

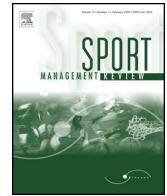


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### Review

# Managing sport-for-development: Reflections and outlook

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#### ABSTRACT

The field of sport-for-development (SFD) has experienced significant growth and increased academic rigor over the past 15 years. As sport management scholars have started to critically investigate and evaluate SFD programs, they have in turn contributed to the future design and improvement of SFD initiatives that today are more strategically planned and pedagogically sound than ever before. As part of the 20th anniversary series of *Sport Management Review*, the author looks back at some of the key achievements of sport management scholarship and proposes new and exciting areas for future enquiry. In particular, while past research can be classified under the four headings of SFD programming and design; sustainable management and capacity building; creating and leveraging impacts and outcomes; and conceptual/theoretical advancements, the author suggests that future studies may attend to the managerial concepts of leadership, entrepreneurship and Design Thinking to maximise the potential of sport (management) to contribute to desired, innovative and sustained community development outcomes.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past 15 years, the field of sport-for-development (SFD) has increased its visibility and legitimacy in the context of local and international development work. Whereas at the beginning of the 21st century it was difficult to find dedicated projects that used sport as a strategic vehicle for positive change in disadvantage community settings, the number of SFD initiatives has since grown substantially. In short, SFD represents the intentional “use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialisation of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution” (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, p. 311). SFD therefore goes beyond traditional forms of sport development; from an SFD perspective, sport is a conduit to achieving wider development outcomes rather than an end in itself.

Back in 2001, the creation of the United Nations Office for Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) was a first significant step towards official recognition and legitimacy for SFD. Subsequent assertions, such as the Magglingen Declaration in 2003 and the United Nation’s International Year of Sport and Physical Education in 2005, further raised awareness of SFD as a philosophy underpinning aspirations for positive change (Burnett, 2015; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014). Overall, the increased awareness of potential social, health and economic benefits resulting from SFD led to the creation of thousands of local and international development projects supported and/or implemented by NGOs, government departments, sport associations, aid agencies, and funding bodies around the world.

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From an academic perspective, the field of SFD has enjoyed increased theoretical and empirical prominence in areas such as sport sociology, management, cultural studies, gender studies and community development. Against this background—and in the context of the 20th anniversary of *Sport Management Review*—it is timely to reflect on how the SFD field, with its many supporters and critics, has developed and evolved. In this article, I will look back on the growing body of managerial research that has been conducted on SFD projects in both theory and practice. In doing so, I will provide examples of where and how sport *can* be used to make an important positive difference within and between communities, but also reflect on instances where sport *cannot*—and perhaps should not—be deployed as a vehicle to address wider societal problems. Finally, I propose areas of research that may be explored to a greater extent in the future, so that we can maximise the potential of sport to contribute to desired and sustained community development outcomes.

## 2. Reviewing the field

At the end of the 20th century, the forebears and progenitors of SFD provided their first scholarly reflections of sport-based development projects that were implemented in different parts of the world. For example, as a pioneer in the area of sport for conflict resolution and peace building, John Sugden (1991) shared his experiences from coaching and managing Belfast United, a football and basketball program intended to encourage cross-community relationships between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland during times of significant civil unrest. Sugden—a critical sociologist with a strong desire for activism and practical realism—was heavily influenced by his personal experiences as both coach and academic during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Looking back, a number of key socio-managerial lessons could be learned from his important early work around the Belfast United program, including the implementation of values-based sporting activities rather than competitive sport; a focus on integrated mixed teams; the importance of committed leaders and mentors; and the provision of (physically and politically) neutral settings when designing and managing sport-based reconciliation projects.

While early SFD initiatives such as Belfast United had failed to include specific research components in its official program design, the field of SFD has since emerged and developed as a distinct area of academic enquiry. One critical theory that has underpinned—and continues to underpin—much of the practice and theory in SFD is Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis; in fact, it often presents an implicit starting point for projects on community development and conflict resolution. Importantly, the Contact Hypothesis holds that contact between different and/or opposing groups is not automatically sufficient to lead to desired social development outcomes, including an improvement of intergroup relations. Rather, for contact between groups to reduce conflict and to achieve wider societal benefits, four conditions help facilitate bias reduction that accompanies contact: (a) equal status within the contact situation, (b) intergroup cooperation, (c) common goals, and (d) support of authorities, law, or custom. Furthermore, Allport (1958, p. 489) suggested that “the deeper and more genuine the association, the greater its effect.”

Building on Allport's recommendations, researchers have explored and investigated numerous SFD programs with a diverse range of development foci. Broadly, SFD initiatives are now classified into seven thematic areas: Sport and Disability, Sport and Education, Sport and Gender, Sport and Health, Sport and Livelihoods, Sport and Peace, as well as Sport and Social Cohesion (see Richards et al., 2013). Over the years, research in these fields has grown substantially, from as little as a handful of dedicated SFD studies conducted in the early 2000s to around 100 research pieces published in academic journals in 2013 alone (see Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016). In line with this increase in quantity, an important change has also occurred regarding the quality and academic rigor of research investigations. As SFD has started to mature, studies have become more focused, differentiated, and critical in their approach; this, in turn, has allowed for a more nuanced design, implementation and evaluation of SFD as well as improved SFD practices, theory and policymaking (Coalter, 2010; Kaufman, Rosenbauer, & Moore, 2014; Levermore & Beacom, 2012; Njelesani, Cameron, Gibson, Nixon, & Polatajko, 2014; Schulenkorf, 2013).

This welcome change followed an initial period of largely “uncritical ‘evangelical’ accounts and assumed myopic powers of sport in the absence of robust evidence” (Burnett, 2015, p. 38) that has been condemned by many academics in the field (see e.g. Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2010; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Darnell, 2010; Levermore & Beacom, 2012; Sugden, 2010; Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2011). It seems that after 15 years, the SFD community has largely cured its own biggest social ill; namely, the simplistic view that sport, and even SFD, automatically leads to positive social, cultural, educational, health-related and/or economic development. The advancement of SFD scholarship—and the field's much improved reputation overall—has to do with a group of powerful new friends that the SFD community has invited into its inner circle: new friends called ‘auxiliary verbs’. In short, auxiliary verbs are ‘helping’ words that modify the main verb and express ideas such as possibility, intention, obligation or necessity. Words such as ‘can’ or ‘may’ are examples of this; they both denote possibility and as such, they now play a crucial role in SFD practice and research. For instance, by using an auxiliary verb, Nelson Mandela's famous speech at the 2000 Laureus World Sports Awards in Monaco—where he suggested that “sport has the power to change the world [and] it laughs in the face of all types of discrimination”—should have perhaps been presented much more modestly as an opportunity rather than a given fact. In other words, the academic SFD community has realised that sport *may* laugh in the face of discrimination, but only if players, fans, the wider community and sport managers make decisions that allow for social inclusion and integration to happen.

Regrettably, the critical academic mantra has not yet entered all political spheres; in fact, the often flowery and undifferentiated rhetoric of sport evangelists remains problematic across several circles of society. For example, in his message for the 2016 International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSDP), United Nation's Secretary-General Ban

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