

Chapter 3

Critical Considerations for Sport for Development and Peace Policy Development

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There are a host of critical issues, illuminated by research, that are relevant to policy development in the area of sport for development and peace (SDP). Four are discussed here: defining development, sustainable programming, sociological issues of identity and the political orientation of programmes. Reconciling these issues may mean considering policies that would: a) move SDP beyond top-down design and implementation; and b) reflect critically on the presumed meanings and benefits of sport itself.

3.1 Introduction and background

This paper is designed to offer insights from recent research in the field of sport for development and peace (SDP). The hope is that these insights stimulate reflection and conversation, as well as point towards some possibilities for future policy development in the area.

The ideas and suggestions that follow draw on the current academic literature on SDP, as well as my own research across three main research projects. The first of these studies was conducted in 2007 and 2008 and drew on interviews with young Canadians (n=27) who had served abroad in the 'International Development through Sport' internship programme that is operated by Commonwealth Games Canada. The second was a study in 2010/11 with programme officials from a variety of SDP projects including NGOs, advocacy groups, athlete foundations and professional sport. The third is a study currently underway examining sport for development as organised between countries in the global South, with a particular focus on Cuba and its partners in southern Africa and Latin America.

3.2 Critical considerations

There are a host of critical considerations that have emerged from these projects and that are relevant to the development of policy in SDP. Four are discussed here, recognising that this is not an exhaustive list. In particular, the first two issues can be understood as recurrent within the study and practice of international development more broadly; they are not unique to sport and SDP.

First, there is a tension within SDP in relation to the actual process of establishing the terms of development. Key questions here include: what are SDP policies and programmes trying to achieve in development terms? What *should* they be trying to achieve? How is this agenda established and with what effects? My own research, as well as the broader SDP research literature, suggests a recurring process by which SDP organisations seek particular (and laudable) development goals through sport such as empowerment, social inclusion or self-esteem. And yet these goals can and often do misalign with local demands for development in terms of, for example, employment, infrastructure or even traditional sports development. Andrew Guest's (2009) work in Angola is particularly insightful in describing this tension as he shows how Olympic Aid, a northern NGO and the precursor to Right to Play, drew in the early 2000s on universal humanism as a basis for its initiatives, but that such programmes were reinterpreted by local people in culturally specific ways. Guest compellingly argues that such results illustrate both local agency and resistance, and act as reminders of the various meanings of sport in different cultural and socio-political contexts. The results also illustrate a dogged modernisation philosophy within SDP, where sport is 'universal' and presumed to overcome the challenges of culture and inequality.

Second is the issue of sustainability of programming. In plain terms, where is funding for sport for development and SDP to come from, now and in the future? Where *should* it come from? Is it reasonable to accept corporate funding, for example, or does this compromise the progressive development principles of accessibility and programme autonomy? These are issues that SDP programme officials wrestle with in organising and working to sustain their programmes beyond the types of short-term and ad hoc interventions that have traditionally plagued international development. At the same time, the notion of what actually

constitutes success of SDP, and justifies continued efforts in the field, remains open to analysis and consideration. To a degree, it has always been the case that development initiatives, if successful, should render themselves obsolete. And yet the increasingly competitive field of SDP, in terms of both funding and implementation, means that volunteers and even local participants need to be retained for the future viability of projects, and organisations also need to show why their project is better than others, rather than compatible with other initiatives in the field.

Third are the sociological issues of identity and representation. My training as a sociologist propels me to examine issues of race, class, gender and sexuality, and so these issues regularly factor into my research into SDP. Research findings suggest that despite well-intentioned beliefs in the universal interest in sports like football/soccer, transnational relationships and experiences are being facilitated through sport for development policy and programming in places that are socially and politically complicated by the history of colonialism or contemporary globalisation. Interviews with young Canadian volunteers, for example, showed that they experienced discomfort of being presumed an expert in sport for development because they were white and middle class. At the same time, such racial and class-based privileges were rarely challenged in the field in meaningful ways. These issues are not ones that can be solved by celebrating sport as universal language or providing more training in cultural sensitivity, but are ones that require, for example, a strong policy commitment to anti-racism.

And fourth is the issue of the political orientation of SDP programming and policy. This issue can be seen, for example, in the divergence between international sport programmes from countries like socialist Cuba versus those of more liberal, or neo-liberal, democracies. In addition, though, there is also a range of political orientations *within* SDP programming itself that have yet to be fully acknowledged in policy terms. For example, while all can likely agree on the importance of sustainable economic development, particularly in poor countries, should this process be focused on seeking new competitive advantages or rethinking economic relationships and processes altogether? Should sport and SDP align with the global, corporate sport sector or attempt to preserve a new development niche? This is particularly salient as sport businesses seek new markets in regions like Latin America, which have diverse political systems and governments.

In practical terms, however, the importation of SDP policy and programming based on, or supported by, the for-profit sports sector is likely to face opposition in some parts of the world and also runs the risk of being co-opted into broader, market-based strategies.

3.3 Conclusion

There are (at least) three ways in which shifts in SDP policy might be considered in response to the issues raised above.

The first is to recognise and support a move away from the tradition of top-down development aid and towards training in SDP that is more locally focused and, in turn, potentially more sustainable. There are several examples of this happening already within the mainstream SDP sector. To this can be added early insights from the current research in Cuba, a country that implements a policy model designed first and foremost to provide educational opportunities in sport on an international scale that can be then be transferred into increasing capacity in sport. In this way, rather than a tool for development or a form of development assistance or aid, sport is repositioned as a form of solidarity that seeks to support development on a global scale.

Second, my work with Canadian interns serving in SDP produced the following recurring narrative: based on their own positive experiences with sport, many interns went into the field of sport for development with firm notions of what sport is and what it is not. However, the cultural diversity they experienced, the exposition of their relative privilege, and the complexities of development that they encountered while serving abroad had the effect of challenging and complicating these deeply held notions of sport, and doing so in what were ultimately highly productive ways. Sport, in relation to sport for development, went from being competitive and organised, to diffuse, local and malleable. This suggests that mobilising sport for development may offer an opportunity to think about the norms, values and benefits of *sport itself*. In this way, sport becomes less a means of or tool for development, and more a site for development processes to take place (see Coalter 2013). This commitment to reflection has practical implications, such as in the case of programmes delivered by *Right to Play* that tend to be based on play and co-operative games rather than competitive sport. However, there are also important implications for local autonomy and for

(re)considering SDP as a bottom-up process facilitated by learners and students of sport, rather than directed by teachers or experts.

Finally, there is, and should continue to be, a trend in SDP policy from sport (and development) as ‘universal’ to sport (and development) as culturally and politically specific. Embedding this perspective into policy can serve to promote and champion local autonomy and agency. There is a move in both international development studies and sport management studies towards participatory action research (PAR), whereby research participants set the research agenda (See Darnell and Hayhurst 2011). This raises the question, what if SDP participants set the development terms and agenda of policy and programming with support from SDP institutions and government? This kind of commitment would likely go some way towards improving the sustainability and development success of sport for development programmes.

References

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