

## **Rethinking Sportland:**

### **A New Research Agenda for the Sport for Development and Peace Sector**

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#### **Abstract**

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) has grown into a huge global field of sport-related activity and intervention, and a heavily researched subject in the social scientific study of sport. In this paper, we advance the case for a new research agenda in SDP, in part to contribute more fully to sustainable development through substantial societal change. We argue that SDP research should engage with wider literatures and theories, notably on political economy and development; take full account of structural changes within the development sphere; and, examine new areas of intervention within SDP per se. To develop our analysis, our discussion is organized into six main parts. We begin by introducing the concept of 'Sportland', to reimagine SDP as a strongly institutionalized field of development activity with its own stakeholder networks. Second, we outline the key aspects of prior SDP/Sportland research on which we seek to build. Third, we examine key changes in the political economy and geo-politics of development, which serve to point Sportland scholars towards engaging with fresh literatures in these fields. Fourth, we explore the implications of these changes in order to re-theorize development. Fifth, we detail new ways ahead for Sportland with regard to policy, practice and research, with particular reference to the position of different organizational stakeholders within SDP. Finally, we consider specific areas of future intervention and inquiry within Sportland that require the attention of researchers. Our analysis is underpinned by the many research studies and projects in Sportland which we have undertaken separately or collectively over at least the last decade.

#### **Introduction**

In this paper, we advance the case for a new, critical and wide-ranging research agenda on the 'sport for development and peace' (SDP) sector. SDP is a global field of activity that uses sport and physical activities as tools or areas of social intervention, primarily with young people, to promote non-sporting social goals, such as gender empowerment, peace-building, health education, employment skills, and the social inclusion of marginalized communities (e.g. ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and refugees).

Since the early 2000s, SDP has become a distinctive and strongly institutionalized field, increasingly connected to international relations and the global development sector, and backed at different junctures by leading international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and Commonwealth Secretariat, for example through the referencing of sport's role in promoting development within the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2015: Article 37). In turn, SDP has become one of the most heavily-researched subjects within sport studies,

generating a large and diverse body of academic work, to which we have contributed through various projects and publications.<sup>1</sup>

We argue here that, while important instrumental approaches to SDP have emerged – often underpinned by behavioural and/or managerial frameworks – a renewed commitment to critical social science research is now needed in SDP research, given the shifting context of international development highlighted by, for example, global inequality, political instability, rapid technological change and environmental crises. We submit that current SDP scholarship can benefit from engaging with wider literatures and theories; should take full account of recent structural changes within the development sphere; and, examine more fully new and recent areas of intervention within SDP. To this end, we explore insights from the current development studies literature and illustrate how we see these as applicable to the study of SDP.

To set out this new research agenda, our discussion is organized into six main parts. We begin by introducing the concept of ‘Sportland’, to reimagine SDP as a strongly institutionalized field of development activity with its own networks of stakeholders. Second, we outline the key aspects of SDP research on which we seek to build, particularly its diverse, pluralistic and innovative features. Third, we examine key changes in the political economy and geo-politics of development, which also serve to point Sportland scholars towards current and fresh literatures in these fields. Fourth, we explore the implications of these changes in order to re-theorize development within the SDP context. Fifth, we detail new routes in policy, practice and research for Sportland, with reference to the position of different organizational stakeholders. Finally, we consider specific areas of future intervention and inquiry within Sportland that require the attention of SDP researchers.

While not built upon a formal data set, our discussion is informed by our many SDP research studies and projects (separate or combined) undertaken over at least the last decade.<sup>2</sup> These activities has included diverse communications with a wide range of stakeholders, including: local communities targeted by SDP programmes, officials with funding and delivery non-governmental organizations (NGOs)<sup>3</sup>, governmental bodies, sport federations and clubs, private donors, academics and journalists. Such discussions have often pondered the strengths, limitations, and future needs and opportunities of SDP.

In sum, our goal is both, to advance a new, wide-ranging research agenda that advocates a contemporary and critical approach to SDP research, and to set out theoretical, disciplinary, methodological, and substantive issues for SDP scholars to consider. Given the constraints of a single journal article, we prioritize these goals over any extended discussions of empirical illustrations, case-studies, or the significant SDP literature that has emerged over the past decade. In addition, we discuss SDP here primarily at a transnational level. While we recognize that SDP encompasses low, middle, and high-income nations (in both the global South and North), in keeping with the wider development sector the majority of what we discuss here applies particularly to low- and middle-income nations.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example numerous collections such as Collison et al. (2019), Gilbert & Bennett (2012), Schulenkorf & Adair (2014).

<sup>2</sup> See for example UK ESRC-funded projects ‘Sport for a Better World?’ (ES/L002191/1) at <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/sportbetterworld/> and ‘New Development Frontiers?’ (ES/R002673/1) at <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/newdevelopmentfrontiers/>; Coalter (2011) Coalter & Taylor (2010); Collison (2016; et al. 2019); Darnell et al. (2019).

<sup>3</sup> Most of our discussion focuses on delivery NGOs which implement SDP programmes; funding NGOs, such as Comic Relief in the UK, focus largely on generating and distributing resources to support delivery NGOs.

## **Sportland: The Field of SDP**

We begin by introducing the concept of Sportland, which is used here to describe SDP as a distinct field or sector of international development activity. The term 'Sportland' is derived from the concepts of *Aidland* and *Peaceland*, which have been coined respectively by Raymond Apthorpe (2005, 2011) and Séverine Autesserre (2014), to capture how aid workers and peacebuilders 'inhabit separate worlds' with their 'own time, space, and economics', as well as their own 'systems of meaning' (Autesserre 2014: 5). Developing this point, Apthorpe (2005; 2011: 199) states that *Aidland* has 'its own mental topographies, languages of discourse, lore and custom, and approaches to organizational knowledge and learning', and its own 'ten commandments' in the form of the UN development goals (Apthorpe, 2005; 2011: 199). Similarly, our idea of 'Sportland' is intended to encapsulate the metaphorical, separate world inhabited by SDP officials, volunteers, researchers, and consultants, with their own networks, discourses and customs, which are anchored in the convictions (or hopes), held with varying degrees of critical reflection or fervour, that sport can contribute towards development and peace.

The concept of Sportland has two broad analytical benefits. First, most significantly, the concept registers how SDP officials, volunteers, researchers and other stakeholders understand and operate within Sportland, in ways that directly parallel how *Aidland* and *Peaceland* respectively have been portrayed. Second, the concept also inspires critical reflection on the relational aspects of SDP, specifically in how Sportland engages with *Aidland*, *Peaceland* and other social fields. There are two concerns here. On one hand, Sportland officials and volunteers, particularly when travelling from the global North to work in the global South, may reproduce some flaws otherwise found in *Aidland*, for example by operating within exclusive 'spaces of aid' – NGO private offices, gated housing or global North hotel chains, air-conditioned 4 x 4 vehicles, and internationals-only restaurants, pubs, and gyms – that are segregated from local communities (Smirl 2013). On the other hand, Sportland 'echo chambers' may emerge, as SDP agencies, officials and experts work with familiar networks, partnerships, policies, and practice, rather than being open to alternative agencies, new voices, and innovative or disruptive types of knowledge (Whiteley et al. 2018). Our argument here is that Sportland's own development and its social impacts are best served if the sector avoids such bubbles, and instead functions as an outward-looking and inclusive field, whether in relations with user-group communities, with other stakeholders within *Aidland*, *Peaceland* and beyond, and with broader academic debates and literatures.

## **Sportland Research: Diversities and New Paths in the Study of SDP**

In establishing new routes for Sportland research, we build upon the solid foundations of prior research into SDP. Here, we highlight in particular the clear commitments to pluralism, diversity and openness to fresh theories and methods that are identifiable within the Sportland research field. In summary, we consider this research field to be:

- Strongly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, with significant contributions from sociology, anthropology, management studies, psychology, political science, social policy, pedagogy, criminology and youth studies, and other disciplinary domains.<sup>4</sup>
- Multi-scalar in focus, and transnational in composition. Research studies are undertaken at local, national and transnational levels; in the global South and global North; and, while still

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Hartmann & Kwauk (2011), Collison (2016), Welty-Peachey et al. (2015), Holt et al (2017), Giulianotti (2011b), Spaaij and Jeanes (2013), and Kelly (2013).

dominated by global North researchers, a growing number of scholars are based in the global South.<sup>5</sup>

- Diverse in epistemologies, as reflected, for example, by various applied, pragmatic and positivist studies of SDP programmes, through to more critical perspectives that draw on neo-Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, globalization and other theoretical paradigms.<sup>6</sup>
- Methodologically diverse, as indicated by the variety of quantitative and, especially, qualitative methods in data-gathering, ranging from randomised control trials (RCT) through to participant action research (PAR) techniques.<sup>7</sup>
- Shaped by relatively open intellectual and professional cultures, which recognize different paradigms and approaches within debates, and that have largely avoided the rancorous exchanges in some other areas of sport studies.

This diverse, pluralistic and innovative community of research practice provides an ideal environment for pursuing a fresh approach to scholarship on Sportland. From our perspective, two interrelated factors confirm the appropriateness of this approach.

First, through our various projects, and notwithstanding the diversities outlined earlier, we have come to reflect critically on the potential challenges and limitations of the SDP research field in regard to theories, methods, and utilization of different disciplines and research literatures. In attending SDP workshops, symposia and conferences across the world, we have found that many within the SDP research community share an explicit concern, and intuitive unease, that the field has become increasingly staid and in need of critical renewal.

Second, as we elaborate here, we consider that a renewed engagement with critically informed approaches to the wider field of international development will enable scholars to respond to substantive changes and emerging opportunities in the Sportland landscape. Some indicators of these new developments include: the explicit referencing, within the United Nations' 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of sport's role in promoting global peace and development; the closure of the UN's Office of Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) in 2017; and, the future SDP roles of the IOC, Commonwealth Secretariat, football clubs like Barcelona and Real Madrid, and other bodies with extensive international reach. As we explain, this shifting landscape is also marked by the emergence of several fresh international issues and challenges within the Sportland and wider Aidland fields. Moreover, for all its diversity, the research field of Sportland, like the SDP sector in general, would benefit greatly from guarding against a bubble effect. As we turn to discuss next, in order to do so, a much more substantial engagement with wider literatures and disciplinary influences, including in relation to the political economy of development, is called for.

### **Rethinking the Political Economy of Development**

The global development sector has been undergoing substantial changes over the past decade, raising important questions, opportunities and challenges for Sportland scholars and stakeholders. Critical analyses by Anglophone scholars have often focused on the influence of neoliberal policies within Sportland and wider Aidland (e.g. Coakley 2011; Darnell 2012; Giulianotti 2011b; Hartmann & Kwauk 2011). These policies – centred on deregulation, privatisation, and slashing of public

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Coalter (2007, 2013) and the edited collections by Gilbert & Bennett (2012), Schulenkorf & Adair (2014), and Collison et al. (2019), reflecting the range of perspectives within SDP studies.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Hartmann & Kwauk (2011), Saavedra (2009), Darnell (2012), Hayhurst (2016), and Giulianotti (2011a).

<sup>7</sup> See for example Coalter (2007, 2013), Richards et al. (2014), Schinke et al. (2013).

services - derive from the 'Washington Consensus' that dominated the global economic and development agendas of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and many global North governments (notably the US and UK) through the 1980s and 1990s (Stiglitz 2017: 351; Harvey 2005). While characterized by a relatively high level of 'coherence', neoliberal policies have had many disastrous social and economic impacts, particularly when imposed as 'shock therapy' measures and structural adjustment programmes in many low- and middle-income nations (Stiglitz 2017; Veltmeyer et al 1997). For some analysts, when introduced in these contexts, SDP programmes represent low-cost, short-term, neoliberal alternatives to the substantive delivery of youth, sport and educational services by the state (e.g. Hartmann & Kwauk 2011).

While neoliberalism remains a powerful global policy model, the development context has become more complicated and nuanced since the late 1990s. Thus, we argue, Sportland scholars would do well to take full account of this shifting environment. Diverse literatures in sociology, economics, and political science have highlighted these key 'developments in development', which we organize and discuss here in three broad domains: global politics, global inequality, and shifting notions of development itself.

### *Global Politics of Development*

In recent years, the global politics of development have become more variegated and contested in several ways. First, a more volatile, fragmentary, and *multipolar global politics* has emerged. US global hegemony continues to erode, sliding into Trumpist nationalism, including acute antagonisms towards the United Nations (King 2017; Wallerstein 2003). Europe's crises have included huge national debts, rising far-right nationalisms, and the UK Brexit saga. China's global ambitions have expanded rapidly, notably through leading the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank and the One Belt One Road (OBR) initiative backed by almost US\$900 billion of expenditure across over 60 countries (Amin 2013; Nederveen Pieterse 2017; Stiglitz 2017; Wallerstein 2003). Thus, scholars and practitioners within Sportland and Aidland will need to be increasingly cognizant of these multipolar political movements, and their influences on local and national contexts, and subsequent development agendas.

Second, since the early 1990s, *multipolar development* has been marked by *the rising semi-periphery*. China and India, with 2.75 billion people or around 36% of world population combined, have experienced rapid economic growth; China alone averaged annual GDP rises of around 9.7% from 1990-2017. Asian countries have largely been behind a closing of growth and inequality gaps between the global North and global South (Bourguignon 2017: 33-36; Baldwin 2016), and significant drops in global absolute poverty (living below US\$1.90 per day), from 35% of global population in 1990 to 10.7% in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere in Asia, oil-rich Gulf states such as Qatar have undergone stratospheric growth, enabling them to pursue 'soft power' through global investments in sport, media, education, and culture.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Sportland and Aidland scholars and practitioners will require to be particularly sensitive to these differential types of development, and subsequent development needs, within these diverse nations.

Third, the world's largest economies pursue more *instrumental global development* to suit national interests. For example, the UK Conservative government has favoured development programmes

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/Poverty/home>

<sup>9</sup> For Nye (2008: 94), soft power is "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment".

in locations important to foreign policy (*The Independent*, 15 January 2018). China has pursued infrastructural rather than social development in nations with political-economic benefits; this includes stadium-building diplomacy in partner countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>10</sup> The United States cut its UN contribution by \$285 million after a resolution was passed condemning the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.<sup>11</sup> In sharp contrast, Nordic and other small, advanced states, maintain more open development policies that pursue political and civil changes in democracy, transparency, peace, and equality (Gjølberg 2010; Tvedt 1998). Thus, Sportland and Aidland practitioners and scholars will need to be increasingly mindful of how development agendas are underpinned by particular foreign policy agendas.

Fourth, there are wider debates on the *future of foreign aid* to consider. While going back to at least the 1990s (Renard 2006), these debates have intensified with several economists arguing that foreign aid has largely failed to eradicate poverty and may even hinder developing countries by ignoring corruption (Deaton 2013; Easterly 2014; Moyo 2009). While aid is still strongly advocated within the international system, these sceptical analyses foreground a shifting political context for development funding. Thus, within Sportland and Aidland, we anticipate that funders will louden their calls for the evidencing of programme impacts, with 'innovative' or 'risky' initiatives, including SDP interventions, facing more critical and sceptical scrutiny.

### *Global Inequalities*

Global inequalities have become central to political economic debates on development and globalization. Two points are highlighted here.

First, *uneven development* is entrenched between and within nations. As noted, Asian nations have largely driven overall reductions in broad global North/South inequalities. But inequalities have grown markedly between the wealthiest and poorest deciles of the global population, producing 'a world that is extraordinarily unequal with regard to any national norm' (Bourguignon 2017: 23). High poverty levels remain across the global periphery (mainly sub-Saharan Africa) and much of Asia and Latin America (Bourguignon 2015; Collier 2007). Inequalities have grown within both developed and developing nations, as the wealthiest sectors have gained most from long-term neoliberal policies. Meanwhile, deep inequalities continue in semi-peripheral countries, as the growing urban middle-classes move towards global North lifestyles, while poor, especially rural populations remain impoverished. Neoliberal policies have also sharpened inequalities along the fault-lines of gender, ethnicity, and disability; thus, for example, women still fill huge, unpaid gaps in family welfare provision.

Second, the *global politics of inequality* are actively contested by many leading economists and social commentators (Bourguignon 2017; Milanovic 2016; Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2013, 2017; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). For example, the 'Stockholm Statement', advanced by world-leading economists, addresses inequalities in calling for inclusive, secure, and sustainable development policies, based on new state, market and community partnerships. At intergovernmental level, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) feature commitments to 'reduce inequality within and among countries', including through 'fiscal, wage and social policies' (UN 2015: 25). Thus, Sportland and Aidland researchers and practitioners would do well to confront these different

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/summer2012/chinas-stadium-diplomacy>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/26/us-to-make-at-least-285m-cut-to-un-budget-after-vote-on-jerusalem>.

scales of inequality, and to draw on world-leading critical economists when envisioning alternative forms of development.

### *Rethinking Development*

Global inequality issues lead to further rethinking of global development. Three observations follow.

First, there is a more influential, *multi-agency development agenda*, as diverse publics, politicians, social movements, and economists have contested neoliberal and austerity policies and advocated more socially sensitive policies (Krugman 2012; Pleyers 2010; Stiglitz 2013, 2017). Confronted by policy failures and outbreaks of mass resistance, international financial and governmental institutions have tempered their neoliberal rhetoric. Thus, for example, the World Bank has spotlighted its support for poverty reduction and social development projects in recent years.

Second, the *multidimensionality of development*, beyond economic growth, is more strongly recognized, for example through Sen's (1989, 2009) 'capabilities approach' (cf. Nussbaum 2011) and Raworth's (2017) 'doughnut economics' model. Rejecting policy obsessions with economic growth, Raworth (2017: 43), for example, has argued that development policy should instead focus on how 'every person can lead their life with dignity, opportunity and community'. These approaches have had definite influence on global policies. For example, the UN has defined development in terms of 'enlarging freedoms', relating to well-being, capabilities, autonomy and voice (UN 2016: 1), while setting development targets in wider non-economic areas such as education, conflict resolution, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

Third, there is growing interest in *challenging conventional North-to-South development models*. Examples here include research focus on promoting 'South-South cooperation', between states or NGOs in the global South (Lewis 1998; Quadir 2013); advancing Southern theories and voices on development and globalization (Connell 2007; de Sousa Santos 2014; Mignolo 2011); and, reversing standard knowledge/power flows, so that global South epistemologies, theories, methods, politics and processes come to influence knowledge and practice in the global North (O'Byrne 2018).

Thus, Sportland and Aidland scholars and practitioners have strong opportunities to draw upon and to engage with these alternative, progressive, multidimensional development agendas and models, in analysing and implementing SDP programmes.

More broadly, the diverse, critical shifts in the global political economy of development which we have outlined here, point to changing contexts for Sportland and Aidland. They spotlight the need for Sportland scholars to address these major structural changes, and to engage with wider literatures on global political economy and development. With these points in mind, we turn now to consider how new theoretical frameworks may be developed for research studies in Sportland.

### **Theorizing Development**

The academic study of Sportland and Aidland clearly requires robust theoretical standpoints that allow us to examine the 'developments in development' outlined above. In our view, the theorization of development in Sportland should have (at least) the following components.

First, research into Sportland should maintain a *contemporary critical* standpoint, registering the *multipolar* and *multidimensional* aspects of development. This approach should examine *inter alia* the diverse ways in which development is understood and experienced, particularly in the global South; interrogate crucial contemporary political issues, such as social inequalities and soft power; explore new and socially inclusive interrelationships between state, market and civil society; and, advance a normative position centred on social justice, human rights, empowerment of the socially marginalized, and reduction of inequalities.

Second, and building on this, we define development in two main ways which underscore its multidimensionality. In ontological terms, we advocate for the *capabilities* approach, premised on human agency, which safeguards and nurtures the ‘capabilities of persons to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value’ (Sen 1999: 18; cf. Silva & Howe 2012). In more sociological terms, we advocate a *societal transformation* approach which promotes development in four main domains: the economy, for example through meaningful employment and equitable resource distribution; the polity, for example through democratic representation of citizen choices; society, for example through securing citizen rights or strengthening civil society organizations; and, administration, for example through transparent, efficient and meritocratic state bodies (Pritchett et al. 2013). Each domain points to societal changes that are achievable and open to evaluation: for example, making state bodies more accessible and open to local publics, or building up local NGOs. Crucially, this approach also requires to consider how transformations in Sportland are best delivered by bridging the scalar divide between ‘small development’ (contextual, sustainable programmes, using local knowledge to meet local needs, thus lacking scale) and ‘big development’ (systemic change pursued through cross-national programme methods, designs and organizations, thus lacking sufficient appreciation of context) (Pritchett et al. 2013: 4-5).

Third, we advocate for an empowering and pragmatic approach to development practice, one centred on *co-creation*, *critical pedagogy* and *andragogy*. Sportland agencies should fully engage user groups and communities in co-creating development strategies, programmes and initiatives (O’Byrne 2018). They should learn from the long-standing expertise of social work, community work and other established professions that utilize ‘critical pedagogies’ with different marginalized groups and communities (Freire 2009; McLaren 1994; cf. Spaaij and Jeanes 2013). Further, the use of andragogy would enable Sportland scholars and practitioners to view user groups as reflective adult learners, and to promote knowledge exchange from Sportland user groups through to programme officials and volunteers (Knowles 1980).

Fourth, we continue to recognize core political quandaries and dilemmas through theory and practice, both within Sportland and beyond. On the one hand, some *paternalism* is inevitable, flowing from donor organizations to recipient communities, as soon as a development programme is planned, or an aid official arrives for work (cf. Barnett 2011). On the other hand, development studies continue to experience the long-running tension between generating *critical theory* and undertaking *pragmatic research*. For some commentators, pragmatic research has prevailed in conjunction with neoliberal development policies (Schuurman 2009: 832). In our view, this should not be an ‘either-or’ scenario, but should integrate both tendencies. Thus, for example, academics and researchers might pragmatically advise Sportland agencies on methods and practices, while at the same time advancing critical insights on development strategies and policies.

## **Sportland: Structural Change and the New Development Agenda**

These 'developments in development' also lead us to consider their connections to key substantive aspects of Sportland. Here, we set out several core issues for Sportland research to address, particularly with regard to the SDP sector's different stakeholders.

### *User Group and Community Relations*

The new development context inspires rethinking of how Sportland's main organizations may engage with user groups. In principle, and following the above, Sportland organizations might pursue development missions that recognize the multipolarities and multidimensionality of development; advocate a capabilities and societal transformational approach; utilize techniques of co-creation, critical pedagogy and andragogy to exchange knowledge and to empower communities in the development process; and, deliver pragmatic and constructively critical research.

Through this framework, research may turn to examine how Sportland organizations register and respond to these multipolar development experiences, understandings and needs. This is particularly acute in heavily-populated, semi-peripheral, middle-income regions across Asia, where high levels of inequality exist between growing urban middle-classes and large, impoverished lower-classes in urban and rural areas. Thus, for example, in such locations, Sportland intervention programmes might tackle modernization-related health problems – such as non-communicable diseases, lack of exercise in urban environments, fast food diets – alongside more long-standing issues such as infectious diseases, malnutrition, and food scarcity.

This approach may also examine how Sportland engages with the wide spectrum of community groups in programme planning, implementation and evaluation. To that end, Sportland organizations may need to override local hierarchies and political structures to engage with highly marginalized groups. Such actions might also help to militate against the Sportland bubble effect, which would otherwise divide global North SDP agencies from their impoverished user communities. A related, pressing concern here is to disrupt the circulation of power/knowledge within the Sportland and Aidland sectors – as funding (from the global North) generates interventions (into the global South) leading to evidence and knowledge of development (that flows back to global North) – and to facilitate the 'stickiness' of knowledge, empowerment and ownership of the development process that stays within these communities.

### *Development and Welfare Sectors*

Sportland research should also explore how SDP agencies may cultivate new types of engagement and connection with the wider development and welfare sectors. Potentially, this could represent one way for SDP stakeholders to burst out of the Sportland bubble. This external engagement should include working alongside and exchanging knowledge and expertise with fellow officials and volunteers in the development sector, as well as in social, community and youth work and education. SDP has much to learn from these wider spheres, as many issues facing Sportland stakeholders have long been confronted by professionals in other domains. In addition, Sportland may follow these other, more established spheres of development and welfare work in terms of professionalization. In practice, the nature of these cross-sector relationships will vary, according to local and national development needs and the types of SDP,

development and welfare agencies that operate in the location. Agenda-setting would require the full input of all agencies engaged in any cross-sector dialogue or collaboration.

### *Transnational Advocacy and Leadership*

Researchers would do well to attend to the matter of SDP's global leadership. Specifically, Sportland lacks a transnational leader that can pull together multifarious stakeholders, help to establish a clear vision for the sector, and develop unifying strategies, partnerships, and programmes. In theory, the United Nations Office of Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) could have been best placed to provide that leadership and advocacy. However, the relatively small office, established in 2001, endured high staff turnover, and tended to be criticized by Sportland officials and workers for lacking strategy and influence. Its closure was confirmed by the UN in May 2017, to be replaced by a 'direct partnership' between the governmental body and the IOC.

How might this transnational leadership vacuum be filled? Three overlapping, yet imperfect, scenarios might be probed by researchers. First, transnational agencies such as the IOC and Commonwealth Secretariat may expand their SDP roles. However, the IOC has yet to articulate a transnational SDP strategy, and may be focused on Olympic sports and the role of Olympic movement rather than the wider sport sector. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Secretariat, while representing 2.2 billion people across 53 nations, is technically restricted to its member states. Second, diverse multi-agency partnerships and networks may address specific issues or areas of activity. When implementing Sportland programmes, these partnerships often combine stakeholders – from corporations through to delivery NGOs – with varied interests and approaches towards development. These partnerships also include 'transnational advocacy networks' (TANs) which, for example, focus on a single transnational SDP programme, have shared national or regional concerns, or have common interests in specific sports. It may be beneficial for donors to enable the hubs of these partnerships or networks to be established in the global South, in part to disrupt the long-standing cycle of aid (in Sportland and elsewhere) which continues to place the global North at the centre. Consideration may be given to the role of UNICEF country offices in addressing this issue.

Third, Sportland might move towards a marketized variant of the development sector. Over the past decade, some development-focused private companies have gained greater traction within Sportland, for example through links to the 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) or 'corporate social investment' (CSI) wings of corporations, or by staging transnational SDP conferences (Levermore 2018).

These second and third scenarios are the most problematic for the development agenda that we have outlined above. They may, for example, draw nation-states, corporations or sport organizations into Sportland to 'sport wash' their images through gestural association with good causes, while offering little substantive towards meaningful social change. In particular, the third scenario would potentially position Sportland in a regressive compact with neoliberalism, as this developmental field is more likely to be co-opted by private and commercial interests. All of this provides a ready focus for academic research.

### *Sport Systems*

There is also scope for SDP researchers to examine how Sportland agencies may build better and mutually beneficial relationships with sport systems. Certainly, a degree of caution is required here. Formally, the two domains have different *raison d'être*, as SDP is centred on the social benefits of sport, while sport systems focus on developing sport *per se*. In addition, there are often competing goals between sport governing bodies (which look to promote their specific sports) and SDP agencies (which use the most appropriate sports to pursue development goals), while attempts by national government and sport bodies to pursue social goals in sport (e.g. greater participation, leading to better health) often founder.

Bearing these potential concerns in mind, however, research may explore several ways in which SDP and sport systems may interact. On the ground interdependencies between Sportland and sport systems should be fully recognized and extended. Sportland programmes already link with sport systems, for example by using coaches, facilities and equipment, while providing young people with physical education or organized sport. Additionally, Sportland stakeholders may also engage critically with important aspects of sport systems, for example by pressing for national hosts and corporate sponsors of sport mega-events to meet certain standards on human rights and sustainable development.

### *Nation-States*

Research may also investigate how Sportland agencies engage in fresh ways with nation-states. In broad terms, Sportland NGOs (both funding and delivery types) and other leading stakeholders may look to integrate programmes into development, education, youth, and other policy fields within nations that are both donors and recipients of aid. A larger aim here would be facilitating the development of national SDP strategies.<sup>12</sup>

We do recognize that national interests have been at the fore since the emergence of global development agendas from the 1940s onwards, and that Sportland has been no exception here (Hasselgard 2015; Kidd 2008; Tvedt 1998). In this context, we would argue that closer examination should be given to how different nations engage with sport and Sportland to increase their soft power. For example, Nordic countries tend to fund programmes while acting as pro-development 'regimes of goodness'; other nations operate more instrumentally within Sportland to gain greater influence within global sport federations. A related area to probe here would be in how 'tied-aid' may operate within Sportland and Aidland, as national governments donate to SDP and other development programmes in exchange for trade deals or political advantages.

Additionally, there is the issue of how emerging economies engage with international development and, prospectively, with Sportland. To date, their interests in SDP seem minimal; the BRICS and Gulf States have largely focused sport interests on mega-events, and investments in elite sport clubs and tournaments. Similarly, we noted earlier China's concern with economic and infrastructural development (including stadium-building) rather than the social and human varieties. Critical future questions here will be how, if at all, these growing economic powers engage with Sportland and Aidland, and with what prospective impacts on SDP and the wider development sectors?

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<sup>12</sup> The Commonwealth Secretariat's SDP programme has, for example, promoted the creation of these national strategies within some of its member states (see <http://thecommonwealth.org/harnessing-sport-development-and-peace>).

Finally, we recognize the evident strains between the development approach that we advocate here, centred on human capabilities and societal transformation, and the actual practices of many nation-states in ignoring or countermanding these development standards. SDP organizations should underscore their commitments to this development approach when engaging directly with different nations.

### *NGOs*

Research may also probe how the position of Sportland's funding and delivery NGOs could be reshaped. Three issues may be highlighted here. First, scholars may examine how NGO independence and integrity might be fully safeguarded, particularly for delivery agencies in constructing programme partnerships with other organizations. This commitment is essential as the marketization of Sportland and Aidland means that delivery NGOs tend to be weakly positioned when competing for resources from donors such as states, corporations, sport federations and funding agencies, who are often well placed to shape the aims, objectives, methods, and public profile of programmes.

Second, scholarship should explore wider studies of Aidland that address the political problems and dilemmas of NGOs, such as for global North agencies that work in the global South. Issues here include 'NGOization', a complex process which in part highlights the lack of democratic mandate and accountability that NGOs often have in the global South; and, the potential for NGOs to function as compradors, state diplomats or development evangelists (Alvarez 2009; Choudry & Kapoor 2013; Tvedt 1998). These issues in turn raise questions on how user groups and local communities are engaged in development processes.

Third, research may assess how intensifying processes of professionalization can substantially assist SDP's institutionalization, sustainability and influence vis-à-vis the wider development and welfare sectors (cf. Lang 2013: 71-2). This professionalization might be pursued through more specialist SDP qualifying programmes for NGO staff, recruiting more actively from the social and community work sectors, and promoting critical reflection and peer mentoring among employees and officials with delivery agencies. We appreciate that there may be tensions between pursuing greater professionalization and institutionalization, while seeking to safeguard the independence and integrity of delivery NGOs. To avoid compromising that autonomy, it is imperative that the accrediting role is taken on by appropriate civil society organizations rather than by governmental bodies or sport federations, for example when assessing training programmes for volunteers and officials.

### *Governmental Sector and NGOs*

The interrelations of national governments and non-governmental organizations have also had an important influence within the SDP sector and remain worthy of ongoing analysis. Hasselgard (2015: 5) has drawn attention to processes of 're-governmentalization' in development aid, in which the public policy agendas of national governments (and inter-governmental organizations) assume renewed prominence. In this framework, donors and national governments partner in a more interventionist approach than is otherwise found in neoliberal policies and do so in ways that re-centre the state as the primary development actor. A result has been that NGOs are expected "to be more oriented towards governments and the development of government-owned development strategies within different public sectors such as health and education" (Hasselgard 2015: 6). In

SDP, this increased emphasis on, and significance of, policy domains can be traced back to the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP IWG) in 2004 that aimed to bring the SDP movement into line with national policy agendas. This approach is also currently supported by key SDP stakeholders, like the Commonwealth Secretariat, who support SDP for its ability to align with and support the policy mandates of its member states.

This re-governmentalization of development “has placed the role of NGOs in a state of confusion” (Hasselgard 2015: 6) and highlighted the tension between the authority and resources of the state versus the autonomy that civil society actors may seek to exercise within the confines of their dependency upon external funding. This tension means that SDP researchers will need to pay close attention to the importance and influence of nation-states, in both establishing policies and distributing resources and aid, while assessing the ongoing efforts of civil society actors who may work with government agendas but also operate around the state to pursue an autonomous development agenda. For SDP delivery NGOs, there are practical benefits in forfeiting some autonomy in return for resources from government departments. But precisely where different NGOs feel they should draw the line between acceptable and problematic trade-offs, is worthy of close examination in future research.

### *External Audiences*

Researchers might also address the ways in which Sportland organizational stakeholders and activities are framed for external audiences. Like some of their counterparts in Aidland, some Sportland agencies pursue global audiences through neoliberal public appeals, funding campaigns, media reports, and public relations exercises. Chouliaraki (2013) has argued that the ‘marketized’ aid sector has entered an era of ‘neoliberal post-humanitarianism’, which has two main features: pragmatism, centred on seeking practical responses from audiences; and privatism, which involves aid agencies and the media hailing audiences as consumers who give financial donations rather than as citizens who would press for political solutions. Many Sportland stakeholders – funding and delivery NGOs, sport clubs, governing bodies, corporate donors, government agencies – use publicity messages and marketing materials that exemplify this neoliberal post-humanitarianism. These outputs often frame the recipients of sport aid through spectacles of suffering and joy, often referred to as ‘poverty porn’, as the ‘power of sport’ is portrayed as transforming lives from despair into hope. Sportland stakeholders – particularly NGOs and campaign groups – need to challenge any further drifts by SDP public appeals towards depoliticized sentimentalism, ‘sportwash’ and a CSR-based simulacrum of development.

### *Assessing Impacts*

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation (M & E) of SDP programmes is a widely debated and critiqued subject, and academics continue to have a key role here. Critical concerns include research that lacks cultural specificity and context, well-defined objectives or clear outcomes, and/or local voices in the reflective process; and which may employ excessively positivist frameworks (Coakley 2011; Kay 2012; Levermore 2011; Nicholls et al 2011; Pawson 2006).

Recent comprehensive reviews of research on sport for development programmes (Jones *et al.* 2017; Hermens *et al.* 2017; Lubans *et al.* 2012; Whitley *et al.* 2018) have referred to the limitations of much descriptive outcome-based research. Most importantly, they refer to the absence of information on the logic or rationale of programmes and the *presumed* relationships between participation, changed values and attitudes and changed behaviour. For example, Whitley *et al.*

(2018: 9), in a systematic review of 70 research studies in sport-for-development, recommended that “organisations and researchers ... outline, adopt, and test intervention theories (i.e., programme theories), rather than focusing predominantly on intervention outcomes and benchmarks. The use of intervention theories (e.g., theories of change, logic models) was not common in this systematic review”.

Within sports research such critiques are reflected in a growing realisation of the need to ‘de-reify’ sport (Crabbe 2000; Patriksson 1995: 128). In this regard, Coakley (1998: 2) argues that we need to view “... sports as *sites* for socialisation experiences, not *causes* of socialisation outcomes”. Similarly, Hartmann (2003: 134) argues that “... the success of any sports-based social intervention program is largely determined by the strength of its *non-sport components*”. The Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group’s (2007: 4) extensive literature review on sport for development concluded that “... the evident benefits appear to be an indirect outcome of the context and social interaction that is possible in sport rather than a direct outcome of participating in sport”.

Responding to a perceived lack of strategic frameworks for the implementation and evaluation of sport for development initiatives, some academics have developed theoretical frameworks derived from wider non-sporting research and theory. Schulenkorf’s (2012) ‘conceptual framework for sport for development projects’ is derived from community development literature, Sugden’s (2010) ‘ripple effect’ is derived from research on conflict resolution and peace-building and Gramscian notions of praxis, and Lyras and Peachey’s (2011) ‘sport for development theory’ is based on humanistic psychology, intergroup contact theory and organisational change theory. All three emphasise the importance of understanding the relationship between the micro (programme) impacts and the social outcomes and potential constraints at meso and macro levels, the need to consider community norms and values, and to adopt a bottom-up collaborative and participatory approach to programme design and implementation.

In addition, a ‘programme theory’ approach has been suggested by other researchers (e.g. Coalter 2007; Whitley *et al.* 2018). A programme theory seeks to identify the critical success factors of an intervention - the mechanisms via which it works. It identifies the key components, mechanisms, relationships and sequences of causes and effects which are presumed to lead to desired impacts on participants and subsequent behavioural outcomes.

In this regard it may be more productive for Sportland scholars to engage more fully with realist evaluation frameworks to respond to these concerns, in examining the contexts, processes, mechanisms, outcomes and impacts of SDP programmes. Realist evaluation is premised on the context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) configuration, whereby social programmes are assessed with reference to the context of their implementation, their intervention mechanisms, and the range of outcomes that did (and did not) occur (Pawson & Tilley 1997). Realist evaluation thus integrates theory, evidence and learning, while recognizing that all interventions will only work for certain people in certain situations in specific conditions (Pawson 2003). Realist frameworks have been widely used in the healthcare, education and social work sectors, enabling evaluations that consider social impacts beyond predefined programme goals and milestones and providing conceptual and methodological frameworks for sport for development research. They may also be utilized to respond to calls for the upscaling of SDP programmes and research studies. Coalter (2013: 54) observes that scale could be achieved by identifying potential commonalities of mechanisms across a range of interventions, to produce knowledge that would ‘provide a robust and potentially generalisable version of “what works”, in what circumstances, for whom and why’, thereby going beyond the narrow examination of programme ‘success’ (ibid). Realist evaluation

may also be used to address knowledge gaps in SDP between micro-level programme successes and macro-level change. Thus, we consider that realist evaluation techniques merit much further and sustained engagement by SDP scholars when assessing the diversity and intensity of programme impacts in different social contexts.

### **Sportland: Areas of Intervention**

To begin, we anticipate that Sportland's longstanding involvement in many development areas – such as peace-building and conflict resolution, gender empowerment, promoting employability, the social integration of marginalized communities (e.g. ethnic minorities), health education, and developing youth leadership skills – will continue, particularly in line with the United Nations' SDGs, and it would serve little purpose to repeat these as points of study for SDP scholars. The need for Sportland organizations and scholars to explore the 'mainstreaming' of disability within the sector might also been highlighted. Drawing on our earlier insights on human development, we would point to the following areas for substantial future engagement by Sportland organizations, and thus for scrutiny by scholars:

#### *i) Social Inequalities*

We highlighted earlier the centrality of social inequalities to future development agendas, and the need for Sportland scholars and practitioners to address the complexities of this issue in national and global contexts. The current focus of much SDP activity on areas such as personal development, employability, and education, does engage implicitly or indirectly with inequality. However, Sportland agencies should have the political, economic and policy impetus to address social inequalities *directly*, going beyond individual level, to instead confront more structural issues relating to better sharing of global resources, and fairer access to education, health care, employment protection, and other key welfare services. Addressing these deep social inequalities is in line with the capabilities and societal transformation approaches advanced earlier, and would require multi-scale activities at grassroots, national and transnational levels. Social inequalities should thus be mainstreamed as a critical development theme into SDP strategies, programmes and practices.

#### *ii) Environment*

We support arguments elsewhere that the environment has been a development blind-spot in Sportland (Giulianotti et al. 2018). An issue with great political traction, the environment connects to the majority of the 17 UN SDGs, while developing nations are most adversely affected by environmental problems such as air pollution in urban areas. We recommend that all Sportland programmes should have protective and educational components on the environment. Moreover, to secure real change on the environment, Sportland stakeholders should partner with environmental NGOs and campaign groups at local, national and transnational levels.

#### *iii) Safeguarding*

Safeguarding refers to the measures put in place by diverse agencies to ensure that individuals, particularly young people and other vulnerable people, are protected from potential harm, violence or abuse. Sportland has a crucial role to play in supporting the effective safeguarding of young people within the SDP and wider sport systems.<sup>13</sup> The need for full, standardized and independent

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.unicef.org.uk/sport-for-development/safeguarding-in-sport/> as an important guide in this area.

safeguarding is underlined by the rapid growth of youth populations and sport academies in the global South, and by a series of high-profile criminal cases and media investigations into the abuse of young people in competitive and elite sport contexts.

iv) *Refugees*

There are an estimated 65 million people displaced by regional and global conflicts, particularly in Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia, and the Lake Chad region. In Europe, some of the most positive and welcoming engagements with refugees have come from community and grassroots movements, such as local sport clubs and football supporter groups. More concerted Sportland work with refugees must be both practical and critical, in alleviating suffering, facilitating social inclusion, and pursuing the critical transformation of the root causes of refugee crises.

v) *Anti-radicalization*

Radicalization here relates to the processes through which individuals come to accept or to advocate the use of violence in pursuit of political or other goals. There has been growing interest from governmental agencies in the use of sport interventions to tackle the political or religious radicalization of young people, particularly males. More funding and other support for this work may be anticipated. It is vital that, as with refugees, Sportland initiatives combine practical and critical approaches, so that the underlying social drivers for political alienation and violence are fully addressed.

vi) *Social enterprises*

Social enterprises combine the social activities of programme delivery NGOs with commercial activities otherwise associated with small businesses. For example, a social enterprise may implement SDP programmes, which are part-financed by business activities such as sport coaching or manufacturing sport equipment, that also offer employment opportunities to young people. The social enterprise model has been promoted strongly in the development sector in recent years, in part as it features the policy themes of neoliberal enterprise and social support, while also offering commercial responses to the thorny problem of agency funding and sustainability. In Sportland, social enterprises should be equipped to develop the active citizenship of user groups and employees, and to work with larger stakeholders to facilitate deeper social changes within the community and beyond.

vii) *Social capital*

A substantial volume of Sportland (and wider Aidland) activity has centred on building social capital among disadvantaged groups.<sup>14</sup> The broad aim is to increase the social ties and networks of these groups to improve their personal and social circumstances, such as in health, employment, and social integration. Development programmes tend to understand social capital in practical rather than transformative ways, with success measured in terms of the numbers and ranges of civic associations, and individual involvement within these formations. While offering the impression of a busy civil society, these indices tell us little about the transformative potential of social capital, in terms of advancing the 'civic voice', or empowering individuals and social groups as social actors within public, private or voluntary spheres (Lang 2013: 47). Sportland therefore needs to foster much more civic, critically reflective types of social capital among its user groups, volunteers and

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<sup>14</sup> For example, see Skinner et al. (2008) and Coalter (2013).

officials. This process needs to occur in ways that safeguard the autonomy of Sportland's civil society agencies, particularly in their relationships with governmental agencies.

While these are vital future areas for Sportland to address through policy and practice, and thereby also for research, the list here is not exhaustive. In addition, each area may be approached in different ways. For example, on social inequalities, Sportland's funding and delivery NGOs may seek to operate: at policy level, pressing governmental agencies to tackle inequalities at national and international levels; at programme level, by seeking to reduce specific social inequalities within communities; and, at the levels of education and civic engagement, by working to empower young people as much as possible, to act as citizens who are able to challenge social inequalities through civil, political and economic actions. Each of these approaches would also fit with the retheorization of development that we advocated earlier, encompassing human capabilities and societal transformation perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, we seek to reaffirm the need for a critically informed research agenda within the global field of SDP, which we reconceptualise here as Sportland. As we have argued, a critical challenge for Sportland scholars is to respond particularly to major ongoing shifts in the global political economic and development landscapes, as reflected in multipolar and multidimensional aspects of development, the rise of semi-peripheral 'emerging economies', and the politics of soft power, inequality, and increasing emphasis on integration of sport for development initiatives into government-led policies. The development standpoint advocated here – combining capabilities and societal transformation approaches – is well suited for critically examining this changing global context, and for underpinning the work of Sportland agencies such as programme delivery NGOs. A key aim for Sportland must be to avoid a 'bubble effect' which insulates the field in research, as well as in policy and practice. Thus, SDP scholars need to engage with much wider literatures on development, just as Sportland agencies should strengthen links with the wider Peaceland, Aidland and sport sectors.

Renewing a critical SDP research agenda in such a way offers real opportunities for academics within Sportland. It carries the prospect of new compacts between SDP agencies and the academy, for example to assist Sportland in its expanding social focus, political influences, public engagements, and further professionalization. Such opportunities and revised forms of connection however are not conceived to enact rigid forms of institutionalisation nor diminish the role and flexibility of civil society organizations in advancing development. Such an agenda also requires academic activity to remain constructively critical, such as through examining how funding-raising media campaigns represent the needs of developing societies, or in holding to account any erstwhile SDP stakeholders (such as mega-event hosts) which infringe human development and equity standards. As we have argued here, academic debates on SDP tend to be undertaken in relatively open, pluralistic ways that provide conducive contexts for exploring new research agendas.

A last set of issues to address here relates to how a new research agenda would serve to position social scientists vis-à-vis the wider array of stakeholders across Sportland. Three points arise here. First, the new agenda would strengthen significantly the potential contribution of academic research for developing communities, notably with reference to advancing human capabilities and societal transformation, and in relatively new as well as long-term areas of human need. Second, it would substantially enhance the academy's roles and relationships with diverse organizational

stakeholders within Sportland, enabling scholars to contribute more fully to shaping policy and practice, based on a more nuanced understanding of, and vision for, the contemporary development field. An arising critical issue for the SDP sector to address relates to shaping future leadership and strategy-building across Sportland: given their global perspective, many SDP researchers are well positioned to seek to comment and impact upon this issue. This is a particularly timely critical issue given the current question of leadership and relative absence of formal commentary provided by the IOC. Finally, a third point concerns how the new agenda may significantly enhance the intermediary role of academics in relations between SDP organizations and programme user groups and communities. This would occur in a variety of ways, from stronger and more 'realistic' evaluations of programmes through to giving voice to marginalized people on their aspirations for societal transformation. In this sense, a key effect of this new approach would be to embed academics and user groups more centrally within the global field of Sportland.

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