Future Directions in Sport for Development: Perceptions and Reflections of SFD Practitioners

Na Ri Shin, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Adam Cohen, University of Technology Sydney
Jon Welty Peachey, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sport for Development - Other (Other)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2018-182
Friday, June 8, 2018
10:50 AM
Room: Annapolis C

Introduction
Over the last decade, the field of sport for development (SFD) has expanded its presence and legitimacy within the context of local and international development (Schulenkorf, 2017). Much of the research to date in SFD has explored the efficacy of sport-based interventions on achieving various outcomes, such as building social capital (Burnett, 2006; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008); contributing to cross-cultural understanding (Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2011; Sugden, 2010); and facilitating social inclusion (Sherry, 2010; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). Recently, scholarly attention has turned to the organizational and managerial aspects of SFD, including strategic management (MacIntosh & Spence, 2012; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016) and partnerships (Lindsey & Banda, 2011; Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2017). Schulenkorf's (2017) recent review synthesized academic achievements in SFD as well as suggested areas of future research, responding to the need to reflect upon and advance the SFD field. However, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to obtaining views on the progress, growth, and future of SFD from practitioners working directly with programs in the field. In addition, scholars have argued that much SFD research does not do justice in emphasizing practitioners' reflections on, and inputs to the field (Spaaij, Schulenkorf, Jeans, & Oxford, 2017; Welty Peachey et al., 2017).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives and reflections of SFD practitioners on the future of SFD. We aimed to gain an understanding of the future of SFD through engaging with a wide-variety of SFD practitioners, with an ultimate goal to provide overarching and holistic directions for the field drawn from practitioner insights. Two research questions were developed: (a) What are the future directions of SFD from practitioners’ perspectives?; and (b) What are suggestions from SFD practitioners for advancing the field? Drawing from Sport for Development Theory (SFDT - Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), practitioners were asked to reflect upon impacts assessment, organization, and program components including sport, educational, and cultural aspects. The present study is significant, given that SFD has been gaining attention from various sectors ranging from public policy making to non-governmental development initiatives, and practitioners’ reflections can help shape SFD agendas for the future.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review
To guide this study, SFDT was adopted (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). SFDT was developed to better understand the structures and conditions of SFD programs and initiatives. According to SFDT, SFD interventions have five core components: (a) impact assessment, (b) organizational, (c) sport and physical activity, (d) educational, and (e) cultural enrichment. SFDT has been adopted by scholars to study diverse issues, such as the role of sport in community capacity building (Edwards, 2015), the effects of intentional design and structure of a sport-based learning initiative (Bruening et al., 2015), and the role of sport involvement in creating self-sufficiency (Inoue, Funk, & Jordan, 2013).

Academically, SFD has developed over the last two decades largely due to its social justice focus, exploration of potential program outcomes, and opportunities to investigate how management of these organizations may be different from that of other sport-related organizations (Schulenkorf, 2016; Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016). Along with the rapid growth of SFD organizations in both size and number, academics from various disciplines have engaged in SFD research dealing with theoretical development, policy discussions, and impact studies (Welty Peachey, Musser, Shin, & Cohen, 2017). Schulenkorf and colleagues’ (2016) integrated literature review of SFD scholarship suggested that a majority of research has focused primarily on individual case studies and program
evaluations. They also critically emphasized a disparity between the geographical contexts of authorship (North America, Europe, and Australia) and study location (Africa, Asia, and Latin America), which aligns with existing criticism of the evangelical rhetoric and neo-colonial approach of SFD entities (Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2012). Thus, the present study recruited participants from diverse locations in order to represent more holistic perspectives of SFD practitioners.

Method
As an exploratory qualitative study, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 practitioners in 29 SFD organizations from around the world in order to gather in-depth, robust data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Through SFD industry recognized online platforms, we contacted 60 organizations that were active and viable, operating in diverse locations across all six continents, and which had variety in programming. Thirty individuals volunteered to take part in this study. Questions for the interview guide were constructed from SFDT (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) and the SDP literature on the context and state of the field (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Schulenkorf, 2017). Personal interviews were conducted by telephone and Skype. The sample was deemed sufficient with the occurrence of data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A priori coding categories and themes were guided by the aforementioned literature and theory (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), and an open coding procedure was also utilized to inductively analyze the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Dependability and credibility were enhanced through establishing intercoder reliability and by conducting member checks with study participants (Schwandt, 2007), where they reviewed their transcripts and study interpretations.

Findings and Discussion
Guided by SFDT (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), data analysis illustrated several key themes revolving around future directions and suggestions to advance the field. Regarding future directions, practitioners suggested: (a) SFD initiatives will move beyond just ‘playing sports’ (e.g., “Being able to differentiate, to properly be able to articulate the difference between sport for sport’s sake and actually what the power of sport is”); and (b) focusing efforts beyond micro level or individual impacts (e.g., “I would definitely say that most organizations tend to take the low hanging fruit [individual impact] . . . but that’s not going to make neighborhoods better”). For suggestions to advance the field, interviewees mentioned: (a) a greater emphasis on impact assessment (e.g., “[We need to] get stronger at the evaluation and monitoring . . . making stronger cases on how sports can help address many, many social issues”); and (b) improving relationships with key stakeholders (e.g., “My very positive view about this is that the different stakeholders start viewing this as a real opportunity . . . and that we are able to grow to our full potential”). Theoretically, this research expands the work of Lyras and Welty Peachey (2011), who suggested SDP programs should design their programming and structure beyond simply executing sport activities. Additionally, these findings complement the efforts of Schulenkorf et al. (2017), whose work highlighted the need for continued reflection and development of further strategies for advancing SFD. The present study adds the perspective of SFD practitioners into this conversation. Future research directions will also be explicated.