

# Sport For Social Cohesion: Longitudinal Impacts And Challenges

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## Aim of the research

This study aims to explore impacts and challenges associated with a sport for development (SFD) program targeting social cohesion.

## Theoretical background

Since the turn of the millennium, the field of SFD has seen an increasing number of nongovernmental organisations, government groups and practitioners turning to sport as a means of addressing non-sporting, social development goals (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016). Consequently, there has also been an increase in academic interest into how these initiatives might positively impact a range of outcomes, such as social inclusion (Maxwell, Foley, Taylor, & Burton, 2013) and social capital (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Borland, & Lyras, 2011). Despite this upsurge in research, few efforts have been made to examine SFD's capacity to impact social cohesion (Kidd, 2011). Consequently, SFD initiatives aiming to develop social cohesion are some of the least understood and therefore hold opportunity for academic enquiries (Kidd, 2011). This paper builds upon previous SFD research into social inclusion (e.g. Maxwell et al., 2013) and social capital (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Borland, & Lyras, 2011). Further, non-SFD research into social cohesion has also been drawn upon in order to more holistically address the notion of cohesion. In doing so, this assisted the conceptualisation of social cohesion within the SFD space as a process with multiple aims that incorporates elements of belonging, social justice and equity, participation, acceptance and rejection, legitimacy and worth (Bernard, 1999; Jenson, 2010).

## Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The SFD context selected for this PhD research project, was an Australian-based initiative known as 'The Huddle'. This non-profit, non-governmental organisation was founded in 2010 in partnership with an Australian Rules Football Club (North Melbourne), the Scanlon Foundation, and the Australian Multicultural Foundation. Since its inception, The Huddle has employed a range of targeted sport and non-sport programs with the aim of developing social cohesion among refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse and youth in Melbourne's inner North-West. Over a two year period, the PhD researcher conducted an ethnographic enquiry whilst embedded within the organisation. During this time, youth (n = 26), staff, stakeholders and volunteers (n = 27) of The Huddle shared their views and experiences of the initiative via one-on-one interviews. The combination of preliminary interviews, follow up interviews and additional interviews with individuals new to the program culminated in a total of 71 interviews. Data were also collected in the form of 93 pages of written research observations and 86 organisational documents provided to the researcher by staff. Data analysis involved both inductive and deductive thematic coding methods facilitated by the NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software program. Themes were coded initially by one researcher and then quality checked by the broader research team to complete the coding process.

## Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

Participants described how The Huddle's programs helped facilitate a number of positive outcomes, including: belonging, support and social networks. However, participants also reported some difficult experiences, such as: staff moving on from programs and a lack of communication. Staff also indicated that cultural imbalances among youth and organisational instability also proved challenging for the program. The results from this study have helped guide the development of The Huddle and therefore encourage positive experiences for youth, volunteers, staff, and stakeholders of the initiative. Furthermore, this research will also help address the lack empirical evidence at the intersection of SFD and social cohesion, and thereby also assist in the conceptualisation of social cohesion within the field of SFD.

## References

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