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Sport Policy in Canada

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Conclusion

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This book fills the need for a renewed overall examination of sport policy in Canada since the publication of Macintosh, Bedeck and Franks's (1987) text entitled *Sport and Politics in Canada. Federal Government Involvement Since 1961*. Moreover, this book offers the most comprehensive analysis of Canadian sport policy that has ever been published. Indeed, by bringing together the finest scholars in the field under this collective project, this book provides a broad selection of detailed assessments of the most salient aspects of Canadian sport policy both past and present. The general *Canadian Sport Policy* along with specific policies covering anti-doping (see Beamish's Chapter VII), sport event hosting (see McCloy and Thibault's Chapter VIII), Aboriginal sport (see Forsyth and Paraschak's Chapter IX), sport for people with disability (see Howe's Chapter X), sport for girls and women (see Safai's Chapter XI), and official languages in Canada's sport system (see Fraser's Chapter XII) have been addressed in the book. As well, issues relating to multi-level governance mechanisms (see Harvey's Chapter II), international development through sport (see Kidd's Chapter III), high performance sport (see Kikulis's Chapter IV), athlete development and support (see Thibault and Babiak's Chapter V), sport participation (see Donnelly's Chapter VI), and social inclusion and sport (see Frisby and Ponic's Chapter XIII) are extensively discussed. In essence, the sheer complexity of sport policy in Canada is fully covered in this book.

At a time when the new *Canadian Sport Policy* (CSP) has just been launched, this book is both timely and valuable in that it not only provides extensive analyses of early and more recent developments and issues related to this policy, but also identifies new opportunities and potential pitfalls that already face policy makers and other stakeholders with regard to its implementation.

In the last two decades, government involvement in sport and physical activity has increased steadily and reached new levels in terms of the breadth of policies and programs put in place to support high performance athletes. To a much lesser extent, policies have also been implemented to encourage and support mass participation for Canadians and to promote the inclusion of disadvantaged constituencies, girls and women, Aboriginal peoples, the disabled, linguistic minorities and low income families. After a decade of cutbacks in the 1990s, Sport Canada's budget has increased significantly, more support has been offered to high performance athletes and coaches, tax deductions have been made available for children's participation in sport and physical activity, and so on. Moreover, significant amounts of federal funds have been devoted to the organization and hosting of the 2015 Toronto Pan and Parapan Am Games, the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver, as well as other major sport events, such as the IAAF World Championships in Edmonton in 2001 and the FINA World Aquatics Championships in Montreal in 2005, public investments that resulted in new and expensive sport infrastructures, mostly for the benefit of professional athletes and/or high performance athletes. The federal government is not the only level of government that has invested large amounts of public funds in sport over that period. As discussed in Harvey's chapter (Chapter II), provincial and local governments have also invested significantly in this area. They are indeed the foremost providers of public funding for sport. All in all, it can be argued that, over the last two decades, sport in Canada has benefited from major increases in public funding by successive governments, which have demonstrated a sustained interest in providing Canadian athletes with the means to develop and compete successfully on the international scene and win increasingly costly medals, ostensibly winning international prestige for their country abroad and, similarly, pride, unity, and identity for Canadians at home.

However, during the same period, increased interest in mass participation sport remained limited to general statements of

commitment to the issue while in reality very limited material investment in terms of dedicated programs and sport infrastructure at the local level (i.e., where sport participation really occurs) actually occurred. Therefore, as shown by Kikulis (Chapter IV) and Donnelly (Chapter VI), while Canadian high performance athletes have continued to strive for medals internationally, overall sport participation among Canadians has been declining, regardless of the type of metrics chosen. Moreover, even though mechanisms of intergovernmental collaboration have been put in place, and bilateral agreements have been signed between the federal, provincial and territorial governments, the amounts of dollars involved pale in comparison to the overall spending in high performance sport. Despite the efforts of the 2002 *Canadian Sport Policy* to bring the issue of sport participation to the forefront of awareness with a dedicated objective, the attainment of the participation objective is not among the list of the successes of this policy. The 2012 CSP, however, further addresses the issue, broadening the scope of sport covered by the policy to include four spheres: introduction to sport, recreational sport, competitive sport, and high performance sport. Moreover, the 2012 CSP breaks new ground insofar as it envisions a wider role for sport in Canadian society, in particular through community sport.

The first set of issues is related to sport funding. After a massive injection of funds by governments into the economy to offset the 2008 economic downfall, sport, like almost all policy areas, has entered an era of high turbulence. For the most part, the federal, provincial and territorial governments are now focusing on deficit reduction and have moved toward, at least at the federal level, reducing the overall size of government. The vision for the 2012 CSP broadens the role sport is meant to play in the next 10 years in order to make Canada a leading sport nation. More precisely, increased funds and infrastructures will be imperative to achieve the policy goals set for increased physical literacy, better access to the introduction to sport and recreational sport and improved competitive and high performance sport opportunities. Indeed, increased financial resources will have to be funneled through bilateral agreements between the federal and the provincial and territorial governments if the federal government is to fulfill the role it set out in the 2012 CSP. Yet, this CSP refers to renewed partnerships both as a means to achieve the wider role of sport and to indirectly access increased funding for sport through resource sharing with other government departments. It calls for

increased funding of sport by the private sector at the same time as it calls for “sharing and economizing resources” (Sport Canada, 2012, p. 2) through “innovative public–private funding models . . . for the ongoing development of sport” (Sport Canada, 2012, p. 20). In short, it will be challenging to reach for the vision and goals of the 2012 CSP in a context of increasingly scarce public funding. For example, from where will the funds needed to offset the huge deficit in community sport infrastructure originate? How will programs such as Own the Podium and national sport organizations continue to be funded, as the corporations that sponsored them in the context of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games and the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games are either reorienting their marketing strategies or are dealing with fewer resources to invest in sport programs, events and athletes as the economy stagnates? Will the state take up the slack?

Dedicating sufficient public funding for sport is not the only leadership challenge for governments in realizing the 2012 CSP vision. Increasingly, governments “. . . can no longer govern alone, as they once did. This makes it increasingly risky to propose big initiatives” (Lenihan, 2012, p. 25). People do not defer anymore to the authority of state elites; citizens want to be involved, consulted and want processes to be transparent (Lenihan, 2012). Policy building requires taking into consideration the often divergent interests of a growing number of disparate stakeholders, making it difficult for governments to propose and implement innovative policies. Yet, the development of the 2012 CSP followed an extensive consultation process, albeit mostly limited to the sport and physical activity field, and called for engagement by all concerned stakeholders in the development of the new policy. Implementation of the policy will require renewed and sustained engagement on the part of interested stakeholders, as well as the willingness of governments to assume the leadership to realize the vision. New information technologies and social media will continue to remodel the interactions between citizens, stakeholders and governments.

Since the International Year for Sport and Physical Education (2005), sport for development has become a major trend in sport. As Kidd has explained (Chapter III), Canada has played and continues to play an important role in this area. The 2012 CSP calls for an increased Canadian role at the international level. The 2012 CSP also paves the road for sport for development within Canada. Huge

inequalities still exist in Canadian sport; improving opportunities and overall inclusion as discussed by Frisby and Ponc (Chapter XIII) are the the greatest challenges for sport in Canada in the decade ahead.

While this book has focused on the challenges and issues relating to sport policy in Canada it is vital to underscore that Canadian sport policy is substantially influenced by developments at the international level. As a participant country in the Olympic Games, Canada's sport policy is increasingly subjected to the dictates of the IOC and International sport federations. Two examples include Canada's anti-doping policy, which is subject to WADA's anti-doping code, and a specific stringent law (Bill C-47, *The Olympic and Paralympic Marks Act*) had to be passed by the Government of Canada to protect the IOC trademarks during the Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Other events on the international sport scene will likely influence Canadian sport policy in the future, especially with regard to hosting policy and the promotion of human rights in the world through sport. New social movements are indeed active at the international level, for example, working toward 'greener' games and more environmentally sensitive sport events, calling for action against countries with poor human rights records and fighting against corruption in the highest spheres of international sport (Harvey, Horne, & Safai, 2009).

As noted at the outset of these closing remarks, this book offers the most comprehensive interpretation of sport policy in Canada published to date. However, it does not cover everything. For example, it does not address government support of professional sport. It mostly focuses on sport policy at the federal level. More research on sport policy at the provincial/territorial and local government levels is needed. This book provides a detailed introduction to sport policy in Canada and a thorough assessment of the issues and challenges of that policy, providing a valuable reference both for policy makers and sport policy scholars in Canada and abroad.

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