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## Sport Policy in Canada

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## Sport and Social Inclusion

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**A**s the quotation below suggests, sport policy makers and researchers have been grappling with what social inclusion means and how to best achieve it:

Inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms that influence sport participation and positions of leadership in sport form a complex constellation of interacting factors and dimensions. Changes in the facilitation and organization of sport can enhance an inclusive sport practice, which might also foster social inclusion in broader society. (Elling & Claringbould, 2005, p. 498)

There is also growing recognition that significant portions of the population do not have basic services, opportunities and democratic participation in all spheres of life. We define social inclusion as the process of creating just and equitable systems that facilitate people's choices and opportunities to engage (or not) in a wide range of social and democratic activities, including sport and recreation (Ponc, 2007). While some sport organizations refer to 'inclusion,' we use the term 'social inclusion' to draw attention to the diversity of people in Canada and the broader structures requiring change. As we explain later in this chapter, we think this is important because inclusion might otherwise be interpreted simply as 'opening the doors' or 'providing access' to the existing sport system. Rather, we argue that

it is necessary to work collaboratively with those who are currently outside the system to make fundamental changes to sport policies and practices so that more people can benefit from participation in a positive sport environment.

Social inclusion is a highly complex policy arena that requires a number of considerations. For example, it raises questions about what social inclusion means for a variety of people including children living in poverty and their parents, girls and women who participate less in sport than boys and men, persons with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, Canadian newcomers and racialized minorities, people with disabilities, people with different sexual orientations and the growing number of Canadians who do not participate in sport and physical activity enough to derive health benefits. It also poses implications for sport organizers and policy makers who are expected more than ever before to make sport accessible to historically excluded groups, but have few resources and guidelines on how to do so.

The well-intentioned goal of social inclusion is to create improved quality of life for all persons, regardless of their situations and positions in society. However, "this requires different ideological, political and strategic policy formulations than currently exist" (Pegg & Compton, 2004, p. 5). Such change will be a challenge in a geographically and culturally diverse country like Canada, which has a fragmented sport delivery system (Sport Matters and Public Policy Forum, 2004). In particular, social inclusion cannot be accomplished only by those with power in the sport system in a top-down fashion. Rather, as we will show, it is a process that requires careful negotiation and a fundamental shift in the hierarchical power relations that typically characterize sport policy development.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of a number of issues that should be taken into account when considering if and how sport in Canada can become more inclusive. We begin by discussing how social inclusion has been defined over time. We then introduce some of the contradictions associated with the concept, along with a discussion of the mechanisms of social exclusion that policies seek to redress. Along the way, we provide examples of how Canadian sport organizations are implementing social inclusion policies. At the end of the chapter, we recommend some promising practices for promoting social inclusion as a starting point for re-envisioning new possibilities for Canadian sport.

## History and Definitions of Social Inclusion

Historically, the concept of social inclusion, which originally developed in Europe, had a narrow policy focus on including people in economic activities (Ontario Women's Health Network, 2009). This narrow interpretation has been used to justify coercive welfare-to-work policies to reduce people's dependence on government for social assistance. Researchers have argued that this policy has adversely affected the well-being of some groups in particular, such as single parents who are sometimes forced to work in jobs that do not earn enough to cover the child care expenses incurred when re-entering the workforce (Gurstein, Pulkingham, & Vilches, 2011). Mitchell and Shillington (2005) pointed out that reducing social inclusion policy to a focus on employability ignores the value of unpaid work done in the home and community and obscures inequalities based on gender, class and race in the labour force and other spheres of life. In addition, those who are unable to participate in the workplace for a number of reasons are cast as being deficient in skills and work ethic, stereotypes that work against a sense of belonging, well-being and social inclusion (Reid, 2004). In this way, public policy itself can exclude people in material and other ways, as suggested by Shakir (2005, p. 286) when she asked:

whether inclusion ought to be a goal of public policy or whether material conditions of contemporary exclusion of some groups in society may in fact be a product of existing public policy, all of which would at least appropriately place the spotlight on public policy as a contested space.

In Canada, the concept evolved more broadly and was initially linked to the disability movement and notions of social accommodation that support public policies attempting to reduce economic, social and cultural disparities. For Richmond and Saloojee (2005, p. 3), "to be included across the different levels of well-being (physical, economic, human, social and political) requires sufficient resources and rights and capacity to participate within the environments and structures of the society in which one lives." Young (2000) argued that social inclusion is fundamentally a social justice issue that is tied to equity, fairness and respect for others. For Donnelly and Coakley (2002), it is a human rights issue that involves the validation and

recognition of the diversity of all people's day-to-day experiences and situations.

Since social inclusion is complex, it can mean different things to different people. Ponc and Frisby (2010) found that it had multiple meanings for women living in poverty who were involved in a health promotion project designed to increase their participation in community recreation. The women reported that feelings of acceptance, recognition, belonging, safety and trust were central to their social inclusion in community activities. They also pointed to the importance of relationships based on respect and support, and the crucial role that community organizations with caring staff can play in facilitating their involvement. The women confirmed that a citizen engagement or community development approach that facilitated their input into policy and program development supported their feelings of social inclusion and resulted in activities that better met their needs and interests. The authors concluded that the meanings women on low income associated with social inclusion spanned their own feelings, their relationships with others, their desire to be involved in decision making and their interactions with community organizations. This illustrates the complexities of the concept, yet at the same time provides some helpful guidance to sport and recreation organizers about the dimensions that need to be considered in order to facilitate it.

In addition to the multiple layers of social inclusion, meanings of the concept are not static or linear. The women living in poverty in Ponc's (2007) study reported incidences of feeling both included and excluded at the same time, for example when they were invited to a meeting but then were not listened to during that same meeting. As Elling and Claringbould (2005, p. 501) explained, "because people have multiple social identities, they might often simultaneously experience inclusion and exclusion according to specific social power relations." This contradiction illustrates the complexity of facilitating social inclusion and the importance of paying attention to power imbalances.

Social inclusion is most often conceptualized as being "both a process (i.e., something that is undergoing constant development and is never quite finished) and an outcome (i.e., something that has clearly defined results)" (Sands, 2006, p. 4). That is, social inclusion is something that needs to be planned for and it is also something that can be evaluated. This is an important distinction because as Parnes

(2007) has argued, although numerous benefits like increased social interaction, skill development, and improved health are associated with social inclusion, it is not always clear if these benefits are being actualized in the same ways by all people. According to Frisby (2011), talking directly to excluded groups to determine the conditions under which they would feel included and involving them in determining the criteria used to evaluate success is crucial when striving to develop inclusive communities.

The terms inclusion and social inclusion gained prominence in sport and recreation in the late 1990s (Pegg & Compton, 2004) and is now frequently used. For example, the *Canadian Sport Policy* (2002), which grew out of a consultation process across the country, paid specific attention to “issues of inclusion and equity” (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 7). Enhanced participation, which aims for a “significantly higher proportion of Canadians from all segments of society involved in quality sport activities at all levels and in all forms of participation,” is an explicit goal of the *Canadian Sport Policy* (Sport Canada, 2002, p. 16). To achieve this goal, the federal government acknowledges that new initiatives, programs, partnerships and resources must be directed at under-represented groups to reduce barriers, recruit new participants, and reduce drop-out rates (Sport Canada, 2002). Yet, as discussed in other chapters in this book, federal sport policies have been developed for Aboriginal people, girls and women and people with disabilities, but it is not clear whether these policies have had the intended impact. In addition, policies and concrete actions related to other under-represented groups such as the growing number of immigrants, families living on low incomes, LGBT<sup>1</sup> individuals, adults and seniors are lacking. This may be because, in part, the consultation process for the *Canadian Sport Policy* was conducted more with those currently inside the sport system (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents, officials, volunteers and various partners) than those outside of it.

Inclusion is also one of the key policy principles in the new *Canadian Sport Policy* (2012) and is described as occurring when “sport programs are accessible and equitable and reflect the full breadth of interests, motivations, objectives, and the diversity of Canadian society” (Sport Canada, 2012, p. 2). Yet given that sport excellence is also a key goal, one wonders how inclusion can be achieved over the long-term when individuals continue to be cut from teams as they move up the competitive sport ladder? Recreational sport offered at

the local level offers an alternative, but program costs are a deterrent for those living on low income. While identifying inclusion as a policy principle is an important first step, much more needs to be done by all levels of government and other organizations working together to more fully achieve it. One such organization is True Sport, a Canadian non-profit organization that is designed to offset the commercialized and overly competitive forms of sport that have arisen in recent decades:

True Sport is a national movement designed to help sport live up to its full potential as a public asset in Canada. Over 1,400 groups have joined the “True Sport Movement” which is based on values of excellence, fairness, fun and inclusion. (Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2008, p. 10)

In another example, the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Organizing Committee (known as VANOC 2010) developed the following performance objective related to social inclusion:

Being socially inclusive and responsible means that VANOC considers the needs and interests of its workforce, sponsors and contractors, athletes and members of the Olympic and Paralympic families, as well as our government, First Nations and corporate partners. It also means that we consider the needs and interests of external stakeholders, including communities and non-government organizations (NGOs) affected by our activities. We are particularly aware of the possible impact of our activities on socially or economically disadvantaged groups that traditionally do not benefit from mega-events such as the Olympic Games. VANOC seeks input on our social inclusion programs and activities from our partners and a wide range of stakeholders. When appropriate or possible, we include groups affected by our activities in our decision-making processes. We also adhere to recognized global standards for corporate social responsibility. (Vancouver 2010, 2009, p. 1)

While VANOC 2010 may have gone further in promoting social inclusion than previous Olympic Games, for example by providing

some Aboriginal youth with jobs and skills training, the high cost of Olympic Winter Games' tickets meant that only those who could afford them could attend the actual events. Similarly, those working in inflexible, low-paying jobs would not have been able to take time off in order to volunteer. It is also not clear how many people actually benefitted from VANOC 2010's social inclusion efforts and whether benefits were sustained following the Games. While many citizens may have felt temporarily included in the sense of community generated as the Olympic torch run took place across the country or when Canadian athletes won medals, many others were largely excluded from this international sport event.

At a local level, the City of Vancouver developed a Sport for Life Strategy (Vancouver City Council and Vancouver Park Board, 2008, p. 7) with an objective to "build an inclusive sport community where all participants have access to welcoming, safe environments to strive for their desired goals in sport (whether it be for recreation, for self-development, or for excellence)." An overall outcome of the strategy was to "recognise the value sport has in the lives of all Vancouver residents, with the objectives of inclusion of age, gender, ability and ethnicity" (Vancouver City Council and Vancouver Park Board, 2008, p. 7). Some of the challenges to achieving these inclusion objectives and outcomes were identified in their strategic plan. These included: i) the limited interaction and co-ordination among sport organizations, ii) the wide social inequities that exist across the city, iii) inconsistent sport program delivery, and iv) sport programming that is focused on those who are relatively young and already fit (Vancouver City Council and Vancouver Park Board, 2008, p. 12). It is by explicitly identifying challenges like this that steps can be taken for overcoming them.

As you can see, the notion of social inclusion has developed over many years and in different policy contexts. More recently, it is part of a shift towards facilitating broader participation in sport through the increased involvement of historically excluded groups. Social inclusion requires careful consideration if it is to be developed in ways that redress rather than re-create experiences of social exclusion. By considering both the mechanisms that promote social inclusion and exclusion, the possibilities for participation in sport can be broadened so that more Canadians can reap the benefits of an improved and more equitable sport system.

## Reasons for Promoting Social Inclusion in Sport

There are many reasons for the rise in social inclusion policies in government and in sport including the learning of skills that contribute to quality of life such as “intra-personal and interpersonal communication, determination, perseverance, confidence, leadership, citizenship, goal-orientation, motivation, and personal satisfaction” (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, p. 5).

Pegg and Compton (2004) concurred that there is well-documented evidence that inclusive sport and recreation opportunities can contribute to physiological, psychological and social well-being, especially when adequate resources are allocated and when citizens are involved in planning and decision making. Donnelly and Coakley (2002) contended that the benefits are particularly important for children because physical recreation is crucial to their physical, social, motor and emotional development. We add that while most sport inclusion efforts are aimed at children, the benefits are also crucial to youth, adults and seniors especially given the aging of the Canadian population and rising health care costs associated with inactive lifestyles.

Pegg and Compton (2004) argued that neighbourhoods and communities benefit from the learning that occurs through the acceptance of individuals who may differ from mainstream society in their beliefs, backgrounds, customs and abilities. To illustrate this, Canadian Heritage research has shown that participation or volunteering in sport and recreation is a common way that new Canadians get involved in community life (Sport Matters and Public Policy Forum, 2004). This can create spaces for people to become more independent, to learn new skills, and to learn from one another, especially when a community development approach is used that builds sustainable social connections and community partnerships for sharing resources, skills and knowledge (Frisby, Reid, & Ponc, 2007; Vail, 2007). Fostering social interactions between diverse groups of people can also help to dispel myths and assumptions that often result in our fear of differences, rather than a respect for difference. An example of this is the Special Olympics, which has been criticized for segregating persons with intellectual disabilities, as this can be viewed as a form of social exclusion (Storey, 2004). Others argue that segregation can, at times, be a form of inclusion because it does not assimilate people into an existing structure that does not work for

them. There is evidence that events like the Special Olympics have raised awareness about the capabilities of persons with disabilities to counter harmful prejudices and stereotypes (Parnes, 2007). Raising awareness can lead to policy changes, such as when the National Deinstitutionalization Initiative in Canada brought about significant changes in how persons with developmental impairments were housed and treated (Hutchison & McGill, 1998). Religious persecution, colonization, homophobia, racism, poverty, ageism and gender inequality are just some of the other areas that can begin to be addressed through effective sport and recreation inclusion policies (Tirone, 2004). What is essential is that a wide range of participation options be made available to accommodate the diverse and shifting interests of people, and this can best be determined by engaging with those outside the sport system. In addition, as Collins (2003) pointed out, sport can rarely yield economic, environmental, health, safety or social benefits acting alone—to be effective, it needs to partner with those promoting other types of social policies.

### **Mechanisms of Social Exclusion**

According to the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (2008, p. 13), “there is a growing gap between the positive benefits Canadians believe sport can provide for their children and their communities and what they are actually experiencing.” When people do not have the opportunity for full participation in the economic and social activities of society, they are considered to be excluded (Guildford, 2000). For Labonte (2004), the concept of social exclusion is valuable because it defines disadvantage as an outcome of broader political structures, global capitalism, and social processes rather than as an individual or group trait that make people responsible for their own misfortunes or lack of opportunities.

Despite the rise of ‘sport for all policies,’ sport in its current form is by nature exclusionary, especially as participants move up the competitive pyramid (Collins, 2003; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). The skills needed to be successful in sport are not necessarily innate, they may have more to do with the opportunities, encouragement and support available to certain segments of the populations over others. In a True Sport report (Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2008), the authors acknowledged that sport can play a role in creating and strengthening social ties, connecting people across geographic

and ethno-cultural boundaries, and linking disadvantaged people to organizations and services. At the same time, they reported Canadians are concerned about the growing number of people who are excluded from sport, which is partly due to the uneven distribution of resources and facilities, the way sport has become highly formalized and the costs associated with participation (Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2008). The True Sport report listed a number of issues that Canadians are concerned about including: an over-emphasis on winning, harassment, intolerance, racism and a lack of fair play—all of which foster social exclusion. Donnelly and Coakley (2002) added that sport participants can be abused, bullied or dominated in ways that make them feel alienated, isolated and humiliated. This illustrates that it is important to consider that for some, the decision to avoid participation is not only a matter of individual choice, it is also about how elite sport-based ideologies, tolerance for abuse, and discrimination within the sport culture encourage people to stay away. To illustrate this point further, Allison and Hibbler (2004) found that negative attitudes and stereotypes held by some local recreation management and staff created barriers to serving ethnic minority populations in American cities. Similarly, a study by the Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants (2006) confirmed that a lack of understanding of the cultural, economic and social circumstances of some communities affect enrolment and ongoing participation in sport and recreation.

Social exclusion is also a function of cultural norms that define the legitimate bodies in sport. For example, Vertinsky, Jette, and Hoffman (2009) documented how females were not allowed to participate in the first Olympic Games and have since had to fight for inclusion in many sports in which only men have traditionally participated. This was because women's bodies were deemed to be too frail and there were fears about injury to their reproductive organs. The lawsuit that female ski jumpers unsuccessfully launched to be included in the 2010 Olympic Winter Games provides a recent example, because some high ranking sport officials used this same rationale along with other arguments to justify the women's exclusion from competition (Vertinsky et al., 2009). It was because of the attention drawn to this issue that women's ski jumping will be included in the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia.

Studies in Europe have demonstrated that boys and men, people with higher levels of income and education, ethnic majority groups,

heterosexuals and people without physical or mental disabilities are overrepresented in both the participation and leadership of sport (Elling & Claringbould, 2005), and similar patterns exist in other countries around the world. In part, this can be explained by patterns of sport socialization and socio-economic privilege where some youth and adults are not offered similar activities within and outside of the school system and receive differential encouragement from family members, peers, teachers and coaches (Coakley & Donnelly, 2001). Other barriers that limit opportunities that DePauw and Gavron (2005) found in the area of disability sport included a lack of early sport experiences, limited training, a lack of understanding on how to include persons with disabilities in sport and limited access to information, social support and resources.

Discriminatory practices can also lead to social exclusion, for example when girls' athletic teams receive fewer resources than boys' teams or when minority ethnic groups are expected to figure out and fit into the physical cultural practices in their new home country with little or no support or encouragement. Racist, sexist and homophobic comments made on and off the playing field also discourage participation and are rarely adequately addressed by sport leaders (Doherty & Taylor, 2007; King, 2008).

The rise of neo-liberalism in Western governments represents another exclusionary mechanism, as decision making and assessments of program success are increasingly tied to a business- or market-oriented model rather than to social policy (Brodie, 2005). As an example, one of the municipal recreation departments that we and women on low income worked with decided to charge us for using a small, rarely used space for meetings. If the women had not organized and argued that they were essentially working for the municipality for free to increase participation by low income citizens, the municipality may have thought it was making an economically prudent decision by charging a fee even though this would have excluded a group that is least likely to participate in community recreation.

Exclusionary practices in sport are created and re-created by a number of structural mechanisms such as cultural norms, discriminatory practices and economically-driven policies. The ideals of social inclusion are an appealing antidote to such practices for sport organizers and policy makers who are invested in fostering mass participation and more equitable opportunities for involvement.

However, as we discussed earlier, social inclusion is a complex process and requires more than simply 'opening the doors' to everyone. There are a number of challenges and contradictions associated with facilitating it that need to be taken into account to avoid resorting to simplistic solutions that are ineffective and may inadvertently perpetuate social exclusion.

### **Contradictions with Social Inclusion**

There is not always consensus about what the purpose of social inclusion should be, which is due to a number of contradictions associated with the term's use. One of these contradictions has already been discussed, that is, social inclusion and exclusion are not static or polar opposites because they can exist at the same time, shift over time, and from person to person. We agree with Elling and Claringbould (2005, p. 499) that "inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms are dynamic, often paradoxical and continuously challenged." Three other contradictions that will be discussed here are the following: i) social inclusion can promote assimilation rather than respecting differences, ii) social inclusion is assumed to be beneficial when it may not always be, and iii) it is often those who are already included in sport who are deciding how to include those who are not.

The policy focus in Canadian sport has been on 'access' or 'opening the doors' rather than on social inclusion and sport system change (Harvey, 2001). The problem with this approach is that sport policies and practices that have excluded people in the first place are left unexamined and unchallenged (Labonte, 2004). This can leave responsibility for social inclusion to those who have been historically excluded and require them to figure out how to include themselves into a system that does not necessarily meet their needs. Another danger of 'open the doors' practices and policies is that they promote the assimilation of people, such as Aboriginal people, into the existing sport system instead of creating spaces for different identities and cultures to participate in sport in traditional and non-traditional ways (Paraschak, 2007). Shakir (2005) concluded that social inclusion policy in Canada is flawed because notions of commonality underpin it, and 'difference' is seen as being part of the problem. As King (2008, p. 424) aptly pointed out, sport should reject normalizing processes that assume that excluded groups must become "just like everyone else."

In terms of the second contradiction, Shakir (2005) contended that social inclusion policy has certain assumptions tied to it, for example, that it is 'good' to be included and 'bad' not to be. However, if in fact the sport system is viewed as being flawed in various ways by non-participants, it is possible that exclusion may actually be beneficial to them because they are avoiding the numerous problems with sport discussed earlier in this chapter (Muller, van Zoonenand, & de Roode, 2008). This underscores why Shakir (2005) and others are critical of formulations that position inclusion/exclusion in simplistic and oppositional terms—because this type of thinking draws attention away from the root causes of social inequalities. This ignores how complex social problems such as structural and economic barriers, poverty, discrimination and legal and institutional policies contribute to social exclusion, which imply it is excluded individuals rather than sport and other types of organizations that need to change. Frisby et al. (2007) provided an example of this when they argued that while offering sport programs for free or low cost may encourage more people to participate, it does not address the conditions that lead to a significant portion of the Canadian population living in impoverished conditions in the first place. Arguably, sport organizers would need to work with other social service providers and governments to tackle the poverty issue if a more inclusive society is the ultimate goal (Collins, 2003). However, shifting sport policy towards the promotion of social inclusion more broadly will be difficult because, as Harvey (2001) noted, sport is bounded by its own legitimizing principles, political cultures and forms of governance that have traditionally had a narrow elite competitive sport orientation.

The final contradiction raises the question: Who should be including whom in sport? The traditional approach to sport management assumes that sport professionals know how to include 'others' based on little or no consultation with those who may be very different from themselves (Frisby, Reid, Millar, & Hoeber, 2005). Mitchell and Shillington (2005) reminded us that the process of policy making itself can promote social exclusion if citizens experience a lack of voice in issues that directly affect them. Ironically, it is this top-down, 'expert'-driven approach that reinforces processes of social exclusion by not giving people a say in how they want to be included or in what types of sport opportunities they would like to participate in (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). In addition, sport organizers and policy

makers are often working in neo-liberal environments that prioritize a business-oriented approach that works against social inclusion even when they have policies that appear to promote it. Elling and Claringbould (2005) provided a good illustration of this when they showed how sport organizations can appear to be promoting inclusion when they are really more interested in functional motives such as increasing memberships to raise revenues. The problem with this approach is it is unlikely that sport organizations will be able to retain newly recruited members unless fundamental changes are made to make membership more attractive to the needs of different individuals and groups. The authors suggested that the likelihood for meaningful change is enhanced when sport organizers and policy makers use moral or ethical guidelines as a basis for promoting social inclusion. These include thinking in terms of equal rights (e.g., to sport participation and leadership), equal value (e.g., of different abilities and cultural practices) and equal treatment (e.g., a lack of discrimination). For example, municipal recreation policy makers in Canada could use moral guidelines in their decisions about resource distributions by allocating separate swimming times for Muslim women so they can participate in ways that are culturally appropriate and comfortable to them, which acknowledges that the current approach to public swimming is often discriminatory. Under current neo-liberal thinking and practices, however, this option would only be considered if there were sufficient numbers of swimmers paying fees to justify the costs involved, and therefore the policy would remain exclusionary.

### **Promising Strategies and Policies for Promoting Social Inclusion**

Labonte (2004, p. 117) posed a provocative question related to the strategies needed to promote social inclusion when he asked, "How does one go about including individuals and groups in a set of structured social relationships responsible for excluding them in the first place?" There are now a number of different frameworks that offer promising strategies for promoting social inclusion to redress historically entrenched patterns of exclusion. Drawing upon such tools and frameworks can be helpful for promoting debate, exploration and collective leadership for generating new approaches. Some of these key principles underpinning inclusion frameworks will be

briefly reviewed here, but as Ponc (2007) argued, the key is for staff and those desiring to get involved to work together because there is no one approach that will work in every situation. Shakir (2005, p. 210) concurred when she argued that because of the diversity of Canadian society, any static notion of inclusion will inevitably result in assimilation or ongoing social exclusion.

The OCASI (2006) developed and pilot-tested one of the most comprehensive sport and recreation inclusion models we have seen. It was developed after conducting a literature review and obtaining input from immigrant and refugee youth as well as service providers. Their report identified a long list of helpful recommendations for inclusive sport and recreation programs including:

... combining educational with sport and recreation activities; introducing sport and recreation activities that immigrant and refugee youth found familiar and popular due to a prevalence in their countries of origin, and the use of these as vehicles to build confidence to learn new sports and recreation activities; boosting parental involvement; developing youth leadership, especially in the areas of officiating and coaching; building collaborative relationships with other service providers; acquiring affordable and accessible space; developing supportive internal organizational structures and top management support; funding and developing strategies for working with funding partners; mobilizing immigrant and minority communities; engaging diverse communities in the youth recruitment activity; training diverse community coaches and people who are skilled in sports; operating under an anti-oppression and anti-racism framework; acquiring transportation for youth; and, where possible, acquiring sportswear for youth. (OCASI, 2006, p. 8)

As indicated in the OCASI recommendations (2006), a starting point in most inclusion frameworks is to engage directly with socially excluded groups to surface the issues requiring attention. This involves discussing how existing policies and practices intersect with people's social and economic circumstances to produce undesirable consequences (Shookner, 2002). Participatory and action forms of research will assist in this regard by generating new knowledge about experiences of social inclusion/exclusion and effective policies and community engagement strategies (Ontario Women's Health Network,

2009). The Working Together Project (2008) on public libraries used a participatory research approach and found that many traditional library policies, such as levying fines for overdue books, worked against the goal of making libraries more accessible. It was by talking directly to non-users in surrounding neighbourhoods that barriers to library use and ideas for overcoming them were identified. Frisby and Fenton's (1998) *Leisure Access Workbook* provided examples of questions that can be adapted or discussed when engaging with socially excluded groups in a recreation or local sport context. Similarly, Ponc (2007) noted in her *Inclusion Tool* that ongoing dialogue is needed from initial brainstorming, to issue identification, through implementation, action and evaluation. It is by working through citizen engagement or community development approaches that communication and trust can be fostered to build relationships that encourage mutual learning and action (Taylor & Frisby, 2010). This requires different approaches to traditional sport program development where staff, management, or sport policy makers talk amongst one another, develop and deliver programs that are convenient for their organization, and then expect people to show up. The problem with this approach is that if people do not attend in sufficient numbers, it reinforces assumptions that they are not interested, which turns attention away from the problems with institutional policies and program delivery methods that may be excluding them.

*Developing partnerships* amongst community organizations is another key component of social inclusion models and they are often crucial in reaching out to excluded groups to address the issues (Vail, 2007). Important considerations in making partnerships effective in promoting social inclusion include determining the purpose of the partnership, identifying potential partners, determining what the nature of the partnership will be, building partner relations and evaluating the partnership (Working Together Project, 2008). Sport Programs in Inner City neighbourhoods (SPIN) is a unique program in the City of Winnipeg that has partnerships with a number of government agencies and community groups. SPIN targets children between the ages of six and 14 to promote basic skill development, team work, leadership and fair play in a non-competitive environment. This program also tackles some of the barriers facing inner city youth by providing transportation, financial assistance, equipment, leadership and volunteer support which is done in conjunction with program partners.

*Engaging community members in sport program planning and policy development* is another key dimension of social inclusion frameworks. This requires staff to spend more time working with socially excluded groups and community partners as learners and facilitators rather than acting as experts who should make decisions for them (Working Together Project, 2008). This, in turn, necessitates a paradigm shift in how staff are trained because, as Allison and Hibbler (2004, p. 264) argued, many professionals in our field are “socialized into a seemingly mono-cultural society with social institutions that are predominantly designed to meet the needs of the dominant population.” This results in organizations becoming structured around the often hidden but powerful systems that have been set in place by those in power. It is under these conditions that the voices of others are minimized, stigmatized or silenced (Young, 1990). Changing this dynamic requires two-way communication and sensitivity to, and an appreciation of, differences in culture, identities, literacy, language and preferred ways of participating in sport. For example, Frisby (2011) and her colleagues organized a two-day workshop that brought recent immigrant Chinese women together with a range of sport and recreation policy makers and community service providers to discuss how to make policy and programming more culturally inclusive. The women themselves provided over 15 suggestions for changes that would make it easier and more appealing for them and their families to participate, including the production of marketing materials in Mandarin and Cantonese, tours of facilities and having the opportunity to ‘sample’ some of the programs offered with instructors who can speak their languages.

*Making an organizational commitment to change* is often recommended, which means that social inclusion policy goals are built directly into planning, policy and sport program design. According to Sands (2006), this requires having a clear vision and obtaining buy-in from decision makers, staff, users and non-users. It also requires building responsibility for social inclusion into job descriptions, the reallocation of resources, and redesigning appropriate reporting and decision-making structures. One of the most important ways that governments and sport organizations can make a commitment is by developing and implementing social inclusion policies (Collins, 2003; Everybody Active, 2009). Policies are a direct reflection of a sport organization’s visions and values and provide ongoing guidance to staff, volunteers and the public, even in times of rapid turnover

and change. When developed collectively and taken seriously, policies can guide decision making, the reallocation of resources and the development of new approaches to program delivery. A key to effective social inclusion policies is that they should serve as organic guiding principles and be open to improvement, rather than being rigid and carved-in-stone (Working Together Project, 2008). This will provide space for sport organizers and potential participants to work together to accommodate the complexities of the many different situations and circumstances encountered to create more inclusive and adaptable sport cultures.

*Ongoing evaluation* that involves the celebration of successes and the identification of areas for improvement is another critical consideration. New approaches to evaluation and accountability that encourage innovation, creative thinking and experimentation are tied to social inclusion goals (Sport Matters and Public Policy Forum, 2004). The OCASI (2006) project provided a good example of this that was in keeping with their youth leadership development goals, when youth interviewed staff as part of an evaluation process and helped decide what the end-of-program celebration would be. The key is to use a participatory approach to evaluation that takes both the process (i.e., how are we doing so far) and outcomes (i.e., what did we accomplish) in mind. Conducting evaluations is often crucial to obtaining ongoing support for sport inclusion initiatives and to share the lessons learned with other communities. While process and outcomes can be difficult to measure, it is often a combination of qualitative data (e.g., testimonials from participants) and quantitative data (e.g., the number of new community partnerships created) that help inform ongoing improvements.

## Conclusion

As Shakir (2004) argued, social inclusion is not about bringing outsiders into the existing mainstream culture, it is about creating a new and negotiated culture together. A key question that remains is how we re-imagine the Canadian sport system, not by thinking in terms of commonalities that will always exclude some, but instead accepting the diversity amongst us which is based on different historical relations of power and privilege and the right to contest the status quo. As an Australian Public Service Commission document entitled *Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective* (2007)

warned, there is a whole realm of public policy problems that cannot be successfully tackled by traditional narrow approaches. This is because problems like social exclusion are highly complex—there are multiple causes, it is usually interconnected with other social issues, it can rarely be solved by any one organization and there is usually no one clear solution. They contended that innovative and flexible approaches that devolve government to encourage more bottom-up approaches, information sharing and working across organizational boundaries are critical to success. This requires a shift in government–citizen relations where more emphasis is placed on providing citizens with information, more consultation on policy-making and program design, and more active citizen engagement where policy options are proposed through improved two-way dialogue.

Federal, provincial, and local governments in Canada have a key leadership role to play in fostering social inclusion in sport. While this brief summary just ‘scratches the surface’ in terms of promising social inclusion practices, engaging socially excluded groups to surface the issues requiring attention and to obtain input into program and policy development is very much in keeping with the definition and goals of social inclusion. Developing new partnerships, making an organizational commitment to change, and ongoing evaluation are other key strategies. Reading more about social inclusion tools and frameworks and experimenting with them will help sport organizers and policy makers work collaboratively with participants and non-participants to create more inclusive sport and recreation opportunities across the country. This brief review provides support for Shakir’s (2005) contention that having good intentions alone is not enough. Rather, having a long-term focus with a flexible implementation plan is important because ‘static quick fixes’ are unlikely to be effective in tackling the ‘wicked problem’ of social exclusion in sport.

## Note

1. LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered persons.

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