

Potential of Sport as an Instrument for Social Empowerment

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Abstract: People all over the world use the potential of sport to promote local development. Sport has the potential to support development in many ways. It might have the potential to cause social, political, cultural and economic-development. An important trigger of ‘development through sport’ is empowerment that is caused through sport. Especially social-development can be supported or happens through sport. The aim of this study is to illustrate the potential of sport in local areas of Shiraz, Iran. This research sought to find out ways through which sport can be empowering the local societies. Quantitative method was used to collect and analyze data for the study. The study identified several integration approaches that can be adopted in social empowerment through sport. The findings of this study showed some of the potential of sport in Shiraz, Iran.

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1. Introduction

Sport has the potential to promote the community and social development in many ways. Definitions of the term “sport” is vary. In a development context the definition of sport usually includes a broad and inclusive spectrum of activities suitable to people of all ages and abilities, with an emphasis on the positive values of sport. In 2003, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace defined sport, for the purposes of development, as “all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games.” Sport’s value as a social connector is one of its most powerful development attributes (International Working Group, 2008).

Sport is an inherently social process bringing together players, teams, coaches, volunteers and spectators. Sport creates extensive horizontal webs of relationships at the community level, and vertical links to national governments, sport federations, and international organizations for funding and other forms of support (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2008). The definition of ‘sport’ as a phenomenon of all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental wellbeing and social interaction is the basic understanding of ‘sport’ in this study. Sport signifies individual’s choice to spend his/her discretionary time fulfilling certain interest or needs, or performing a gratifying experience for the sake of wellness or personal development (Babalola & Alayode, 2012). Sport has

the power to empower people. Sport and human existence cannot be separated because movement and competition have always been part and parcel of human existence (Ezomoh & Amasiatu, 2012). However sport is an main instrument for social development but, poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure still remain to be some of the challenges facing the people residing in the local areas for achieving the local development through sport (Obonyo & Fwaya, 2012). Hence, sport has been seen as a key strategy that can be used for achieving local development objectives, which are employment creation, poverty alleviation, economic growth and sustainability (Ramukumba, 2012).

Political-, cultural- and economic-development through sport is dependent on nations whereas generally social-development through sport is independent of nations. Individuals either from Norway, Brazil, China or Iran probably have different motives to do sports but they all receive the same satisfaction. A satisfied man has the power to face life with its positive and negative sides (Hackl, 2009). Generally, developing countries today face greater urbanization challenges than developed countries (Owoeye & Omole, 2012). (Emmanuel, 2012). Hence sport could help to reduce these challenges.

There is no doubt that sport has historically played an important and diverse role in virtually every society (International Working Group, 2008; Women Win, 2008). Sport and physical activity programs provide opportunities for addressing discrimination faced by particular groups of young people. Moreover, many sport and physical activity

programs have taken measures to bring together communities and realize development objectives relating to sexual and reproductive health, access to employment and peace and reconciliation (Women Win, 2008).

2. Research Methods

This study is based on quantitative method to investigate the potential of sport in social empowerment. This study was carried out in local district of Shiraz, Iran during the March and April 2012. The study used survey design, where a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The stability and constituency of the instrument used were tested using the “split-half” method (Basorun & Rotowa, 2012). The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The respondents answered each statement based on five scales. Each statement was situated on a 5-point scale as recommended by Dong-Wan and William (2002) with 1 representing a response of “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree.” The respondents were 250 sport club members in Shiraz. That they were chosen based

on cluster sampling. The respondents were asked to answer these questions which were constructed to gauge their level of empowerment by local sport activities.

The questionnaire was piloted tested to have its contents validated (Emmanuel, 2012). The questionnaire was pre-tested through administration on 15 sport club and a 100% response rate was obtained. Statements for level of participation were tested for their validity using Cronbach’s alpha. Descriptive analysis was employed to determine the level of empowerment by sport activates.

3. Results

This study determines the level of social empowerment through sport activates. Generally, the findings reveal that the level of empowerment in local areas by the sport is low (Mean= 1.28). This means that local sport club and other sport institutions are not involved in the building social empowerment.

Table 1. Mean of indicators of empowerment through sport.

Indicators	Mean
Sport activites are able to effectively preserve local human resources	0.96
Sport activites can effect on local development policy	1.00.
Sport activites control the management of local resources	0.90
Sport activites are able to influence on sport productions market	2.10
Sport activites have impacts on decision-making about local development	0.40
Sport activites are a solutions to root causes of young issues	0.50
Sport activities are able to reduce the social issues related to youth	2.15
Total Mean	0.98

Based on the mean scores of empowerment, it could be concluded that sport activities do not have significant contribution towards building empowerment. For local residence to be effective in social development, they should come together and interact with governing bodies collectively. Local residence should be more involved in sport activities and influence decision-making processes that affect their communities. They need to interact with the other local organizations to develop sport activities among local people. However based on descriptive results, it was revealed that the contribution of local sport activities in building empowerment was low; except for reduce the social issues related to youth.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Sport is done out of different motives and for different reasons. Characters of sport can vary from nation to nation but sport as well has common characteristics. The function of sport and the way it is exercised depends on the respective culture where it is embedded. Sport is not only connected to culture it is also connected to politics. Sport is a political arena. States for example use sport to represent their country or to make welfare-work.

Nowadays churches use sport to promote religion and sportsmen and –women make use of religious practices in conjunction with sport. If we talk about sport we cannot miss the fact that sport is tightly connected to the economic area. Sport is represented in the labor-market, the media, the

production of consumer goods, in tourism and also in marketing- and management sector.

Another important area of sport is health. Health is a motive and reason for doing sports. Sport is also present in different units of society. First, the nation has an impact on sport at the same time sport has an impact on the nation. Second, sport is exercised in groups, communities and in sport clubs. It is not only the group or the community that is represented by its members it is also the sport that represents the group or the community (Hackl, 2009). Doing sports in groups and communities has a certain effect on individuals. Sport brings people together and gives them a common interest. Individuals identify with the members – sport clubs, communities and groups have a social function. Sport clubs have an important effect on collaborative learning environments in school and universities (Pourdavood, 2012)

Additionally, sport clubs have a mediating function not only for politics but also for social aspects of people. Sport has also an impact on the individual in regard to one's personality, one's individualizing and socializing processes, one's self-confidence, psyche and one's identity. Through the findings of this study I could suggest the following suggestions:

-Development sport INGOs in local communities are thought to succeed where governments fail because of their grassroots approaches and local community organization (Murdie & Kakietek, 2012).

-Development sport cooperatives. In this way, other cooperatives sectors' experience such as rural, agricultural and tourism cooperatives can be used to develop and building sport cooperatives (Galluzzo, 2012; Henama, 2012; Ifenkwe, 2012; Munshid & Rosli, 2012).

-Develop the tourism sport. However we do not have such kind of activity in Iran. But we could use other countries' experience (Chen, 2012) to develop sport tourism in Shiraz City, Iran.

-Since local communities often support events and sport activities which they know would be beneficial to them, it is then advised that government and all stake-holders especially the private sector and local people be involved in sport development in their areas and much effort should be made towards sensitizing, informing and educating the local people on the essence of supporting and contributing to the promotion of the sport activities (Ejiofor, Ajake, Oba, & Elechi, 2012).

The findings of this study have implications for the sport activities development in other local communities in the Fars Province as well as for further research to establish the needs for development of sport activities in local communities.

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