

# **Strengthening the Global Framework for Leveraging Sport for Development and Peace**

## **A BACKGROUND PAPER**

(Preparing for the themes of ‘mainstreaming of sport in development programmes and policies’ & ‘Monitoring and evaluation of programmes and policies to leverage sport for development and peace’)

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### **Abstract**

This background paper provides a critical review of major issues associated with the design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of sport for development and peace (SDP) projects. By referring to the concept of event leverage, it highlights in particular how various issues have hindered the development of sustainable impacts by SDP programmes. It is therefore argued that the use of process tracing frameworks (together with theory of change and theory of action) to assist the design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation processes of SDP may offer a practical and theoretical solution for addressing the identified issues and for contributing to the development of methodological rigor.

### **1 Introduction**

The use of sport for development and peace (SDP) is a strategy which has attracted support from a wide range of policy bodies including the United Nations (2003), the IOC (2018), European Parliament (2005), and the Federation Internationale de Football Association (2005). Sport is also considered to be a prominent part of the emerging ‘fourth pillar in development aid’ (Develtere & De Bruyn, 2009).

In the context of the UN, the role of sport in development and peace has long been recognised, and sport was officially incorporated into various activities geared towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals since 2000. More recently, replacing the Millennium Development Goals, a new plan for global development (called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015; in this new plan, the ‘growing contribution of sport to the realisation of development and peace’ is explicitly identified, and sport is described as an important ‘*enabler* of sustainable development’ (United Nations, 2015, para. 37).

Driven by this high level of global attention and policy impetus provided by the UN, there has been a burgeoning research interest in studying the topic of SDP from different disciplines including sport management (Schulenkorf, 2010; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2017), sport sociology (Burnett, 2015), health (Hershow et al., 2015), policy (Giulianotti, 2010), gender (Meier & Saavedra, 2009), education (Janes, 2013), and psychology (Guest, 2013). Various organisations have also engaged with this international ‘movement’ (Kidd, 2008, p. 370) that uses sport to fulfil development and peace-building goals in communities (Gilbert & Bennett, 2012; Svensson, 2017).

After approximately 20 years of development, it would seem that in the field of SDP, a stage has been reached at which theoretical rather than methodical efforts are most needed. Assessment of sport’s contribution to development and peace should be less concerned with the question of whether SDP programmes can generate positive outputs and outcomes, and

more concerned with a more nuanced question of how to effectively leverage SDP programmes in a particular context to achieve particular types of positive outcomes.

Indeed, the increasing need to report *how* and *why* sport can achieve intended outcomes seems to stem from pressure to illustrate some kind of return on foreign donors' investment (Coalter, 2013; Levermore, 2008) as well as from the dearth of good quality empirical studies to support or reject 'evangelical' claims about the value of sport (Coalter, 2010). On the one hand, as critiqued by Coalter (2013), a simple micro-level implementation of SDP intervention seems to provide little impact on complex macro-level outcomes (e.g., poverty reduction). On the other hand, Mwaanga's (2010) examination of a range of HIV/AIDS interventions using the SDP concept delivered in Sub-Saharan African countries reminds us that we have yet to establish a sound theoretical understanding of sport's potential for addressing HIV/AIDS; as a result, the capacity of sport to combat HIV/AIDS is often overstated and local contexts are underappreciated (Mwaanga, 2010). All of this makes it necessary to rigorously evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of SDP programmes (Coalter, 2013; Levermore, 2011; United Nations Evaluation Group, 2013).

In the context of this discussion [about **Strengthening the Global Framework for Leveraging Sport for Development and Peace**], this background paper seeks to provide a critical review of the current development of the field of SDP with particular reference to the concept of leverage, and it will focus primarily on identifying the issues associated with the process of designing, delivering, monitoring, and evaluating the SDP programmes. The paper then discusses how those issues could potentially be addressed by adopting a process tracing framework as well as the concepts of theory of change and theory of action.

## **2 SDP: current issues and challenges**

In examining the field of SDP, an important initial point to make is perhaps the distinction between 'sport plus' and 'plus sport' (Coalter, 2007a). The approach of 'sport plus' aims to develop sustainable sporting organisations to achieve objectives such as enhancing sport participation, providing training to sports leaders and coaches, and developing physical literacy and basic sporting skills. The 'plus sport' approach by contrast centres on the concept of 'development through sport' and recognises the potential of sport, for example, to address a broad range of social issues (e.g., gender equity). This approach starts with considering a certain social or development issue and then designs programmes using sport as a vehicle to address the issue.

Regardless of the types of approaches used, there is a risk of accepting the 'exceptionalism of sport' (Black, 2010; Coalter, 2010; Giulianotti, 2004). Sport by itself is not a silver bullet that holds a solution to problems (Coalter, 2010); creating change requires a clear vision and strategic planning for sustainable community development (Schulenkorf, 2012). This point relates closely to the core concept of event leverage (Chalip, 2004; O'Brien, 2006).

The notion of leveraging has been well articulated in sporting events literature: Namely, in order to generate positive impact and legacy from the hosting of an event, strategic management processes and tactics must be formed and implemented (Chalip, 2004; O'Brien, 2006). The general consensus in the literature of event leverage is that events themselves do not constitute interventions (O'Brien, 2006); we should adopt an attitude geared towards 'making things happen' (Schulenkorf, 2010, p. 120), rather than take it for granted that positive event legacies and impacts will be generated by themselves (Smith, 2009).

Recent changes in SDP-related policy discourse published by the UN (with sport now considered to be ‘an *enabler*’ of sustainable development instead of a ‘*means* to promote education, health, development and peace’) exhibit awareness of leveraging; sport is no longer perceived as an automatic recipe for development and peace but, rather, as needing the backup of additional actions to fully maximise the opportunities stimulated by SDP programmes.

Another prominent point identified in the leveraging field is the importance of the formulation of collective community and the building of alliances. As emphasised by Chalip (2001), event leverage should start with the tightening of the linkages between different agencies that are responsible for various elements of event development. An effective coordination network between an array of public and private organisations – such as local agencies, businesses, communities, and various levels of government – is needed to ensure that a positive legacy is leveraged. SDP programmes could therefore be considered as the ‘seed capital’ (O’Brien, 2006, p. 258), which then requires detailed strategic planning and the formulation of collective international cooperation networks.

### **2.1 The design of SDP programmes**

Having illustrated the potential benefits of taking a leveraging strategy for SDP, we now move on to highlight some primary SDP issues, by tracing the process of SDP programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In general, the quality of the design of SDP intervention is not rigorous enough (Levermore, 2008). There are clear signs of ‘evangelical’ SDP thinking when designing SDP programmes (Mwaanga, 2010). As a result, theoretical articulation of the logic underpinning SDP programmes has been kept to a minimum; there was limited questioning about cause and effect, or about the ways in which sport can contribute to the leveraging of positive social outcomes.

The second issue with the design of SDP programmes concerns their ‘short-term’ nature (Armstrong, 2007; Hognestad & Tollisen, 2004; Lindsey, 2017). As noted by Kidd (2011), the temporariness characteristic of SDP programmes directly influences the creation of lasting and substantial impacts (Chansa, Sundewall, McIntyre D, Tomson, & Forsberg, 2008).

The third issue with SDP programme design is associated with overreliance on foreign funding in the designing and delivering of SDP programmes (Kidd, 2008). Several scholars revealed that local communities unable to continue delivering activities after the completion of initial funding (Donnelly, Atkinson, Boyle, & Szto, 2011; Lindsey, 2017; Schnitzer, Stephenson, Zanotti, & Stivachtis, 2013). The ‘donor-driven’ nature of development projects in general (Hope, 2013, p. 624) and of SPD programmes more specifically is considered to be problematic (Akindes & Kirwin, 2009).

Funding of this nature then leads to another important issue, namely that SDP programmes and activities are often tailored towards fulfilling the objectives of foreign donors – rather than those of the local community – and neglect the interests, challenges, and cultures of the implemented communities (Giles & Lynch, 2012; Lindsey, 2017) as well as failing to engage local stakeholders in meaningful dialogue (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Oxford & Spaaij, 2017). As confirmed in Langer’s (2015) systematic review of SDP programme evaluations in Africa, two-thirds of reviewed interventions (n=24) were designed and implemented by international and national governing organisation, rather than by local actors, while international bodies were the main drivers of the programme in Africa.

## **2.2 *The delivery of SDP programmes***

In terms of programme delivery, the current development of the SDP field still faces some challenges which require additional effectors. First, it is still not clear how SDP projects can be integrated into existing organisational networks at the local level (local government, civic groups, schools, etc.). This challenge remains unresolved due to the fragmented implementation (Darnell, 2008; Hayhurst, 2009; Kidd, 2008; Lindsey, 2017). There is a lack of communication in general between different levels within a country receiving development aid, and this situation leads to issues such as duplication in the programme's design and a failure to make the most of existing resources (expertise, facilities, or equipment).

A second challenge in SDP programme delivery involves ensuring that a project transfers skills and knowledge to local organisers so that when nonlocal experts leave, the project does not collapse. In fact, existing research has already noted the benefits of building local capacity, benefits that are beyond the common focus of SDP initiatives-based approaches, for example regarding the training of local staff to deliver specific SDP activities (Lindsey, 2017).

A third challenge for SDP programme implementation is related to the alignment of projects with locally and nationally defined priorities so that projects can gain and retain local and national political support; and, eventually, local stakeholders can be empowered to take ownership of interventions (Schulenkorf, 2012; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). In Swatuk, Motsholapheo, and Mazvimavi's (2011) analysis of SDP interventions implemented in the Botswana region, they also highlighted the importance of conducting a thorough contextual analysis of local conditions prior to the design of SDP interventions, and the need to integrate SDP policies and practice into existing local-level structure. This view is consistent with the theory behind leveraging, that there is a need to consider existing local strategies, resources, and sociocultural and political conditions more broadly in order to achieve effective event leverage (Beesley & Chalip, 2011).

## **2.3 *The monitoring and evaluation of SDP programmes***

In terms of issues regarding monitoring and evaluation of SDP programmes, the first one to note is a lack of rigorous and reliable evidence in support of SDP programmes' effectiveness which has been repeatedly identified (Burnett, 2010; Coalter, 2013; Cronin, 2011). Langer's (2015) review of SDP programme delivery in Africa found no available evidence to support or reject the claim that sport had a positive impact on development in Africa, and SDP programmes have thus far failed to measure final and impact outcomes.

Secondly, previous research has indicated some potential epistemological issues regarding the employment of standard, quantitative research methods for measuring outcomes and impacts (Levermore, 2011; Lindsey & Grattan, 2012). There are two relevant issues existing: One is that, because the planning of SDP evaluations tends to be an 'after-thought' or a 'post-rationalisation' process (Levermore, 2011, p. 341), this rules out the possibility of conducting meaningful comparative analysis, due to a failure to capture baseline data. The second relevant issue is that sport is not 'a conducive environment/good' (Levermore, 2011, p.341); providing a neat experimental comparison seems virtually impossible in most practical contexts (with the exception of a limited amount of experimental sport science research, e.g., physiology). The instrumental approaches to research and evaluation seem to be less effective in revealing the real contributions of SDP interventions on the one hand (Kay, 2009), and they fail in practice to challenge the relationships of power and the existing structures which are fundamentally important for transforming societies (Darnell, 2012).

Thirdly, the short-term outlook of SDP programme design also affects the evaluating of certain impacts that take a long time to surface, such as health outcomes (which are one of the main outcomes reported in SDP interventions, Langer, 2015). Taking HIV-related SDP interventions as an example, Langer (2015) reported that the reviewed evaluations often focused on assessing intermediate outcomes (e.g., changes of HIV-related knowledge) rather than on changes of behaviour.

Fourthly, in addition to concerns over evaluation quality, there is also an issue of political influence and will associated with the process of monitoring and evaluating SDP programmes (Harris & Adams, 2016; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014), whereby the so-called evaluation evidence is perceived to be useful when it supports and reinforces policy beliefs or programme commitment (Coalter, 2017). Such top-down western-led exercises (Kay, 2009) suffer from criticisms such as lack of accountability and overly controlled research findings (Sanderson, 2000). Consequently, we have seen overstated evaluation results (Botcheva & Huffman, 2004; Kidd, 2008) and sometimes underreported findings (Kruse, 2006). There have also been accusations of cultural insensitivity and of local voices being neglected in the evaluation process (Levermore, 2011).

Although there exist some evaluation tools and manuals readily available for the purposes of SDP evaluation (cf. Burnett & Hollander, 2006; Coalter, 2006), we argue that the methods on offer require substantial updating in order to address current issues associated with the process of SDP programme design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation analysed above. Indeed, the subject of evaluation has developed significantly in the mainstream literature since 2010 with the rise of causal case-study methods (Beach & Pederson, 2016). The debate on process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2014), for instance, is one important contribution to the topic. In addition, incited by Darnell and Black (2011) to take on board ‘a more sophisticated understanding of the distinctive characteristic of sport-based initiatives’ (p. 371), development studies scholars are encouraged to adopt a realist approach (Coalter, 2007b; Picciotto, 2015) – to identify real causal relationships between inputs, throughputs, outputs, and outcomes – and to clarify what causal mechanisms have worked in a given SDP programme to generate changes. In response, we propose the use of a process tracing framework for SDP evaluation, in conjunction with referring to theory of change and theory of action, in order to improve internal validity and the understanding of SDP’s causality.

### **3 Process tracing, programme theory, and action theory**

The process tracing approach (George, 1979; George & Bennett, 2005), concerning theory building and theory testing, is viewed as particularly useful for measuring and testing hypothesised causal mechanisms (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Bennett & Checkel, 2014). The approach seeks to identify whether ‘there is actual within-case process-related evidence of a theorised mechanism actually operating as predicted in the chosen case’ (Beach, 2018, p. 66).

Central to the process tracing framework is the concept of *theory*. Theory refers to a set of explicit or implicit assumptions about actions required to solve a policy problem and about why the problem will respond to such actions (Chen, 1990). In the context of programme, assessing theory (called programme theory) involves evaluating both *processes* and *outcomes* on which a programme is based (Chen, 1990). The need for assessing not only outcomes but also processes of programmes has been highlighted in the field of SDP (Coalter, 2009), as there is little value in understanding whether or not a programme works if the reasons why such success has been achieved are not addressed and understood (Chen, 2015). Indeed, actions within a programme can cause success or failure to achieve outcomes, but success in invoking

a causal mechanism will vary from one context to another (Elster, 1998; Mayntz, 2004). For example, the prescribing of a particular drug may reduce an unwanted medical condition, but this may be dependent on the context. Prescribing drugs which are administered in a hospital context overseen by qualified nurses can have a positive effect in terms of countering difficulties in remembering to take the drug at a particular time and so on. Contexts (namely whether a patient is being treated in hospital or as an out-patient and, thus, whether or not the patient is responsible for taking their own drugs at prescribed intervals) can thereby have a marked influence on whether or not a drug regime is successful. This contextual awareness is pertinent to our argument above regarding the need for taking into consideration existing local strategies, resources, and sociocultural and political conditions when undertaking the design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation processes of SDP programmes.

In reaching an understanding of programme theory, Funnell and Rogers (2011) suggested that, to complete the development of a programme theory, one should pull together the theory of change and the theory of action. There is a clear distinction between ‘theory of change’ and ‘theory of action’. While theory of change refers to the central mechanism by which change comes about for individuals, groups, and communities, theory of action indicates how interventions are constructed to activate, or facilitate, the intended change (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Although a theory of change approach has become accepted as a basic foundation for most types of impact evaluation (United Nations Evaluation Group, 2013), this concept remains underemployed in the field of SDP. As highlighted above, various local stakeholders associated with SDP programmes have yet to be engaged in meaningful dialogue. The development process of theory of change and theory of action therefore offers an opportunity to foster open communications between programme makers, programme operators, and programme evaluators; in turn, this process makes sure that there is a consistency in the assumptions made and actions taken.

Various studies in the evaluation literature have applied the process tracing approach to seeking out and assessing evidence for the purpose of developing causal explanations (Befani & Stedman-Bryce, 2017; Byrne, 2013). In the context of sport, our recent evaluation has highlighted the usefulness of the process tracing approach as a strategy for identifying the leveraging impacts of the London 2012 Olympics in terms of both sporting and non-sporting impacts (Chen & Henry, 2018). In this evaluation, we focused on examining the causal contribution of hosting the Olympics for achieving intentional impacts through the analysis of two legacy programmes. By particularly referencing programme theory, our evaluation uncovered the logic(s) (explicit and implicit) of stakeholders (actors and institutions) in linking the outcomes sought from the two legacy programmes to the respective contexts and the actions adopted. The principles underlying theory of action helped to guide the process of understanding which specific approaches and actions had been taken by the stakeholders to facilitate, or bring about, the intended outcomes. Particularly, our study showed that employing the process tracing logic to test the theories and to evaluate the weight of the evidence has contributed to evaluation of the Olympic legacy claims.

We therefore put forward our argument that key principles underlying process tracing (particularly by referencing the concepts of theory of change and theory of action) seem to offer some solutions for addressing the aforementioned issues and for contributing to the development of methodological rigorousness. When assessing SDP programmes’ impacts, the results of evaluations are often criticised as being ambiguous in providing causal contribution claims; that is, we still don’t know what sport has contributed towards achieving sustainable development and building peace. In this respect, the process tracing approaches, which build

on a mechanism-based understanding of causation (Beach & Pederson, 2016), can be particularly useful for identifying the precise generative mechanisms in place to produce intended SDP outcomes and how those outcomes are best measured. This understanding of theoretical causality and measurability is critical when designing a SDP programme, because an explicit outline of the causal assumptions and expectations on which policymaking and measures are based will improve programme implementation (by being more explicit than method-driven evaluations in informing programme operators' understanding of what has causal impact and why) and evaluation (in terms of facilitating policy learning). In addition, it is recognised that the utility of process tracing principles in a case-study research design can help with increasing the strength of causal inference (Schmitt & Beach, 2015), which is desirable for case-based types of SDP programme evaluations.

#### **4 Conclusion**

In this background paper, we have sought to provide a critical review of major issues associated with employing SDP interventions. We should acknowledge that we have focused predominately on the challenges emerged from the process of designing, delivering, monitoring, and evaluating SDP programmes, rather than on engaging sociological debates.

Forging a positive relationship between sport and development (in terms of generating positive outcomes through sport participation) is not a straightforward process. Provided in appropriate contexts, to appropriate groups, and in the appropriate manner, sport can provide practical examples of positive moves towards an inclusive society (Henry, 2015) and can potentially address social issues; additional efforts are nonetheless required to effectively leverage sport for the achievement of development goals. The major challenges lie in defining the practical details involved in the design and delivery of SDP programmes, in applying rigorous evaluation approaches for capturing such impacts, and in taking on board lessons learned from different SDP programmes.

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