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The Two Other Solitudes: Sport and Physical Activity Policy in Canada
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The title of this paper is an analogy to the way are often described the relationships between the two official language communities in Canada i.e. French and English. Indeed, the two linguistic groups do not always share the same values. They have their own separate cultural institutions and artists, although they share the same love for ice hockey, Canada’s national sport. The two other solitudes referred to in this paper are sport and physical activity. Our point is that over the last 40 years, they became increasingly foreign to each other as policy fields. The goal of the paper is to present and discuss the two latest policy discussion papers released in the Fall of 2011. One relates to the process leading to the renewal of the 2002 Canadian Sport Policy, the second relates to a proposed new physical activity strategy for the country. More precisely, the question raised by this paper is the following. After some 40 years of separate evolution is there a possibility for a new joint sport and physical activity policy to be launched in April 2012?

The paper starts with a short introduction to some of the features of the Canadian political system, in order to point out how this system frames national sport and physical activity policy in Canada, providing opportunities, as well as creating barriers to policy makers. Subsequently, are quickly presented the two consultation papers referred to above, with the goal of

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pointing out where sport and physical activity policy might eventually meet. While at the time of the writing of this paper nobody knows what will be the end result of the policy writing processes underway, a few reflections on some of the expected outcomes are presented in conclusion.

The Canadian political system, sport and physical activity policy.

Canada is run by a Federal system of parliamentary government copied from the England’s Westminster model. Composed of ten provinces and three territories spread over ten million square kilometers, the country is the second largest in the world, while it ranks 35 in population size with its 35 million citizens.

One of the biggest challenges for Canadian policy in fields like sport and physical activity is the wide disparities among provinces and territories, in terms of land area, density of population and percentage of national population. For example, Ontario is a highly industrialized province which contains 38.7 % of the total Canadian population, while Nunavut’s territory only has a population of 32,558 while representing 21 % of total Canadian land area. These disparities between provinces and territories pose many challenges for sport policy, since for example they do not all benefit the same: overall wealth therefore some provinces do not have a lot of money available for sport, the same potential to nurture viable concentrations of athletes and coaches, as well as sufficient resources to boost extensive let alone basic recreational infrastructures. For example, in less populated areas sheer distances create major transportation problems, which prevent the organization and maintenance of sustainable sport competition systems.

The most challenging feature of the Canadian political system for sport and physical activity is nevertheless the division of power between the two higher levels of government. Indeed, the federal, on the one side, and provinces and territories, on the other side, both hold exclusive, although at times intersecting, fields of jurisdiction. As for the local level of governments, such as municipalities, they are creations of the provinces according to the Canadian constitution. Therefore, the federal government cannot intervene directly at the local level such as with cities, municipalities and school boards without the mediation of each respective province and territory. There is no provision for sport in Canada’s 1867 constitution. However, sport has been understood as part of education or health, especially when the focus is on mass participation sport and physical activity. Both education and health services are prerogatives of provinces and territories. Therefore, for the federal government, it is very difficult to develop a national sport policy or a physical activity policy without running the risk of getting into problems over jurisdictions with provinces and territories. Jurisdictional issues are even more complex with regards to competitive sport. While it is clear that the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over foreign affairs and therefore over international sport as well as national level sport, high performance sport development and interprovincial/territorial competition are shared responsibilities.

There are two types of inter-governmental relationships in Canada: competitive federalism and collaborative federalism. Sport and physical activity are not different than other policy fields. In these two fields the two types of relationships exist. One example of collaborative relationship between the federal and the provinces is the 1985 Agreement on areas of responsibility with regards to athletes. In the document are listed three categories of areas: 1) provincial and territorial exclusive areas, such as participation development, provincial/territorial games and provincial/territorial team programs; 2) shared areas of responsibility, such as high performance program planning national championships and hosting major events; 3) federal exclusive areas, such as national team programs, national coaching programs, international sport relations, etc. On the other side, the 1987 National Recreation Statement can be seen as an example of competitive federalism as it reaffirmed the primacy of provinces and territories with regards to recreation and mass participation sport. This statement makes it impossible for the federal government to act at the local level, without the mediation of provinces. These jurisdictional issues are reflected in the Canadian Sport System. Looking at figure 1 one can see that there is no direct line of communication between the federal government and municipalities, let alone schools and sport clubs. Similarly, national sport organisations have the competence to develop national regulations that apply to their sports, but it is through the provincial and territorial associations that these rules get eventually applied at the level of schools, local clubs and
community associations.

While constitutional issues determine the respective areas of responsibilities of the different levels of government, other characteristics of the Canadian system are key factors determining what types of policies are possible. The system relies heavily on a diminishing number of volunteers (few clubs have paid staff and few coaches are paid). Governments do not have direct mechanisms of intervention and therefore rely on funding criteria to nongovernmental associations to deliver their policies. There are disconnects between municipal, provincial and national levels. There are multiple uncoordinated stakeholders in the system. A final consideration with regards to a national sport policy is the very fact that sport really happens at the local level, if we take into consideration from which sources public funding for sport originates. There is no system of national public accounts specific to sport, but estimates realized by Statistics Canada show that 9% of sport public spending comes from the federal, 12% from provinces/territories and 78% from municipalities. (Statistics Canada, 1999). Indeed, it is at the local level that most of the action is, despite the fact that the small number of Olympic athletes are the ones that attract most of the attention of the mass medias.

Overview of the evolution of the federal state legislation in sport and physical activity

The first sport and physical activity law passed the Federal government was the 1943 National Physical Fitness Act. This piece of legislation was adopted as a result of the realisation by the Canadian Army that most Canadian youth were not physically fit to go to war. As a result the National Council on Physical Fitness was created under that law. The Council entered in agreements with several provinces to create program to improve youth fitness. It is interesting to note that several provinces, including Quebec didn’t participate in this program, as they considered physical fitness their exclusive area of jurisdiction.

The second law, the one that marked the beginning of systematic federal intervention in sport, was adopted in 1961. The law was motivated by fact that Canadian athletes were performing poorly in Olympic Games, as well as by the desire of the Federal government to boost Canadian identity and national pride at a moment where Quebec nationalism was growing. During the first decade of existence of this law, the government limited its action to support financially national sport organisations. In the 1970s a public service for sport was slowly put in place. The Fitness and Amateur Sport Directorate was created within the Department of Health and Welfare. Two main components of the Directorate were Sport Canada, in charge of high performance sport, and Recreation Canada, which became later Fitness

Figure 1 The Canadian Sport System
Canada. ParticipACTION, a nonprofit organization funded by the government was also put in place with the role of to encouraging Canadians to get involved in the practice of sport and physical activity. Its first public advertisement campaign became quickly famous for its saying that a 60 years old Swede is more fit than a 30 years old Canadian.

In 1993, a new reshuffling of the Federal cabinet resulted in the creation of a new Department of Canadian Heritage, in charge of boosting Canadian nationalism. With culture, Sport Canada became a directorate of that Department while Fitness stayed with Health and Welfare. That was one further step in the separation between sport and fitness (or physical activity). The current federal structures are the following: Sport Canada is still attached to Heritage Canada and what was Fitness Canada has been transferred to the new Public Health Agency Canada. Physical activity is now one of the files of the Healthy Living Unit, along with anti-smoking, healthy diet, etc.

Finally, the current law, the Act to promote physical activity and sport, was adopted in 2003. This Act made into law the 2002 Canadian Sport Policy (CSP) four main goals:

**Enhanced Participation:** A significantly higher proportion of Canadians from all segments of society are involved in quality sport activities at all levels and in all forms of participation.

**Enhanced Excellence:** The pool of talented athletes has expanded and Canadian athletes and teams are systematically achieving world-class results at the highest levels of international competition through fair and ethical means.

**Enhanced Capacity:** The essential components of an ethically based, athlete/participant-centred development system are in place and are continually modernized and strengthened as required.

**Enhanced Interaction:** The components of the sport system are more connected and coordinated as a result of the committed collaboration and communication amongst the stakeholders. (Heritage Canada, 2002b)

The goals are vague at best, and constitute mainly of a set of wide guiding principles for governmental action. No baselines were set, nor precise targets stated in the policy. In practice however, some targets for example with regards to high performance, as we shall see later, were eventually developed at the federal level. In addition, it is fair to say that the very nature of the document was not conducive to such clear targets and tight policy goals. Indeed, the policy could be read as an exercise in compromise and flexibility in order to bring the Federal as well as all the provincial and territorial governments under the same roof, leaving provinces and territories maximum flexibility to apply the policy as they see fit, according their respective realities.

Before redirecting our attention on the policy renewal process, it is important to reinforce the fact that the CSP is an umbrella or an overarching policy that mainly serves as a framework for a series of specific policies and programs, as well as for inter-government agreements. These policies and programs include:

- Policy on Sport for Persons with a Disability (2006)
- Sport Canada’s Policy on Aboriginal Peoples’ Participation in Sport (2005)
- Athlete Assistance Program (2005)
- Canadian Policy against Doping in Sport (2011)
- Treasury Board Policy on Official Languages
- Sport Funding Accountability Framework (SFAF) (1995)

Now that we have layed out the major factors structuring Canadian Sport Policy, as well the main goals of the Current CSP, it is now time to turn to the current policy renewal process.

**Renewing the Canadian Sport Policy Process**

The current renewal process is a three stages process that started with a summative evaluation in 2009. Summative evaluations assess the goal attainment and effects of policies at the end of their cycle. (Woolmann, 2007). The summative evaluation of the CSP came to the conclusions that the overall impact of the policy has been positive, albeit limited with regards to designated groups, such as aboriginal people, women and persons with disability. Among the unexpected positive impacts of the policy, according to the report, were the injection of new funds for high performance sport and the development of the Canadian Sport for Life model. Evidence in the report showed that the participation goal hasn’t been met, as sport participation rates among Canadian declined. The report also underlined the need for a new Canadian Sport Policy.
Key factors behind the policy renewal

Among the key factors behind the policy is the fact that the policy was set to be in place for ten years. Other factors were major changes in the sport field since the adoption of the policy. One of them is the creation of Own the Podium (OTP) a program of targeted excellence initiated as a result of the successful bid by Vancouver to host the 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Games. The idea behind OTP was initially to target Canadian athletes and disciplines that had the best chances to earn medals at the Vancouver Olympics and to channel vast resources to these athletes in order to maximise their chances of success. Approximately $117 million was distributed over five years preceding the Vancouver games. (Donnelly, 2010, p. 84) The overall goal of the program was for Canada to rank first in the unofficial medal count. It finished third but Canadian athletes won record of fourteen gold medals. The proclaimed success of the program contrast with the deceiving statistics about mass sport participation.

Another factor affecting the CSP renewal process is the prominent place now holds the Long-Term Athletes Development Program (LTAD), also called the Canadian Sport for Life Model (CS4L). The model began receiving funding from Sport Canada in 2005 to support its implementation in the sport system. Now most of Canadian national sport organisations have adopted the LTAD model. LTAD defines itself as: “a developmental pathway whereby athletes follow optimal training, competition, and recovery regimens from childhood through all phases of adulthood.” (LTAD, 2011).

New actors on the sport arena are also influencing the policy renewal process. Among them is The Sport matters Group (SMG). The group defines itself as a non organisation working for the betterment of sport policy in Canada. It is a fluid network of sport decision makers, mostly at the national level, that share ideas and expertise as issues arise, use extensively new media to network collectively and lobby governments on several issues. For example, during the last two federal election periods SMG has developed priority items for government action and challenged all official political parties to answer their demands, for increased public funds to be dedicated to sport at all levels. Sport Matters Group was behind the adoption of the Children Fitness Tax credit.

At the time of writing this paper, the most recent events in the policy renewal process were, first, the October 28, 2011, release of the Discussion paper entitled: Towards a Renewed Canadian Sport Policy. Second was the November 9 and10 Canadian Sport Policy Renewal National Gathering in Toronto. It is interesting to notice that the group with the task of writing the discussion paper and the policy is a mix of representatives of different levels of government and organisations of civil society. The group is called the Sustained Engagement and Collaboration Work Group (SEAC). It is an example of governance mechanism put in place by the government in order to partner with civil society in developing public policy.

Another feature of the openness of the process were the extensive consultations with sport organisations and interested individuals, making sure to foster inclusiveness of targeted groups of the population, such as women and girls, persons with disability, aboriginal peoples, ethnocultural populations and official language minority.

Building from policy principles

The October 28 discussion paper includes a series of principles to guide the new policy. These principles were endorsed by the participants at the Toronto gathering and are indeed framing the current policy writing. The list enumerates the characteristics that the new policy should include:

- Strong linkages with stakeholders at the local level
- Long term participant/athletes development concepts included in the policy
- Broad vision that include positive contribution sport can bring
- A narrative or storyline must emanate from the policy
- Policy designed as a road map
- Mechanism of endorsement for governments and nongovernmental associations (a policy for all the sport sector)
- Include a performance strategy (measuring progress, monitoring)

(SEAC, 2011, pp. 31–33)

The Sport Participation Map

A second prominent feature of the October 28 discussion paper is its Sport participation map reproduced below.

The map is a conceptual tool for broad-based policy development only. It was designed to encompass all spheres of sport participation. These spheres are: high performance, competitive sport, recreation sport and initiation to sport.
Arrows represents pathways that sport participants may take as their form of participation evolves over time. Moreover, according to this model one may be a competitive participant in one sport and a recreational participant another.

The map represents a new departure from the previous policies as it breaks the participation versus high performance silos. Moreover, the sport participation sphere definition can be extended to include physical activity and as a result reach out to the health promotion sector, breaking ever further governmental silos.

**The Proposed logic model**

The last feature of the Discussion paper to underline is the Logical model.

According to McCauley a logic model:

⋯ is a tool that has been used for more than 20 years by program managers and evaluators to describe the effectiveness of their programs. The model describes logical linkages among program resources, activities, outputs, audiences, and short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes related to a specific problem or situation. (McCawley, 2010)

The model is composed of four main components: areas of focus, participation outcomes, vision and public policy outcomes. On the left hand side are the areas of focus, followed to the right by participation outcomes, the vision and finally public outcomes. Let’s start with the second column from the right hand side, the vision. The vision is what normally drives the rest of the logic model. The proposed vision for the policy is the following: “when sport participation is maximized for positive impacts on the individual and/or leveraged for broader societal inputs, its potential can be realized.” (SEAC, 2011, p. 24) That vision would lead to a continuum of programming extending from, on the one side, “sport for sport”, or in other words for the purpose of developing athletes with an emphasis on individual outcomes such as winning medals. On the other side of the spectrum, sport programming would be designed to achieve “sport for society” i.e. to improve health, better integrate new immigrants. This vision speaks to the real innovation of the proposed model, a new emphasis on sport for wider social goals at the community level. Coherent with its vision, the model identifies several areas of focus, such as equity and inclusion, as well as several participation and public policy outcomes.

The November 28 discussion paper was well received at the Toronto gathering, although some of strong...
supporters of the LTAD model raised their voice asking to replace the sport participation map by the LTAD Model. The polemic about this issue continued for some time, until one provincial government representative informed the participants in plenary discussion that his province would not endorse a policy based on the LTAD model. A reservation about the document was its omission of the Sport for Development International trend. While it is doubtful that the LTAD model would be central to the new policy, Sport for Development on the other hand might figure in the new policy.

Towards a New Physical Activity Strategy

It is now time to turn our attention to the other current policy development initiative Active Canada 20/20: A physical activity strategy for Canada. However, before getting into the content of the document, it is important to underline a few features of the evolution of the public discourse on physical activity and Health in Canada.

In 1974, the Federal Minister of Health released a landmark document entitled, A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians. The main feature of the document was to list determinants of health, with a strong emphasis on individuals’ responsibility towards their own health in an effort to curb health care costs in Canada. That new emphasis on making Canadians responsible to their health was soon referred to as an example of a «blaming the victim ideology» as it downplayed the social determinants of health. In this new discourse physical activity became an important tool for health prevention. In 1986 was released a similar document that adopted a wider vision of health determinants. It proposed a three dimensional strategy: reduce social inequalities, increase prevention, promote healthy environments. However, no money was set aside to reach these objectives, and the promotion of individuals’ behavior modification as the measure for health prevention remained the main focus.

Since then, many policy statements were issued, which were mostly left unimplemented. Today, despite the use of new language the emphasis on the importance for Canadian to change their lifestyle and adopt healthy behaviour remains core and center of the Federal action in physical activity. The other determinants of health such as the environment and social inequalities are left
The Active Canada 20/20 writing team lists why adopting a new pan Canadian physical activity strategy should now be a national priority: Physical inactivity is now in 2011 the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. 85% of adults and 93% of children are not meeting Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines, Canada’s approach to increase physical activity has been fragmented and there is a lack of coordination, there is a need to move beyond being a country of disconnected projects to become a country of strategic action. (ParticipACTION, 2011)

In the report are also reminded the physical activity targets adopted by the Health Ministers of Canada: Children (5–11 years) and youth (12–17) need 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day. Adults (18–64) and older (65 plus) need 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week. A recent addition to the physical activity targets that is reproduced in the paper is the Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines. For children and youth they are to limit recreational screen time to two hours per day and limit sedentary transport, prolonged sitting and time indoor.

Here are the vision and goals stated in the strategy document. As a vision for Canada for 20/20 the writing team suggests: «A physically active lifestyle defines Canada and strengthens the health and social fabric of our country. Canadians benefit being physically active every day wherever they live, learn, commute, work and play.» (ParticipACTION, 2011, p. 7) As for the proposed goal statement it is being proposed: «to increase the physical activity of Canadians, by inspiring and supporting their efforts to be active every day.» (ParticipACTION, 2011, p. 7)

In the proposed document are also listed a series of principles that should guide the strategy. They are reproduced here:

The different components of the strategy are regrouped in a figure (see figure 5 below). It builds on the principles listed above, on four pillars for change, as well as foundations for change, all interacting together in «Creating a culture of an active nation.» There is no room here to go through all the components of the figure, but let’s take the example of one of the pillars. The proposed

**Principles**

**Active Canada 20/20** adheres to the following:

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<td>1. Adopt evidence-based strategies that target the whole population, as well as specific population subgroups, particularly those facing the greatest barriers;</td>
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<td>2. Embrace an equity approach aimed at reducing social and health inequalities and disparities of access to physical activity;</td>
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<td>3. Address the environmental, social and individual determinants of physical inactivity;</td>
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<td>4. To achieve the greatest impact:</td>
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<td>a. Value, invest in, and build on current evidence informed locally, regionally, and nationally.</td>
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<td>b. Implement sustainable partnerships across sectors and between all levels of government;</td>
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<td>5. Build capacity and support training in research, practice, policy, evaluation and surveillance;</td>
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<td>6. Use a life-stage approach by addressing the needs of children, youth, families, adults and older adults;</td>
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<td>7. Advocate to decision makers and the general community for an increase in political commitment to and resources for physical activity;</td>
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<td>8. Design for inclusion and adapt strategies to accommodate varying local needs, cultures, contexts and resources;</td>
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<td>9. Facilitate healthy personal choices by making the physically active choice the easy choice.</td>
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Source: (ParticipACTION, 2011, p. 7)
change action agenda for the Policy Development pillar is: Federal provincial task force lead the development of Canadian Physical Activity Policy, leading Canadian employers develop programs for employees to become active, governments address sub-populations (low income, women, aboriginal) and develop programs, transportation departments to design programs for active transport, school boards will adopt and implement Quality Daily Physical Education in School, new Canadian Sport Policy will bring priority to increasing physical activity levels as part of sport participation goal. (ParticipACTION, 2011, p. 10)

Here one notices the reference to the Canadian sport policy renewal process. The Strategy is indeed ambitious but many challenges face this initiative.

First, unlike in sport where an extensive sport system exists, there is no delivery mechanism for programs in physical activity. Schools and health services are the prerogatives of the provinces as we have noticed earlier. Therefore ParticipACTION the Healthy Leaving Unit can only try to play a coordination role. Moreover, the province of Québec has recently made it clear it is not interested in any national policy or strategy in this area, as it has put in place its own strategy.

Conclusion

After having reviewed the main components of the two policy development processes being unfolding in sport and physical activity in Canada it is now time to return to our initial question: After some forty years of separate evolution is there a possibility for a new joint sport and physical activity policy to be adopted at the next sport Ministers meeting in April 2012? If we forget the reference to the sport participation goal in the Active 20/20 proposed strategy, as well as the reference in the CSP renewal discussion paper about opening up to the health sector, the two documents are almost totally foreign to each other. They use a different language and put forward divergent strategies. Hence, the chances are that at the end of the current policy renewal process the two solitudes will still live peacefully side by side, at least in the near future. Moreover, and this applies to the two policy areas, Canada as much of the countries in the world, is in the midst of a fiscal crunch which raise doubts about the possibility that governments could find the needed resources to fund these two ambitious plans, although action is really needed in sport and physical activity participation given the current health status of the population. Given the fact that the country is now
under the rule of a government that strives for a leaner and less expensive state apparatus, these documents might still get adopted, but they are most probably destined to gather dust on the shelves of the Ministers offices. Meanwhile, at least at the federal level, financial resources will remain devoted to high performance in order to continue provide Ministers good photo opportunities with Canadian high performance athletes as they win medals at major games.

List of references