A fair game for all? How community sports clubs in Australia deal with diversity

Ramón Spaaij, Karen Farquharson, Ruth Jeanes, Jonathan Magee, Dean Lusher & Sean Gorman

Abstract

Diversity and equality are key issues confronting sport. This paper draws on findings from qualitative research carried out in Australia to critically examine how diversity is understood and valued in community sport. The findings suggest that there is a discrepancy between the policy objectives of government and sport organizations and the way in which diversity is understood and responded to in practice. Diversity management is not being adopted widely among local sports clubs. The idea of a moral imperative to cater to people with diverse backgrounds and abilities is largely absent; rather, the dominant discourse is underpinned by a business rationale which interprets diversity in terms of benefits and costs to the organization. This business-driven approach is often detrimental to the social policy objective of ensuring equitable outcomes in sport. A fundamental reconsideration of the rationale and practice of managing diversity in sport is therefore necessary.

Introduction

Managing diversity is an important challenge for groups, organizations and communities. How diversity is dealt with at societal, institutional and local levels affects an individual's opportunities and wellbeing. Sport is one area where diversity has become a policy buzz word. In countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia, social policy actors draw attention to sport as a policy tool that can be used to strengthen public values such as social inclusion (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Kelly, 2010; Spaaij, 2013a). Within this context, diversity can be seen to represent one of the most significant issues confronting sport today (Cunningham, 2011; Gasparini & Cometti, 2010). Sport provides an interesting case to study in terms of diversity management as there is a tension

between performance (winning) and participation (recreation). Sports clubs contest competitions with the goal of winning which can work against the inclusion of people with diverse backgrounds.

Different nations have different policies for encouraging diversity in sport. The United States has had Title IX, which has aimed to ensure gender equity in sport since 1972, and since 2004 the United Kingdom has had Equality Standards which relate to disability and gender along with race and ethnicity. These regulations have led sport organizations in those nations to develop and implement diversity policies and programs. However, research suggests that the status of diversity in the policy frameworks of sport organizations is frequently not matched by an equivalent status in the way in which sport is managed and delivered on the ground, where equality standards are seen at best as supporting work already being done, but at worst as an unwarranted interference (Spracklen, Hylton, & Long, 2006). It appears, then, that the policy rhetoric of diversity has often not translated into practice, with some groups remaining marginalized despite institutional goals of equal opportunity (Adair, Taylor, & Darcy, 2010; Spaaij, 2013b).

Previous research indicates that formal diversity and equal opportunity policies are unreliable indicators of the actual practices, beliefs and values towards diversity issues within organizations (Embrick, 2011; Kirton & Greene, 2010). This raises the important issue of the extent to which diversity policies filter through to the grassroots level and affect local participants' assumptions, attitudes and practices. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine how diversity is understood and valued in community sport in Australia. We are particularly interested in how local sports clubs articulate and justify the ways (if any) in which they manage diversity and what this reveals about their underlying assumptions regarding sport participation of people with diverse backgrounds. This paper examines these issues by drawing on a collaborative research project undertaken among community sports clubs in the Australian state of Victoria. Community sport is an important setting where people are socialized into norms around race, gender and ability, with significant consequences for how they engage with people with diverse backgrounds. It provides a site for socialization and community building for many young people, parents, volunteers, coaches and spectators.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section critically examines the main debates around fostering and managing diversity in organizations. We will then present the project's research methods, followed by a discussion of the research findings. The final section of the paper brings together the key findings and conclusions to critically reflect on and inform

contemporary diversity management debates. Overall, we find that diversity management is not being adopted (either formally or informally) widely among community sports clubs in Victoria. The dominant diversity discourse in community sport is underpinned by a business case approach which interprets diversity in terms of benefits and costs to the organization. If the perceived costs are too high, no attempts to foster diversity are made. It is concluded that the ability of this business-driven approach to achieve the social policy objective of ensuring equitable outcomes in sport is highly problematic.

Discourses of diversity: arguments and critique

There are ongoing concerns about the challenges faced in developing and implementing diversity policies and initiatives at the public sector, civil society and corporate levels around the world (April & Shockley, 2006). It is questionable whether policy-level initiatives have been effective in promoting a genuine consideration of diversity and equality issues in practice. Whilst organizations may be able to invoke diversity as an institutional value, it appears that in many cases no genuine attempts are made to ensure or enforce diversity in organizational policy and practice (Embrick, 2011). We must also be reminded that social policies, when they are implemented, do not necessarily promote human capabilities and wellbeing, but can also undermine them (Dean, 2005).

In a broad sense of the term, diversity occurs when people of varied backgrounds in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, ability or other observable or unobservable social factors are present and interact. Diversity can celebrate difference, but it also serves to mark out those who are perceived to be "different" from the majority or from any in-group for differential treatment in a way which is detrimental to equality. Yet, the definition and the measurement of diversity are very much contested. There is no consensus on what diversity means, nor is there consensus about what the pivotal dimensions of diversity are and how to measure them (Dickie & Soldan, 2008; Harrison & Sin, 2006). Levels of analysis addressed in diversity research range from macro-structural systems to micro-level interactions to individual traits. One problem with defining diversity is that it tends to fix and essentialize differences by presenting them as stable and unchanging, rather than capturing the fluid nature of social identities and boundaries. From a sociological perspective, a key point is that diversity is socially constructed: it is a result of the definitions that people in a network of social relations (e.g., a sports team or club) make. Diversity, then, must be understood and analyzed in

relation to a social network or context in which definitions arise and are used, and whose members are likely to have unequal definitional power.

Much of the recent literature is concerned with how diversity is managed, where diversity management is aimed at improving the interactions among persons within a social unit who differ in some way (Kirton & Greene, 2010). In particular, the diversity management field examines how diversity is beneficial for organizations and how it poses challenges. The field is founded on the premise that harnessing differences can create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents and skills are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998).

Organizations implement diversity policies for a variety of reasons. There are three main approaches identified in the diversity management literature: the business case, the social justice case, and the no-need-to-manage case (Ely & Thomas, 2001). These three cases constitute discourses through which diversity in sport is understood. The business case, which operates on an economic logic, values diversity as a direct contribution to the performance of an organization, notably by providing alternative viewpoints which can lead to innovative problem-solving and opening up new markets (Kaler, 2001). The assumption is that recognizing, valuing and including women and men of diverse backgrounds makes good business sense. The business rationale dominates and has to some extent replaced the social justice case, which has long formed a major rationale for diversity and equal opportunity action.

Whilst the business case can be usefully applied to the sporting context there are various nuances within the voluntary sports sector that are important to highlight. Voluntary sports clubs are typically not-for-profit organizations, run largely by a voluntary workforce. Whilst the business case rationalizes diversity management for economic benefit, voluntary sports organizations are generally not concerned with making a profit (Robinson, 2011). They are seeking to "break even" and cover the costs of facilities, equipment, coaching and training to allow the club's activities to continue in the longer term. Promotion of diversity may well be justified as an aspect of this, to increase membership and generate revenue but generally within voluntary clubs, particularly amongst individual teams within the club structure, economic rationales are unlikely to underpin a business case as it would do in commercial organizations (Shibli, 2011). Instead, their core aim is usually competitive success in various leagues and tournaments. As will be seen below, the business case as the promotion of diversity for enhanced organizational success is still applicable but is not solely underpinned by economic logic familiar with more traditional business settings. Within the organizations

that oversee the voluntary sports sector, such as state or national sporting associations, there is more of a profit-driven imperative as organizations compete for "market share" in a crowded arena. For these therefore a more traditional application of the business case as motivation to promote diversity is more appropriate.

The social justice case recognizes that people are not treated equally and argues for active intervention to change institutions and society towards being more just (Coleman & Glover, 2010). It encourages organizations to implement diversity policies because they ensure equality of opportunity and fair treatment regardless of whether diversity benefits the organization (Noon, 2007). Proponents of the social justice case for diversity argue that organizations have a moral or social responsibility to achieve diversity and equity and to address historical power imbalances, but critics suggest that this argument is nowadays less persuasive than the business "bottom line" argument. For example, Fink and Pastore (1999) argue that "for diversity initiatives to be truly embedded within the organization, those in power must be convinced of diversity's relationship to organizational effectiveness" (p. 314). As will be seen in this paper, this argument is dominant in sport organizations today.

The third case sees diversity as potentially beneficial, but not part of the organization's core business, and therefore not needing to be actively managed. For these organizations, diversity is not a core goal and they are unlikely to implement strategies around diversity management. Interestingly, organizations in this category often invoke a business rationale for not pursuing diversity: the cost of developing and implementing a diversity management policy is seen to outweigh the possible, but unknown, benefits that might result. A key area of debate has been whether promoting diversity simply on business case terms could be seen as the exploitation of difference while doing little to transform attitudes and cultures to make organizations more inclusive (Kirton & Greene, 2010; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000) What happens, for example, when particular forms of diversity are not "good for business"? Once the debate is conducted in terms of what is in the interests of the organization, then a business rationale can be articulated against equal opportunity action (Dickens, 1999). The realm of sport is particularly instructive in this regard because of the hegemony of "ability" and performance discourses (Clark, 2012), which reveal an inherent tension between the promotion of diversity and the pursuit of sporting excellence. The pursuit of excellence can be a key motivation underlying sports club practices, with an aim to attract the best possible players who will enhance the team's chances of winning. If talented people of diverse backgrounds are not made welcome, they may also not participate and the team may (or may not) be worse off for it. Policies that promote diversity might encourage people

from diverse backgrounds to participate, and thus potentially enhance sports performance. However, such policies might also reduce team performance, depending on how the team views "success," and result in divisions, fractures and discontent.

If a team's major imperative is to win, they will likely resist policies that promote diversity of ability. Given the importance of ability, then, diversity of ability must be taken as qualitatively different from diversity by race/ethnicity or gender, as the promotion of diversity of ability runs counter to the overarching goal of promoting sporting excellence. However, for community sports clubs participation can be a core value: the policy ideal is that all people (and particularly children and young people) should have the opportunity to play regardless of how skilled they are (though participation may be less of a focus with age). This provides a conundrum in terms of diversity management. If a team's main goal is performance success, sports clubs will be unlikely to support initiatives that seek to expand participation at the expense of performance.

The instrumental and mechanistic rationale underpinning the business case for diversity management has been strongly criticized. Diversity management can be viewed in most cases as an instrument or tool that uses people's diversity or difference as a means of achieving business objectives that operates as an instrument of control and compliance (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). This raises important questions regarding power differences among social groups: who is being constructed as different? For what purposes? With what consequences? And who benefits? It seems that diversity management strategies are not constructed to confront such power relations but are "conceived in a very selective and instrumental way with reference to the productive process in the specific organizational context", thereby reproducing existing power relations between management and those being managed (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004, p. 71).

These questions are directly relevant to Australian sport, where sport organizations are being persuaded to pay significant attention to diversity management by presenting it as a business case (e.g., Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006). In relation to cultural diversity, government, not-for-profit and commercial actors in the Australian sports sector emphasize the potential gains in terms of the following:

- Increased membership base and participation growth: culturally diverse groups are a key source of paying club members, players, referees, coaches, volunteers, and spectators;

- Talent identification: increasing the participation base increases the talent pool, thus enabling improved performance on the field and providing opportunities for some culturally diverse people to transition into elite sport;

- Marketing and branding opportunities: lifting the image and profile of a sport or a sports club in the local community and beyond;

- Sponsorship growth: sponsors increasingly require sponsorships to have a whole of community focus as culturally diverse communities have economic muscle and spending power;

- Increased revenue from fan development, merchandising and broadcasting, especially for professional sports clubs;

- Funding opportunities: engaging with culturally diverse groups enables sport organizations to access government funding and grants;

- Social benefits: fostering wider social interaction and intercultural harmony, thus contributing to the government's social policy agenda.

This dominant approach thus looks to diversity as a potential source of increased revenue, market share, and other contributions to organizational performance.

The Australian government has identified a need to enhance the capacity of sport organizations to achieve increased and equitable participation for all community members (Australian Government, 2011; Australian Sports Commission, 2011). Several national sporting bodies in Australia have put in place anti-discrimination legislation and equal opportunity policies to create more inclusive sporting environments (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006). Across the Australian sporting landscape different national sport organizations, such as the Australian Football League and Cricket Australia, have established diversity policies within their organizations that stress the need to promote respect for diversity both within sport and across the community. The Australian government's recognition of this need is articulated in its 2010 policy statement *Australian Sport: The Pathway to Success*, which announces a Social Inclusion and Sport Strategy focused on supporting initiatives that maximize the participation of all Australians in sport regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion or ability, implicitly invoking the social justice rational diversity. The government states its commitment to "ensuring sporting opportunities are safe, fun and inclusive for all of our community members and to supporting sport to ensure that our nation's diversity is reflected in participation" (Australian

Government, 2010, p. 4). However, little is known about what sports clubs are actually doing to manage diversity in all its facets or even how they understand or value diversity.

Diversity management in Australian sport is, to a large extent, an expression of wider debate and policy around diversity in Australian society. Anti-discrimination or equal opportunity legislation has been used to address increasing diversity issues that have challenged Australian governments in the post-Second World War era (Dickie & Soldan, 2008). When looking at diversity in regard to the engagement and maintenance of "difference" in Australian society, a key (but not the only) broader, longitudinal policy platform from where this stems is multiculturalism. For some, the promotion of a multicultural society is a divisive objective. Despite multiculturalism in Australia being an official government policy over time it is also a term that is both ambiguous and contested. For some it represents a richness of diversity and cultural practices – as Macintyre (2004) suggests, "the tolerance and pluralism of the reconstituted nation". Others, not all of whom are necessarily conservative, have been offended by the self-conscious political correctness that has emerged from such a term (Macintyre, 2004). This overcorrection to a great extent was driven by the prevalence of racially and culturally intolerant attitudes in some sections of the Australian community (Hage, 1998). It is from this that "diversity" as we understand it today has had its genesis and evolved. In the next section, we discuss the research methods used to investigate diversity in junior sport in Australia.

Methods

The research was conducted at 19 community sports clubs in the Australian state of Victoria and focused on how diversity is understood and managed in community sport. In total, 31 sports clubs were approached to participate. Clubs were initially contacted via an email which outlined the research and invited them to contact the researchers if they were interested in participating. Recruiting clubs was relatively easy, particularly given that most of the individuals we contacted were volunteers with full-time jobs and generally extremely busy. The 19 clubs who responded to emails generally replied enthusiastically and were keen to share their experiences, even where they felt their club was struggling to engage with diversity. None of the 12 clubs who were not involved stated that they would not take part in the research. They did not respond to an initial email or follow up at which point the researchers decided not to pursue them. Whilst we cannot be certain of the reasons for non-participation we would anticipate given the voluntary nature of involvement in sports clubs

some could not afford the time to be involved, others may simply not have been interested. For some sports that were out of season when contacted it may simply have been a case of not picking up the email within the appropriate time frame.

When selecting potential clubs to be involved we sought to identify how different axes of diversity intersect in sports club settings – race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability. The research involved 41 semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Thirty-three interviews were conducted with committee members and coaches of the sports clubs, and eight interviews were with sport development workers responsible for diversity issues at the local and state levels. The clubs and interviewees represented seven Australian sports played by men and women, boys and girls: Australian Rules football (AFL), basketball, association football (soccer), cricket, netball, field hockey and lawn bowls. The sports were selected to maximize variation of participants by gender, ethnicity, ability and age. As Australian sport is largely gender-segregated we selected clubs with both female-dominated (e.g, netball) and male dominated (e.g., football) sports. Lawn bowls was included as a sport that attracts older adults. While it is outside the scope of this paper to report our findings here by type of sport, the selection of clubs was made to enable a broad range of responses to questions about diversity management. As researchers we decided that it was beyond the scope of this paper to interview representatives from respective national sport organizations regarding recently established diversity policies, but recognize that to explore the complexities of diversity within sport these views are important for future research.

The clubs varied not only in membership size (ranging from 80 to 400), but also in the composition of their membership in terms of gender, age, class and cultural background. We expected that clubs with diverse memberships would be likely to value and prioritize diversity management differently from clubs whose constituency is less diverse. Building on this, we selected clubs with a relatively diverse constituency as well as clubs with a less diverse membership. This was reflected in part in the geographical location of the clubs, which ranged from middle-class areas in inner-city Melbourne to working-class suburbs such as Dandenong and Sunshine in outer Melbourne. The suburbs ranged from very low to very high in terms of socioeconomic status as ranked by the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

Themes that were addressed during the interviews included how respondents understood diversity in general and also within their club context, their awareness and application of formal diversity policies, the strategies (if any) they employed to manage diversity at their club, and the perceived benefits and challenges associated with managing

diversity at their club. The majority of interviews took place at local sports venues, the researchers' offices or participants' homes and lasted an average of one hour. The interviews were recorded (with the permission of participants) and transcribed in full. Qualitative data from the interviews were entered into NVivo and coded for data analysis using thematic analysis techniques. We examined the data to identify the common issues and themes that recurred. This process was not necessarily sequential; as new themes and sub-themes emerged, the observations were compared and the data were re-examined. Full ethics approval was obtained from the Faculty Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University and the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The research findings are as follows.

Defining diversity

Our data indicate that the emergence of diversity as a policy buzz word is reflected at the local level. There was general agreement among interviewees that diversity is a complex term which is relatively new to the political and sporting agenda. However, there is no clear, agreed upon understanding among the sports clubs as to what diversity actually means. Instead, the term "diversity" is typically under-conceptualized and broadly defined by club representatives and sports development workers.

In a broad sense, the interviewees described the purpose of diversity management to be about broadening access to different population groups. For some this meant promoting those with less ability, for others it referred to welcoming all nationalities with diversity management referred to as promoting safe spaces for ethnic minorities. Some respondents focused on individual differences and recognized the need to maximize individual potential, however most interviewees also recognized the social group characteristics and implications of diversity and difference (Liff, 1997). An example of a broad definition was provided by a cricket club committee member (male, 40s):

> Diversity is all the plusses and minuses that go along with clubs. It's… it can be race, it can be creed, religion, it can be social status, it can be popularity, it can be money. There is many and varied ways that it can be perceived. … Diversity can also be with respect of ability – haves and have nots and developing those with better ability as well as promoting those and encouraging those with lesser ability.

In a similar vein, a sports development worker (male, 30s) specialising in disability described diversity as:

> Diversity, I guess, from a club's perspective, is the ability to cater to different populations, which shouldn't be seen as something difficult. I mean, the ideal structure would be one that is inclusive of all, of all groups, not separate groups, or separate needs, if that makes sense.

These two definitions are comprehensive and seemingly all-inclusive in their reference to "different populations" and "many and varied ways that it can be perceived". However, our data show that there was often a discrepancy between how sports clubs define diversity and how they responded to it in practice. They tended to define diversity in broad and inclusive ways, but they typically operationalized it in narrow terms in their club practices.

In practice, sports clubs often emphasize one axis of diversity over others in ways that often overlook or ignore the intersections between gender, culture, (dis)ability, and racial/ethnic inequalities. This process of reducing diversity to just one of its many dimensions not only reflects the complexity and contested nature of the term "diversity" itself and the clubs' struggle to operationalize it in the real world, but is also closely related to the business-driven approach to managing diversity that characterizes many sport organizations, despite their not-for-profit status.

The business case for diversity

The dominant diversity discourse articulated in the community sports clubs under study was the business rationale, which values diversity as a contribution to organizational performance. Indicative of this, a netball club committee member (female, 40s) argued:

> As a general rule, clubs that [encourage diversity] do it obviously for their own vested interests, so increased membership, financial gain [to keep the club running], which is fine. I mean, it doesn't matter how you achieve the end result [a diverse club], does it?

An important element in this dominant rationale is the belief that attracting people of diverse backgrounds can be good for team and club performance. This belief is particularly strong in relation to young males from African backgrounds who are seen to have natural abilities that

provide a winning edge. This myth of "Black Magic" has long "defined" Indigenous Australians playing in the AFL, particularly with the advent of the first Perth team, the West Coast Eagles in 1987, that had a distinct cohort of Indigenous players (Adair & Stronach, 2011; Gorman, 2011). Further to this paper, a cricket coach (male, 40s) noted that "the amazing thing is these children are quite talented as well, and for say high performance people in cricket that see these tall strapping strong Sudanese boys, it's very attractive". Consider also the following dialogue between a secretary (female, 40s) and a coach (male, 40s) at an AFL club:

> *Club secretary:* Well a lot of people who you might consider to be more conventional and more narrow thinking in this club have really embraced it [cultural diversity] because they will say things like "got to get those Black kids [of African background] here because they're' really fast" [laughs].
> *Coach*: Yeah, they're tall, they're tall.
> *Club secretary:* Yeah, good for us, good for us.

These participants support racial diversity because they believe "Black kids" are talented at sport and will help them win. The business case for diversity supports initiatives that enhance performance, so if the type of diversity is perceived to do that, it will be encouraged. In this case biologically determined racial stereotypes around African children and their ability to play sport led the club to reach out to this demographic in the first instance.

Sport organizations can attempt to differentiate themselves from others in a competitive marketplace by "specializing" in an area of diversity in which there is a particular need or gap in provision or where they have a particular expertise. For example, a multicultural sports development officer (male, 20s) argued:

> [Sport organizations] are prioritizing based on what they feel, and I think what they feel is almost a business decision. Which is fine because you're a business essentially and you have to make a profit and they think how can we make our sport accessible to people with disability, CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] background, et cetera? So obviously they've done their own research and crunched their own numbers and looked at their own sport internally. So [for example] a sport like basketball is very prominent with disability and it obviously lends itself to that with wheelchair basketball. I also think sports are looking at it saying "we have to change

and grow or that's it our sport will lose out. We'll lose out to another sport; we'll be out of the game."

Although these remarks focused on the business model at state and national sporting bodies, this model also has implications for local clubs, as discussed below. This interviewee further recognized the potential danger of this business-driven approach to managing diversity:

> We need to be very strategic about that because we bombard communities. We'll come in with a million come-and-try days and they'll just be like "I'm sick of sport, I'm not doing any of it." … The last thing we need is [sport organizations] going in there doing more work and just doubling up on each other. We need to be there doing what's best for communities and still ticking our own boxes at a sport level.

An important aspect of this business-driven approach is the emphasis on having to prioritize particular aspects of diversity at a strategic and policy level. Perceived organizational performance benefits such as access to external funding affect how local sports clubs and the state sport organizations with which they are affiliated understand and deal with diversity. A sports development worker (male, 30s) expressed this as follows:

> There are identified areas that the sports make, whether it's women, indigenous, disability, CALD communities, that they focus on, and so you know if it's a sport that is the CALD communities they are in essence doing it to satisfy their funding… in essence they're doing it for the money. … Everyone wants a piece of the cake. You've got all these organizations that are trying... that have got an idea, and their ideas are good, but they're all competing for the same pool.

A basketball development officer (female, 40s), whose sport is particularly active in the disability area, reiterates the significance of this issue by noting how funding is often tied to particular areas of disadvantage:

> To say that the disadvantage [we focus on] is disability, [then what about] Indigenous, rural, remote, women and girls? What happens to the little Aussie kid in the high rise flat who has no money? There's never the opportunity to actually say let me put a funding submission in particularly for the real struggling… Just for that level of

people let's be able to get out there and help everybody, whereas government goes, "Well, they can only be confined to these areas".

This comment suggests that whilst some types of diversity (cultural, gender, disability) are considered by some sport organizations, these different axes of diversity are frequently treated in isolation from each other due in part to a policy or funding emphasis on having to prioritize particular forms of diversity. Other contributing factors, such as perceived organizational constraints, will be discussed below.

The social justice case for diversity

The business case for managing diversity may be dominant in Australian sport, but it is contested. At some of the community sports clubs (4) under study an alternative diversity discourse based on social justice orientations could also be found, often coexisting and intertwined with business-oriented arguments. For proponents of the social justice rationale, encouraging diversity within sports clubs is, first and foremost, "the right thing to do." At one association football club there has been a long-standing tension between performance-oriented individuals and a group of people who prioritize social inclusion. Representing the latter faction, the club secretary (female, 40s) expressed how, in her view, "a sporting club is the very basic foundation of democratic society. You know it's where everybody can come together and interact where they normally wouldn't interact." This perceived community building function was reflected in the club's efforts to engage culturally diverse young people, including those who could be seen as less talented.

The social justice orientation occupied a central place in only a few sports clubs under study, and arguably nowhere more so than at a cricket club located in a multicultural working-class suburb of Melbourne. A committee member (male, 50s) of this club, which has a strong representation of people from a migrant background, expressed this orientation as follows: "We're very much about including people for participation, and to make better citizens, that's something that we always celebrate." He continued:

It's our duty to embrace new migrants, and embrace anybody that wants to come into the club and play, that we will try and minimize all the barriers so they can successfully participate in cricket, and not only to become good cricketers and to strengthen our cricket, but to become good community members. … Look, I think in

essence we are a cricket club, and we play cricket, but an extension to that is that we are very welcoming, and we look to see other groups who may be typical. There's so many people out there who love the sport, yet maybe don't know where to go or whatever. So, you know, when we find people who may be from a different background or whatever, we want to nurture that, we see the passion that they have for the sport, and we sort of tie into that and try and get them involved, and learn about them at our club.

In the same vein, and problematizing the performance logic that underpins the business rationale, a coach (male, 40s) at this club expressed his views on what sporting success is about:

I think we need to redefine what success is, because I think sports shouldn't be defined in terms of the success in just the competition, in terms of their premierships or winning games, I think success can be defined in terms of what you're doing at a club, how you're integrating players, how you're developing leaders at the club, and how people are enjoying coming through that club ... I think the success has to move more towards what a club can develop, and how much more it really gives, not just to individuals, but how it builds its own community, and how it can help.

These individuals' sense of social and moral responsibility to embrace new migrants at the club should be understood within the context of their own trajectories as immigrants who arrived in Australia as young children and who found at their local cricket club a welcoming environment and "a way to make us equal with the other kids". However, they also admitted to having encountered some resistance from fellow club members who were more focused on performance issues. The club committee member noted:

There has been some resistance, definitely. It hasn't been an easy sell for everybody. But where people didn't understand it and really resisted, you know we were steadfast in our message that unfortunately this club is for equal participation. We were crystal clear that this is what we're about, these are our values, and we're sticking to it, we hope you understand. But some people just didn't understand that. … But what we find now is as those [new players] became more skilled, and became contributing members of the team, you know people swing around and embrace it.

This comment reiterates the tension that often exists in sport organizations between the promotion of diversity and the pursuit of sporting excellence, particularly where encouraging diversity is seen to diminish performance. It appears that even at a club that has evoked diversity as an institutional value, there can still be conflict or disagreement over which types of diversity are desirable. There is a danger here that high-performing diversity will be valued differently to low-performing diversity, which could reinforce rather than reduce differential treatment of those perceived to be "different and less able" (even if their presence can be regarded as "good for business" in terms of membership contributions).

Another critical issue to be gleaned from this example is that even though the club in question has been proactive in encouraging *cultural* diversity, again the different forms of diversity are addressed in isolation, with cultural diversity being prioritized over other axes of difference. The club has sought to extend itself by supporting an association football team for people with physical disabilities, and it aims to create a safe and inclusive environment for women. However, the respondents recognized that they had been less successful in addressing these forms of diversity, as the following remark by the club committee member suggests:

> It's something that we work diligently on. It's something that we can do a lot more. We try to make the functions as friendly as possible to women, and to children, and to families, so alcohol is sort of minimized, you know we have food that's of all different nationalities. … But we also involve the women by asking them, "What do you want? What do you want to see from the club?" And we're guided by that.

An interesting case here was lawn bowls as it is popular with both males and females with the elderly population prominently involved as retirees who had time and availability to play matches and organise events during the day. Consequently, this appealed to disability groups seeking day-time activities and resulted in some lawn bowls clubs establishing a disabled section within their club. However, extending this diversity practice to incorporate other population groups, such as newly arrived migrants, within the lawn bowls club was not considered by any club in the research. This highlights the still narrow confines within which broader diversity practice is addressed.

The no-need-to-manage case

The cricket and association football clubs highlighted in the previous section are atypical in that they are relatively proactive in valuing and promoting diversity. The majority of clubs (10) that we studied did not consider managing diversity as part of their core business even if they recognized the potential benefits. Although there may not necessarily be overt discrimination or differential treatment at these clubs, they make no outward moves to be all-welcoming or inclusive. This is reflected in comments such as "you know where we are", "come and pay your money", and diversity being "not for us", "too much to take on" and something that they put in the "too hard basket."

These clubs typically approach diversity from a deficit model, where differences are interpreted by managers as deficiencies or challenges to be managed, for example in terms of financial cost, time, skills or attitudes (cf. Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). These costs are deemed particularly pressing for volunteer-based clubs with limited organizational capacity. Club managers are faced with a daunting task of having to cater for the vast array of diverse groups, which they often feel ill-equipped to do. For example, an association football coach (female, 30s) noted the pressure diversity management puts on already stretched resources:

> You're talking about clubs that the issue of just maintaining the club is such a burden… well burden's probably the wrong word but it's so much work and it's a big job already. Then trying to add on things without applying some extra resources is just really, really hard. … We would have the physical resources in the club but we don't have the time. Running a club is an incredibly hard and complex thing.

Of particular interest here is the respondent's reference to diversity as an "add on," i.e. as something that is perceived to be beyond the "normal" sphere of club practices and responsibilities. An AFL coach (male, 40s) asked: "It's a great idea, but who's going to do it?" For these respondents, fostering harmonious diversity is not part of their core business. A similar view was presented by a committee member of a field hockey club who commented: "We struggle to get all our coaches for our teams, we struggle for people in the canteen, you know. So these are things that we're faced with weekly. But we would love to run [diversity] programs, yeah, we would, but again, it's just the resources and people available, you know, and that's the hard thing".

The lack of commitment on the part of several sports clubs to encourage diversity was not simply based on practical issues such as those described above, but sometimes reflected an organizational culture focused on similarity. In this type of organizational culture, similarity is valued and diversity is suppressed (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). Individuals who are different to a homogenous dominant group are expected to leave their values and customs at the door and adapt to those of the in-group. For example, a cricket coach (male, 40s) described how his club had engaged two Sudanese boys: "Jonathan and James we called them, because it was two easy names to remember." While this club's perception was that it was managing cultural diversity, the players' identities were contested by the club's identification and positioning of the young men through the assignment of Anglicised names. Previous research suggests that this monolithic culture is typical of the majority of sports clubs in Australia (Hanlon & Coleman, 2006). The entrenchment of a culture of similarity reveals an underlying system of shared values, beliefs and assumptions which results in closed group membership. Core values of such a club culture include parochialism/ethnocentrism, rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and a view of difference as deficit (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). A key challenge for those seeking to promote diversity and equity in sport, then, is to transform ingrained organizational cultures and practices so that they come to value and support diversity. In the next section, we bring together the research findings presented in this paper to critically reflect on this issue.

Discussion: the problems with the business-driven approach to diversity

The findings presented here indicate that, with few exceptions, local sports clubs in Australia view diversity from a business-driven perspective which recognizes diversity as a potential benefit or cost to the organization. Although the clubs defined diversity broadly, in practice they utilized the business rationale to either elect not to engage with diversity management or to engage with a narrow version of diversity management, usually engaging people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This is perhaps unsurprising considering sports clubs are being persuaded by government, not-for-profit and commercial actors in the Australian sports sector to pay close attention to diversity because it makes good business sense. However, as noted earlier, there are some serious problems with the assumptions and implications of this dominant diversity discourse, problems that we now turn to.

In an influential contribution to the diversity debate, Noon (2007) argues that the business rationale of managing diversity is detrimental to equality outcomes and social

justice. For Noon (2007: 773), the dominance of the business case has potentially "fatal flaws which can undermine equality outcomes and might ultimately prove to be dangerous for social justice." In relation to the sports clubs under study, one major problem of the business rationale is that it relies on a rational cost-benefit analysis in terms of what is in the interests of the organization. The danger is that the costs of diversity may be perceived as outweighing the benefits. Where diversity management is considered not to be in the interests of the organization, then a rational business decision can be made not to engage in diversity management. As noted earlier, clubs are faced with a daunting task to cater for the vast array of diverse groups, to which they often feel ill-equipped. Several respondents viewed encouraging diversity as being costly and time consuming, and therefore as something that is not in the best interest of their organization, at least in the short term. They typically described diversity management as an "add on" that goes beyond the clubs' "normal" practices and responsibilities. In so doing, diversity is constructed as something that can be legitimately dismissed as "not for us" and "too much to take on." Although diversity might be seen as desirable, this study found that most clubs did not genuinely attempt to develop or implement diversity management policies.

A key concern here is the logical contradiction in the business rationale: a universal principle of equality (the right to participate in sport in a safe and inclusive way based on equality of opportunity) is supported by a contingent argument (provided it is good for the organization) (Noon, 2007). As Noon (2007) notes, this implies that "fair treatment cannot be extended to all individuals but must be the consequence of particular organizational circumstances and managerial evaluation" (p. 780). In relation to sport, this concern is highlighted not only by the aforementioned cost-benefit analysis that can lead sports clubs not to take diversity and equality action, but also by the tension between inclusive participation and the pursuit of sporting excellence. Our data show that high-performing diversity is often valued differently from low-performing diversity. In other words, the cost of managing diversity can only be borne if performance justifies it. From a business case perspective, such differentiation makes sense even if it means that fair treatment is extended only to those who are perceived as "different but talented." Importantly, however, this differentiation is not simply based on a rational cost-benefit choice, but is also about prejudice and stereotype, for example when club managers discriminate against certain individuals based on assumptions about their "natural" race-based sporting abilities.

Finally, the contingent argument that underpins the business rationale is problematic in that it leads local sports clubs to reduce diversity to merely one of its many axes (e.g.,

gender, (dis)ability, or race/ethnicity). Many sport organizations that portray themselves as inclusive only deal with one particular type of difference. As noted, this approach to managing diversity is reinforced by a policy or funding emphasis on having to prioritize particular forms of diversity.

While Australian government and sporting bodies are encouraged to promote sport as a site for social inclusion, there are no policies that provide either incentives for diversity or disincentives for a lack of diversity. Where in the United States (in the case of gender and Title IX) and Britain (via the Equality Standard) government funds for sport are only given to organizations that promote diversity, this is not the case in Australia. In the absence of such policies, sporting organizations and clubs must develop their own policies. As long as they feel it is too difficult to do so, the status quo will remain.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that there is a discrepancy between the diversity policy objectives of government and sport organizations and the way in which diversity is understood and managed in practice. At a club level, diversity is not so much a commonly held ideal but a situational response to specific opportunity or demand. The idea of a moral imperative to provide for diversity was largely absent in clubs' responses. Instead, with few exceptions, the clubs' diversity discourse was underpinned by a business case rationale which interprets diversity through the lens of organizational performance. Several of the clubs (10) under study argued that managing diversity was not part of their core business despite recognizing the potential benefits that could accrue from having a diverse club membership. As we have seen, these clubs' reluctance to take diversity action was based not only on capacity constraints, but also on organizational culture, a deficit approach to diversity, and the wider policy and funding context. Overall, we found that diversity is not being promoted widely among community sports clubs despite Australian sport organizations' evocation of diversity as an institutional value. It appears only rarely (in the case of this study only at 4 clubs) are genuine attempts made to foster diversity in organizational practice. And even where diversity is proactively managed, it tends to be reduced to one of its many facets, such as when sports clubs invest almost exclusively in engaging people with disabilities or people from culturally diverse backgrounds, rather than seeking to cater for all diverse social groups simultaneously.

There is still a long way to go before equitable and inclusive participation in sport will be a reality. If the Australian government's objective of safe and inclusive sporting opportunities for all residents regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion or ability is to be achieved, this will take more than merely enhancing the capacity of sport organizations to accommodate the nation's diversity. A mandatory approach may help to reduce some of the perceived costs associated with diversity action for local sports clubs, thereby altering their cost-benefit analysis of diversity. However, a more fundamental reconsideration of the rationale for managing diversity is also necessary. Our study has shown that the business rationale is often detrimental to equality outcomes in sport. As such, it confirms Noon's (2007) conclusion that the business case alone is not a sufficient basis for building policy on equality. Although one might argue that traditional social justice policies have been at least partly ineffective in their goal of equity outcomes, it seems that the moral case for equality remains the strongest foundation for underpinning the promotion of diversity in sport, where the business case might provide an additional economic rationale. This moral foundation has the ability to confront sport organizations with their own ingrained assumptions about the way their clubs work and to question and critically reflect on (aspects of) their organizational cultures and practices. A key challenge will be to cultivate a commitment and preparedness to take diversity and equal opportunity action at the micro level, where sport is managed and implemented on the ground in everyday encounters between people with diverse backgrounds and abilities.

References

Adair, D., & Stronach, M. (2011). Natural born athletes? Australian indigenous people and the double-edged lure of professional sport. In K. Spracklen & J. Long (Eds.), *Sport and Challenges to Racism* (pp. 117-134). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Adair, D., Taylor, T., & Darcy, S. (2010). Managing ethnocultural and 'racial' diversity in sport: Obstacles and opportunities. *Sport Management Review, 13*, 307-312.

April, K., & Shockley, M. (Eds.). (2006). *Diversity: New realities in a changing world.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). *Census of population and housing: Socio-economic indexes for areas (SEIFA).* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Government. (2010). *Australian sport: The pathway to success*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Australian Government. (2011). *National sport and active recreation policy framework*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Australian Sports Commission. (2011). *Strategic plan, 2011-2012 to 2014-2015*. Canberra: ASC.

Clark, S. (2012). Being 'good at sport': Talent, ability and young women's sporting participation. *Sociology, 46*(6), 1178-1193.

Coleman, M., & Glover, D. (2010). *Educational leadership and management: Developing insights and skills*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Cunningham, G. B. (2011). *Diversity in sport organizations* (2nd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway.

Dean, H. (2005). *Social policy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Dickens, L. (1999). Beyond the business case: A three-pronged approach to equality action. *Human Resource Management Journal 9*(1), 9-19.

Dickie, C., & Soldan, Z. (2008). *Diversity management*. Melbourne: Tilde University Press.

Doherty, A., & Chelladurai, P. (1999). Managing cultural diversity in sport organizations: A theoretical perspective. *Journal of Sport Management, 13*, 280-297.

Donnelly, P., & Coakley, J. (2002). *The role of recreation in promoting social inclusion*. Toronto: Laidlaw Foundation.

Ely, R., & Thomas, D. (2001). Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 46*(2), 229-273.

Embrick, D. (2011). The diversity ideology in the business world: a new oppression for a new age. *Critical Sociology, 37*(5), 541-556.

Fink, J. S., & Pastore, D. L. (1999). Diversity in sport? Utilizing the business literature to devise a comprehensive framework of diversity initiatives. *Quest 51*, 310-327.

Gasparini, W., & Cometti, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Sport facing the test of cultural diversity*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Gorman, S. (2011). Black Magic? White Muddle more like it. *The Conversation*, 6 April.

Hage, G. (1998). *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in multicultural society*. Annandale: Pluto Press.

Hanlon, C., & Coleman, D. (2006). Recruitment and retention of culturally diverse people by sport and active recreation clubs. *Managing Leisure 11*, 77-95.

Harrison, D., & Sin, H. (2006). What is diversity and how should it be measured? In A. Konrad, P. Prasad & J. Pringle (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace diversity* (pp. 191-216). London: Sage.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2006). *What's the score? A survey of cultural diversity and racism in Australian sport.* Sydney: HREOC.

Kaler, J. (2001). Diversity, equality and morality. In M. Noon & E. Ogbonna (Eds.), *Equality, diversity and disadvantage in employment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Kandola, R., & Fullerton, J. (1998). *Managing the mosaic: Diversity in action* (2nd ed.). Wiltshire: Cromwell Press.

Kelly, L. (2010). 'Social inclusion' through sports-based interventions? *Critical Social Policy 31*(1), 126-150.

Kirton, G., & Greene, A. (2010). *The dynamics of managing diversity: a critical approach* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

Liff, S. (1997). Two routes to managing diversity: Individual differences or social group characteristics. *Employee Relations, 19*(1), 11-26.

Lorbiecki, A., & Jack, G. (2000). Critical turns in the evolution of diversity management. *British Journal of Management, 11*, 17-32.

Macintyre, S. (2004). *A Concise History of Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Noon, M. (2007). The fatal flaws of diversity and the business case for ethnic minorities. *Work, Employment and Society 21*(4), 773-784.

Robinson, L. (2011). The voluntary sports sector. In L. Robinson & D. Palmer (Eds.), *Managing voluntary ports organisations* (pp. 3-18). London: Routledge.

Shibli, S. (2011). Managing finances. In L. Robinson & D. Palmer (Eds.), *Managing voluntary ports organisations* (pp. 99-120). London: Routledge.

Spaaij, R. (2013a). Sport, social cohesion and community building: Managing the nexus. In P. Leisink, P. Boselie, M. van Bottenburg & D. M. Hosking (Eds.), *Managing social issues: A public values perspective* (pp. 107-125). Brookfield and Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Spaaij, R. (2013b). Cultural diversity in community sport: an ethnographic inquiry of Somalia Australians' experiences. *Sport Management Review 16*(1), 29-40.

Spracklen, K., Hylton, K., & Long, J. (2006). Managing and monitoring equality and diversity in UK sport. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 30*(3), 289-305.

Zanoni, P., & Janssens, M. (2004). Deconstructing difference: The rhetoric of human resource managers' diversity discourses. *Organization Studies 24*(1), 55-74.