BUILDING SAFE SPACES IN SPORT-FOR-DEVELOPMENT

Submitting author: Prof Ramon Spaaij
Victoria University, University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University
School of Governance,
Footscray, 8001
Australia

All authors: Ramon Spaaij (corresp), Nico Schulenkorf

Abstract

Aim of abstract/paper: Access to safe sports spaces is an important supporting condition for sport-for-development programs to achieve their objectives (Brady, 2005; Van Eekeren, Ter Horst, & Fictorie, 2013). However, the concept of safe space and its applications to sport-for-development are still poorly understood. This paper explores how safe spaces can be cultivated within sport-for-development and how this can enhance development programs' capacity to leverage positive social impacts for local communities.

Theoretical background: We build on educational and feminist thought to theorise safe space as a way of acknowledging and relating to others. Safe space is best understood not as a physical space, but as a figurative, psychosocial space constructed through social relations. Safe space is conceptualised as a multidimensional process involving physical, psychological/affective, socio-cultural, political and experimental dimensions. The paper shows how these different dimensions of safe space operate and interact in sport-for-development praxis.

Methodology, research design and data analysis: We draw upon our qualitative research conducted at sport-for-development programs in three countries: Sri Lanka, Israel and Brazil. More than 150 semi-structured interviews were conducted across the three countries with program participants, organisers, staff members, local communities, and volunteers. We also conducted a series of focus groups and structured observations. For our qualitative data analysis we used the transcribed interviews and discussions from all three countries along with observational field notes which resulted in an extensive data base out of which grounded empirical and theoretical insights were garnered.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions: Safe space is critical both to the provision of inclusive sport-for-development programs and to leverage positive social impacts for program participants and the wider community. Yet, the cultivation of safe spaces in sport-for-development

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requires insight, planning and management. Managers and practitioners need to incorporate all five dimensions into their planning and design to build effective safe spaces in sport-for-development. A critical challenge for sport-for-development is to experiment around safe spaces with the purpose of balancing the need for physical, psychological and socio-cultural safety with experiences of risk-taking and creative tension. The paper identifies a number of practical strategies that sport managers, policymakers and practitioners can use to cultivate safe spaces in sport-for-development.

References
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new role for sports. Women's Studies Quarterly, 33(1), 35-49.
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