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## MANAGING SPORT-FOR-DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES OF THEORETICAL ADVANCEMENT

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

Over the past decade, the field of sport-for-development (SFD) has received significant attention from Non-Governmental Organisations, Government agencies, sport practitioners, and sport management scholars across the globe. Growing political and institutional support has led to the proliferation of sport-based projects that aim to contribute to developmental outcomes such as economic development, social inclusion, cultural cohesion, healthy lifestyles, fair education, and gender equity (Coalter, 2013; Levermore & Beacom, 2009). The popularity of SFD initiatives stems from their ability to capture or 'hook' a large number of people – particularly those interested in sport and physical activity – and use the momentum associated with sport as a strategic vehicle to communicate, implement and achieve development goals beyond sport.

In the academic domain, the continued growth of SFD projects has led to an influx of theoretical and empirical studies across numerous disciplines, including sport management, sociology, health, education, marketing and media, as well as conflict and peace studies. With the intention to provide a comprehensive, explicit, and transparent research overview of SFD scholarship, an integrative literature analysis was conducted which followed Whittemore and Knaff's (2005) 5-step process including: Problem Identification, Literature Search, Data Evaluation, Data Analysis, and Presentation. This approach resulted in evidence related to the status quo of research contexts, research foci, theoretical frameworks, sport programs and initiatives, methodologies, methods and key research findings in the field of SFD. In particular, the literature search conducted through Scopus and SPORTDiscus resulted in 610 articles that were specifically related to the topic of SFD/development through sport. Of these 610 articles, independent agreement

was reached between the authors that resulted in the inclusion of 437 of those articles and exclusion of 173 articles for further analysis.

Based on our integrative literature review findings and the newly created SFD Database, in this presentation we aim to provide insight into common features and constructs presented in the body of research that together may inform future theoretical development. It may be argued that the breadth and diversity of SFD themes (from gender equity to peace; education to healthy lifestyles; social inclusion to livelihoods) make it unrealistic to expect one single theory of sport for development to emerge, there appear to be key constructs and important programmatic features within much of the research that may contribute to a more specific theoretical understanding of how SFD operates. In particular, the following appear to be common across the majority of SFD studies:

- The importance of a key figure, role model or change agent in the establishment and delivery of successful SFD programs
- A participatory approach to program design, delivery and evaluation with those on the ground participating in the program itself
- The provision of opportunities for multiple levels of engagement over a period of time; and,
- A clear programmatic design for the desired development outcome (e.g., education) to be embedded into the SFD program during the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation phases of the program.
- The creation of ‘safe spaces’ for community engagement and development
- A strong desire for sustained SFD practice that includes a commitment to (funding) support and an empowerment process that transfers management knowledge and responsibilities to local communities

Some of these key features are represented in recent research literature that has aimed to advance our theoretical and conceptual understanding of SFD (see e.g. Coalter, 2013; Lyras & Welty-Peachey, 2011; Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014). Against this background, we will encourage discussion around these factors and additional constructs that may inform new theoretical approaches, models, frameworks and concepts. We will also discuss whether the field is indeed welcoming or rejecting the idea of a standalone SFD theory. In fact, at present there is significant debate surrounding whether SFD as a field of study is “ready” for—and indeed worthy of—its own theories, or if the trend of “borrowing” and applying theories and frameworks from parent disciplines—such as sociology, management, gender studies, cultural studies, anthropology, and psychology—will continue into the future.

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