Delhi 2010: Considerations for a Participatory Action Research Approach Toward Sport-in-Development

Mark Dawson

Royal Roads University

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daws33@shaw.ca

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Abstract

The 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Delhi provides an opportunity to critically examine the link between sport mega-events and the use of sport for grassroots community development. This study highlights Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a viable methodology to explore this relationship. Participatory research, a methodology common to community development, allows for an inclusive and cooperative approach towards inquiry through which participants influence process and outcomes. The inquiry aims to be both informative and transformative; data generated by those within the research has practical value when successfully applied to sport-in-development initiatives. Application and implementation of this study requires consideration of context, whether it be the diverse communities in India or another country hosting a sport mega-event. The considerations for a democratic and participatory approach towards sport-in-development aim to build greater opportunities for success.

Keywords: Sport mega-event, community development, India, participatory action research, Commonwealth Games
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Part 1: Assessing the need.

When the United Nations declared 2005 the International Year of Sport and Physical Education, it recognized the potential of sport as social policy aimed at improving the quality of people’s lives (Beutler, 2008; Kidd, 2008; Spaaij, 2009; Vermeulen & Verweel, 2009). As a result, sport is seen as a tool to be utilized in addressing social, political, and economic challenges in countries around the world; it has been used to combat hunger, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, and racism (Beutler, 2008; Levermore, 2008). The hosting of mega-events such as the Commonwealth Games (CWG) is often framed as an opportunity to attract financial investment in the host country and thus build development at the grassroots level (Misener & Mason, 2006). The 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, India—a country that lags far behind the global average in several United Nations social indicators—provides the context to measure participation and ownership in a sport-in-development program. In evaluating New Delhi’s bid to host the 2010 CWG, the Commonwealth Games Federation (2003) stated, “The renewed enthusiasm among youth for physical fitness and sports culture will contribute to fulfilling the aims and objectives of the National Sports Policy of the Government of India...” (p. 88). Those aims include the general broad-basing of sport and building mass participation in a country where less than 5% of the population has access to sport facilities and organized sport (Government of India, 2009, p. 71).
However, the rapid growth of development through sport, driven by corporate donors, media, charities, and government, has resulted in uncoordinated efforts with a lack of monitoring and evaluation (Black, 2010; Burnett, 2009). The many organizations form a “multiplicity of agencies seeking accountability for their ‘development work’ in the form of tangible evidence” (Burnett, 2009, p. 1193) that privileges results over process. As donors try to justify financial investment in development, non-government organizations (NGO) may ignore factors such as availability of resources, diversity in stakeholders, or unique socio-economic factors critical to project success and long-term sustainability. Levermore (2008) suggested the focus on development is frequently secondary to other goals, such as the establishment of a tangible sport infrastructure. The objective of this research is to critically examine and measure notions of participation and ownership within a sport-in-development program in rural or urban India. In particular, echoing Brady (2005) who called for further research specific to girls and sport in various contexts, settings, and venues with diverse models and programmes, it will focus on those who are traditionally marginalized or excluded.

There is a history of failed government policy, shifting responsibility, and dwindling financial support behind the promotion of sport within India. Jordan (2003) reported the discourse of participation “has been gradually appropriated and re-contextualised within a neo-liberal policy regime” (p. 186) that favours the interests of capital over communities. As such, this research aims to cut through the rhetoric that usually surrounds ‘top-down’ approaches toward sport-in-development by working at the grassroots level and assessing program goals and outcomes. Specific consideration will be given to the impact of the 2010 CWG, exploring the possibility that the economic mandate of the Games’ production possibly compromises
development at the community level. The research is informed by the goals outlined by India’s Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport (MYAS) which recognizes in its Annual Report the need to develop capacity and infrastructure in Indian youth, and the value of sport’s ability to promote public health, build social inclusivity, and stimulate economic activity (Government of India, 2008).

According to the MYSA (2007), of a population of 770 million people under the age of 35 years, only 50 million people in India have access to organized sports and games. Since hosting the 9th Asian Games in 1982, and the subsequent creation of a National Sports Policy in 1984, India has recognized sport as an avenue for general development. In 1995 an Indian Parliamentary Committee Report recognized an “absence of sports consciousness and culture in the country...almost a total lack of sports infrastructure at the grassroots level all over the country” (MYAS, 2007). The 2001 National Sport Policy echoed the need for grassroots development of sport infrastructure, but placed the onus on State governments. A 2007 draft of the National Sport Policy again called for the nurturing of an Indian sport culture. Further, it stressed the need to capitalize on the short-term benefits of hosting the CWG as part of a clearly defined, long-term vision. The 2007 draft takes strides in assessing the needs for Indian sport, recognizing gaps in participation by gender, a general lack of coordination among governing bodies, and calling for the reinforcement of physical education within the school system. Most important, the document encourages sport as an ‘entry point’ to community development. In its 2009-2010 Results-Framework Document the MYAS (2009) listed as objectives the universalisation of sport in both rural and urban areas, increased participation among women and the disabled, and the promotion of public private partnership in sports.
Clearly the Indian government recognizes the potential role sport can play in encouraging personal and community development, building tourism, and encouraging indigenous knowledge. Still, taking ambitious plans from concept to completion require significant coordination among multiple stakeholders, vision, determination, and financial commitment. For example, 25 per cent of the government’s 2007 sports budget of Rs. 5 billion was diverted to the hosting of the CWG and away from the promotion of sport at the grassroots level (MYAS, 2007). There is also a challenge in relying on government to define, implement and strategize sport programming. As noted by Akindes & Kirwin (2009) in their analysis of sport in sub-Saharan Africa, political management of sport is mired in outdated and obsolete models. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this proposal to analyze all the successes or failures of Indian sport policy since 1982. However, it is possible that a top-down approach and the many layers of Indian governance and bureaucracy has previously resulted in a diluted and weakened product by the time it reaches those for whom such programs are actually designed.

*The function of elite sport and the mega-event.*

As Nauright (2004) noted, the number of countries who can host such events is limited to a very small percentage of the actual participants. The Commonwealth Games are particularly well placed to examine the links between development and mega-events as the majority of the Commonwealth Games Federation membership are post-colonial or developing states (Black, 2007). As a result, bids to host the CWG frequently employ a “more noble and inspiring vision” (Black, 2007, p. 263) relating to sport’s intangible benefits as well as the material infrastructure that is required of the host. The pursuit of mega-events is an increasingly popular politico-economical strategy for semi-peripheral states and key factors in
local and national development strategies (Black & Van der Westhuizen, 2004; Nauright, 2004). A successful bid can result in large-scale job creation, widespread exposure resulting in increased tourism, and a target for foreign investment. Still, competition to host mega-events occurs on an unequal basis that is worsened by unfavourable positioning in the international economic arena (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 1293). Additionally, the discourse of development tied to such events has favoured hard (physical infrastructure) legacies rather than soft (social and cultural) legacies (Cornelissen, 2009).

The nature of sport mega-events and long-term, sustainable community development are contradictory. In their assessment of the 2006 Torino Olympics, Frey, Iraldo, & Menis (2008) highlighted the unlikelihood that a long-term and sustainable sporting legacy could be fashioned out of an event that is so fleeting yet requires tremendous social and financial resources. Similarly, a 12-day event such as the Commonwealth Games, hosted by a city rather than a state, is not well-placed to spread benefits beyond its immediate boundaries (Frey et al., 2008). A second contradiction is that such events position the majority of stakeholders as consumers rather than participants. In that sense, the sport-media complex, including corporate sponsors, is responsible for selling involvement in the games by way of tickets to an event, purchasing a wide range of event souvenirs, or simply as a viewer of television coverage. As India is a country where millions of people live in poverty, it is unlikely that these are viable options for participation. Third, with regard to stakeholder involvement, the hosting of a mega-event is a highly regulated, controlled affair. The Commonwealth Games Federation, along with the local organizing committee, corporations, and multiple levels of government drive the event according to strict guidelines. Frey et al. (2008) highlighted the need for local stakeholder

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involvement early in the planning process, specifically stakeholders within the sport system, as an important step in ensuring a Games is a source of social capital.

Tying elite sport to development initiatives is part of a broader neo-liberal agenda that privileges cost-effective and accountable investments over the reality of sport at a community level. One example of this is the oft-repeated claim that elite athletes can act as role models, particularly those who win medals on home soil elite Games. There is an assumption that watching female athletes participate necessarily transforms “males and female perceptions of the capacities of girls and women” (Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group [SDPIWG], 2008, p.153). As a result, the purpose of sport shifts away from participation for the sake of it and towards an elite model. Kidd (2008) distinguished between sport development and Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) programs, the former more closely aligned with high performance or elite sport and doing little to increase participation for the broad majority of people.

Governing bodies in sport such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Commonwealth Games Federation, and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) often support smaller, local community organizations. Successful partnerships are well documented. It is not the purpose here to undermine successful social work, but rather to realize and be wary of fundamental differences in the values and philosophy of such partners. Organizations that are seeking to justify their presence and expense in a community are an example of the overall commodification of sport, a likelihood that increases where sport mega-events are hosted. Hayhurst & Frisby (2010) identified several tensions found in such partnerships, not the least of which is the unequal distribution of resources. They suggested
that such relationships are fundamentally asymmetrical where a small NGO is beholden to its wealthier partner in all aspects of program implementation. Second, such partners serve very different memberships: elite athletes in training versus the poor or marginalized. Third, elite sport is tied to a ‘win at all costs’ mentality that contradicts the building of widespread participation at the community level. Finally, sport partnerships are frequently aligned in terms of the North and South, echoing a donor-recipient relationship. As a result, well-intentioned coaches, athletes or administrators from the North who have grown up with commercialized, pro-Olympic forms of sport “fail to understand that for many people, the goal is to exercise as little as possible” (Lawson, 2005, p.143). This has particular relevance to adults and children living in poverty and working manual labour; the idea of having surplus time and energy for sport or play is totally foreign.

*Working within the Indian community.*

Conducting research within the Indian community requires specific modes of conduct and unique considerations. For this reason, participatory research is particularly well situated as it will allow for a more reflexive process that learns from previous research but is easily adapted throughout. Considering the history of previous attempts by government to spur on participation in sport, and their subsequent failure, a participatory approach may reveal underlying issues that continually undermine success. Such threats could include the distribution of power or resources at the local, family, or individual level, and coincide with gender, caste, class, religion or age. Andharia (2007) recognized the importance of a shift in focus towards analysis of social and political structures, and away from the traditional discourse of Indian social work that centered on ‘people in need’. Further, she emphasized the need to
recognize social context; failure to do so will result in interventions having a “myopic and fragmented approach” (Andharia, 2007, p. 106). For these reasons, the participatory approach is ideal and considers the diversity of India’s culture and the many influences and imbalances at the grassroots level.

Any intent to involve girls and women within the research requires careful planning as they occupy a unique position within Indian society. It is not within the capacity of this proposal to consider the multitude of challenges involved, but rather to broadly recognize possible obstacles to conducting successful research, drawing upon similar work. In a patriarchal society, women are particularly vulnerable and face obstacles to participation in both an academic and sport context. Sport itself has a strong male bias at many levels and, in developing countries, is a departure from traditional norms of femininity (Brady, 2005). Some of the challenges include a woman’s role in household decision-making, her responsibilities to the family, and a strict code of conduct within society. For example, a woman’s role within the family changes as she reaches puberty or marries; a daughter-in-law has a different place within the family structure than does a mother-in-law. Previous projects aimed at improving women’s positions have been successful at improving women’s earning capacity but have not challenged their social position (Pardasani, 2005). Pardasani (2005) concluded that despite successful programs, women have been unable to change their personal living environment because such interventions are inflexible, and “implemented from a centralized bureaucratic perspective without sufficient attention paid to the needs of women they aim to assist” (p. 90). In order to address women in a more holistic fashion, it is necessary to consider the impact that individual circumstances have on participants for research, including family, health, poverty, and familial obligations. In her
research related to Canadian women in poverty, Frisby, Reid, & Ponic (2007) concluded “health, recreation, and sport policies were designed in isolation from one another, with little or no input from those encountering structural barriers to participation” (p.121). Removing barriers to participation for Indian women is an immediate priority for successful research.

Working successfully within a community requires input and participation from various stakeholders. In rural communities especially, it is crucial that leadership come from those within the community rather than ‘importing’ people from nearby urban centers who are not invested in the community. Handy & Kassam (2007) recognized the positive effect that role-modeling by peers has on participants. Rather than relying on verbal communication alone, peer role models increased the opportunity to build self-efficacy. Further, community members should be able to relate to role models’ context, including gender, economic, and social class (Handy & Kassam, 2007). In order to facilitate communication, a safe space where participants can discuss and share openly will encourage collective action. Frisby et al. (2007) employed various strategies and dialogue principles to encourage a democratic and participatory working space that included rotating chairing of meetings, establishing guidelines for group communication, and plans to handle inter-group conflict. Basic steps, such as scheduling of activities, must consider social norms enforced by family and community leaders including the local council, elected officials, elders, and family in order to assure them that social, religious, or cultural beliefs are not threatened. Changing societal norms is not a rapid process, and the consequences for social transgressions can be severe and further build barriers to participation for women and girls. As noted by Brady (2005), “enabling girls to enjoy greater freedom of movement while at the same time maintaining their safety and dignity” (p. 42) is a significant
challenge. Possible solutions to this dilemma include timely scheduling of activities during daytime hours, encouraging girls to travel together, and providing public transport where necessary or available. For that reason, gradual changes that offer minimal risk, allowing time for dialogue and the building of support for programs by local leaders, are more likely to be successful than rapid, sweeping changes (SDPIWG, 2008).

Defining vague and ambiguous terms between researchers and participants early in the research process will prevent confusion and clarify goals. The development discourse is littered with catchphrases and buzzwords that have multiple meanings; empowerment is an obvious example. Various interventions claim to ‘empower’ their targets, yet empowerment is a difficult concept to quantify. The World Bank defined (2007) empowerment as the means to “enhance the capacity of an individual or group to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (p. viii), but conceded that the concept is amorphous and instruments and indicators are lacking. Handy & Kassam (2006), in their research on rural Indian NGOs outlined four ‘spheres’ of empowerment - personal, economic, familial, and political. Specific to Indian women, they added two additional spheres to this list: household and interfamilial. Lawson (2005) called for empowerment to be actionable, while Pardasani (2005) and Nicholls (2009) invoked an element of self-determination. Inevitably, any model with an aim to empowering its participants should be conceived and implemented with significant input and in consultation with those whom it would benefit; it should allow participants to “establish their own agenda, make connections between individual and collective experience, and recognize the women’s ability to guide practice” (Pardasani, 2005, p.91).
With regard to models of empowerment, Pardasani (2005) highlighted a human development model and a feminist empowerment model. The appropriate model, whether it focuses on promoting earning capacity, literacy, independence or minimizing violence, should be flexible and responsive to the needs of the community. A grassroots approach will evoke greater commitment on behalf of participants. Encouraging empowerment via participation and ownership involves self-reflection and increases the chances of success. Finally, a gender specific comment on empowerment suggested by Lawson (2005) suggested that individual empowerment was influenced by masculinity, or patriarchy, and was “antithetical to feminist ideals, including women’s ways of knowing, being, and acting in the world” (p. 146).

**Part 2: Outlining action.**

**Method.**

This proposal is situated within PAR, a method that lends itself towards research in community development. The research outcomes will include recommendations and best practices for development policy, future Games legacies initiatives, and serve a monitoring-and-evaluation function for the host organization. The research objectives will be reached through the mutual participation of all participants, taking into account the reflexive nature of participatory research, and supported by a literature review related to sport-in-development, development in India generally, and the impact of sport mega-events upon the host community.

Simonson & Bushaw (2001) highlighted the effectiveness of PAR as an alternative to the professional expert model of community assessment while stressing the value of broad involvement. PAR considers those involved as “active agents” rather than “passive participants”
This approach will challenge traditional models of aid in which resources flow from international, Northern donor organizations to small NGOs in the South, threatening program sustainability. In an organizational hierarchy that includes donor, organization, and peer educator, the implementing partner is often far removed from strategic visioning or consultation (Nicholls, 2009). Specific to sport, PAR has the ability to link local knowledge with the global discourse on sport-in-development as it fundamentally changes the relationships of those involved in the process (Nicholls, 2009). Further, PAR stresses the need to involve the community at all stages of the assessment in order to build ownership and capacity in the people an intervention seeks to address (Kidd, 2008). Munford, Sanders, & Andrew (2003) underscored the element of self-determination as invaluable to the success of the research.

The participatory approach is particularly suited to a cross-cultural context. Previous research (Chambers, 1998; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Munford et al., 2003) emphasized the empowering function of PAR, a dynamic and reflexive approach that replaces domination with facilitation. Ladkin (2004) favoured an inclusive process in which biases and framing of situations are unearthed. Participatory research will uncover the specific needs of the community and inform a reflexive approach towards program design and a sport-for-development intervention. The participatory approach values indigenous knowledge and the expertise that all participants can contribute, and drives research that offers solutions to the particular needs of the community (Blattman, Jensen, & Roman, 2003; Coenen & Khonraad, 2003; Kay, 1990; Kidd & Kral, 2005). It emphasizes reciprocity as a key goal: the results of the research will directly benefit those who participate (Munford et al., 2003). In action research,
the ongoing process is the method, “a self-reflective spiral composed of multiple sequences of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing” (Kidd & Kral, 2005, p. 189). To that end, Coenen & Khonraad (2003) suggested Habermas’ theory of communicative action highlights the importance of establishing mutual trust and open communication between all participants as an essential step in conducting quality research. Senge & Scharmer (2006) recommended participants in collaborative research must be passionate, involved, and bring first-hand experience. Finally, following the recommendation of Munford et al. (2003), the profile of research participants must reflect community diversity, a requirement that will further enhance ownership of the project.

The goal of PAR within a sport-in-development organization is to create knowledge in the form of best practices, manuals, and training that is in a particular social context, rather than based on generalizations from the outside. The host organization will be a local NGO with a mandate for social development—be it education, health, or capacity building—through sport. Coalter (2009) categorized such organizations as ‘plus sport’ — favouring social and health programmes — as opposed to ‘sport plus’ where “social and economic development spin-offs vary considerably” (p. 58). Knowing the goals of the organization has implications for defining and measuring long-term sustainability and short-term success. Attempts to measure success should hinge on the process, rather than qualitative generalizations and superlatives commonly used by international sport organizations. Grandiose statements often reinforce a sense of heterogeneity, that sport-in-development can be easily replicated across contexts. Pawson (2006) suggested that analyzing the process of participation would result in a “process-led,
formative approach” (p. 65) rather than a traditional quantitative approach frequently employed by donors or sponsors seeking to justify investment.

Selection of participants and methodology will be determined through consultation with the host organization and provide ample room for reflection and adaptation. However, a proposed course of action may consider the following. Participants will be drawn from various stakeholders in the local community, including children, parents, municipal officials, traditional leaders, and NGO staff and management. Data will be collected through observation and interviews with stakeholders that elicit the Games’ impact on the local community. For example, are the core values of the CWG synonymous with those of the residents, the host organization, and community groups? Further lines of investigation will include questions of access and the influence of athletes as role models. How is the researched organization, or the local community in general, being included or involved in the Games? Are research participants, particularly youth and young women, inspired by Indian athletes as role models, and why or why not? Data collected through dialogue with participants will highlight the needs of the community to be measured against available resources, support received as a result of hosting the Games, and the goals of the host organization. Investigative strategies—including interviews, questionnaires, and concept maps—will reveal the extent of participation and ownership that participations realize, as well as the role that the CWG play in encouraging or discouraging participation in NGO programming. A longitudinal framework might include pre-Games, mid-Games, and post-Games comparisons. The methodology should strive to elicit the participants’ views on sport and the Games in general.
White et al. (2008) concluded that action research methodologies are “critical to the development process itself” and “an important way to operationalize the concept of participation” (p. 27). As noted by Kidd & Kral (2005), triangulation from multiple perspectives will reveal dissonance between participants’ perceptions of the CWG, the goals of the organization’s programming, and the positive and negative impacts of hosting such an event. Coalter (2009) concluded that monitoring and evaluation must be formative, or “concerned with examining ways of improving and enhancing the implementation and management of interventions” (p. 71). Threats to successful evaluation include lack of resources, base-line data, language, literacy, and research expertise. Faced with a dearth of proof in previous studies, this research will shed light on the extent of community involvement in the hosting of a large-scale sporting event.

**Conclusion**

Until now, the significant body of research on sport-in-development has focused on sub-Saharan Africa; the awarding of the FIFA World Cup to South Africa in 2010 will likely produce further research. Following the recommendation of Levermore & Beacom (2009), this proposal calls for specific and contextual knowledge on sport-in-development in India that considers the social, political, and economic nuances of that community. Through a participatory approach it is possible to ensure that those for whom a program is created are involved in its strategy, implementation, and evaluation. It will build dialogue among partners, reshape power relations, and build local ownership of sport programs that increase opportunities for sustainability. Finally, it would provide evidence of the role that sport mega-events can play in the broader development agenda within India and has implications for future bids from
countries in the global South. Development is not inherent in the hosting of large-scale Games; it is only as successful as political and economic constraints allow.
References


