

## Commentary

## What's sport got to do with it? A reflection on methodologies in Sport for Development from a German perspective

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### STARTING POINT

In the context of Sport for Development (SFD), researchers have primarily examined the concept of *development* (Black, 2017). However, little attention has been given to the concept of *sport*, which is expected to be the differentiating factor. Within SFD, the term *sport* is defined as "a generic term, comprising sport for all, physical play, recreation, dance, organized, casual, competitive, traditional and indigenous sports and games in their diverse forms" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 9). Simply put, this encompasses all kinds of sports and physical activities that one can conceive.

It is common for the question of which sport is being referred to in the context of SFD to arise. This includes whether we are discussing school, mass, or recreational sports, as well as whether games and dance are included. This issue often arises in discussions between colleagues. Nevertheless, this matter is seldom addressed in research. Instead, diverse kinds of sport are haphazardly enumerated or summarized using vague collective terms, like "general physical activity" or "multiple sports" (Schulenkorf et al., 2016, p. 31; Svensson & Woods, 2017, p.37). This is surprising, given that sport is considered to be *the tool* that initiates development processes. However, it remains unclear which methodological-didactic implementation of sport could be responsible for this effect. Is simply playing football sufficient, or does the modification of the game, such as adding a third half as in the methodology of football3 (Fox et al., 2013), make the difference?

In general, various SFD activity guidelines and methodologies have been created and implemented in various countries and settings. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Society for International Cooperation) (GIZ), as the main German development agency, has compiled approximately

100 manuals on the SFD Resource Toolkit Homepage. The manuals, which were developed in the context of GIZ-funded programs in various countries, serve as blueprints for how sport can address specific development issues, such as gender equality or climate action, through exercises and games, with most of them centered on football (S4D Resource Toolkit, n.d).

Prompted by imprecise definitions and terms, never-ending discussions about which sport is being referred to, as well as the flood of manuals that raise questions about pedagogically valuable and effective sport-based methodologies, this commentary highlights three perspectives to approach the important role of sport-based methodologies in SFD: (1) concepts of sport in sport sciences, (2) pedagogical perspectives with a focus on experiential learning and (3) team sports. Although this reflection is focused only on the SFD approaches of one German actor, it illuminates the research gap related to sport-based methodologies and can serve as a stepping stone for future research.

### SPORT – THEORETICAL CONCEPTS FROM SPORT SCIENCES

In sport sciences, there are ongoing efforts to clearly define the concept of sport. It is apparent that the understanding of this term has evolved alongside social changes, such as shifts in movement culture, demographic changes, and associated value change. The understanding of sport is reflected in diverse theoretical models: The original pyramid model, symbolizing competitive and elite sport at the top and mass sport at the base, was replaced in the 1980s by the two-column theory. This dual model distinguishes between competitive and leisure/recreational sports. The latter splits into result-focused mass sports, socio-cultural experiential sports, and alternative experiential sports. These terms denote broader categories such as fitness, health, and

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adventure sports, which all fall under the umbrella of experiential sports. The term recreational sport encompasses activities accessible to all individuals (*sport for all*). In Germany, the concept of *sport for all* was first introduced by the German Sports Federation (DSB). In 1959, the DSB chose a new strategy to make sports accessible to as many people as possible, especially those who had been marginalized in the past. The term *sport for all* is often used interchangeably with *mass sport* and is now globally recognized, including in international agreements that promote universal inclusion (Wopp & Dieckert, 2002).

Through its SFD programs and projects, German development cooperation aims to provide marginalized groups with access to sports. Examples of these groups include young girls and women in Afghanistan, children and youth with disabilities in Uganda, and refugees in Jordan and Iraq (e.g., GIZ, 2017). As such, SFD projects are based on the principle of *sports for all*.

In line with social changes and the evolving understanding of sport, the role of sport in the scope of German development cooperation has transformed. Utilizing a broad interpretation of sport and following the dual model, SFD could be categorized as a type of recreational sports focused on promoting socio-cultural experiences through mass sports with a results-driven perspective (experiential sports). In the past, sport was utilized solely for its inherent functions in relation to individuals and systems in the context of development cooperation (Giebenhain, 1990). However, currently, sport embraces a 'pedagogical mission'. This incorporates modifying rules and movement tasks, alongside contemplating experiences made during game and drills, to guarantee long-term changes in attitudes and behavior that can be applicable to daily life.

## PEDAGOGY COMES INTO PLAY

To fully understand the pedagogical factors that impact SFD methodologies, it is crucial to examine sub-disciplines of pedagogy, including sport pedagogy and the pedagogy of experiential education. Sport pedagogy covers education both *in* and *through* sport, with a primary focus on schools and kindergartens, as well as extracurricular sports settings such as clubs and leisure activities. The adoption of the competence-based curriculum in German schools circa 2011 has significantly impacted physical education (PE), placing importance on education and development *through* movement, play, and sports (Zeuner, 2015).

In certain partner countries of the German Society for

International Cooperation (GIZ), national PE curricula were co-designed or supplemented, such as in Mozambique (UP Maputo, 2019). Through the development of holistic PE activities, an effort has been made to contribute to education *in* and *through* sports. GIZ has contributed to curricula in various ways. The approaches can be non-sport-specific, such as the child-centered and inclusive PE curriculum developed in the SFD project in Afghanistan. Other approaches focus solely on one sport, such as making football part of a nationwide character-building program in Indonesian schools. Furthermore, competence-based learning is a key aspect of GIZ's SFD approach. The SFD Competence Frameworks, which are grounded in the Curriculum Framework Education for Sustainable Development (Schreiber & Siege, 2016), serve as standards in GIZ's projects and programs. The frameworks include a series of personal, social, and strategic competences in the sequence "Recognizing - Assessing - Acting" (Schreiber & Siege, 2016, p. 18) that young people can acquire by participating in SFD training and activities.

Another important aspect of SFD methodologies is the pedagogy of experiential education, which emphasizes learning through experience. Through reflective processes, participants share and discuss experiences gained during playing games and sport activities. The knowledge constructed from these experiences is supplemented with expert instruction (coach), leading to insights that can be applied to everyday life (Kolb, 1984; Michl, 2009). This same functional logic applies in SFD. Reflect, connect, and apply is the reflective process employed by Right to Play, one of the most established SFD organizations. Additionally, GIZ has introduced a fourth step: action. During the training session, the 'apply' step requires consideration of how to transfer learned skills to daily life, while the 'action' step involves committing to specific actions to implement before the next session (GIZ & DSHS Köln, 2021).

Michl (2009) contends that the deployment of carefully selected reflection techniques is essential for translating acquired knowledge into everyday life practices. Despite the pivotal role of reflection, most SFD manuals or training courses provide a limited discussion of diverse reflection methodologies.

Experiential education primarily involves sport- or play-based activities. This is exemplified in German literature through various collections of games and practical examples (e.g. Reiners, 2007). The games that Reiners (2007) refers to as *interaction games* with the aim of developing personal and social competences can be found

in numerous SFD manuals of the GIZ (e.g. Steinbach & O'Rourke, 2017). Commonly labeled as *small or fun games*, they do not pertain to any specific sport. For instance, experiential education literature and GIZ's SFD manuals include games such as Spider Web, Poison River, Human Knot, and Robot Game. The manuals exhibit that a consultancy firm, composed of experts in experiential education, contributed to the development of SFD methodologies in the Western Balkans, Indonesia, and the Palestinian Territories (e.g., Steinbach & O'Rourke, 2017).

### TEAM SPORTS – ALL ABOUT FOOTBALL?

Team sports, especially football, feature prominently in SFD (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson & Woods, 2017), as well as in GIZ's projects and programs (Schreiner et al., 2020). This may be due to the fact that team sports are generally linked with positive social learning results such as respect, fair play, tolerance, and teamwork (Glöckner, 2010). Biester et al. (2009) emphasize football's potential for promoting global learning and education. Sugden and Haasner (2010) highlight football fields' role as a site for interaction and how sports can serve as a catalyst for communication, contact, and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. However, SFD research overlooks the reason why a cricket pitch was not selected instead of a football field. As other sports such as cricket, netball or rugby are more popular in some regions and may therefore provide better access to different target groups, the choice of sport in general and the dominance of football in SFD projects in particular should be questioned.

Thorpe (2016) was the pioneer in emphasizing the added value of action sports such as streetball, skateboarding, and parkour. However, only a limited number of SFD organizations integrate these sports into their programs (Svensson & Woods, 2017). As streetball, skateboarding, and parkour are typically non-competitive, self-organized, and self-refereed, they provide unique opportunities for developing personal and social skills, such as self-confidence, creativity, responsibility, and autonomy. Furthermore, the culture of urban sports provides easily accessible opportunities due to its flexible spatial and temporal nature. It can also shape one's identity as it is frequently linked with a particular way of life (Bauer et al., 2020; Thorpe, 2016).

In various SFD manuals published by GIZ, conventional training sequences for team sports (comprising warm-up, main part, cool-down) are described. These routines aim both the development of sporting skills (techniques, tactics) and non-sporting skills (social and personal skills) while

also being linked to specific topics such as gender equality or environmental awareness. Exercises and games are modified either to provide knowledge (e.g., by dribbling a ball while addressing gender stereotypes) or designed in a competence-oriented manner (e.g., a dribbling activity with a partner exercise to enhance cooperation skills) (e.g. GIZ, 2019).

Additionally, the SFD teaching and learning materials from GIZ include concepts from both national and international federations, such as the Heidelberger Ballschule (Roth & Kröger, 2015). This concept was developed in cooperation with the German Football Association (DFB) and is highlighted in the Mozambique manual (UP Maputo, 2019). Furthermore, sports are implemented with modified rules as seen in football3 or the Crazy Soccer Tournament (Steinbach & O'Rourke, 2017). As previously noted by Schreiner and colleagues (2020), German sports organizations, including the DFB as GIZ's primary sports partner, exert influence on the operational level through their experts. These associations significantly influence the conceptual and content-related design of SFD projects and programs, as well as the SFD methodologies.

Regarding football3, a frequently utilized methodology among SFD organizations, some qualitative studies of events utilizing the methodology have determined that football3 generally promotes positive experiences regarding relationship building (Gannett et al., 2014; Segura Millan Trejo et al., 2018). Since these studies were conducted in a specific short-term event context and do not provide a comparison with other sport-based methodologies used in SFD, they alone do not provide enough information to fully comprehend the role or effectiveness of football3.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This commentary aims to draw attention to *the tool* in SFD, its significance, and a major research gap. First, it is important to gain a better understanding of the tools offered by sports in the form of methodological approaches and to think about them in terms of impact mechanisms, as they constitute the *main mechanism* in SFD. What do impact studies actually say if *the tool* intended to initiate development processes and achieve impacts, is not properly understood?

Second, it is necessary to question the suitability and the pedagogical value of the tools currently used in SFD projects for specific regions, contexts, target audiences, and age groups, or if other sports and sport-based methodologies would lead to more positive outcomes.

The highlighted aspects (sport, pedagogy, and team sports) underscore that there are different ways to approach the important role of sport-based methodologies in SFD, and surely, many more exist. Though this reflection on German SFD methodologies in light of broad concepts from sport sciences and pedagogy as well as more focused perspectives from team sports and experiential education, it becomes obvious, that the range of the German SFD activities is very broad. In summary, GIZ's SFD methodologies mostly involve traditional team sports, where exercises and games are modified in a thematic or skill-based way, and/or small games from experiential education, and that they target marginalized groups, who otherwise have little or no access to sport, in line with the principle of *sport for all*.

This initial classification could serve as a starting point for further considerations in SFD research with a focus on methodologies. For instance, it could be used to modify the well-tryed *SportPlus-PlusSport* model, which distinguishes whether sport-related aspects predominate in SFD initiatives or organizations, or whether development goals are more prominent (see Coalter & Taylor, 2010). The knowledge of certain initiatives leads to the assumption that the dual model may not cover all projects designated as SFD projects, and one can legitimately ask 'how much development is there in SFD projects at all?'. SFD projects and programs, such as those of the GIZ or other actors, could be analyzed according to the original model and determining if and what kind of development-specific content they contain or if the focus is more on promoting (grassroots) sport based on the *sport-for-all* principle and expanding infrastructure.

Regarding perspectives from team sports and experiential education, it becomes evident that collaborating with other German sports actors or experts with a background in experiential education, significantly affected the SFD methodologies used in the partner countries. At this point it is not possible to understand, if and to what extend a participatory design process with local partner organizations took place or if the question of 'cultural export' could be further discussed (Giebenhain, 1990). In this context, it would be desirable to conduct an in-depth analysis of SFD methodologies of and manuals published by governmental and non-governmental actors that have a longstanding tradition in SFD; they could be compared, differences and similarities highlighted, set against the background of 'national cultural exports'. In addition to the sports, sport- and game-based methodologies presented in the manuals, further analytical aspects to consider include the region and contexts in which they are used, the target and age groups, and the actors involved in the publications. Furthermore,

instead of analyzing individual methodologies during short-term events, studies should be conducted during the day-to-day training process of SFD projects and organizations, ideally comparing different methodologies.

Understanding why certain sports and methodologies work better or worse in specific regions, contexts, and with particular target and age groups is crucial. This knowledge can lead to more effective and tailored SFD projects, benefiting organizations, beneficiaries, and their communities. Focusing on *the tool* in SFD research would provide answers to the central question, 'What sport or play-based methodologies make a difference?' and ultimately unleash and exploit the full potential of SFD projects and programs.

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