Conceptualizing the Unique Contribution of “Sport” in Sport for Development and Peace.

Emma Sherry, Swinburne University
Jon Welty Peachey, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Na Ri Shin, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sport for Development - Other (Other)  
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This research seeks to conceptualize the unique theoretical contribution of sport to sport for development and peace (SDP). Academicians and practitioners alike have argued that sport provides an effective context for the achievement of individual and community development (Cohen & Welty Peachey, 2015; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2013; Sherry, 2010). However, little is known as to why or how sport, as distinct from other contexts, can act as a development tool. SDP scholars have consistently grappled with identifying and explaining the contribution of sport to SDP (Levermore, 2011). Indeed, critical and theoretical SDP scholars such as Darnell (2010; 2012), Spaaij (2015), Hayhurst, Kay, and Chawansky (2015), Harris and Adams (2016), and Guilianotti (2011), have often argued that SDP research needs to more carefully and thoughtfully identify the unique contribution, if any, of sport, to achieving community and social development goals. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to engage leading SDP academic experts in a conceptual mapping process to better understand “why sport?”.

Academic participants for this study were identified as those researchers and higher degree research students (PhD) who are publishing and/or presenting their research in the major academic journals and conferences in SDP and/or sport management field. Overall 31 academicians participated in the study. Concept Mapping followed a structured process of engagement with key participants via an online tool. Data collection was undertaken via a two-step process. The first step of this research method involved the Generation of Ideas (brainstorming). Once a subject agreed to participate, they were invited to generate a set of statements around the concept of Sport for Development and Peace in answer to the following prompt: “Please generate short phrases or sentences that describe why sport is an effective development tool”. Participants were encouraged to generate as many statements as they wished. The second step of the process entailed Structuring the Statements. Once the complete set of statements was received from all participants, each participant was then asked to perform two “structuring” tasks: a) Grouping / sorting – each participant was instructed to group the ideas into piles in a way that made sense to them, and b) Rating – each participant then rated each statement on one or more dimensions (such as importance of the concept).

Initial results from the Concept Mapping analysis identified five (5) key thematic clusters from the data, broadly categorised as: a) development outcomes, b) SDP process, c) social connection, d) community, and e) flexibility. In our attempt to answer “why sport?”, we will argue that these results indicate that social connection and interaction, and bonds created through the inherent physicality of sport, have been identified by leading researchers in the field as the key theoretical contribution of sport to SDP. We will also offer thoughts on implications for managing and designing SDP programs, and on next steps for conceptually answering the question of “why sport”.