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**TO SPORTIFY OR NOT TO SPORTIFY?**  
**Unpacking the profiles of sport and lifestyle initiatives for  
sustainable social development**

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## Abstract

**Background:** Sport is often perceived as inherently positive for sustainable development. This widespread assumption is however found to be quite normative, and the standardization of its boundaries dangerously naive. The lack of contextual specificity across the dominant schools of thought calls for a more comprehensive analysis of what different activities entail in different contexts.

**Purpose:** This study examines the field of sport for development through a critical lens. Different initiatives using traditional mainstream sports and lifestyle sports, seeking an array of social development objectives, are structurally and systematically unpacked, hence uncovering the attributes that shape the achievements and challenges of the projects.

**Methods:** Through a qualitative approach, six organisations operating in varying scopes and environments were interviewed using a semi-structured approach.

**Results:** The investigation pinpoints the encompassing theme of sportification as a force of change influencing the internal and external dynamics of lifestyle sports as well as traditional mainstream sports, though to a lesser extent. Several important issues emerge from the investigation, such as how the notions of focus, networks and the fundamental benefits and challenges underlying each type of sport can materialize into concrete impacts on social development.

**Conclusions:** A fine balance of sportification is necessary in order to gain the leverage and capital required to access the opportunities presented by organized sport yet without excessively compromising the innate social qualities of the activity.

**Key words:** *sport-for-development, social sustainability, lifestyle sport, mainstream sport, sportification, networks, identity.*

## Foreword

The idea for this study by D’Arcy & Barcenilla emerged as a combination of both our areas of interest with the topic of sport for development as a central guiding principle. Our different sporting backgrounds, one situated in the more organized sports and the other within more informal lifestyle activities, meet at a crosspoint where the objectives of social development are particularly compelling to us. We take this chance to acknowledge the insightful guidance of our supervisor, Kutte Jönsson, along with the rest of the Malmö University staff and everyone who has contributed to the shaping of this study. We are also deeply grateful for the six participants who volunteered their time to provide us with great content for our research.

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# 1. Introduction

Sport and organised physical activity have traditionally been perceived as a powerful tool for development at various levels. These taken-for-granted assumptions have taken over the schools of thought across academic establishment and popular belief in wider society. However, the academic field of sport for development and peace has been growing evermore contentious and nuanced in recent years. Foundational scholars such as Coalter (2010) and Coakley (2015) have raised concern to the lack of critical scrutiny levied at sport. Contemporary scholarly tendencies increasingly posit that sport does not have a fundamentally positive and pure essence, nor that positive changes will befall those who engage in it (Coalter, 2010). The previously unquestioned inherent benefits of sport in achieving sustainable development have therefore shifted the issue towards a challenged conundrum. Thus the need for a more critical approach in devising development through sport initiatives is clearly felt within the academic community.

In efforts to tackle this predicament, this study strives to determine the extent to which different types of sport, and underlying levels of sportification, can potentially successfully achieve social development through harmonized initiatives, if at all. Sport has long been attributed with many areas of social development, including peace building, cultural integration, spatial integration, community building and female empowerment to name a few. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) 2030 agenda serve as a comprehensive benchmark for what development projects should be aiming to accomplish (United Nations, 2021). Hence this study uses the SDGs as a point of reference for the categorisation of objectives in terms of the underlying social and cultural parameters.

However, the wide range of sustainable development objectives is not reflected in the activities used. The choice of sport has commonly evolved around traditional mainstream sports, pinpointing notions of hypercompetition, institutionalisation and commercialisation amongst others. Yet despite the deep-rooted uncontested position of these sports in society-wide systems and attitudes, there has been an undeniable surge of lifestyle sport capitalization for development. Lifestyle sports are regarded as avant-garde, oppositional, hedonistic and central to the element of free choice, and they hold a certain artistic sensibility

through a lack of competition (Wheaton, 2004). The progression of these more informal activities has gained more traction in recent years with social initiatives increasingly open to using skating, parkour and surfing for example. It is interesting, not least important, to analyse how the opposite ends of the spectrum operate and to compare the subsequent differences between social dynamics, identity, stakeholder influence, financial structures, adaptability and autonomy amongst other determinants of achievement.

Sport can be classified into many categories, and encompasses a vast array of attributes. The Global Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF) defines sport as a physical activity that, amongst several other requirements, includes an element of competition, does not rely on luck and does not pose an undue risk to the participant (GAISF, 2020). Further classifications could, for example, divide sports into individual or team sports and their scope into sport-for-all or elite sport. Lifestyle sports have traditionally centered around an individualistic, grassroots, non-competitive and unorganized philosophy, with several values unfamiliar to mainstream sports such as extreme risk-taking (Booth, 2004). Many of the notions underpinned in the foundations of lifestyle sport hence directly contradict the very basis of formal institutionalized sport ethos. Throughout this paper, those sports that are heavily regulated, competitive, institutionalized, commercialized, mediatized and fit into the formal organized structures and systems of sport are referred to as traditional or mainstream sports.

There are unique challenges and opportunities presented by each kind of sport, and it is precisely these attributes that, along with the contextual factors of a certain environment, can ‘make or break’ a social development initiative. However, it is widely accepted that lifestyle sports are increasingly undergoing a process of sportification, defined as the development of cultural and recreational activities into explicitly regulated and institutionalised sports, fitting into the civilising process of wider society (Van Bottenburg and Heilbron, 2006, p.262). This is envisaged as a process of hegemonic globalisation where the standardisation of activities reflects certain sports colonising other forms of activities and the regeneration of their original forms, which can ultimately lead to the loss of the original identity (Collinet et al., 2013).

Originally, traditional mainstream sports and lifestyle sports are diametrically opposite in terms of their systems and structures. It is therefore imperative to account for this transition

within the latter in order to establish how the changing social dynamics influence their impact on social development initiatives. This study focuses on traditional sports and lifestyle sports to build its comparison rather than on others such as those primarily mind or coordination-related because of the clear dualism they present, yet with sufficient congruence in certain aspects as to identify patterns from which to build a comparison upon. The need for increased scrutiny is evident from the leading academic literature and it is hoped that this study can further the critical awareness of the potential of different approaches.

## 2. Previous Research

### 2.1 - Field of Sport for Development

Sport has a range of diverse meanings, however the International Working Group on sport for development and peace research defines it as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being, and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organised or competitive sport and indigenous sports and games. Sport-for-development has been defined as “the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialisation of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution” (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, p.311). A comprehensive literature review of the field (Schulenkorf et al, 2016) found that a majority of research was conducted with a qualitative approach due to the subjective nature of social development. Most research focuses on the educational and social outcomes related to youth participation in sports with traditional sports being exponentially more common and association football being the most popular. While the majority of initiatives are focused on issues relating to the global south, paradoxically, over 90% of authors are based in Western countries.

Since the turn of the century, the field of sport-for-development has received significant attention from nongovernmental organizations, government agencies, sport practitioners, and sport academics around the world (Schulenkorf et al, 2016). As a consequence of growing support from the private and public sector, the number of sport-based projects aimed at contributing to positive development has been constantly increasing (Coalter, 2007, 2013; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014). This is demonstrated in the institutionalisation and professionalization of the sector and the increased number of programmes being implemented in different contexts on a global level, as well as the establishment of the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) tasked with advocacy and promotion of sport as a tool for achieving the United Nations sustainable development goals (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2013).



The popularity of SFD is due to its perceived ability to engage participants and act as a hub for social change. Mwaanga (2010) details the most popular reasons given for the use of sport in development programmes namely, for moral development, positive diversion, as a “hook”, a means to foster empowerment, and to improve healthy living (Mwaanga, 2010). The hypothesis that participants in sport innately acquire socially desirable attributes such as good moral values is contentious and ignores diversity as again it stems from the understanding that participants are homogenous. There is no consensus: Nichols (2004) and Sandford (2006) argue for sports efficacy in this regard while Iong & Sanderson (2006) and Moris et al. (2003) have pointed to the lack of empirical evidence in this area. In regards to sport as a positive diversion, Mwaanga details the hypothesis that sport provides an activity that occupies young people in a constructive way during time where they may otherwise be participating in antisocial behaviour. This is popular with many stakeholders such as parents and teachers, however diversions do not in themselves account for development per se (Guest, 2005) or qualify sport as sufficiently beneficial (Green, 2008). Sport is lauded as a vehicle for development due to its seeming ability to capture or “hook” (Mwaanga, 2010: Macintosh, 2016) a large number of people—particularly those interested in sport and physical activity—and use the momentum in and around sport as a strategic vehicle to communicate, implement, and achieve non sport development goals. Development in terms of empowerment of participants is heavily accredited by practitioners in the field (Mwaanga, 2010: Erkut & Tracy, 2002: Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011: Coalter, 2010: Darnell, 2012) through increased responsibility, leadership and discipline.

## **2.2 - Criticism of the Field**

In recent years scholars have grown increasingly pessimistic and critical of the fields of sport and development through sport itself. Foundational scholars such as Fred Coalter and Jay Coakley have lamented the lack of critical consideration of the efficacy of sport from academics coupled with the increasing financial incentive for powerful private stakeholders contributing to “an unshakable belief about the inherent purity and goodness of sport” (Coakley, 2015). They both argue a “mythic” quality has been bestowed to sport,

safeguarding it from criticism and/or shortcomings (Coakley, 2015; Coalter, 2013). This is worrisome as it hinders critical discussion of the issues undoubtedly present in the SFD field that hinder developmental potential on communities. While further masking and enabling the power wielders in the broader sports sector who continue to benefit from the positive image of sport and appropriate public monies, Coakley (2015) and Coalter (2013) suggest that the SFD sector lacks scope and true critique that is coupled with biased researchers, research methods, and a strong yearning from political and private stakeholders for sport to be perceived as inalienable positives. The examples of mismanagement of public money in the name of social development through sport are wide-ranging and recurring. Funds dedicated to sport under the pretence of social development often are invested in the building of capital infrastructure rather than human and social capital that is required from participation programmes (Lunn, 2008). Initiatives founded and funded for the purpose of development are also liable to in turn focus on sports development and competition (Hafen, 2016) deviating in practice from their stated objectives. Further, critics also point to traditional sports potential as proliferators of social inequalities (Delaney & Fahey, 2005) as well as beacons which reflects divisions already held within society (Liston & Deighan, 2017), polarising sects of society due to the cultural symbology often associated with certain teams. Liston and Deighan's study highlights the potential of sport to polarise people and reinforce feelings of difference. This awareness that sport may promote segregation and polarisation within society is under-researched and often overlooked due to the "mythical" ability of sport as an unquestionable societal good as discussed by Coalter and Coakley.

What counts as "positive development" is often not defined and these uncritical, normative narratives are used to justify the creation of sport programmes in populations lacking opportunities or facing challenges often caused by poverty or oppression (Coakley, 2016). Sport is being increasingly institutionalised and mobilized as a means to meet development goals, promoting the idea that participation on the microlevel will have macrolevel reach or impact (Coalter, 2013) contributing to a "displacement of scope". SFD initiatives must be part of a wider integrated development strategy rather than acting alone as benefits are more likely an indirect outcome of the context and social interaction taking place in the programme rather than directly from participation in an organised sport (SDIWG, 2008). Scholars ascertain that sport is suitable as a vehicle for social development while not necessarily a

direct cause and that the transformative effect of any sports-based initiative is reliant on the prevalence and power of the non-sports related components (Hartmann, 2003). Pawson (2006) argues that changes in social relationships, behaviours and social conditions are affected through the workings of entire systems rather than stand-alone programmes.

Scholars are increasingly criticising the normative notion that sport is a fundamentally pure and positive entity and that positive changes are guaranteed to befall those who engage in it (Coalter, 2010; Coakley, 2015). Coalter points to the ambiguity of ambitious wide-ranging, ill-defined claims often stated from SFD initiatives. Saying that while they are in part a function of the processes of lobbying, persuasion, negotiation, alliance-building and pragmatic opportunism that are central to all policy processes, success markers associated with SFD projects are purposefully vague and obtuse in order to escape criticism and that the sector solely relies on the optimism of practitioners rather than results (Coalter, 2013). This contributes to an oversimplification of the field and a homogenisation of experiences of all participants of an initiative (Coalter, 2013). Ubiquitous positivity attributed to SFD programmes oversimplifies the complex realities of development in diverse settings (Black, 2010) and ignores the importance of the focus on the participants and their own unique contexts (Pawson, 2006) and their responses to the initiatives. Coalter (2013) argues that it cannot be presumed that any and all participants, irrespective of who they are within their own community or indeed what challenges their community faces, will benefit from sport initiatives or will experience sport initiatives in similar ways. Indeed, Coalter's study suggests that while participation in sports may increase self-efficacy for some, particularly those who had low self-esteem beforehand, other cohorts of participants experienced negative impacts. “Therefore, there is a strong need to understand which sports, processes and contexts produce what impacts for which participants.”(Coalter, 2013).

## 2.3 - The Case of Lifestyle Activities

As the academic community grows increasingly critical of the usefulness and suitability of sport for development there has been a growing interest in lifestyle activities, making use of non-competitive, informal, and decentralised atmospheres in the development sector. Unlike organized sports, which are governed by oligarchical entities and have a growing disconnect with the non-for-profit motives of democracy and ground up empowerment (Levicky & Busey, 2017) community and pick up, decentralised manifestations of sports are more rooted in communal relationships, social capital and notions of common good. Common scholarly criticism of organized sports focuses on their reliance on governing bodies for infrastructure and rules while private enterprises are often approached to invest in sponsorship to procure equipment. Each stakeholder involves themselves and the activities become reliant on gaining and maintaining these connections. Decentralised, informal manifestation of sport thrives upon groups of grass roots people who initiate and control organizations. This is promoting a more democratic and egalitarian model, more in touch with the participants' context and the benefits are focused on those at grass roots (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2015). This adaptable approach allows for similar experiences rather than a one size fits all model. Commitment to contributing to the activity in this way coupled with the development of skills, gratification is more easily garnered. Voluntary contributions to community focused activity groups are “fundamental to the development of a democratic socially inclusive society” (Coalter, 2007).

The potential for social development through these lifestyle sports has been proposed by pivotal scholar Holly Thorpe. She argues that action sports should be critically considered by practitioners in the SFD field, due to their alternate value systems and ability to promote youth agency and creativity (Thorpe, 2016). In their dominant recreational forms, action sports do not rely on competition and allow for a sense of accomplishment based on individual skill development. They offer opportunities for individual empowerment through both skill mastery and the development of social skills. They are also largely self-regulating and allow for a (sometimes communal) celebration of play, creativity and self-expression. Such characteristics provide numerous avenues for personal enjoyment, growth and development through participation in physical and movement activities, without some of the deleterious aspects inherent to more mainstream competitive sport forms (Wheaton, 2013,

2020: Thorpe, 2016). Scholars have broadly been optimistic of the potential for lifestyle activities to promote development in other areas or to different cohorts when compared to traditional sports (Wheaton, 2020) and may make the experience more interesting, increasing the initiative's efficacy. Skating for example has been observed as achieving social development in underprivileged areas, through atmospheres of curiosity, play focus on self-set goals and empowerment through incremental progress and developing emotional resoluteness in the face of the constant presence of failure to the extent that eventually it becomes a non-issue (Corwin et al, 2019).

## **2.4 - Recommended Directions for Future Research**

While far from a consensus, many scholars point to the need for more critical and diverse methods of research within the field (Coakley, 2015). Issues are present due to the lack of varied approaches (Straume, 2013). Pessimistic scholars such as Coalter take a positivist approach as they dismiss more modern feminist and decolonial methods of research and rely on more traditional models (Darnell, 2014). As a foundational scholar within the field his work continues to be given significant credence from the academic community. However, his disdain for modern decolonial and feminist research frameworks as ideologic and politically focused rather than empirical and verifiable research is inaccurate. While there does remain debate within post-colonial studies of certain terms such as “global south”, to dismiss the entire approach of research is an overreaction.

Further, post-colonial research aims to draw attention to the structures at play that contribute to unequal development, corruption and to what extent sport for development is affected by or even implicitly contributing to. Coalter's unwillingness to employ or at the very least appreciate new forms of holistic research stifles true understanding of the complex, dynamic nature within which development through sport initiatives run. At stake is the importance of maintaining space and legitimacy for different, yet complementary, approaches to theory/method within the field of sport for development. Coalter's data and conclusions are

valuable but his critiques of other research paradigms (and of other researchers) will be to the detriment of the field if they exile any particular framework or approach that could support the empirical illumination of the possibilities and limitations of sport for development programmes.

Moving forward, a more considered approach is to understand the history of colonialism, the connections of this history to contemporary practices and structures of imperialism and/or neo-colonialism, and theories and methodologies of decolonisation. From this critical perspective, a post-colonial feminist approach is particularly useful for foregrounding, situating and deconstructing the ways that cross-cultural and/or global relations of power, domination and resistance are deeply enmeshed.

### 3. Aim and Research Questions

By illuminating the success factors that can ‘make or break’ a certain sports initiative, this paper will develop a greater understanding of what sport for development seems to entail, and how efforts may be materialized into progress. Hence this study aims to provide theoretical grounds as guidance for sports initiatives aiming for social development to follow.

The main research question this paper aims to investigate is the following:

**What are the effects of sport/sportification on an organization’s social development capabilities?**

Several sub-questions better define the parameters of this study:

- How does the focus differ between traditional organized sport and lifestyle activities?
- What benefits and challenges do different sports for initiatives have, and how do they exploit or face them?
- How does the network and stakeholders of a particular sport or sport initiative influence its impact?

## 4. Theoretical Perspective

The framework from which the research is built touches upon several disciplines, notably sociology, policy or cultural anthropology. The theoretical perspectives taken throughout this study serve as a set of assumptions about reality that shapes the conclusions we obtain. Thus the philosophical underpinnings outline the extent of reality accepted as legitimate and how to obtain the information in the first place. The main ones discussed are ontology and epistemology. The highly sociological nature of this research process calls for an interpretivist methodology; capable of capturing the nuances, subliminal messages and range of subjective views to enact the research question accordingly. The interpretivist approach seeks understanding rather than truth, by identifying causal relationships between action and external social forces (Gratton and Jones, 2010, p.27). The ontological and epistemological assumptions must relate to this.

### 4.1 - Ontological Position

Ontology refers to “how one sees the world and the nature of one’s reality” (Edwards and Skinner, 2009, p.15). It can alternatively be defined as “the philosophy of the existence and nature of phenomena” (Gratton and Jones, 2010, p.24). Ontology is broadly classified into realist or constructivist. The latter, also referred to as interpretivist, relativist or subjectivist, holds that multiple, subjective realities are internally and socially constructed, meaning they are alterable. It is through, for instance, the use of language or cultural symbolism that meaning is mentally shaped, and it is the researcher’s job to interpret the active interpretations of others (Sparkes and Smith, 2013, p.11).

This research adopts a constructivist ontological approach, as it examines the socio-politico-economic forces that drive the collective societal efforts to achieve development, which can be tangibly quantified yet are defined in quite an intersubjective way. Each unique viewpoint represents an individual cog in the system both at a sport-level and within wider society, which are social constructions in the first place. Gratton and Jones (2004) note that since contexts are not constant and are therefore unstable, data cannot be



directly measured and consequent findings might be unreliable. However, this study acknowledges the contextual changes and actually builds its argument over the very basis that certain patterns can be found across ever changing environments.

## **4.2 - Epistemological Position**

Similarly, epistemology refers to the possible ways of gaining knowledge on reality and truth (Smith, 2010, p.200). Epistemological approaches range from objectivist to subjectivist, the latter being the one this research adopts. This stresses the subject-subject dualism, where “the knower and the known are interdependent and fused together in such a way that the ‘findings’ are the creation of a process of interaction between the two” (Sparkes and Smith, 2013, p.13). The subjectivist perspective falls well with the great level of contextualisation of ideas this study requires, as this way meaning is shaped and reality is obtained through the unique viewpoints and purposes of individuals leading sport initiatives.

## **4.3 - UNESCO International Charter**

This study grounds its search for truthful results on UNESCO’s International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport as a theoretical model on which the fundamental basis of our conclusions is supported. The charter is a rights-based reference that orients and supports policy and decision-making in sport, promotes inclusive access without discrimination, sets ethical and quality standards for the design and implementation of sport programmes and expresses the common vision of all stakeholders in sport (UNESCO, 2021). It asserts that the practice of PE, PA and sport is a fundamental human right and introduces universal principles such as gender equality, non-discrimination and social inclusion in and through sport. Based on its values, the role of sport for development, peace and post-conflict objectives is highlighted as a potential avenue (Art.11) yielding a wide range of benefits for individuals, communities and societies at large (Art.2). The principles underlying the charter feature the need to inspire lifelong participation (Art.4); sustainability on an economic, social

and environmental level (Art.5); research and evaluation as indispensable components of development (Art.6); qualified personnel to administer and implement sport (Art.7); adequate and safe spaces and facilities (Art.8); proper risk management systems (Art.9); and the protection and promotion of integrity and ethical values (Art.10). Even though not all of these principles are discussed in this study as central tenets driving social development, the charter serves as an all-encompassing blueprint which prompts and directs sport initiatives and their stakeholders to act accordingly to what it stipulates. Its applicability to this study lies in the direct relation between the theoretical reference it provides and the elements of sport and sportification the investigation aims to uncover.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 - Introduction**

The methodological process carried out for this investigation is tailored around the research purpose and objectives, in order to add depth to the discussion of results. This section will outline the several aspects integrated and harmonized within the approach. First, the research design is covered, focusing on the broader issues that determine the kind of data required and the logical design that follows. The second subsection tackles the actual methods used for data collection and analysis, covering all the theoretical instruments and procedures needed. Next, target subjects for primary data are set, and appropriate samples are outlined. Further, the prospective quality of the data is evaluated, in terms of the extent to which it is reliable and valid. Finally, scientific and ethical considerations are set forth, in order to illuminate the academic advancements brought along by this study all whilst ensuring its nature and character follow a proper moral conduct.

### **5.2 - Research Design**

The aforementioned core philosophical perspectives provide a fundamental basis from which the research design is conceived. Following the assumptions laid out by the ontological and epistemological positions of this study, the research adopts a qualitative approach regarding the kind of data sought. Rather than a quantitative approach, this form of social inquiry allows us to collect in-depth idiosyncratic insights into complex non-numerical concepts. Qualitative research illuminates the dynamics of process, and usually takes an emic perspective yet favouring naturalism when approaching the researched environment (Sparkes and Smith, 2013, p.14-16). Thus the overarching strategy is rather exploratory than highly structured, as it aims to provide more familiarity with the examined phenomena in order to be able to develop hypotheses (Skinner et al., 2015, p. 7).

Within the qualitative research approach, a cross-sectional design is taken. This refers to data being collected from several different individuals, or sport initiatives/collectives in this case,

representing a sample at a single fixed point in time. Causal relationships are suggested respecting the research question, which can then be generalised back to the wider population (Gratton and Jones, 2004, p.95). The set of results is then cross-tabulated both between each other and with the knowledge drawn out of existing literature, at which point correlations are analytically identified and the relationship between the variables and the development outcomes is made clear.

### **5.3 - Methods**

The methods of primary data collection and analysis will be outlined next. The main method of collection consists of semi-structured interviews, which are based on a set of standardized predetermined template questions yet with open-ended spontaneous following discussions taking a rather informal conversational tone. Some of them are synchronous online interviews, using information communication technologies for accessibility purposes. The angles of inquiry are tailored accordingly to the subject's background, for instance whether involved in a traditional mainstream sport or a lifestyle sport. This kind of exploratory method grants a certain level of flexibility when collecting data from a large number of people representing a broad range of ideas (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). It also allows to capture nuanced meanings and perspectives that other research methods would not be able to apprehend, thus bringing more depth to the primary research findings.

Each interview comprises a single sport initiative or collective promoting social development. In most cases, this consists of a single participant representing their organisation, but there are cases with several participants in an interview. There are a total of six interviews, with a fair balance between the two types of sport being compared in order to obtain significant input from each yet prevent a certain perspective from dominating the narrative. The social development objectives sought are also reflected quite equally across both types of sport, which provides a clear comparison between the specific dynamics brought along by the nature of these goals.

This study includes elements of decoloniality in research, in order to expose how issues of power, privilege and oppression influence knowledge and understanding (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). This kind of ‘restorative justice’ does not discredit a certain perspective, yet it admonishes the fact that said truth is not necessarily the way to go. Aiming to uncover epistemic paternalism, defined as a knowledge-related imposition motivated by contentious protectionism for the good of the person interfered (Bernal and Axtell, 2020), this study asks its participants to consciously detach their initiative from the context they are set in. By placing the project in a totally opposite spatial place, the knowledge asserted becomes potentially irrelevant and highlights the need to empower sustainable indigenous and local perspectives that truly adapt the operations of an initiative to the needs of its community and environment.

The raw, scattered findings are then processed into concrete results from which to draw conclusions through an appropriate data analysis technique, defined by Flick (2014) as the classification and interpretation of linguistic material to create meaning of the different dimensions and structures (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). First, each interview is transcribed into a script-style text. Then, data is reduced by organising the information through coding, which refers to the distribution of raw data into exclusive conceptual categories, in order to provide a logical structure from which conclusions can be built upon (Gratton and Jones, 2004, p.219). Conducting a further thematic analysis classifies the various concepts into the themes this study pinpoints and those touched upon in the literature review, such as networks, identity, sportification, commercialisation and others. Next, the data is mapped out into some sort of model displaying the key points and themes in an organised way, in order to facilitate the drawing of conclusions. The whole coding process takes an analytical approach, also referred to as axial, where the researcher interprets the data to create meaning rather than merely describing the superficial implications.

## **5.4 - Samples**

Sampling allows for the representation of the target population through purposeful generalisations (Smith, 2010, p.116). In the case of this study, the populations are the two

types of sport being investigated, namely traditional mainstream sports and lifestyle sports. The samples of these populations are chosen in a non-probability way, meaning they are purposely and conveniently chosen according to certain criteria rather than randomly. More specifically than non-probability samples, the research takes elements from several sampling sub-types. For instance, a purposive sample is used, since participants are selected based on specific qualities, such as the role they have in a social development initiative, what their project entails, the sport being used, and other. Elements of snowball sampling are also included, as some participants are directed to the study through other participants who put us in contact with them.

The main grouping is sports initiatives or collectives. This choice of sample is intentionally broad: given the study aims to model the relationship between activity and context leading to positive social development outcomes, having a wide range of variables provides the study with more angles to gain insight into the success factors of social development. The sample targets the leadership of the chosen initiatives and collectives rather than its participants or beneficiaries in order to better understand the workings and operational philosophies behind the projects, and thus discern how the forces that drive social development may succeed in so doing.

The chosen initiatives or collectives have varying objectives, including social integration, cultural cohesion, empowerment of minorities, youth leadership and such other similar aims. The activities these organisations focus on also vary, ranging from skating and surfing within the lifestyle sport classification to football and an array of traditional sports within the mainstream classification. Although non-random sampling can be linked to bias, qualitative research does not demand prescribed precision in terms of quantitative representativeness (Veal and Darcy, 2014, p.403).

## **5.5 - Scientific Considerations**

This paper provides a comprehensive comparison to the field, which is something rarely found across the existing academic literature. Most studies take a quite general theoretical

approach, or a very specific case study to apply the academic outlook on a concrete example. Comparisons contrasting the different schools of thought found across sport ideology and practice are quite scarce, which fails to provide the academic field with depth into the complexity of the social dynamics of development through sport. Much of the scholarly research concerning development through sport takes for granted the perceived inherent benefits of sport for such objectives. The critical approach taken by this study, exploring the fundamental rationale at its most basic level and building up on this, differentiates the research through the neutrality it seeks. Finally, the integration of decolonial perspectives into the research design and methodology of this study is quite a unique feature, not just in terms of ethics but in terms of data quality too. Through decoloniality, findings will be less biased and hence more applicable and adaptable to different contexts and environments.

## **5.6 - Ethical Considerations**

Rigorously following an ethical code will be at the core of the research process. This is quite important also for the quality of the data, as according to Patton (2015) “the trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of those who collect and analyse the data” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). The design will be implemented in a way that no entity is physically or psychologically harmed, its integrity compromised or its reputation negatively influenced in any way. All research subjects and participants will be kept anonymous, mentioned, if at all, through the use of pseudonyms and the delicate information shared will be kept confidential in order to maintain their privacy and intimacy as much as possible within the objectives of this study. Although the interviews will be recorded for data analysis purposes, only the researchers will have access to the data and authority to handle it.

Furthermore, as white, middle-class male researchers, we acknowledge there is a potential level of bias in terms of the perspective this study takes. For instance, the sample targets we are able to reach live in an environment and context similar to ours, so our cultural background and network might be in a sense shaping the content in a certain way and skewing the data. This is why this study consciously integrates a decolonial approach to its methodology and targets a broad range of sport organisations, in order to minimise the

potential negative impact on the research quality and fulfil the ethical responsibilities we have as researchers to expose a global issue as neutrally as possible. The wide choice of samples also tackles the ethical dilemma of truthful representativeness of the population being analysed, as our limited capabilities can only attain a certain percentage of said population, and this can repercuss on the findings.

Finally, as is the case with all research methodologies and practices, this study might entail certain potential risks which we as researchers are bound to minimize. These risks are inherent in good qualitative inquiry itself and take a large amount of skill and tact to mitigate (Morse, 2001). One of the main risks participants undergo is the reputation and integrity of their organisation being jeopardised through an unconsciously biased and dumbfounded portrayal. The guarantee that this risk is most unlikely to materialize is the complete anonymity of participants across any published material. For purposes of data quality, the methods of data collection and analysis are kept as fairplay and honest as possible. Secondly, there is a risk that the participants might feel coerced into answering in a certain way, which would distort the information and cause an unnecessarily negative experience. However, the structure of the interviews, with standardized questions yet a flexible approach to these, is designed so that the researchers do not automatically dominate the direction and tone of the conversation, which reduces the pressure on the participant. Finally, although the risk of revealing confidential information could potentially breach organisational policy, participants are in no way whatsoever manipulated to disclose delicate or sensitive information. It should be highlighted that all participants voluntarily and consensually partake in this study and are willingly sharing their perspective on the record.

Ultimately, the honest intentions of this study to illuminate the elements of sport and sportification that are advantageous for development imply certain social considerations. Facilitating sustainable guidelines of adaptability or networks for example promotes positive directions which can potentially bring success in causes such as social equality or cohesion. One could say the purpose of development is to improve the quality of life for humankind and the environment, and this can take shape in many dimensions and realms. An important consideration to keep in mind is that the framework correlating sport and development needs to be adapted and tailored to the appropriate context, which is a core message of this study.



Assuming one-size-fits-all theoretical models are all-encompassing is possibly what births the cynicism surrounding failed sport for development initiatives. Exposing a comprehensive and unbiased reality may increase the social conscience that allows to properly design and implement such initiatives. Thus the purpose of this study in terms of what it adds to society is to serve as a handbook which inspires sustainable progress through sport.

## **5.7 - Research Quality**

This subsection undertakes the concepts of validity and reliability to assess the quality of the data, striving to evaluate the extent to which the operationalisation of the concepts explored provides truthful answers (Gratton and Jones, 2004, p.85). Validity is defined as “the extent to which the information presented truly reflects the phenomena which the researcher claims it reflects” (Veal and Darcy, 2014, p.49), or, in more common terms, how effective the data is in answering the question. The more flexible approach of the semi-structured interviews allows to redesign the content and process of the programme, which, coupled with the ability to triangulate the open-ended questions from different angles, establishes content validity (Skinner et al., 2015). Another key aspect of the validity of this study lies within the sample choices, as a broad range of sports and social development objectives is covered. For instance, the whole spectrum of local to global initiatives is covered, which provides more levels of perspective in terms of contextual specificity. Also, the organizations are chosen within each type of sport so that their sought social development objective matches their counterpart and is a reflection of the same aims, which brings a fair balance to the equation. On a general note, the sample includes initiatives and collectives that are designed around and operate in many different contexts, which ultimately is what allows us to answer the research questions.

Similarly, reliability refers to “how consistently a technique measures the concepts it is supposed to measure”, and is linked to having a structured process and programme support (Skinner et al., 2015, p. 61). In order to attain trustworthiness and repeatability, the same set of questions was asked in the six interviews, and the data analysis process was kept homogenous. This ultimately creates a certain stability in the data from which clearer patterns

emerge to build conclusions. However, the nature of the interview process allowed for participants to focus on different particular areas. Moreover, all the organisations analysed have a reputable standing in the community they serve and in the sector they operate, according to an objective analysis of their impact, relevant connections and self-sustainability.

## **6. Results and Analysis**

### **6.1 - Introduction**

Based on the research questions and the subsequent line of inquiry during the interviews, three main themes can be clearly identified from the data gathered. This section outlines these issues, underpinning traditional organized sports' and lifestyle sports' unique attributes, which will be then brought together in the discussion. First, the focus of the sport initiative is laid out, in terms of the values, objectives, modus operandi, vision for the future or overarching philosophy guiding the philanthropic aims of the project. Then, the benefits and challenges faced by the sport initiatives are set out, in order to weigh the extent to which they encourage/hinder the success of said initiative in the discussion. Finally, the networks and stakeholder influence are examined and evaluated. While respecting the anonymity of participants quotations are referenced to appendix C, an index giving some further information to their context.

### **6.2 - Focus**

#### **6.2.1 - Traditional Sports**

When interviewing practitioners from development programs using traditional sports, a recurring theme that emerged across several of the interviews was the strong focus on addressing social issues through the fostering of a community. Traditional, team-based sports were credited as being innately social activities, forming a hub of multi-stakeholder engagement. Practitioners were optimistic in their program's ability to function as an inclusive and accessible space for youths who may not have the opportunities or desire to access competitive, talent-based sports clubs. Participants often previously were faced with barriers of access to sport for social, financial and/or geographical reasons. Addressing and reducing these factors were of key concern to facilitate an inclusive, community environment within initiatives.

*“We do see that the kids out there like to compete, some of them more than others, so we take some things from the more traditional way of using sports but with a lot more focus on development and life skills. We don’t have the same structure of training twice a week and then matches, nor do we have first and second teams. That way there is more focus on inclusion. You can come one week, come back a month after and you are still as part of the team as before. It’s a more flexible system.” (6)*

*“The first step would be to invite everyone to participate in building a vision workshop and talking to the community to know what kind of needs there are and that there’s local components.” (5)*

*“It has always been focused on the community, the youth of the community, there’s nothing there for them, not a patch of grass for the kids, our main focus is to promote and use the sense of community there that is so strong. If you are doing something for the local community, people buy into it, parents and guardians, once they see the youth wanting to get involved, they support it.” (5)*

*“It’s not sport first, it’s a development first approach. Building a positive community around sports where you can feel safe and develop and then you can tackle different issues.”*

*“A lot of the players that come in have never really found their feet within another sport, it’s always a welcoming atmosphere, in rugby, whenever you get somebody down, they always come back. Participants can’t be selected based on talent.” (5)*

*“Kids come down in jeans and a pair of runners asking, “can I play?”, and I say of course let’s get going, the hardest thing you did was to step over that threshold.” (5)*

*“The idea is that there is the possibility to go inside disadvantaged areas with sport activities. It’s also easily accessible, it’s 50 Krone a year to be a member and it has something for everyone, so the idea is to lower the barriers (financial, geographical and social) to be able to participate in a physical sports community.” (6)*

The interviewees involved in traditional sports maintained that their chosen sports had strong developmental abilities, creating a space for participants to learn transferable life skills. Focusing on this rather than competitive success was key in order to activate social development. Traditional, team orientated sports were accepted as being almost universally understood and always in demand with participants. The structure of established team sports as well as their prevalence and social nature was regarded as important by practitioners in their use for development initiatives.

*“With football you can reach people because it is a team sport and people need to be in touch with other people, it’s a social sport. Everyone knows how to play it and the rules” (4)*

*“Learning new skills and how to get better in a team environment creates a certain amount of confidence amongst kids.” (5)*

*“It’s easy to talk about conflict resolution in an active way with kids doing it through sports rather than around the table. We as an organization are not blind to seeing the limitations of the sport community, but when it is facilitated in a positive way it’s a good base for working life skills and these development related issues.” (6)*

The interviewees also expressed traditional sports’ ability to expose participants to new networks and to bridge into other sects of society. A common theme of their focus was that of leveraging the status and influence their sport had within society and the benefit their participants would have through being engrossed. Becoming involved in traditional sports settings was attributed with offering opportunities for participants from disadvantaged areas to socialize with other members of their locality in a positive way. Further, the networks that traditional sports possess provide access to the jobs market and education.

*“Yeah, forming affiliation and relationships within other sects of society such as private schools, jobs market using the rugby network in bridging the participants community with others is a big part of what we do.” (5)*

*“Suddenly they are exposed to areas they maybe haven’t been before, but they are in it together as a team and they have a reason to be there.” (5)*

*“We mostly invite the local football club in for them to show what’s possible to do if you want to be a more organized club. For us it’s very important that we’re not an alternative to the more formal structures, we are like a supplement somehow.” (6)*

## 6.2.2 - Lifestyle Sports

A recurring theme within the lifestyle sports initiatives targeted is the will to change societal perceptions and preconceptions of the activities. Due to their counter-cultural roots and excessive mediatisation distorting the legitimate identity of lifestyle sports, such activities are commonly overlooked as having potential for social development. Hence it is a priority for initiatives using lifestyle sports to change these social norms and offer a rebranded image in order to acquire a perceived relevant and useful character. However, the sportification of activities such as skateboarding is not necessarily beneficial in the efforts to portray an identity that stays true to its roots, which is ultimately what allows it to build a sense of community.

*“ I have a bit of a nervous feeling that you want to get away from the perception of it being like a kind of teenage stoner thing, but that’s more a 90s stereotype.” (1)*

*“There’s so much more to skating than athletic excellence, if you will; its roots in street culture, its links to punk and hip hop and street art and so many other traditionally underground and alternative street cultures... That is not going to be able to be represented in the Olympics.” (1)*

The arguably deeper, almost spiritual connection achieved through the use of lifestyle sports is another big aspect pinpointed in the data. This is portrayed not only by creating more meaningful relationships with other participants, but also engaging in the subculture and building solid ties with the underlying values. It is through these connections and the sense of belonging to the identity that the social development purposes are fulfilled.

*“The first value is having the fun factor for every project, and the second thing is development. We work out of a passion for surfing, and that’s the key. Every kid in the project is feeling the stoke, the good vibes and the power of the ocean.” (2)*

*“There’s something about working on an individual basis, but with that community support, the feeling of being in a session and encouraging each other to develop your own individual skills, to me that feels like a quite unique dynamic.” (1)*

*“Surfing has a lot of potential because there is this relaxed environment. There’s a lot of connection there and to us that serves as purpose. We search for affinity around the sport. As*

*a society, people have become quite alienated, we are very individualistic, and there is more of a personal experience in these individual sports that brings closeness.” (3)*

The self-sustainability of communities is also a factor underpinned in the focus of lifestyle sports initiatives. A common element found across all three interviews was the ability of the targeted community to maintain the positive effects of the initiative, mitigate the attached adversities and give continuity to the opportunities presented. The bottom-up approach of more informal initiatives is clearly reflected in this ethos.

*“One of our biggest values is that every project has to sustain itself. Investing in the local communities, local projects, local people, and having them make the difference in their community. That’s long-term, and it goes with everything. It has so much more value than just doing it for them.” (2)*

*“It’s got to come from the community you are serving, basically just get it pushed from the locals. That way you have something people can join, and get involved in an existing skate scene, to engage in the community.” (1)*

The emphasis of quality over quantity sums up the overall reasoning behind the lifestyle sports initiatives interviewed. This is portrayed actively, through a day-to-day focus on consistency and significance in order to have a greater impact, and passively, through the mentality driving the initiatives’ performance.

*“We need to push having a steady regular base to run sessions from, as the kind of community that we form is very real but is also quite temporary due to the nature of the camps, so social cohesion results are not that clear.” (1)*

*“We are not focused on the dollar sign. Our goal is to be helping, guiding and adding value. We’re open to anything, but it must work, it must be sustainable and touch the community.” (2)*

## **6.3 - Benefits and Challenges**

### **6.3.1 - Traditional Sports**

Part of the interview then went into what the practitioners felt their activity in particular had to offer their participants and the broader communities in which they operated in. As detailed

in the academic research, “there is a strong need to understand which sports, processes and contexts produce what impacts for which participants.” (Coalter, 2013). The interviewees were optimistic of traditional sports ability to have a transformative effect on participants and communities. The practitioners attributed specific benefits they believed their sports possessed which were conducive to social development and transferable to other spheres of life.

*“Rugby as a sport you don’t have to be a superstar, different sizes, speeds, skills, all the different elements working together, it’s easy to slot into a team and it reflects real life.” (5)*

*“I would feel rugby has a great structure to it that would emphasize respect to other teams, officials... We try to promote that first and foremost, what’s done on the pitch is what we want to see off the pitch as well.” (5)*

*“It’s easy to talk about conflict resolution in an active way with kids doing it through sports rather than around the table. We as an organization are not blind to seeing the limitations of the sport community, but when it is facilitated in a positive way it’s a good base for working life skills and these development related issues.” (6)*

The practitioners were enthusiastic about traditional sport’s recognised place in society. The participants were already aware of the sports before they engaged into them and often came to the programme with a curious mind. Due to the increased cultural significance of sports and the promotion of sports stars as role models within the media and common lexicon. Some participants as well as parents/guardians, had a positive association with traditional sports and moral/ social benefits.

*“To get kids to participate there’s always a need for soccer. Well a need I don’t know, but there’s always a lot of people who want to play soccer” (4)*

*“The kids see what we are doing and they are curious, they haven’t seen rugby in their area before they haven’t had access, they have preconceptions but they are curious to get involved.” (5)*



While the status of traditional sports benefits the practitioners in their reach, the social baggage attached to sports provides obstacles for development programmes. With traditional sports having a large profile within society, normative associations are attributed to what a participant in a particular sport is like. Often these assumptions are based heavily on lines of gender and socio-economic background.

*“There’s a distinct silhouette of what a rugby player is in this city.....and a feeling that that sport isn’t for us it’s for posh people.” (5)*

*“It should be for everyone, the preconceived ideas and those social restrictions, they shouldn’t be there.” (5)*

*“For example, we are aware that bringing in football has barriers for some people because football is a sport for especially boys, and if you haven’t started playing football when you’re 7 it’s really difficult to get into it when you’re 12, and we are very much aware of the barriers of using sport as a tool.”(6)*

Further, practitioners often spoke of the challenges of recognition due to their focus on social development rather than competition. Challenges relating to securing funding from governing bodies, and access to facilities were common amongst all interviewees. They felt as if they were considered as lesser due to a lack of focus in talent development. It was also mentioned that relationships with more formal, local sports clubs could at times be strained as the development programmes could be viewed as competitors in some regard. The challenges posed through lack of recognition were a considerable concern to all interviewees and created significant issues.

*“They provide us with coach development and seminars, but when it comes to access to and development of facilities, which we desperately need, they tell us that we are just an after-school programme.” (5)*

*“We definitely see that (lack of recognition), and it’s something we are working on at the organisation in different levels. At the higher level in order to be recognised and to receive money from governments or official national federations and being kind of legitimised. We also see it when in our local communities, if we want to use the street sport facility, it’s not always possible because we are not officially a local organised club. Self or semi structured are not recognised or legitimised in the same way as organized sports.” (6)*

### 6.3.2 - Lifestyle Sports

Several clear patterns of benefits and challenges emerged from the data. It is widely accepted that lifestyle sports are rooted in and most commonly found across Western societies. This carries a certain degree of social baggage which places the subcultures into a stigmatized framework. However, the relatively low knowledge about and use of these activities in different contexts entails there is a lack of cultural bias influencing the impact of lifestyle sports as a choice of mechanism for social development.

*“Skateboarding as it is in certain communities in the Middle East is a relatively new thing, and in society it doesn’t have the same gendered preconceptions as other sports. Girls are allowed to skate in certain conservative areas, which can be used to get them participating in education as well.” (1)*

Due to the natural setting of many lifestyle sports, there is a certain connection with the environment which is often used in development initiatives to approach sustainable objectives more holistically. In this sense, lifestyle sports are advantageous when designing a comprehensive method to tackle the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs. Even though this study focuses on social development initiatives, there is a greater correlation with environmental sustainability across lifestyle sports, which ultimately plays in its favour when evaluating the aggregate impact on development.

*“If you take care of Earth, the people will benefit. We believe nature is a gift that’s been given to us, and we depend so much on our values it becomes our responsibility.” (3)*

*“We’re setting up a programme for the kids to learn a new skill making photos, and teach them to pick up plastic through this.” (2)*

Further, as the sportification process these activities are undergoing continues, there is a perceived advantage that the increased exposure, commercialisation and participation of lifestyle sports will bring more resources to run the initiatives, be it social or economic capital. To an extent, this emboldens the structure and systems found within lifestyle sports, which translates into increased support for social development initiatives.

*“As skating gets recognised as an Olympic sport, I think it brings legitimacy to what we do. It’s a good thing for funders for us because the majority of funders don’t skate and don’t get it. It also brings extra coverage on women skateboarding.” (1)*

*“It might help us bring in more people, because there will be more surfers like-minded to what we do. That could help us set an example, as we will have a bigger duty to demonstrate certain values.” (3)*

Finally, another perceived benefit of lifestyle sport initiatives for social development is the easy accessibility. Having such a seemingly welcoming environment leads to a stronger sense of community whilst keeping a homogenous identity. This is mostly grounded upon the lack of hypercompetition, which according to the data is what prevents cultural fragmentation and thus creates an appealing environment to solidify the impact of the social aims being pursued.

*“The fact that you care about them landing their trick as well, and sharing it in a way is a wonderful form of non-verbal communication, which brings all people together from all backgrounds.” (1)*

*“Competitiveness can be an obstacle. In sports where there is a sort of personal expression there is no judgement when someone wins. It gives you freedom, having a group identity but without having to prove yourself.” (3)*

However, certain perceived challenges come up following the sportification process of lifestyle activities. For instance, the massification ensuing the establishment of surfing or skateboarding as mainstream sports could potentially lead to the loss of identity and values, which are one of the perceived aptitudes of lifestyle sports in creating cohesion and furthering social development goals. It may also lead to the gradual decline of the sports’ utility in societies with no preconceptions, as certain assumptions strengthen amongst the collective perspectives of previously unaware populations. The powerful influences of commercialisation and mediatisation exacerbate this issue.

*“Surfing is so fashionable now, everyone’s bought the same board from Decathlon and everyone’s wearing the same wetsuits, without really knowing what surfing is. That can*

*change the culture. There's a more defensive environment, where people are more anxious when a good wave comes." (3)*

*"The skateboarding you find in 2021 is almost like an elite sport, sponsored by Red Bull and Monster, which is actually something I don't want to perpetuate too much." (1)*

Another issue raised concerns the hypercompetitive tendencies that can potentially arise as lifestyle activities become regulated and shift towards a zero-sum competition ethos. This can lead to localism or gender issues for instance, which deteriorates the welcoming environment created by the hedonistic and empowering values of lifestyle sports. The competitive aspect of lifestyle activities inevitably leads to a certain overprotection of the identity's prestige and elitism, which can diminish their capability to improve a community.

*"We don't want to fall into the negative attitudes of surfing, of localism, or when there's violence for a certain wave or geographical location. When there's an arrogant or pretentious attitude when you surf better than somebody." (3)*

*"Skating still replicates a lot of the prejudices you might see everywhere else in society, it's still a sport that is often dominated by tough guy alpha males, and we are trying our best to be a part of a change in the scene opening up to all kinds of skaters." (1)*

A final challenge emerging from the data is the extreme nature of lifestyle sports resulting in the issue of risk, and the potential barriers this imposes on certain people. Lifestyle sports are commonly associated with adrenaline-fueled extravaganza and extreme danger. This automatically limits the fundamental ability of these activities to reach out to all populations no matter the context or social development aim.

*"There's certain steps to becoming a surfer. It has a lot of risk, there's sharks out there and not every kid can swim. Most kids are afraid of the water." (2)*

## 6.4 - Networks

### 6.4.1 - Traditional Sports

The third main theme pinpointed in the data reflects how the different networks of different organizations striving for social development influence their impact. The networks include ties within the organized structures of sport, less official partners such as sponsors, and governments at various levels. A common theme in all interviews was the importance of networks for their programmes. Indeed, the network traditional sports facilitate was often a key reason why the sport was chosen to begin with. Mentioned were both the relationships traditional sports had with other sectors of society as well as within the sports for development realm. Practitioners felt that organised sports were more conducive to private investment in particular.

*“A lot of the older generation in rugby have had successful lives in the business sector and are willing to invest in the logistical side of things, the local governmental body will provide coaching training.” (5)*

*“Football is one of the main and well-known sports around the world, so it is a sport that connects people and has a very strong potential to change societies.” (4)*

Indeed, a prominent umbrella organisation that was interviewed spoke of the broad network available through the use of football in a development capacity. Interconnecting organizations all over the world, supporting funding opportunities and developing initiatives as well as sharing expertise amongst different initiatives.

*“Say there is an organization in Mexico that wants to get better in their child protection policies, so then we interconnect them with another organization in the network that we know are very strong in child protection policies.” (4)*

*“The organizations that want to be a part of our network would increase their visibility around the world because we are very well known, especially in the football field. For organizations like Adidas, Nike or the FIFA foundation or FIFA, it would increase their visibility and the idea to get funds from different partners..... There are other organizations working with other sports and they are very well known but not as much.” (4)*

## 6.4.2 - Lifestyle Sports

The relationships the lifestyle sport initiatives have with the government structures poses the greatest obstacle in terms of the various stakeholders these projects have to deal with. Repeatedly, governments both at national and local levels are designated as an impediment to successfully achieve the social development goals sought.

*“I would not call the government a partner of ours, but they are definitely a hindrance. They reject so many applications and don't give any sort of reason for it, so essentially it's only left to big international NGOs.” (1)*

*“With most governments it's super tough to set up a campaign because they want to make a profit. There's lots of corruption. It's really sad, it's maybe one of the biggest battles every project is fighting. We don't get any support because they don't see the value of it, they don't care.” (2)*

State-related connections are however not the only area where lifestyle sports often lack leverage. Everyday operations require support from all kinds of stakeholders, beyond obtaining the funds to run a particular initiative. Since lifestyle sports are to a certain extent less involved in the formal structures of sport federations and institutions, getting things done requires pulling other strings. This is found to be quite a hassle.

*“The biggest challenge is kind of getting the right kind of support from the right people. This is a city that works on connections, meeting the right people and playing within their framework might get us gifted a bit of land for our youth center. Since we are a british-registered charity it doesn't register on anyone's radar.” (1)*

Lifestyle sports do however present certain attributes which correspond well with other socio-cultural systems, which can be used as a support structure. For instance, a sport initiative analysed in this study uses its religious faith and network to connect with supporters, be it for donations, volunteering or other resources, and gather a stronger community which uses surfing as a tool for a range of social development objectives. By consolidating both the sports and the religious networks, the organisation gains access to more resources and harmonizes the values of surfing and faith to have a broader reach and a stronger impact.

*“Loving each other, that relaxed surfing environment, with good values of overcoming, helping others, learning... It’s parallel to what we want to do as Christians.” (3)*

## 7. Discussion

The following discussion brings together the main themes identified separately in the results above, striving to provide a comprehensive correlation of the elements that traditional sports and lifestyle sports initiatives present. Common themes will be identified, and differences outlined. Further, the overarching principle of sportification will be weighted and evaluated in terms of its benefits and challenges applied to the field of sport for development.

### 7.1 - Common Themes

Several of the recurring themes outlined in the results are present in both the traditional sports and the lifestyle sports initiatives. To a certain degree, the nature of these elements is emulated across each other because of what the sportification process entails. The main theme analogous in both types of sport initiative is the focus on community-building as a core principle and tenet. While traditional sports achieve this through the inherent social qualities brought along by the team dynamic and their universality and establishment across the collective consciousness of most societies worldwide, lifestyle sports may attain the same results through the genuine intrinsic nature of their communal identity self-supporting the cohesion created through initiatives and the relatively few fundamental barriers of access to the subcultures of these sports. As Coakley reminds us, it is of vital importance to adapt and tailor the initiative to the social needs of a particular population. Consequently, designing the community-building efforts using the self-sustaining focus of lifestyle sports and the scope of traditional sports to infiltrate seemingly unreachable communities appears as a powerful drive of social development projects.

Secondly, there is a certain amount of social baggage identified across both types of sport initiative that is carried along and obstructs efforts to inspire potentiality in social development. These preconceptions come in many forms and are not homogenous across the different sports initiatives, yet all of them seem to bear particular notions subjectively embedded in the minds of varying societies. Attitudes towards and perceptions of lifestyle sports often seem to lag behind the rapidly-acting pace of sportification, as many activities are still commonly associated with their hedonistic counter-cultural roots and their



progression into more formal, organized activities remains ignored. Many traditional sports initiatives also carry their own sort of social baggage, as they are often associated with a certain socioeconomic class, gender or ethnic background due to the particular trajectory the activity has followed. Under the course of sportification, the massification and mainstreaming of these sports creates new and ever changing perceptions that whatever demographic happens to dominate the scene is unalterable. The additional weight of being deeply ingrained in popular perceptions makes these assumptions more fixed. Again, the literature highlights the need to prevent this kind of standardization, to which the identities and values of different sports is no exception. The efforts of sports initiatives to deconstruct the prejudices formed around their activities implies an opportunity cost on resources and capital that would otherwise be invested in fulfilling the aims of the project.

Finally, a lack of recognition seems to befall both types of sport initiatives. Overwhelming expectations that the hardcore competitive values of sportification are followed hold certain traditional sports initiatives back from gaining the necessary standing within the appropriate network. A certain position within the structures of organized sport is also commonly expected. In the case of these less rigid initiatives, they are seen as second-fiddle to other, more solidified organizations due to their slight detachment from the institutional principles of sport. Lifestyle sport initiatives are more directly disconnected from the structures providing recognition and resources for the obvious reason that there is yet a lack of federations or formally-recognised governing bodies with the necessary support systems. The unstable nature of lifestyle sports philosophy under the influence of sportification results in a fragmented scene of undetermined institutionalization. The lack of recognition ultimately traps initiatives in a cycle of decentralized rapports with more informal stakeholders, which further isolates their position of compliance with organized structures.

## **7.2 - Differences**

While there are themes common to both approaches, stark divergences are also evident. Primarily this can be seen when assessing their ability to access investment. The fraternal element within established team sports culture is an important factor in developing revenue

streams. Former players and older generations often maintain an attachment to the sport and are a prime source of donations, acting on a feeling of wanting to contribute back. Lifestyle activities simply do not have a comparable social network of private financial backers in terms of scale. This could be attributed to a transience in the community regarding age with older generations less likely to maintain as strong connections to the activity, or indeed the underground/subculture nature traditionally associated with leisure activities compared to the position of competitive team sports which are firmly woven within the social culture.

Traditional sport enjoying mainstream status also allows initiatives to bridge into other sections of society. Practitioners were aware of the likelihood of increased employability and education prospects due to the networking ability of traditional sports. Conversely, lifestyle activities lack the integration with society at large. Instead, lifestyle activities initiatives seek to act as catalysts for community development on a local level. The transformative effects are focused around increasing independence of communities.

Another factor that must be addressed is simply the difference in scale. A prominent footballing umbrella organisation was able to boast a network of 143 members whereas an organization fulfilling a similar role within the realms of surfing was connecting 6. Sportified activities have a higher prevalence throughout the world and so have more robust and in depth management systems guiding these networks. While this in and of itself does not qualify traditional sports as superior activities for development, it undoubtedly has its own benefits in terms of access to expertise and the sharing of resources.

### **7.3 - Benefits of Sportification**

Reflecting on the interview data it is clear that the use of sportified activities has a number of clear benefits over lifestyle activities. A considerable contributing factor being the platform given to the initiatives. In terms of the development sector itself using a traditional sport allows for connection to larger global networks of initiatives. Such networks allow Individual

sports programmes to benefit by being able to learn from each other's expertise as well as increase visibility to large private sector corporations interested in donating through these platforms. Further, the traditional sports model allows for access to private investment from stakeholders already involved in the sport in other capacities. The sense of using the strong social, almost fraternal, elements in sport to garner support is an important strategy that was commonly cited in our interviews.

Traditional sports can potentially benefit due to a clearer route to investment through the ability to leverage a link with such a commercialised and lucrative industry as professional sports. Investment into infrastructure, coach development and overall promotion of sport as a social good benefitted the traditional sports profile and somewhat supported their operations. Initiatives have the ability to leverage partnerships with professional bodies, teams and players in order to increase their reach and also to receive increased financial support. Traditional sports development programmes can run pledge initiatives from professional athletes or indeed embed themselves within the CSR strategies of professional sports organizations.

## **7.4 - Challenges of Sportification**

A concern that traditional sport initiatives have to contend with has always been the issue of focus being drawn to development of sport rather than through sport. Practitioners in the field can be somewhat corrupted by the notion of glory and enticed into focusing on competitions or talent development, somewhat abandoning their stated developmental objectives. As activities become sportified the importance of competition becomes increasingly central. Indeed, as per the interview, all development initiatives using traditional sports felt a considerable lack of recognition from governing bodies and partners. This was evident in the lack of support at board levels, a dearth of access to infrastructure, and in some instances being viewed as direct competition to existing sports clubs in the locality. The strong consensus gathered from practitioners is that within the world of organised sports primary focus is given to talent development and competitive success, with development initiatives habiting a place of far less importance. Thus, sportification, while undeniably offering

increased visibility and a larger platform, contains with it the issues of having to contend with the competitive nature of sport.

Sportification contributes to the homogenization of activities into a definite entity and permits society to form a normative understanding. This process is liable to cause an erosion of identity and cause divisions within existing activities as has been seen in the cases of snowboarding, skating and surfing. Indeed, interviewees commented that the identity, culture and sense of belonging contributed strongly towards a feeling of community and was of importance in their development objectives. This element of the activity's offering becomes lessened, or at least conflicted, when sportified. This homogenisation of development initiatives is also at odds with the academic consensus that the development through the sports field needs to incorporate a greater appreciation of context and critical awareness of activity's different abilities to stimulate different development responses in particular communities. Through the homogenising effect of sportification the unique qualities of certain activities may be lessened or eroded entirely.

## **7.5 - Decolonising the findings**

A complex pattern emerges when correlating the relationship between sportification and social development with colonialism and its historical impact on societal systems and structures. The very origins of many of the most popular organized sports are rooted in colonial powers, such as football or rugby originating in Britain. Sport was also used within colonies as a means of cementing a collective cultural bond to Empire (Hughson, 2009), so the organized sport ethos as we know it is not only deeply ingrained in the foundations of colonialism, but also in the mechanisms that have sustained the power of imperial states. The attitudes and processes surrounding this mentality have inevitably permeated the landscape of sport and lifestyle activities under the influence of sportification.

The platform provided by organized sport structures and the opportunity to gain leverage and investment from these can be directly echoed in the systems imposed on colonies whereupon

resources were poured into the territory, arguably with vested interests. The resulting expansion entails a certain exclusion of that which does not conform or adapt to the new establishment, which is something that can be found in the way sportification, particularly institutionalization and commercialisation, takes over lifestyle activities to provide it with the apparent wonders of capital and networks.

The challenges posed by the nature of sportification also mirror those brought along by colonialism. Identity erosion is inherent to the imposition of unfamiliar cultural norms upon a colonised people, through the homogenization of diverse indigenous traits. In the case of many lifestyle sports experiencing mainstreaming, the massification as well as fundamental sportification attributes such as competition has led to a subsequent distortion of their legitimate identity. Whilst the sportified model does not necessarily entail corruption of values through hypercompetitive tendencies, it is the individual vulnerability of administrators and practitioners of sport that tends to succumb to these forces, as discussed in Section 7.4. This equates to the colonial control of local populations through chiefs rather than a central state, resulting in greater corruption through increased autonomy and power and decreased accountability (Ali et al., 2020).

There are stark similarities between the workings of colonialism and those of sportification, both in terms of the underlying benefits and challenges. Therefore, in order to decolonise the sport landscape, it is necessary to mitigate the aforementioned barriers to development with the appropriate safeguarding mechanisms and the right balance of sportification. Good governance codes are widely used across institutions and governing bodies, yet one could wonder how certain lifestyle sports or sport initiatives which are not formally supported by these structures manage the negative pressures of sportification without the appropriate protocols. Ultimately, what prevents the ‘colonising’ of lifestyle activities and their transformation into formal sports is the preservation of their identity. Legitimacy and integrity are bound to maintain the genuine traits of a subculture, which prevents the erosion of the identity yet does not shut off the opportunities presented by sportification.

## 8. Conclusion

The academic field of sport for development increasingly demands critical scrutiny of the various factors shaping the potential success of initiatives. A rising awareness of the importance of adapting sport initiatives to the contextual and circumstantial factors of a certain environment has taken over the academic sphere of influence. Thereupon, this study identifies a blank in scholarly research regarding what types of sport have a certain capability to exert their potential on social sustainability and development. As seen, the existing literature falls short in consolidating the aptitudes of lifestyle sports within the whole structure and systems of sportification, and correlating the findings to their counterparts across the mainstream sport dominion. Striving to determine the necessary attributes when pursuing social development objectives through different sport initiatives, this study has uncovered several issues central to the process of sportification.

Taking a qualitative approach and through the use of semi-structured interviews, six organisations were targeted as samples of what the whole sport-for-development spectrum includes in terms of traditional mainstream sports and lifestyle sports. The different sport philosophies and connections to the forces of sportification provide a perspective which encompasses a wider scope of frames of reference. This way, results reflecting the workings of sport-for-development initiatives appear as more applicable to the field.

From the interview data themes that were common to both approaches were identified. The two different approaches commented on a shared reverence for the importance of community building within their development projects. Indeed, development of personal empowerment and self-esteem were also commonly cited by interviewees as core objectives. Accessibility was also given considerable attention. Organised sports benefited from access to larger networks and easier avenues to private investment, support from governing bodies, professional entities and sponsors were more readily available. However, both approaches detailed difficulties relating to recognition at various levels, and access to infrastructure. Traditional sports were more likely to incorporate elements of integration into the fields of

employment and education leveraging the ingrained position of organised sport within society with lifestyle activities instead seeking to build community self-sufficiency and independence.

While the benefits of using a traditional organised sport for development initiatives is clear in terms of scale of networks, wide appeal and access to private investment. It was acknowledged that sportification does pose threats to development capabilities in terms of the prevalence of social baggage, accessibility, particularly in terms of gender, and the systemic focus of the sports industry at large to competitive pursuits. These difficulties coupled with the different development potential of lifestyle activities suggest that sportification does not necessarily positively improve development initiatives. The development through the sports sector should seek to maintain both approaches and foster more integration between activities.

Further research could focus on the potential avenues of lifestyle sports gaining a place within the organized structures of sport and the implications this would have on the advantages they currently present. Conversely, one could wonder how the complex framework of formal sport could be more inclusive of activities that do not necessarily follow the lead of sportification, in efforts to take a step towards each other and compromise. Perhaps it could be of academic interest to investigate the factors impeding this from happening. Ultimately, even within the mainstream sports realm there is a certain segregation amongst activities and the structures and systems surrounding them, which calls for an integrated approach of development through sport charities in general.

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# 10. Appendices

## A) Interview Questions

- 1) What are your objectives? How important is it that you use this activity in particular?
- 2) How would you change this activity if operating in the global south?  
(Exploring the consideration of *context*)
- 3) What measurable impact have you had?  
*What are they actually achieving/ and how successfully?*  
*How is success being monitored? If at all*
- 4) What type of affiliations/partners do you have ? How do they support/ hinder you ? How important are they to your operations?  
*Network structure, power dynamic*
- 5) What do you think about Lifestyle activities/ traditional sports? in relation to your activity?
- 6) What do you require to grow? What are your desires and ambitions for the future?  
*Assessing values, aspirations, sustainability, ideology*

## **B) United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

- 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts <sup>[n 10]</sup>
- 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

## C) Interviewees

- 1) The first organization interviewed used skating within the context of a European city. The host city has suffered years of economic turmoil as well as mass migration in recent years due to the refugee crisis. This coupled with the lack of inclusive and accessible recreational activities for young people has increased inequality, discrimination and prejudice for the already marginalised. The organisation seeks to use skating as a medium for promoting wellbeing, empowerment and social cohesion for young people within the city. These objectives are listed within the United Nations' sustainable development goals (UNSDG) under goals 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”, 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, 10 “Reduce inequality within and among countries” and 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.
  
- 2) The second interview was conducted with an organization using surfing as means to connect communities in need of aid and support on a global scale. They focus on community development and enabling local projects through support including service trips, providing surfing equipment, promoting locally made goods, and financial assistance for specific one-time cost addressing UNSDG 2 “ End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”, 3, 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and 14 “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.
  
- 3) The third organization used surfing to enable community development as well as for religious evangelism. They focused on empowering young people and communities socially as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle and care for the environment. This organisation was addressing UNSDG 3,11 and 14 “Protect, restore and promote



sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”

- 4) The Fourth interview was conducted with an umbrella organisation for development programmes using football throughout the world. Facilitating the network of football initiatives throughout the world, they indirectly contribute to multiple development goals however their focus is to amplify the impact of football as a catalyst to tackle social change, enable football initiatives to support the sustainable development agenda and to unite the global community to overcome the challenges facing society, strongly correlating to goal 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”.
  
- 5) The fifth interview was conducted with a rugby club, founded and ran in an underprivileged western European city. The use of rugby, heavily associated with the upper echelons of society within this context, is an effort to bridge young people into education, employment and social groups beyond their immediate environment. This club was addressing UNSDGs 3,4,8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”, 10 and 11.
  
- 6) The sixth interview was conducted with an organisation seeking to use street sports and culture to enact social change. The mission is to create lasting social change through youth-led street sports and culture. Focused on developing youth leadership, empowerment , entrepreneurship and social challenges through physical activity this organisation addresses UNSDGs 3,4,5,7,10,11.