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Abstract

In recent years, sport has been acknowledged by a broad range of organisations as a viable tool to promote peace in highly volatile contexts. Acknowledging the complexity and myriad of issues that shape and define the Colombian and Northern Irish struggles, this article explores the use of sport to advance peace-building as seen through the lenses of the personnel involved in designing, supporting and implementing sport-based peace interventions (SDP officials) in both regions. This paper found points of commonality and divergence between Colombia and Northern Ireland showing that the unique conflict dynamics in both cases have played a major role in shaping the perceptions of SDP officials with regards to the peace-building dimension of sport, their role as drivers of change and the structure and content of sport for development and peace programs.

Keywords: *peace building; sport for development and peace; Colombia; Northern Ireland; sport*

Author Bio(s)

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Sport and Peace-Building in Divided Societies: A Case Study on Colombia and Northern Ireland

Alexander Cárdenas

In recent years, sport has been widely accepted as a vehicle to advance social development and promote peace in highly volatile contexts. This approach is known as Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) and has emerged not only as a popular social intervention strategy, but also as a policy sector (Giulianotti, 2011b) and a growing interdisciplinary academic field. As a result of the worldwide upsurge in SDP activity, research on this subject has also notably intensified, with twenty-five articles, book chapters, and theses published in 2012 alone (Hillyer, 2013).

When examining previous research on the place and role of sport in promoting peace in conflict contexts, several studies have shed light on the opportunities and limitations of sport and physical activity to advance peace-building in deeply divided communities. The majority of these studies, however, have analyzed this phenomenon from a program beneficiary's perspective and have focused heavily on particular geographical regions, predominantly Africa (e.g., Dyck, 2011; Rookwood & Palmer, 2011), the Middle East (e.g., Liebmann & Rookwood, 2007; Sugden, 2008) and Eastern Europe (e.g., Gasser and Levinsen, 2004). In addition, current comparative case studies on sport for peace-building, with a handful of exceptions (see for instance Giulianotti and Armstrong (2011)), do not typically expand beyond a given geographical area.

Considering the above, a cross-regional study can shed more light on the use of sport to advance peace-building in essentially different social and political contexts (e.g., two different continents; Global South vs. Global North). In order to construct a more robust picture of the place of sport as a peace-building agent, it is essential to explore the role and perspectives of the diverse actors who make up the sport for development and peace constellation; it is also crucial to engage with geographical regions affected by conflict—where peace-building-through-sport actively takes place—but where little research has been carried out.

Therefore, this investigation explored the ways in which recreational sport (mainly football given its status as the most popular sport discipline) is being employed as a peace-building vehicle within the conflict and post-conflict setting of Colombia and Northern Ireland respectively, and as seen through the lenses of the personnel involved in designing, implementing, and supporting SDP programs (SDP officials). The analysis is divided into five parts. The first section provides a literature review on sport and peace-building and SDP programs. The second part presents background information on the conflict and sport in Colombia and Northern Ireland and introduces the case study. In the third and fourth sections the findings of the study are presented, followed by a discussion. The article concludes with a final reflection and a set of recommendations.

Literature Review

Sport and Peace-building in Conflict Regions

Scholars and SDP advocates have both concluded that, when properly managed and designed, sport can play a constructive peacemaking role in communities affected by conflict and division (see Guilianotti & Armstrong, 2011; Sugden 1991; Woodhouse, 2010a; SDP IWG, 2008; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2005). Sport-based interventions have emerged as useful tools to support peace-building efforts in highly volatile contexts due to, for instance, the ability of sport to maintain open channels of communication in hostile environments (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2005) and its capacity to connect people and develop networks of cooperation (SDP IWG, 2008). These characteristics found in sport can potentially contribute to reframing social relations between communities and groups that have been disrupted due to conflict (Rubenstein, 2011).

In his pioneering study examining the potential role of football as a reconciliation tool between Catholic and Protestant youth, Sugden (1991) arrived at the conclusion that “under carefully qualified conditions, sport and related forms of recreation can help in the process of reconciliation” (p. 79). In Kenya, Borsani (2009) observed sport tournaments and festivals that integrated groups having been in conflict, and noted these contributed to reconciliation and the building of a more positive and healthy environment (p. 11). In relation to other conflict zones such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, Lea-Howarth (2006) concluded that team sports such as football played a valuable role in bringing clashing sides together (p. 42). In South Africa, a society which of course was divided by apartheid, both professional and recreational sports, according to Höglund and Sundberg (2008), have contributed to reconciliation at the national, communal and individual level (pp. 807-814).

Notwithstanding the positive impact that well-structured sport-based interventions may have on divided communities, various limitations surface when sport is used as a peace-building tool. Dyck (2001) points out that sport has failed to engage directly with the dominant political and economic structures and the sources of structural violence as experienced by young people in armed conflict. In the same way Lea-Howarth (2006) argues that sport “can do nothing significant to alleviate structural violence or direct violence” (p. 10), and suggests not to conceive sport as a holistic peace-building instrument. Furthermore, scholars have widely reported on the risk of sport and sport-based interventions to serve as conduits for neo-colonial practices to be perpetuated (see Coalter, 2010a; Darnell, 2007). Despite these obvious limitations of sport as a peace-building agent, recreational sport has been fruitfully incorporated into peace and development programs using two main approaches: sport plus and plus sport.

Sport for Development and Peace Programs: Sport Plus and Plus Sport

Programs incorporating sport to achieve social goals—including the peaceful resolution of differences—are, according to Coalter (2008), categorized in two groups: sport plus and plus sport. Sport plus programs emphasize the participation of the general public in sport, yet sport is

used to tackle a number of broader issues (HIV/AIDS education, increase citizenship, etc.). In plus sport programs, sport is used as a means to an end. That is, sport is used to bring young people and at-risk populations into sport in order to achieve broader social objectives (Coalter, 2007). In both approaches the desired development and peace outcomes are not reached by sport alone, but they incorporate a variety of non-sport based practices (Cárdenas, 2013) such as games, seminars and other pedagogical activities. Additionally, some SDP programs feature diverse methodologies and adaptations of traditional sports to best address the needs of communities and program participants.

Background

The Conflict and Sport in Colombia

Colombia has experienced the oldest internal conflict in the Western Hemisphere. Spanning more than fifty years, a war between government forces, guerrillas, and paramilitary groups has yielded a devastating loss of human life and a deep fragmentation of society. The National Center for Historical Memory (2013) indicates that between 1958 and 2010, 220,000 people have been killed in the Colombian conflict (with 81 percent being civilian casualties); 5.7 million have been displaced; 900,000 have been assassinated; 147,000 have been victims of forced disappearance.

In 2012 a series of exploratory talks, between the government of President Santos and the FARC guerrilla, began in Cuba with the aim of finding a political solution to the armed conflict. Efforts to promote peace, however, are not limited to finding a political solution to the hostilities, but a peace movement, largely associated with civil society, sought to mobilize all sectors of Colombian society to act in favor of peace through a variety of programs and initiatives. Increasingly, cultural and artistic expressions—and especially sport—have been recognized by political leaders, international organizations, and civil society as powerful allies for the advancement of peace-building in the nation (Cárdenas, 2015d). As a consequence, the country has recently experienced an upsurge of sport-for-peace activity (though still under-reported in academic literature, both in English and Spanish) and has gained an incipient international exposure, attracting the interest of a variety of peace-promoting institutions from home and abroad that support recreational sport as a tool to achieve specific peace, conflict resolution, and development goals.

The Conflict and Sport in Northern Ireland

While popular discourse generally perceives the Northern Irish struggle exclusively as a religious confrontation between Catholics and Protestants, this is a clash by those whose political loyalties are with the Republic of Ireland, and those who are loyal to the United Kingdom (McGlynn, 2010, p. 69). In spite of the fact that a peace agreement was signed more than fifteen years ago, this identity-based confrontation has left profound divisions which are still visible today in areas such as education, housing and recreation.

Education in Northern Ireland is heavily segregated. That is, Catholic parents send their children to Catholic schools exclusively, while Protestant families send their children to schools of their same faith (Cairns & Hewstone, 2002, p. 221). Similarly, it is estimated that 90 percent of public housing in Northern Ireland is segregated (Housing Executive, n.d).

The separation between both communities is also reflected in sport-related activities. Though there are many exceptions to this rule, broadly speaking, sport in Northern Ireland is usually expressed in terms of cultural identity. That is, the type of sport practiced and teams supported usually reveals the religious—and political—affiliation of an individual (McGinley et al., 1998, pp. 464-471). The complex dynamics of interaction between sport, cultural identity and politics within the Northern Irish context has been extensively documented by Sugden and Bairner (1991), noting that sport in this corner of Western Europe has a “particularly strong political pedigree” (pp. 133-141). In the same way, Bairner (2001) argues that Gaelic games on the one hand, and sports such as rugby and cricket on the other, have served as mediums to consolidate pro-Nationalist and pro-British identities respectively (p. 283), entrenching and reflecting dynamics of the conflict. Various forms of recreational sports (for instance football, due to its wide popularity across the divide and basketball, a sport that has not claimed any affiliations with either community), however, have been seen as platforms to bring Catholics and Protestants together with the aim of promoting a more tolerant and peaceful environment via sport-based peace-building interventions and programs (see Cárdenas, 2014a; Sugden, 1991).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comparative case study was to explore the ways in which recreational sport is being used to advance peace-building in Colombia and Northern Ireland, as seen through the lenses of SDP officials in both regions. These officials fulfill diverse roles in designing, supporting, and executing sport for development and peace programs. They represent some of the most visible organizations in Colombia and Northern Ireland that, via sport-based interventions, employ recreational sport (mainly football) as a strategy to achieve broader social goals—with promotion of peace being one of the most salient.

This research is guided by various theoretical approaches, such as the web-making approach to peace-building (Lederach, 1997) and contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). The former stresses the importance of developing strategic networks (web-making processes) that are particularly relevant for NGOs, whereas the latter prescribes contact as one of the most beneficial ways to improve relations between groups experiencing conflict. Furthermore, this investigation follows Giulianotti (2011a), who claimed that the overall understanding of the peace-building dimension of sport could be expanded by examining the reflections and views of SDP officials.

Methodology

This investigation adopted a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2003), employed comparative case study as research methodology (Stake, 2000), and used triangulation as a

technique for validating data interpretations (Yin, 2004b). Case study was the research methodology of choice as it facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon using multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008), hence allowing for a rich description of the phenomenon under study, especially where the phenomenon under study is bounded by aspects such as geography or timeframe (Merriam, 1998). This study aims to explore the use of sport to promote peace against the background of the unique conflict dynamics of Colombia and Northern Ireland. Therefore, case study, because of its emphasis on investigating a given phenomenon, process or group within their real-life context (Yin, 2003a), emerged as the most appropriate means of inquiry.

Data Triangulation

Data was gathered between March 2012 and June 2014 using open-ended interviews as a primary method; an online survey, direct observations, participant observations, and analysis of secondary sources complemented the data collection process. The researcher employed both English and Spanish to collect the data.

In Colombia, nineteen (19) SDP officials from thirteen (13) organizations were interviewed, while in Northern Ireland, eleven (11) officials from six (6) SDP organizations were interviewed. Fourteen (14) SDP officials from thirteen (13) organizations in Colombia, and ten (10) officials from eight (8) organizations in Northern Ireland filled out an online survey. (See appendix for list of participating organizations.) Direct observations were performed twice in Colombia with the NGO *Tiempo de Juego* (Time to Play). In Northern Ireland five (5) visits to the program Football for All were conducted between April and September of 2013. Observations were also conducted during two major conferences on sport for peace-building taking place the same year. In Colombia, participant observation was employed on three occasions, all of which involved SDP activity of the Football and Peace Network (*Red Fútbol y Paz*), and in Northern Ireland once during a four-day values-based coaching workshop delivered by Football for Peace (F4P). A series of documents compiled by SDP organizations and governmental agencies in Colombia and Northern Ireland were analyzed, including monitoring and evaluation, annual activity and technical reports, training manuals, brochures, and workbooks.

Data Analysis

The analysis and interpretation of the data collected were done concurrently (Stake, 1995). That is, as the data was collected, it was analyzed and subsequently categorized according to a set of codes that emerged during the planning stage and from major themes identified in an exhaustive literature review on the subject (e.g., sport and conflict, sport opportunities and limitations, perceptions of officials, program content and implementation, sport methodologies, football and peace-building, etc.), and to new codes that emerged throughout this phase. The codes were grouped together by analogous meanings forming broader categories of analysis. Nevertheless, as the data collection process unfolded, various themes appeared repeatedly that had not been contemplated during the earlier phases of the study

(e.g., non-sport component of SDP programs). As a consequence, new codes were incorporated, while some others were re-evaluated or dropped.

Further analysis of the data collected employed two methods: within-case analysis, and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Using within-case analysis, each of the cases was handled independently and the data collected was used to learn as much as possible about the use of recreational sport for peace purposes. Once each case was finalized, a cross-case analysis followed. At this stage, cross-case patterns on sport for peace between Colombia and Northern Ireland were identified. The interpretation of the processed data was based on two dimensions: perceptions of SDP officials, and SDP programs. An additional dimension, SDP sector, was identified during the data analysis phase. Nevertheless, for the purpose of our discussion this paper deals only with the perceptions of SDP officials and programs.

Limitations of the Study

Relying strongly on the perceptions and points of view of SDP officials presents a limitation in this study. Although some of the claims of these officials were corroborated using various data collecting techniques, other assertions could not be fully explored by means of supplementary methods. An additional limitation presented itself by the fact that, since this study focused on the most visible SDP organizations, it did not include a large number of less well-known programs and individuals advancing peace via sport in Colombia and Northern Ireland.

Findings

Dimension 1: SDP Officials

1) SDP Officials' Views on Sport/football to Achieve the Peace Goals of their Organizations

SDP officials in Colombia and Northern Ireland acknowledged the value of popular sport practices such as football to advance the overall peace-related goals of their organizations. In the view of these officials, sport: a) has a capacity to reach large audiences and break down barriers; b) serves as a hook to bring participants into their programs; c) serves a pedagogical function; and, d) allows the transmission of certain pro-social values. In general terms, the idea of sport as a “hook” to attract participants into programs was more popular among Northern Irish SDP officials than among their counterparts from Colombia. As reported on the survey and interviews, “We are obviously using sport as a hook to engage young people. It keeps them excited and focused” (Coordinator, Teenage Kickz).

As opposed to their European counterparts, Colombian SDP officials were more inclined to stress the educational facet of sport when employed as a social intervention strategy, stating, “Sport has a great capacity to gather people together and is potentially an excellent pedagogical tool. Football in particular facilitates the development of values and social and emotional skills” (Executive director, *Fútbol Con Corazón*).

When asked to pinpoint some of the drawbacks associated with recreational sport when employed as a social cohesion tool, SDP officials noted: a) the lack of motivation in sport by

some program beneficiaries, and the exclusion of girls in sport activities; b) the competitive nature of sport; c) the lack of awareness about the social role of sport which may lead to insufficient support to SDP initiatives; d) the association between sport and sectarian division in the case of Northern Ireland; and, e) the lack of proper sport facilities, as reported in Colombia. Conversely, in relation to the last point, officials from Northern Ireland perceived that the existing sport system—with suitable infrastructure to hold sport events, proper transport networks, and familiarity of people with sport—grants sport a significant advantage over other social intervention strategies.

2) SDP Officials' Views on the Role of Sport Within the Conflict Context of Northern Ireland and Colombia

Data collected through interviews and an online survey indicated SDP officials support the idea that sport can be useful to partially address some of the challenges resulting from each country's unique conflict dynamics. In Northern Ireland, SDP officials' perspectives with regard to the role of football and other sports within this region's unique (post) conflict setting, gravitated consistently around two fundamental issues (in order of importance): a) fostering contact among Protestants and Catholics and, b) promoting intercultural awareness and understanding.

Using popular sport practices to promote contact across the divide is partially associated with the idea that interaction between individuals from opposing groups can lead to significantly decreased prejudice when certain conditions are met. This approach is known as the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), and has been one of the guiding principles of various Northern Irish SDP initiatives, including Peace Players International (PPI). This NGO sees sport as an efficient vehicle for interaction to take place. The director of PPI commented, "Our guiding principle is: Children that play together can learn to live together."

Other SDP officials shared the same view on sport as a key element to foster interactions across the divide. When asked to illustrate an example in which recreational sport was key to promote contact between Catholics and Protestants, a coach from Football for Peace noted, "Through our interventions I have seen coaches working with other coaches and teachers from the 'opposite' community as well as with children." Similarly, an official from Derry City Council called attention to the role of sport as a contact promoter: "Children and youth come together through sport and forget about their background."

Officials believe sport-based programs and interventions could have a positive effect on increasing intercultural awareness across the divide. Given the segregated school system (Cairns & Hewstone, 2002) and housing scheme (Housing Executive, n.d.), Catholic and Protestant children and youth live, grow up, and go to school almost exclusively with members of their own community. This, in addition to the historical separation and current antagonism between both groups, has led to the perpetuation of entrenched beliefs and misconceptions members of either community may have about the other. To tackle this, sport is used to "build an understanding of

their own culture and build an understanding of other people's culture," said a consultancy officer at the University of Ulster. Elaborating on this issue, the coordinator of Teenage Kickz added: "Through football and football-related activities young people have been able to appreciate the differences, but what they ultimately found is that they have more in common than they have as differences."

Notwithstanding the positive perceptions of SDP officials with regard to the role of sport in fostering contact and raising intercultural awareness and understanding between Catholics and Protestants, some SDP officials brought to light the complex interplay between sport, identity and conflict within the Northern Irish context. A project officer at Football for Peace recalled: "The word *if* is key. Sport has to be managed because it can be, and it is, of part of the conflict." An official from Derry City Council agreed with the notion of sport being part of the conflict in this society, conveying:

A challenge is that some sports are very divisive. Some sports have a long history of separation and in those particular sports is where the challenges lie. There are no particular challenges in sports like swimming. There is just no separation between those that practice these kinds of sports; they do it together.

Unlike their European counterparts, Colombian SDP officials reported a wider array of issues related to the conflict in Colombia that they believe could be addressed in part using sport as a medium. In their view sport can be useful for (in no particular order of importance): 1) providing a safe space for at-risk children and youth; 2) teaching abilities and skills that would allow them to make proper decisions if (or when) they face recruitment by illegal armed forces (or criminal networks); 3) helping youth build a life plan; 4) creating jobs and related economic opportunities; 5) fostering peaceful coexistence and tackling urban violence; and, 6) promoting social inclusion.

When asked to elaborate further on some of the above issues, a coordinator at NGO Tiempo De Juego expressed his opinion on the use of sport to prevent the illegal recruitment of youth by criminal networks and illegal armed actors:

We noticed that there was a lot of illegal recruitment by various actors in Cazucá. The fact that kids were not properly using their free time helped for this to happen. So, those kids that were hanging out on the streets' corners were being captured, so to speak, by criminal networks and illegal armed forces. We use sport, among other things, to prevent this recruitment from happening.

In general terms, the perceptions of SDP officials with regards to the constructive role of sport within the conflict context of Colombia were in some measure confirmed in key government documents addressing social issues and sport. *The Decennial Plan for Sport 2009-2019* (2009), for example, acknowledges sport and physical education as, "Efficient strategies in

the search for peace, reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and social welfare (p.5), while the second part of the document *Vision for Colombia Second Centennial 2019* (2007) is entirely devoted to the theme “Sport for a Harmonious Coexistence, Development, and Peace.” The *Decennial Plan for Football 2014-2024* (2014), another key document, brings to light the contributions that NGOs and football-based social programs have made to the promotion of peace in the nation:

From civil society, there are many non-governmental organizations and community initiatives that have been created around football as a tool to promote peaceful coexistence, prevent drug addiction, crime, violence, and child and juvenile recruitment by illegal armed groups (pp.152-153).

In Northern Ireland, two key documents, *Sport Matters* (2009) and *Program for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (n.d.), establish current efforts by the Northern Irish government to position sport as a tool to promote social cohesion and good community relations within the shared future context.¹

Both documents support the perceptions of some SDP officials pertaining to the dual role of sport—as a unifying factor across the divide but also as an outlet for the expression of sectarian sentiments. Yet, as opposed to Colombia, a more pragmatic approach seems to guide the perceptions and attitudes of political decision makers towards the social role of sport within the Northern Irish context. As highlighted in *Sport Matters* (2009):

Although sport and physical recreation can bridge Northern Ireland’s community divisions, the development of sport and physical recreation and their ability to improve communities is hindered by ongoing community tensions. Yet sport reflects the communities within which it exists and often contributes to the continuation of the traditional patterns of segregation and under-representation (p. 42).

3) SDP Officials’ Reflections as Peacemakers and Drivers of Change

Data gathered through interviews and observations suggest that SDP officials in Colombia and Northern Ireland were to some degree mindful of their role as (potential) peacemakers and drivers of community change. To explore this in further detail, a group of SDP officials were reached via an online survey² and asked to provide their response to a number of questions, including the following statement: *Considering the work that I do, I regard myself as*

¹ Broadly speaking, shared future refers to a comprehensive set of strategies and policies aimed at establishing a united society in Northern Ireland. It also entails the implementation of plans and actions in order to increase cooperation among major political forces.

² An online survey was made available to SDP officials to obtain information on their perceptions regarding issues such as: a) the role of sport as a social intervention strategy and peace tool (e.g., *what in your opinion are some of the advantages and disadvantages of using sport to advance the work of your organization?*); b) the content of SDP programs and their role within the conflict context of Colombia and Northern Ireland (e.g., *does your program feature any peace-building/conflict resolution component? If yes, how is this articulated? Please explain*); c) the reflections of SDP officials as drivers of community change and peacemakers (e.g., *considering the work you that you do, and the overall goals of your organization, do you think you have made a contribution to the creation of a culture of peace in /Colombia/Northern Ireland? Yes; No; May be. Please explain*).

a peacemaker. The great majority of officials reached in Colombia and Northern Ireland (86%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Further, SDP officials from Northern Ireland were asked to state their position with regards to the following question: *Considering the work that you do, and the overall goals of your organization, do you think you have made a contribution to the creation of a culture of peace in Northern Ireland? Yes, No, or Please explain*. One of the positive responses included the following:

Yes, we have witnessed first hand the breaking down of sectarian barriers between the two communities: people from both sides coming together without fighting or arguing but being part of the same team and encouraging each other. They are building friendships with people they may have thought of as enemies before taking part in our project (Coordinator at Street League).

While the self-perception as having a peacemaker's role was widely shared among SDP officials both in Colombia and Northern Ireland, the intensity of web-making, and the actual existence of networks among SDP officials to share their experience and collaborate, varied strongly between the two countries.

4) Web-making Among SDP Officials

A wealth of information on web-making among SDP officials was gathered via interviews and observations. This study found that in Colombia the Football and Peace Network is one of the few initiatives from the region that brings together SDP officials and NGOs in the fields of sport, development and peace. Working under a common framework and with the logistical, technical and material support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the German International Development and Cooperation Agency (GIZ), and the World Bank, twelve programs and foundations have joined forces with the aim of raising awareness on the use of football as a development and peace tool, as well as to collectively address, via sport, issues affecting children and youth in communities where programs operate. An education specialist at the World Bank Colombia highlighted the potential of the Network by saying:

One of the strengths of the Network, and this is work in progress, is that we are showing the country that it is worth investing in peace and development through football.

Collectively, we have been able to bring different actors together under a common vision, and there is the possibility that something important will be learned from this process.

Unlike Colombia, the creation of strategic networks among SDP officials was not a prevailing theme in the Northern Irish case, to the detriment of the SDP programs in the view of at least one official. A consultancy officer at the University of Ulster elaborated on the need for SDP officials and organizations to work collectively under a common goal:

There are a lot of people doing a lot of good work, but this is all individual. There is

nothing coordinated. Some things are fantastic and work very well in one area, and would be great if they worked in another area, but there is no communication of that. There is no leadership, and we need to get more organized on this.

According to officials in both countries, web-making was commonly viewed as an additional enabler for the field, while networks between SDP officials and programs can still be increased, particularly in Northern Ireland. Beyond the perceptions and views of officials, the analysis of SDP programs revealed some findings pertaining to the use of non-sport elements as program components.

SDP Programs: Non-sport Components of Programs and Interventions

Though the focus of SDP programs is clearly sports, there is a non-sport component to SDP interventions that assists programs in achieving broader social objectives. In Northern Ireland popular non-sport activities include community relations and conflict resolution seminars and talks (e.g., Peace Players International; art and crafts workshops (Seaview Enterprises), and guided discussions on issues such as the conflict, sectarianism (Teenage Kikz), and cultural identity (University of Ulster), among others. In addition, some of the most experienced Northern Irish NGOs and SDP organizations are also involved in community outreach through several initiatives including the design and delivery of a variety of school and university accredited courses in areas such as sport and community relations, sport and peace-building, and sport and the teaching of values. Peace Players International, for example, delivers a program that is linked to the community relations' curriculum in Northern Ireland—PDMU (Personal Development and Mutual Understanding). This is an academic requirement within the Department of Education and is mandatory for schools and teachers to deliver. According to the director of PPI Northern Ireland, “We are helping schools fulfill their academic requirements. Schools are good at doing the personal development stuff but the understanding and community-relations stuff, they really struggle with.”

The University of Ulster also designs and delivers various courses open to community members that confer university credits. One of the most recent courses taught is Sport for Inclusion: Physical Activity and Recreation, which corresponds to five units of university coursework that instructs participants in areas such as sport peace-building and social inclusion.

In Colombia the non-sport component of SDP programs include painting, photography, dance and music workshops, youth advancement programs, fieldtrips, and after schools programs (Football and Peace Network); talks on substance abuse prevention, community development and peace and security (*Gestores del Deporte*); conflict resolution skills (*Tiempo de Juego, Colombianitos*), and civil education seminars (*Fundación Luker*), among other activities. In addition, the program *A Ganar* (“to win” in English) provides youth with skills required to find jobs in a range of fields employing a variety of sport as well as non-sport activities. Through the non-sport component, program participants undertake 250 hours of vocational training, complete

an internship with potential employers, and volunteer for community service projects. This program supports the idea that sport can teach specific skills replicable in life and at the workplace, therefore contributing to advancing individual and community development. The director of sport for development at Partners of the Americas commented, “We are not a sport program but rather a development program wrapped in sports.”

Discussion

SDP officials in Colombia and Northern Ireland acknowledged the value of sport not only as an effective and reliable means to bring participants into their programs, but also as an educational tool and a platform to transmit values that can be applied beyond the sports grounds. Broadly speaking, the positive characteristics of sport (e.g., as a platform to transmit positive values, as a tool to foster peace and bring conflicting sides together, or as a means to partially address a variety of social problems) are consistent with the work of scholars (e.g. Rookwood & Palmer, 2011; Sugden, 1991, 2008; Woodhouse, 2010a), and SDP advocates (SDP IWG, 2008; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2005).

Notwithstanding the positive effect of sport, most SDP officials pinpointed several drawbacks associated with this practice. For instance, they clearly conveyed the idea that it would be erroneous to assume that all children and youth are inherently interested in sport. In addition, officials stated that sport could potentially promote an exaggerated sense of competition among participants. This is particularly evident when sport programs and interventions focus heavily on the technical and tactical aspects of sport, as opposed to placing greater emphasis on the achievement of broader social goals and teaching specific skills through this activity.

Compared to their counterparts from Europe, SDP officials in Colombia perceive football and sport in general as a way to address a broader range of social issues. In varying degrees of influence, all the factors pinpointed by SDP officials are connected to the conflict in Colombia. The fact that officials highlighted an extensive list of elements they believe are specific to the conflict in Colombia that could potentially be partially addressed through sport, reveals some of the factors that, in their view, are also necessary to achieve peace. In this sense, peace is not just about putting a stop to the armed hostilities and promoting a harmonious co-existence among Colombians, but it is also about creating economic opportunities and assisting those at the margins of society in developing a life plan for themselves.

Given the testimony of SDP officials, it can be concluded that the social dynamics and the unique conflict settings in Northern Ireland and Colombia have largely shaped their opinions as to the place of sport in their respective societies, and their perceptions of the potentiality and limitations of sport to serve as a vehicle for peace. This assertion is validated by the fact that distinct sport-based approaches and interventions have emerged both in Colombia and Northern Ireland that, through sport, seek to tackle specific issues related to each country's struggles.

As in the case of Northern Ireland, sport-based interventions have provided a controlled

environment to promote contact across the divide. As the contact hypothesis proposes, the right kind of contact between groups in conflict, under properly managed circumstances, may lead to a reduction in hostilities and toward improving social relations (Allport, 1954). Sport, in the view of SDP officials, has allowed program participants to interact with their peers from the “opposite community,” helping them to better understand different points of view and cultural traditions, potentially reducing instances of prejudice and discrimination between Catholics and Protestants. Whether such interactions forged across the divide during sport-for-peace activities can be maintained over time—and have an impact on sustaining peace in Northern Ireland in the long run (though there was a wealth of anecdotal evidence provided by SDP officials in this regards)—remains to be explored in more detail.

In general terms, the perceptions of SDP officials closely match the governmental authorities’ views in relation to the capacity and limitations of sport to function as a vehicle for peace within the conflict context of Colombia and Northern Ireland, as presented in key documents. In Northern Ireland official documents examined in this research emphasized the dual role of sport (as a unifying factor across the divide but also as an outlet for the expression of sectarian sentiments). Yet these official government reports do not fully explore the connection between sport and SDP programs, and building sustainable peace in a shared future context. By contrast, in Colombia, interventions and programs employing recreational sport have been extensively acknowledged in key documents as viable tools to address some of conflict-related social phenomena.

The above is critical considering that once there is sufficient awareness on the social dimension of sport, the natural step is for governments to develop policy (SDP IWG, 2008, p.21). In the current scenario, it is anticipated that recognition of the potential of sport as a peace vehicle will soon be followed by the creation of concrete policy on this front in Colombia (even more so as Colombia is expected to enter its post-conflict phase in the months to come), whereas in Northern Ireland there seems to be an absence of a solid political agenda guiding the issue of recreational sport and peace.

A propos to the role of SDP officials as peace builders and drivers of community change, this study found that the majority of officials reached perceived themselves as peacemakers. The ramifications of this are manifold as through these reflections officials imply that: 1) they have an understanding of the conflict and their efforts and actions are aimed at building and facilitating peace; 2) they are aware of the connections between their work, the role of sport and the conflict context of their societies; 3) they avoid a possible negative impact of their interventions; and, 4) they are equipped with specific methodologies or tools to maximize their role as peacemakers.

While a detailed examination of each of these arguments is beyond the scope of this paper, through my interactions with SDP officials I was able to confirm that some of these professionals had not only a sophisticated understanding of the conflict, its dynamics and

complexities, but also, they could clearly elucidate the specific contributions of their programs—and of themselves—to fostering peace amid the conflict in both regions. Furthermore, in Northern Ireland some officials were highly aware of the political status of sport, and hence they have developed a pragmatic assessment of the limitations and opportunities of this activity when employed as a peace tool within the particular conflict setting of this society. Nevertheless, the idea I want to raise is that if SDP officials perceive themselves as peacemakers, they should therefore have acquired certain practical skills, as well as awareness of specific methodologies and approaches that would allow them to fully carry out this role. This was to some extent substantiated during my observations when it became evident that some of these professionals have developed useful competences by being in close contact with communities (especially in Colombia where NGOs such as World Coach Colombia, *Colombianitos* or *Tiempo de Juego* have been pivotal in advancing social development in underserved communities), as well as by learning from the needs of people and adapting sport to tackle some of those needs. While some of these skills have been learned in an experiential manner through their extensive work with underprivileged communities, acquiring additional competences through more structured means could certainly add value to their “peace work.”

I have come to appreciate the constructive role that academic institutions and practitioners in the field of peace-building and conflict resolution could potentially fulfill in the future; they could build on the empirical knowledge gained by SDP officials and instruct them on how practical peace-building approaches may be applied to their sport-based interventions. Similarly, peace-building practitioners could assist officials in locating their own efforts within the broader peace-building field.

It is claimed here that forming webs of cooperation among SDP officials and organizations can lead to raising greater awareness on the social dimension of sport, and potentially contribute to the expansion and strengthening of organizations and the broader SDP sector. As stressed by Lederach’s (1997) web-making approach to peace-building, middle level leadership (e.g. individuals, programs and NGOs) are placed in a privileged and strategic position to connect the base of society with top-level leadership to address particular social problems and promote positive change.

The creation of webs is particularly relevant for the SDP sector as these networks could initiate (or intensify) dialogue and promote greater interaction among social actors advancing—as well as benefiting from—sport-for-peace activity. In Colombia, the Football and Peace Network has supported the formation of a network of individuals and institutions dedicated to building peace and promoting development via sport as a primary component. These efforts, as a representative of the UNDP and member of the Football and Peace Network pointed out, may in turn help to formally consolidate sport as a strategy for national development: “One of the goals that we discussed we could achieve through the Network was that our work should have a repercussion on public policy, on the development plans at the local and national level.” By

contrast, in Northern Ireland there was no evidence of any significant progress made on the development of strategic webs among SDP officials. NGOs and programs operating in the field of SDP in Northern Ireland have yet to explore the potential benefits of working together under a common framework and vision, concretely through the creation of webs of cooperation. The fact that there is a lack of a clear political agenda driving sport for peace in Northern Ireland may be one of the factors preventing sport for peace officials and NGOs from initiating such endeavors.

Finally, this study found that SDP programs in both Colombia and Northern Ireland feature sport plus and plus sport programs, though in the majority of cases, sport is used to achieve greater social goals (plus sport). These programs are also structured around sport and non-sport activities. Whereas sport constitutes, and should remain the central pillar of SDP interventions, non-sport activities can strengthen such programs in diverse ways.

In Northern Ireland where SDP officials indicated that sport was a hook to bring participants into their programs, positive values, lessons, and skills are transmitted to children and youth with the overall aim to foster contact between Catholics and Protestants, as well as to promote greater intercultural awareness between both groups. Via non-sport actions, especially through courses and guided discussions on sectarianism, intercultural understanding, peace, reconciliation and community-relations, a more constructive and holistic message may be conveyed, while ideally causing a stronger impact on program beneficiaries rather than using sport as the sole vehicle.

In Colombia non-sport activities have the potential to provide program participants and their families with additional skills and valuable information that they may not be able to learn otherwise, or that they could not obtain through sport alone. Such skills might be valuable in expanding program participants' conflict resolution competences, helping them to develop a life plan, increasing their awareness about alcohol and drug prevention, and enhancing their prospects to obtain jobs. Additionally, non-sport activities infuse SDP programs with dynamism, in the best case awakening the interest of beneficiaries in SDP programs who might not fully enjoy sport-related activities alone.

Conclusion

The reflections of SDP officials in Colombia and Northern Ireland indicated that sport and sport-based peace-building interventions and programs have made a modest, yet tangible, contribution to building peace in these societies affected by division and conflict. In Northern Ireland recreational sport has promoted peace by providing a platform to encourage contact between youth and adults from clashing communities, with the hope that meaningful relations can be created and sustained across the divide. In Colombia, sport-based interventions and programs have contributed to peace-building efforts by welcoming those at the margins of society into a space where vulnerable populations can play safely, and where they can, to some extent, develop a life plan for themselves.

This study has also shown that both the setting and the conflict dynamics where

interventions take place play a crucial role in shaping the perceptions of SDP officials regarding their own work and the capacity and limitations of sport as a vehicle for peace. In the same way, this research has confirmed that in Northern Ireland sport is burdened by political and community affiliations. Though sport can promote cultural awareness and foster contact between Protestant and Catholics, it is also linked to the conflict in diverse ways. In Colombia sport is perceived by SDP officials as having the capacity to partially address some of the challenges directly related to the conflict, such as preventing illegal recruitment of children. Sport can also present program beneficiaries with opportunities and transmit specific skills, so that their likelihood of joining illegal activity can be minimized. In the same vein, sport can act as a catalyst for education and the transmission of positive values.

Based on the discussion offered in this paper, a set of recommendations for sport and peace-building can be directed toward SDP officials and organizations in Colombia and Northern Ireland, which can also be applicable to other divided societies where peace-building through sport takes place. These recommendations include:

1) The formation of strategic webs of cooperation among SDP officials may boost the SDP sector and strengthen peace-building via sport. For this to happen, working under a common framework and developing a shared vision is essential. In the best of scenarios, web-making can lead to raising greater awareness among governmental agencies on the importance of supporting sport-based social interventions as a peace-building mechanism.

2) Non-sport activities play a significant role within SDP programs and therefore these should be carefully selected and incorporated within sport interventions; a balance between sport and non-sport activities should underpin sport-for-peace programs. Further, sport by itself should not be regarded as an integral peace-building strategy. SDP interventions may work more effectively if they are supported by other strategies, and ideally, these should operate within broader peace-building schemes.

3) Following the Northern Irish case, it is strongly advised that SDP officials in divided societies be aware of any underlying cultural or political issues attached to sport when employing it as a social cohesion tool. In Northern Ireland it is necessary to raise awareness on the social role of sport among governmental agencies, embed programs within larger national development schemes, and develop concrete policy on SDP within a “shared future” context.

4) In Colombia, it is essential for both universities and sport federations to get actively involved in SDP activity—as has been the case in Northern Ireland. Collaboration between academic institutions and practitioners in the peace and conflict resolution sector and SDP organizations, for instance, can greatly enhance the peacemaking skills and competences of SDP officials; hence they can become dynamic agents of peace-building in a society affected by war. Further, producing solid evidence of the results achieved by NGOs, and the collective impact of these in the form of webs and networks of collaboration, is imperative in order to approach policy makers if the intention is influencing social policy on sport. It is also advised that a

follow-up on the results and impact of the newly introduced Football and Peace Network in Colombia can shed some light on the usefulness of such endeavors. Therefore, this study recommends increased evaluative research on SDP programs

5) Lastly, as Colombia is slowly entering into its post-conflict era, the social role of sport should therefore acquire a renewed dimension. Programs and interventions should be restructured to meet some of the challenges that this post-war phase poses, such as assisting combatants as they reintegrate to civilian life by providing psychosocial recovery, and potentially, creating economic opportunities for victims of the conflict. In Northern Ireland, where SDP programs have been operating within a post-conflict setting for many years, sport-based peace-building interventions and programs must continue to evolve and successfully adapt to a constantly-changing environment in order to modestly address the needs and demands of a society that remains deeply polarized.

To the author's knowledge, this is the first comparative study on the use of sport for peace-building in Colombia and Northern Ireland. It is therefore considered that this research has important implications for both peace studies and the emerging interdisciplinary field of SDP, as well as for theory development and practice in the area of sport for peace-building. From a practice perspective and acknowledging the myriad of issues that shape both struggles, it is believed that the recommendations presented in this paper could strengthen peace-building-through-sport by enhancing the work and performance of SDP officials and programs, both in Colombia and Northern Ireland, and beyond.

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Appendix

Participating Organizations and Officials

In Colombia 30 officials from the following 20 organizations participated in this research: Children International (International NGO); Colombian Football Federation (Sport Federation); Colombianitos (NGO); Con-Texto Urbano (Association/NGO); Fórmula Sonrisas (NGO); Fundación Luker (NGO – Foundation); Fútbol Con Corazón (NGO); Gestores del Deporte (Governmental Program/Coldeportes); Goles por la Paz (NGO); Golombiao (Governmental Program – Youth Affairs Office); GIZ (International Development and Cooperation Agency – Germany); Grupo Internacional de Paz (NGO); Partners of the Americas/A Ganar (International non-Profit); Peace and Sport (International NGO); Tiempo de Juego (NGO); UNDP (International Organization); UNICEF (International Organization); Universidad Militar (Academic Institution); World Bank (International Organization) World Coach Colombia (NGO).

In Northern Ireland 16 officials representing 9 organizations participated in this study: Derry City Council (Governmental Organization); Derry/Londonderry YMCA (International non-Profit); Football for All – Program of the Northern Irish Football Association (Sport Federation); Football for Peace (International NGO); Northern Ireland Street League (Community-based Organization); Peace Players International (International NGO); Seaview Enterprises (Private Sport Company – CSR); Teenage Kickz (NGO); University of Ulster (Academic Institution).