

## Original Research

## Using report analysis as a sport for development and peace research tool: The case of El Salvador Olimpica Municipal's programme

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### ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a promising tool for analyzing the contents of sport for development and peace (SDP) agency reports (activity or annual). Contributing to ongoing methodological discussions in this field is important since reports afford rich data when access to the ground is not timely, practical, or feasible. Building on Greimas' Actantial model and the SDP Snakes and Ladders model, a semiotic analysis method specifically adapted for sport for development and peace projects is proposed. Such analysis of concepts that theoretically help or hinder sport for development projects are brought to the fore and serve as an initial waypoint when analyzing reports. By applying this approach to one specific sport for development project report (case study), this paper demonstrates that valuable insights about management priorities and practices may be obtained through the systematic and rigorous application of this proposed research tool. Moreover, the importance of content analysis as a precursor to, or in concurrence with, fieldwork is also discussed.

### BACKGROUND

The size and scope of the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) industry, as well as the number of SDP projects throughout the world is rapidly expanding.<sup>1</sup> Projects within this industry aim to foster social improvement within communities through the development of sport and physical activity programmes.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the new United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goals (2015-2030) presents a new opportunity to this industry. It

is effectively time for the UN, Sport for Development (SDP) agencies, as well as academics alike to evaluate the contributions of not only specific SDP projects, but to also reflect on the contribution of sport as a development tool more generally. In fact, certain academics have recently "suggested that sport for development organizations must evaluate or perish".<sup>1</sup> Clearly, evaluations are critical for proponents who advocate using sport as a medium to contribute to individual or community development and peace and updating or establishing new development goals for the next decades (2015-2030). A better understanding of previous successes and failures will provide insights about the realistic potential and limits of future SDP projects, which will aid stakeholders to identify best practices and to better define and plan future development schemes. However, it remains difficult to access certain SDP operations for research purposes, and even more challenging to evaluate projects that have already ended. Accordingly, this paper proposes a systematic procedure for reviewing<sup>3</sup> and analyzing SDP programme documents and reports, such as activity or annual reports.

### Crafting a SDP Content Analysis Tool

Notwithstanding the existing literature supporting the claim that sport is a cost-effective development tool<sup>4</sup> as well as the increase in both managerial and academic interest in this growing industry,<sup>5</sup> Sport for Development (SFD) and SDP research is still thought to be under-theorized.<sup>6</sup> There has been insufficient discussion on how to investigate SDP project reports, as well as more general community development documents produced by the SDP field. Much

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of the existing published literature in this field has focused on the relationships between sport and the development of communities or individuals.<sup>7-12</sup> With the exception of a handful of studies,<sup>13-15</sup> there has been limited attention paid to the elaboration of research methodologies applied to this field. Hence, adapting one proven method for analyzing narratives to the field of SDP could provide a valuable tool for analyzing specific SDP documents in a way that will concurrently contribute to both the specific SDP as well as the broader community development and research fields. Furthermore, adapting a proven content analysis approach to the reality of SDP operations may contribute to ongoing calls for more and better SDP evaluation made by practitioners<sup>16, 17</sup> and academics alike.<sup>1</sup>

This last argument appears all the more relevant considering several critiques of the claimed benefits of sport in society,<sup>18, 19</sup> and a lack of understanding of the best practices needing to be implemented in order to maximize SDP project impacts.<sup>20</sup> A review of the existing literature reveals rich and diverse theoretical thought regarding concepts that need to be implemented in the design of SDP projects in order to maximize their chances of being successful and sustainable. For instance, Lederach<sup>21</sup> posits that well-designed SDP projects can provide multiple processes of change. Based on peer-reviewed literature, successful SDP projects need to be rooted in dialogue;<sup>4, 22-24</sup> mobilize multiple partnerships;<sup>4, 25</sup> structured around “skilled committed administrators, coaches and volunteers [who] enjoy the confidence of the intended beneficiaries and their communities”<sup>26</sup>; and afford opportunities to build trust.<sup>27</sup>

However, we concede that understanding SDP evaluation could be a challenging undertaking, especially when the project targets amorphous objectives such as peace or development. Consequently, researchers might need to shift the focus away from evaluating overarching theoretical social impacts and concentrate on evaluating the tangible traces left from a project. Project reports provide rich, valuable, and traceable accounts of the performance of a given SDP programme and are therefore a very pertinent source of such tangible data.<sup>28</sup> Similar to Duff’s<sup>29</sup> position with regards to annual reports, and Czarniawska’s<sup>30</sup> review of gender in fiction, SDP project reports are a “most promising source of field material for studying discriminatory practices in organizations...because a prolonged, direct observation of a workplace is often difficult to conduct”.<sup>29</sup> Thus, what is evaluated, by whom, with what tools and to what end may all be captured and synthesized from such reports. Several authors discuss methods, such as semiotics<sup>31-33</sup> and content analysis<sup>34, 35</sup> that

have been shown to be effective for analyzing reports. As an illustration, Gendron and Breton<sup>33</sup> applied Greimas’ actantial model to explore the content of organizations’ reports, whereas Hasbani and Breton<sup>36</sup> used this same approach to analyze discursive strategies used in annual reports.

### Analysing Narratives with The Actantial Model

Greimas’ Actantial model<sup>37</sup> is a robust theoretical model that deconstructs the action, actors and their relations presented in a document or report by a) identifying actors mentioned in the narrative, b) allocating them to one of six Actantial categories (roles) and c) analyzing the structure of actors’ relationships within the story or the quest presented in a written narrative. Inspired by the study of folk-tales, actors’ roles are positioned in relation to the drama of a given story. Specifically, a *hero* is on a quest to obtain an *object of value*. Actors who positively help the hero are known as *adjuvants*, and those who hinder are known as *opponents*. The *quest* is proposed by a *sender* to benefit a *receiver*. Actors’ roles may shift over time throughout the narrative. For example:

From a folk tale: The King (sender) asks a Princess (hero) to obtain a magic lamp (object). During the quest, the princess is helped by a Genie (adjuvant) to defeat the evil Vizir (opponent). The lamp is then used to bring prosperity to the people (receiver).

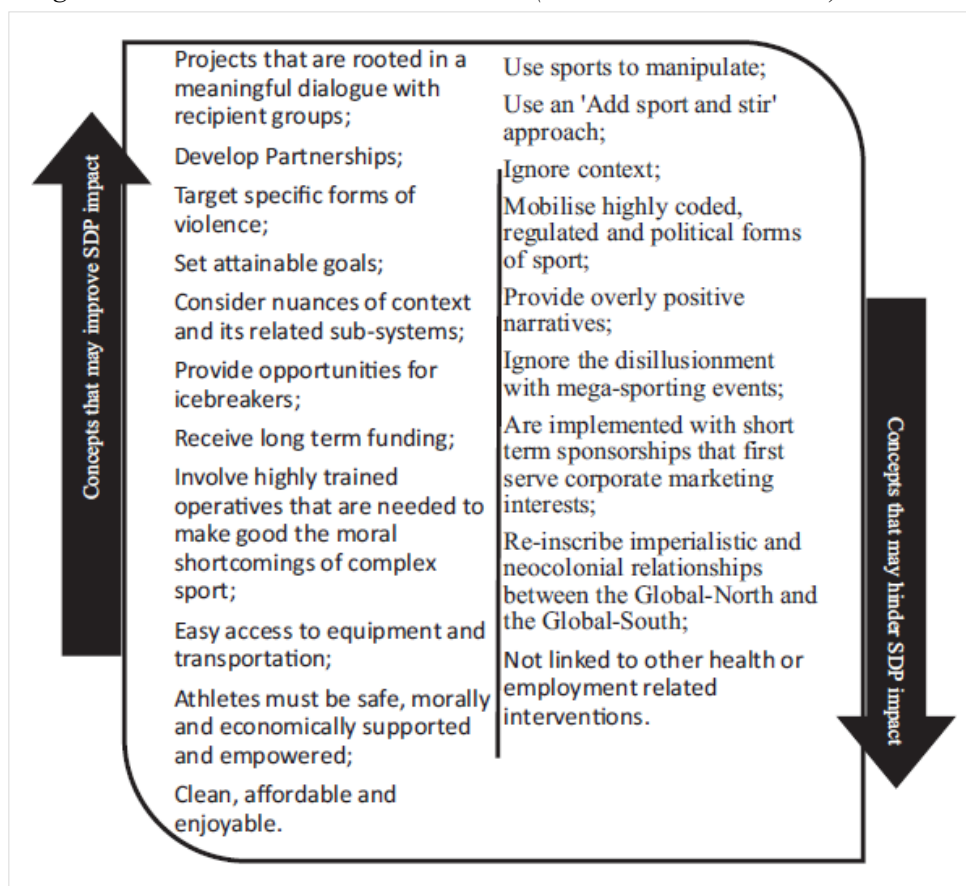
From Hasbani and Breton’s<sup>36</sup> study of pharmaceutical annual reports: Pfizer (hero) is given a legal mandate to operate by Governments (sender) in order to provide health (object) to the people (receiver). The Hero accomplished this quest with the help of patents and R&D (adjuvant) allowing them to develop new products faster than competition (opponents).

Although Greimas’ Actantial model has been utilized in different contexts and industries, applying it to a research field as broad as SDP may require certain adjustments and refinements in order to produce a more manageable network of actors. The SDP Snakes and Ladders review could offer promising perspectives on this issue.<sup>38</sup>

### SDP Snakes and Ladders

Drawn from scientific articles, the *Snakes and Ladders* metaphor serves to conceptualize 14 *Ladders* that the literature claims will help SDP projects as well as 12 *Snakes* that are thought to hinder projects. For instance, focused impact targets, multilevel partnerships, and contextual

Figure 1 – SDP Snakes and Ladder Model (Webb &amp; Richelieu, 2015)



intelligence represent key concepts that theoretically need to be included in the design of the SDP project to ensure its success (Figure 1). Thus, considering Snakes and Ladders should facilitate the initial identification of *adjuvants* and *opponents* and provides opportunities for examining contrasts and coherence between how academics and practitioners conceive adjuvants and opponents.

In this study, we combine the Actantial model and the SDP Snakes and Ladders review as a new tool to investigate SDP reports via content analysis. As a metaphorical test-drive, this tool has been subsequently applied to the case of the *Juventud Olímpica Municipal, Modelo de Club, El Salvador*.

### The Case Study Report: Juventud Olímpica Municipal, Modelo de Club, San Salvador

The project targeted for this study began in 2009, in San Salvador, El Salvador, and was terminated following the election of the Alcaldía Municipal of San Salvador in 2012. A programme report was published in 2013 by the *Alcaldía Municipal of San Salvador* (City hall mayor team) in collaboration with the *Instituto Municipal de Deportes y*

*Recreación* (Sport and Recreation Institute from San Salvador), the *UN Children's Fund* (UNICEF), and the *Programa Conjunto Reducción de Violencia y Construcción de Capital Social for El Salvador* (Programme for the reduction of violence and building social capital in El Salvador). This extensive sport programme was developed to target reduced violence and improved social capital, and was provided in part by the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF with the intention of achieving certain Millennium Development Goals. This project was retained as the locus of this study because a) it was cited by UNESCO as an example of a sport for peace accomplishment;<sup>39</sup> b) the project has ended; c) the violent and nihilistic subsystem in which this programme operated presents challenges to field work;<sup>13</sup> d) reports were available for content analysis.

### Objectives of The Study

This study has two objectives: 1) to operationalize a method for analyzing SDP project reports; 2) to validate the SDP Snakes and Ladders review by contrasting concepts that academic literature claims either help or hinder projects, with what practitioners include in their narratives.

## METHODS

### Research Design

Considering that this is the first time this adapted content analysis tool has been operationalized, a single case study was retained for this research project.<sup>40</sup> Case studies are highly suitable for exploring complex social, managerial, and procedural phenomena when the situation includes many interesting variables, multiple sources of evidence, and broad theoretical propositions that guide the collection and analysis of data.<sup>40, 41</sup> Yin's three prerequisites that justify using a case study method are present in this project, notably that a) the main research questions are *how* or *why* questions; b) there is little or no control over behavioural events; and c) the focus of study is a contemporary phenomenon. This study remains descriptive and exploratory and as such will focus on describing, in great detail, the data collated from the studied SFD project, in relation with the context in which the project took place, by using the two aforementioned lenses (i.e., Actantial model, Snakes and Ladders) in a complementary way.

### The Targeted Report

This study targets the case of the *Juventud Olímpica Municipal, Modelo de Club de San Salvador* (JOM) project report published in 2013.<sup>42</sup> The authors of this report were the Alcaldía Municipal de San Salvador (AMSS) in collaboration with the Programa Conjunto Reducción de Violencia y Construcción de Capital Social en El Salvador and the UNICEF. The Instituto Municipal de Deportes y recreación (IMDER) was in charge of designing and implementing the project with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, the International Work Organization, the Panamericana Organization of Health, and the United Nations Fund for Population. Collaborators inside and around the JOM project were numerous, including among others: International organizations (e.g., UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, European Union), community and women leaders, El Salvador Olympic Committee, and other public institutions.

The activity report is 84 pages long, and includes the following sections: 1) Context; 2) Basic concepts of the model; 3) Model structure; 4) Methods of attention; 5) Planification and 6) Research sheets and documents, with a thesaurus, references, and five appendices. The main idea of the report is to present the JOM and the basic concepts that structure the project. Also, a small study was conducted during the project using discourse analysis, deep interview and focus groups as collecting methods, but no results were

mentioned. Two categories of pictures are found inside the report: a) focus groups pictures and b) pictures of the initial event to introduce the JOM.

The project was implemented for three years (2009-2012) during the mandate of the past mayor of the city of San Salvador in El Salvador, Latin America. It targeted 36.43% of the San Salvador population. Previously in 2009 and 2011, El Salvador adopted three laws to reinforce the protection of the population, especially girls and women (Ley Marco para la Convivencia Ciudadana y Contravenciones Administrativas; Ley de Igualdad, Equidad y Erradicación de la Discriminación contra las Mujeres; Ley de Protección Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia (LEPINA)). The main goal of the JOM was to create sport events and tournaments to involve children from each neighborhood of San Salvador with the condition of reintegrating schools and repossessing public places, which were under the control of *maras* armed groups.

This major project involved 130 municipal sport schools and required the collaboration of 26 different sport installations (e.g., stadiums, sport fields, swimming pools) to propose various activities such as soccer, basketball, swimming, baseball, track and field, and martial arts, as well as implementing active recess breaks in schools. Participants were between 6 and 17 years old. Various sport programmes were set up for younger children (6-8 year olds) focusing on basic physical education training, gross motor skills, and introduction to multiple games. For 8-10 year olds, the project added multiple training practices, and 10-12 year olds received activities to perfect motor skills and manage their own health. For 12-14 year-olds, the project focused on participants' basic sport preferences and on acquiring complementary sporting skills, and 14-17 year olds received the first phases of specialization and application in a specific sport.

### Analysis

Following Yin<sup>40</sup> and Gee,<sup>41</sup> this case and content analysis was conducted in four phases. In the first phase, a double blind review and coding was conducted by two authors of this study who spoke Spanish. Their first task was to identify actors and the relations between them in order to establish the Actantial model of the project. The second task was to identify concepts in the report that either helped or hindered the project. To this end, the authors initially looked for traces that could be connected to conceptual Snakes and Ladders. The two authors had to identify exact quotes and page numbers to facilitate comparison of their



results. Subsequently, quotes were collated according to which of the 14 Ladders (L) and 11 Snakes (S) they most represented.

In phase 2, a comparative analysis was conducted to confirm agreement on the Actantial model, and also identification and coding of the S and L quotes.

In the phase 3, quotes that could not be allocated to previously identified Snakes or Ladders were allocated to new categories labelled adjuvants (A), for new concepts that helped the SDP project, or opponents (O) for those that hindered the project.

Finally, phase 4 implied collating coherence and contrast between what practitioners and academics claimed either helped or hindered the project. In short, the process identified traceable<sup>43</sup> concepts that were subsequently categorized as new adjuvants (A), previously identified Ladders (L), previously identified Snakes (S), and new opponents (O), providing the foundation for a so-called “AL-SO approach” to analyzing SDP documents, reports, and narratives. In the end, mix methods (quantitative and qualitative) were used to give us a general picture about content analysis from the report and also provide details about reasons or explanations for those results.

## FINDINGS

Applying the AL-SO approach to one specific Latin-American SDP project report provides evidence of some coherence in how practitioners and academics view Adjuvants/Ladders and Snakes/Opponents concepts. However, many contrasts were also revealed.

### Drawing The JOM Project as a Story (Actantial Model)

In this case, the Alcaldía Municipal de San Salvador, the UNOSDP (sender), asked IMDER administrators (hero) to

develop and implement the JOM project (task) to provide sport for development (object of value) for the youth of San Salvador (receiver) in order to develop future responsible citizens for the country (quest). During their quest, IMDER administrators were helped by UN agencies such as UNICEF, by official laws (LEPINA and Ley de Protección Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia), and by the Programa Conjunto Reducción de Violencia y construcción de Capital Social en El Salvador (adjuvants). Together, they were facing the *maras* armed groups and the violent context they impose on the Salvadorian population, as well as the political context with elections (opponents) of political parties who did not support this project. Figure 2 represents the Actantial model applied to the JOM project, and gives a reading of the thematic forces of this story.

### Adjuvants and Ladders That Helped The Implementation of The Project (AL)

The AL-SO approach highlighted numerous concepts that helped this sport for development project succeed. The first author who reviewed the data identified 158 references to Adjuvants/Ladders, whereas the second author identified 157. After combining, analyzing, and comparing the results, Figure 3 synthesizes 181 Adjuvants/Ladders that were retained. Subsequently, after validating the identified concepts, the codification was validated for 134 references identified by both authors.

Of the 14 Ladders, both authors conducting the content analysis of the JOM concurred that only 28.5% ( $n=4$ ) of the theoretical Ladders are found in the report. Specifically, *rooted in dialogue* was referenced 66 times; *Partnerships* 5 times; and *Consider nuances of context* 11 times. Interestingly, 15 *New adjuvants*, or concepts that practitioners claimed helped their project, but that were not identified in previous literature, were also observed. These previously unidentified adjuvants will be revisited in the discussion section.

Figure 2. Actantial Model Applied to The JOM Project

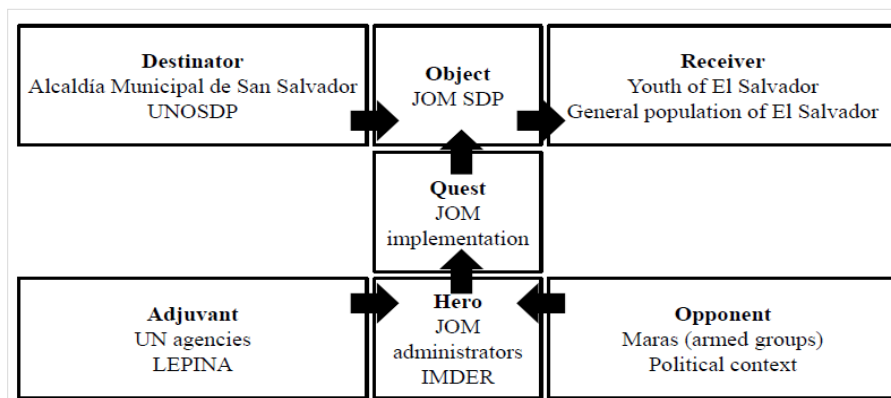
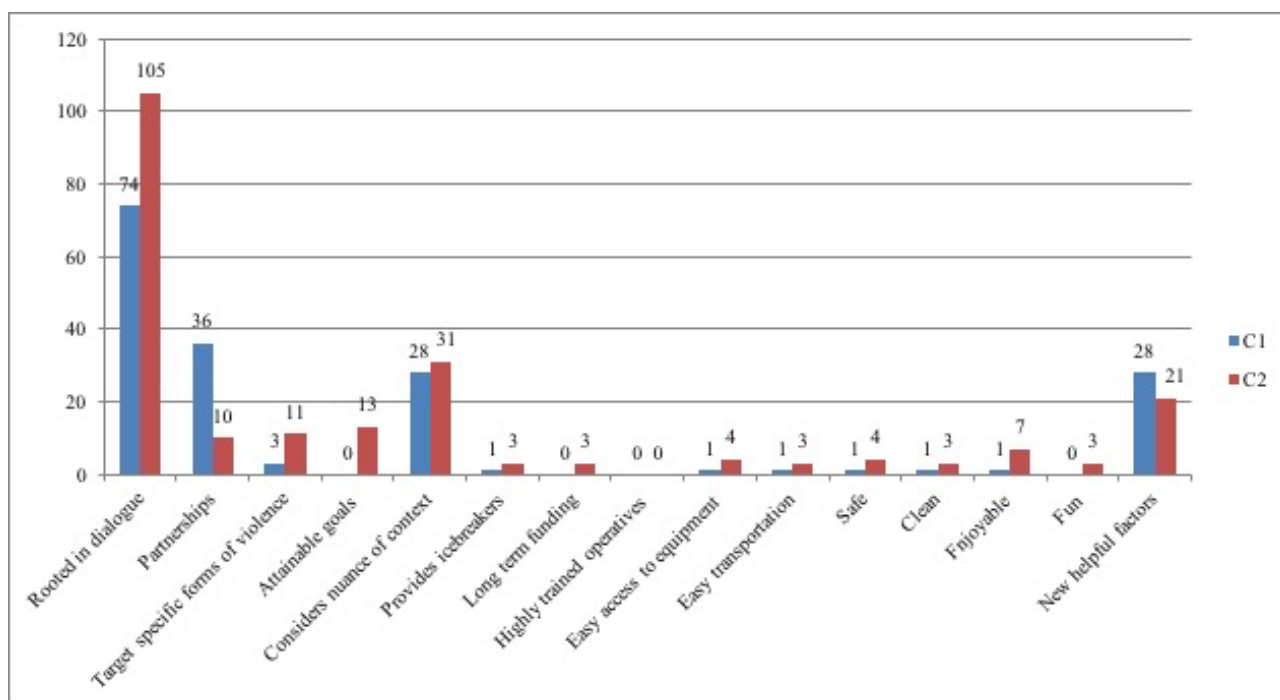


Figure 3. Ladders Found in The JOM Report by The Two Coders



Remarkably, the third most common category identified, *new adjuvants*, has not been previously considered by academic literature and is thus not classified as conceptual Ladders. Yet, because new adjuvants were clearly claimed to help the project, they are concepts and actors that could warrant more academic attention. What is more, the comparatively high number of references to A/L concepts suggests that the JOM report paints a highly positive picture of the project, which is somewhat unexpected since the report was written after the project had ended. Many quotes transmit a general positive message throughout the report. For instance, within the *rooted in dialogue* ladder,<sup>i</sup> authors noted many positive messages supporting the way in which the JOM project took place, such as:

(1) *One of those is to bring back the pride of citizens and the identification of residents with their city; so we made a significant investment to recover historical sites and landmarks of the capital such as the Plaza El Salvador del Mundo, San Jose Plaza, Plaza Barrios, among others. We also focused on making a major investment in remodeling, recovery public areas and parks construction in neighborhoods and districts. (Translated from Spanish)*

Another illustration of the *rooted in dialogue* Ladder refers to the benefits that youth gain from participating in sport. The report claims that:

(2) *By holistically integrating kids, teenagers and youth through sport, and to train them as a good citizen and an*

*excellent athlete, enables them to assume their role and responsibilities in society and to contribute to the productive development of their community, municipality and nation.*

However, no traces were found to indicate that these goals had been achieved.

Additionally, the analysis also finds many references regarding the concept of *Consider nuances of context* in the report. San Salvador is sadly known for its very violent context, a contextual situation that is quietly mentioned via the support of working partners such as:

(3) *I want to make a parenthesis to acknowledge the support they have given us through the different United Nations agencies, through the Programa Conjunto Reducción de Violencia y Construcción de Capital Social, in this effort to rebuild the social base in San Salvador.*

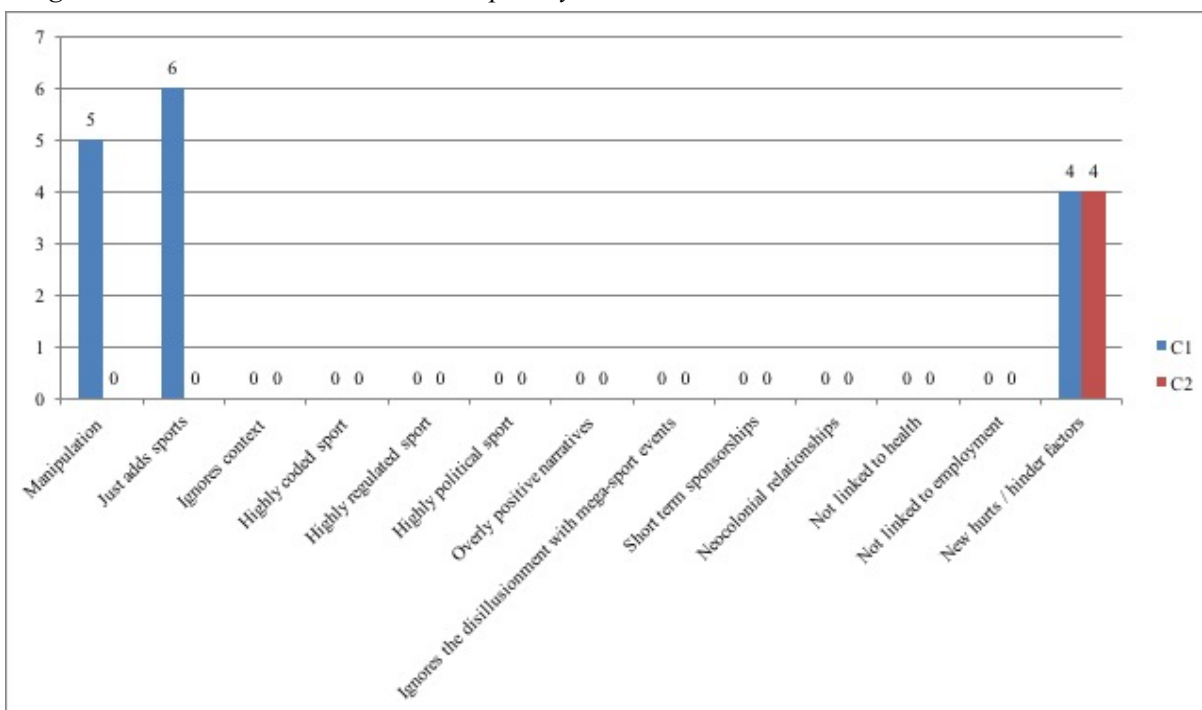
Other contextual situations are mentioned via references to opportunities for safer communities such as:

(4) *In that meaning, rest, recreation, play and recreational activities appropriate for each age can be considered as protective factors, also to be considered as kids and teenagers rights but they are not frequently satisfied because of unsafe conditions inside the public areas.*

Thus, it appears as the main focus of the report is more about the involvement of many partners inside the

<sup>i</sup> Quotes used as illustration of results have been translated in English by the authors.

Figure 4. Snakes Found in The JOM Report by The Two Coders



programme such as the Instituto Municipal de Deporte y Recreación (IMDER), UN programmes like UNICEF and the Programa Conjunto Reducción de Violencia y Construcción de Capital Social. As a case in point, JOM claim that,

*(5) In this context, the Municipality of San Salvador decided to strengthen capacities and reorient the functions of the Municipal Institute of Sport and Recreation (IMDER) in order to respond to this new approach, and also institutionalize the revitalization model implemented inside public areas of the municipality of San Salvador, in the framework of the Programa Conjunto Reducción de Violencia y Construcción de Capital Social in El Salvador.*

A reference to the introduction of a new law to protect girls and women in the country is another example of a concept thought to help the project.

*(6) In 2009 the Ley de Protección Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia (LEPINA) was created in El Salvador (Law for the integral protection of Children and Adolescents). It aims to ensure the enjoyment of rights and facilitate compliance with the duties of every girl and boy. Those are defined as full subjects of rights, equal in priority.*

These quotes highlight two concepts that appear to play a significant role for JOM but that were not previously identified in published academic literature: political will (quote 5) and legislation (quote 6). Such new adjuvants

complement academic understanding of SFD success factors. This law is based on the children's rights convention of 1989:

*(7) Illustration 1 shows some of the rights of children and youth contained in the Convention that have greater relevance to the reality of El Salvador. The essence of these rights promulgated by the convention is considered as a model for the development and progress for the whole society.*

### Snakes and Opponents That Hinder The Implementation of The Project (SO)

The content analysis review also identified Snakes, or concepts which hindered or limited the project. Author 1 identified 15 references to Snakes, while author 3 identified 4. The combined results considered 15 Snakes in total (see Figure 4). The comparative lack of references to Snakes and opponents raises certain academic questions such as: are concepts that hinder projects considered by managers, but simply not included in their report? Or are concepts that hinder SDP projects even knowable?

The dominant Snake extracted from the JOM report, labelled *Just add sport*,<sup>44</sup> conceptualizes the idea of implementing a sport project on its own or without social, political, or economic policies and practice. Analysis of the report suggests that project managers assumed that sport could be enough to improve the quality of life of youth in

San Salvador and give them energy to develop themselves (identity).<sup>45</sup> As a case in point, JOM's managers explain that the general objective is to:

*(8) Create dynamic public areas through the practice of various sports (football, basketball, swimming, athletics, softball, martial arts, among others) and through recreation, to enhance skills and attitudes, improve the quality of life of children, teenagers, youth and other residents of the municipality of San Salvador, strengthening their personal development integrally and participation with identity.*

Thus, nothing more than practising sport on its own is thought to be sufficient to ensure that the JOM programme's goals will be achieved. Few details about the training youth received from JOM were mentioned, and few possibilities for their future to be involved in SDP administration are cited:

*(9) Strengthening and consolidation of the knowledge acquired by sports monitors in the Diploma in Sports Administration...so that they can be integrated and strengthen the development of specialized schools for different sports.*

Furthermore, one new conceptual opponent was identified in the JOM report regarding the special context of El Salvador:

*(10) Discontent over the lack of educational opportunities, health, economic and security mainly are the everyday concerns of ordinary citizens. The AMSS is a territory within a country that has many gaps and where resources needed to bring comfort to all its inhabitants are scarce.*

*(11) It is in these contexts where sport, rather than being inclusive, excludes those who do not have access to certain spaces because of situations of gang territoriality or other circumstances of insecurity.*

Thus, coders identified a new conceptual opponent through the content analysis in the JOM report. After discussion, it was labelled *violent context*, referring to many references of the violent context of San Salvador Society. This concept will also serve as an underpinning for proposing avenues for future research.

## DISCUSSION

This study had two major goals: 1) to analyze a specific project report with the proven Actantial model and 2) to

validate the SDP Snakes and Ladders model by contrasting concepts that academic literature claims either helps or hinders projects, with what practitioners include in their narratives. We used the Juventud Olímpica Municipal, Modelo de Club de San Salvador report as a case study for crafting a SDP research tool by content analysis. This tool, and the specific case study chosen, showed particularly pertinent in reviews of SDP projects given because 1) documents are a rich source of research data<sup>3</sup> and reports are often promising avenues for collecting empirical evidence (they assemble valuable marketing, accounting as well as managerial information);<sup>29</sup> 2) more insight is currently needed about the reality of the SDP field;<sup>46-48</sup> 3) there is currently a lack of published research that focuses on sport for development projects located in Central America;<sup>49-52</sup> 4) there is a need for a research tool to investigate SDP projects and this could fit with the nuance of SDP context given in El Salvador.<sup>1, 53</sup>

This is one of the first studies in the field of SDP research to analyze a specific project report using Greimas' Actantial model.<sup>37</sup> One advantage of this chosen method is that this content analysis tool facilitates an understanding of the structure of the studied narratives and allows authors to appreciate the meta-context of the SDP project and to better understand the roles and functions of each stakeholder.

Be that as it may, a first discussion point is related to importance of authorship. Undoubtedly, who pens a given report must be considered since the same story, told by different authors, will present the actors in different light. For instance, the final report about the performance of the JOM project would clearly be different if the author had a more positive view of the *maras* gangs cited in the report as an opponent. As noted by Rodgers, gangs can have either oppressive or protective relationships with local communities. The protective role might be particularly prominent in the Central American context.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, what is viewed by JOM as opposition may actually be viewed as protective or defensive actions by a portion of the population. This is not without recalling Latour's argument that for every actor-network that is described, the *anti-groups* should also be considered,<sup>28</sup> and Greimas' view that the actors are defined by the roles that they play in the drama. Future research is needed for describing, in greater detail, the actors involved in SFD dramas as well as the relationships they form throughout the ongoing story. In short, the Actantial model provides the underpinnings for future research efforts.



The second objective of this study was to validate the SDP Snakes and Ladders model by contrasting concepts that academic literature claims either help or hinder projects with what practitioners include in their narratives. This provides a conceptual waypoint for initial review efforts, and facilitates an understanding of the contextual situation in which this specific SDP programme was operationalized. Because gathering first-hand data on the management of SDP organizations may be difficult to accomplish in a timely, efficient, safe, and cost-effective manner, conducting content analysis of detailed reports provides rich and nuanced data about management, marketing, strategies, thought, and organizational behaviour. The AL-SO approach arguably provides a robust, effective, and practical research tool for conducting content analysis of specific SDP reports. For instance, as traces of all previously identified SDP Ladders were found in the report, this suggests that each category previously identified in academic literature was clear for coders.

However, the AL-SO approach revealed important nuances. For instance, based on the number of references to them in the narrative, some concepts appear to help or hinder more than others. Specifically, *rooted in dialogue* and *Consider nuance of context* are, of the 14 concepts that are theoretically thought to help SFD projects, the most commonly referred to by practitioners. However, the third most commonly mentioned category in the report, *New adjuvants*, had not been previously identified in academic literature. This implies that there is a gap between how practitioners and academics currently view what is needed to help a given project, and more research is needed to address this gap. For instance, highlighting the importance given by practitioners to laws and legal documents is an original contribution of this study.

It appears similarly important to consider the usefulness of the AL-SO approach for the evaluation of the effectiveness or impact of a project at the more strategic level, or of the cumulative impact of several projects on social change processes. Indeed, the AL-SO approach appears to be an effective tool for analyzing documents of specific SDP projects, but remains unproven for large scale SDP projects.<sup>55, 56</sup> However, in as much as there are documents and reports to analyze, the adapted version or the Actantial model will likely provide valuable insights.

Notably, the abundance of both theoretical and practical concepts that helped this project succeed largely overshadows references to concepts that hinder it. This may be a reflection of what Coalter describes as incestuous amplification<sup>57</sup> in this field, but may also be a result of the

largely positive tone adopted by the authors of the report. Thus, the curious case of the missing Snakes provides another avenue for future research that suggests that conceptual opponents and Snakes currently lack theoretical clarity and precision, and as such, are empirically unwieldy at this time. As a case in point, frequent conversations were needed between the two authors who coded the text, as many passages did not clearly refer to specific concepts that could hinder the project. Finally, another explanation may reside in the political nature of the report. As this report was written after local elections that led to the closing of the programme, it is plausible that the authors wrote the report with the intention of celebrating the success of the programme over highlighting the challenges, in the hope that funding would be restored. Likewise, it is plausible that certain cultural characteristics of the authors, such as their views about how to interact with funding agencies, may have affected the tone of the document. These explanations remain speculative, as the data collected for this project were limited to the analysis of the programme report. Future research is now better positioned to pursue this case study and meet with key actors involved in the report. Such efforts appear both timely and highly promising research endeavours.

Not only does the AL-SO approach provide valuable insights to orient analysis efforts, it can also serve as a pertinent first step for obtaining awareness of an organization and its context before embarking on more elaborate and costly field research. Such practical research methods appear all the more important considering that recent literature reviews of published SDP articles confirm “that a majority of published research focused on individual case studies and programme evaluations”.<sup>58</sup> Thus, this new mixed method for conducting content analysis of SDP programme reports is proposed as a promising preliminary first step for future case studies that has the potential to provide valuable contributions to this emerging research field.

### Limits

As stated previously, this study aimed to 1) operationalize a method for analyzing SDP project reports; and 2) validate the SDP Snakes and Ladders review by contrasting concepts that academic literature claims either help or hinder projects, with what practitioners include in their narratives. To this end, a proposed methodology that deconstructs the action, actors, and relationships presented in specific project reports was road tested. By a) identifying actors mentioned in the narrative, b) allocating them to one of six Actantial categories (roles), and c) identifying the structure of actors’

relationships within the story or the quest, this research design provides modest contributions to our understanding of the management of SDP accounts. Yet, certain limits of this research must also be conceded.

One major limit to this research materialized from contrasts in the conceptual nature of the *Snakes and Ladders* identified from academic literature. For instance, let us recall that the dominant Ladders, or concepts that would theoretically help a project, were in this specific case, projects that are rooted in dialogue (with  $n = 66$  references), build partnerships, and consider the nuances of context. The potential theoretical issue here is that the aforesaid function of the Actantial model is to allocate roles to actors. Thus, identifying that a project is rooted in dialogue or in partnership does not imply the same interactions and relationships as those built by specific actors engaging in dialogue or entering into partnerships. Granted, organizations are collectives formed of actors who have aligned their interests, yet it is the individual actors who build relationships, and not organizations as such. Hence, one limit to this paper is that this study took the conceptual liberty of assuming that it was an actor, or actors, who became spokespersons for the agency and subsequently engaged in dialogue, or entered a partnership. However, this nuance possibly highlights the need to consider project reports in a new light. Undoubtedly, from a certain point of view, a report may be considered to be a syntagmatic organizational<sup>59</sup> representation of the acts of actors. Thus, what scholars are studying is not the actual actions of the organization, or of its actors, but more precisely the paper, or electronic, versions of actions. Therefore, the limit to this study is that we have focused on the descriptions of the actions provided in the report, and not the actions themselves. Theoretically, then, as the report translates actions in words, it appears safe to submit that studying the actions themselves would provide a much different representation of the actors' interactions, and hence the very nature resulting in the Actantial model. Unfortunately, pursuing this line of enquiry was beyond the scope of this paper, yet this more research is clearly needed to explore this promising avenue.

## CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates the effectiveness of a new approach for analyzing the contents of SDP project reports. As the first step in a larger study of the Juventud Olímpica Municipal, the Adjuvant/Ladder-Snakes/Opponent approach provides a better understanding of the nature and context of the project. As such, the AL-SO approach to content analysis could make future field work more effective and

efficient. What is more, applied to other SDP project reports, this tool also has the potential for improving our understanding of evaluation reports in a way that may contribute to the revisiting of the millennium development goals for the 2015-2030 timeframe.

Overall, practising a new approach for analyzing the content of SDP reports proved to be a valuable exercise. Indeed, allocating actors to Actantial categories with a specific attention to those who could be labelled as adjuvants, Ladders, Snakes, or opponents provided rich insights into SDP managers' thoughts regarding their project. For instance, as reflected by the overwhelming references to adjuvants and Ladders over opponents and Snakes, the dominant focus of this report is to provide a very positive spin to the project. This report appears so overwhelmingly positive, in fact, that it may easily be interpreted as political manipulation, or even as propaganda in favour of sport. This is somewhat unsurprising considering sport subcultures' deep divisions that can be easily exploited by political manipulation.<sup>60</sup> Yet, this observation simply whets our appetite for more research on the use of SDP as politics by other means.

Beyond the positive light in which the project was penned, the report itself provided little evidence in the way of concrete results. For instance, there was a notable absence of traceable evidence of logic models, management by results, or evidence-based management in the report. Thus, this study is not able to present observations regarding the successes or failures of the project, or even to provide a broad qualification of the performance of the project. What could be described as an ultra-positive discourse in favour of the JOM project is plausibly the result of the local political context or culture, yet the report itself provides little in the way of specific, measurable, attainable, and timed objectives. Indeed, the values presented in the narrative are highly laudable, and the discourse about the importance of SDP for youth is quite elaborate, but the overall report appears to be pro-sports discourse with little substance. This is underscored by the lack of references to opponents, theoretical Snakes, or other negative factors and concepts, such as acknowledging the violent context that currently plagues El Salvador, which makes conducting such a sport project all the more challenging.

Undeniably, implementing any sport for development projects in such a violent context will be challenging. This is why there is an evident need for content analysis tools to facilitate the practical elaboration and implementation of such projects and to simplify the evaluation of the project. Indeed, as it may not be possible to conduct research safely

in some situations, authors could benefit from research tools that facilitate extracting and analyzing a maximum amount of pertinent data from readily accessible sources. As a first step before accessing the field, the AL-SO approach proposed here may clearly contribute to future research efforts.

In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to propose and put a new content analysis tool specifically tailored for sport for development research through a trial run. This combined model provides a valuable method for operationalizing content analysis of SDP reports for practitioners and academics concerned with SDP evaluation as well as subsequent reporting and accounting. Overall, the AL-SO approach has the potential to provide valuable insights into the management of accounts in a SFD context, fascinating insights into SDP storytelling, as well as a new way of exploring the SDP landscape. In short, having successfully navigated this qualifying round, the AL-SO approach now appears ready for more challengers.

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