

Understanding approaches to evaluation within the community sport social enterprise

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The increasing number of autonomous third-sector organisations that emerged during a period of austerity (2010-2018) presented a compensatory lifeline for community sport prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Rossi and Jeanes, 2018). However, there are now increasing concerns that many third sector organisations may struggle to recover from the impact of the pandemic (Grix, 2021). The depletion of public resources has continued to create greater competition for funding within community sport. As a result of this changing financial climate, there has been a requirement for flexible, adaptable and autonomous organisational models that must diversify their income as a necessary strategy for survival. This chapter intends to conceptualise and analyse the role of the social enterprise within this narrative and explain how and why specific organisational typologies may have an impact on shaping evidence and approaches to evaluation within sport and leisure in the future. To do this I examine the emergence of the social enterprise through the lens of community sport in England. First, models of social enterprise in community sport in England are introduced and explored. Second, the chapter examines the value each model might place on evaluation based on key characteristics such as governance and funding related to specific models. Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting critical questions regarding the value and purpose of evaluation within the broader socio-political context.

Introduction

The increasing number of third-sector organisations that emerged during a decade of austerity presented a compensatory lifeline for community sport prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Rossi and Jeanes, 2018). However, there are now real concerns that these third sector organisations may also struggle to recover from the pandemic at a time when demand for their services is greater than ever (Grix, 2021). These more financially independent organisations became necessary to fill the gaps left from the closure of sport sections in local authorities where much of the funding for community sport and leisure has traditionally come from (Kenyan, Mason and Rookwood, 2018; Widdop et al, 2018). The threats of further austerity measures in England to reduce the government Covid-19 spending via the withdrawal of public spending, the continuing advocacy of privatisation, and increase in taxes, has led to an ever more precarious environment for community sport and leisure (Grix, 2021). Subsequently, it is likely that in England and in other international contexts that a greater competition for limited public financial resources will continue to result in

organisations having to adapt, reinvent and explore a wider range of income diversity to survive (Widdop et al, 2018). Thus, the global requirement for flexible, adaptable, and most importantly, financially autonomous organisations is likely to remain a necessary mechanism for survival.

The social enterprise has emerged, within this context, as a flexible common-sense approach for organisational survival and sustainability across multiple disciplines and fields previously supported by social provision (Rivera-Santos et al, 2015). In principle social entrepreneurship (SE) aims to achieve social change efficiently and productively through the adoption of sustainable business-like models which includes the reinvestment of some or all profits back into the organisation (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006; Smith et al, 2013). The ability for SE to extend the definition of entrepreneurship into the third sector, by primarily emphasising ethical integrity and maximizing social value, whilst accessing trading income, has led to an unchallenged and smooth transition for SE into different disciplines and fields. Forming a vehicle for an accessible form of 'ethical capitalism' (Newey, 2018; Reid, 2017). Unsurprisingly, there is also a growing trend towards developing the social enterprise in the field of sport and leisure internationally due to its compatibility with the assumed desired needs of a global society (Bjärsholm, 2017; Ratten, 2011). For example, organisations such as Bikes for All, Social Initiative for Development, One World Play Project, Senda, Janji, Love Futbol and Alive and Kicking (McSweeney, 2018) operate across Asia, Africa, Europe and South America respectively. These organisations include sport manufacturers which produce ethical products and sport development organisations which aim to use sport and physical activity as a tool to address social issues related to health, education and gender inequalities.

This chapter intends to clarify and analyse the role of the social enterprise and explain how and why its emergence may have an impact on shaping evidence and approaches to evaluation within sport and leisure in the future. This is achieved by exploring the emergence of the social enterprise through a case study of community sport in England. According to McSweeney (2018), acknowledging the specific geopolitical environment within which social entrepreneurial processes shape sport and leisure is a necessary starting point. This will help to facilitate a more rigorous understanding of what we are seeing in practice in different contexts. Subsequently, unless stated otherwise, SE is defined, conceptualized and applied within an English context. The importance of context rests on a desire to avoid under theorization and conceptual stretching (Peterson and Schenker, 2018, Hazenberg et al, 2016). It is anticipated that this chapter will encourage reflection and research into different geopolitical contexts where social enterprises operate in sport and leisure.

To achieve the intentions of this chapter, the chapter will outline the different models of social enterprise that exist within community sport in England. This will provide the platform for considering how each model of social enterprise may consider evaluation relative to key characteristics such as their legal form, main goal, main resources and type of governance. This will ultimately help to understand what evidence might look like, who has autonomy in how it is captured, what form of evaluation each model might take and for what purpose would evaluation be carried out? Funding is a key determinant of what evaluation looks like and therefore the type of governance is a vital consideration when looking at the social enterprise in sport and leisure (Spear et al, 2018). The chapter will conclude with some critical questions regarding the value of evaluation within a broader socio-political context which fails to look outside the parameters of economic evaluation. Indeed, concerns related to the extent to which evaluation as a method for learning is superseded by a set of ideas that advocates efficiency, productivity, short-termism and self-assessment based on performance in the market, are not new debates (Coakley, 2011; Green, 2009). To be sure such discussions are vital when considering the lack of heterogeneous methods of evaluation within an increasingly marketized field of community sport. In the next section the variety of social enterprises located in community sport within England will be outlined and examples will be used to accentuate this.

Models of social enterprise in community sport in England

Spear et al, (2018) identify four main social enterprise models in England which are divided between third sector (non-profit) and non-third (for profit) sectors. There are three third sector models of SE; the socially orientated co-operative, trading charity and community interest company. The fourth model of social enterprise, the 'for profit', is positioned in the private sector and very little is known about the presence of this model of social enterprise in broader SE literature, let alone sport and leisure literature (Sugden, 2015; Schulenkorf, 2017; Spear et al, 2018). Despite social enterprises becoming increasingly responsible for addressing social problems across a wide range of disciplines and fields due to their flexible and adaptable characteristics (Reid, 2017), there remains a lack of conceptual clarity and critical examination of how social enterprises fit into community sport and leisure. At the same time there has been a growth in the adoption of social entrepreneurial models that embrace marketized and business-like approaches as a necessary strategy to remain sustainable. The emergence of the social enterprise in community sport in England can be seen, but it is not understood and consequently under-examined in research.

Trading Charity

The trading charity is the most prevalent third sector model of social enterprise in sport. The main legal forms of the trading charity include companies limited by guarantee (CLG) and charitable incorporated organisations (CIO). The main goal of charitable organisations is public benefit and their main resources can come from public contracts, private market income, plus subsidies producing a mixed income. In relation to governance, there is some level of democracy with members being the beneficiaries. What differentiates a charity from a trading charity is its access to income; a charity does not have access to trading income, whilst a trading or independent charity does. As public contracts have become less available, there has been a natural shift towards sport charities (previously funded solely by public contracts, grants and donations) becoming more market orientated through the sales of products and services. Alongside this, trading charities in England get some tax exemptions from corporation tax, capital gains tax and local business taxes (Spear et al, 2018). In recent years, questions concerning registered charities' very close links to commercial business have been voiced, with some charities providing shareholders with personal financial gain. The trading charity tends to be the largest model of social enterprise by organisational size (based on number of employees and income). In addition, trading charities in sport tend to rely on a voluntary workforce, more so than any other model of social enterprise. Community sport organisations which fit the criteria of a trading charity includes; Northamptonshire Sport (Active Partnership) which is responsible for getting more people physically active or participating in sport within the county of Northamptonshire. In addition, organisations such as Snow Camp; School of Hard Knocks; and Street Games attempt to use sport and physical activity as a tool to address social issues related to unemployment, crime and education respectively.

Community Interest Company

The community interest company is another third sector model of social enterprise present in community sport in England. It's main legal forms include community interest company (CIC), company limited by guarantee (CLG) and company limited by shares (CLG). In contrast to the trading charity where the main goal is public benefit, the CIC's main goal is a narrower focus on the community. Subsequently, CIC's tend to have more of a focus on locality and are smaller in size than the trading charity with a much smaller workforce. In contrast to the trading charity which has more of a mixed income, the CIC's main resource is market income through sales of products and goods. Despite this, the CIC is still able to apply for public contracts and grants, whilst accessing donations. Due to its community focus it would appear such a model requires excellent engagement with locality as this is where it

delivers services and/ or sells its products and receives its trading income. Significantly, in relation to governance, this model can be member or entrepreneur controlled. This model generally has less democratic control when compared to the trading charity. An example of a sporting organisation which aligns to the criteria based on these processes in England includes Switch Up CIC which is centrally controlled by an individual entrepreneur. Switch It Up CIC attempts to use boxing to empower young people, children and young adults to break the cycle of crime in the respective locality of Nottingham.

Socially Orientated Cooperative

The socially orientated cooperative is the final third sector model of social enterprise. The main legal forms of the socially orientated cooperative are the industrial and provident society (I&PS) and company limited by guarantee (CLG). In contrast to the trading charity and CIC, the main goal of the socially orientated cooperative is mutual and general interest. In practice this creates ambiguity with Spear (2015) suggesting that if a co-operative emphasises mutual benefit, its members are not disadvantaged, and there is little wider community or public benefit, then it is difficult to consider that this type of co-operative has a social purpose. On the other hand, a cooperative which is owned by disadvantaged members of the community and makes decisions in the needs of its key stakeholders clearly does have a social purpose. Similarly, to the CIC, the socially orientated cooperative's main resource is market income, and this is supported by public contracts and grants (Spear et al, 2018). A significant difference between the CIC, trading charity and socially orientated cooperative is the latter's governance being the most democratic with the members being beneficiaries. According to Roy and Hazenberg, (2019), the Scottish ecosystem is generally more welcoming to collectively owned social models of social enterprise such as the socially orientated cooperative, whereas in England the ecosystem is more favourable of individualistic models. The ideological shift towards placing emphasis on the individual rather than the collective democracy appears to be a logical explanation to which models of social enterprise are dominant in community sport in England (Nicholls, 2010; Reid, 2017), however research into the social enterprise in community sport remains in its infancy and significantly more focused research is required in this area. Likewise, further research is required to see whether northern England, with its history of cooperatives and traditionally left leaning politics has closer links to the Scottish models than the English models in community sport (Roy and Hazenberg, 2019). Whilst the current English socio-political landscape prioritises the notion that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills (Teasdale, 2012), the socially orientated

cooperative model is more suited to an environment where informal groups have more capacity and opportunities to share a collective vision as opposed to specific legal or formal organisation.

For Profit

The for profit social enterprise is a non-third sector model. Its main legal forms can be subcategorised into companies limited by shares (CLS), sole traders, partnerships or B-Corps. Significantly, when compared to third sector models, the for profit social enterprise has private (profit) and general interest as its main goals (Spear et al, 2018). Due to the UK's very open definition and business orientated set of criteria for defining a social enterprise, there is muddy water between the notion that both social and economic logics can be collective main goals. This model of social enterprise has been labelled as the 'elephant in the room' (Spear et al, 2018, pp,31). For example, the extent to which a social outcome (impact) and economic outcome (financial return) can ever have an equal level of priority is questioned. There continues to be much debate about whether an organisation can be categorised as a for profit social enterprise and the convolutedness between terms such as for profit social enterprise, social business and corporate social responsibility opens a debate which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Unlike any other model of social enterprise, the for-profit relies on market income for its revenue and is governed and controlled by the entrepreneur. With limited empirical research into this model of social enterprise, it is difficult to scope the prevalence of this model in sport and leisure at this moment in time (Spear, 2015; 2018).

Hybridity

Although this overview provides a breakdown of the main models of social enterprise and explains their unique characteristics, it must be stated that levels of hybridity across the models of social enterprise are present and thus organisations are adaptable to change with the external environment and may therefore be difficult to identify (Battiliana and Lee, 2014). This is perhaps the point, that the socio-political landscape rewards fluid, adaptable and flexible organisational models which can shift and transform with the ever-changing environment to maximise income diversity (Bruneel et al, 2016; Battiliana and Lee, 2014). On the other hand, whether the trend towards the hybrid social enterprise represents innovation, creativity and diversity (heterogeneity) or reflects a growing level of sameness (organisational homogeneity) is a key question to consider in relation to evaluation. The

chapter now examines the value each model might place on evaluation. In a competitive environment, community sport is currently being centrally steered by government and Sport England (2021) to recover and reinvent itself, connect communities, create positive experiences for children and young people, connect with health and wellbeing and enable active environments. The ability to address long term societal inequalities through a culture of learning and understanding has been advocated by Sport England and this could create a space for different approaches to evaluation. Equally the latest strategy continues to broaden the scope of who Sport England are willing to work with and opens the door for non-traditional organisations to operate in the field (Dowling, 2021).

Evaluation and the community sport social enterprise

With an emphasis on community sport to evidence social outcomes (Sport England, 2021), there have been calls for more innovative and rigorous approaches to understand how social outcomes have been achieved, under what circumstances this may have taken place, and how and why this may be the case (Harris, 2018; Kay, 2012; Coalter, 2007, 2010, 2013; Nichols et al, 2010). At the same time, economic evaluation and the advocacy of market-based principles in the form of economisation, calculation, measurement and value have become synonymous with the right way to evidence social impact in community sport.

Davies (2016) claims that economic evaluation has become so powerful that it has been able to replace political judgement due to market liberalism becoming common sense ideology across governmental parties (Somers, 2013). Consequently, this focus ensures that the heterogeneity of evaluation remains distinctly absent in practice due to successive and cross-party governments ideological fixation on the market and economic outputs (Davies, 2016). Moreover, it could be naïve to assume this thinking will not continue to shape the value, purpose and meaning of how and why evidence is captured and understood in accordance with evaluating community sport's social outcomes in the future due to policies relationship with practice (Smith, 2018)

Before the chapter examines how the different models of social enterprise may evidence social outcomes, it is important to elaborate on the process of collecting evidence. The terms 'monitoring' and 'evaluation' are sometimes conflated which invariably has implications for disentangling what each term refers to (Harris, 2018). This chapter uses Gasper's, (2000) conceptualisation of evaluation, as a process which highlights whether and how the objectives of programmes are being met (or not) and how the programme is working at different levels (or not), with the intended purpose of 'learning lessons' to make practice

better. This stands in contrast to monitoring which is defined as a process to keep track of what is happening, and check progress being made towards achieving objectives (Levermore, 2011). In short, whilst evaluation focuses on understanding outcomes and impact over a longer period, monitoring conceptualises evidence as something which tracks or proves something works in relation to outputs across a shorter period. As Adams and Harris (2014) assert, much of the work that practitioners undertake in sport is monitoring opposed to evaluation. In this respect, whilst the notion of using performance indicators as a method of evidencing social outcomes and impact is contested, it is widely applied in practice.

Hunter et al, (2016) suggest that it is often due to the lack of expertise and capacity within small and medium-sized organisations to sufficiently evidence their value and impact which leads to a lack of robust methods of M&E. However, it is noteworthy that larger organisations such as the trading charity also often lack this expertise and generally rely on external evaluators as experts, to assess their merit through technocratic approaches (Adams and Harris, 2014). Therefore, it cannot be ignored that the limited desire from public and private funders (who have heavily shifted towards competitive commissioning and contract-based models of funding), to financially support evaluation, could continue to shape the negative perceptions and value placed on evaluation at an agency level (Harris and Adams 2016; Smith and Leech 2010).

Level of governance and funding in shaping evaluation

Undoubtedly the growing dependency on trading income to subsidise public contracts and grants is significant in providing an insight into what evidence and evaluation in community sport might look like in the future (Bruin, 2019). The differing levels of governance within each model of social enterprise tends to mean that the level of autonomy organisations have in shaping what evidence looks like will be reduced. Indeed, much of the literature centred on evidence in community sport, acknowledges (Nichols et al, 2010, Harris and Adams 2014) that the ideological culture driving interpretations of evidence has led to practitioner subjugation and unequal power dynamics which have limited the capacity of practitioners to conduct evaluation work and accept under-theorised collaborative approaches to evaluation (Shula et al, 2016).

Optimistically, with the move towards autonomous funding and self-sustainability, SE's emergence in community sport may provide a framework for organisations to challenge hegemonic approaches towards evaluation. This is dependent on the opportunity for community sport organisations to detach themselves from government ideology and a dependency on policies closely related to funding (Smith et al, 2018, Adams and Harris,

2014). In particular the governance of the for-profit model of social enterprise shows how evaluative approaches have the potential to move beyond constraints imposed by power dynamics and bureaucratic barriers to a focus on the individual social entrepreneur (Dey and Steyaert 2016; Scott and Teasdale, 2012).

Whilst it is likely that the non-third sector for profit model of social enterprise will have more freedom due to its sole funding from trading income, it is likely that the third sector trading charity, community interest company and socially orientated cooperative will have differing levels of autonomy based on the percentage of trading income to public contracts and grants ratio (Spear et al, 2018). Hunter et al, (2016) and Proulx, Hager and Klein, (2014) emphasise that the trading charity is dominating the market. Due to the continued growth of trading charities, if funding continues to be based on social outputs, this could continue to result in increasing funding scarcity for small and medium-sized third sector models such as the community interest company and the socially orientated cooperative (Walker and Hayton, 2018; Ahonen and Savolainen, 2018).

Although one perspective is that funding should be prioritised for those organisations who are committed to providing evidence for their programmes, products and services that deliver wider public social impact, such as trading charities (Kay, 2012). With evidence-based approaches towards social impact tending to be conceptualised as 'proving' something works through hard facts as indicators (Smith and Leach, 2010). In practice this means that power remains with larger models of social enterprise that can attract funding due to the wider social impact they can deliver. Therefore, opportunities to evaluate and understand how and why social impact has (or has not) been achieved across different levels is implicitly discouraged due to such approaches being naturally subjective, expensive, time consuming, and ultimately antithetical to the ideological agenda (Levermore, 2011). Without an emphasis on rigour to understand outcomes and impact across different levels, alongside financial support, there is a threat that community sport social enterprises that have access to limited public funds will do everything they can to jump through hoops to fit the agenda of the funder to remain sustainable. Such analysis explains how a desire to conduct meaningful evaluation which understands the effects of an intervention could be further challenged in an immediate post Covid-19 society. particularly if the purpose of evaluation becomes less about the strategy 'to remain sustainable' in the face of diminishing public funds and more about looking good for potential funding organisations.

Subsequently, it would be uncritical to think that due to increased organisational autonomy, that there would be a direct impact of 'better' evaluative practice. Indeed, it would appear that many organisations are involuntarily pushed towards the 'freedom' of SE by the market

due to the scarcity of public contracts and without the necessary tools and capacity to learn about, and therefore conduct, rigorous evaluation (Walker and Hayton, 2018). Furthermore, the hybridity of the workforce provides another point of contention with many organisations relying on the good will of volunteers as a strategy to cut costs and maximising profits to reinvest in the organisation (Spear et al, 2018). Thus, relying on a volunteer workforce to conduct evaluation is not only unprofessional, but also arguably, an ethical issue if volunteers are not trained to deliver such practice (Bjarsholm et al, 2018). Irrespective, it cannot be ignored that becoming a specific model of social enterprise may indeed be a strategy of necessity, rather than an outcome of desire moving forward.

Powell et al (2019) identify three conditions that enable social enterprises to be sustainable and provide evidence of social purpose whilst also being financially viable. First, organisations use a range of income streams; second, there is a hybrid workforce made up of skilled workers, paid employees and volunteers, and third, delivering a quality service. Although it may be assumed that evaluation will need to play a key part in delivering social quality and customer service-level, this chapter suggests this assumption should be approached with caution. Ultimately, whether the growing dependency on trading income as a method of organisational sustainability is compatible with operational spend to finance evaluation to determine social impact, is at best, debatable. For example, why spend large sums of money on evaluation over a number of years to simply inform you that your programme is having limited social impact? Is it not much more efficient to spend money on marketing and then let the market decide whether your programme, products or services deliver on social impact through the measurement of sales?

Ultimately the challenge sport social enterprises face in balancing social and economic objectives is evident through practice, i.e. achieving commercial sustainability, meeting the needs of 'trading' customers, as well as fulfilling social objectives (Powell, Gillet and Doherty, 2019). Within the current socio-political context and in a post Covid-19 society, it is likely that some community sport social enterprise models will prove to be more sustainable than others, and surely it will be the case that income diversity and organisational hybridity will continue to play a key role.

Conclusion

With the power that funders and policy makers have in determining what evidence looks like (Adams and Harris, 2014), the dominant ideology has, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse which is more suited to monitoring outputs through practices of efficiency,

productivity, short termism and self-assessment (Coakley, 2011; Green, 2009) as opposed to evidencing longer term social impact through effectiveness, merit and worth (Patton, 1990; Scriven, 1991). This chapter has provided some insight into both the opportunities that social enterprises provide, but also the threats faced by the sport field as more 'freedom' is given to certain organisations to shape what evidence and evaluation looks like. However, what cannot be contested is that the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to shape practice. Optimistically this may lead to an opportunity for community sport social enterprises to change the hegemonic evidence discourse and rewrite the framework of what evidence looks like due to higher levels of autonomy. Pessimistically, there is also a threat that evaluation as a process to help understand and evidence social impact will be completely abandoned, and in its place market driven outputs will be the key performance indicator as an objective measure of social impact. It is hoped that this chapter has offered a reflective and critical assessment of the potential future of evaluation in community sport and raises caution of a new evaluation evangelism with the increasing marketisation of the field. A critical sociological perspective suggests that community sport can never achieve structural change by tackling (and profiting from) the effects of inequality rather than addressing the causes (Garrow and Hasenfeld, 2014). The continued marketisation of community sport through SE approaches asks real questions about the need for a variety of evaluation methods and without regulation it might be too idealistic to expect organisations to do anything but prove their programme, product or service works.

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