

John Sugden & Adrian Haasner

Sport Intervention in Divided Societies

Introduction

In recent years a growing number of sports initiatives have sought to intervene in the context of social conflicts within divided societies (Coalter, 2009). As opposed to purely internal social divisions and patterns of stratification of any society, or external tensions between rival states, the integrity of these divided societies is under constant threat. Political and constitutional difficulties derived from contested notions of national identity, ethno-religious affiliation constantly threaten to tear such nations asunder and make them extremely difficult to govern (Sugden & Bairner, 1995, 1999). South Africa, Sri Lanka, Cyprus, Northern Ireland and Israel are only few examples of deeply divided societies. In this complex situations of political and often military conflict the so called sport-for-peace or sport-for-development programmes try to make small, but nevertheless significant, contributions to the cessation of hostilities, to encourage reconciliation between the conflicting sides, promote co-existence, and bring support through sport and physical activity to victims of conflict. Despite a growing number of these interventions, research in the area is quite limited (Coalter, 2006). Only few of the existing studies on sport-for-peace interventions are grounded in peace-building theories. Based on their experiences in Northern Ireland and Israel, in this chapter the authors seek to make a contribution to the wider academic debate on the development of theoretical models concerning sport interventions in divided societies.

Theoretical Approaches to Intervention in Divided Societies

Considering the complexity of deeply, politically divided societies and how multi-faceted, fractured and fractious the issue of sport and community relations can be (Sugden, 1991; Sugden & Bairner, 1995), much can be learned from a number of peace and conflict resolution activists and theorists who have sought to develop theoretical frameworks to guide practical interventions. Many of these are based on the pioneering work of Paulo Freire (1970) and Adam Curle (1999) who drew on their fieldwork, respectively in South America and the former Yugoslavia, to advocate the notion of 'peace building from below' – a strategy whereby external forms of intervention and mediation concentrate on facilitating the organic empowerment and active participation of local actors and agencies in conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Based on these approaches, Marie Dugan (1996) developed a 'nested paradigm' which is a 'sub-system' approach linking the challenges of conflict resolution to the broader necessity of peace-building. At a sub-system level, a peace-building strategy could be designed to address both the systemic concerns and the problematic issues and relationships. The sub-system approach allows one to shape both grassroots relationships, as well as contribute to wider systematic change. Galtung (1998) identifies the interrelationship between visible and less visible violence. In order to begin conflict transformation and achieve sustainable peace it is necessary to address less visible violence. For Galtung, peace-building requires the '3 Rs': reconstruction of people and places, reconciliation of relationships, and resolution of issues and animosities. Sport interventions can help building positive social networks through relationships which is central to many of the processes underpinning each of the '3 Rs'. Lederach (2005) has theorized a 'web approach' to peace-building. He encourages interventions that explicitly focus on strategic networking or 'web-making', a term used to describe the building of relationships. Web-making is especially relevant for NGOs working in the field of sports. As they are middle-level actors, they are ideally located to bring people together and weave dialogue, ideas and programmes across boundaries. By capitalizing on key social spaces, they are able to spin a web of sustainable relationships. Schirch (2005) has

pioneered the use of rituals as a process to transform identities in and among antagonistic people who have dehumanized each other through a protracted violent conflict. It is essential in peace-building that conflicting groups are able to 're-humanize' their vision of each other as part of a reconciliation process that aims for sustainable co-existence. Rituals, Schirch argues, create spaces and opportunities to 're-humanizing' the other. Rituals can take a variety of forms, from a shared meal, to dancing, to ceremony, to sport participation (Schirch, 2001). He emphasizes that success in the use of ritual is embedded in sensitivity and awareness of culture.

According to the theoretical frameworks mentioned above the extent to which sport can make a contribution to peace-building encompasses: (1) help people 'rehumanize' each other through its ritual ceremonies and ethics of 'fair play' and sportsmanship; (2) help people (re)build relationships in the organisation and conduct of events; and (3) help build webs and relationships at the sub-system level.

Sport – an Unlikely Harbinger of Peace?

There is some limited theoretical support for the palliative role of sport from the academic community. According to Elias and Dunning (1986), for instance, the experience of sport has a moderating effect on social behaviour beyond the playing field itself and as such makes a positive contribution to human social development. Sport, by offering opportunities for the socially approved arousal of moderate excitement, leads people to exercise stricter control over their public behaviour. In short, sport is a "*civilising*" influence, not just at a local or national level, but also between nations. Others are more sceptical, believing variously that sport encourages aggression and violence, racism, sexism homophobia, and political submissiveness (Brohm, 1978; Jarvie, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994, 1996; Messner & Sabo, 1994; Alison, 2000; Young, 2000).

Undoubtedly, sport is a very important element of collective identity, carrying meaning beyond anything intrinsic to the activity itself. Even in (relatively) stable societies, a high degree of social stratification and racial/ethnic heterogeneity means that sporting expressions of shared identities are complex, often ambiguous and can be generative of class distinctions and cross-community animosity and conflict. When there is a lack of shared understanding of what precisely constitutes 'the nation' and/or a legitimately sovereign state, the function of sport in the politics of community identification and celebration is even more problematic. In this regard it is argued that sport is a fiercely contested element of 'civil society' – that area of civic culture and popular participation which stands outside of the formal institutions of state but is nonetheless vital in securing consensus and control for those occupying the commanding heights of 'political society'. Understanding the role that sport can play in the relationship between political and civil society is key in understanding the role it can have in peace processes.

Most plausible is Kidd's view that, in and of itself, sport is of no intrinsic value: it is neither naturally good nor irrevocably bad. It is, like all collective human endeavours, a social construction which is malleable according to the social forces that surround it. Kidd captures this position well when he says:

...caution should be taken not to 'essentialize' sport" and the role it plays in societies – in fact it would be preferable to think of 'sport' as a plurality of forms that have different results in results in different contexts (Kidd, 2007, p. 165).

This is why sport can be claimed and proclaimed in the name of both complementary and contradictory social goals and practices and in this regard context is everything.

A "Critical Left-Realist" Approach to Sport Intervention

Based on the works of the American philosophers and educationalists, William James (1979) and John Dewey (1935), critical pragmatism advocates the science of the possible whereby action and intervention is linked to outcomes which themselves are based upon a critical assessment of what can be achieved within a given set of circumstances. Critical pragmatism places emphasis on theoretical development and refinement through critical, practical, empirical engagement, rather than fixating upon abstract debate and unmoveable theoretical principles. This view recognises that the construction of society is not passively structural, but is an embodied process of individual and collective actions. As Kadlec (2007, p. 3) puts it:

Much is missed when we impose artificial arrests on a world in flux, as not only does this impede our ability to perceive deeper and more nuanced relations of power that constrain and repress, this also stunts our ability to perceive and cultivate new possibilities for change.

The emergence of left-realism within critical criminology can in some ways be viewed as a branch of critical pragmatism. Disillusioned with conventional theories of crime and deviance emanating from the political right and the failure of class and revolution-fixated Marxists to provide the foundation for the development of an agenda for empirical investigation and intervention, scholars developed a new approach which became known as left realism. This new paradigm allowed for the mobilisation of a radical and critical sociological imagination in determining strategies for progressive and pragmatic engagement with social problems with a view to influencing local policies and interventions that could improve the conditions of society's most vulnerable groups (Young, 1997; Taylor, 1999; Downes & Rock, 2003). While left realism developed with particular foci on deviance and crime, a similar form of 'praxis' has been advocated in the context of sports activism by Marxist scholar, Ian McDonald (2002), who argues that rather than being satisfied with armchair critique 'a radical sociology of sport should be seeking to assist the reconfiguration of the culture of sport by intervening against dominant relations of power'. This kind of 'critical left-realism' can be applied equally to a range of sport-for-development programmes, including those which focus on fractured community relations and social conflict in divided societies.

Sport and Human Rights

Of course, even with strategies based on critical left-realism, engagement in social activism of any kind requires those involved to have a starting position and defined goals to work towards. This can be a minefield, particularly when working in contexts of deep division and conflict when the antagonistic groups and social fractions that are brought together espouse antithetical ideologies and mutually exclusive goals. When this is the case it is vitally important to maintain a neutral stance with regard to those conflicting goals while at the same time articulating a rationale for social and political intervention that does not expose those engaged in this work to the charge of cultural imperialism, religious proselytism, and/or hegemonic normalisation and legitimisation. Instead of reverting to religious and/or ideological doctrine or falling prey to the inertia of cultural relativism, as Donnelly and Kidd (2000, p. 135) have argued that:

Those of us committed to opportunities for humane sport and physical activity ought to resort more systematically to the strategy of establishing, publicizing and drawing upon the charters, declarations and covenants that enshrine codes of entitlement and conduct.

This begs the question, which ‘codes of entitlement’? The United Nations Charter for Human Rights is one of the few touchstones for governing activism that has (near) universal approval Article 26 of the U.N. 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

A fuller discussion of the role and value of human rights-type testaments in the framing of sport for development interventions can be found in Fred Coulter’s contribution to this volume. As he and others have argued, however, abstract paper declarations and accompanying rhetoric are useless

without concrete intervention (Coalter, 2006, 2009; Fraser, 2008): but how and where to intervene?

To begin with, the notion of ‘peace’ is itself an illusive and problematic concept embracing a variety of meanings from ‘the absence of war’ to ‘a state of equilibrium and tranquillity’ and many things in between. In addition, peace ‘processes’ are messy affairs: hugely complex enterprises that move forwards or backwards according to conditions prevalent in the transcending social and political order. Usually they are driven by activities and actors in political society. However, if there are major social and cultural impediments, ‘road maps to peace’ that take account of the political sphere alone are doomed to failure. Changes of heart and mind do not ordinarily take place because of political initiatives. Peace is only possible when significant proportions of ordinary people are ready for and open to conflict resolution. By way of illustration, politicians may be in the driving seat but for the ‘peace bus’ to get anywhere meaningful along its road map there must be passengers willing to climb on board. This comes gradually through social and cultural engagement in everyday life.

A Model for Sport Intervention in Divided Societies

How then can ‘critical left-realism’ be applied to fractured community relations and social conflict in divided societies and what role can sport play in this situations? The challenge is to discover ways to join up specific grass-roots cultural interventions with more broadly influential policy communities and those elements of political society that hold the keys to peace. The following diagram¹ draws on critical left-realism to depict how this can be achieved:

¹ The fieldwork that has most inspired this model concerns the evaluation of Football for Peace, a child centred and sport based co-existence project for Jewish and Arab communities in Northern Israel. Further information about this project can be found at www.football4peace.eu

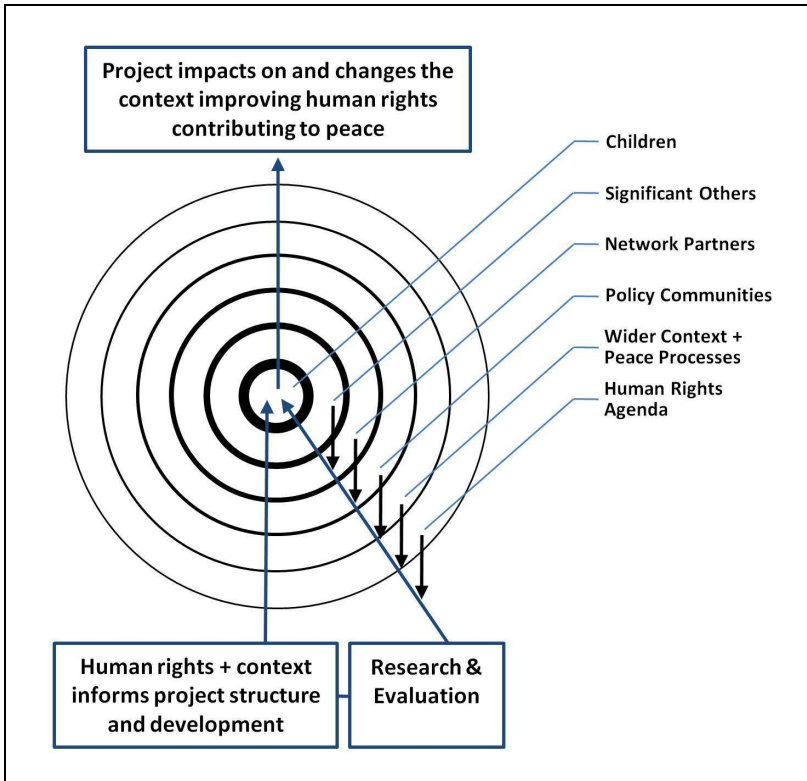


Figure 1: Critical pragmatic-realism and a Human Rights Approach to Sport Intervention in Divided Societies (a version of this diagram first appeared in Sugden, 2009, p. 8)

The two outer circles represent a human rights agenda and the prevailing transcending social and political context, including the peace process. Taken together they provide a framework upon which to make pragmatic judgements about the structure of the intervention and its development goals. The two inner circles represent the intervention itself, consisting first and foremost of children or participants from different communities, surrounded by adult volunteer coaches and significant others (relatives, teachers, community leaders, etc.) from represented local communities, and the external volunteers. The nature of the structure, organisation, management and delivery of activities and encounters taking place within

these two circles is crucial in determining the outcome of any such sporting intervention. In between, working from the middle outwards, the next circle comprises representatives from a network of institutional partners through whom ideas and findings emanating from the project can be articulated within the wider policy community for sport. This in turn may influence events taking shape in the transcending social and political context and have an impact on the human rights situation not only of those directly involved in the project but also further afield. Each level of the process is subject to research and evaluation and these findings are fed back to inform interventions modification, growth, and redevelopment. The different thicknesses and permeability of the concentric circles is to indicate that, just like a stone dropped into a still pool of water, the ripple effect of an intervention dissipates as we move further from the centre where the impact is more obviously felt and more easily measured.

In many ways this model resembles the aforementioned 'web approach' to peace building whereby starting with a small focus the strategy is to build networks of relationships among individuals, communities and institutions around the delivery, development and expansion of that focus (Lederach, 2005). Like a real spider's web, the more threads there are, the thicker they get and the more anchor points they have, will make them more robust enabling them better to withstand potential damage and more amenable to repair should that damage occur. While the above figure is a structural representation, in reality it is an embodied process and the success of any endeavour will depend on the animation and agency provided by key actors operating across and between each level of activity. This reminds us that, in situations where an outside organisation is facilitating the initiative, it is important to share the commitment, responsibilities and ownership, building organically toward peace and reconciliation. The parties involved and particularly the local partners should be consulted in all important evaluations, decision making planning and implementing processes.

Conclusion

In his critical review of the sport-in-development 'movement' Coalter, drawing on Pawson (2006) concludes:

Rather than seeking simply to assert sport's almost magical properties, or commission 'research' which proves 'success' (however defined), what is required is a developmental approach based on the de-reification of 'sport' and a concentration on understanding the social processes and mechanisms which *might* lead to desired outcomes for *some* participants or *some* organisations in *certain circumstances* (Coalter, 2009, p. 31).

It can be concluded that if handled sensitively, and in keeping with the spirit of the theoretical frameworks mentioned above, sport can make some proportionate contribution to co-existence, conflict resolution, and peace. However, more research is demanded in order to both build and share the body of knowledge which will help to better understand the impact of sport interventions and how they can successfully be implemented. The research dimension has a two-way dynamic: ongoing learning about the transcending social and political context which is used in the pragmatic design and development of the programme of intervention; and detailed evaluation of the impact of the project at each level, up to and including, were possible, tracking its influence on the transcending social and political context.

Sport alone will not change the world. Neither will it be a key factor in any peace processes, but doing nothing may no longer be an option. Using sport for intervention in divided societies means to take active steps towards mutual understanding and conflict resolution on a grassroots level and in doing so to facilitate and complement peace processes on a bigger political scale. This can be achieved through a critical left-realist approach to the sport intervention which is framed by universal human rights and values and a commitment to social justice.

References

- Allison, L. (2000). Sport and Nationalism. In J. Coakley & E. Dunning (Eds.), *Handbook of Sport Studies, Handbook of Sport Studies* (pp. 344–355). London: Sage.
- Brohm, J. M. (1978). *Sport: A Prisoner of Measured Time*. London: Ink Links.
- Coalter, F. (2006). *Sport-in-Developments: A Monitoring and Evaluation Manual*. Retrieved August 01, 2009, from http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/pages/monitoring_and_evaluation/.

- Coalter, F. (2009). The Politics of Sport for Development: Limited Focus Programmes and Broad Gauge Problems. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, (forthcoming).
- Curle, A. (1999). *To Tame the Hydra: Undermining the Cultures of Violence*. Oxford: Charlbury.
- Dewey, J. (1935). *Liberalism and Social Action*. New York: Putnam.
- Donnelly, P., & Kidd, B. (2000). Human Rights in Sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(2), 131–148.
- Downes, D., & Rock, P. (2003). *Understanding Deviance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dugan, M. A. (1996). A Nested Theory of Conflict. *A Leadership Journal: Women in Leadership - Sharing the Vision*, 1(1), 9–20.
- Elias, N., & Dunning, E. (1986). *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fraser, N. (2008, October 21). Dignity and Hope too much to ask for? *The Observer*, (Review, Human Rights Special) 6–8.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Galtung, J. (1998). *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*. New York: Sage.
- Hargreaves, J. (1994). *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, J. (1996). *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Cultural Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain*. Cambridge: Polity.
- James, W. (1979). *Pragmatism*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jarvie, G. (1991). *Sport, Racism and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge.
- Kadlec, A. (2007). *Dewey's Critical Pragmatism*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Kidd, B. (2007). Peace, Sport and Development. In P. Donnelly (Ed.), *Literature Reviews on Sport for Development and Peace*, (pp. 158–195). Retrieved August 01, 2009, from <http://iwg.sportanddev.org/data/htmleditor/file/Lit.%20Reviews/literature%20review%20SDP.pdf>.
- Lederach, J. (2005). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McDonald, I. (2002). Critical Social Research and Political Intervention: Moralistic versus Radical Approaches. In J. Sugden & A. Tomlinson (Eds.), *Power Games. A Critical Sociology of Sport*, (pp. 100-116). London: Routledge.
- Messner, M., & Sabo, D. (1994). *Sex, violence and power in sport: Rethinking masculinity*. Freedom CA: Crossing Press.
- Pawson, R. (2006). *Evidence Based Policy: A Realist Perspective*. London: Sage.
- Schirch, L. (2001). Ritual reconciliation: Transforming Identity/Reframing Conflict. In M. Abu-Nimer (Ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and*

- Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, (pp. 145–161). New York: Lexington Books.
- Schirch, L. (2005). *Ritual and Symbol in Peace Building*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Sugden, J. (1991). Belfast United: encouraging cross-community relations through sport in Northern Ireland. *The Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 15(1), 59–80.
- Sugden, J. & Bairner, A. (1995). *Sport and Sectarianism in Divided Ireland*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- Sugden, J. (2009). Sport Intervention in Divided Societies: Pragmatic Realism and a Human Rights Approach. *Play Fair! The official publication of the European Fair Play Movement*, 17(2008-2, 2009-1), Academic Supplement, Issue No 7, 6-8.
- Sugden, J., & Bairner, A. (1999). *Sport in Divided Societies*. Aachen: Meyer & Meyer.
- Taylor, I. (1999). *Crime in Context: A Critical Criminology of Market Societies*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Young, J. (1997). Left Realism: Radical in its Analysis: Realist in its Policy. In M. Maguire, R. Morgan & R. Reiner (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, (pp. 473–498). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young, K. (2000). Sport and Violence. In J. Coakley & E. Dunning (Eds.), *Handbook of Sport Studies*, (pp. 382–407). London: Sage.