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Dossier

## Using Recreational Sport for Social Mobility of Urban Youth: Practices, Challenges and Dilemmas

*Le recours au sport amateur pour favoriser la mobilité sociale des jeunes en ville: Pratiques, défis et dilemmes*  
*El uso del deporte recreativo para la movilidad social de la juventud urbana: prácticas, desafíos y dilemas*

Ramón Spaaij

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### Résumés

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This article critically examines some of the major challenges and dilemmas faced by sport-based intervention programs that aim to achieve social mobility of urban youth. Drawing on case studies from Brazil, Australia and The Netherlands, the author proposes and illustrates a typology for analysing sport-based social interventions, which incorporates the level and the focus of intervention. A number of barriers to successful intervention are identified, including persisting inequalities in sport participation, cultural expectations and norms, the competitive nature of sport, and the cost of sport engagement. It is argued that there are at least three major dilemmas in relation to using sport as a vehicle for social mobility of urban youth: balancing the intrinsic and extrinsic significance of sport ; the interrelationships between sport and other social fields ; and the demand for sustained and dialogical commitment by all parties involved, including funding bodies. It is concluded that sport does not offer a panacea for social problems. Sport-based social intervention programs can make a difference for some people in some circumstances, depending on the ways in which these programs are delivered as well as on the specific conditions in which they operate.

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**Mots-clés** : jeunesse, sport pour le développement, football, mobilité sociale, capital social, inégalités dans la participation sportive

**Keywords** : youth, sport-for-development, football, social mobility, social capital, inequalities in sport participation

**Palabras claves** : juventud, deporte para el desarrollo, fútbol, movilidad social, capital social, desigualdades en la participación en el deporte

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#### SYNDICATION

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## Texte intégral



## Introduction

- 1 Sport is widely regarded as having significant social, health and economic benefits. In contemporary political discourse, sport is being analysed not only in terms of its economic impact but also in terms of its potential to combat poverty, unemployment, crime and segregation <sup>1</sup>. Sport is believed to serve as a vehicle for the empowerment and social connection of 'vulnerable' young people living in underprivileged urban neighbourhoods <sup>2</sup>. In particular, it has been argued that the social benefits of sport extend to spheres that are hard to reach through more traditional political and social activities <sup>3</sup>.
- 2 This article critically examines the practices of sport-based intervention programs that seek to generate upward social mobility of urban youth as well as the main challenges and dilemmas they face. It aims to interrogate the existing academic and policy debates using empirical research data collected by the author in Brazil, Australia and The Netherlands. The article is divided into four parts. The first part provides a brief discussion of the academic and policy debates on recreational sport's contribution to social mobility of disadvantaged youth. It proposes a framework for analysing the impact of sport-based intervention on the social status of young people, especially those deemed « at risk » or disadvantaged. The second part of the article presents a typology for categorising sport-based interventions. This is followed by a discussion of three contemporary initiatives seeking to achieve or contribute to social mobility of young people through sport engagement. Drawing on ongoing empirical research by the author, this discussion emphasises the diversity of approaches in terms of their objectives, methodologies and social contexts. On the basis of this discussion, the final part of the article formulates a number of dilemmas and barriers to successful intervention as well some conditions that need to be met in order to enable beneficial outcomes of sport engagement.
- 3 For the purpose of this paper I adopt Giulianotti's sociological definition of sport <sup>4</sup>. Giulianotti defines sport as:
1. Structured by rules and codes of conduct, spatial and temporal frameworks (playing fields and time limits on games), and institutions of government ; <sup>5</sup>
  2. Goal-oriented: aimed at particular objectives, e.g. scoring goals, winning contests, increasing averages ;
  3. Competitive: rivals are defeated, records are broken ;
  4. Ludic, enabling playful experiences, germinating excitement ; <sup>6</sup>
  5. Culturally situated, in that 1-4 correspond closely to the value systems and power relations within the relevant sport's host society <sup>7</sup>.
- 4 In this paper the main focus will be on team sports, especially football (soccer). The three case studies presented in this article all feature football as the main sporting activity. This reflects the fact that the most used sport in sport-for-development programs across the globe is football due to the game's global appeal. Other often used sports, though to a much lesser extent, are team sports such as volleyball and basketball. However, as I have argued elsewhere, a much wider range of sports may act, in certain circumstances, as agents of personal and social change <sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins et al., *Sport and social exclusion*, Loughborough, Institute of Sport and Leisure P(...)

<sup>2</sup> Fred Coalter et al., *The role of sport in regenerating deprived urban areas*, Edinburgh, The Statio(...)

<sup>3</sup> The Football Task Force, *Investing in the community*, London, The Football Task Force, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *Sport: A critical sociology*, Cambridge, Polity, 2005, p. xii-xiii.

<sup>5</sup> See also David Shilbury et al., *Sport management in Australia*, Melbourne, Strategic Sport Manageme(...)

<sup>6</sup> See also Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for excitement: Sport and leisure in the civilizing(...)*

<sup>7</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Ramon Spaaij, « Personal and social change through sport: cross-cutting themes », *Sport in Society(...)*

## Sport, capital and social mobility in policy and academic debates

5 Two general perspectives on the uses of recreational team sports can be distinguished. The first perspective focuses on the intrinsic significance of sport. People may participate in sport simply because they enjoy playing the game or to learn particular skills directly related to the game. From this perspective, sport participation is viewed as a valued end in itself. The second perspective values sport according to its extrinsic significance, for instance its role in fostering social relationships, social skills and character building <sup>9</sup>. Figure 1 lists some of the commonly presumed benefits of sport engagement for the individual. Here we may speak of development through sport, that is, sport as a vehicle for personal and social change. The primary objective of development programs in this area is social inclusion. Such schemes aim to use sport to achieve societal outcomes, such as improving the health, educational performance, and social and professional skills of target groups <sup>10</sup>. It is this latter perspective that I will focus on in this article. It should be noted however that both perspectives – « sport as an end » and « sport as a means » – are closely intertwined <sup>11</sup>. Many people participate in a particular type of sport not only for the sport itself, but also for reasons such as health and social contact. Furthermore, the physical, mental and social benefits accruing from sport participation may surface as a side effect of initiatives principally aimed at enhancing participation in sport and physical activity.

6 Figure 1: Presumed benefits of sport engagement

<b>Physical effects</b>	<b>Mental effects</b>
Physical fitness and health	Reduced anxiety, stress and depression
Healthy lifestyle	Sense of well-being
	Self-esteem and self-efficacy
<b>Material and cultural effects</b>	<b>Social effects</b>
Cognitive development	Socio-moral development
Professional and technical skills	Transmission of standards and values
Educational attainment	Empathy and tolerance
Employability	Social behaviour
Social status	Social relationships

7 A major shortcoming in the debate on the social benefits of sport is that while sport's impact on social mobility is often recognised and praised, there is an absence of robust empirical evidence to substantiate this claim <sup>12</sup>. Presumed theoretical benefits of sports remain largely unexplored empirically <sup>13</sup>. There is consensus among scholars neither about the precise benefits of sport, nor about the specific conditions that enable social mobility through sport engagement. Consequently, there is a need to test these claims empirically, and to assess sport-based social interventions so that their outcomes can be measured more accurately and future initiatives can be designed more effectively <sup>14</sup>.

8 At least three limitations can be identified in policy and academic debates on social mobility through recreational sport. Firstly, the debate is conceptually vague and underspecified. Most analyses focus exclusively on sport's contribution to the formation of social capital <sup>15</sup>, largely neglecting: the significance of other forms of capital ; the nexus between different forms of capital ; and the actual effects of social capital on a person's social position. I would argue that sport can be conceptualised as a vehicle for generating different forms of capital, most notably economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital <sup>16</sup>, from which certain benefits can be derived that enable social agents to improve or maintain their social position. The actual or potential impact of sport on an individual's social position can be analysed through the impact of sport engagement, in playing or non-playing roles, on different forms of capital and on the ways in which these forms of capital are « converted » and transferred to other social spheres. In short, investigating the ways in which social agents create, use and convert capitals through sport enables us to determine more precisely the relationship between sport engagement and social mobility, and to generate better understanding of the conditions necessary for sport-based social intervention programs to achieve social mobility of disadvantaged young people <sup>17</sup>.

9 Secondly, policy initiatives seeking to use sport as a vehicle for social mobility tend to focus on macro-level interpretations of social capital. In this view, the benefits of social capital accrue not so much to individuals as to the collectivity as a whole, be they entire communities or nations <sup>18</sup>. The transition of the concept of social capital from an individual asset to a

<sup>9</sup> Ilkka Vuori *et al.*, *The significance of sport for society*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Press, 19(...)

<sup>10</sup> Fred Coalter, *Sport and community development: a manual*, Edinburgh, SportsScotland, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Janssens, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Long and Ian Sanderson, « The social benefits of sport: where's the proof? », in Chris Gr (...)

<sup>13</sup> Fred Coalter *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Tacon, *Football and social inclusion: evaluating social policy*, London, Football Governanc(...)

<sup>15</sup> For example: Matthew Nicholson and Russell Hoye (eds), *Sport and social capital*, Oxford, Elsevier(...)

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, « The forms of capital », in John Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of theory and resear(...)*

<sup>17</sup> Ramón Spaaij, « Sport as a vehicle for social mobility and regulation of disadvantaged urban youth(...)

<sup>18</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*, New

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and

community or national resource is relatively weakly developed conceptually. At the individual level, the sources of social capital are explicitly associated with a person's social networks, while effects are related to a range of material and informational benefits. These are separate and distinct from the social structures that produce them <sup>19</sup>. Collective social capital lacks this distinction <sup>20</sup>. Moreover, macro-level approaches to social capital under-recognise that social capital is part of a wider set of structural relations and subjective beliefs that are bound up with inequalities of resources, and hence with power inequalities. These inequalities are crucial for understanding both the relationship between sport and social mobility, and the ways in which different forms of capital are generated through sport within particular social contexts. Capital is essentially a positional asset that people can use in order to strengthen their own position relative to others, and not simply and invariably a communal good.

- 10 Thirdly, policy approaches tend to use a community-specific « deficit model » in seeking to strengthen aspects of « community » through a range of social interventions, including sport. Such policies frequently ignore not only the wider social and cultural changes that contribute to the erosion of social connectedness and community involvement (e.g. lifestyle changes and wider socio-economic conditions) <sup>21</sup>, but also more specific, context-dependent developments, for instance the erosion of social cohesion and community safety in certain urban neighbourhoods due to the withdrawal of public institutions <sup>22</sup>.
- 11 In the remainder of this article, I will discuss the ways in which these issues have been addressed in the practice of sport-for-development. The aim of this discussion is to link the abovementioned theoretical debates to the actual delivery of programs that seek to achieve or contribute to social mobility and social inclusion of urban youth.

Loic Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Chicago, University of Ch(...)

<sup>20</sup> Alejandro Portes, « Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology », *Annual Rev(...)*

<sup>21</sup> Fred Coalter, « Sports clubs, social capital and social regeneration: « Ill-defined interventions(...)

<sup>22</sup> Loic Wacquant, « Negative social capital: state breakdown and social destitution in America's urban(...)

## Social mobility through recreational team sports: a typology

- 12 Programs that use recreational sport as a vehicle for social mobility, at times under the banner of « community sports development » <sup>23</sup>, come in many different shapes and with many different foci of practice. They are all premised on the belief that sport has significant extrinsic values and the potential to enhance personal and social development, as reflected in the following statement by the United Nations Inter-Agency Taskforce on Sport for Development and Peace:

Sport – from play and physical activity to organised competitive sport – has an important role in all societies. Sport is critical to a child's development. It teaches core values such as co-operation and respect. It improves health and reduces the likelihood of disease. It is a significant economic force providing employment and contributing to local development. And, it brings individuals and communities together, bridging cultural or ethnic divides. Sport offers a cost-effective tool to meet many development and peace challenges, and help achieve the Millennium Development Goals <sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Hylton and Mick Totten, « Community sports development », in Kevin Hylton *et al.* (eds), *Spor(...)*

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, *Sport as a tool for dev(...)*

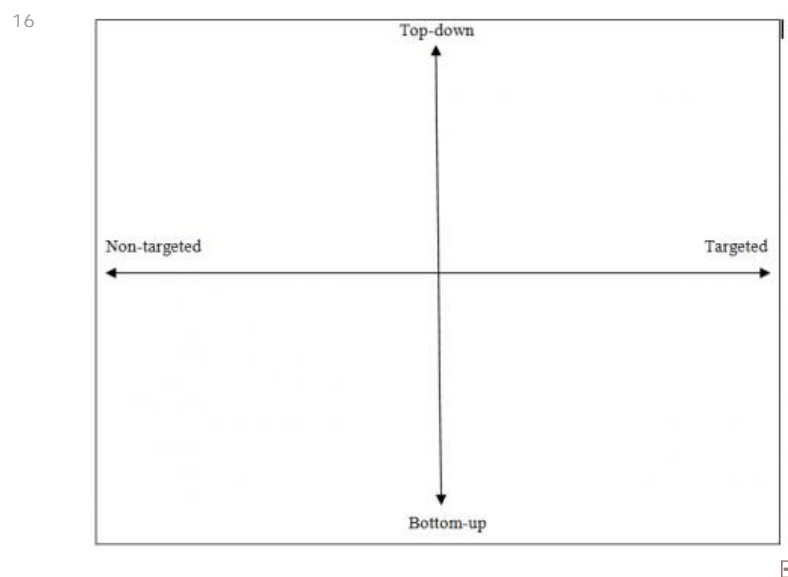
- 13 Notwithstanding this common belief, Fred Coalter rightly warns against the danger of de-contextualised, rather romanticised, communitarian generalisations about the power of sport for development. Coalter argues that « sport in any simple sense rarely achieves the variety of desired outcomes attributed to it and that issues of process and context ... are key to understanding its developmental potential » <sup>25</sup>. Following this line of argument, I would argue that different types of sport-based intervention programs face different barriers and are likely to generate different outcomes, and that we therefore need to distinguish more carefully between distinctive forms and foci of practice.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Coalter, « Sport-in-development: Development for and through sport? », in Matthew Nicholson *a(...)*

- 14 For this purpose, sport-based intervention programs can be usefully categorised on a continuum along two axes. The first axis refers to the level of intervention. This scale ranges from a top-down approach that is entirely determined and funded by government, to a bottom-up model of intervention that is initiated and run from within civil society. In reality there is often a mixed economy of provision, involving partnerships between private, public and voluntary organisations. The second axis refers to the degree to which sport-based interventions are targeted at specific groups that experience social and economic marginalisation, and to whether they attach specific educational services and programs to sport activities in order to redress this

marginalisation. In other words, it differentiates between sport-based interventions that focus primarily on sport (i.e. sport development) and those that focus primarily on development (i.e. sport-for-development). These two axes can be combined to produce a typology of sport-based social intervention, as shown in Figure 2. Any individual program or initiative can be interpreted as located at a given point on the two scales, fitting into one of the four (ideal-type) quadrants.

15 Figure 2: A typology of sport-based interventions



17 To offer insight into the rationale and implementation of sport-based social intervention programs and the particular challenges and dilemmas they face, in the remainder of this article I will discuss three case studies. These case studies represent different positions in the proposed typology, as Figure 2 shows. They are based on empirical research by the author in Brazil, Australia and The Netherlands. The case studies were selected on the basis of a multiple-case design, with each case study representing a sport-based intervention with distinctive features with reference to the proposed typology. In each of these case studies the focus is on organised team sports, especially football, which are often viewed as the forms of sport that are most likely to generate durable social connections and social capital <sup>26</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> For example Robert Putnam, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

18 The Vencer program in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, focuses on youth development rather than sports, that is, it uses sport as a hook or motivator to engage local youth. Although Vencer has a large civil society component and could therefore be viewed as a relatively bottom-up intervention, its affiliation with organisations like the Inter-American Development Bank compromises its position as a « grassroots » campaign. The program is thus driven from both ends. The Dutch Sport Steward program is an example of a comparatively top-down, targeted approach financed by local government and, previously, through EU funding. In this program the focus is also on youth development rather than sport participation *an sich*. The Melbourne Giants football club, on the other hand, can be viewed as a relatively bottom-up, non-targeted approach that focuses on Melbourne's Somali community but without attaching specific educational services or programs to its sport activities. <sup>27</sup> The club is generally more concerned with sport provision that with youth development even though, as we will see, the latter issue has also been addressed by local organisers. Typical examples of a top-down, non-targeted approach are government-led campaigns to improve sports facilities and to increase sport participation among the general population, for example to promote beneficial health outcomes. The latter is not discussed below due to its more general nature and due to its focus on health rather than on social mobility <sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> In this article I use the fictive name Melbourne Giants to protect the anonymity of respondents an(...)

<sup>28</sup> For an analysis see Ramón Spaaij and Hans Westerbeek, « A healthy active Australia? Sport and heal(...)»

19 Each case study uses football as a vehicle for social mobility, but with variable rationales, methodologies, modes of funding and outcomes. The case studies show the diversity of approaches to community sports development and the differential socio-cultural and political contexts in which programs of this kind operate. As such, they underline the point that issues of process and context are key to understanding the developmental potential of sport. Lack of space prevents me from discussing the three cases in full. Instead, below I provide a

concise description of the three sport-based intervention programs under study.

## Case study methodology

- 20 A similar methodology was used for each case study, but with some variations. Each case study combined quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was compiled from the records kept by program coordinators regarding the pre- and post-program situations of participants, including their previous and current employment, education, financial and housing situations as well as their behaviour and sporting habits. This data was supplemented and updated using interview and observation material collected by the author. The purpose of this method was to establish a detailed picture of the impact of the programs on the lives of participating youth and former participants. However, as this picture failed to produce any profound insight into the youth's everyday experiences and the meanings they give to their participation in the programs, I supplemented the quantitative data with qualitative data gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews ; not only to monitor the experiences and progress of individual participants, but also to investigate teaching methods and group dynamics. In addition, focus groups were organised in which participants, former participants, teachers and tutors participated. These sessions focused on the life histories of participants and on their expectations and aspirations for the future, such as their views on the impact of the program on their personal development, employment and educational opportunities.
- 21 Scale differences largely determined the use of surveys. Only in one case study, the Vencer program, was a survey conducted among participants and former participants. The other programs, with approximately 80 (former) participants, were deemed too small to generate any statistically relevant data through surveys. With over 1,200 former participants, the Vencer program did lend itself to a larger-scale survey. In total approximately 300 completed surveys were collected at this program. The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions relating to (former) participants' experiences with the program and their perceptions of its impact on their lives.

## Sport for youth employability and professional development: the Vencer program

- 22 The Vencer program is a team sports partnership model for youth employability in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Vencer is part of a wider program, called A Ganar (Vencer), which operates in three South American countries: Brazil, Uruguay and Ecuador. Vencer is funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and Partners of the Americas. As the largest volunteer-based organisation in the western hemisphere engaged in social, economic, and cultural development, Partner of the Americas is the executing agency that houses the Project Coordination Unit. It helps to develop the capacity of the participating local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the areas of financial management, communications and outreach, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, and volunteer management. In Brazil, the organisation that runs the Vencer program is the Instituto Companheiros das Américas (ICA), a sister organisation of Partners of the Americas.
- 23 The objective of the Vencer program is to improve the employment prospects of young people living in Rio de Janeiro's disadvantaged urban areas. Vencer seeks to bring together youth's interest in football and other team sports, a growing focus on corporate social responsibility and a deep concern for the future of urban youth. The intended overall program outcomes are demonstrably improved employability skills for participating youth, practical work experience that builds their credentials and knowledge about how to pursue job opportunities <sup>29</sup>. Vencer is built on the belief that team sport is an effective tool for motivating youth to participate in vocational training and for teaching employment skills. As a program coordinator noted:

Sport, and football in particular, gave us an opportunity to talk about other things, like work skills. Because everybody knows a little bit about football, and even if they don't like it they would like to go watch it. And so it facilitates negotiation and establishes relationships, institutional relationships

<sup>29</sup> Inter-American Development Bank, *Football and team sports partnership model for youth employability(...)*

as well as personal relationships.

- 24 The use of sport as a means to teach certain employability skills is recognised by many participants. For example, an 18-year old female, who completed the program in 2008, argued that:

Football is a good way to learn certain skills which you can apply in everyday life and at work. It is not about the technical aspect of the game, for example whether you can give a good pass, but about communicating with others, to work together. These are things that you also need in the labour market.

- 25 As this comment illustrates, the vast majority of participants consider playing football merely as a means for personal and professional development, not as an end in itself. For them, getting a job, preferably in the formal sector, is the ultimate goal of their participation in the program. An essential component of the program is therefore the practical application of workforce and employability skills. The objective of this component is to provide opportunities for participants to put their training into practice, based on the assumption that demonstrated work experience is crucial to obtaining future employment. Participants are supposed complete at least 180 hours of practical on-the-job experience through internships with local businesses. Each participant is evaluated during the internship on his or her technical skills and employability skills.

- 26 Participants in the program are youth aged 15 to 24 who live in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods where they face substantial access barriers to the workforce. Reflecting these barriers, one of the program's major challenges has been to establish partnerships with businesses in order to create job placements for participants. To date approximately 71% of former participants have completed an internship, notably in the areas of telemarketing, administration, information technology and sales. The survey findings indicate that participants consider job placement a crucial part of the program, as this enables them to get to know the formal labour market from the inside, that is, to gain their first professional experience. The lack of professional experience, not having completed secondary education, and the poor quality of public education were noted by many participants as the main barriers to formal employment (as opposed to working in the informal economy, which is common for disadvantaged Brazilian youth from an early age, especially for boys <sup>30</sup>). Some participants also felt discriminated by outsiders, including public and private organisations for being 'slum dwellers' (*favelados*), which leads some of them to try to conceal their residential address during the job interview process. Prejudices and stereotypes held by potential employers may frustrate the program staff's efforts to establish new partnerships with the private sector, as one staff member indicated:

30 Mary Garcia Castro and Miriam Abramovay, « Jovens em situação de pobreza, vulnerabilidades sociais (...) »

- 27 We talk to people from big companies around here. I ask them how many of their employees come from this community. They say « just a few ». Why? ... « Oh, because [in the shantytown] we don't have qualified people » ... [T]hey have the idea that « it's poor so nothing is good ».

- 28 Another program coordinator described the situation in more graphic and controversial terms, using the hospitality sector as an example:

We had a training to work as a waitress, but that was very difficult because the girls [participating in Vencer] were black, fat, lived in a *favela* [shantytown]. And companies don't want this type of people to work for them. They want waitresses but they prefer good looking girls, preferably white, they need to speak properly, have nice clothes. They need to speak English and Spanish. The social distance is enormous. And the wage is not even good, it is quite low.

- 29 A significant number of former Vencer participants have nevertheless been able to find challenging and relatively secure employment due in large part to their professional development and learning activities and to the social credentials provided by the program organisations. Some former participants have seen considerable improvements in their financial situation as well as in their interaction with people outside their own community through work or studies. However, it should be noted that not everyone experiences a profound impact on their lives. As one female in her early 20s stated: « The program has not had much impact on my life. It did not really help me find a job. First and foremost, it was a pleasant time, cosy and good fun. And I have learned certain things. My expectations have changed a bit ; I know better what I want to do now. »



- 30 The organisations that coordinate and implement the Vencer program have also been aware of the fact that the number of young women playing organised team sports in Rio de Janeiro is relatively small. To increase the participation of young women and to stimulate their personal and professional development, in 2009 a new program called Vencedoras was established. Like Vencer, Vencedoras uses a sport-based methodology that incorporates football and classroom activities to help girls transform sport skills such as teamwork, communication, discipline and a focus on results into practical employment skills. The Vencedoras program ultimately aims to develop a model for economic empowerment of young women in Brazil.

## Linking sport, education and employment: the Sport Steward program

- 31 The Sport Steward program focuses on the improvement of the socio-economic position of unemployed and underemployed young people in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, by means of providing personal and professional development and employment opportunities <sup>31</sup>. The program particularly targets urban areas that are characterised by comparatively high levels of durable youth unemployment and attendant issues such as educational deficits, crime and drug abuse. The program is a collaborative effort of two regional educational colleges, the non-profit organisation Sport Steward Promotion (SSP) and several stakeholder agencies, notably three local professional football clubs, local government and police. It is delivered by youth workers, teachers and counsellors from a range of backgrounds, including local government, education and police.

<sup>31</sup> A more in-depth analysis of the Sport Steward program can be found in Ramon Spaaij, *op. cit.*

- 32 The Sport Steward program seeks to tap into the need for motivated, well-trained stewards on the part of professional football clubs and other major sport and event organising bodies (e.g. cycling, baseball, concerts) in Rotterdam. SSP functions as an intermediate agency between sporting events in Rotterdam and qualified sport stewards. SSP is also responsible for the continuity of the program and the recruitment of participants by means of an intake and assessment procedure. The project partners have developed a professional education program in the form of a dual trajectory of working and learning. The program is aimed specifically at offering an educational platform where participants obtain knowledge of and experience with the profession of sport steward. Participants are offered not only sport activities but also, and arguably more importantly, a broad training including job placement and prospects for further education and employment. The program aligns with existing courses as much as possible in order to secure formal qualifications for participants, which is seen as key to increasing youth employability. For example, the sport steward training enables formal qualifications in areas such as first aid, traffic control, crowd management and security, and social hygiene.

- 33 For the vast majority of participants, the sport focus of the program and the prospect of working at major sporting events are important incentives to participation, as expressed in the following comment by a 17-year-old male: « I don't like books or classes. I just like sport. That's why I chose this program. I read that it was a sport-based education. I would love to work in a sporting environment. » However, the first results also show that there are significant barriers to participation. In the first instance 39 people were approached for an intake meeting. Twenty people dropped out before or after the intake for various reasons, such as: they found a job (seven), not responding to the invitation (five), not showing up for the intake (three), financial problems (two). Of the 19 people who agreed to participate in the program, two did not show up at the start of the training and a further two stayed away after the first day. None of the remaining 15 people dropped out before completion of the program. The considerable degree of non-participation and drop-outs, which is not uncommon for projects of this kind, points to the problem of self-selection: only those who are highly motivated are likely to enter and successfully complete the training. Unless young people are motivated and willing to engage, the outcome is likely to be minimal. Another potential barrier is the sport focus of the program. Even though many local youth, especially young males, seem to be attracted to the program particularly by the involvement of high-profile football clubs and by the prospect of working at these clubs, others may be less interested in

football and therefore find no particular incentive for joining the program.

- 34 My research indicates that the role and influence of program staff is vital to the ways in which SSP generates social leverage. It can be argued that the organisation as a whole, including partner agencies, provides an extensive social network which contains valuable resources. The organisation can be viewed as linking young people to a range of educational, business and leisure opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. But not every participant is able to benefit to the same extent from the social, cultural and economic capital effects SSP seeks to produce. In October 2008, 38% of former participants were in some form of stable employment. The most common areas of employment were the service sector and manual labour. Most of these youth have been able to considerably improve their financial position since their participation in SSP. Program staff have helped a number of youth to set up a payment plan to pay off their debts and create more structure in their financial situation. A further 18% decided to pursue further education, for instance in the areas of sport and human movement, youth work or specialised manual labour. A consequence of this decision is that although (in time) they may increase their cultural capital, they have not yet been able to make significant progress financially. 11% of former participants found temporary employment with relatively low levels of job and income security. 16% remained unemployed.
- 35 In general, young people who face particular learning difficulties struggle to increase their cultural or economic capital vis-à-vis their age group. This applies especially to a number of young refugees who participated in SSP. Often due to their temporal legal status as 'political refugees', most of them have not completed regular secondary education, and even those who have tend to have a limited knowledge of (written) Dutch language, which is a major barrier to finding secure and challenging employment. A sport development worker openly questioned whether SSP is suitable for these individuals:
- "I honestly believe that we were not capable of really working with her [a female African refugee]. What she needed first and foremost was intensive language training. We don't have the means to really teach them that. We teach them a little bit, but you cannot make up for years of non-education within the space of four months. That's impossible."
- 36 Others, however, have experienced significant improvements in their employment situation. One male participant stressed that he had tried to get a job at several security companies in the past, but that they never hired him due to the fact that he had not completed secondary education. He not only felt that SSP contributed to his skill development, knowledge and experience, but also that program staff provided intensive support when needed and really pushed employers to give him a chance to prove himself. Several participants expressed similar views.
- 37 We may therefore conclude that while sport activities are an important incentive for young people to participate in SSP in the first place, the transformative capacity of the program can only be realised within a personal and professional development approach and not by merely offering sport. Several participants recognise that SSP serves as a supportive environment to encourage and assist them in their professional and social development, learning, and connection through related programs and services.

## The role of football in the settlement of Somali refugees: the case of the Melbourne Giants

- 38 Melbourne Giants FC was founded in Melbourne, Australia, with the aim of increasing the level of sport participation among Somali (and, initially, Eritrean) refugees and assisting them in their settlement process. Melbourne Giants is essentially a grassroots initiative that has received limited institutional support. The initiative is nominally supported by two local not-for-profit organisations, whose youth workers invested considerable (mainly unpaid) time and effort into the management of the club. The club is also supported by local Somali community organisations, and community leaders have been instrumental in providing limited funds. In recent years, the club has been awarded some small grants, which have helped it to acquire football jerseys and some training materials, and to lower its membership fees in

order to reduce the cost barrier to participation (the membership fee is currently an equivalent of €80 per season). However, the two youth workers who were most centrally involved have recently distanced themselves from the club due to what they perceive as the lack of active parental support in the everyday running of the club. As a Somali male in his early 40s stated:

A major theme in your research should be the lack of cooperation between parents and the coach. Parents like to see their kids play football but they don't have time to be involved themselves. They are too busy working or running the household. It's the children who are pushing their parents to take them to soccer, not the other way around.

- 39 Only a handful of parents appear to be committed to performing administrative or coaching tasks. Often-heard arguments voiced by parents are that they do not have time to help out due to work and family responsibilities, that they lack the skills needed to perform these tasks, or that, when it comes down to it, football is not a priority for them. As a consequence, the available resources and the available pool of volunteers remain rather limited, inhibiting the club's expansion beyond the three youth teams it currently fields.

- 40 While club representatives tend to focus principally on the intrinsic significance of football – that is, football as fun – attention has also been paid to the extrinsic values of sport engagement, in particular health and social benefits. These perceived benefits include increased self-esteem, a sense of belonging and the development of life skills. Several club representatives and parents view football as an important tool for fostering interaction and cultural understanding between different social groups, including with those outside their own communities, both African and non-African. At the same time, recognition should be given to the importance of young people being able to play with peers who they feel comfortable with and who can provide mutual support. This may mean that young Somalis want to play with others from the same cultural or language background, or with those who have shared life experiences, for instance with others who are newly arrived in Australia and who have also lived in refugees camps. For young people going through the difficult process of settling in a new country, playing football in a supportive environment can provide a « time out » from the many challenges of settlement and a space where young people can do something they are familiar with <sup>32</sup>. This applies especially to their parents, who in many cases face particular language, cultural and socio-economic barriers and for whom engaging with other Somali refugees in a supportive environment can represent an important break from their perceived marginalisation in other social spheres <sup>33</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, *Playing for the future: the role of sport and recreation in(...)*

<sup>33</sup> Andre Krouwel *et al.*, « A good sport? Research into the capacity of recreational sport to integrat(...)

- 41 Some parents and coaches argue that to enhance the settlement of Somali refugees, a more open approach is needed beyond « easy socialising », that is, increased interaction with non-Somalis in the football context would be preferable. For example, the social interaction with supporters and coaches of opposing teams is generally very limited on match days. As one coach put it:

[Melbourne Giants] do not mix with other people much. It's mostly close ties, bonding. They find this more comfortable, especially the parents. They tend to live in their own little world, and it's difficult for them break through this. A mixed team would be better in that sense, with Somalis and non-Somalis playing side by side.

- 42 The father of a young player made a similar point:

We need to interact more with other groups because this will increase our integration and increase our and our children's knowledge of the world outside our own community. That's what settlement means, not just to stick to your own little world.

- 43 This parent also made an interesting observation in relation to what he perceived as a negative consequence of the competitive nature of sport:

There is an emotional aspect of playing football for kids. I notice that when they lose – and they have lost most games this season – it affects them. They get a bit down about it. And at school other kids ask them if they have won, or they tease them because they play for the opposing team. So it's not all positive. Kids don't like losing.

- 44 This remark alludes to some of dilemmas and barriers faced by programs that seek to use sport as a vehicle for social mobility and social inclusion. These dilemmas and barriers are discussed in the next section.

## Dilemmas and barriers to using sport as a tool for social mobility of urban youth

- 45 The case studies described in this article suggest that sport can be a useful tool for achieving social mobility of socially disadvantaged urban youth. This optimism is tempered by the dilemmas and barriers faced by young people, parents, sport and community leaders, and youth workers involved in sport-based social intervention programs. Some of these dilemmas and barriers have already been discussed to some length above. In this section, I will draw upon the three case studies to identify a number of commonly experienced barriers and dilemmas. As mentioned earlier, the ways in which sport-based social intervention programs confront these barriers and dilemmas depend, to a large extent, on the objectives and methodologies of the program (see Figure 2) as well as on the specific socio-economic and political circumstances in which they operate.
- 46 One of the main barriers to achieving social mobility through sport is that the ideals of « sport for all » have never been fully achieved in practice. Massive inequalities and variations in sport participation remain. Key influences include age, gender, social class, educational attainment, ethnicity, disability and sexuality<sup>34</sup>. The material and symbolic accessibility of sport activities varies according to an individual's (or group's) social environment and position, as Bourdieu has powerfully demonstrated. For Bourdieu, there is a profound reason why certain people prefer certain types of sports and dislike the idea of participating in others. Variations in sporting practices and tastes « derive not only from the variations in the factors which make it possible or impossible to meet their *economic or cultural costs* but also from the *variations in the perception and appreciation of the immediate or deferred profits* accruing from the different sporting practices »<sup>35</sup>. In a similar vein, Pociello stresses that the place one occupies in society conditions the type of relationship one maintains with one's body and largely determines one's sporting practices<sup>36</sup>. An implication of these inequalities and variations in sport participation is that it may prove difficult for sport-based social intervention programs to actually reach particular target groups because they are underrepresented in (certain) sport(s). Unless there is recognition of the needs and aspirations of diverse people in society and amongst target groups, providers in the area of sport development will continue to maintain societal inequalities<sup>37</sup>. Despite their differences in focus and breadth, the programs discussed in this article all demonstrate recognition of this need and, each in its own distinctive way, seeks to reduce inequalities in sport participation, albeit only in a very limited number of sports (especially football).
- 47 A second, related barrier concerns the cultural expectations and social norms associated with masculine sporting culture. Certain sports, such as football and rugby, have long been associated with male drinking culture, sexist language and homophobia<sup>38</sup>. Girls and young women are often excluded due to the « masculinisation » of urban public spaces through sports.<sup>39</sup> While playing sport may be a rewarding activity for young males, the case studies indicate that it is often more difficult to engage young women. The Vencer program has noted the lack of young women who play team sports in Rio de Janeiro, while the Melbourne Giants exclusively field young males, with community leaders typically stating that in Somali Islamic culture men and women are not allowed to play sport together (there are separate indoor football and basketball teams for girls in Melbourne but not as part of the club). Engaging disadvantaged young women remains a major challenge. More generally, there is wider concern that those who are not, or less, interested in sport are excluded from the programs altogether.
- 48 A third barrier is the competitiveness that is inherent to sport, as Giulianotti's definition of sport highlights. Sport is a social activity that divides as much as it unites. The competitive nature of sport means that it is also site of tension and conflict: there are winners and losers. One potential source of social exclusion is the « talent/ability barrier ». Those who are less talented often have less social status within the team and may consequently experience a lack of self-esteem and the absence or loss of symbolic capital. For example, when a Somali male recently enquired whether his son could join the football club, a club representative responded that this would depend on whether « he is a good player or not ». On another occasion, a new boy had to train with the team for a couple of weeks before being admitted into the team. The
- <sup>34</sup> Kevin Hylton and Mick Totten, « Developing sport for all? Addressing inequality in sport », in Kev(...)
- <sup>35</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, « Sport and social class », *Social Science Information*, vol. 17, no 6, 1978, p. 8(...)
- <sup>36</sup> Christian Pociello, « La force, l'énergie, la grâce et les réflexes », in Christian Pociello (ed.)(...)
- <sup>37</sup> Kevin Hylton and Mick Totten, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- <sup>38</sup> Andrew Smith and Ivan Waddington, « Using « sport in the community schemes » to tackle crime and d(...)
- <sup>39</sup> Gasparini and Vieille-Marchiset, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

coach indicated that he did not want any more « lazy » players in the team. He was not satisfied with the skills the boy demonstrated during training and therefore decided not to include him in the team, despite the insistence of the boy's father. This barrier could be reduced by promoting a more inclusive sporting environment in which the focus is less on winning or losing, and more on the fun, friendship and learning elements of sport. Arguably, these values are frequently overshadowed by popular representations of sporting celebrities and rivalries, which tend to focus more on instant fame and fortune as well as ritualised inter-group antagonisms.

49 A fourth barrier to participation in sport-based social intervention programs, and therefore to the delivery and outcomes of such programs, is the financial cost of participation and transport. Club membership can be quite expensive even for popular sports such as football. Government subsidies and/or funding from outside of government enable several sport development programs to offer free activities. Indeed, two of the three case studies discussed in this article operate this way: enrolment in the program is free of charge. In the case of the Melbourne Giants, funding has proved insufficient to cover all membership costs. Community members and sport leaders have nevertheless been flexible and creative in finding ways to enable poor children to join the team, for example in setting up payment plans or by donating part of the membership fees. Further, although free activities certainly reduce the cost barrier, some young players and youth workers express concerns that offering free activities tends to prevent young people from fully engaging in and taking ownership of sport programs. They argue that by requiring people to pay a fee, providing that this fee is relatively small, it is possible to commit young people and their parents to the team or program in a more active and structured manner, and that this is likely to enhance the social benefits resulting from sport engagement.

50 In addition to the identified barriers to the delivery of sport-based social intervention programs, there are at least three major dilemmas in relation to using sport as a vehicle for social mobility of young people. The first dilemma is that in placing too much emphasis on the extrinsic significance of sport, one may lose sight of the intrinsic significance that sport has for its participants. As noted earlier, many people do not engage in sport and physical activity to achieve certain societal ends, but rather for enjoyment, health or to spend time with friends and family. In Australia, for example, enjoyment and health/fitness are the main reasons for sport participation. For those aged 15 to 17 years enjoyment was the main motivation given for participating in sport and physical activity <sup>40</sup>. In other countries a similar appreciation for the intrinsic significance of sport has been observed. In some cases up to 70 percent of respondents noted fun as their most important reason to participate in sport <sup>41</sup>. There is a danger that promoting sport as an instrument for social change rather than as an end in itself may cause some people to refrain from engaging in sport altogether due to diminishing enjoyment. The massive expectations people have of sport as a means to reduce or « solve » social problems should therefore be balanced with promoting the intrinsic significance of sport, thereby providing a more direct incentive for young people to engage with sport-based social intervention programs. Sport is about enjoyment, particularly for young people ; perhaps this needs to be stressed as the bottom line.

<sup>40</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Participation in sports and physical recreation, Australia, 2005-(...)*

<sup>41</sup> Hans Westerbeek, *Using sport to advance community health: an international perspective, Nieuwegein(...)*

51 The second dilemma is that sport, as a relatively autonomous social field, should be viewed in relation to other social fields. In other words, the creation of capitals in and through sport, and its potential for social mobility, is dependent on influences from other social spheres. For people who are systematically excluded from the labour market, for example, engagement in recreational sport is unlikely to yield significant improvements in their life chances. Programs such as Vencer and SEASS explicitly seek to work across different social fields to enable the transference of social and cultural capital acquired in the realm of sport to other social spheres. In this context, Hylton and Totten stress that sport development workers need to be conscious of the evident common ground which sport shares with other « social » services. They refer to these mutual areas of interest which become fields for integrated coherent policies as « cross-cutters », enabling workers from different professions to work together to reduce social exclusion <sup>42</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Hylton and Mick Totten, « Developing 'Sport for All?' Addressing inequality in sport », in K(...)

52 The third dilemma is more practical. The organisation of sustainable sport-for-development programs is an enormous challenge that requires sustained commitment by all parties involved. The Vencer program has noted that certain stakeholders are reluctant to participate fully and that many businesses do not take an interest in employing more young people,

<sup>43</sup> Tim Crabbe, « Avoiding the numbers game: social theory, policy and sport's role in the art of rela(...)

especially those whose lack formal qualifications. Similar observations have been made by those working in the SEASS program in the Netherlands. Many programs are continuously faced with the challenge of securing future funding, as funding is usually provided for a limited period of time. Despite the fact that demonstrable outcomes are neither readily available nor easy to quantify, to say the least <sup>43</sup>, (sport) development workers are often pressured into applying outcome-based or cost-benefit analyses to evaluate the actual impact of the program. A longer-term approach to funding and support would relieve the pressure for immediate and demonstrable success in terms of social mobility, and acknowledge the resource-intensive and time-intensive character of sport-based social interventions <sup>44</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Brett Hutchins, « The problem of sport and social cohesion », in James Jupp and John Nieuwenhuysen(...)

53 On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that top-down funding, for example by international organisations, often compromises the agendas of local (sport) development workers. Partnerships of this kind can be problematic, masking existing power relations between international donors, states and NGOs and creating challenges for NGOs in a context where organisations are competing for similar sources of funding. <sup>45</sup> This issue is exacerbated by the danger that sport-based intervention programs are imposed on disadvantaged communities in a top-down manner, lacking community engagement and shared ownership.

<sup>45</sup> Davis Banda, *et al.*, *Partnerships involving Sports-for-Development NGOs and the fight against HIV/...*

54 In conclusion, it could be argued that despite the passion and belief of many devotees, sport does not offer a panacea for social problems. Again, the key here is not to over-generalise and over-simplify the relationship between sport engagement and social mobility. Sport-based social intervention programs can make a difference for some people in some circumstances, depending on the ways in which these programs are delivered as well as on the particular socio-cultural, economic and political conditions in which they operate. What seems most fruitful is a holistic, long-term approach that actively engages children and young people, families, community members and a range of education and employment related services. While sport development workers generally acknowledge this need, the abovementioned barriers and dilemmas frustrate the implementation of sport-based social intervention programs in the longer term and limit their contribution to social mobility of urban youth. We should acknowledge that sport is but one part of a much broader community engagement and social change agenda <sup>46</sup>. Unless this is kept clearly in mind, there is a danger that sport will remain of limited use, or at worst, work against the objective of improving the life conditions of disadvantaged urban youth.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

## Notes



<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins *et al.*, *Sport and social exclusion*, Loughborough, Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, 1999; Sport England, *The value of sport*, London, Sport England, 1999; Central Council for Physical Recreation, *Everybody wins: sport and social inclusion*, London, CCPR, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Coalter *et al.*, *The role of sport in regenerating deprived urban areas*, Edinburgh, The Stationery Office, 2000; Michael Collins and Tess Kay, *Sport and social exclusion*, London, Routledge, 2003; cf. Lionel Arnaud, « Identity as a project: art and sport in the service of urban development policies », *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 14, 2008, p. 431-444; William Gasparini and Gilles Vieille-Marchiset, *Le sport dans les quartiers: Pratiques sociales et politiques publiques*, Paris, PUF, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The Football Task Force, *Investing in the community*, London, The Football Task Force, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *Sport: A critical sociology*, Cambridge, Polity, 2005, p. xii-xiii.

<sup>5</sup> See also David Shilbury *et al.*, *Sport management in Australia*, Melbourne, Strategic Sport Management, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> See also Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for excitement: Sport and leisure in the civilizing process*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Giulianotti, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Ramón Spaaij, « Personal and social change through sport: cross-cutting themes », *Sport in Society*, vol. 12, n° 9, 2009, 1257-1258.

<sup>9</sup> Ilkka Vuori *et al.*, *The significance of sport for society*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Press, 1995; Jan Janssens (ed.) *Education through sport: an overview of good practices in Europe*, Nieuwegein: Arko Sports Media, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Fred Coalter, *Sport and community development: a manual*, Edinburgh, SportsScotland, 2002, p. 7.

- 11 Jan Janssens, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
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- 15 For example: Matthew Nicholson and Russell Hoye (eds), *Sport and social capital*, Oxford, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008; Grant Jarvie, « Communitarianism, sport and social capital », *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 38, 2003, p. 139-153.
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- 25 Fred Coalter, « Sport-in-development: Development for and through sport? », in Matthew Nicholson and Russell Hoye (eds), *Sport and social capital*, Oxford, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, p. 48.
- 26 For example Robert Putnam, *op. cit.*, p. 411.
- 27 In this article I use the fictive name Melbourne Giants to protect the anonymity of respondents and to prevent any potential damage to the club or the community under study. I do use the actual names of the other two sports programs as these programs are formally sanctioned and funded by relatively powerful institutions.
- 28 For an analysis see Ramón Spaaij and Hans Westerbeek, « A healthy active Australia? Sport and health policy in Australia », in Hans Westerbeek (ed.), *Using sport to advance community health: an international perspective*, Nieuwegein, Arko Sports Media, 2009, p. 59-91.
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*naar sekse en etniciteit*, Nieuwegein, Arko Sports Media, 2002.

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43 Tim Crabbe, « Avoiding the numbers game: social theory, policy and sport's role in the art of relationship building », in Matthew Nicholson and Russell Hoye, *op. cit.*, p. 21-37.

44 Brett Hutchins, « The problem of sport and social cohesion », in James Jupp and John Nieuwenhuysen (John) (eds), *Social cohesion in Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 178.

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46 *Ibid.*

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