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### Sport and livelihoods

*An introduction to the special issue*

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### Publication date

2020

### Published in

Journal of Sport for Development

[Link to publication](#)

### Citation for published version (APA):

McSweeney, M., Oxford, S., Spaaij, R., & Hayhurst, L. M. C. (2020). Sport and livelihoods: An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Sport for Development*, 8(15), 1-9.

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## Editorial

**Sport and livelihoods: An introduction to the special issue****Mitchell McSweeney<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Oxford<sup>2</sup>, Ramón Spaaij<sup>3,4</sup>, Lyndsay M.C. Hayhurst<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup> York University, Canada<sup>2</sup> Monash University, Australia<sup>3</sup> Victoria University, Australia<sup>4</sup> University of Amsterdam, Netherlands*Corresponding author email: mcsweenm@yorku.ca***INTRODUCTION**

Sport for development (SFD) has continued to evolve as a field to the point where it has been suggested as an institutionalized sector within the broader international development discipline (Darnell et al., 2019; McSweeney et al., 2019). Research, practice, and policy related to SFD has increased greatly since the new millennium, including empirical analysis related to the management, innovative processes, and partnerships of organizations (Welty Peachey et al., 2018; Svensson & Cohen, 2020; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016), sociocultural investigations into the power relations across and within North/South contexts (Darnell, 2012; Hayhurst, 2014, 2017; McSweeney, 2019), explorations of gender (in)equalities and (de)colonization (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; Oxford, 2019; Oxford & McLachlan, 2018), and studies of the (un)intended consequences of SFD programs for participants who are “targeted” as development beneficiaries (Spaij, 2011, 2013a; Whitley et al., 2016), to name but a few. Yet, although critical and important insights into the complexities and premise of SFD continue to grow, and organizations continue to emerge within the field (at least pre-COVID-19), there remains a need to examine further the potential opportunities of sport, if any, for promoting and offering livelihood opportunities to specific populations (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). This special issue aims to advance theoretical, empirical, and practical insights into the relationship between SFD and livelihoods.

**LIVELIHOODS AND SFD**

Broadly speaking, livelihoods are defined as the way in which a person earns a living to support their subsistence of basic life necessities (De Vriese, 2006). A number of scholars from various disciplines and backgrounds, for instance political economy (Banks, 2016), refugee studies (Omata, 2012), and, perhaps most relevant for SFD, development studies (Bryceson, 1999), have conducted wide-ranging research on livelihoods in and across various contexts (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa; Indigenous communities; Latin America). In addition, international development agencies have refocused attention on strategies to enhance livelihoods, including the UN Development Program and World Bank. Indeed, the United Nations (2020) emphasizes livelihoods directly in relation to three of its Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 1: no poverty, Goal 8: decent work and economic growth; and Goal 10: reduced inequalities. Hence, in contemporary international development, livelihoods remain as a pressing and important topic to academics, development agencies, policymakers, practitioners, and those targeted by development programs

Though livelihoods are increasingly being promoted, discussed, and studied within international development, the intersections of livelihoods and SFD have received only limited attention (Schulenkorf, 2017), with a primary focus on employability in a relatively narrow, neoliberal sense (e.g., Spaaij et al., 2013; Theeboom et al., 2020). This

oversight is concerning given that Svensson and Woods (2017) noted that the second most common thematic area of SFD organizations included a focus on livelihoods, which used “sport to improve livelihoods of disadvantaged people through career and economic development” (p. 39). For instance, A Ganar, an organization working in Latin America to reduce cycles of poverty, received a Beyond Sport “sport for employability” award in 2015 for their SFD program focused on providing lessons from sport such as teamwork and leadership to be translated to “market-driven” skills for practical internships and opportunities (Partners of the Americas, 2020). Other SFD organizations seek to build capital of SFD participants in order to enhance education and prepare program users for future employment and occupations (e.g., Right to Play, DIVERTcity).

Sport and livelihoods may refer to a number of different employment or financial opportunities. For instance, some scholars have discussed how sport and livelihoods, at its simplest level, is related to making a living through sport, such as an athlete attaining sponsorships or professional contracts, or as a coach, sport agent, administrator, or as an athletic trainer or physiotherapist (Stewart-Withers, 2020). Indirectly, participation in sport may also lead to benefits that build additional livelihood opportunities for specific populations, for instance through improved access to education, which may make individuals better able to compete in the labor market (Dudfield, 2019). More directly, organizations may offer vocational programs alongside SFD activities (Spaaij et al., 2016), provide youth and adults with job skills training and increased access to employment opportunities through addressing social exclusion (Kay, 2014; Spaaij et al., 2013), and/or implement community SFD events that involve the hiring of local community members (Welty Peachey et al., 2015). Still, while the studies above have touched on livelihoods and SFD, as Schulenkorf et al. (2016) note, there remains a need for further attention to the intersections of SFD and “job skills training, employability, rehabilitation, and the creation of social enterprises” (p. 34). In their review of literature, Theeboom et al. (2020) conclude that there is limited evidence as to the success of programs in developing job skills and employability through sport. We would add that more scholarly work needs to be done in relation to intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability in relation to livelihoods and SFD. This special issue is one step forward in responding to the relatively limited insights into the possibility of SFD, and sport more generally, to connect with the concept of livelihoods.

## OVERVIEW OF ARTICLES

The guest editor team would like to thank the contributors

to the special issue and we are delighted to collaborate with scholars and practitioners to form this important addition to the SFD literature with support from the *Journal of Sport for Development* editorial and management team. The papers range across various topics, foci, countries, and SFD contexts and present interesting and nuanced viewpoints on the relationship between SFD and livelihoods. Overall, the special issue includes two From the Field articles that present important and necessary perspectives of the organizational work being done within SFD related to livelihoods and two original research articles that offer exciting empirical investigations into SFD and livelihoods.

In their From the Field article on Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) LaunchPad—a sport for development facility located in Toronto, Canada—Marika Warner, Jackie Robinson, Bryan Heal, Jennifer Lloyd, Patrick O’Connell, and Letecia Rose consider how SFD is used to promote work preparedness, life skills, and employability among local youth facing barriers in the Moss Park community. Informed by literature on “youth employment training” delivered by community-based entities, Warner et al. investigate the utility of MLSE LaunchPad’s Positive Youth Development approach to employment training through its Ready for Work program involving “plus sport” initiatives (i.e., programming that starts with employment training as the tool to entice youth to participate) created and executed with local partners. The authors examine three programs successfully developed and delivered at LaunchPad, including: 1) Digital Customer Care and Professional, 2) Culinary Skills Placement, and 3) Leaders in Training. In turn, the authors provide an overview of best practices for delivery of such initiatives, including prioritizing the collaboration and codevelopment of programming and the utilization of mixed funding models to ensure sustainability and impact. They conclude by suggesting that “plus sport” employment training initiatives present promising opportunities to improve long-term positive youth development outcomes in relation to sport, physical activity, and employability.

In a research article, Sacha Smart, Kyle Rich, and Allan Lauzon explore the role of sport participation in newcomer migrants’ acculturation and livelihoods in Toronto, Canada. Drawing on theories of social and cultural capital as well as acculturation processes, the authors direct attention to the experiences of migrants’ acculturation and their use of sport to build cross-cultural relationships in relation to their social integration. Adopting an exploratory case study methodology, the paper highlights how sport played a limited role in effecting (and enhancing) the financial capabilities and livelihood opportunities of migrants. Foreign credentials and discrimination within the

community often inhibited the creation of economic capital. While sport was notable for its ability to bring diverse groups together and form new social relationships, the paper unpacks how there remained difficulties to procure interpersonal relationships through sport due to language. The authors also find that sport had an unequal distribution of benefits, for instance due to the playing ability of some sport participants compared to others. The paper holds significant insights into the limits of sport for the purposes of fostering social and cultural capital of migrants and their acculturation processes, and further, urges scholars and organizations to recognize the complex relations in which livelihoods and sport intertwine. Overall, the authors suggest there is a need for further research on how the sport industry might overcome challenges to the generation of social and cultural capital of migrants and offer livelihood opportunities to individuals who face disparate and difficult circumstances during their resettlement.

In another From the Field submission, Anne De Martini and Wylie Belasik demonstrate how an SFD initiative in the United States draws on thoughtful and mutually beneficial partnerships to mitigate community and institutional challenges in order to improve participants' livelihoods. The unique CrossFit initiative, UliftU, is tailored to support incarcerated men as they re-enter the workforce, and the program is offered to men while incarcerated and after their release. Incarcerated men face many challenges once released, such as stigma, lack of work experience and job skills, and employer prejudice (Bucknor & Barber, 2016; Holzer et al., 2003). Fitness industry jobs do not have extensive barriers to employment. CrossFit, a company and unique fitness regimen, has low barriers to entry, high growth, and adaptability. CrossFit workouts are scalable to individual fitness, which helps with accessibility. They are also performed in groups led by a coach, which engenders a supportive community. Participants are required to commit to the year-long training (at no charge) that includes workouts at the gym, preparation for Level 1 trainer certification, and assisting at the gym with various paid tasks such as coaching, hosting the front desk, and cleaning. Various partnerships have been formalized for UliftU to meet its goals: the federal court system provides referrals, an adult educational specialist delivers andragogy, the CrossFit foundation donates resources, and a for-profit CrossFit gym houses the initiative. UliftU developed from experiences of an SFD initiative that did not work. While UliftU has not been formally evaluated, this paper demonstrates that thoughtful partnerships coupled with a tailored approach has the potential to improve participants' livelihoods.

In the second research article, Rochelle Stewart-Withers

and Jeremy Hapeta examine livelihoods using an analysis of different forms of capital—human, psychological, social, and cultural—that are developed and transferred in a sport for development program. Their empirical focus is the Māori and Pasifika Rugby Academy (MPRA), a sport-based educational partnership in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The authors conclude that the education provided in the program is particularly apt for fostering cultural and psychological capital. Calling for a holistic partnership approach to using sport to increase employability, their analysis of the MPRA program suggests that initiatives need to think beyond the end goal of building hard skills (i.e., training and educational qualifications). They argue that “soft skills might be the most important, albeit the hardest to evidence. In this case, increasing cultural and psychological capital were key to unlocking potential making more out of human and social capital” (Stewart-Withers & Hapeta, 2020, p. 61).

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR SPORT AND LIVELIHOODS RESEARCH**

The articles in this special issue offer a starting point for future research into SFD and livelihoods. More specifically, the articles underline the key role that varying forms of social, cultural, and economic capital play in influencing and impacting how individuals involved in SFD navigate, relate to, and potentially acquire livelihood opportunities. Given the importance of varying forms of capital, future studies may find the utilization of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) (see Chambers & Conway, 1992) particularly suitable for empirical investigations. The SLF has become an increasingly popular approach for the study of livelihoods in international development, most notably for its application to poverty eradication, moving beyond traditional definitions that focused on certain (mostly economic-related) elements of poverty, such as low income or employment levels (Scoones, 1998, 2009). The SLF instead focuses attention on the varying ways in which poverty is perpetuated by, for example, social exclusion, gender relations, lack of social services, and the multidimensional factors and differentiated processes that construct livelihoods and their attainment. Different types of capital (natural, economic, human, cultural, and social) that individuals accumulate and/or face challenges of attaining are assessed in relation to the construction of livelihoods (Scoones, 1998). The nuanced nature of the SLF to be applied to diverse contexts of livelihoods has led to it being operationalized in responding to specific global development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

While we hope that this special issue invigorates more

research that adopts the SLF for studies of SFD and livelihoods, another theoretical lens that may be useful for future empirical investigations is the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1999). The capabilities approach has been discussed more recently in relation to SFD (e.g., Darnell & Dao, 2017; Svensson & Levine, 2017; Zipp & Nauright, 2018). As Zipp, Smith, and Darnell (2019) argue, the capabilities approach

*encourages a better understanding of how development initiatives are experienced, rather than restricting the focus of development (and development research, merely to prescribed outcomes, which can obscure underlying inequalities (e.g. gender, race, class), reinforce neo-liberal ideologies and overlook restraints on peoples' freedoms. (p. 8)*

The ability for the capabilities approach to understand how development programs are experienced is key for advancing studies of how SFD initiatives focused on livelihood creation and opportunities actually take place and the processes and possibilities involved therein. Other research pertaining to livelihoods may benefit from examining more closely social enterprises, social entrepreneurship, and innovation in SFD, which are growing areas of scholarly investigation (McSweeney, 2020; Svensson, Anderson, & Faulk, 2020; Svensson, Mahoney, & Hambrick, 2020; Whitley & Welty Peachey, 2020). Social enterprises and social entrepreneurs have been claimed to hold potential for enhancing livelihood opportunities for diverse individuals and groups, particularly through microfinance or job readiness programs (e.g., Kistruck et al., 2011; Mair & Marti, 2009a, 2009b). Future research should investigate the intersections of SFD, innovation, social entrepreneurship, and livelihoods more specifically.

Whilst this special issue highlights sport and livelihoods work that is taking place across diverse contexts in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, there is also a need for future research beyond the Global North. Hence, another future direction for research into sport and livelihoods is to explore more specifically and analyze sport-related work taking place in the Global South, or in low- to middle-income countries, that seek to offer opportunities of employment and livelihood creation to individuals, groups, and communities. From the Field articles and insights that draw on and emphasize practitioner viewpoints in Global South contexts are particularly needed given that a large portion of SFD takes place in such geographical locations (Svensson & Woods, 2017). These articles may shed light on the innovative and novel approaches that actors “on the ground” employ for the purposes of sport and livelihoods.

The articles in this special issue also speak to the broader context in which sport and livelihoods take place. In particular, recognition of the structural relations that constrain certain populations (e.g., newly arrived migrants, youth in low-income areas) from employment or job opportunities were essential—and perhaps more importantly, influential for sport participants—to understand the complexities and nuances inherent within livelihood attainment and access. Indeed, Smart et al. in this special issue and Spaaij (2013b) point to how sport may not hold much relevance for newly arrived migrants and their livelihoods given that their immediate need is to gain employment in a new country and community. Hence, the question arises, what is sport’s place in livelihoods? How does SFD hold promise for the creation of livelihood opportunities if structural constraints (e.g., gender equality, migrant discrimination) inhibit the ability of sport to make an impact?

This leads to an additional future research avenue in SFD—that of critical research related to sport and livelihoods. Darnell et al. (2018) argue that instrumental approaches to, for example, vocational training through SFD, may merely train individuals and groups to be passive workers in a depoliticized, inequitable world. Given this, the authors suggest that scholars should look to adopt critical approaches that “might investigate the structures or antecedents of unemployment or discuss the socio-political implications of preparing workers for a neo-liberal global order in which capital is increasingly unregulated and mobile, and labour less organized and more precarious” (Darnell et al., 2018, p. 140-141). Indeed, critical explorations of SFD and livelihoods are particularly encouraged due to the way(s) in which they may not only offer more nuance to the power (and neoliberal) relations that influence employment-focused sport programs, but also work to envision an approach to SFD and livelihoods that accounts for the diverse sociopolitical contexts in which labor remains important to those SFD participants who have often been marginalized by the very (capital) system within which they hope to work. Hence, further research that unpacks the complexities, relations of power, and neoliberal structures of SFD and livelihoods would assist in uncovering and explicating the way in which SFD programs, participants, and organizations navigate, perpetuate, and/or resist a neoliberal ethos.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Finally, it is important to highlight the practical implications this special issue holds in relation to sport and livelihoods, particularly given the inclusion of two From the Field articles. First, both Warner et al. and DeMartini and Belasik



note the significance of collaboration and mutually beneficial partnerships for proper implementation of sport and livelihood programs. This includes the need for SFD staff and organizations to codevelop livelihood programs with partners and end users in order for effective execution of SFD for participants to ensure that livelihoods are sustained and successful for individuals. We would suggest then that—for any SFD program, but sport and livelihoods in particular—building reciprocal and inclusive relationships with partners and end users is crucial for SFD relevance, effectiveness, and impact. Involving partners and end users step-by-step in the cocreation of sport and livelihoods programming, from initial needs assessment and conceptualization to implementation, evaluation, and follow-up, and adhering to inclusive and ethical decision making and sharing of ideas, questions, and challenges of SFD initiatives is required.

Second, and specific to the contribution by DeMartini and Belasik, SFD organizations should consider alternative sports (e.g., CrossFit) for sport and livelihood programs beyond traditional sports used in SFD (e.g., football/soccer, rugby, basketball) (Svensson & Woods, 2017). This includes the use of less structured sports and informal activities (see Jeanes et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2020; McSweeney et al., 2020) in SFD practice that may have fewer barriers to participation for marginalized individuals and groups. As highlighted in their *From the Field* article, CrossFit is one sport that is less restrictive to potential participants (in this case, formerly incarcerated individuals) and, furthermore, offers a space in which SFD participants may not only engage in physically, but also find livelihoods (e.g., coaching, administration).

Last, with reference to honing in on the power relations and neoliberal underpinnings of sport and livelihood programs discussed above, SFD organizations and practitioners should discuss, highlight, and structure SFD programs to unpack the ways in which those unemployed or less likely to attain livelihood opportunities have arrived at such a position. For instance, in what ways do sport and livelihood programs consider structural relations of poverty or gender that inhibit livelihood creation for specific populations and work to disrupt such relations rather than work within such structures? In practice, this may mean that SFD organizations, program creators, and end users collectively envision how employment opportunities may possibly be increased for certain individuals and groups but also how to deconstruct underpinning relations leading to unemployment in the first place. For example, practitioners may wish to pair employment opportunities with programs focused on gender equity in communities where unemployment is high for women and girls to respond to

marginalization and underrepresentation. Another strategy may involve working with nonsport partners (such as is noted in this special issue) to conduct community-based assessments of poverty and the factors that influence unregulated, limited, or precarious labor of certain people in specific contexts and to construct SFD programs that work to ameliorate such factors for sustainable livelihood creation (such as is emphasized in the SLF mentioned above). Although these practical suggestions are not exhaustive (and indeed will require further research and refinement over time to understand whether such strategies may reduce inequitable relations in regard to sport and livelihoods), it is nonetheless important for practitioners to consider the neoliberal and broader power structures in which sport and livelihoods programs take place to ensure that participants of such initiatives may find sustainable employment and improved opportunities to work.

Overall, the possibility of SFD to create livelihood opportunities is even more important given the worldwide impact COVID-19 has had on communities around the globe, including its impact on the social, cultural, political, and perhaps most important, economical contexts in which SFD takes place. COVID-19 has had enormous implications on the economic stability of various countries, including many nations in sub-Saharan Africa (where a large majority of SFD programs operate) (Svensson & Woods, 2017), and even more pertinent, diverse effects on marginalized populations including women, refugees, Indigenous communities, and other often underrepresented groups (Handy Charles, 2020; Levesque & Thériault, 2020; Lewis, 2020). It is difficult to approximate the effects of COVID-19 around the globe, especially as its effects will remain for years to come. And yet, as others have postulated, the reconstruction of economic sustainability and restructuring of the global economy will need to occur in order for many of the effects of the global pandemic to be managed and, ideally, better serve those who have been both impacted greatly by the global pandemic as well as have been marginalized prior to (and after) its longevity. What role does SFD play post-COVID-19 in relation to livelihoods? How may SFD, through employability programs or livelihood creation, support and enhance (or perpetuate) the lives and systemic structures of inequality that have become even clearer during the global pandemic? We hope that this special issue and its included articles serves as a starting point for future investigations of SFD and livelihoods.

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