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# Sport Management Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/smr](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/smr)

## Editorial

# Managing sport for social change: The state of play



### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Sport for development  
 Sport for social change  
 Development through sport  
 Sport for development and peace

### ABSTRACT

Sport-for-development (SFD) provides a platform for sport to be used as a tool or “hook” to contribute to positive outcomes in areas including economic development, social inclusion, cultural cohesion, healthy lifestyles, education, gender equity, as well as reconciliation and peacebuilding. The area of sport for social change (SFSC) represents a sub-field of SFD that uses sport as a catalyst to build social capacity and develop socially and physically healthy communities. The Managing Sport for Social Change special issue of *Sport Management Review* brings together a collection of conceptual advances, empirical research papers and teaching case studies from a range of social and cultural perspectives, with a focus on managing sport for social change; aimed at engaging critically with sport management theory and praxis, and discussing associated practical and policy implications. Theoretical gaps and recommendations for future research, including: local engagement, innovative research methodology, and a broadening of the scope of research are also discussed.

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Over the past decade, the field of sport-for-development has received significant attention from government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), sporting bodies and development agencies across the world. As a result of increasing political and institutional support, the number of sport-based projects aimed at contributing to positive outcomes in areas including economic development, social inclusion, cultural cohesion, healthy lifestyles, education, gender equity, as well as reconciliation and peacebuilding has grown exponentially (Levermore & Beacom, 2009; Scholenkorff & Adair, 2014). The popularity of sport-for-development stems from its ability to capture or “hook” a variety of people, particularly those interested in sport and physical activity, and use the momentum in and around sport as a strategic vehicle to achieve non-sport development goals.

The area of sport for social change (SFSC) represents a sub-field of sport-for-development that uses sport as a catalyst to build social capacity and develop socially and physically healthy communities. Where at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it was difficult to find projects that used sport as a strategic vehicle for positive social change, the number of sport-related initiatives that aim to make a difference in at-risk or disadvantaged communities has since grown substantially. Today, SFSC programs are implemented in both developed and developing nations, and with varied aims and objectives. For example, in developed nations, SFSC programs are directed toward communities identified as marginalized or at-risk, or those communities requiring development and regeneration, including socially and economically disadvantaged groups, at-risk youth, indigenous communities, recently arrived refugees, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. In both developed and developing nations, SFSC aims to empower communities through capacity building initiatives and skill development, the promotion of healthy lifestyles including the combating of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and the enhancement of social capital and cohesion through sport. In socially, ethnically, or politically divided societies, SFSC also includes programs in the area of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

As an intriguing space for theoretical and empirically driven research, SFSC has started to receive increased attention from academics who have conducted sport-related studies in unique social and cultural contexts. However, there is still a dearth of research on the provision and actual *management* of these SFSC programs. While the management of SFSC projects (including tactics, strategies and implications) underpins much current research, scholars have yet to critically analyze and

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.12.001>

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discuss the specific management aspects of these projects. This special issue therefore set out to focus on managing sport for social change; it aimed at engaging critically with sport management theory and praxis, and discussing associated practical and policy implications. Moreover, in contrast to numerous NGO publications about SFSC that tend to feature idealistic accounts of sport as a panacea to solve the ills of humanity, this special issue was conceived to encourage questioning of, and critical engagement with, the taken for granted assumptions and practices underlying the SFSC space.

## 1. Papers in this issue

The Managing Sport for Social Change special issue of *Sport Management Review* brings together a collection of conceptual advances, empirical research papers and teaching case studies from a range of social and cultural perspectives. All manuscripts within this special issue provide unique contributions to the field of SFSC and they are categorized broadly under four themes: 1) health and physical activity, 2) social capital, 3) social capacity building, and 4) social inclusion. Moreover, a review article and a teaching case study are included to provide further context and application for scholars in the field.

## 2. Review article

The concept of SFSC is first addressed in a review article by [Edwards \(2015\)](#), who discusses the role of sport, and in particular sport-for-development initiatives, in community capacity building. Edward's review of the established sport-for-development literature encourages the reader to examine the efficacy of sport's contribution to achieving community health outcomes, and calls for sport-for-development to build a learning culture where researchers, practitioners and the community can learn with and from each other.

## 3. Health and physical activity

The inherent physical activity within sport provides a platform for the achievement of health outcomes for specific at-risk or marginalized populations within a sport-for-development context. In this special issue, the theme of health (both physical and mental) is discussed in the following four articles.

[Berg, Warner, and Das \(2015\)](#) examine the efficacy of organized sport versus physical activity head on in their paper, investigating how sport could be better positioned on the public health agenda. The authors argue that traditional approaches to promoting increases in physical activity through community sport, including improvements to physical health and personal appearance, are less effective than the promotion of hedonic (feel-good) rewards and social interaction with others. In other words, the opportunity for, and promotion of, social interaction is particularly relevant to community sport initiatives that provide an engaging social context for physical activity compared to more individualistic health and fitness activities.

[Bullough, Davies, and Barrett \(2015\)](#) investigate the opportunities, limitations and participant outcomes of a free of charge community swimming program for English youth. This article identified that although cost of participation is often cited as a reason for low participation numbers for marginalized or at-risk groups in the community, the removal of cost to participate was insufficient to increase participation in the target community. While health benefits were accrued to regular participants, this program did not result in an increase of new participants to the sport of swimming, nor did it provide value for money compared to a more targeted sport-for-development program. The authors suggest that structured sessions within a pathway and exit structure are more likely to result in engaged and ongoing participation than unstructured access to sport activities.

[Gallant, Sherry, and Nicholson \(2015\)](#) provide a unique setting for the development of health and wellbeing outcomes from a sport-for-development program conducted in a prison context. Four case studies of prison sport programs are outlined, with common themes of health and wellbeing outcomes, desistance, rehabilitation, and offender management being identified. The authors argue that while sport in the prison context appears to have a positive influence on prisoner health and behavior, the impact of these programs on desistance and rehabilitation of offenders remains uncertain and deserves further (longitudinal) research.

[Dalton, Wilson, Evans, and Cochrane \(2015\)](#) focus their study on the role of sport in contributing to health outcomes of Australian Indigenous youth. The authors found a positive relationship between sport participation and the participants' overall physical and mental health. The specific value of this research is the illustration of the utility of appropriate measures for health outcomes in targeted sport-for-development programs, particularly when conducted within a culturally appropriate community-led program.

## 4. Social capital

Bringing people together through sport and physical activity programs, including members from socially, culturally and geographically diverse communities, provides an opportunity for the development of social capital ([Kobayashi, Nicholson, & Hoye, 2013](#); [Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008](#)). The following two articles discuss the opportunities and challenges in developing and leveraging social capital through SFSC programs in the United States.

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