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# Sport for Development and Peace: Current Perspectives of Research

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## Abstract

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is an international movement that began in the 2000s with the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) and is currently continuing around the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2015–2030, driven by international organizations such as UNESCO. Often located in an international development context, organizations and associations use sport as a vehicle to reach several social and humanitarian missions (e.g., education, social cohesion, health, reintegration, diplomacy, and peace). This chapter presents the origins and objectives of the SDP, but it also looks at current research in the field. Since 2010, studies have significantly increased in the field around four main areas (macrosociological, field explorations, program management and evaluation, and literature reviews). This chapter also provides illustrations of SDP research projects, axis of tensions between practice and theory, and perspectives for future research in the field.

**Keywords:** sport for development, sport for peace, sport for education, sport for health, international

## 1. Introduction

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is an international movement that began in the 2000s to meet the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015). Several local, regional, national and international organizations are currently continuing to implement sports projects in an international development context to reach the United Nations' sustainable development goals (2015–2030).

This chapter aims to present the various origins and objectives that are being used around the SDP. It then focuses on current research on SDP, providing illustrations of research projects conducted in the field. Finally, this chapter offers perspectives for future research in this domain.

### 1.1 Origins and history of the SDP movement

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is not a new phenomenon contrary to what one might think. In 1894, Pierre de Coubertin had already considered the reconstruction of the modern Olympic Games to bring nations closer together around sports disciplines. He said “I remained convinced that sport is one of the most forceful elements of peace and I am confident in its future action” [1]. But the use of sport to serve development, peace, or diplomatic interests in the

contemporary world is more due to the work of Mandela, who said “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does” [2]. Indeed, the South African leader decided to use the power of sport during the 1995 Rugby World Cup to fight apartheid and unite the South African people. According to him, “Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers” [2].

The United Nations (UN) took a step further toward the recognition of sport and its diplomatic, integrative, educational, or peace-building potential by signing a resolution in favor of the use of sport as a tool for development and peace-building among peoples, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2003. This vote also led to the reaffirmation in 2015 of the 1978 UNESCO International Charter for Physical Education and Sport. The prevalence of SDP projects was so high that the UN has recognized its potential by setting up a specific instance between 2008 and 2017 (United Nations Office for Sport and Development and Peace; UNOSDP) through which it has initiated a large number of projects, particularly in Central America and West Africa [3]. This office had three main roles: to encourage dialogue, to establish SDP collaborations and partnerships, and to support international sports organizations, civil society, private sector, and media.

## **1.2 Definition and objectives of the SDP**

SDP projects have been developing in recent years around the world. They have been defined as “the intentional use of sport, physical activity and play to achieve specific development objectives in low- and middle-income countries and disadvantaged communities in high-income areas” [4], which includes “all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, indigenous sports and games” [4, 5]. These definitions have since been widely used by many SDP actors and several researchers [5–7].

In these initiatives, sport is presented as a lever for integration or social reintegration in developing countries or in conflict-affected areas [7, 8]. For example, soccer matches are used between two enemy sides to help rebuild relationships. In addition to its positive impact on health, sport is now recognized for having a number of other benefits such as the prevention of violence or doping, awareness of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and also as a medium for instilling respect for opponents and rules, teamwork, sportsmanship, determination, and discipline, in youth [7, 8]. These fundamental principles could also be transferred to the social life of person according to some organizations that value them [9]. The UNOSDP [10] indicates other elements related to the use of sport as a lever for development and peace, among others:

- a. Sport is a powerful tool with unique power to attract, mobilize, and inspire;
- b. Sport embodies issues of participation, inclusion, and citizenship by its very own nature;
- c. It represents human values such as respect for the opponent, acceptance of restrictive rules, teamwork, and equity;
- d. Sport is used in a very wide range of situations to serve development and peace-building as an integrated instrument in short-term emergency humanitarian aid activities or in long-term development cooperation projects [11, 12].

Finally, sport has benefits such as individual development, health promotion and disease prevention, gender equality, social integration, peace-building or conflict prevention/resolution and post-disaster/trauma assistance [13, 14]. UNESCO published a report in 2016 on the power of the values of sport that reinforces this vision, and then UNOSDP published a document that shows the articulation of using sport to support each of the new Sustainable Development Goals 2015–2030 [10]. From a development perspective, the focus is most of the time on mass sport and not elite sport [15, 16]. In a development context, sport generally includes a wide range of activities adapted to people of all ages and abilities, with an emphasis on the positive values of sport [10]. Sport is used to reach the most needy, including refugees; child soldiers; victims of conflict and natural disasters; poor people; people with disabilities; and victims of racism, stigma, and discrimination [14, 17, 18].

## **2. Current researches on SDP**

Beyond descriptions of SDP programs and contributions from international organizations, researchers examined the SDP field and analyze the benefits of these programs on individual development, health promotion and disease prevention, gender equality promotion, social integration, peace-building or conflict prevention and resolution, and assistance after a disaster or trauma, among others [13, 14]. At the moment, four main types of research that have been conducted around SDP can be identified: (1) macrosociological studies on the positive attributes of SDP; (2) exploratory field and case studies; (3) studies on the management and evaluation of SDP programs; and (4) literature reviews on SDP.

### **2.1 Macrosociological studies on the SDP**

First, researchers are conducting a large number of macrosociological studies to question the so-called positive attributes of sport by raising its potential abuses [11, 12, 19–21]. For example, Kidd [14, 22] conducted extensive literature reviews describing the landscape of the SDP movement. According to the author, SDP initiatives were motivated by athlete activism, the reaction to the fall of apartheid and made openings possible by the end of the Cold War, the neoliberal emphasis on entrepreneurship and mass mobilizations for “Make Poverty History,” as part of a major focus of UN political development and the SDP International Working Group [14, 22]. The current results of these global studies show that despite the potential benefits of sport, these positive social impacts do not automatically accumulate. Achieving positive impacts require professional and socially responsible interventions that are adapted to the social and cultural context, prioritize development objectives, and are carefully designed to be inclusive [10, 17, 23]. Nevertheless, some authors note the lack of scientific literature regarding the understanding of the specific mechanisms by which sport can foster development and peace among participants [9, 24, 25].

### **2.2 Exploratory field and case studies on the SDP**

Second, some researchers have used several exploratory methodologies to conduct field case studies [26–28]. For example, Oxford [27] focused on the social inclusion of young Colombian women through football, a traditionally very male sport. The researcher conducted a 6-month ethnographic study in Colombian neighborhoods of the SDP organization to explore the social, cultural, and historical complexities surrounding the safe practice of girls’ sports. Whitley et al. [28]

attempted to question key players in SDP about their experiences and expertise in the field. The study provided a better understanding of the limit, the lack of efficiency and equity in practices as well as a concrete impact that they felt was unclear. The study concludes with a list of recommendations to improve SDP field work, research partnerships, and evaluation collaborations in a more rigorous way. Finally, some authors such as Gadais et al. also aim to develop research methods adapted to the SDP field, which is often unstable, complex, or unsafe [26]. The authors intended to implement analyses and methods from a distance and on the field to better understand SDP organizations and their needs in order to better support them in their work.

### **2.3 Management and evaluation of SDP programs**

Third, researchers are also interested in questions of program evaluation and management of SDP activities. On the one hand, SDP organizations are frequently approached by the funding agencies to conduct SDP program evaluation studies. This is a classic way of observing the impact of sport on social change [29–31]. The evaluation studies examined various aspects of the missions and paradigms of SDP projects [30, 32, 33]. A literature review conducted by Levermore [30] revealed three major limitations to SDP evaluation studies: (a) monitoring and evaluation are insufficient; (b) they are conducted with acclaimed programs; and (c) they tend to use a positivist logical framework (Levermore [30]). Levermore concluded his analysis by stressing the need for evaluations that can take into account the diversity of SDP projects, some of which have unclear objectives or missing justifications. Indeed, their objectives and strategies remain unclear and questionable in relation to fully implemented program evaluation protocols [30, 34]. Programs should be evaluated using solid methodological documentation on logical frameworks and critical participatory approaches to try to apply these approaches to specific case studies or to consider their use in the context of a particular sporting event [30]. On the other hand, some researchers aim to strengthen the managerial aspects of SDP projects to improve their functioning, management, or implementation mechanisms [34–37]. Often, the overall idea is to build connections between the theory generated by macrosociological studies and field case studies. Sport management specialists have begun to critically review and evaluate SDP initiatives, and they are now more strategically planned and pedagogically solid than before. For example, Schulenkorf [37] reviewed the main achievements of sport management research and classifies current research under four headings: (a) SDP programming and design; (b) sustainable management and capacity-building; (c) creation and optimization of impacts and outcomes; and (d) conceptual/theoretical advances. Finally, he suggested that future research could focus on the managerial concepts of leadership, entrepreneurship, and design thinking to maximize the potential of sport (management) to contribute to desired, innovative, and sustainable outcomes for community development.

### **2.4 Literature reviews on SDP**

Fourth, three literature reviews have been conducted on SDP. Until 2016, there was little research to synthesize research on SDP. There was no mapping to know what projects existed and to have an overview of the situation at the global level. In 2017, the review conducted by Svensson and Woods [38] addressed this gap by providing a systematic overview of SDP organizations. While the precise locations of action of SDP organizations remain largely unknown, this review has focused these efforts and on the physical and sporting activities used in the programs. It provided

an opportunity to review the practice of SDPs in order to provide an overview of the current state of the field: 955 entities involved in SDP practices were identified based on a systematic review of 3138 organizational entries in the SDP databases. The majority of organizations operate programs in Africa, but many are present in Europe, North America, Asia, and Latin America, with more than 80% of them having their headquarters in the same region. Education, livelihoods, and health emerged as the most common themes, while disability and gender were less represented. A total of 32 types of sports have been identified, one-third is only based on football (soccer). In relation to positive youth development (PYD) through sport, Jones et al. [39] conducted an analysis of how sport is a mechanism for achieving various development objectives. The review shows that this link between sport and development is not inherent and depends not only on a variety of programs and activities but also on contextual factors. The positive potential of sport does not develop automatically; it requires a professional and socially responsible intervention, adapted to the social and cultural context [17, 23, 30]. Finally, Schulenkorf et al. [8] conducted an integrated analysis of the literature on sport for development to provide a comprehensive and holistic picture of the sector. Despite the significant increase in published research in the field of sport for development, there has been no attempt to rigorously review and synthesize scientific contributions in this field so far. The paper shows an upward trend in scientific publications since 2000, with an emphasis on social and educational outcomes related to youth sport,

Thematics	Descriptions
Sport and disability	Sport and disability focuses on research related to sport as a vehicle for the development, access, inclusion, and human rights of people with disabilities. This section encourages critical thinking and diversity of perspectives, welcoming research at the intersection of theory and practice.
Sport and education	Sport and education presents research and case studies related to interventions that use sport to advance education, youth development, and life skills. Rather than focusing on sport education, this section discusses the role of sport in achieving the academic and social outcomes of youth.
Sport and gender	The theme on sport and gender presents research and case studies related to interventions using sport to promote gender equality, challenge gender norms, and empower girls and women in disadvantaged environments.
Sport and health	Sport and health presents a wide range of outcomes associated with physical, mental, and social well-being. This is the effect of SDP programs on the risk factors for communicable and non-communicable diseases, including the direct effect of sports programs on physical activity. It also examines the role that sport can play in preventive education and health promotion interventions.
Sport and livelihoods	The theme on sport and livelihoods presents research and case studies on interventions using sport to improve the livelihoods of disadvantaged people, from programs focusing on vocational skills training to rehabilitation and social enterprise.
Sport and peace	Sport and peace focuses on projects that use sport as a vehicle for reconciliation and peace-building. The concept of peace is broadly defined to include connotations of personal, community, and social well-being, as well as the absence of conflict and tension between groups. In particular, this section examines the possibilities of creating peace between individuals and groups in socially, culturally, or ethnically divided societies.
Sport and social cohesion	The sport and social cohesion theme includes projects in the areas of community empowerment, social inclusion/integration, and diversity management. It focuses on social impact assessments and capacity-building initiatives that can lead to social cohesion, skills enhancement, and overall community development.

**Table 1.**  
*Research themes related to the SDP field.*

with football (soccer) being the most common activity. The vast majority of SDP research has been conducted at the community level, where qualitative approaches dominate (70% of conceptual and qualitative methods). The authors also noted an interesting paradox regarding the geographical contexts of the studies: a majority of the projects are carried out in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but 74% of the study fields and 90% of the SDP authors are based in North America, Europe, and Australia.

## **2.5 SDP research themes**

According to the Journal of Sport for Development, several research themes have been identified in relation to SDP (Table 1).

## **3. Illustrations of SDP research projects**

### **3.1 Education, social inclusion, and environment: Bel Avenir (Madagascar)**

Bel Avenir (BA) is a Malagasy NGO working in the southern region of Madagascar, through social projects, focusing on “education as a vehicle of development.” BA carries out activities in various fields of education for young disadvantaged populations in Madagascar, particularly in Toliara and Fianarantsoa. The field of education includes: (a) formal education in two schools, (b) non-formal education including a school of sports and a music and arts center, among others, (c) awareness-raising projects, such as international inter-school exchanges, or publications of Malagasy stories. Thus, the organization offers a holistic approach to education for development and the SDP proposed by its school of sports, which is only one of its various services. The country is severely affected by extreme poverty, malnutrition, severe hygiene and health problems, child labor problems (mining or prostitution), corruption in society, and frequent political crises. In this sense, BA works in a complex context, most often difficult, unstable, and sometimes insecure, where reality could be ephemeral. BA is finally a member of the international network Agua de Coco, based in eight countries, and mobilized around children’s rights.

Two research projects are currently running to support and strengthen BA’s projects. The first study attempts to develop a methodology that uses the Actantial Model [40] and the Snakes and Ladders [7] to analyze and understand the NGO’s situation from a distance [41]. By using the NGO’s annual reports and comparing them to reality, the researchers are developing a methodology to verify whether a research can be successfully conducted in collaboration with the local organization. A second study, focusing on the needs of the NGO, aims to measure the effects of sports (school of sports) and artistic activities (arts and music center) [42] in order to understand their consequences on the psychological and social well-being of disadvantaged youth. This research also aims to strengthen monitoring and evaluation tools for young people and to set up a psychological unit to monitor young people in their development.

### **3.2 Training of life and sports coaches—Pour 3 points (Canada)**

The non-profit organization Pour 3 points (P3P), established in Montreal, Canada, since 2013, uses sport as a tool to promote the development of youth in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. More specifically, P3P offers a 2-year life coaching training program for young Canadians who are interested in

coaching and are willing to make a long-term commitment to the program and to disadvantaged communities. Their role is to learn how to support young people in their lives and to help them to avoid dropping out of primary or secondary school, and to support those who experience learning problems or have serious behavioral problems. By being well trained, coaches can help young people develop the skills they need to succeed in school and in their life. After parents, coaches are the most influential adults in the lives of young athletes according to P3P. This influence is felt not only in the teaching of the game but also in the teaching of life.

Coaches are recruited at the time of enrolment in the training program, based on the skills required to become life coaches while becoming sport coach in one of the organization's partner schools. Each year, the program recruits approximately 15 coaches who participate in a 4-day training retreat, five peer discussion circles, five formal training sessions, and three personal evaluations each year, all under the supervision of a development consultant.

Several research projects have been conducted with P3P. A first study conducted on the P3P training program [43], examined coaches' perceptions based on a humanist coaching workshop they received in their training. The results revealed that coaches perceive positive results in autonomy, communication, skills, motivation, and willingness to help their athletes' teammates. A second study was conducted to strengthen the organization's logic model to identify indicators for subsequent program evaluation. The results showed differences in the understanding of the program between key stakeholders. Recommendations from research allowed P3P administrators to reframe their theory of change [44]. This study was designed in collaboration with P3P administrators to help them improve their logic model and prepare their program evaluation. The idea for this research came directly from the P3P administrators and the researchers acted as facilitators.

#### **4. Axis of tensions between practice and theory of SDP**

Several tensions can be noted between the needs of practitioners and their realities on the field with the possibilities of SDP research. The aim is to identify them and then propose a plan for action and research (**Table 2**).

First, we can observe a first axis of tension around program evaluation. On the one hand, SDP organizations are often asked by their donors to conduct program evaluations. This allows them to justify the rationale for their projects and to demonstrate the effectiveness of their actions. However, if these evaluations are not well planned, negative results can be found that compromise projects. SDP organizations often call on researchers to help them conduct their program evaluation because it is a time-consuming process. On the other hand, researchers need precise and specific criteria to conduct a relevant program evaluation. Unfortunately, few projects are able to provide evaluators with these very important indicators to conduct a fair and meaningful evaluation.

Second, SDP projects are rarely perfect in their planning and implementation because they face limited resources and highly changing contexts. As well, it is necessary for administrators to make constant adjustments to improve the implementation and realization of their projects. While SDP projects are criticized by researchers in demonstrating several nonsense between the aims and actions of the project, it remains true that researchers would also benefit from offering a support and collaboration service to try to solve the field difficulties encountered by the actors.

Thirdly, another axis of tension can be detected on the managerial aspects of SDP projects. On the one hand, the administrations of organizations are

SDP practice	Axis of tensions	SDP theory or research
<b>Practical needs of SDP</b>		<b>Needs for research</b>
Evaluate effects or impacts of the SDP projects	<i>Program evaluation</i>	Need for indicators/criteria to conduct evaluation
Projects are imperfect and need be improve	<i>Critic/support</i>	Need to critic projects but also support actors and organizations
Reinforce administration team and management work	<i>Management</i>	Need to reinforce management elements of projects
What is the finality/use/form of SDP?	<i>Finality/use</i>	Need to identify the types of SDP and needs about thematics
What is the qualification/training of SDP personal/staff	<i>Training/workshop</i>	Need for research on training
Reality field could be unsecure, unstable, complex, dangerous	<i>Method/tools</i>	Need to improve quality of research and have adapted tools for investigation

**Table 2.**  
*Tensions between practice and theory on SDP.*

increasingly developing with their projects. As they do so, they must strengthen their structure and organization, which is often dependent on the financial and human resources at their disposal. On the other hand, researchers have started to conduct several studies to better understand the managerial aspects of SDP organizations, and it would be relevant if these studies could strengthen the organizational aspects of SDP projects which often do not have much support.

Fourthly and for the time being, few differences have been made in SDP projects between those aimed at elite sport, competition, physical education, physical activity for leisure, or another theme such as health education through SDP. In our opinion, there is a very important tension about the purpose, use, and form that the SDP can represent and be truly in field projects. While several texts have been written to attempt to highlight these elements, few studies have attempted to go further in understanding what the SDP really is. This research seems essential to us to make the difference between the various forms of SDP and their multiple uses. This will eventually make it possible to identify new themes to investigate around the SDP.

Fifth, there are currently many questions around who are the people who work with the populations in SDP, what are their training or qualifications? While the research strongly recommends the use of sport supervised by qualified and trained personnel, few studies have focused on the profiles and the training of those people who work in the field every day. On this axis of tension, research must propose areas of response to strengthen field actions. And on this point, it is therefore necessary for researchers to go down to the field to see and understand the reality of the projects.

Finally, SDP fields are often dangerous and unsafe as they are located in humanitarian crisis or international development situations. These situations can change in a few minutes and working in this environment is therefore extremely unstable. They also face very complex realities in which it is necessary to take into account as many elements as possible in order to operate. Faced with the reality of this type of terrain, researchers must adapt their work. In particular, research methods and tools must evolve to adapt to a changing reality and to conditions that are sometimes very inappropriate for conducting a traditional research project. These adaptations are necessary to improve the quality of research in SDP's fields.

## 5. Future research perspectives on the SDP

SDP research now offers a better understanding of the movement and allows practitioners to better orient themselves in their use of sport for development. However, the research also raised a set of concrete issues for field projects and some questions remain unanswered at this time. Following the results of the latest studies, six main areas of work should be considered to guide further research on SDP.

1. Provide a space for reflection (criticize vs. support): current research is often critical of SDP projects and too rarely supports or improves the action of actors in the field. However, it seems important to strengthen the work of the actors while continuing to question their actions and achievements. In this sense, the researcher must offer a space for joint reflection with the actors in the field;
2. Use a collaborative or partnership approach to conduct research (be a facilitator): one of the roles of research is to help solve practitioners' problems. Specifically in the domain of SDP, field actors express difficulties and needs that must be listened in order to co-construct research projects. In this sense, the researcher should act as a facilitator to support the projects and the work of the actors while continuing to criticize them in his/her support;
3. Starting from the concrete angle of the field: to be able to fully understand the nuances of the context and/or the environment of the SDP actors, researchers are invited to be as close as possible to reality, and to step into the field as possible. This element is essential to build a relationship of trust with the actors to help them by understanding their background and endings as much as possible;
4. Seek interdisciplinary research: SDP themes are complex and often overlap with scientific knowledge from several research fields (e.g., sociology, psychology, and education). Researchers from several scientific disciplines must be open and work together as much as possible, in order to have the most precise and complex understanding of the phenomena that are difficult to capture from a single angle. Research must provide a better understanding of the multiple issues and the complexity of the issues, problems, and realities;
5. Propose better quality of research: it also seems relevant to us to question how to carry out better quality research on ephemeral or unstable fields, when access is considered complex and dangerous. This requires, among other things, the development of methods able to adapt and respond to the requirements of the domain as well as to the various fields of investigation;
6. Clarify the uses of SDP: finally, it seems essential to us to question the type of sport for development and peace that is used in the various contexts of SDP. More specifically, is it competitive sport, physical education, physical activity, health education, or any other form? On this subject, Hills et al. [45] had opened up interesting avenues for reflection by mentioning sport + and + sport [46], sport for social inclusion [24], sport as a universal language [1, 24], sport as a diversion [47], as a replacement or alternative [48], as a hook [49, 50] or for life skills [51, 52], among others.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to present the field of SDP, its origins, its evolution, the research that has been carried out so far, as well as illustrations to give the reader a better idea of what “Sport for Development and Peace” is. However, answering the question “what is the SDP?” is not easy given that this field is vast, complex, and constantly changing in practice.

In conclusion, three main elements can be remembered: (1) a large number of projects and programs have been developed since the 2000s, mainly in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, with football being the main sport [8, 38]. Other various forms of physical activity and sports (e.g., physical education, competitive sport, and leisure activities) have also been used in order to achieve development or peace and related topics; (2) research on SDP has intensified since 2010 [8]; and it can be grouped into four main categories of studies: macrosociological, exploratory field studies, managerial and program evaluation, and literature reviews; (3) several challenges and tensions remain to be resolved in order to accomplish quality research that will truly help and support actors from the field who use SDP.

We can finally return to the proposals of Baron de Coubertin and Mandela, who were very visionary in using sport as a vehicle for development and as a means of establishing peace. Because today, many organizations such as the United Nations prefers to rely on the universal potential of sport or other non-formal recreation to resolve conflicts and educate future generations, rather than traditional institutions such as schools or governments.

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## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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