Sport-For-Development: A Comprehensive Analysis of Theoretical and Conceptual Advancements

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Introduction

In this presentation, we provide a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical and conceptual developments within the sport-for-development (SFD) field. Following a sport-focused review of SFD literature (Chalip, 2006), our study addresses the call from scholars who have illuminated the need for theory building and critical dialogue within SFD to help further legitimize and develop the field (Coalter, 2013a; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2015); moreover, it also responds to a similar call in the wider sport management discipline to engage in more theory development (Cunningham et al., 2018; Doherty, 2013). Given the ongoing development of SFD and important conversations about the potentially unique qualities and attributes of sport in facilitating development agendas (Coalter, 2013b; Schulenkorf, 2017; Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2015) – as well as the broader discourse on the importance of identifying the uniqueness of sport in sport management theory development (Cunningham, 2013; Fink, 2013) – a review such as this is critical in developing a synthesized and nuanced understanding of sport and its role in development. The purpose of this systematic literature review, therefore, is to present a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical developments that have emerged within the SFD space and identify how this theoretical work has been extended or expanded by scholarship.

Method

Building on Schulenkorf, Sherry, and Rowe’s (2016) review of SFD literature, we investigated the top 10 journals that this article identified as featuring the highest quantity of SFD-specific research. We also reviewed articles published in the Journal of Sport for Development. Our literature-scanning process focused on identifying articles that included SFD-focused theory or conceptualizations published between 2010 (the year the first SFD-focused theory was published) and January 2019. Initially, 27 articles were identified, with five theoretical/conceptual frameworks found that emerged from the SFD space. We interrogated our sample once more to include additional databases to determine if articles that included any of the five SFD-specific theories/conceptual frameworks could be found outside the 11 journals. Relevant databases (i.e., ProQuest, Scopus) were searched with each of the five theories/frameworks as keywords, yielding seven additional articles. We then engaged in discussion about the distinct use and application of SFD-specific theories or conceptualizations around different levels of engagement: from merely mentioning SFD theories/concepts, to engaging with them, to applying them as guiding frameworks.

Findings and Discussion

Findings revealed five theoretical/conceptual frameworks have emerged from the SFD space: the Ripple-Effect Model (Sugden, 2010), Sport-for-Development Theory (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), the Sport-for-Development Framework (Schulenkorf, 2012), Programme Theory (Coalter, 2013b), and the Sport-for-Health Model (Schulenkorf & Seifken, 2019). Findings also suggest the majority of SFD scholarship is borrowing theories from other disciplines rather than engaging with, applying, and extending the five SFD-derived theories. The limited work that does feature SFD theorizing embraces some aspects of good theory; however, it also suffers from vague processes and difficult to test relationships. Drawing from this review, we extend current SFD theorizing by positing three conceptual advancements: the link between type of sport and targeted outcomes, the dosage of sport, and integration of leadership into SFD theorizing.