The United Nations is increasingly calling on its members to recognize sport as a viable tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Lemke, 2016). As a result, a broad range of stakeholders are now involved in this domain including sport governing bodies, governments, inter-governmental agencies, corporations, local nonprofits, multi-national nonprofits, and social enterprises. Prior studies describe a broad number of inter-organizational relationships among these actors, although many of these relationships are characterized by unequal power structures (Beacom, 2007; Giulianotti, 2011; Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010; Levermore, 2008; Lindsey, 2013; Lindsey & Banda, 2010; Sugden, 2010). Additional studies have examined partnerships between academic researchers and industry organizations (Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016). The literature also suggests a clear lack of collaboration among grassroots Sport for Development (SFD) organizations, despite likeminded goals and objectives (Coakley, 2011; Lindsey, 2013; Lindsey & Banda, 2010). The nature of inter-organizational relationships in SFD, however, remains largely unexplored in the literature. To this point, researchers have called for increased focus on enhancing our understanding of organizational aspects in SFD (Schulenkorf, Burdsey, & Sugden, 2014; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016).

This study seeks to contribute to the literature by examining the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation’s Model City initiative in New Orleans. The aim of the foundation’s project is to promote collective impact by developing inter-organizational collaboration and increased organizational capacity through a city-wide initiative (Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, 2016). The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the network cohesion of this coalition and how (if at all) it influences inter-organizational linkages. Specifically, the researchers were guided by the following questions: (a) How do the member organizations within the Model City initiative interact with each other? (b) How has the externally funded coalition influenced these inter-organizational ties? and (c) How does information flow within the coalition? Findings from this study will contribute to the SFD literature by indicating the role of an inter-organizational coalition in facilitating increased collaboration and collective impact in SFD.

A mixed-method research approach was adopted for this study (Creswell, 2007). A web-based questionnaire was developed based on a review of relevant literature to collect information regarding formal and informal ties between actors within the Model City initiative. Specifically, the questionnaire consists of items related to (a) information sharing (Ziakas & Costa, 2010), (b) resource sharing (Sallent, Palau, & Guia, 2011), (c) inter-organizational referrals (Menger, Stallones, Cross, Henry, & Chen, 2015), (d) shared marketing and fundraising efforts (Cousens, Barnes, & MacLean, 2012), and (e) collaboration on grants and projects (Wasche, 2015). This questionnaire will be distributed to staff and board members of the 19 entities currently involved in this initiative during December 2016. The information gathered will then be examined through social network analysis (SNA). This method allows researchers to investigate individuals, groups, and organizations and the shared relationships among them (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). A number of studies in related disciplines have employed SNA to examine nonprofit organizations (Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007).

SNA involves constructing sociograms, or visual displays of a social network. These sociograms include a collection of circles and lines. This study will develop a sociogram to reflect the Model City inter-organizational network. The circles, or nodes, will represent the organizations, and the lines connecting these nodes will represent the relationships among the initiative’s network members (Hansen & Shneiderman, 2010). In addition to these visual representations, SNA can provide quantitative information about the network. Density indicates the interconnectedness among the members based on the number of existing versus potential relationships within the network. Additionally, centrality values can be calculated to measure the prominence of network members, including...
the frequency and strengths of their relationships and their ability to connect with other members (Lusher, Robins, & Kremer, 2010). A network sociogram as well as density and centrality values will be presented.

To supplement this data collection and analysis, in-depth interviews are also currently being conducted with representatives of the member organizations to develop a deeper understanding of their inter-organizational linkages and how information flows within the coalition. These interviews will be completed by December 2016. Participant observations are also being undertaken, and these will allow the researchers to further observe the human interaction between actors and their lived experiences during coalition meetings and events (Jorgensen, 1989). The qualitative data from field notes and interview transcripts will be examined through a two person independent coding procedure to identify emergent concepts and higher-order themes (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). Throughout this data analysis process, Tracy’s (2010) criteria for qualitative research will be used by the researchers to enhance the quality and trustworthiness of findings.

Several scholars have noted that whether SFD efforts result in desired outcomes depends on the organizational processes of the entities implementing these programs (Schulenkorf et al., 2014; Sugden, 2010). To date, however, most SFD research has focused primarily on the program outcomes rather than the organizational aspects (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016). Findings from this study will help address this knowledge gap in the literature by examining the nature of inter-organizational linkages within an externally funded SFD coalition. This will allow for a deeper understanding of the partnerships often reported in the literature (Coalter, 2013; Levermore, 2008; Lindsey & Banda, 2010; Schulenkorf et al., 2014). Specifically, findings from this mixed-method study will indicate the actual interaction among member organizations within the network, the strength of these organizational ties, and the SFD coalition’s influence on these linkages. This will allow for an improved understanding of the use of collaborative networks in SFD for promoting inter-organizational collaboration and collective impact. In addition, findings from this study will extend our understanding on the role of inter-organizational partnerships in regards to the capacity of SFD entities (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Research on other types of nonprofit organizations suggests external relationships can either increase or decrease an organization’s capacity depending on the nature of the partnership (Gazley & Abner, 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009, 2012). Furthermore, this study’s mixed-method will allow for the identification of groups and subgroups within the network and their roles in influencing the information dissemination process. Overall, implications from this study will help in identifying how governments and funding agencies can develop more efficient network structures and collaborative efforts within SFD.