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## Who Owns Sport?

### 1. Aim of the research/project

This paper interrogates of sport ownership, and seeks to uncover some of the tensions, dilemmas and controversies enmeshed within this concept. In doing so we outline how ownership of, in and through sport has significant impact on the idea, practices and outcomes of sport for managers and practitioners and participants.

#### Objectives

To establish how the idea of ownership can be understood in a variety of sport contexts

To clarify and categorise the complexities of conceptualising ownership between/amongst individuals, organisations and the social institution of sport itself

To establish the impact of ownership on the outcomes of sport

### 2. Theoretical background

Ownership within and of the sport domain is an under-theorised and overly taken-for-granted concept that is often overlooked as having value for the study of sport and applied within sport management. Ownership in general is a right constituted relationship, or set of relationships, between persons with respect to things; ensuring that connotations are multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary. Sport products can be owned as commodities by consumers as well as producers, for example sport apparel is owned by individuals perhaps because of fan allegiance, but is also owned in the business sense as commercial production from broader ownership of property rights (Hassan and Hamil, 2011, p.1).

Contemporary perceptions of ownership are problematic, open to interpretation and change over time. Most post-industrial sport forms suffer from contentious questions of ownership, performance and meaning ((Martin and Berry, 1974; Alison, 2001; Passy, 2009). Questions, which tend to be uni-disciplinary and narrow, focused on a particular concern, such as the strength of grassroots programmes or the monopoly power of players (Hassan and Hamil, 2011). We contend that this is indicative of the dominant view of sport ownership which has ritualised research to the extent that it is at best used contextually; occasionally descriptively, but rarely analytically.

Sport is a cultural product and its management through a lens of ownership has only really been problematized through fictional representations that portray owning sport as impacting on power and control, individualism and collectivism, and corporatism and entrepreneurialism. When considering who owns sport it is necessary to question transmission processes of property rights in and for sport, and the contexts and mechanisms that enable transference to occur. This is increasingly important for

sport managers who may have to operationalise newly created and legitimised sports for particular purposes. We contend that the key contexts of globalisation, a dominant neoliberal consensus and commercialising and commodifying pressures ensure that sport managers must be reflexively engaged and conceptually savvy to be able to respond effectively.

In this paper we present a conceptual framework that transcends disciplinary boundaries and rigidities to analyse who owns sport, what this means for participants and ultimately how this can then be transposed to developing sound management practice. At its heart is the philosophical question of ownership around which rules, rights, duties, value, universalism and relativism swirl as we structure understandings of who owns.

### 3. Discussion, implications and conclusions

It is clear that ownership of sport is problematic. Sport cannot be thought of as a single homogenous entity. We examine a number of positions concerned with owning sport and apply those positions to reflections on sport management in public, private and voluntary domains. These positions (e.g. philosophical, historical, political, commercial and corporate) are contested and are in many cases antithetical and often portrayed in dualistic terms e.g. community versus commercial ownership (Andrews, 2013).

This conceptual paper juxtaposes concepts of ownership to make sense of the place, role, meaning and function of sport. Whilst it may be simple to define ownership (but problematic), Locke's point that ownership creates webs of rights and duties ensures that meaning and interpretation will vary depending on perspective employed (e.g. political and/or economic and/or sociological). Contemporary literature does not consider the wide ranging and far reaching impact of the meaning of ownership in modern sport. The conceptual model we present clarifies relationships and contexts and is innovative in problematizing a taken for granted idea in sport management

In an era where market forces have become predominant in the production and consumption of sport forms, we ask the question who owns sport?; and address it with scholarly intent to reveal some of the deep seated issues that bedevil sport now and are likely to persist into the future.

### 4. References

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