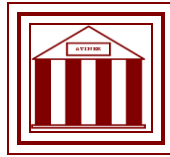


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**Preserving Canada's National
Sport: Socio-Cultural and
Demographic Challenges**

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Preserving Canada's National Sport: Socio-Cultural and Demographic Challenges

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Abstract

Canada is a multicultural society. A large number of Canadians are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Recently, Statistics Canada revealed that the face of Canada is changing, with most new immigrants coming from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the United States. These immigrants, as did the European immigrants who came to Canada from 1951 to 1971, have brought their traditions, values, beliefs, and ways of life. For most of these new immigrants, ice hockey has not been a part of their way of life. In Canada, ice hockey is one of the nation's two national sports – the other being lacrosse. Indeed, Canada, which prides itself as the birthplace of ice hockey, is recognized as one of the dominant ice hockey nations in the world. However, current immigration patterns, a decreasing number of Canadians below the age of fifteen, and the high cost of participation has meant that minor hockey participation rates have witnessed a steady decline during the past few years. Ultimately, the fear is that lack of enrollment in ice hockey at the minor levels may mean less talent to choose from for future international competitions. In light of this trend Hockey Canada has altered its traditional marketing approaches to try to enhance participation and to attract new immigrants to the sport. Professional ice hockey teams have also recognized the potential benefit of outreaching to Canada's multicultural population. The sport of ice hockey will continue to face socio-cultural and demographic challenges. The purpose of this paper is to describe the current state of condition of socio-cultural and demographic challenges faced in Canada for the preservation of its national sport of ice hockey. Specifically, the objectives of this paper are to: (1) provide an overview of changing demographics in Canada and the impact this is having on sport involvement, (2) present ice hockey as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and (3) provide suggestions for marketing and promoting ice hockey to a multicultural society.

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Introduction

Canada is a multicultural society. A large number of Canadians are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Recently, Statistics Canada revealed that the face of Canada is changing, with most new immigrants coming from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the United States (Statistics Canada, 2006). Currently, six out of ten (60%) of immigrants in Canada are from Asia and the Middle East (Warren, 2008). From 2001 to 2006 for example, 1.1 million immigrants came to Canada with roughly 60% of these coming from Asia and the Middle East (Statistics Canada, 2006). Indeed these new immigrants to Canada come mostly from tropical and warmer climates. That is, most immigrants that come to Canada today come from climates where summer outdoor sports such as soccer and cricket are popular. In addition to bringing their passion for their favorite summer sport activities, these immigrants have also brought their traditions, values, beliefs, and ways of life.

Canada is a country with four seasons. Unlike many other parts of the world that also have four seasons, Canada's winter tends to be the most distinguishable season. Despite being officially four months – from December 21 to March 21 – winters in Canada feel longer and last longer. It is not uncommon for winter to stretch to a six month period with cold, snow, freezing rain and brisk temperature in many urban Canadian regions. Cities like Quebec City, Calgary, Edmonton, and Ottawa may see snow as early as November and as late as April.

Canada's cold winter climate as well as its vast outdoors is vital in shaping the sport activities of the land. Winter sports such as hockey, alpine skiing, cross country skiing, and snowboarding are extremely popular in Canada. Canadians embrace these outdoor activities in often frigid temperatures as a way to stay active and to cope with long, harsh winters. For immigrants coming from warmer climates, getting used to the cold is one thing, becoming accustomed to winter sport activities is another thing. It takes a great deal of re-socialization for these new immigrants to not only adjust to a different climate, but also the way of life of the people that live in this climate, including winter sports and leisure activities (Horna, 1980).

The nature of Canadian society, including its climate, has been influential in shaping its cultural leisure and sports pursuits (Karlis, 2011). Despite not having a long history – Confederation took place in 1867 – the land called Canada has managed to play a vital role in the global history of sports, thanks to its Aboriginal people and the activities and pastimes of its early settlers. Two activities that are globally recognized as having roots in Canada are lacrosse and hockey. Lacrosse, which was called baggataway by the Algonquin and Iroquios (Searle and Brayley, 2000) and tewaraathon by the Mohawks (Cole, 1993) is an activity that has been traced back prior to the arrival of the French and English settlers and was invented unknown centuries ago (Decarie, 2000). Lacrosse was played in Canada for a number of different reasons including: "(1) the game was used for settling major conflicts as an

alternative to armed conflict, (2) bestowing power on individuals or groups of people, (3) constituting a means of offering thanks to the Creator for allowing an elder or medicine person to remain with the people to continue sharing their richness of life with the youth, (4) developing maturity and respect among players, and (5) developing coordination, quickness and timing for the players” (Cole, 1993: 110).”

Hockey also has a rich history in Canada. Many historians credit Canada as being the official birthplace of hockey. Indeed, a number of different arguments exist as to where the original whereabouts of hockey took place in Canada. Historical research, by Dr. Garth Vaughan (1996), a dentist, argues that the birthplace of hockey is Windsor Nova Scotia. In his compelling piece of research, Vaughan claims that hockey was first called Hurley-on-Ice and was played by the Mi'kmaq in Windsor Nova Scotia. A further argument put forth by Gruneau and Whitson (1993) states that hockey was first played by the British military in the military garrisons of Kingston Ontario. Whereas, further research posits that the first hockey game in Canada took place on the corner of Bleury and Dorchester streets in Montreal (Tessier, 1984).

The Canadian historical connection of hockey and lacrosse has been critical in the way these sports are accepted, respected and practiced in this society. Canada's current Prime Minister for example is writing a book on the history of hockey. He also recently wrote the forward in a book entitled *How Hockey Explains Canada*. This book authored by Paul Henderson and Jim Prime in 2011 argues that hockey is vital in shaping all aspects of Canadian culture including language, religion and leisure behaviors. It is no wonder that in 1994, the Parliament of Canada officially proclaimed hockey as its official winter sport and lacrosse as its official summer sport.

There is no doubt that hockey is intertwined with Canadian culture. The close link of this sport with this young evolving culture poses a concern for the maintenance and sustainability of this sport. The success of this sport is largely shaped by success in international competitions. Historically, Canada has been a world leader in international competitions of ice-hockey. Will this continue to be the case in the future? Will Canada's minor hockey system continue to develop elite players to compete in the future? Will Canadians continue to participate in hockey in high numbers thus enhancing the probability of elite player development? Will Canada's changing demographics and socio-cultural make-up have an impact on ice-hockey participation?

The purpose of this paper is to describe the current state of condition of socio-cultural and demographic challenges faced in Canada for the preservation of its national sport of ice hockey. Specifically, the objectives of this paper are to: (1) provide an overview of changing demographics in Canada and the impact this is having on sport involvement, (2) present ice hockey as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and (3) provide suggestions for marketing and promoting ice hockey to a multicultural society.

Changing Demographics in Canada and Sport Involvement

As other western societies Canada's demographic make-up is changing. One of the most talked about demographic changes is that Canada is an aging society with roughly one out of every four Canadians projected to be seniors by the year 2025. This aging trend is reflective of the fact that baby boomers born between 1947 and 1966 have started to enter into the senior years of life. Aging is not the only demographic change experienced by Canada. Today less children are born in Canada as many couples are choosing to have a small family of only 1-2 children. The average number of children per family reported by Statistics Canada in 2005 is 1.66 (Statistics Canada, 2009) meaning that the average number of children under 15 is not significantly increasing. Specifically, the birth rate under 15 has remained static since 1981 (Charron, 2012). Between the years 2015 and 2021 it is forecasted that the number of Canadians 65 and over will surpass the number of Canadians 15 and under (Statistics Canada, 2010). Families are choosing to have less kids thus making it easy to understand why Canada is graying and getting older with less new members born.

While taking into consideration the dwindling effect of an aging population and declining fertility rates, the Government in Canada has focused on increasing immigration in Canada. Roughly 300,000 immigrants enter Canada each year. Dating back to 2001, the census conducted by the Government of Canada reported that immigration rates were at the highest peak that they had been in over 50 years (Karlis, 2004). The trend towards greater immigration has continued as it was reported in the last two census reports released by the Government of Canada in 2006 and 2011. The majority of immigrants that have come to Canada in the past 15 years have not come from Europe, but have come mostly from Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. The result – the face of Canada has changed as is changing as it is projected that 14.4 million Canadians will belong to a visible minority by 2031 more than doubling the 5.3 million of 2006 (Dawson, 2013). Not only has immigration grown, the bulk of the people have come from parts of the world that have different traditions and in some cases, even different values and religious beliefs that their predecessors immigrants to Canada.

When immigration takes place, adjustment is difficult. One of the challenges faced by new immigrants is language. Language can be a barrier to integrating into society (Karlis, 1990). For immigrants that come from lands in which French or English are not the primary languages, learning to communicate in their adopted country becomes a challenge for both work and play. In addition to working for survival, learning French or English becomes a top priority for immigrants. Play, recreation and sport participation becomes a secondary concern and is often engaged in if and only time permits. For many immigrants however, it is easier to adjust to the recreation and sport activities of their respective ethnic community organizations rather than to integrate into those of mainstream society at least during the initial first years of immigration.

Further demographic trends in Canada reveal that the nature of the family is changing. Not only are fewer people getting married, the traditional two parent family has also been in decline as the number of single parents have grown (Karlis, 2011). One reason for this is high divorce rates, another reason is a decision made by some to be single parents. The impact of single parenthood is felt by some families as basic needs have to be met with one income. This makes it especially hard when it comes to paying for costly sport and recreation activities for children, particularly those that are structured and organized and require high equipment costs.

Canada, as are many countries in the world, is experiencing a transition in recreation and sport involvement from more active to more passive. One reason for this transition is technology. Gameboys, Ipads, and other computer games have made play more sedentary. It has become easier, and even safer to play at home that to go out to play. Homes have become recreation places for many as people feel safer entertaining themselves at home and build their homes as recreation spaces with home theatres, swimming pools, and entertainment systems. As a result, there is no reason to leave the house. One of the big criticisms of the home as a recreation centre however is that people become more sedentary, especially when the focus is on sedentary computerized games.

The trend towards sedentary entertainment may be a cause for decrease enrollment in organized sport in Canada. Participation in organized sports in Canada has decreased for both boys and girls in recent years. In 1992, it was reported that 66% of boys and 49% of girls participated in organized sports in Canada (Clark, 2008). By 2005, the numbers for participation in organized sport in Canada had decreased for both boys and girls to 56% and 45% respectively. Although technology and stationary games can be identified as a reason for this decrease, the high and rising costs of participating in organized sports are more likely to blame (Clark, 2008). The past twenty years have been tough financially in Canada, with cost of living on the increase and job stability and uncertainty prevailing.

Ice Hockey - A Socio-Cultural Phenomenon in Canada

Ice hockey is an organized sport. It is played in teams and team sport requires structure, organization and pattern. Ice hockey, unlike other team sports such as soccer and volleyball, require a tremendous amount of equipment. Without the proper equipment you cannot play. The catch is that equipment comes with a cost, a high cost. For growing children between 5 to 14 years of age, this can be expensive as new equipment needs to be purchased almost yearly.

Organized sports are played in leagues. In the case of ice hockey, this means registration fees which in turn help leagues survive as well as pay for ice-time. In Canada, it is not uncommon to pay on average \$1500 on hockey costs which means anything from equipment to meals. It does not end there as

for kids to travel to tournaments and play in competitions families can spend more than \$5000 annually (Royal Bank of Canada Survey cited in Charron, 2012). Participating in the organized sport of ice hockey is very expensive thus making it difficult for children of immigrants to participate (Charron, 2012).

Another factor that has hindered involvement in ice hockey is the nature of the sport. It is an aggressive sport, a physical sport, in which kids that are bigger have a size advantage. The physical nature of the game, including the hitting component, can be intimidating and even keep kids away from the arena (Charron, 2012). In 2002-2003 for example, it was reported in the province of Ontario that over 8000 injuries incurred by children were hockey injuries (Therrien, 2012). This is an alarming number considering that many of these were of a more serious nature including concussions and neck injuries (Therrien, 2012).

Despite these drawbacks, ice hockey is Canada's game. It is a big part of Canadian culture. Yet Canada's game is facing a crisis on Canadian soil and this crisis is not only a result of demographics, high costs and a decrease in organized sport involvement. One of the major difficulties ice hockey is facing in Canada is competition from soccer. Soccer has become the fastest growing sport in Canada. Despite a decrease in organized sport involvement in Canada, participation rates in soccer have found a way to increase. While hockey enrollment is down roughly 25%, soccer enrollment is up with almost 20% of young Canadians playing this game (Clark, 2008; Rutherford, 2009; Jackson, 2012). Factors such as cost, immigration trends, global media and internet may have an impact on this growth yet it might also be attributed to a simple lack of interest for hockey from today's Canadians.

Canada has for years been the pride of the hockey world in international competitions. In recent years however it has struggled. It is projected that the struggles will get worse as other nations such as the USA are not only expanding its resources for player development (e.g., College systems), the Americans are also coming out to the arenas more and are willing to participate in growing numbers (Therrien, 2012). While the number of Canadians playing hockey is decreasing, the number of Americans playing ice hockey is increasing. Thanks to marketing programs such as Try Hockey for Free Day held on November 5, 2011, more and more Americans are being introduced to and playing ice hockey.

Minor hockey in Canada has recognized that a problem exists. It has also recognized that something needs to be done now to address this problem as well as to take action to ascertain that ice hockey participation levels remain healthy into the future. Conferences, think tanks, focus group discussions, municipal planning boards, and well as minor hockey officials have addressed a number of means and possible solutions to meet these challenges of the future. For instance the Ontario Minor Hockey Association through a Pilot Program in 2009 aimed at introducing the game of hockey to Canadians of ethnic descent in Brampton and Markham (OMHA, 2013).

The question that needs to be asked however, are these enough? Is more needed? Awareness is a start yet awareness also needs to be followed by

action. Marketing and promotion often leads to action. To complement what has been done to enhance awareness and to encourage action, a series of suggestions for marketing and promoting ice hockey in multicultural societies is put forth below. The focus of these suggestions is on the multicultural nature of Canada as it appears this competent of promoting the game may not have received enough emphasis in planning and development approaches to date. It is also recognized that the ethnic make-up of Canada needs to be targeted for this game to continue to thrive in Canada as the people of this nation must be provided with the opportunity to first experience this game before they learn to love it.

Suggestions for Marketing and Promoting Ice Hockey in a Multicultural Society

1. Integration:

Ethnic community organizations are private not-for-profit organizations that exist for the preservation, maintenance and practice of ethnic cultural attributes in multicultural societies. The intent of ethnic community organizations is to bring together people with collective characteristics in order to fulfill collective needs. The needs are based on ethnic cultural attributes such as religion, language, and leisure. Ethnic community organizations tend to focus on ethnic cultural leisure activities to address collective interests, particularly those of immigrant members. Very few ethnic community organizations offer hockey leagues or programs related to hockey. There are hockey opportunities offered in some of the older ethnic communities – such as the Greek Community of Ottawa and through the Multicultural Hockey League of Toronto. Most ethnic communities, particularly those which have been established by more recent ethnic groups in smaller cities in Canada such as Somalians, Ethiopians, and Serbians have no ice hockey programs offered from within. Recently developing and growing communities such as these can benefit from ice hockey programs offered through the ethnic community. Hockey Canada should encourage the integration of ice hockey programs and leagues in these communities to enhance the probability of participation. Integration means that hockey is used as a means to bridge the gap between the ethnic community and mainstream society. To integrate, the opportunity to engage in ice hockey should come from within the ethnic community.

2. Subsidization:

Hockey is an expensive sport to play. High cost keeps a lot of children of the ice. Research indicates that children whose parents have the economic means tend to be those that play hockey. Most children of immigrant parents do not have the economic means, particularly those whose parents are recent immigrants. Subsidization of any sort would help not only alleviate the cost of playing, but also provide opportunity for children of ethnic descent to play. Corporations are heavily involved with professional hockey sponsorship. Why

not become involved at the minor hockey level? Subsidization of minor hockey teams would help with the purchase of equipment plus provide a needed break with registration fees. Corporations can play a huge part in enhancing the number of children that play hockey by targeting minor hockey leagues in ethnic neighborhoods. Sidney Crosby is shown in a Tim Horton's commercial in an old video clip while he was playing TimBits hockey. Imagine the publicity Coca Cola would have for example 15 years from now when Canada's future hockey hero from Asia is sporting a Coca Cola sponsored minor hockey shirt.

3. Outreach:

Hockey at all levels needs to outreach to ethnic community organizations. The best way to outreach is to make those that you are outreaching feel "welcomed." The act of welcoming requires empathy, sensitivity and compassion. Moreover, the act of welcoming also depends on understanding and recognition. Some professional ice hockey teams have done this such as the Ottawa Senators. In 2012-2013, the Ottawa Senators in a game against the Boston Bruins held a Greek theme night. During this match, zorba dancers and bouzouki players performed on the big screen, Greek music was played, and famous Greek-Canadian actor and comedian Angelo Tsarouchas was on hand to provide a comedy show following the game. The game attracted roughly 350 Greek-Canadian's from the Ottawa community with a portion of each ticket sold being given back to this ethnic community by the Ottawa Senators to help fund future building projects. This is not the first time the Ottawa Senators held an ethnic theme night. In 2011-2012, the Ottawa Senators held a Chanukah night for the Jewish Community as well as an Indo-Canadian night for the Indian Community of Ottawa.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) also outreaches to Canada's ethnic community. On one of its broadcast stations, you can follow Hockey Night in Canada on Saturday nights in Punjabi. This broadcast helps establish a sense of connection and welcoming with members of the Punjabi community across Canada. Stations broadcasting hockey games in Canada can use this example from CBC by outreaching to other ethnic communities with regular broadcasts in ethnic languages.

4. Promotion:

With diminishing numbers of minor hockey players and an awareness of changing demographics in Canada, the Canadian Minor Hockey Association has started to promote the game in 12 different languages (CBC News, February 16, 2011). Promotion attracts members. It is a form of advertising. For promotion to be successful, language barriers have to be removed. Indeed, a smart idea by the Canadian Minor Hockey Association, yet promotion is not complete without a positive image. Steps are being taken by Hockey Canada to promote hockey as a safe non-violent game.

Promotion however can take many forms, some involving communication as aforementioned above, other involving action. For instance,

on November 5, 2011 in 47 states in the United States, aspiring hockey players tried hockey for free. Try Hockey for Free Days should be held in Canada as well. Perhaps Try Hockey for Free Day programs can be provided for the benefits of Canada's minority. By covering equipment and participation fees as well as through the introduction and instruction of basics of the game such as skating and rules, children and their immigrant parents are exposed to the game.

5. Leadership/Role Models:

Leaders are role models. Professional hockey players coming from ethnic backgrounds are leaders of the game and role models for their ethnic communities. Players such as Manny Malhotra of the Vancouver Canucks with an Indo-Canadian background, Milan Lucic of the Boston Bruins who is of Serbian descent, and Lebanese-Canadian Nazem Kadri of the Toronto Maple Leafs are examples of hockey leaders that members of ethnic communities can look up to. These individuals simply based on who they are and what they have achieved can go a long way in acting as role models that can provide hope and dreams for children of immigrants aspiring to do the same. Professional hockey players of ethnic descent can also play a vital role in promoting others who are of the same backgrounds to become introduced to hockey.

6. Continuation:

The impact of immigration and multiculturalism on Canada is not temporary. It is long term as the face of Canada is changing for generations to come. Hockey Canada needs to be constantly be aware of changing demographics and plan accordingly for the survival and well-being of this game. Hockey will continue to be Canada's game if measures are taken that recognize the needs of ethnic communities while using the game of hockey to address these needs. This will require a commitment to change by Hockey Canada as well as innovative planning and implementation approaches.

Discussion and Conclusion

For most of these new immigrants, ice hockey has not been a part of their way of life. In Canada, ice hockey is one of the nation's two national sports – the other being lacrosse. Indeed, Canada, which prides itself as the birthplace of ice hockey, is recognized as one of the dominant ice hockey nations in the world. However, current immigration patterns, a decreasing number of Canadians below the age of fifteen, and the high cost of participation has meant that minor hockey participation rates have witnessed a steady decline during the past few years. Ultimately, the fear is that lack of enrollment in ice hockey at the minor levels may mean less talent to choose from for future international competitions. In light of this trend Hockey Canada has altered its traditional marketing approaches to try to enhance participation

and to attract new immigrants to the sport. Professional and junior ice hockey teams have also recognized the potential benefit of outreaching to Canada's multicultural population. In light of these changes, it is understood that the sport of ice hockey will continue to face socio-cultural and demographic challenges.

For ice hockey to be the game of choice for Canadians, change in orientation is needed from all parties and in all service sectors. Hockey needs to focus on its image as a safe fun game, as well as its "sell-ability factor" particular to Canada's new Canadians. This can be done by making the game more affordable with corporate subsidization. Of course, outreach and promotion is paramount for survival.

Role models, ethnic community leaders, as well as minor hockey and professional hockey administrators need to work together to bridge the gap between ethnic communities and the game of hockey. Once this is done all that hockey has to offer - particularly fun and excitement - will be integrated into the mindset of new Canadians. To do this, Canada must be recognized as being more multicultural today than ever. Indeed multiculturalism is the way of the future of hockey in Canada.

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