementation of the policy are interspersed throughout the text. The first author was a member of the working

group that negotiated the overall objectives and scope of the policy, was the primary person responsible for consulting with Aboriginal sport leaders in Ontario on its parameters, and along with the second author, edited various sections of the document. We believe that our personal insights are important to share with students and scholars because they provide a deeper understanding of the context in which policies take shape, as well as the boundaries in which historically marginalized groups, like Aboriginal people, seek to achieve their desired goals for sport.

Theoretical Framework

The Double Helix

Our starting point for examining *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* (Canadian Heritage, 2005) is derived from a universal model in the biological sciences, the double helix. The anatomy of a double helix consists of parallel strands stabilized by cross-links. The parallel strands represent the mainstream and the Aboriginal sport system, each operating independently of the other. The cross-links represent the sites where the two systems connect. Our inspiration for beginning here comes from Alex Nelson, a leading figure in the Aboriginal sport movement in Canada, who used the model to explain the relationship between the mainstream and the Aboriginal sport system to federal representatives throughout the policy-making process. Though the double helix is not the only way to portray the relationship, it was nevertheless a central unifying concept throughout discussions related to the development of the policy.³ Thus, the model served as a discursive element structuring the way people imagined the two sport systems in relation to one another, while at the same time providing an effective way of communicating the existence of an alternative sport system, characterized by specific sites where Aboriginal sport connects to, and remains distinct from, the mainstream sport model.

There are at least three key benefits to using the double helix model when discussing the relationship between the Aboriginal and mainstream sport system. First, as a familiar and easy image to grasp, it is useful for facilitating complicated dialogues about the philosophical underpinnings and political objectives that differentiate the two systems. A case in point is the way in which Aboriginal people use sport to assist their broader goals for self-determination.

For many Aboriginal people, self-determination is fundamentally about having the right to make decisions on how to live and govern themselves as a people, and having those efforts supported by government through equitable resource allocation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In his statement to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, René Tenasco, Councillor for Kitigan Zibi Anishnabeg Council, said, “Self-determination is looking at our desires and our aspirations of where we want to go and being given the chance to attain that . . . for life itself, for existence itself, for nationhood itself . . .” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 108). Although not applied directly to sport, Tenasco’s understanding of self-determination captures the essence of the way we wish to frame that concept. Our point about the relationship between the double helix model and self-determination is illustrated by the history of the Northern Games, an annual competition comprised mostly of traditional Inuvialuit activities. The Northern Games were established in July 1970 in part as a response to the rejection, by organizers, of a request that they incorporate Inuvialuit games into the inaugural Arctic Winter Games in March 1970 (Paraschak, 1991). The Arctic Winter Games are similar to the Canada Games in that they are a government-controlled spectacle featuring mainstream sport events, albeit limited to circumpolar teams only. As a counter-hegemonic initiative, the Northern Games were developed to provide opportunities for indigenous northerners to participate in their traditional games and dances, and thus pass on their cultural values and skills to the youth—an objective that is apparent in the following statement from the organizers: “Through the Northern Games youth discover the rich history they have inherited from their ancestors, and take pride in their cultural heritage” (Gordon, 2009). These Games, created and administered by indigenous northerners, are thus an example of Aboriginal self-determination in sport.

Second, the model of the double helix is useful for the way it positions Aboriginal sport practices and the Aboriginal sport system as a separate and equally legitimate sport system that is worthy of government funding—a position that authorities in the mainstream system have repeatedly challenged and rejected. Tensions surrounding competing visions for ‘sport’ during the life of the Native Sport and Recreation Program (herein NSRP) are instructive. Established in 1972 by Fitness and Amateur Sport, a unit of the federal government’s Ministry of National Health and Welfare, the NSRP was designed

to increase sport and recreation opportunities for Aboriginal people on and between reserves throughout the country (Paraschak, 1995). For almost 10 years the program flourished as Aboriginal organizers co-ordinated local, regional and national-level activities in a wide range of events from popular mainstream activities like basketball, hockey, and rodeo, to sport and cultural events like Métis Days and Indian Summer Games. However, friction over the legitimate vision for sport between Aboriginal and federal sport leaders continued throughout the lifetime of this program. In keeping with this ongoing debate, in 1978, Fitness and Amateur Sport sent the Northern Games Association a letter that stated funding would be reduced and then stopped by 1981 because the mainstream activities in the Arctic Winter Games fit better with the department's mandate for sport development than did the traditional activities performed in the Northern Games (Paraschak, 2004). Then, in 1981, the federal government terminated the NSRP when it shifted its priorities towards high performance sport and away from recreation, which federal officials saw as the mandate of the provincial/territorial level of government. Similar to the rationalization provided to the Northern Games Association several years earlier, federal officials had determined that the range of activities fostered through the NSRP fell outside the scope of sport activities supported by Fitness and Amateur Sport, and, furthermore, that those activities would not produce the high performance results desired by government (Paraschak, 1995).

Third, the double helix model conveys movement between the two systems, showing how the Aboriginal sport system connects and contributes to the Canadian mainstream system—just as the Canadian mainstream system connects and contributes to the Aboriginal sport system, albeit in an unequal system of power relations. This movement is evident in dialogues around a parallel system in official reports and policies leading up to and including the Aboriginal sport policy. One of the first reports to do so was *Sport in Canada—Everybody's Business, Leadership, Partnership and Accountability*⁴ (Mills, 1998). This report included a recommendation to enhance coaching development for Aboriginal people, thereby supporting the ASC's perspective that coaching was a "cornerstone of the emerging Aboriginal sport delivery system" (Mills, 1998, p. 87). In so doing, members of the committee responsible for writing the report were supporting the right of Aboriginal people to create a separate sport delivery system aligned with their vision of sport.

It was thus surprising to read in the eighth draft of the Aboriginal sport policy that:

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have worked diligently for several years to bring the major barriers concerning Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport to the attention of both government and the Canadian sport system. Although this movement has made an impact on the healthy, active lifestyles of Aboriginal youth, the ultimate vision of broad-based participation of Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian sport system will need to be achieved through the committed, cooperative effort of Aboriginal Peoples, the Canadian sport community and all levels of government. *There is no desire to create a distinct sport system for Aboriginal Peoples.* (Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 3, *emphasis added*)

We assume that this statement means the “emerging Aboriginal sport system” identified and supported in the 1998 report is not considered legitimate by the federal, provincial and territorial sport administrators. Certainly, the fact that Aboriginal people have actively created a distinct sport system over the last 40 years—as outlined in the section on background and objectives—is evidence of *their* desire to do so.

Duality of Structure

While the double helix provides a clear and common visual for representing the relationship between the two systems, it does not explain how or why the two systems came into contact, how the links were strengthened or destabilized over time, or how decisions about which aspects of each system should be enhanced or ignored were made. In light of this, we turn to Giddens (1984) to examine the relationship between individual and collective agency and the seemingly organized, enduring patterns of social life. We are particularly interested in his concept of ‘duality of structure’ to help explain the way agents, whether as individuals or groups, are able to gain access to, take advantage of, and shape the rules and resources to secure better positions for themselves in sport. It is worth noting that within this framework agents do not have to be aware of their actions or even be able to verbalize how they know what they know, for a great deal of their competence is based on their lived experience, or what Giddens (1984) referred to as their “practical consciousness.”

In this chapter, we use duality of structure to examine the ways that Aboriginal people, through their ongoing actions, have responded to and shaped the sport system around them, and how they did this within the boundaries of what they believed (through lived experience) was possible. Viewing the double helix model from the point of view of duality of structure thus calls attention to the ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are impacted by each other's ideas and actions.

Sport as a Socially-Constructed Practice

Our theoretical positioning of the double helix is further linked to our understanding of sport as a cultural practice. If culture, simply defined, is the "way of life" of a people (Williams, 1983), then Aboriginal people in Canada have their own cultural practices that in part align with, but also differ from, other Canadians. Essential to, though not explicit in, this definition is the assumption that people have the right to shape their own cultural practices in ways that provide meaning for them. For example, in *The Constitution Act, 1982*, existing Aboriginal rights are identified as a legitimate part of the Canadian political framework. In other words, Aboriginal people in Canada did not give up their status as separate nations when Canada was formed. This truth has been reinforced through various court decisions where Aboriginal rights and treaty rights have been upheld or created anew, as with the Nisga'a Treaty in British Columbia.⁵ Aboriginal people thus have a unique status in Canada, a justification that underlies their differential treatment from other identifiable groups in the country.

Furthermore, we understand sport to be a "socially-constructed" practice, which is to say that sport practices are constantly being produced, reproduced, and reshaped by individuals and groups acting within the boundaries of what they think are possible. These boundaries, including the rules for how things work and the distribution of resources needed to achieve the desired objectives thus continuously shape, and are shaped by, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Those who make the rules have more power because they can decide what the rules will be and how the resources will be distributed. These individuals get to legitimize their preferred forms of sport, their preferred sport traditions and the meanings and practices associated with dominant sport forms (Gruneau, 1988). Over time, the ways that sport is constructed as a cultural practice become part of

most peoples' practical consciousness as they naturalize that this is 'the proper' way to organize and participate in sport. Unequal power relations thus lie at the base of this process because those who get to shape the rules ultimately have a better chance of naturalizing their way of doing sport as *the* way that sport will be reproduced and understood. These unequal relations exist within Aboriginal sport, but they also exist between different groups within the mainstream system, including Aboriginal sport leaders and government. This latter group currently has greater access to desired resources and is more able to shape and implement its desired goals for sport. Policies, such as the Aboriginal sport policy, accelerate and crystallize this naturalizing process based on unequal power relations, further institutionalizing sport practices in a manner that best fits with those defining and benefiting most from the development and implementation of policies.

Background and Objectives

Background

Policies are constructed at every level of government, from the local to the federal. As decision-making instruments, they help to define a particular course of action for a specific issue, such as racism in competitive sport, or for a bundle of related issues, as with problems concerning equity and access for Aboriginal people and sport. Equally important, policies also render visible, by way of exclusion, areas that will not receive systematic attention, thus institutionalizing a legitimized direction for how human, financial, and infrastructural resources will be deployed (Pal, 2010).

The level of authority given to a policy determines how government can respond to any given situation. Similar to the policy for women and girls in sport, and sport for persons with a disability, the Aboriginal sport policy is a departmental policy, situated in Sport Canada, the administrative authority responsible for sport development throughout the country. As a departmental policy it enables vertical relationships *within* the department where it is located; that is, Canadian Heritage. More specifically, Sport Canada is a branch of the International and Intergovernmental Affairs sector, one of five divisions in the Department of Canadian Heritage. Established in 1993, Canadian Heritage is responsible for "national policies and programs that promote Canadian content, foster cultural participation, active citizenship and participation in Canada's

civic life, and strengthen connections among Canadians” (Canadian Heritage, 2009d). Within the context of Canadian Heritage, sport is viewed as a means to enhance national identity, social inclusion, and citizenship.

Herein lies a significant problem we see with the Aboriginal sport policy: as a departmental strategy, the Aboriginal sport policy can refer to—but not directly address—an array of important issues tied to Aboriginal sport development, including weight loss and obesity prevention, diabetes, suicide, substance abuse, justice and education. These issues are vitally connected to Aboriginal sport development but are beyond the scope of what Sport Canada and Canadian Heritage have been empowered to tackle, and thus would play no role in the implementation or evaluation of this policy. Only select policies, such as the *Federal Policy for Hosting International Sport Events* (Canadian Heritage, 2008), incorporate accountability across federal departments. Had the Aboriginal sport policy been structured as a federal rather than a departmental policy, it could have permitted horizontal relationships among relevant federal government units such as Health Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs, and Justice, *as well as* vertical relationships within Canadian Heritage thereby allowing the issues to be addressed in a more holistic fashion.

To be sure, several federal departments were involved to a limited extent in policy discussions. Their presence thus held promise for enhanced structural relations. However, these relationships were never institutionalized through the policy framework. Instead, federal sport officials ‘hoped’ the policy would facilitate horizontal relations across departments by allowing their representatives to partially engage in meetings about the policy. We will return to the limitations of a departmental policy in the following section. For now, it is enough to say that the greater the number of partnerships, the greater the range and amount of resources that can be made available for programs and activities thereby helping to create a more effective policy situation. In other words, with multiple federal stakeholders addressing a variety of issues connected to sport, a policy is given more force in terms of being able to achieve its goals.⁶

As with all policies, the Aboriginal sport policy must be understood as the result of a long period of focused attention and promotion by interest groups whose concerns are tied to patterns they see in the broader social, political and economic environment. Related social concerns, for example, arose from statistics outlining the poor

quality of life faced by many Aboriginal people in Canada (e.g., Mills, 1998), combined with recognition that Aboriginal people perceived sport as a way to counteract negative behaviours in their communities, especially for the youth. Political concerns were strengthened by the desire of the federal government to improve its relationship with Aboriginal people more generally, as could be seen in their establishment of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The final lengthy report, published in 1996, included a number of recommendations specific to sport. As well, the two Speeches from the Throne prior to the release of the Aboriginal sport policy also stressed the federal priority “to work with Aboriginal Peoples so that they can participate fully in national life as well as share in Canada’s prosperity” (Canadian Heritage, 2006, p. 1). Broader economic concerns, tied to increasing levels of physical inactivity and the costs to health care this created, made addressing the health of Canadians through increased sport participation more attractive. A commitment by all governments to reduce inactivity among Canadians by 10% by 1993 (Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 10) necessitated action across the country and amongst its many constituents, including Aboriginal people.

Sport-specific concerns provided an additional impetus for the creation of this policy. In his detailed report on the use of banned substances in sport, prompted by the scandal surrounding Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea, Charles Dubin (1990) identified a moral crisis in Canadian sport that required a re-examination of its values. He recommended that government funding should be based not on medal counts but rather on ethical principles, such as the extent to which programs are available to the broader community, and the encouragement of women, minorities, the disadvantaged, and the disabled in sport (Jennings, 1990). Also in 1990, the inaugural North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) were held in Edmonton: these Games became a cornerstone of the emerging Aboriginal sport system. In the federal report, *Sport: The Way Ahead* (Minister’s Task Force, 1992), a national body for Aboriginal sport was recommended. In 1995, that recommendation became a reality with the creation and federal funding of the ASC. Provincial and territorial Aboriginal sport bodies (PTASBs) soon followed, at times receiving funding from their mainstream government counterparts. Aboriginal requests for funding to prepare and send provincial and territorial teams to the NAIG became an issue all levels of government needed to address. As pointed out in the Mills

Report (1998), governments were having to respond to an emerging Aboriginal sport system, which in and of itself was an outcome of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal actions.

In 1995, the federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for sport, recreation and fitness recommended a focus be placed on the physical activity needs in Aboriginal communities (Canadian Heritage, 2005). Two years later, the ASC reported to the ministers about the barriers affecting Aboriginal sport participation, and they agreed to tackle the issues. Contributing to this heightened concern for addressing Aboriginal sport, two roundtables were held as part of the process leading to the creation of the *Canadian Sport Policy* (CSP) (Sport Canada, 2002a), the overarching policy for sport development in Canada. The February 2000 National Recreation Roundtable on Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples produced the *Maskwachees Declaration* (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee, 2000). This document outlined strengths and challenges facing Aboriginal involvement in physical activity, physical education, sport and recreation, and called on governments and the non-profit sector to endorse the Declaration. A roundtable later that year focused on elite athletics and Aboriginal people.

In terms of federal support, the 2002 CSP outlined all 13 governments' commitment to a values-based approach to sport, including equity and access for underserved groups. This federal commitment was repeated in Bill C-12, *An Act to Promote Physical Activity and Sport*, released in 2003 (Parliament of Canada, 2003). One of the underserved groups was Aboriginal people. Federal funding was attached to the CSP, and bilateral agreements created a structure for distributing new resources across the country in keeping with the priorities identified in the policy. These factors all provided an impetus for the creation of Sport Canada policies promoting access and equity for underserved groups, the first of which became the Aboriginal sport policy.

A three-year process followed to craft the eventual policy, and involved multiple partners, including provincial and territorial government representatives who did not wish to see the legitimization of a distinct Aboriginal sport system in the policy, as this could lead to a parallel Aboriginal sport system that would compete with the mainstream sport system for limited resources. It was, for many supporters of the double-helix model, a frustrating process. One participant explained:

We tried to get that [acceptance of a parallel system] into the policy; we tried to put that explanation into the policy. They [the government officials] appreciated the values of those models in understanding why we are different; [but] they absolutely refused to include that in the document. It was actually in the initial draft but as it worked its way up through the food chain people became very uncomfortable about that. (Te Hiwi, 2009, p. 124)

Eventually, after prolonged debates with government officials, as well as many edits to the policy, an Aboriginal sport system was formally recognized in the document in the guiding principles that stated, “An Aboriginal sport delivery system exists and it is important to work with the ASC, its national body, to identify and address the areas of priority to advance Aboriginal Peoples’ participation in sport” (Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 6). Then, consultation with Aboriginal groups on the eighth draft of the policy resulted in concerns being raised over the scope of ‘sport’ in the policy. Aboriginal respondents voiced their commitment to a holistic approach to sport (and life more generally); however, this contradicted mainstream notions of Sport Canada’s mandate. In the end, the policy makers acknowledged the unique holistic approach taken by Aboriginal people to sport in the policy, but they did not incorporate that understanding, using the model of the double helix, into the structures created through the policy.

Objectives

By now it should be clear that policies are not neutral instruments (Pal, 2010). Rather, they are developed and implemented to address specific issues that have been identified as needing attention. How those issues are addressed within the context of each policy varies according to its design. For example, some policies have objectives (or goals) while others do not. The approach can vary for a number of reasons. A case in point is *Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls* (Canadian Heritage, 2009a). As discussed in Chapter XI, several policy objectives are identified to address federal priorities in this area. The objectives for *Actively Engaged* are explained in more detail in the *Action Plan, 2009–2012* (Canadian Heritage, 2009b) that accompanies the policy.

In comparison, *Sport Canada’s Policy on Aboriginal Peoples’ Participation in Sport* (Canadian Heritage, 2005) does not identify any

objectives specific to Aboriginal people. Instead, it offers broad statements about the need for more and more equitable opportunities for Aboriginal people in sport and outlines four key areas tied to CSP where development is needed:

- 'Enhanced excellence' focuses on creating a more welcoming environment for Aboriginal athletes, coaches and officials in high performance sport;
- 'Enhanced participation' deals with significantly increasing the number of Aboriginal people at all levels and in all manners of participation;
- 'Enhanced capacity' involves building human resource capacity; and
- 'Enhanced interaction' is about fostering collaboration between governments, organizations and Aboriginal people in Aboriginal sport development.

These broad-based statements should not be viewed wholly as a weakness in the policy. Rather, they are a starting point for determining measurable objectives that can indicate the success (or not) of government actions tied to the policy. The guiding principles for the Aboriginal sport policy aligned with the 2002 CSP, as evidenced through the listing of the four goals of the 2002 CSP as the framework for the Aboriginal sport policy. Eventual details were to be worked out through an action plan for the Aboriginal sport policy, which would further identify key intentions and associated resources, providing the foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the policy. However, the action plan was never publicly released.

The possibility of sport being used for broader social development among Aboriginal people is mentioned in the Aboriginal sport policy, but was undeveloped in its details. To the contrary, their linkage to the four goals of the CSP suggests that the Aboriginal sport policy is *only* about sport development. Broadening the Aboriginal sport policy to a federal focus would have allowed other federal government units, such as Health Canada and Justice, to link with the policy, connecting and contributing to sport by addressing the issues that fit within their mandate but extend beyond the reach of Sport Canada and Canadian Heritage. Since the policy did not institutionalize relationships across different federal units, the possibility that such relationships—which are essential

to broader social development—would, in fact, be formed were unlikely.

Aboriginal sport leaders were rightly concerned about the way in which the objectives for the policy were being construed. Throughout the policy-making process, we acknowledged that they had the potential to foster relations between different government units while countering that it was equally probable the emphasis on sport could reinforce silos between them. In other words, Health Canada is not in the business of doing sport, just as Canadian Heritage does not concern itself with physical health. Our primary concern was that a departmental policy emphasizing sport would undermine the broader community and health objectives long hoped for by Aboriginal sport leaders. On these broader social issues, Sport Canada states clearly in the Aboriginal sport policy that its role is limited to sport development: “Sport Canada is committed to *contributing*, through sport, to the health, wellness, cultural identity and quality of life of Aboriginal Peoples” (Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 3, *emphasis in original*). We were reminded several times throughout the process that the policy was intended merely to “open doors” to other federal departments, not establish formal connections with them. This approach would thus require each department to construct its own policy in relation to the one that Canadian Heritage would ultimately endorse. Our concerns were reinforced with the new CSP, released in June 2012, which clearly states Sport Canada will “encourage the development of new partnerships (*while respecting government roles and responsibilities*) with local and national, domestic and international, sport and non-sport partners” (Sport Canada, 2012, p. 22, *emphasis added*). In other words, Sport Canada will do its best to encourage relationships between federal departments but will stop short of building those relationships by breaking down the administrative boundaries to address matters of broad social importance. We knew this departmentalized process could take years and (still) wonder whether it will ever be successful at all.

Current Issues and Limitations

In this final section, we identify and discuss the key issues and limitations of the Aboriginal sport policy. We begin with an analysis of the outcomes that are ostensibly linked to its implementation, specifically a CA\$ 12M commitment by the federal government to

support programs to increase Aboriginal participation in sport. This money, provided over five years, from 2005 to 2010, was the most strategic investment ever made by government to foster Aboriginal sport development in Canada. With a policy in place, Sport Canada had a general outline to help guide its decision making about how to enhance this area of public administration.

How was the CA\$ 12M allocated? In view of the fact that the Aboriginal sport policy was designed to build on the 2002 CSP, the overarching policy for Canadian sport, funding was given to activities that would augment that framework. Four areas were targeted for support: (1) funding for hosting the NAIG in Canada; (2) financial support for athletes travelling to the NAIG; (3) grants for provincial and territorial sport development programs and capacity building; and (4) increased funding for the ASC.

First, up to CA\$ 3.5M was provided to assist with hosting the NAIG, a major sport and cultural festival held approximately every three years in either Canada or the United States. Following this cycle would mean that the Games should be hosted in Canada every six years. However, the NAIG hosting dollars had been made available in the past. In 2003, two years before the Aboriginal sport policy was released, the federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for sport, recreation and fitness agreed to support the hosting component of the NAIG when they are held in Canada, with the federal and host provincial governments contributing up to 35% of the Games' total budget to a maximum of CA\$ 3.5M each (Sport Canada, 2003a): these were the exact same terms that were agreed to after the policy was released in 2005. Furthermore, in 2004, the ministers endorsed a multi-party funding agreement for the NAIG, which included a formal support mechanism for the hosting of the NAIG when in Canada (Canadian Heritage, 2009c). Bearing this information in mind, it is debatable whether or not the provision of NAIG hosting dollars can be seen as an outcome of this policy. What is certain, and likely more accurate, is that the policy further institutionalized government support for this area of the NAIG, ensuring the hosting component would receive a reasonable level of funding on an ongoing basis thereafter. Practically, it meant that Canadian host societies would not have to scramble for dollars with every NAIG, as they had done in the past (Forsyth, 2000), since permanent funding for this culturally significant event was now in place.

A second area targeted for support was athlete travel to the NAIG. In 2009, the Ministers agreed to provide up to CA\$ 1M for athlete travel to the Games whether in Canada or the United States (Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, 2009). Funding for this aspect of NAIG was a noteworthy victory. Many Aboriginal people occupy the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder with the implication being that involvement in competitive sport is more a luxury than a normal part of everyday life. Federal support for travel to and from the NAIG was thus intended to provide athletes, many of whom otherwise would not have the means to participate in sport, with an opportunity to experience the Games. This is particularly true for athletes who live in rural and remote areas, where the costs associated with sport development often make sport participation unaffordable. According to a report compiled by the ASC (1998), approximately 25% of all Aboriginal people in Canada live in census metropolitan areas, meaning the vast majority of Aboriginal people live in smaller towns and cities or in rural or remote areas. Furthermore, statistics on Aboriginal community population size and remoteness show that 58% of Aboriginal communities have populations between 100 and 499 residents. Of those communities, 166 are located between 50 to 350 kilometers from service centres (which have access to government services, banks, suppliers) and 22 are located more than 350 kilometers from the nearest service centre (ASC, 1998, p. 12). Much of the Aboriginal population is thus located far from urban areas where the structure of sport is usually best supported.

The issue of costs was raised several times in the report on the regional consultations (Sport Canada, 2003b) for the development of the Aboriginal sport policy. As noted in the report from Ontario:

Aboriginal people who live in isolated communities must factor in the cost of an airplane ticket in order to get to a store that sells equipment. They do not have the luxury of traveling by car to the nearest supplier to buy the gear they need to play or compete. These are some of the everyday realities for Aboriginal people living in small or isolated communities. (Sport Canada, 2003b, p. 11)

Yukon respondents went further in their analysis of the socio-economic landscape. They linked historical oppression through

residential schools as an issue to contend with in Aboriginal sport development:

Another interesting point raised around access, is the issue of competitions that require billeting. This issue was raised as a challenge for those in the Yukon where travel costs are prohibitive, and some parents/adults are suffering from negative experiences in residential schools [and thus should not be given the responsibility of caring for young people]. (Sport Canada, 2003b, p. 26)

And finally, the respondents from the Northwest Territories (NWT) addressed the cost of sport development from the point of view of capitalist food production and consumption, asserting, “[The] well-being of people is closely tied to nutrition, and the cost of transporting food to NWT can result in poor nutrition choices [because healthier food products are too expensive]” (Sport Canada, 2003b, p. 23). They were simply stating the obvious—it is difficult for athletes to perform well consistently when they are not getting proper nourishment.

The above statements revealed the broad range of issues that Aboriginal people face around sport development, with some concerns, such as the trauma caused by the residential school system, almost certainly going well beyond the social policy objectives imagined by Sport Canada officials. We are also alert to the fact that funding for travel is contingent on the regional teams increasingly needing to meet minimum standards for athlete preparation and team selection—criteria that are intended to promote elite sport development by raising the level of competition at the NAIG, an event where, for the time being at least, the emphasis remains focused on participation more so than high performance outcomes. As such, we share Green’s (2004, 2007) skepticism about the rhetoric surrounding the broader social goals for sport in Canada, wondering where these goals fit in relation to the high performance priorities that have been the hallmark of federal efforts over the past 40 years. For now, the extent to which these broader concerns can be addressed through the Aboriginal sport policy remains to be seen.

The *Federal-Provincial/Territorial Bilateral Agreements for Sport Development* was the third area targeted for support.⁷ Similar to the hosting dollars for the NAIG, the bilateral agreements for sport

development were in place several years before the Aboriginal sport policy was released in 2005. In 2002, Sport Canada recognized participation in sport, recreation and physical activity as a program priority and created the bilateral agreements as one of four initiatives to address the lower rates of representation in sport among girls and young women, persons with a disability, visible minorities, youth at risk, the economically disadvantaged, and Aboriginal people. As a result, the federal, provincial and territorial governments directed human and financial resources towards increasing participation among these historically underrepresented groups. The bilateral agreements for sport development thus represent a joint response by the two levels of government—the federal government, through Sport Canada, and the provincial/territorial governments—to priorities outlined in the 2002 CSP and the *Federal-Provincial/Territorial Priorities for Collaborative Action, 2002–2005* (Sport Canada, 2002b).

In terms of funding allocation, the federal government provided CA\$ 4M over three years, from 2003–2006, to be shared among the provinces and territories, with equivalent matching funds to be provided by those governments. Of those funds, approximately CA\$ 1M were distributed between the 13 provincial and territorial governments of Canada for Aboriginal sport development. Thus, each of the 13 governments had approximately CA\$ 77,000 to put towards programs for Aboriginal people. In terms of costs for travel in rural and remote areas, which is needed for enhanced training and competition, this money would hardly make a dent in terms of sport development.

Not all of the CA\$ 1M was designated for programming. A portion of it went to capacity building for the PTASBs, the regional affiliates of the ASC. While the ASC focuses on national level activities (e.g., national championships, national policy issues), the PTASBs are responsible for programming and policy development in their region and are thus the primary means for advancing Aboriginal sport throughout the country. Even with this limited funding, there remains uneven government support for PTASB capacity. Since the ASC was first established in 1995, it has repeatedly identified PTASB support as a cornerstone to Aboriginal sport development. In 1998, of the 13 regions represented at the ASC, only six had operational bodies with two additional bodies being formed. Of the six operational bodies, only three received core operating funds from their provincial governments and one had partial program support (ASC, 1998, p. 10).

More than a decade later, in 2009, while each region has a representative body, several affiliates still do not have a consistent funding base, a limitation that has had a significant bearing on their ability to influence sport development in their region. Among other things, it means the PTASBs cannot hire personnel for programming, let alone deal with the intricacies of policy development. With little or no staff, some areas such as Quebec and most of the Maritimes have operated almost wholly on volunteer help from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people highly dedicated to Aboriginal sport. Predictably, this results in uneven development throughout the country, as some regions are more able than others to create and sustain initiatives.

The bilateral funding is reminiscent of the Native Sport and Recreation Program in the 1970s (discussed in the *Background* section) in that it has led to the creation of a number of Aboriginal sport participation initiatives throughout the country. For example, in Alberta in the 2004–2005 fiscal year, 40 trained youth workers ran 36 sport camps, with 14,589 Aboriginal youth participating (Treasury Board of Canada, 2005). There is, however, a conspicuous difference between the two programs. In the 1970s, Native sport leaders were provided with decision-making authority about the types of programs that should be developed and how they should be implemented. In the current bilateral agreements, however, the regional governments—not the PTASBs—are given programming autonomy, and very few provincial and territorial governments consult with the regional Aboriginal sport bodies about program development and implementation.

In so doing, the bilateral agreements reinforce historically oppressive relations between Aboriginal people and government. To be sure, the PTASBs and the ASC consider this process unacceptable and have registered their displeasure at the highest level of government, as indicated by the following comment from Lyle Daniels, Chair of the ASC, in addressing the 2005 Ministers' Conference in Regina, Saskatchewan:

We have advocated for years about all of the very practical things we would like to do to support community-based programming, and to some extent we have accepted the reality that funds are limited. As we have examined the bilateral process and compared notes among our Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies, the discrepancies have become apparent. While I

want to commend those governments that have made Aboriginal sport development a major priority within the bilateral agreements, it is clear that others have chosen a very different focus. (Daniels, 2005)

His remark about some governments having chosen “a very different route” than was hoped for by the PTASBs is a sharp reminder that the Government of Canada is still resistant to the notion of the model of the double helix. In some regions, funding went to well-established mainstream sport and recreation organizations rather than to Aboriginal community groups or to the PTASB, the principal agent for developing and delivering Aboriginal programming in the Aboriginal sport system. So while this funding further reinforces the mainstream sport system and its involvement in Aboriginal sport, it does not help to stabilize and support the Aboriginal sport system’s delivery system.

Lastly, the bilateral funding provided the ASC with CA\$ 535,000 per year for three years beginning in 2003. Organizational support is critical but it is only provided at the national level, a top-heavy approach that further widens the asymmetry between the Aboriginal and mainstream sport system. A second round of bilateral funding was made available for the ASC for another three years beginning in 2006. Until the provinces and territories commit serious dollars for administration and staffing of the PTASBs, the ASC as a collective will continue to struggle to address barriers at the *community* level. While the PTASBs are contributing to the development of elite athletes through initiatives such as the NAIG and coaching and athlete development camps, community development remains an area that has fallen very short. The ministers, along with relevant federal departments need to address this gap by training community leaders and developing sustainable grassroots programs. This issue is exemplified by the lack of attention paid to the highly anticipated report, *Best Practices—Physical Activity Programs for Aboriginal Youth* (The Sutcliffe Group Inc. and Sluth Management Consulting, 2007)—a compilation of information generated from data collected by people working in Aboriginal sport and recreation development throughout the country. The insights provided in this document could be enhancing community capacity for Aboriginal sport but the government has shelved it: the federal-provincial/territorial ministers responsible for sport, recreation and fitness abandoned the report shortly after

it was concluded. Why? We argue that the data collected through this report, which shows a real need and interest in sport as a tool for broader social development (not simply elite participation), runs counter to the institutionalized and naturalized views of 'sport' held by federal officials, so that 'best practices' at the Aboriginal community level are definitely not the same 'best practices' imagined by the power bloc in government.

In terms of key weaknesses not being addressed, there is only one—but it is significant: there remains no action plan for *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* (Canadian Heritage, 2005), even though it states that an action plan will be developed (p. 8). Without an action plan, transparency and accountability tied to the policy becomes impossible to achieve. Action plans have been released for subsequent Sport Canada policies created to enhance access and equity for other historically marginalized groups in sport. The *Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability* (Canadian Heritage, 2006) has an action plan with clear resource commitments, as does *Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls* (Canadian Heritage, 2009a) (see Chapters X and XI for more details). The same needs to be done—and has been promised in the policy—for Aboriginal people and sport.

Why no action plan? We believe that this omission is tied to challenges embedded in the development of the Aboriginal sport policy. The Reference Group, comprised of selected members from the Aboriginal Sport Circle and government involved in the development of the Aboriginal sport policy, stated their belief that most provincial and territorial governments felt that Aboriginal sport and recreation could be addressed through a generic policy that encompassed all citizens; that is, the CSP (Sport Canada, 2003c, pp. 4–5). The absence of an action plan reinforces this approach, assuming that the provincial and territorial governments can (and should) adequately address the needs and interests of Aboriginal people in sport. No action plan also means no clear measures for evaluation. What is more, the 2012 CSP does not offer any indication that an action plan for Aboriginal sport will be developed. Indeed, Section 7, "Policy Implementation and Action Plans," suggests the government's preferred course of action will be the status quo:

Consistent with the first CSP, this approach to implementation will respect the existing roles and responsibilities of the federal and

provincial/territorial governments that are described in the National Recreation Statement (1987) and other existing governmental agreements addressing *specific jurisdictional realities*. The renewed policy direction is supported by governments and non-governments to the extent of their *desired* commitment. (Sport Canada, 2012, p. 15, *emphasis added*)

In this kind of policy environment, how can Sport Canada and the ASC really assess what they have accomplished as a result of the CSP or the Aboriginal sport policy to determine where the gaps are and how best to move forward?

Conclusion

Policy, by its nature, sets boundaries for how activities within its purview are structured. Our examination of the creation and implementation of the Aboriginal sport policy highlights several strengths arising from this policy, tied to further issues that need to be addressed. Sport Canada has become a leader worldwide through its formal recognition and legitimation of government support for Aboriginal sport, including the Aboriginal sport system. The policy pays some attention to the particular, holistic approach taken by Aboriginal people to sport, broadly understood. Likewise, the possibilities for social development through sport are noted. And financial resources have been directed to Aboriginal organizations and athletes. All these elements hold promise for enhancing the access and equity of Aboriginal people in sport, and for their contribution, therefore, to a values-based approach to sport in Canada.

However, the promised action plan has not emerged, which could have clarified objectives tied to these strengths, generating a uniquely Aboriginal vision of sport participation. How can Aboriginal organizers demonstrate, and thus further legitimate their preferred approach towards sport participation, and/or revise it as necessary, when there is no formal set of objectives and accompanying evaluation plan in place? Without this action plan, resources are instead being directed to provincial and territorial governments rather than to PTASBs, reinforcing the mainstream portion of the double helix instead of those organizations that facilitate the operation of the Aboriginal sport system. This pattern of resource distribution does not allow for the further legitimizing of the

Aboriginal sport system; instead, its legitimacy is undercut along with its perceived suitability for government resources. Funding to NAIG and to the ASC reinforce a focus on elite sport more so than the community-based development necessary for social goals to be reached. And the departmental focus of the Aboriginal sport policy lends itself to an emphasis on sport development, rather than social development *through* sport. Creating structural links between federal departments is one way that Aboriginal aspirations linking sport and social development can be pursued more concretely. Generating an action plan with Aboriginal people that gets resources into the communities and generates capacity within Aboriginal sport bodies, thus enhancing Aboriginal self-determination is a second way that sport development can combine with social development. This process would ensure that Aboriginal people are involved in their own visioning and provision of sport, broadly understood and holistically framed.

The evaluation that follows from that action plan would help assess their success in that endeavour. It would also serve as a values-based approach that the mainstream sport system could draw upon as it works to enhance access and equity across Canada. This outcome is the strength of the double helix model of Aboriginal sport—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have much to learn as we share our separate and intertwined approaches towards the provision of sport in a manner that enhances the lives of all Canadians. However, the Aboriginal sport system must be further legitimized before its many contributions to the mainstream sport system can be seen and adopted. Once these steps are taken, we will be closer to developing novel ways in which disadvantaged groups in Canada can receive enhanced access and equity in the Canadian sport system, which is surely the goal of a truly values-based sport system.

Notes

1. In this chapter, *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* (Canadian Heritage, 2005) will also be referred to as the "Aboriginal sport policy" and "the policy." This policy can be found online at: <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/sc/pol/aboriginal/2005/aboriginal-eng.pdf>
2. The Australian Sports Commission (2010) currently has a National Indigenous Sport Development program, which directs human and financial resources to Aboriginal communities and mainstream sport

organizations that work with Indigenous communities. A national network of indigenous sport development officers work in partnership with indigenous communities, mainstream sport organizations and state/territory departments of sport and recreation to assess community sport needs and priorities and to deliver programs, resources and services in order to build the sport capacity of Indigenous Australians. Funding is also available for travel and accommodation for indigenous sportspeople (athletes, coaches, officials, managers, trainers) involved in mainstream official national championships and international sport competitions. However, no overarching Indigenous sport policy directs these efforts to enhance Indigenous sport opportunities in Australia. Retrieved from: <http://www.ausport.gov.au/participating/indigenous>

3. In response to a question about the usefulness of the double helix as a model for discussing Aboriginal sport in Canada, one interviewee in Braden Te Hiwi's (2009) thesis noted her preference for the image of two canoes in the two-row wampum as a way for moving indigenous peoples and the government forward, rather than the more "heavily scientific grounding" of the double helix (p. 130). The Mohawk concept of the two-row wampum belt is a model of how people should govern themselves in Mohawk society, as well as how Mohawks see themselves relating to other groups around them.
4. This document is also referred to as the Mills Report since Dennis Mills, a member of parliament, was chair of the committee that produced the report.
5. Here, we make a distinction between Aboriginal rights and treaty rights. Aboriginal rights are not clearly defined, and must be established through the courts on a case-by-case basis. Treaty rights are negotiated and can be exhaustively set out and described in detail. With respect to the Nisga'a in British Columbia, as a modern treaty, the Nisga'a Treaty describes in detail how the rights of Nisga'a citizens will be exercised. Any Aboriginal rights of the Nisga'a are modified to become rights set out in the Treaty. In this way, the negotiating parties have agreed to rights—rather than extinguishing them. Retrieved from <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/is/nit-eng.asp>
6. This can be seen, for example, with the Indigenous Sport Program in Australia. Funding for Indigenous Sport Development Officers (ISDOs), as well as for the Travel and Accommodation Assistance Program grant, are both shared with the Department of Health and Ageing. "In addition ISDOs work with Indigenous Coordination Centres and the Department of Health and Ageing to ensure programs are delivered to Indigenous Australians and their communities with an integrated whole of government approach." Retrieved from: <http://www.ausport.gov.au/participating/indigenous>

7. A bilateral agreement is a formal contract between two parties, outlining what each will contribute to the relationship. Usually, bilateral agreements are constructed for special projects that do not normally receive ongoing (baseline) funding. Chapter II addresses bilateral agreements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

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