

Practitioners' Perspectives On Innovation And The Future Of Sport For Development And Peace

Mahoney, Tara Q.¹; Svensson, Per G.²; Hambrick, Marion E.³

¹State University of New York at Cortland, USA; ²Louisiana State University, USA; ³University of Louisville, USA

E-mail: tara.mahoney@cortland.edu

Aim of abstract

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) has evolved considerably during recent years with an increasing number of stakeholders involved in this space. These organizations seek to address complex social issues and often do so in environments associated with challenging political, social, and economic factors (Sherry & Schulenkorf, 2016). Most initiatives are operated by non-governmental organizations, which are often faced with limited organizational capacity. Innovation can arguably help these organizations better achieve their goals and objectives through the development of creative solutions to overcome existing problems. Unfortunately, little is known about the nature of innovation in the field of non-profit and voluntary organizations and even less so about how innovation is manifested in the SDP domain. This requires exploratory research to conceptualize innovation from within SDP to better understand the lived experiences of practitioners in this field. Therefore, the purpose of this study was two-fold; to gain a better understanding of how SDP stakeholders (1) define innovation, and (2) envision the future of SDP.

Theoretical background

The aim of this research was to explore and better understand the complexity of views regarding innovation among SDP leaders rather than narrowing down their meanings. Therefore, Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism theory served as the underlying theoretical framework since it allows for an exploration of how SDP practitioners construct the meanings of their lived experiences. We draw upon a social constructivist epistemological perspective as we aim to understand how people engaged in SDP construct the meanings of innovation based on their experiences. This responds to calls for better inclusion of local voices in SDP research (Nicholls, Giles, & Sethna, 2011).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A qualitative research design was adopted to address the purpose of this exploratory study. We used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify potential participants. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with 47 practitioners representing organizations from Africa, Asia, Australia and Oceania, Europe, Middle East, North America, and South America. An interview/focus group guide was developed based on recent scholarship on social innovation in human service nonprofits. Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed. Data were inductively coded by two authors. Each author read the transcripts and then developed initial codes. At this point, we compared the initial codebooks and discussed any disagreements. A second-cycle of coding was then conducted where initial codes and sub-codes were combined into broader holistic codes and emergent themes. Secondary data from organizational websites were also analysed to triangulate findings across data sources.

Results, discussion and implications

Our findings provide a nuanced conceptualization of how social innovation is manifested within the SDP environment compared to other non-profit contexts through the voices of SDP practitioners across a broad range of geographical locations and thematic areas. Participants defined the concept in terms of (a) risk-taking and (b) new ways of achieving meaningful impact. The latter was associated with four sub-themes including: (i) non-traditional new programs and practices, (ii) adaptations of sports and programs to local contexts, (iii) creative funding models, and (iv) creative inter-organizational collaborations. Practitioners also emphasized the critical importance of innovative behavior for the future of SDP. Specifically, our findings indicate sub-themes related to the perceived need for: (a) paradigm shift among SDP practitioners in how they view other SDP actors, (b) creative solutions for overcoming capacity challenges, (c) improved synergies with traditional sport organizations, and (d) transformational advocacy for the SDP sector as a whole.

This study contributes to the literature by emphasizing local perspectives in SDP research (Nicholls et al., 2011), and also responds to recent calls for research on how SDP leaders are creating alternative ways for achieving sustainable outcomes (Schulenkorf, 2017). Evidence from this qualitative inquiry suggests that innovation in SDP encompasses a broad range of creative solutions. At the same time, our findings also highlight the importance of examining the lived experiences of SDP practitioners as they interact and make sense of the complex environments in which they operate (Giulianotti, Hognestad, & Spaaij, 2016; Sherry

& Schulenkorf, 2016). Future research can build on these findings to further identify how SDP actors can develop creative and more sustainable solutions that contribute to meaningful outcomes.

References

- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.
- Giulianotti, R., Hognestad, H., & Spaaij, R. (2016). Sport for development and peace: Power, politics, and patronage. *Journal of Global Sport Management, 1*, 129–141.
- Nicholls, S., Giles, A. R., & Sethna, C. (2011). Perpetuating the 'lack of evidence' discourse in sport for development: Privileged voices, unheard stories and subjugated knowledge. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 46*, 249–264.
- Schulenkorf, N. (2017). Managing sport-for-development: Reflections and outlook. *Sport Management Review, 20*, 243–251. doi: 10.1016/j.smr.2016.11.003
- Sherry, E., & Schulenkorf, N. (2016). League Bilong Laif: Rugby, education and sport-for-development partnerships in Papua New Guinea. *Sport, Education and Society, 21*, 513–530.