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Conceptualising Sustainability in Sports Development

Abstract

Sustainability is a concept that has become ubiquitous in sports development policy and practice. Despite this ubiquity, there remains a lack of clarity in practical understandings of the concept of sustainability. Moreover, research on sport and sustainability is limited and lacks theoretical underpinning. This paper addresses these problems by proposing frameworks that can be used to examine and understand sustainability in sports development. In particular, two frameworks are developed through synthesising sustainability concepts presented in the literature on health programmes and adapting them to sports development through consideration of recent policies and programmes. The first framework addresses definitional issues by identifying four forms of sustainability that may be addressed by sports development programmes, namely individual, community, organisational and institutional sustainability. The second framework allows classification of processes that affect sustainability according to dimensions that concern the level of control held by agencies responsible for sports development sustainability and the level of integration between processes to achieve desired sports development outcomes and processes to achieve sustainability. Presentation of a case study of sustainability in the New Opportunities for PE and Sport Activities programme in Scotland enables discussion of the applicability of the frameworks to sports development as

well as identification of implications that are derived from application of the frameworks. As a result, the conclusions concern the relationships between different forms of sustainability and the effectiveness of sports development programmes, the types of processes that affect different forms of sustainability and identify implications for future research on sports development sustainability.

Key words: long-term change, sports policy, sustainability frameworks, health development

Introduction

Sustainability is a key issue in sports development policy and practice in the United Kingdom. Terms such as 'sustainable' and 'sustainability' are used liberally throughout national sports strategies, such as 'Reaching Higher' in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2007) and 'Game Plan' in England (DCMS / Strategy Unit, 2002). It is also asserted that sustainability 'underpins' planning for the 2012 Olympic Games (LOCOG, 2006). Given this focus, it is important that both academics and practitioners with an interest in sports development have a clear understanding of sustainability and how it may be achieved.

However, rather than providing clarity, policies related to sports development are characterised by the diverse meanings ascribed to the term sustainability. For example, in the 'Reaching Higher' (Scottish

Executive, 2007) strategy, sustainability is referred to in general terms ('we need strong foundations to underpin and sustain change', p24), in terms of individual change ('encouraging and sustaining young people's involvement and development in sport', p2), in organisational terms ('build and sustain a sporting infrastructure', p24) and in environmental terms ('promoting sustainable forms of transport', p8). Similar examples can be found in other sport policy documents. The variety of language used suggests that sustainability is, in definitional terms, an amorphous concept and, as a result, little policy guidance is commonly provided as to how it should be addressed or achieved in sports development practice.

Academic literature on sport does little to clarify the concept of sustainability. There are few systematic studies of the sustainability of sports development programmes. Of those studies available, Lawson (2005) focuses on the sustainability of social and human development through sport while Dowda et al. (2005) examine the sustained usage of the resources provided through a physical education programme. More generally, Kirk (2004) recognises that there is a lack of research that examines the sustainability of young people's participation in sport. These contributions typify the small number of studies of sports development programmes to consider sustainability in that they examine specific aspects of sustainability rather than offering guidance as to how the concept could be considered, or addressed, in its entirety.

As a result, it is necessary to turn to other academic domains to provide a theoretical underpinning for the study of sustainability in sports development. There is a substantial literature available on sustainable development generally and in particular policy areas. Lamberton (2005) identifies that the sustainability literature generally focuses on a combination of ecological, economic and social concerns. A common position in the literature is one in which 'sustainability is a notion that reimagines economy and society against some notion of environment' (Luke, 2005, p231). This focus can be identified in policy areas that are similar to sports development. For example, Chernushecko (2001) addresses the nexus between economic and environmental sustainability in sports facility management, as do Videira et al. (2006) in sports tourism. However, economic and environmental issues are not often central to the policy and practice of sports development and so these approaches are not overly suited to the study of sustainability in this context. Although there is a focus on social aspects of sustainability in other policy fields, often narrow definitions of the concept are implicitly or explicitly used (e.g. Fullan (2005) in education; Kelly, Caputo & Jamieson (2005) in crime prevention). Again, given the wide variety of ways in which the term sustainability is used in sport policy, narrow definitions of the concept are unlikely to suffice for the study of sustainability in sports development.

The literature on health programmes offers a potential solution to the problems of identifying suitable frameworks that can be utilised to

consider sports development sustainability. As in other academic domains, literature on sustainability of health programmes is fragmented (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998; Pluye et al., 2005). However, syntheses of this literature have produced conceptual frameworks related to two separate but connected aspects of sustainability of health programmes. Firstly, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998), Swerissen & Crisp (2004) and Sarriot et al. (2004) all suggest similar categorisations of alternative definitions of sustainability. Secondly, and moving beyond definitional considerations, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and Pluye et al. (2005) both propose different classifications of processes and factors affecting sustainability. As many similarities exist between the health programmes considered by these authors and sports development programmes, for example in the types of desired outcomes and the service-based nature of provision, it is suggested that these two types of conceptual framework may have utility in examining sustainability in sports development.

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to develop, from the concepts in the health literature, frameworks that are applicable to sustainability in sports development. These frameworks, presented in the following two sections of the paper, will follow the health literature in addressing forms and processes affecting sustainability in sports development respectively. The development of each of the frameworks will be approached in a similar manner, firstly, examining and synthesising the concepts identified in the health literature and,

subsequently, utilising examples from literature on sports development programmes to examine how these concepts could be adapted to make them applicable to the types of services that are the focus of the paper. The fourth section of the paper then begins to examine the utility of the suggested frameworks through its application to one particular sports development programme in Scotland: the New Opportunities for PE and Sport Activities programme. This application is not intended to make an assessment of sustainability of the programme per se, rather it is used to highlight in greater depth issues relevant to research and practice regarding sustainability that may arise from utilisation of the proposed frameworks. These issues are then taken forward into the concluding section of the paper which considers the overall utility of the frameworks proposed and the work that is still required to gain a greater understanding of sustainability in sports development.

Defining Sustainability

A categorical definition of sustainability is no less elusive in the health literature than in the sport literature. For example, in identifying six different definitions utilised in studies of health programmes, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998, p91) demonstrate that 'little consensus exists in the literature on the conceptual and operation definitions of sustainability'. For this reason, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) present a conceptual framework based on three alternative 'perspectives' on sustainability, Swerissen & Crisp (2004) identify four different 'levels of social

organisation' at which change can be sustained and Sarriot et al. (2004), in their Child Survival Sustainability Assessment (CSSA) framework, categorise six components of sustainability within three separate dimension. The similarities between these categorisations enable them to be synthesised into a framework comprising of four forms[1] of sustainability: individual, community, organisational and institutional. By using examples of sports development policy and practice, the concepts in health literature will be further refined to adapt the framework into one that is applicable to sustainability in sports development.

Individual Sustainability

A common form of sustainability included, either as a separate element or within other elements, in each of the categorisations suggested by Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998), Swerissen & Crisp (2004) and Sarriot et al. (2004) is the maintenance of health outcomes for the individual beneficiaries of any programme. Therefore, the definitional framework for sustainability in sports development needs to include a form of individual sustainability. However, different sports development programmes may provide, or aim to provide, a variety of different outcomes for their individual beneficiaries. The examples of the Active Sports and Positive Futures programmes in England demonstrate the variety of aspirations for continued individual benefits that exist within and across different sports development programmes. With regard to the goals of the Active Sports programme, an evaluation report identified that it was desirable

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not only to sustain involvement of individuals in sports clubs but also levels of individual performance in sport (KKP, 2005). Alternatively, in the Positive Futures programme there was a focus on entirely different individual outcomes with the programme evaluation highlighting a desire to 'sustain the progression of the participant's journey' defined in relation to personal and social development (Crabbe, 2006, p7).

These diverse programmatic outcomes highlight the need for a flexible conception of the maintenance of individual outcomes in order for it to be applicable to a range of sports development programmes. Therefore, the first form of sustainability in the framework for sports development is defined as:

> *Individual Sustainability: longer-term changes in individuals' attitudes, aptitudes and / or behaviour through involvement with the sports development programme.*

Community Sustainability

Besides individual outcomes, each of the three categorisations of sustainability include aspects of community-based change, although somewhat different conceptualisations are included in each case. Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone's (1998) third perspective on sustainability relates to community capacity which could include access to knowledge, skills and resources. To this perspective, Sarriot et al. (2004) also add

cultural acceptance of change and social cohesion. Although their definition lacks precision, Swerissen & Crisp (2004) additionally identify that community-level sustainability may comprise of changes in relationships between community-based organisations and between these organisations and community members.

Aspects of community development are commonly the focus, or an element, of sports programmes. In general, Coalter (2002) suggests that social inclusion can be addressed by sports development programmes which seek long-term changes in community ownership and awareness. More specifically, sports development planning in the 2012 Olympic bid stage identified the potential of the Games to have a 'long-term legacy' in terms of strengthening community capacity, in particular within local sports clubs (Five Olympic Boroughs, undated). Commonly, sports development programmes that are similarly aligned seek to develop the skills of community members, a facet again identified in the Positive Futures programme which included an aim to ensure that 'skills vital to the long term health of the community are developed' (Crime Concern, 2006, p12). Alternatively, the increasing focus on partnerships and networks in sports development policy and practice (Houlihan & Lindsey, forthcoming) links to Swerissen & Crisp's (2004) conception of the sustainability of community-level relationships. However, it is important to relate sustainability to the longevity, or desired longevity, of these arrangements rather than merely their establishment. Examples of this type of sustainability are again to be found in the Positive Futures

programme, in which their was an aspiration to 'help projects to develop long-term partnerships' (Crime Concern, 2006, p26), and in the Cricket Foundation's *Chance to shine* programme in which a sustainable element was the networks developed, in specific locations, between schools and clubs (Jeanes et al., 2007).

As a result of the slightly different conceptions of long-term change within communities, both in the health literature and in sports development policy and practice, a broad definition is required within the proposed definitional framework:

> *Community Sustainability: maintenance of changes in the community in which the sports development programme is delivered.*

To enhance its flexibility, this definition also leaves open the possibility that communities could be interpreted geographically, culturally (in the case of a sporting community) or organisationally (in the case of a community of agencies).

Organisational Sustainability

Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998), Swerissen & Crisp (2004) and Sarriot et al. (2004) all include organisational dimensions in their categorisations of sustainability. Sarriot et al. (2004) perhaps provide the greatest degree

of clarity in identifying capacity and viability as two separate, yet overlapping, components of organisational sustainability. In this distinction, capacity relates to the ability of the organisation to maintain service delivery, while viability pertains to the financial and other forms of support required to do so. Alternatively, Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and Swerissen & Crisp (2004) suggest that organisational sustainability relates to the degree to which a given programme or practice is adopted within the organisation in question.

These conceptualisations of organisational sustainability are certainly pertinent to sports development programmes. As with other forms of sustainability, the policy documents for the Positive Futures programme explicitly state goals of sustaining both organisational capacity and viability. These goals are demonstrated respectively in the statements that identify a need to develop, amongst organisations involved in the programme, 'a long term commitment to sustaining and growing their competence in this area of work' whilst also seeking to 'ensure that projects initiated … are sustained long after their initial funding streams cease' (Home Office, 2003, p22 & p19). A similar focus on organisational viability is demonstrated in one of the nine outcomes that were determined for Sports Action Zones: 'attracting additional funds, and making better use of existing funds, to … develop and sustain new opportunities' (Sport England, 2001, p11).

While these examples demonstrate that conceptions of organisational sustainability are generally applicable to sport development, the perspective commonly adopted in the health literature, that the organisations responsible for sustainability differ from those within which sustainability is to be achieved, means that care is required in suggesting a sports development-specific definition. For some sports development organisations, such as Sports Action Zones, responsibility for sustaining programmes resides with the delivery organisation itself. In other programmes, as suggested by the second quote regarding Positive Futures presented in the previous paragraph, the delivery agency may not be solely responsible for its own organisational sustainability. As a result of these slightly different perspectives, the following definition of organisational sustainability provides clarity as to the organisation to which it refers:

Organisational sustainability: the maintenance or expansion of sports development programmes by the organisation responsible for their delivery

This definition is close to that provided by Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998). As a definition, it also includes sufficient flexibility to encompass both organisational viability and capacity components suggested by Sarriot et al. (2004) as well as the different perspectives identified above in the literature on sports development programmes.

Institutional Sustainability

A final aspect of sustainability identified by both Sarriot et al. (2004) and Swerissen & Crisp (2004) relates to changes in the wider institutional and policy context in which programmes are situated. For Swerissen & Crisp (2004, p127), institutional change relates to 'achieving major policy change, redistribution of resources, and the establishment or reform of legislation or regulation'. To these types of political and economic change, Sarriot et al. (2004, p28) add changes in 'environmental/ecological conditions and [the] human development situation'. It should be noted that, with respect to the definitional framework being suggested for sports development sustainability, human development has already been encapsulated in the definition of individual sustainability.

Nevertheless, changes of the nature described by Sarriot et al. (2004) and Swerissen & Crisp (2004) can be identified in documents associated with sports development programmes. In the context of elite sport, UK Sport (2006, p21) seeks to utilise the 2012 Olympics to 'create a performance environment that will leave a lasting legacy … a true and lasting transformation of the high performance sporting landscape in this country'.

In this case, given other policy pronouncements, the 'landscape' can be taken to include physical, political and economic changes. Alternatively,

in more local contexts, a study into the Active Sport and County Sports Partnership programmes suggests that two long-term priorities should be

> '· influencing the development of policy and use of resources (i.e. creating change) …
> · improving the credibility and (economic and political) impact of CSPs'

> (KKP, 2005, p29)

Finally, a number of sports development programmes include aspirations to promote better practice in the longer-term. For example, the study highlighted above also indicated a desire that staff wished to 'take forward the best practice from Active Sports' into the operation of County Sports Partnerships (KKP, 2005, p22)

As with other forms of sustainability, the synthesis of concepts in the health literature and the diversity of examples from sports development suggest that a broad definition of institutional sustainability is required as follows:

> *Institutional sustainability: longer-term changes in policy, practice, economic and environmental conditions in the wider context of the sports development programme.*

Process Issues in Addressing Sustainability

Besides the definitional issues identified in the previous section, factors and processes affecting sustainability are also examined in the health literature.

Moving beyond the descriptive focus of some authors (e.g. Johnson et al., 2004), both Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and Pluye et al. (2005) suggest different ways in which factors and processes affecting sustainability could be classified. This section describes these contributions of Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and Pluye et al. (2005) in turn and uses literature on sports development to assess and improve their utility to this particular type of service. In particular, adaptations to the two classifications presented by Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and Pluye et al. (2005) will be suggested which allows them to be integrated into a common framework that may be used analytically to examine sports development policy and practice. The resultant framework is presented at the end of this section.

Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) identify three main groups of factors affecting sustainability.

1) **Project design and implementation factors** - include the process of negotiation underpinning a programme, the effectiveness of the programme, the length of time available for the

programme to address sustainability, the available financial capital

and the training available to develop human capital.

2) **Factors within the organisation setting -** include the strength of

organisations delivering the programme, the extent to which

programmes are integrated into organisational structures and the

presence and capabilities of programme 'champions' or leaders.

3) **Factors in the broader community environment -** include the

political, social and economic environment of the programme and

the degree of community participation. (Shediac-Rizkallah &

Bone, 1998)

Although such factors are rarely identified in sports development policy

documents, programme evaluations frequently identify issues affecting

sustainability, even if the form of sustainability referred to is not explicitly

stated. The evaluation of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme in

Scotland provides one example in which factors identifiable with each of

Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone's (1998) three groups were reported to have

affected the continuation of activities delivered through the programme.

Firstly, the evaluators were critical that 'no systematic attempts' were

made in the design or implementation of the programme to consider if

activities could be financially sustained through charging participants

(Coalter & Thorburn, 2003, p13). However, there was also recognition

that young volunteer teachers trained to continue to deliver activities

frequently moved on (Coalter & Thorburn, 2003), a factor that could be classified as residing within the organisational settings of the schools involved in the programme. Finally, in noting the apprehension of individuals involved in the programme regarding further funding for the programme after its initial four-year funding period, Coalter & Thorburn (2003) implicitly suggest that such issues would be determined in the broader political environment.

The presentation of a single example cannot fully demonstrate the applicability of Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone's (1998) classification to sports development programme. However, the example of the School Sport Co-ordinator programme enable some useful insights to be drawn. The first of these insights is that the sustainability of individual programmes may be affected by a variety of factors ranging across those suggested by Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998). As a result, empirical evidence may need to be very comprehensive in order to categorise factors into one of the three groups. For example, while the transient nature of volunteers was classified as an organisational factor, further empirical examination may have demonstrated that the root cause of this transience was employment conditions determined in the wider political environment. Further hypothecation, regarding the question of participant charging, also identifies another relevant issue. Including consideration of participant charging in the design of projects, as Coalter & Thorburn (2003) suggest, may in fact have demonstrated the viability of this approach to sustainability was in fact dependent on the wider economic

environment. Thus, the enactment of design and implementation practices, over which School Sport Co-ordinators had control, may have resulted in these individuals considering that they had, in fact, little control over this factor affecting sustainability. The issue of control is one that will be returned to after consideration of the alternative perspective on sustainability processes offered by Pluye et al. (2005).

This alternative perspective is developed from Pluye et al.'s (2005) criticism of the modelling of programme development into distinct, chronological phases of planning, implementation, evaluation and sustainability which they suggest is common in the health literature. Instead Pluye et al. (2005) suggest that processes and events can either be a) specific to the sustainability of programmes, b) specific to the implementation of programmes or c) address both sustainability and implementation of programmes (Pluye et al., 2005). Again, examples from evaluations of sports development programmes identify processes relating to sustainability that can be classified according to this schema. An evaluation of the Liverpool Sports Action Zone identified success in addressing sustainability by supporting the development of community groups to deliver programmes which would thereby continue once funding for the Zone ended (Sport England, 2006). Given that increased community involvement in the provision of sports activities was one of the initial aims of the Sports Action Zone programme, the overlap between implementation and sustainability process in this instance is clear. Conversely, with regard to County Sports Partnerships, Knight, Kavanagh

& Page (2005) warn that efforts to ensure financial self-sustainability distracted staff from achieving set targets, an example where there was little integration between implementation and sustainability processes.

Although these two sports development examples suggest that Pluye et al.'s (2005) main idea regarding the overlap (or otherwise) of processes is relevant to sports development practice, a problematic issue remains in the detail of the classification schema. As Pluye et al. (2005) recognise, programme planning and evaluation may also exist concomitantly with implementation and sustainability processes. However, they deny that planning and evaluation processes, unlike those connected with implementation, may be integrated with sustainability processes. Conversely, in suggesting that there should have been greater consideration of exit strategies in the School Sport Co-ordinator programme, Coalter & Thorburn (2003) implicitly identify a need for greater integration of planning and sustainability processes. Likewise, Coalter (2002) also promotes the role that evaluation can play in identifying and sharing best practice to improve the future delivery of sports development programmes. Therefore, in order to improve the applicability of Pluye et al.'s (2005) conceptualisation to sports development, it may be appropriate to consider the integration of sustainability processes with all other processes related to the desired outcomes of the programme in question, rather than solely those related to implementation.

Notwithstanding this suggested adaptation, further conceptual development is required if the classifications suggested by Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone (1998) and Pluye et al. (2005) are to be integrated into a framework that is singularly applicable to sports development. This integration becomes possible if the two classifications are recast as scales. A scale developed from Pluye et al.'s (2005) classification would therefore reflect the *degree* of overlap between processes to achieve desired outcomes and processes to achieve sustainability. The issue of control identified earlier offers a way in which Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone's (1998) classification can be similarly recast. Adopting a locus of control perspective, the three factors affecting sustainability can be viewed as ranging from those design and implementation aspects within the control of those responsible for a sports development programme to the wider environmental factors beyond the control of these same individuals or agencies. Thus, a relevant scale would consider the *degree* of control that the responsible individuals or agencies have over the sustainability of a given sports development programme.

The combination of these two scales results in a two-dimensional framework by which processes affecting sport development sustainability can be examined (Figure 1). Utilising this framework, the case of the Liverpool Sports Action Zone addressing community development, for example, could be classified as one in which there were high levels of control over sustainability as well as high levels of integration of processes to achieve desired outcomes and sustainability. Alternatively,

attempts by CSPs to become financially self-sufficient may be identified as a process by which a higher degree of control over sustainability could be gained by the staff of these organisations but which would be associated with a lower degree of overlap with processes to achieve desired outcomes. That these two examples relate to community and organisational sustainability respectively suggests that different forms of sustainability may be subject to processes which may be located at different points on each of the two scales. Further examination of this proposition, and the utility of both of the suggested sustainability frameworks more generally, requires additional empirical evidence. Consideration of sustainability in the New Opportunities for PE and Sport programme begins this required process of empirical examination.

Case Study: Sustainability in the New Opportunities for PE and Sport Activities Programme

In Scotland, the New Opportunities for PE and Sport (NOPES) Activities programme was supported by £35 million of funding from the Big Lottery Fund. A proportion of this sum was given to each of the 32 local authorities to fund a portfolio of sports development projects for up to three years[2]. As a result of the national design of the NOPES programme, the funded projects were characterised by their diversity with some offering young people a wide range of sporting and cultural activities while others used sport to divert young people from crime, or behaviours

likely to lead to crime, and to promote positive behaviour in school (Loughborough Partnership, 2005).

As part of the national evaluation of the NOPES programme, interview data on sustainability was collected from staff responsible for NOPES projects in six local authorities. The presentation of this data is included here not to demonstrate the achievement of sustainability or to provide a comprehensive account of sustainability issues in the NOPES programme. In fact, such an analysis was not fully possible due to the limited number of interviews and the timing of the majority of interviews prior to the cessation of NOPES funding. As a result, the purpose of this case study is, instead, to show how the conceptual frameworks developed in the previous sections can be applied to a specific sports development programme and identify both the implications of doing so as well as the insights generated as a result.

The interview data demonstrated that all four forms of sustainability in the definitional framework were relevant to, and addressed within, the NOPES programme. However, there were differences in the forms of sustainability aspired to by interviewees from different projects, a facet that reflects the diversity of types of provision within the NOPES programme as a whole. Given the qualitative methodology employed, statements regarding the commonality of aspirations for particular forms of sustainability must be treated with some care. Nonetheless, the data suggested that organisational sustainability, and specifically obtaining

further funding to continue programmes, was a significant priority for a large proportion of projects, especially those designated by local authority staff as 'pilots'. For these pilot projects, successful achievement of outcomes was viewed as a precondition for applying for further funding which suggests, for the organisational form at least, a degree of interconnectedness between project effectiveness and sustainability.

Interview data also highlighted a relationship between organisational and institutional sustainability. As well as having a rationale linked to organisational sustainability, pilot projects were also viewed by some interviewees as a mechanism through which wider learning could be generated regarding new or innovative approaches to sports development provision. For other projects, interviewees suggested that institutional sustainability was not commonly a project objective from the outset. However, there was recognition in some cases that the thinking of key local authority stakeholders had been influenced by NOPES projects. That this influence on the wider institutional context potentially affected organisational sustainability was demonstrated by an Outdoor Adventure Manager who stated that the NOPES project had:

> *certainly made senior management aware of what we do and,*
> *consequently, they have got to support that [financially] and to be*
> *fair to them they have.*

These examples suggest that not only can sports development programmes address different forms of sustainability concurrently but also that there may be advantage in attempting to do so.

Links between individual and community forms of sustainability were also implicit in one of the six outcomes set for the NOPES programme at the outset:

> *NOPES Outcome 4: Establish new links between schools and their communities that encourage young people to enjoy lifelong involvement in sport and cultural activities.*

However, there was little evidence of projects focusing strongly on achieving individual sustainability. Interviewees suggested that it was beyond the capability of projects to fully address individual sustainability within a three-year period especially given that many programmes were focused on generated an initial interest amongst low participation groups. However, through addressing aspects of community sustainability, projects did attempt to create a lasting 'pathway' through which individuals could continue their participation. Training for volunteers, actions to develop voluntary sports clubs and the encouragement of ongoing partnerships between different community organisations were actions undertaken by various NOPES projects that were identified with community sustainability. Undertaking such tasks was the primary purpose for a few projects although, more commonly, projects combined

addressing community sustainability with the delivery of activities for young people.

Data on the relationship between individual and community sustainability also begins to highlight issues pertaining to the degree of control that project staff had in attempting to address particular forms of sustainability. Interviewees suggested that addressing sustainability of individuals' participation was particularly challenging in areas where, due to factors beyond their control, the infrastructure of voluntary sports clubs was weak or volunteers were not available. Conversely, where there was a lack of a joined-up sporting infrastructure, interviewees believed that they could more readily develop new, sustainable partnerships between organisations operating in these communities. These contrasting features suggest that sports development staff may be able to increase their control over sustainability through designing programmes that address those forms that may be particularly achievable in the context in which the programme is delivered. This point is reinforced by the evidence that suggested that those projects that were designed to address particular gaps in provision were more likely to achieve a measure of organisational sustainability through procuring further funding.

Despite identifying aspects of programme design could enhance organisational sustainability, project staff commonly lamented their lack of control over attempts to secure further funding after the NOPES programme ceased. Economic conditions generally affecting local

authorities at the time that NOPES projects were coming to an end were believed by project staff to have negatively affected attempts to address organisational sustainability. Furthermore, interviewees suggested that it was difficult to anticipate, in initial planning for projects, the effect that changes in wider political objectives would have on available funding streams when organisational sustainability was to be addressed towards the end of the NOPES funding period. However, project staff also recognised that undertaking evaluations to demonstrate the effectiveness of programmes was one way to enhance the likelihood of programmes becoming organisationally sustainable. Therefore, such actions were another way in which project staff could improve their level of control over this form of sustainability, even though it remained largely determined by external factors.

With regard to other forms of sustainability, interviewees also identified ways in which staff responsible for projects could increase their levels of control as well as increase the integration between processes to achieve desired outcomes and sustainability. For example, in addressing community sustainability as well as programme objectives, some project staff gained a degree of control over sports clubs in return for providing access to training and facilities. However, there were other examples in which the design and implementation of NOPES projects themselves negatively affected community sustainability. In more than one local authority area, the widespread payment of coaches through NOPES funding was described as leading to an expectation of payment and a

'breakdown' in capacity in the voluntary sector to deliver sport and physical activity opportunities. Although project staff recognised that payment of coaches was an issue that they had control over, this example highlights a negative consequence of separating processes to achieve desired outcomes, which were given primacy in this case, from sustainability considerations.

Other interview data also highlighted issues with regard to the integration of processes to achieve sustainability and desired outcomes. In general, interviewees bemoaned instances, for example in applying for further funding, when there was inevitably a lack of integration between the two types of processes. However, such integration was not always possible or desirable. For example, in addressing low participation, one interviewee commented that sustaining individual participation was only possible once inactive young people had been initially engaged in programmes. Similarly, in some cases where introducing charges for participants was considered, to enable programmes to become organisationally sustainable, such actions were viewed as 'counter productive' to attempts to overcome barriers to participation. Issues relating to the desirability, or otherwise, of integration of processes to achieve desired outcomes and sustainability will be one of the issues considered further in the following concluding section.

Discussion and conclusions

The main purpose of this paper, as previously stated in the introduction, is to develop conceptual frameworks applicable to sustainability in sports development so as to address identified weaknesses of current academic, policy and practical approaches to the subject. The two frameworks suggested in the paper, pertaining to definitions of sustainability and process issues in sustainability respectively, have been developed by synthesising concepts in the literature on sustainability of health programmes and adapting them to the particular context of sports development through the use of literature on particular policies and programmes. The subsequent case study analysis of a particular sports development programme, the NOPES Activities programme, to examine the utility of the proposed frameworks highlights a number of issues regarding the suggested sustainability frameworks and their relevance to future policy, practice and research in sports development. As a result, this final section will consider how the proposed frameworks enhance understanding of sustainability in sports development, starting with issues regarding the categorisation of forms of sustainability followed by those related to the classification of processes affecting sustainability. The paper will conclude by considering opportunities and constraints for future research on sustainability in sports development.

The analysis of data from the NOPES Activities programme raises both conceptual and practical issues regarding the suggested categorisation of forms of sustainability. Positively, the forms of sustainability that were defined appeared to encompass all the types of long-term change aspired to by NOPES project staff. This finding is perhaps unsurprising given the flexibility incorporated in the definitions as a result of both the synthesis of concepts from the health literature and the diverse examples drawn from other sports development programmes. Moreover, it should be recognised that the single case of the NOPES Activities programme, although diverse in itself, may not encompass all the types of sustainability aspired to, or achieved, in the wide range of sports development programmes delivered in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Nonetheless, the categorisation of forms of sustainability did prove a useful way of identifying and making sense of the different aspirations of NOPES project staff regarding sustainability. As suggested at the start of the paper, the lack of definitional clarity regarding sustainability is a weakness of policy, practice and research in sports development. The categorisation of different forms of sustainability offered in this paper may, therefore, provide a framework by which this weakness can be addressed.

The evidence from the NOPES programme also suggested that, in practical terms, there was overlap between attempts to address different forms of sustainability in the NOPES programme. Overlap between forms of sustainability is not an issue examined conceptually in the health

literature nor identified explicitly in previous empirical studies of sports development programmes. Specifically in the NOPES programme, it appeared that achievement of individual and organisational sustainability could be linked in some cases to successfully addressing community and institutional sustainability respectively. Moreover, the dominance of attempts to address organisational sustainability could also be interpreted as a desire to ensure that individual, community and institutional outcomes of the specific projects continued to be delivered in the longer term. This is not to say that organisational sustainability is either necessary or sufficient to achieve other forms of sustainability. Implicit in the design of the design of projects that had a sole focus on building community and voluntary capacity was a belief that community sustainability could be addressed irrespective of organisational sustainability. Alternatively, concerning the sufficiency aspect, some sports development programmes may not be successful in achieving, and thus sustaining, individual, community or institutional outcomes irrespective of their organisational sustainability. It is suggested that further research is required to further clarify how different forms of sustainability may be positively, or negatively, correlated and the conditions in which such correlations occur.

The arguments offered in the previous paragraph further reinforce the earlier suggestion of a degree of interconnectedness between the effectiveness and sustainability of sports development programmes. The example of the consequences of payment of coaches on voluntary

capacity shows that certain approaches to increase effectiveness may hinder attempts to address some forms of sustainability. Conversely, demonstrating effectiveness was also believed by some interviewees to enhance attempts to achieve some measure of organisational sustainability. Thus, the relationship between effectiveness and (different forms) of sustainability is a complex one that, due in part to the limitations of the data, cannot be explained fully with reference to the NOPES Activities programme. Given the identification earlier in the paper of the variety of outcomes desired of sports development programmes, and thus the different ways in which effectiveness can be judged, and the diverse forms of sustainability that can also be aspired to, a complete understanding of the relationships between these two facets requires significant empirical research. Beyond these descriptive issues, normative questions also remain, for example regarding whether, and to what extent, programme effectiveness should be given primacy over the achievement of sustainability. A similar issue is alluded to by Pluye et al. (2005, p8) who identify the risk in sustainability being considered 'as an end in itself regardless of effectiveness'. However, these same authors dismiss the potential problem quickly with a call for improved reflective practice and evaluation by practitioners. It may be that this cursory consideration masks deeper conceptual, policy and practical issues that may emerge from further study.

As with the relationship between sustainability and effectiveness, there also remain descriptive and normative issues with regard to the

framework of processes affecting sustainability. In the case of health programmes, the fragmentation of the conceptual literature may have contributed to a lack of published research on the types of processes affecting different forms of sustainability. However, the data from the NOPES Activities programme added weight to the proposition that different forms of sustainability are affected by processes situated in varying segments of the suggested framework. For example, processes affecting organisational sustainability in the NOPES programme were largely characterised by the lack of integration with processes to achieve desired outcomes and the lack of control of NOPES project staff. Conversely, NOPES project staff appeared to have higher levels of control over processes to achieve community sustainability and commonly such processes were largely integrated with processes to achieve desired outcomes. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of the data on the NOPES Activities programme, a full classification of processes was not possible. However, further research may identify whether similar processes are common to different sports development programmes and, if so, it may be possible to more comprehensively map the processes that affect different forms of sustainability.

Mapping the processes that affect different forms of sustainability will also support understanding of any normative implications of the framework, an issue that is again not extensively explored in the health literature. Besides being frustrated when sustainability processes lacked integration with processes to achieve desired outcomes, NOPES project staff also

wished for greater control over issues affecting sustainability. However, whether a case in which there is both high integration between processes to achieve desired outcomes and sustainability and high control over sustainability by sports development practitioners is desirable, let alone achievable, remains open to question. For example, there may be significant democratic and accountability implications of an increasing level of control over sustainability processes by sports development practitioners. Likewise, integrating processes to achieve sustainability with unproven processes to achieve desired outcomes may also prove counter-productive. Again these issues cannot be addressed or resolved solely with reference to the NOPES programme and, at present, further clarification is hindered by the lack of conceptually informed research on sustainability in sports development.

However, rather than identifying weaknesses of the frameworks suggested, the fact that the issues and questions identified in the previous paragraphs arise from application of these frameworks to a particular sports development programme highlights their potential utility. What is therefore required is further research that utilises the frameworks suggested to build a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability in sports development. Future research on sustainability needs to go beyond that undertaken on the NOPES Activities programme by, not only examining the aspirations and views of stakeholders regarding sustainability but also, assessing the degree to which particular forms of sustainability are achieved. By undertaking research that evaluates

success in addressing sustainability, an enhanced understanding of the processes that affect sustainability may also be achieved.

The difficulties in undertaking the suggested types of sustainability research must not be underestimated. Evaluating the achievement of sustainability necessarily requires longitudinal research which brings inherent challenges (Gratton & Jones, 2003). These challenges are compounded by the fact that the majority of sports development evaluations do not currently continue beyond the period of funding of the programme in question. Moreover, evaluating the sustainability of even a single sports development programme may require adoption of complex multi-method approaches. For example, to evaluate the achievement of certain forms of sustainability aspired to in the NOPES programme would hypothetically require tracking of volunteers, examination of future policies and practices as well as monitoring of continued activities. It may be that smaller case studies of individual sports development projects may be a first step to building the understanding of sustainability that is required.

In general, however, the research challenges that are presented by sports development sustainability are those that must be addressed. With priorities for sports development increasingly focused on long-term outcomes, understanding whether and how sports development programmes can contribute to sustainable change is vital to improvement of policy and practice. It may be that the frameworks suggested in this

paper may help to bring more clarity to sports development policy and practice. However, it is through their analytical utility for research on sports development sustainability that the suggested frameworks may bring the greatest benefit by enabling the greater understanding of the issue that is required.

Acknowledgements

[1] The term 'form' has been used in order to disassociate the framework from a hierarchy of importance that may be implied in 'levels' of sustainability.

[2] Some programmes were subsequently given dispensation to be funded for up to four years due to delay in the early phases of NOPES.

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