

# Locating Sport and Recreation in Rural Community Development

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CRRF, October 13, 2016

# Purpose

- Examine the perceived outcomes of sport and recreation in and for the community.
- Discuss the complexities of using sport and recreation as a means of community development in rural contexts.



# Background

- In rural contexts, sport and recreation are implicated in:
  - Sense of community (Atherly, 2006)
  - Restructuring (Oncescu, 2015)
  - Social Capital (Spaaij, 2009; Tonts, 2005)
  - Physical and Mental Health (Leipert et.al, 2011)

# Methodology

- Participatory action research project with the municipal recreation committee:
  - Semi-structured interviews ( $n=40$ )
  - Participant Observation
    - Policy making, programming, and community events

# Context

- “Bedroom” community of ~3200.
- Amalgamated to incorporate two distinct town centres and the outlying township.
  - Political tensions.
  - Surplus of facilities.
  - Recent developments.



# Results

- Economic/tourism development
- Sense of community/pride
- Social inclusion/networking



# Economic/Tourism Development

“the local area gets an injection of cash that they wouldn’t have otherwise”



# Sense of Community/Pride

“something to  
be proud of”



“ brings people  
together and you know for  
one objective...Roll up the  
sleeves and work  
together”

# Social Inclusion/Networking



“you have a step back...if you're a new person...you have to work yourself in”

# Discussion

- A diversity of outcomes can be perceived from sport and recreation.
- Policy making relies on optimistic expectations and narratives of outcomes with little evaluation.



# Discussion

- Understandings of socio-cultural histories within the community, particularly those based on family-based identities, were prominent in experiences of sport and recreation.
- New technology enhances “evidence,” but not necessarily the capacity to make “evidenced-based” decisions and policy.

# Implications

- Sport and recreation are understood to be important community activities which are enthusiastically endorsed by community members.
- While sport and recreation appear to be an effective means of generative community development outcomes, rural communities may require support in order to strategically, effectively, and inclusively manage these activities.

# Thanks

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