

Book Review

Global Sport-for-Development: Critical Perspectives

Schulenkorf N, Adair A (eds). *Global Sport-for-Development: Critical Perspectives*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan; 2014. 280pp., £68 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-137-28962-9

Review by Michael Crawley

Global Sport-For-Development: Critical Perspectives is an intuitive, empirically grounded and well-structured text, which offers a welcome blend of critical theory and reflective development practice. The book's focus is on Sport For Development (S4D) projects, which are projects that are intended to act as a 'conduit' or 'vehicle' for achieving various social, cultural, economic or health-related outcomes as opposed to offering sports development or participation for its own sake. Given the ever-increasing number of S4D projects, this book is a much-needed addition to the field, and will appeal both to scholars from a variety of disciplines and to S4D practitioners. The book is divided into two principle parts: a 'Framework' section (chapters 2 - 5), which offers a conceptual background of the S4D field, and a 'From the Field' section (chapters 6 - 12), which focuses on the practical issues faced by those implementing S4D interventions.

In Chapter 2, Giulianotti and Armstrong map the various ways in which the S4D sector is structured and orientated, cataloguing the various institutions and forms of engagement (technical, practical, and critical) that are currently at play within a disparate, multi-level sector. They apply two broad theories, 'global civil society' and 'glocalisation', to this mapping exercise, which offers an interesting engagement with power relations and cultural processes and opens up questions about the extent to which S4D interventions are shaped towards local needs. They

conclude that a more influential role for radical NGOs and social movements would allow the S4D sector to forge "more critical or 'glocal' projects, more creative partnerships, and more democratic relationships with their user communities" (29). However, their confidence that such organisations can be "empowered to engage selectively and innovatively with the more transnational features" of the S4D movement may understate the power relations involved and overlook the potential for such organisations to be co-opted.

In Chapter 3, Damell and Hayhurst advocate a post-colonial feminist research ethic, which contends that many of the current social and political problems with which S4D is engaged have their roots in the colonial project and that S4D interventions can play a role in reproducing inequalities. They urge practitioners to think critically about the language of 'empowerment' and to consider the ways in which neoliberal practices are reproduced rather than resisted through the emphasis that S4D programmes place on "the promotion and education of individual capital, and the building of skills necessary to survive within such structures of violence"(45). They also offer a nuanced critique of the politics of representation within S4D, noting that the current call for increased monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has a tendency to reinforce "unjust hierarchies of knowledge production" while also urging practitioners to think carefully about the ways in which they represent "beneficiaries."

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Coalter elaborates on the importance of critical reflection in the representation of S4D in Chapter 4. He warns that the ‘studied vagueness’ of much writing on sport is compounded by the ‘amorphous’ concept of ‘development’ (65) and claims that there is a fundamental problem of displacement of scope in much discussion of S4D interventions, whereby micro-level changes to individual behaviour are conflated with importance and complexity of the social relations facilitated with projected changes at the meso- and macro- levels. He shares the concerns of Damell and Hayhurst that focusing on selective individual testimonies and measurements of self-efficacy are misleading since “*any* social intervention will produce individual successes” (71), and also tend to reproduce neoliberal values. Coalter follows Levermore (2008) in suggesting that we consider multiple levels of ‘sports-for-development’ in terms of its effects not only on individuals but on broader processes involving social capital and collective organisation.

Sugden argues in chapter 5 that in the context of conflict resolution and peace-building through sport, sociologists are ideally placed to offer a nuanced understanding of historical context and the complex relationship between sport and political and civil society. He uses Salomon’s ‘ripple effect’ to conceptualise communication across international, regional and grassroots levels, mapping the complexities of these networks in diagram form. In general, the opening chapters provide a sense of the scope of both the existing initiatives and the critical frameworks that can be applied to them. The introductory chapters provide vital context for the case studies to follow, even if connections made to the broad social processes and theoretical paradigms are at times expressed in vague technical terms and lack explicit empirical grounding.

The second section of the book opens with Wallis and Lambert’s reflections on *Football for Peace* in Israel. They offer experiential insights into the organisation, application and development of the project, which evolved a coaching methodology emphasising the promotion of five key pro-social values through ‘research cycles of action-evaluation-reflection-adaptation’ (103). They are also candid in their critique of certain aspects of project delivery such as asking why local coaches often became disengaged with the project and noting research showing that very few local coaches could actually read the training manual, which was not translated into Arabic until 2008. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a theme that emerges throughout the book, and Wallis and Lambert argue that much of this work fails to assess the project’s key aims of targeted behavioural,

attitudinal and emotional change on an individual level. They also note that much research is conducted by ‘research parasites’ with short-term access and who merely use the project to increase their own academic prestige.

Mwaanga and Mwansa’s contribution applies a Foucauldian concern with discourse to the study of S4D rhetoric, and argues that hybrid notions of Ubuntu and Christian values can challenge top-down, neoliberal discourses, which champion the individual over the collective. However, their uncritical presentation of ‘economic empowerment’ through small business loans to individuals somewhat confuses this critique of neoliberal practice.

In Chapter 8, Jeanes and Magee discuss the lack of research which foregrounds the lived experience of those participating in S4D projects. Their in-depth interviews with Zambian female footballers indicate the complex nature of ideas about ‘empowerment’, identity formation and gender roles, whilst exposing a lack of alignment between the organisational aims and what the women participating sought from playing football.

The necessity to engage more with the needs of communities is further addressed in Chapter 9 through Richards and Foster’s discussion of a football-based intervention in Gulu, Uganda. They note that the formative evaluation of the programme, which involved consultation with local people, was actually carried out *retrospectively*, because “at the time it was completed, the programme objectives and design had already been finalised in order to secure funding for the programme” (163). This fundamental disconnect between local knowledge and external intervention meant that the project, whilst successful in terms of organising a competitive football league, failed to address peace-building. We should note that whilst the project appeared to have some success in promoting physical activity through football, when it was considered purely through the lens of a peace-building agenda, it could be seen to have failed as a S4D initiative as defined by the book’s introduction.

Kaufman, Rosenbauer and Moore’s contribution presents the perceptions and experiences of six practitioners in carrying out M&E programmes in the Caribbean. They outline a tendency to focus on monitoring during interviews and note that there was little emphasis on outcome evaluation or on sharing findings with individual organisations. In conclusion they set out a variety of ways in which organisations in the Caribbean and elsewhere might improve their M&E practices.

Chapter 11 presents the personal testimonies of Kath and van Buuren, who reflect on the *Soldados Nunca Mais* programme in Rio de Janeiro. They reflect on the role of football as a culturally significant means of bringing people together in Brazil but note that football games alone do not lead to the positive social outcomes they identify. Through a detailed account of one individual, 'Juliano,' who has left the drug trade through the programme, they discuss the through sport as well as the role in which social workers play as 'changeagents'.

In the final 'From the Field' chapter, the 'reflective praxis exercise' of Siefken, Schofield and Schulkorf examines the importance of developing a hybrid approach combining Western and Pacific Island perspectives for implementing a health promotion programme in Vanuatu. A community participation strategy whereby local women chose their preferred initiative (in this case a team-based, rather than individual, walking challenge) was combined with social marketing tools and the use of pedometers developed in Western health promotion initiatives. Whilst the programme had some success in improving physical activity and local capacity-building, it proved unsustainable due to excessive staff turnover and a loss of government support.

As with any edited volume we can identify some inconsistencies. The first section of the text presents a high level of theoretical critique which sometimes relies on overly broad generalisations and vague connections to broader theoretical discussions but which nonetheless makes frequent references to the politics of representation and the danger of reproducing neoliberal values. This level of critique is rarely matched by the 'From the Field' chapters, which often present issues of 'empowerment' and 'voice' relatively uncritically. The spectre of 'neoliberalism' as in much social scientific writing on development, is only vaguely defined and is deployed unevenly throughout the book, whilst the call for a greater focus on 'radical NGOs,' which challenge hegemonic representations made by Giulianotti and Armstrong, is not answered by the 'From the Field' chapters. Instead, the chapters largely present the views of established development workers. More detailed ethnographies that focus on participants in S4D programmes would add a valuable dimension to the text and go further towards tying together the concerns of authors across the two sections of the book. We must hope that this valuable contribution to the field spurs more writing that precludes the need for separate 'Framework' and 'From the Field' sections, since critically engaged writing on S4D should be able to provide both of these facets at once.