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SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT – A SYSTEMATIC MAP OF EVIDENCE FROM AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a systematic map of the evidence on sport-for-development's effectiveness in Africa. Applying systematic review methodology, it identifies all rigorous evidence that evaluates African sport-for-development interventions. These impact evaluations are then mapped to provide a systematic and comprehensive examination of sport-for-development's evidence-base. This contributes the first systematic engagement with sport-for-development's evidence-base in Africa and the systematic map finds that there is currently no available evidence that supports or refutes the assumption that sport can positively influence development outcomes. It cautions against the continued rhetoric and promotion of sport-for-development as an effective approach to poverty reduction and international development.

Keywords: sport-for-development, systematic map, evidence-gap map, development effectiveness, evidence-informed development



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1. INTRODUCTION

The application of sport as a development intervention has evolved significantly since the early 2000s. In the context of development, sport programmes are associated with a number of positive social outcomes, such as gender empowerment, HIV prevention, and conflict resolution (United Nations 2003). Under the umbrella term ‘Sport for Development’, sport is recognised as one of the social tools applied to address global poverty. This recognition is evident in the high-level support by the United Nations (UN) and operationalised in sport’s assumed contribution to the remit of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2003).

The article will follow the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group’s definition of sport-for-development as ‘the intentional use of sport, physical activity and play to attain specific development objectives in low- and middle-income countries and disadvantaged communities in high-income settings’ (SDPIWG 2008). A number of terms and abbreviations have been used to refer to the application of sport as a vehicle for development: Sport-in-development (Levermore and Beacom 2009); Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) (UN 2003); Development through Sport (DTS) (Black 2010); Sport for Development (SFD/S4D) (Richards, Kaufman, Schulenkorf, Wolff, Gannett, Siefken, Rodrigez 2013). In order to position this article within the ongoing scholarly conversations, the term sport-for-development will be applied as used by Burnett (2010) and Coalter (2013).

Despite the widespread usage of sport programmes to foster development, and given the extent and amplitude of the assumed benefits of sport-for-development, little research has synthesised the current knowledge in the domain. This lack of research synthesis leaves the domain dependent on the findings of individual case studies and anecdotal evidence. The aim of this article is thus to provide a systematic and comprehensive examination of sport-for-development’s evidence-base in Africa. Using systematic review methodology, it maps the current evidence – that is quantitative and qualitative impact evaluations of sport-for-development programmes – to establish an overview of the research landscape. This systematic map serves as the first structured examination of sport-for-development’s evidence-base in Africa and thereby highlights knowledge frontiers as well as research gaps to provide an outline of what works in sport-for-development. The remainder of the article is structured as follows: the background of sport-for-development and of the advent of evidence-informed development is provided, followed by a brief introduction to the methodology of systematic maps. The findings of the systematic map are then presented and discussed in their relevance to inform sport’s role as a development intervention.

2. BACKGROUND

The understanding that sport has a role to play in international development is explicitly expressed in the academic literature for the first time in 1969 (Anthony 1969). Yet documented practice of the use of sport with a stated objective of contributing to international development only emerges 20 years later with the foundation of sport-for-development organisations such as the *Mathare Youth Sports Association* (MYSA) in Kenya in 1987 or *SCORE* in South Africa in 1991. The formal conceptualisation of sport-for-development thereafter was driven by the UN, which mobilised high-level support for the concept in the early 2000s. This includes, for example, the publication of the *Sport for development and peace: Towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals* report (UN 2003) and the declaration of 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

The growth of the sport-for-development ‘movement’ (Kidd 2008) was further fuelled by the rapid uptake of the concept across non-governmental organisations (NGOs). By one count, 93 per cent of sport-for-development programmes¹ have been established after 2000 (Levermore and Beacom 2009: 9). Network organisations such as *streetfootballworld* or the online platform *sportanddev.org* showcase this growing number of programmes and refer to more than 100 sport-for-development projects, respectively. Some of these bottom-up programmes have achieved considerable scale. *Grassroots Soccer*, an NGO focused on HIV prevention through football, for example, has since its inception in 2002 reached more than half a million youth in Africa (Grassroots Soccer 2013). Private and public sector programmes are equally part of this drive towards sport-for-development, with FIFA’s *Football for Hope* project arguably enjoying most prominence.

2.1. Sport-for-development in development policymaking

Notwithstanding the high-level support by UN agencies and the inclusion of sport-for-development in the policies of a small number of aid organisations², the recognition of sport as a development intervention is contested. Sport-for-development has struggled to gain a foothold within the mainstream debates on international development and poverty reduction (Levermore 2008; Coalter 2010). Theoretical conceptualisations of, and approaches to, development mainly bypass sport, which is not regarded as an essential ingredient in the effort to achieve social and economic development. In the context of development policy organisations such as the World Bank, sport-for-development is regarded as a mere footnote in the remit of international development (Levermore 2008). Similar, the academic study of international development has not integrated sport as part of the development discourse. As of May 2014, the ten most cited development journals yield not a single reference to sport-for-development³. This phenomenon is confirmed by Levermore and Beacom (2009), whose review of over 70 000 entries in *International Development Abstracts* identifies only twelve references

to sport, and leads the authors to the conclusion that ‘sport is seen as a by-product of development, not as an engine’ (2009: 17).

Sport-for-development scholars have taken different positions to explain this isolation of sport within the international development community. Investigating whether it is ‘time to treat it [sport] seriously’, Levermore (2008) concludes that sport is understandably excluded from mainstream development. He cites the exaggerated claims of sport-for-development and lack of expertise as well as rigorous research as barriers to sport’s uptake as a development intervention. Coalter (2013) generally relates to this notion, and further introduces the idea of a ‘displacement of scope’ (Wagner 1964) affecting the domain of sport-for-development. That is, a simple micro-level intervention – sport in this case – is assumed to influence complex macro-level outcomes such as the compound challenge of poverty reduction. This hypothesis is supported by Mwaanga (2010), who, using the example of failed initial attempts to position sport as an effective solution to HIV prevention, explains how sport-for-development’s advocates overstated the capacity of sport to combat HIV/AIDS and at the same time failed to appreciate the complexity of the disease. Lastly, Darnell and Black (2011) show how sport might subscribe to an inherently different, more bottom-up approach to development, which fundamentally contradicts prevailing power relations and practices in development. However, in each of these perspectives there seems to be a consensus among authors that the absence of evidence on sport-for-development’s effectiveness presents a major obstacle to the rationale and appeal of the concept.

2.2. Effectiveness of sport-for-development and the question of evidence

The discipline of sport-for-development is out of step with the current drive towards evidence-informed development. Evidence-informed development refers to the need for reliable research and evaluation data to inform the design of policies and programmes in international development (Langer and Stewart 2014). Often associated with the term ‘development effectiveness’, the increased focus on evidence of what works (or what does not work) in international development has led to the promotion of more rigorous evaluations of development interventions as well as improved systems to encourage policymakers and practitioners to make use of this information (Banerjee and Duflo 2011). For example, the importance of evidence to inform development interventions has been shown in the case of micro-finance, which, evaluated carefully, was found to be as likely to cause harm among poor people than it was to support poverty reduction (Stewart, Van Rooyen, Dickson, Majoro and De Wet 2010).

Discussions within the field of sport-for-development are at odds with this institutionalised practice to base development programmes and policy on the best available knowledge of what works. On the one side, a number of scholars have realised this schism between mainstream development thinking and prevailing beliefs in sport-

for-development (Burnett 2009; Coalter 2013; Giulianotti 2012; Levermore 2008). Legitimisation of sport as a development intervention requires 'sport to learn from approaches in the wider field of international development and to ensure its contribution matches its claims' (Kay 2012: 19). As long as sport-for-development's assertions of how sports leads to development remain vague, and sport-for-development programmes fail to prove their effectiveness, the intervention will remain at the margins of the development discourse (Levermore 2008). In a policy climate in which effectiveness of what works influences programme support, the absence of such reliable evidence in sport-for-development prevents the integration of the domain into mainstream development. As a result, the need for rigorous evaluations of sport-for-development interventions to address this evidence gap is highlighted (Coalter 2013; Levermore 2011; United Nations 2005).

On the other hand, a number of scholars seem to hold the belief that attempts at rigorous evaluations of sport-for-development interventions using quantitative outcome and impact measures are inherently illegitimate (Lindsey and Grattan 2012; Darnell and Hayhurst 2012; Nicholls, Giles and Sethna 2010)⁴. Assuming neo-colonial or neo-liberal hegemonic motives, these scholars reduce the idea of rigorous impact evaluations of sport-for-development interventions as an agenda to reinforce existing global power relations and injustices in international development. Neo-liberal mechanisms and motives, which impact-orientated research is believed to reflect, are seen to create a renewed oppression or re-colonisation of marginalised groups. Decolonising, feminist-orientated, participatory action research is then portrayed as an alternative approach to promote unheard stories and local knowledge, which are assumed to present more meaningful evidence of sport-for-development's impact (Lindsey and Grattan 2012; Nicholls, Giles and Sethna 2010). At the most extreme of these positions, research evidence by definition 'is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism' (Nicholls and Giles 2007: 69).

Epistemologically, this article is based on the assumption that evidence of sport-for-development's effectiveness in some form is required to support the claim that sport programmes can be used to pursue development objectives. Investing scarce resources to design a social intervention that then subjects poor people, who in return invest their time and capital, to a formal set of activities without reliable knowledge of the outcome of this process, presents an ethical dilemma. In particular when there is a risk of causing harm as well as good, it is ethically questionable to implement development interventions with incomplete knowledge of their effect on poor people's lives (Langer and Stewart 2014). This narrative provides a clear rationale for the production of evidence in sport-for-development. The article is hence positioned in support of the notion of a more evidence-informed practice of sport-for-development as advocated by Burnett (2010) and Coalter (2013).

The adopted language of 'evidence-informed' rather than 'evidence-based' acknowledges that there are multiple and equally valid forms of evidence, and further

that the usage of evidence is not a linear process. Evidence is but one factor to influence programme and policy design and different forms of evidence are relevant to answer different types of questions. The inclusion criteria in this systematic map reflect this notion as the definition of impact evaluations is deliberately formulated to encompass both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods. Having said that, a detailed epistemological discussion of the nature and definition of evidence in sport-for-development is beyond the scope of this article⁴. The article is primarily concerned with generating an empirical account of the evidence-base on sport-for-development, subscribing to the belief that research evidence per se occupies a valid space in sport-for-development and has a positive role to play in improving programme and policy design.

2.3. Sport-for-development's claims and research evidence

The controversial notion of research evidence in sport-for-development has led to a paradoxical situation in which a dearth of reliable evidence is contrasted by extensive claims of sport-for-development's effectiveness. Despite the fact that there is no systematic evidence of the relative or absolute effectiveness of sport-for-development interventions, sport is positioned to support the achievement of a number of development objectives. For example, the UN considers sport as

a low-cost, high-impact tool ... that can make an important contribution to public health; universal education; gender equality; poverty reduction; prevention of HIV and AIDS and other diseases; environmental sustainability as well as peace-building and conflict resolution (Beutler 2008: 359, 361).

The above quotation indicates that sport seems to present a multi-purpose tool, being able to address social problems as diverse and complex as epidemic diseases, lack of education, and violent conflict. Arguably, a development intervention is yet to emerge claiming as far-reaching impacts on global development.

In contrast, the current evidence-base on sport-for-development is limited. Isolated impact evaluations⁵ of sport-for-development programmes have been conducted with mixed results. This limited set of evidence has resulted in cherry-picking positive results (Botcheva and Huffman 2004), while more cautious findings remain underreported (Kruse 2006). Further, only a few structured evaluation tools and manuals have been developed and applied in multiple contexts.

There is thus a need for a systematic appraisal and review of the current evidence of sport-for-development's effectiveness. This article aims to present the first step in this remit, providing a structured and systematic overview of the sport-for-development impact evaluation landscape in Africa. Compared with the only two existing review products in the field (Kaufmann, Spencer, Ross 2013; Cronin 2011), this research differs in terms of a more extensive scope, regional focus, inclusion criteria, and reach of the search strategy.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Systematic maps

This article presents the findings of a systematic map of the evidence on sport's effectiveness as a development intervention in Africa. Systematic maps are a particular type of research synthesis, and can either be conducted in the process of developing a full systematic review, or as much serve as a research product in their own right (Gough and Thomas 2012). By collecting and thematically grouping existing research and evaluations, a systematic map provides a visual overview of the evidence-base on the given issue or question. Systematic maps allow for a graphical representation of intervention/outcome relations, highlighting quantity and quality patterns as well as gaps in the current evidence-base. They thus present an integral part in the repertoire of evidence-informed policymaking and are increasingly used as a tool to assess development effectiveness.

A recent World Bank working paper (Snilstveit, Vojtkova, Bhavsar and Gaarder 2013) acknowledges systematic maps' growing importance in evidence-informed development, and introduces the term 'evidence-gap maps' to encourage an increased production of systematic maps in their own right. Both terms will be used interchangeably for the remainder of the article. Finally, it needs to be highlighted that systematic maps are not designed to answer a specific research question, but rather focus on providing a broad overview of the existing evidence (Snilstveit, Vojtkova, Bhavsar and Gaarder 2013).

3.2. Evidence of complex interventions: The need for programme theories

In conducting evidence-gap maps of complex social interventions, such as sport-for-development programmes, the challenging encounter of diverse interventions designs and outcome measures can be expected. Existing systematic maps in international development have therefore resorted to including surrogate or intermediate outcomes (Stewart, Erasmus, Zaranyika, Da Silva, Korth, Langer, Randall, Madinga and De Wet 2014). This approach shares some commonalities with theory-based evaluation and research synthesis as developed by Pawson (2006).

Theory-based or realist evaluation emphasises the importance of mechanisms and contexts to guide and shape the impact of a programme through its various stages to the final outcomes. This leads directly into the construction of so-called programme theories (or logic models), which aim to establish a detailed understanding of how the programme is assumed to deliver the desired results. For this purpose, programme theories map the anticipated sequence of events triggered by the intervention along a

logical pathway. The presented systematic map structures the identified evidence with the help of such a programme theory of sport-for-development.

3.3. Search strategy and exclusion/inclusion criteria

Based on the philosophy of rigorous research synthesis, evidence-gap maps follow a structured and transparent methodology to systematically search for, screen and code relevant research evidence. The search strategy for this systematic map was exhaustive and over-inclusive. That is, it deliberately aimed to identify a larger number of citations in order to control for the danger of missing relevant studies due to a narrow search approach. Search sources include both academic literature sources as well as grey literature sources (e.g. organisational websites and databases, Google and Google Scholar). This approach acknowledges that grey literature sources arguably might not present the same rigour of research and rarely are peer-reviewed as a mechanism of quality control. In order to ensure a comprehensive overview of the available literature regardless of quality appraisal, grey literature sources were included in the map.

The applied search strings consisted of terms related to sport and development or developing countries (e.g. sport AND develop* OR 'low income' ...); or of terms combining sport and any of its assumed outcome areas (education; HIV education; lifeskills etc.). If sources provide a sophisticated search engine, the terms were coupled using boolean operators. Given the nature of reporting and indexing of development literature, no methods filters were applied, keeping the search strategy as broad and as inclusive as possible. The identified search hits were then screened on title and abstract.

Pre-defined and transparent inclusion/exclusion criteria were developed and applied to judge a study's eligibility for inclusion in the systematic map. Firstly, inclusion was limited to studies conducted in Africa after 1990. Secondly, the study needed to report on the application of a sport-for-development programme as defined above. This entailed that studies merely conducting sporting activities in low- and middle-income countries without any explicit or implicit development objective were excluded. This relates in particular to professional youth sport development initiatives.

Thirdly, only impact evaluation designs were eligible for inclusion. Process evaluations were excluded as well as evaluations that merely assessed participants' or practitioners' satisfaction with the programme. The focus of these systematic maps is on sport-for-development's effectiveness, that is the change in outcomes that can be attributed to the application of sport as a development intervention. Included evidence thus had to apply research designs that explicitly set out to measure the impact of the programme on the targeted beneficiaries. Within the family of impact evaluations, no restrictions were made regarding inclusion. Eligible study designs thus include qualitative impact evaluations, quasi-experimental designs, randomised control trials and so forth. Lastly, included studies were then coded according to key characteristics as outlined below. Codes also included two pre-specified themes for sub-group analysis – South African evidence, as well as sport plus/sport categories. These sub-groups

were identified after an initial literature review and justified by the prominence of sport-for-development research from the country as well as the conceptual rigour of the sport plus/plus sport categories.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Inclusion and exclusion of studies

The systematic search yielded 15 580 identified citations⁶. Of these, 9 848 search hits emerged from the academic literature (e.g. peer-reviewed journals, conference publications, dissertations), while grey literature sources (e.g. organisational websites and databases, Google and Google Scholar) contributed 5 732 citations. Based on the deliberate over-inclusive nature of the search strategy, a large number of irrelevant citations (15 369) was identified and subsequently excluded after screening on title and abstract. Full-texts of the remaining 211 search hits were then obtained and screened against our inclusion criteria (see Figure 1).

From the sample of 211 possible included studies, 173 publications were excluded after full-text review for the following reasons: (a) the study was not conducted in Africa (n=19); (b) the study did not present an impact evaluation (n=141); (c) the evaluated programme could not be described as a sport-for-development intervention (n=7); and (d) the study presented a duplicate (n=6). Full-texts of two studies could not be obtained.

A study that came close to meeting the map's inclusion criteria, and that presents a telling case of how the exclusion criteria were applied, is provided by Lindsey and Grattan's ethnography of sport-for-development in Zambia. While setting, study design, and intervention might have qualified the study for inclusion, the study is not based on data obtained from the sport programme's participants, but relies on the input from local sport-for-development practitioners and policymakers. Such an evaluation approach fails to measure the impact of a programme as it solely derives data from sources implementing the programme, rather than from sources exposed to the programme. The evaluation therefore presents a reflective commentary featuring aspects of process evaluation designs, but cannot assess programme impact.

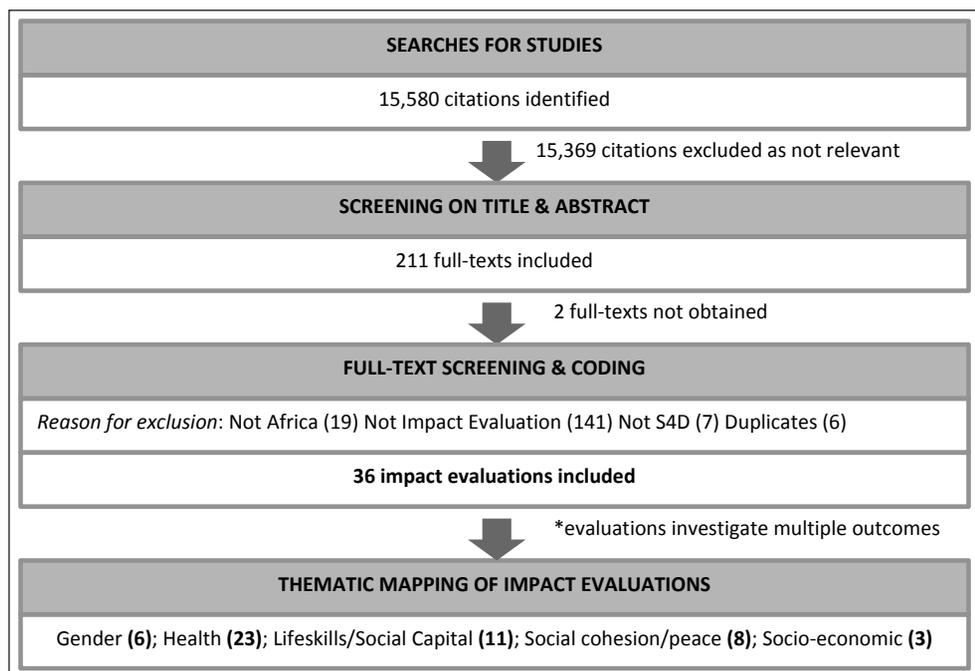


Figure 1: PRSIMA flow chart – Filtering of studies from searching to inclusion

Following the exclusion of these 173 studies, 36 impact evaluations were eligible for inclusion in the systematic map of evidence. These studies were then coded on key characteristics regarding study design, region, intervention, outcomes, and sub-group categories in order to thematically map the evidence-base of sport-for-development⁷ in Africa.

4.2. Study characteristics

All but one identified evaluations have been conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, with roughly half of the studies (n=19) evaluating programmes in South Africa. Within this group, east and southern African states dominate, and only three west African countries feature in the sample. Evaluations of multi-country interventions are exceptional (n=6).

Most of the identified impact evaluations (n=23) apply a quantitative design, followed by mixed-methods evaluations (n=8). Qualitative impact evaluations form a minority, and only two studies make use of exclusively qualitative evaluation methods⁸. The Sport in Development Impact Assessment Tool (S•DIAT) is the single most applied evaluation method (Burnett and Hollander 2006). In the identified sample, sport-for-development interventions that focus on health outcomes are subject to more rigorous evaluation designs. These 21 impact evaluations, guided by health care practices of assessing programme impacts, in all but three cases, compare programme effects against

a control group, and further apply complex and rigorous evaluation methods, such as cohort designs or randomised control trials (RCTs).

4.3. Interventions

Based on the identified sample, football is the dominant sport used in sport-for-development interventions in Africa. With 32 out of 36 (88%) reviewed programmes focusing on football, other sporting codes such as rugby, athletics or traditional games play a minor part. Moreover, if projects or organisations used only a single sporting code, the applied code was without exception football. Other sporting codes are solely found in multi-programme interventions.

Two thirds of the reviewed interventions (n=24) were conceived and implemented by international and local NGOs. International development agencies were engaged in seven sport-for-development programmes albeit only in a partnership context. African government agencies and international research teams each facilitated five interventions. Combining national governments and local NGOs, it emerges that only 14 interventions are conceived and driven by local actors. This leaves international bodies as the main driver (n=22) of sport-for-development programmes in Africa. However, type of funding does not seem to present a variable that affects priorities or implementation strategies of sport-for-development programmes.

Interventions were further classified as following either a ‘sport plus’ or ‘plus sport’ model of sport-for-development (Coalter 2013). Acknowledging other sport-for-development typologies (Burnett 2010; Kidd 2008), the sport plus/plus sport framework refers to the development-specific focus of the intervention. Plus sport development organisations place a primary focus on fostering a development objective, leaving sport to play a secondary role in the programme approach. The majority (n=25) of the identified interventions applied a plus sport model. Sport plus, on the other hand, places a primary focus on sport related objectives, with social benefits presenting a by-product of the sport programme. Thirteen reviewed projects used a sport plus model.

As indicated above, 19 evaluations review the effectiveness of sport-for-development programmes in South Africa. The country thereby seems to present the hub of sport-for-development in Africa. The sample was, however, influenced by multiple evaluations being conducted over time and at different project sites related to two large-scale sport-for-development programmes: *Grassroots Soccer* (n=5) and the *Active Community Clubs* (ACCs) initiative (n=5). South African projects share similar characteristics as the projects in the total sample. Project evaluations, though, feature more rigorous evaluation designs due to the widespread application of the S•DIAT, and efforts by *Grassroots Soccer* to facilitate RCTs of the organisation’s activities.

4.4. Outcomes

The 36 identified impact evaluations report on 51 different outcomes. Outcomes were grouped into iterative categories. The identification of outcome categories featured both inductive and deductive characteristics. On the one hand, outcome categories were influenced by outcome domains reported in the conceptual literature on sport-for-development (e.g. UN 2003 as cited above). On the other hand, outcomes assessed in the identified impact evaluations similarly informed the design of the outcome categories used in this systematic map.

Drawing from both the theoretical literature and the empirical data, five outcome categories were used in this systematic map: gender empowerment; health outcomes; socio-economic development; lifeskills/social capital; social cohesion/peace. As regards the last two categories, it proved unfeasible to assess concepts individually. This came as a result of unclear outcome measures as well as vague concept definitions reported in the identified evaluations. In general, reported outcomes were taken at face value – that is, if a study claimed to have measured social capital, the study's definition of social capital was not compared with existing definitions of the concept.

Almost two thirds (n=23) of the reviewed sport-for-development interventions aimed at improving health outcomes. In all but two studies, health outcomes relate to efforts of HIV prevention. Prevention efforts through sport programmes thus seem to present the primary focus of sport-for-development interventions in Africa. However, none of the 22 evaluated HIV prevention outcomes measured final outcomes such as levels of HIV prevalence. Lifeskills/social capital was the second main outcome addressed in 11 interventions. There is considerable overlap between lifeskills measures and HIV prevention, and programmes often assumed an increase in lifeskills (e.g. self-confidence) to translate into a decreased risk of HIV infection.

Eight studies evaluated programmes' impact on social cohesion and peace. In practice, this referred to the broad concept of community development and only two studies made explicit reference to conflict resolution. Sport's impact on crime levels was not assessed. Gender empowerment was a focus in six studies. Outcome measures, however, relied entirely on self-reports. Lastly, three studies, each conducted in South Africa, aimed to assess the effectiveness of sport programmes to promote socio-economic development. Improvements in the socio-economic context of participants (e.g. access to employment opportunities or soup kitchens) served as a proxy for poverty reduction. None of the three studies measured poverty indicators, such as the World Bank's \$2 per day poverty line.

It should also be noted that sport-for-development advocates often refer to difficult to measure, intangible benefits that sport programmes might feature. This is often in line with a transformational view of sport-for-development, which portrays sport as an alternative to top-down approaches of development (Darnell and Hayhurst 2012; Lindsey and Grattan 2012; Nicholls and Giles 2007). Sport-for-development's impact

is expressed in a structural transformation of society and development processes, often linked to a shift in power balances and enhanced capabilities and agency of developing countries. While this is a theme prominent in the conceptual literature on sport-for-development, no empirical studies were identified that attempt to assess such structural changes in practice.

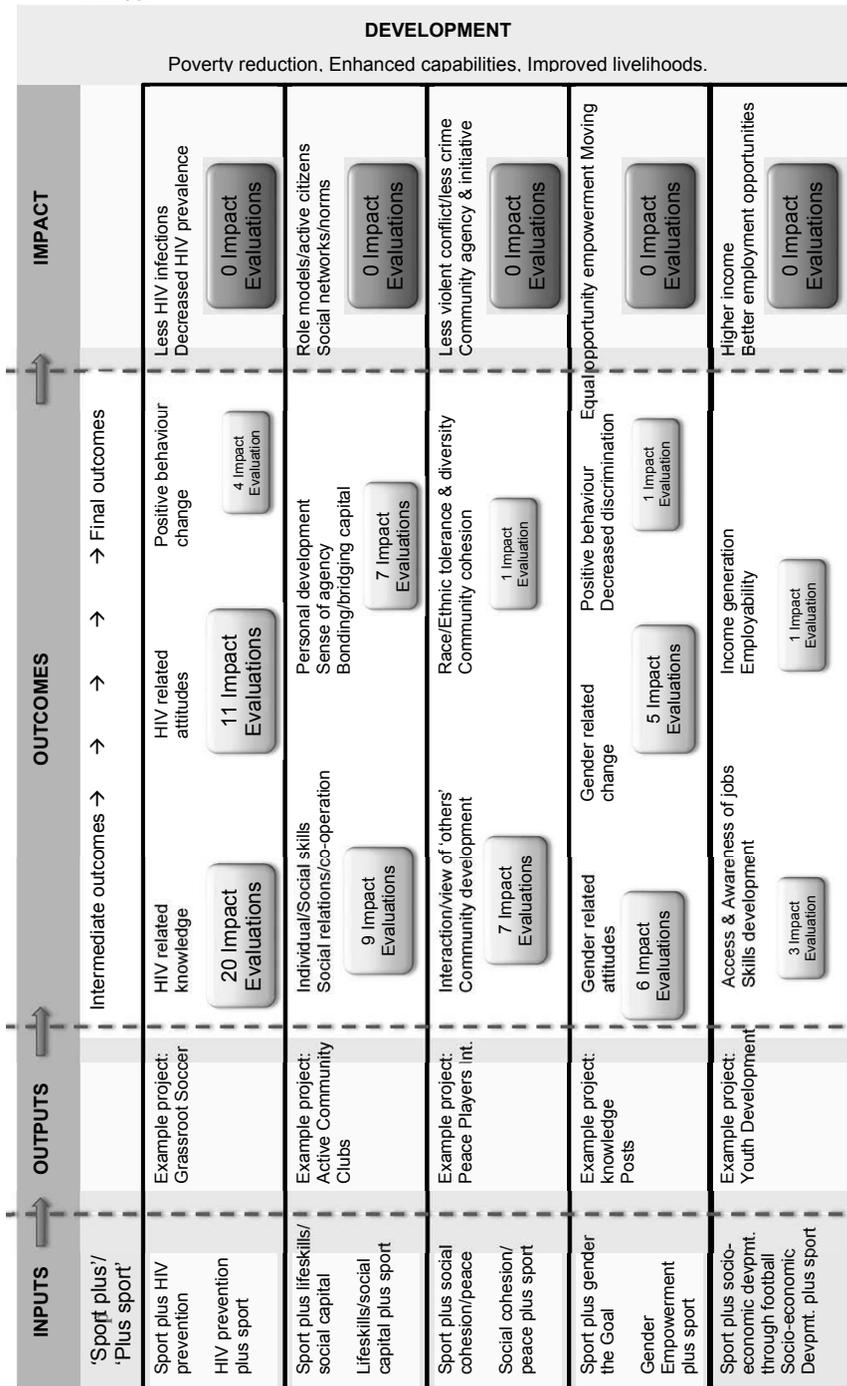
4.5. Systematic map of evidence

The identified evidence on sport-for-development's effectiveness in Africa is graphically represented in Figure 2. Based on the intervention/outcome relations of the reviewed studies, the evidence is mapped out alongside sport-for-development's programme theory. This programme theory is grounded in the information derived from the 36 included studies. As expressed in the included studies, it sketches the casual outcome steps assumed to connect the applied sport plus/plus sport programme with the targeted development objective. The number of identified impact evaluations is then allocated to each outcome step, which results in the presentation of a systematic map of sport-for-development's effectiveness in Africa.

The systematic map above shows there is currently no available evidence that supports or refutes the suggestion that sport has a positive impact on development in Africa. The evidence-gap map reveals that, thus far, impact evaluations of sport-for-development programmes have failed to adequately measure final and impact outcomes. That is, evaluations investigate intermediate outcomes, but do not follow up how these intermediate steps translate into the desired development objectives. For example, while sport-for-development programmes in Africa lay claims to combatting HIV/AIDS, programme evaluations mostly (n=20) focus on changes in HIV-related knowledge, as opposed to behaviour change (n=4) or levels of HIV infections (n=0). This pattern holds true for each of the five outcome categories, and not a single evaluation measuring impact outcomes was identified in the systematic map.

The map further shows the prominence that health outcomes, in particular HIV/AIDS prevention, enjoy in sport-for-development. Sport's role in improving health outcomes seems to be stronger empirically grounded as a majority of the sport-for-development research has been conducted in this area. This finding could provide a rationale to target the language and remit of sport as a tool in international development towards health care. Focusing on the health sector, in which sport's role enjoys a larger evidence-base, rather than focusing on the vast area of poverty alleviation per se, could help narrow down sport's potential contribution to development more convincingly.

Figure 2: Systematic map of evidence of sport-for-development interventions in Africa



5. DISCUSSION

The claims that sport-for-development programmes have a positive impact on development objectives in Africa are not based in, or supported by, reliable evidence. This systematic map of evidence shows that the promotion of sport as a development intervention can best be described as faith-based. This is in line with Coalter's (2013) and Guilianotti's (2004) characterisation of sport-for-development's rhetoric as a form of 'sport evangelism'. Sport has been portrayed as a solution to an extensive set of complex development challenges, but in none of the reviewed outcome categories has evidence of sport's impact been identified. This absence of evidence is at odds with the prevailing rhetoric and presentation of sport-for-development as an effective approach to international development and poverty reduction.

It should be noted, however, that the absence of evidence on sport-for-development's effectiveness does not imply that sport has no impact on development objectives altogether. Yet, this absence refutes common statements and claims that empirical evidence supports sport's application in the context of international development (Beutler 2008; UN 2003). Since there is currently no reliable evidence on sport-for-development's impact on its assumed beneficiaries, the implementation of such programmes needs to be treated with caution. This is of particular importance as sport equally has the potential to cause harm, being associated with extreme nationalism, cheating and community divisions (Cubizolles 2013; Beutler 2008). The unqualified embracing of sport as a natural contributor to development is thus neither unanimously supported by theoretical assumptions, nor is it a reflection of the current evidence-base on sport for development's effectiveness.

In this context, the continued assumption that sport's use as a development intervention is a 'no-brainer', that the appeal of the idea means sport-for-development programmes 'ought to work' (Traxler 2013), displays certain hybrids. It is both ethically and rationally concerning to subject perceived beneficiaries with an intervention whose processes as well as implications are not fully understood and leave room for harm. As long as there is no endogenous uptake of sport-for-development programmes, leaving the domain donor-driven and programmes struggling to achieve scale and sustainability, claiming the inherent effectiveness of sport-for-development, arguably, is at least negligent and at worst irresponsible.

In the wider development discourse similar findings have led to the institutionalisation of evidence-informed decision-making and the importance of development effectiveness. Guidelines for, and worked examples of, rigorous and context-aware impact evaluation of development programmes have been formulated (Glennerster and Takavarasha 2013; Morra-Imas 2009). The utility and importance of evidence to inform policy and programme design remain controversial among sport-for-development advocates. 'Heartfelt narratives' (Coalter 2013) and anecdotal case studies are presented as an alternative and equally valid approach to generate evidence of what works in sport-

for-development. Without going as far as the editorial team of the *Journal of Sport for Development* (Richards, Kaufman, Schulenkorf, Wolff, Gannett, Siefken and Rodrigez 2013: 2), who attest sport-for-development a decision to ‘evaluate or perish’, a need for systematic evidence of what works, why, and for whom in implementing sport-for-development programmes is essential for the domain to be regarded as a serious actor in international development.

International development and poverty reduction are complex issues, which require a combination of different interventions, whose interplay might result in positive social change (Ramalingam 2014). Sport-for-development’s failure to embrace this complexity and to critically reflect on sport’s necessarily limited contribution in such a compound challenge has led to sport’s isolation in international development. It is now widely accepted that there is no ‘silver’ bullet to global poverty reduction (Banerjee and Duflo 2011; Bamberger, Rao and Woolock 2010). In contrast, an award winning sport-for-development project is unchallengedly claimed to present

a revolution in sports for Afghanistan and an opportunity to raise up children in a better environment countering drugs and terrorism. The only solution that leads Afghanistan toward peace and stability is sport (Thorpe and Rinehard 2013: 115; Welch 2010).

To be clear, this is not to undermine the value of sporting activities in developing countries, and the efforts to create skateboarding opportunities for youth in Afghanistan are by all means laudable. Yet to place this remit in the context and conversation of global poverty reduction and sustainable economic and social development appears to overstate the impact any single development intervention can possibly claim in complex global and local systems. It further ignores sport-for-development’s lack of evidence, which should caution against claims of any scale related to sport’s effectiveness.

As the systematic map of evidence shows, there is not a single identified evaluation in the development impact categories of the map. In an attempt to improve both the ease of facilitation and rigour of programme evaluations, Burnett and Hollander (2006) and Coalter (2006), respectively, have developed sport-for-development evaluation tools and manuals. The reluctance to conduct impact evaluations might thus rather be based in epistemological concerns than a lack of practical skills and resources.

As a result, sport-for-development is missing the opportunity to open the domain to take part in current debates on how best to incorporate evidence into the development discourse. The mantra of evidence-informed development has stressed the importance of making use of a diverse range of evidence. The rigid application of evidence hierarchies does little to address the complex realities in which development programmes are implemented. Social and political contexts influence the development process, and evaluating impacts therefore needs to be based on a variety of different evaluation designs. Evidence-informed development is thus clear about the equal standing of quantitative and qualitative definitions of evidence, highlighting the importance of local knowledge, perceptions, contexts, and mechanisms (Bamberger, Rao and Woolock 2010;

Langer and Stewart 2014). In this context, there might be little justification for sport-for-development's exceptional role as an 'evidence-free' development intervention.

6. CONCLUSION

This article presents a systematic map of the evidence on sport-for-development's effectiveness in Africa. It aimed, through the use of systematic review methodology, to provide a transparent and comprehensive overview of the evidence-base of applying sport programmes in the context of international development. It finds that most sport-for-development interventions (n=21) focus on HIV prevention, and that the large majority of projects (n=32) choose football to attract youth into the programme. Programme evaluations are mainly (n=23) quantitative in design but fail to adequately measure final outcomes and impacts.

As a result, there is currently no available evidence, which supports or refutes the suggestion that sport has a positive impact on development in Africa. The claims that sport-for-development programmes have a positive impact on development objectives are thus not based in, or supported by, reliable evidence.

This lack of evidence on sport-for-development's effectiveness in Africa has important implications for on going debates within the domain. Firstly, it is at odds with the prevailing rhetoric and promotion of sport-for-development as an effective approach to international development and poverty reduction. Secondly, it is at odds with the institutionalisation of evidence-informed decision-making and the importance of development effectiveness in mainstream development. Consequently, sport-for-development has isolated itself, undermining its position as a development intervention.

This evidence-gap map has shown that the need for systematic evidence of what works, why, and for whom in implementing sport-for-development programmes is essential for the domain to be regarded as a serious actor in international development. The map presents the first step in providing such systematic evidence. To move towards a more reliable evidence-base of sport-for-development, research evidence in form of more rigorous impact evaluations or a full systematic review, arguably using methods of realist synthesis, is recommended.

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ENDNOTES

1. This is based on 2009 figures of sport-for development programmes listed on the *sportanddev.org* project register. The total number of projects is 255, but no baseline number is provided.
2. Most notable among these are: Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (former CIDA) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (former AusAID).
3. This is based on Heek's (2010) ranking of development journals.
4. For an in-depth epistemological discussion on the contested nature and definition of evidence in sport-for-development see, for example, chapter 3 in Coalter (2013).
5. See, for example, Willis (2000); Botcheva and Huffman (2004), and Kruse (2006).
6. Full details of searches and search results broken down per database date, etc., are available on request.
7. The fully coded list of all included studies is available on request.
8. There is a vast body of qualitative process evaluations and case studies, which failed to measure project impact and were thus excluded.

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