Sport for Development: Reviewing the Field

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Over the past decade, the field of sport-for-development (SFD) has received significant attention from Non-Governmental Organisations, Government agencies, sport practitioners, and sport management scholars across the globe. Growing political and institutional support has led to the proliferation of sport-based projects that aim to contribute to developmental outcomes such as economic development, social inclusion, cultural cohesion, healthy lifestyles, fair education, and gender equity (Coalter, 2007, 2013; Levermore & Beacom, 2009; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014). The popularity of SFD initiatives stems from their ability to capture or ‘hook’ a large number of people – particularly those interested in sport and physical activity – and use the momentum associated with sport as a strategic vehicle to communicate, implement and achieve development goals beyond sport.

In the academic domain, the continued growth of SFD projects has led to an influx of theoretical and empirical studies across numerous disciplines, including sport management, sociology, health, public policy, gender studies, cultural studies, marketing and media, as well as conflict and peace studies. Despite the prevalence of significant scholarship in this burgeoning field, attempts are yet to be made to rigorously review and synthesise SFD research studies, approaches and findings, or to systematically reflect on the wider implications of SFD as a new and complex body of knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation is to provide an Integrative Review of SFD literature with the intention of portraying an overarching and holistic picture of the field. A comprehensive literature analysis was conducted which followed Whittemore and Knafl's (2005) 5-step process including: Problem Identification, Literature Search, Data Evaluation, Data Analysis, and Presentation. This approach resulted in evidence related to the status quo of research contexts, authorship, research foci, theoretical frameworks, sport programs and initiatives, methodologies, methods and key research findings in the field of SFD. The presentation will summarise such results, reflecting on key trends and observations.

Research findings suggest that publications in the SFD field predominantly focus on social and youth sport, with football (soccer) the most common sport activity. There has been an increasing trend of publications in this field since 2000, reaching a peak of 96 articles published in 2013. Of particular interest for the sport management academy is that the three leading sport management journals (Journal of Sport Management, Sport Management Review and European Sport Management Quarterly) were listed in the top 10 journal outlets for SFD research. The impact of geography, research methods, research populations and programs and key findings, limitations and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

The findings from our review provide a detailed account of recent SFD research, with an emphasis on studies published between 2000 and 2014. Building on these newly gained insights, this presentation will discuss key factors that underpin or may have contributed to study findings and more specifically, to the status quo of the field. The identified gaps in SFD research will also be discussed and opportunities for further scholarly enquiry identified. In doing so, we aim to provide a strong basis and reference point for future research in and around SFD. In other words, we aim to encourage other scholars to draw on our findings to stimulate new lines of research inquiry and to contribute to practice, theory and policy development associated with SFD.

References


