Winning the Peace or Playing at Development?
Interrogating the Utility of Sport in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

John Skelton
PRDU Working Paper Series

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Preface
This paper emerges from field research conducted during the author’s studying for a Masters degree in Post-war Recovery Studies at the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York, during 2011–2012.

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Abstract

Recently there has been an upsurge of interest among agents of liberal peacebuilding in the role of sport in peacebuilding processes. However, the wide-ranging claims concerning sport’s peacebuilding utility as articulated by proponents of the so-called ‘sport for development and peace’ (SDP) sector have escaped rigorous empirical research. Focusing on Lebanon, this piece draws on social capital and civil society peacebuilding theory to critically examine key suppositions of sport-based peacebuilding.

The paper argues that, contrary to claims of proponents of the SDP sector, the key issues regarding the effectiveness of sports initiatives are not sport-specific but rather are those common to community initiatives more generally. Crucially, sport initiatives are not immune to deep-seated dilemmas and challenges facing civil society peacebuilding efforts, including: ensuring that intergroup contact serves to mitigate conflict, balancing local and external agendas and achieving sustainability.

Consequently, it is suggested that efforts to ‘exceptionalise’ sport-based peacebuilding are misguided and that it is instead more beneficial to conceptualise sport initiatives within mainstream civil society peacebuilding theories and frameworks. Reverence for ‘sport’ confuses rather than clarifies mechanisms of social capital development and displaces attention from the key issues of the form and quality of the social organisation that is created through civil society initiatives.

Introduction

This piece is interested in how the social fabric of divided societies can be transformed from conditions of prejudice and security dilemmas to those of cohesion. Within this, the paper interrogates the role of community sports initiatives in generating inclusive bridging forms of social capital; the latter understood as a collective term for social relations and the norms of trust, cooperation and reciprocity that are derived from them (Putnam 2000: 19).

The paper’s focus lies in response to the increasing popularity of sport programming among leading agents of the liberal peacebuilding industry which has led to something of a rhetorical and policy explosion.¹ Sports-based peace-support initiatives have been implemented by leading humanitarian agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children, and by specialist sport development organisations such as Right To Play, while sport initiatives are becoming increasingly integrated into bilateral international assistance (Kidd 2011). In 2001 the UN established an Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) and an Inter-Agency Task on Sport for Development and Peace in 2002, while
the UN General Assembly declared 2005 to be the ‘international year of sport and physical education’. This collection of intergovernmental and non-governmental actors has been perceived as an emerging ‘sector’ (Kidd 2011) which is unified by the assertion that sport constitutes a legitimate and effective form of humanitarian intervention in post-conflict and development contexts.

Critics however suggest that such enthusiasm has not been accompanied by either sound theoretical grounding or empirical evidence. Specifically, Coalter (2010a, 2010b) has criticised the sport for development and peace discourse for adopting an ‘evangelical policy rhetoric’ and for its tendency to reify sport’s social properties and to romanticise its social utility. In some cases there appears to be a tendency among supporters to view sport as a unique instrument of bringing about certain social goods, amongst them peaceful intergroup relations, yet without a firm empirical or theoretical basis for such faith. In particular there has been little effort so far to consider the intersection or divergences between sport interventions and non-sports efforts to break down divisions through intergroup contact.

The paper’s methodology consists of a case study analysis of a community sports intervention in Lebanon. Since the settlement of Lebanon’s civil war in 1989, the interaction of complex internal and external dynamics have resulted in the maintenance of a highly fragile peace. The ‘Community Club programme’, implemented by the Danish NGO Cross Cultures Project Association (CCPA), aimed to promote interaction between Lebanon’s divided communities through the medium of youth grassroots football.

The paper is guided by a central research question: What insights does the case study provide regarding the utility of, and challenges facing, community sports programmes as peacebuilding vehicles in conflict-affected societies? The paper first locates sport-based peacebuilding within theoretical frameworks of social capital, social cohesion and civil society. The paper then applies this framework to the context of contemporary conflict in Lebanon. It is shown how civil society in general, and sport in particular, does not necessarily exert a unifying influence upon Lebanese communal groups. The next section examines the case study, drawing on fieldwork. The overall finding is that the key issues regarding the effectiveness of sports initiatives are not sport-specific but rather are those common to community initiatives more generally. Crucially, sport initiatives are not immune to deep-seated dilemmas and challenges facing civil society peacebuilding efforts, including: ensuring that intergroup contact serves to mitigate conflict, balancing local and external agendas and achieving sustainability.

Consequently, it is suggested that efforts to ‘exceptionalise’ sport-based peacebuilding are misguided and that it is instead more beneficial to conceptualise sport initiatives within mainstream civil society peacebuilding theories and frameworks. Reverence for ‘sport’ confuses rather than clarifies mechanisms of social capital development and displaces attention from the key issues of the form and quality of the social organisation that is created through civil society initiatives. The paper concludes by offering a range of recommendations that should guide sports-based peacebuilding interventions.
Social Capital Peacebuilding Theory

Social capital
The concept of social capital has attracted enormous attention in recent years by both development economists and democritisation/peacebuilding theorists. For the former, the relevance of social capital lies in its ability to develop other forms of capital and thereby promote economic efficiency (Collier 2002). For the latter, it is essential for social cohesion, civil society and democracy (Paffenholz 2009, Paffenholz and Spurk 2006, Colletta and Cullen 2000, Putnam 2000, 1993).

While there is a lively on-going debate regarding what is the essence of social capital, there is broad agreement that the concept is concerned with features of social organisation that enable collective action. Such characteristics are commonly held to be social networks, relationships, norms, and reciprocity (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 226, Putnam 2000, 1993). The element of trust is at the core of Fukuyama’s (2001) understanding of social capital, who states that trust is central to the ability of individuals to act collectively. Whilst social capital is considered capital because, like human and economic capital, it is productive, in contrast to other capital it is deemed to increase in quantity the more it is used (Putnam 1993: 4). For Putnam (2000: 18–19), the underlying principle is that ‘social networks have value’.

Analysts variously attribute social capital to reside with communities and with individuals. Putnam’s interest in social capital lies in its ability to generate positive collective outcomes, regarding it as a public rather than private good. In this analysis, communities or societies rather possess social capital (Coalter 2010b: 378, Colletta and Cullen 2000: 2). Other theorists such as Coleman (1988) adopt a more individualistic interpretation. Similarly, Lin (1999: 30), views social capital in rational self-interested terms, describing it as ‘investment in social relations with expected returns’.
Social capital, civil society and peacebuilding

Social capital is deemed to be an important aspect of bottom-up peacebuilding approaches such as conflict resolution and transformation Paffenholz (2009). These approaches are advocated by Lederach (1997: 85–85), who defines peacebuilding as: ‘…a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships.’ The role of social capital in peacebuilding has been considered in terms of the association of the former with social cohesion (Paffenholz 2009, Korac 2009, Saner 2009). Although no universally-agreed definition of social cohesion exists, its presence has been assumed to be a basic prerequisite for any successfully functioning society (King et al 2010, Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Berkman and Kawatchi (2000:175) perceive social capital as a core element of the second of two features which constitute social cohesion:

Social cohesion refers to two broader intertwined features of society: (1) the absence of latent conflict whether in the form of income/wealth inequality; racial/ethnic tensions; disparities in political participation; or other forms of polarization; and (2) the presence of strong social bonds—measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity; the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions (civil society) and the presence of institutions of conflict management, e.g., responsive democracy, an independent judiciary, and an independent media.

An important source of social capital, particularly in Putnam’s communitarian interpretation, is deemed to be civil society and voluntary associations therein. Putnam (2000) considers both formal civil society organisations and informal social connections (such as meeting with friends) as proxies of civic engagement and thereby of social capital. Indeed, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) identify ‘conflict sensitive social cohesion’ as one of several peacebuilding functions performed by civil society.

While civil society and the social capital with which it is associated have been positively linked to social cohesion, the literature emphasises that both civil society and social capital can also have negative social impacts. Here, Putnam’s (2000: 22) distinction between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital is crucial. The former refers to cohesion and trust within socially homogenous groups whilst the latter refers to cohesion and trust between different identity groups (Putnam 2000:22). It has been noted that certain forms of bonding social capital can be built on exclusionary norms which can be detrimental to the cohesion of a society (Nan 2009, O’Reilly 1998:27). Organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan are examples of extremely exclusionary forms of social capital; while such organisations reflect and produce strong intragroup social cohesion, they simultaneously exclude outsiders and therefore contribute to social fragmentation rather than cohesion (Fukuyama 2001:8).

This points to the fact that civil society per se does not lead to social cohesion, and may in fact have a detrimental impact if built on exclusionary norms. As Mac Ginty and Williams (2009:88) note, civil society, ‘can be exclusive rather
than inclusive and decidedly uncivil’. This is particularly true of post-settlement societies, which are often characterised by an abundance of bonding social capital, while bridging social capital is frequently a casualty of violent conflict (Belloni 2009, Paffenholz 2009: 194). Thus, while bonding social capital is not automatically detrimental to social cohesion, in the context of deeply divided societies it can also reinforce intergroup intolerance, fear and social fragmentation (Mac Ginty and Williams 2009, Morrow 2006). Belloni (2008) observes that this is particularly the case if it promotes civil society based on extremely exclusionary forms of bonding social capital.

In view of the potentially detrimental impact of civil society based upon bonding social capital, civil society-based peacebuilding approach has mainly involved the promotion of civil society based on bridging social capital. This approach is underpinned by the assumption that, ‘if cross-ethnic bonds of trust, cooperation and solidarity are formed, they will counterbalance the divisive force of ‘bonding’ social capital, or the social networks, values, norms and connections that keep homogenous groups cohesive.’ An underlying assumption of such approaches is that intergroup segregation creates ripe conditions for spirals of fear and mistrust to develop; thus, intergroup contact is a prerequisite for the breaking of such cycles.

The above theoretical assumptions suggests that sport may occupy a role in peacebuilding if it is creates bridging forms of social capital, as reflected in rhetoric espoused by policy stakeholders. For instance, according to the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace (2003),

sport is ‘a key component of social life, directly engaging communities’ and ‘helps create social relationships, build connections and improve communication between individuals and groups.’

**Contemporary Protracted Conflict in Lebanon**

This section examines contemporary conflict in Lebanon in the period since 2005, drawing on Azar’s (1990) theory of ‘protracted social conflict’ (PSC). In explaining conflict in multi-communal societies, Azar focuses on communal group identity as the core level of analysis. This model, which sees identity as a core need of individuals, can be witnessed in Lebanon to such an extent that communal identity ‘trumps’ national identity and the state operates only as a result of a political system based on communal power-sharing (Harris 2009: 9). The development of national societal cohesion is further inhibited by a system whereby each religion has jurisdiction over personal status issues (UNDP 2009:70).

However, Azar (1990) argues that the primacy of communal identities does not itself cause conflict: a necessary second condition is the presence of communally-expressed grievances relating to the deprivation of basic needs – such as security, access to resources, and access to political representation (Ramsbotham 2005: 114–115). Of key importance, the Ta’if Accord repackaged the National Pact in such a way that was accepted by all communal elites yet failed
to address the underlying causes of conflict. Therefore, while the main conflict fault-line has been re-orientated from Muslim versus Christian to Sunni versus Shi’a, the key driver of conflict remains insecurity regarding the political and security needs of Lebanon’s multiple communities (Krayem undated).

According to Nir (ibid) a core problem is that the Ta’if political system fails to reflect demographic realities: despite the Shi’a being the largest political communal group, the current political formula provides them with 27 of 128 seats in parliament, compared with Maronites’ 34 and the Sunnis’ 27 (ibid). The traditional political underrepresentation of the Shi’a lies in contrast to their military and organisational strength. The Shi’a group Hizbollah was the only militia not demobilised following the end of the civil war and its military ability was highlighted in 2008 during which, alongside its ally Amal, its members took over Sunni-controlled West Beirut (Nir 2009:178). Moreover, Hizbollah’s influence was sufficiently powerful to collapse the Sunni dominated government of Saad Hariri in 2011, and to prevent political progress until the formation of a government in which it dominated, holding 16 out of 30 seats.
Both historical and contemporary conflict in Lebanon has been intimately connected to external influences. Lebanon has on various occasions been a front line of the Arab–Israeli conflict, entailing Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanese territory in 1978 and between 1982 and 2000 and Israeli aerial bombings in 1996 and 2006. Lebanon has functioned as strategic battleground involving a range of interested actors, including the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation between 1969 and 1982, Israeli proxies notably the South Lebanon Army, and the Syrian government.

While the 2005 Cedar Revolution entailed the termination of Syria’s fifteen year political and military hegemony in Lebanon, Damascus has remained an influential actor such that political conflict post-2005 has been largely characterised by Syrian efforts to regain political dominance, both directly and through proxies (Harris 2009: 17). Thus since 2005 the Lebanese political landscape has been divided into two political blocs, distinguished primarily by their position towards the Assad government. The Western-favoured ‘March 14th’ alliance is dominated by the Sunni Future Movement and opposes Syria’s interference in Lebanon whilst the Shi’a-led ‘March 8th’ bloc is strongly allied to Damascus and Tehran (Brahimi 2012).

Recent political instability has been driven by the efforts of each bloc to attain political dominance. The political deadlock of 2007–2008, the resolution of which required international mediation in the form of the Qatar-sponsored Doha Agreement, was characterised by incompatible positions between the March 8th and March 14th blocs with regards to a successor to President Lahoud (Salem 2007: 1). The March 14th bloc demanded a president who would proceed with the UN’s Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), and who would enforce the UN’s Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701 which call for the strengthening of the Lebanese state’s internal authority. Conversely, the March 8th bloc insisted that the new president should be tolerant of Hizbollah and Syria and ensure the blocking of the UN tribunal (Salem 2007).

Sectarian conflict in Lebanon along a Sunni-Shi’a axis has been reinforced by the onset of increasingly sectarian conflict in Syria since 2011 which is in turn a symptom of a wider regional conflict which pits a Shi’a coalition composed of Iran, Syria and Hizbollah against a Sunni and Western grouping of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, US, and EU which seeks to weaken the Shi’a ‘crescent of resistance’. At the elite political level this plays out most significantly through Tehran’s sponsoring of Hizbollah, western states’ efforts to characterise the same organisation as a ‘terrorist’ group, and Riyadh’s support for the Future Movement (Picard and Ramsbotham 2012: 7). At popular levels, the Sunni-Shi’a divide has been most visibly been expressed through violent clashes in the northern city of Tripoli between majority Sunni and minority Alawite communities (Chulov 2012). Lebanon has been a source of arms and fighters for both Syrian rebels and the Assad government, with the official participation of Hizbollah fighters in Syria as of 2013 only the highest profile indicator of the polarising effect of the Syrian conflict on Lebanese society. Thus it is evident that ‘international linkages’ have served to reinforce communal needs-based grievances.
Social capital and civil society in Lebanon

Two commonly used proxy measures of social capital are trust and membership of civil society associations (Glaeser et al 2000, Lochner et al 2003). Based on quantitative survey data from 2009, the Legatum Institute (2011) found that just 7% of Lebanese surveyed believed their fellow citizens to be trustworthy, placing Lebanon in 102nd place of 110 societies surveyed. A different study found high levels of mistrust between communal identity groups, with less than half of the respondents comfortable with interacting with members from another religious community Haddad (2002a). Notably, however, the study did not find a lack of social capital per se: lack of trust between communal groups contrasted with indications of high levels of communal identity consciousness and communal pride, with upwards of 90% of respondents believing that their sect was the best to lead the country (ibid). These findings thus suggested the presence of high levels of intra-group trust, a key indicator of bonding social capital.

A high level of social capital is further indicated by Lebanon’s highly developed and dynamic civil society based on a strong culture of volunteering, particularly in comparison to other Middle East societies. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are concerned with a wide range of activities, including a large number devoted to service-provision associations which substitute for the state in many areas such as relief and welfare (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2009).

However, the ability of civil society organisations to bridge communal divides is limited by the fact that a large number of NGOs have a sectarian affiliation, many of which are also directly linked to political parties (UNDP 2009: 83), while others are de facto segregated along communal lines. As Mac Ginty and Williams (2009: 88) observe, ‘many social and civil organisations are located in and operate for one community. Thus different groups have their own media outlets, charitable organisations and social spaces.’ A prominent example is Jihad Al Bina (the reconstruction wing of Hizbollah), which was one of the most effective relief agencies following the 2006 conflict with Israel (Barakat and Zyck 2011). It is important not to caricature Lebanon’s civil society: many organisations do possess a multi-communal membership and leadership. However, the ability of such organisations to act as inter-communal ‘connectors’ is reportedly limited by the fact that many feel compelled to accommodate their cross-factional membership through adopting governance structures based on sectarian power-sharing, thus mirroring the national political system (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2009). The core point is that Lebanon exemplifies the differential effects that bridging and bonding social capital exert on the cohesion of a society. The following section discusses social capital in Lebanon with specific reference to the sports sector.

The role of sport in Lebanese society: vehicle of social fragmentation?

In contrast to the significant role that sport plays in many western societies as a source of social capital (Le Roux et al 2000 in Coalter 2007), its ability to play such a role in Lebanon is limited by a lack of a national structure for recreational sports (Nassif 2009:86). In turn, this is linked to limited government
funding: for example, Nassif (2009:166) claims that 0.4% of the government’s budget is allocated to the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS).

The role of sports organisations in civil society is limited by an elitist sports national culture in which the governing sports bodies prioritise high-level over participatory sport. Consequently, the limited sports funding is skewed away from grassroots development in favour of talent development (CCPA 2012). Indeed, until 2008, the marginalisation of grassroots sport has been to the extent that the organisation of non-elite sports was subject to stringent legal conditions which in effect denied ordinary citizens the right to form grassroots sports associations.10

The reduction of sports to formal sports organisations serves to undermine social cohesion by accentuating divides between socioeconomic constituents, with clubs and state of the art fitness facilities geared to those with financial means. Lebanon’s sole golf club is a prominent example of the country’s culture of combining sport with economic elitism, with the club’s Porsche-driving members paying a $11,000/£7,000 initiation fee (one-time joining cost) in addition to an annual fee of $1,940/£1,245.11 In a vivid illustration of Lebanon’s wealth imbalances, the club’s pristine green fairways and five-star leisure complex are located against the backdrop of one of Beirut’s most impoverished Shi’a neighbourhoods, in which families living in overcrowded slums are still recovering from the damage sustained during the 2006 Israeli bombardment. The accentuation of socioeconomic divisions through the organisation of sport also involves social separations along ethnic lines, with those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds – and accordingly with relatively less access to practices sports – disproportionately represented by the Shi’a and Palestinians.

At the sporting elite-level, ethnic and political divisions are hardwired into the organisation of sport, with professional sports clubs commonly affiliated with political movements. According to Reiche (2011) virtually all of Lebanon’s men’s elite football and basketball clubs (the most popular sports) are affiliated with religious communities as well as with the ‘March 8th’ and ‘March 14th’ political movements. Reiche maintains that, as a consequence of a lack of revenues from ticket sales and broadcasting, sports clubs have become dependent upon private sponsors and in this way have been co-opted into patron-client structures by political elites who consider sports clubs to be powerful opportunities to obtain support (ibid:201112). Thus, each of the most populous sectarian communities control elite football and basketball clubs: Al-Ansar is Sunni (Hariri family/March 14th), Al-Ahed is Shia (Hizbollah/March 8th); Hikmeh is Maronite (Lebanese Forces/March 14th); Sada Sporting Club is Druze (Progressive Socialist Party/March 8th) etc. Reiche further shows that while women’s elite clubs are typically devoid of political affiliations, they generally have religious affiliations (ibid). Based on these findings, Reiche concludes that this politicisation results in sports clubs being part of ‘confessional subsystems’ (along with the media and other institutions), which obstruct the formation of national identity and cohesion, or bridging social capital.

Analysis of the Lebanese context thus suggests that civil society is predominantly focused on bonding rather than bridging social capital. Further,
this is reflected in the organisation of sport at both grassroots and elite levels. This illustrates Coalter’s (2010b:1386) claim that, rather than sport functioning as a source of social capital and cohesion, the latter is the product of certain specific forms of social organisation. As far as peacebuilding interventions are concerned, this suggests the need for the strategic deployment of sport tailored to the local context.

Cross Cultures Project Association’s Community Club Programme

Background: building social capital through sports

CCPA first intervened in Lebanon in 2005 as part of a wider Middle East regional peacebuilding programme also involving Syria and Jordan. The Community Club programme, established in 2008, shared with the organisation’s other programmes the objective of employing youth football to build trust between divided groups. By 2012, 107 Community Clubs had been established throughout the country, involving 3,083 children and youths, local volunteer coaches, coordinators, parents, and municipalities encompassing all of Lebanon’s major communities: Sunnite, Shiite, Alawite, Christian, Druze, and Palestinian (ibid:11). The clubs organised regular grassroots football activities including festivals and tournaments within and between clubs across all of Lebanon’s regions.

In addition to football-oriented events, the programme involved related activities as a means of building bridging social capital, including coaches’ and parents’ training sessions. Through the participation of parents, the programme was designed to address a commonly-cited challenge in relation to children’s peacebuilding programmes, namely that the process of reintegrating participants back into their own communities may have the result of nullifying impacts of the intervention if such communities are resistant to challenging engrained prejudices or stereotypes (Rigby 2008:7). While the immediate purpose of such events was to impart the necessary practical and organisational skills to run the Community Clubs, at a deeper level the training was intended as a tool to promote bridging between people from diverse religious and political backgrounds. One coach explained how he had developed sustained personal relationships with other participants having attended a seminar:

Every two weeks, we are a group of CCPA volunteers who meet up and have fun together. We are some from Tripoli, some from the Bekaa, one from Beirut and one from the South. We are Christians, Sunnites and Shites, girls and boys, so we must be the perfect example of what CCPA is all about. Now we have to show the children how to meet new friends from other areas on the football pitch. (Quoted in CCPA 2012:25).

The programme targeted areas characterised by deep divisions such as the protracted conflict in the northern city of Tripoli between the Sunnite anti-
Damascus Bab al-Tibbaneh neighbourhood and the adjacent Alawite pro-Assad Jabal Mohsen community.\textsuperscript{14} For many participants – both children and adult volunteers – involvement in Community Club sports activities constituted the first contact they had had with members of the other community.\textsuperscript{15} The trust-building utility of the programme was similarly emphasised by participants in other contexts, for example between Palestine refugees resident in Wavel refugee camp and the neighbouring Shiite community where previously there had been little inter-group contact.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Analysis of the Programme’s Effectiveness and Challenges}

\textbf{Mitigation of conflict through intergroup contact}

An obvious requirement of peacebuilding initiatives based on contact is that such contact serves to promote trust and tolerance rather than to exacerbate conflict. A general theoretical basis for contact-based peacebuilding strategies is the ‘contact hypothesis’: an empirically-based theory originating in social psychology which maintains that, under certain conditions, intergroup contact can foster positive intergroup relations (Pettigrew 1998; Allport 1954).\textsuperscript{17}

Concerning the utilisation of sport in peacebuilding, debate has commonly focused on whether or not sport is a suitable medium through which to operationalize the contact hypothesis. On the one hand, sport is said to promote conciliatory behaviour through promoting qualities such as teamwork, discipline and ‘fair play’ (UN). Conversely, the inherent competitiveness within sport is alleged to make it a poor vehicle for bridging divides. Events such as football riots in Egypt in 2012 (BBC 2012b),\textsuperscript{18} in addition to sport’s propensity to become politicised at elite levels as discussed above in the context of Lebanon, demonstrates that (competitive) sport, especially football, is not a natural tool for promoting intergroup cohesion (Ramsbotham et al 2011:351;
Kaupuscinski 1990). In their study of interethnic football games, Krouwel et al. (2006: 176) suggest that the competitive element of sport when organised between ethnic groups serves to increase rather than diminish divisions: ‘…as far as these teams encounter teams with another ethnic background in mixed competitions, the societal tensions manifest themselves once again in the play itself and are sometimes even magnified.’ The authors conclude that rather than the contact hypothesis, intergroup sport resembles the ‘hypothesis of competition’ which in fact undermines rather than promote conflict transformation. Despite the value of these observations, however, the case study suggested that both sets of arguments fail to acknowledge that of more importance than inherent characteristics of sport is the strategic manner in which sport is used and how this impacts the effective operationalization of the contact hypothesis. Two issues were particularly important in this respect.

First, the case study indicated that peacebuilding effectiveness necessitated the adoption of sport – specifically, though eliminating its competitive elements. This necessity was reflected in the Community Club programme in which the qualities of ‘fun’, ‘participation’ and ‘success’ were at the forefront of all football activities while competitiveness was minimised. Moreover, children were strategically mixed-up so that there was no competition along ethnic lines.

Less obviously, the case study indicated the importance of the specific ways in which sport is linked with peacebuilding for the degree to which the initiative enjoys local legitimacy and support. This issue is particularly pertinent to peacebuilding programmes driven by international actors which are vulnerable to lacking legitimacy and/or being viewed with suspicion by the societies or governments at which they are targeted. In Lebanon, western-led peacebuilding initiatives (especially those which employ the discourse of ‘peace’) frequently face charges that such efforts are linked to a process of settling regional conflict as part of a broader Washington-led Trojan horse for normalising and legitimising a regional status quo vis-à-vis Israel to which Lebanese popular opinion regards as acutely unjust.

In this context, the widely-held perception in Lebanese society of youth’s sport as a politically neutral activity was an important factor in minimising the risk of a legitimacy deficit. However, equally important in terms of the latter was the strategy pursued by the project management through which an indirect peacebuilding approach was adopted. This entailed marketing the programme as primarily a sports development initiative, whilst the peacebuilding element was subtly pursued as a ‘second agenda’. In light of the legitimacy barriers which overt peacebuilding initiatives face in Lebanon, the framing of the programme as a sports development rather than peace initiative appeared to lower the social cost of participation. The subject of youth sport provided a means through which individuals could connect with people from different communities without their actions being questioned or rejected by community leaders. Thus the indirect application of sport as a peacebuilding means was important in minimising the prospect that the intervention ‘did harm’ through dividing opinions as to its legitimacy.
It is interesting to compare the terminology related to the case study (‘Community Club programme’ and ‘Cross Cultures Project Association’) with initiatives which adhere to a more direct peacebuilding approach. Examples of the latter include: Football4Peace, Generations for Peace, Peace Players, The Peres Centre for Peace, Peace and Sport, to name just a few. A focus on terminology is not merely an academic exercise, but rather language plays an important in framing peacebuilding interventions, and accordingly how they are interpreted by target groups. Ultimately, the case study suggested that the programme’s design, whereby the primary focus was on sport development (rather than ‘peace’) was an important factor in the broad appeal and impressive participation rates enjoyed by the programme.

This finding poses important questions concerning peacebuilding approaches that seek to ‘teach’ tolerance to divided communities’. Rather than such direct methods, the study suggests that social cohesion may more effectively be brought about as a by-effect (rather than sole objective) of programmes which are perceived to contribute to genuine development priorities; in this case through contributing to the development of social infrastructure required for enhanced grassroots sports opportunities.

Balancing external and local agendas
The case study illustrated the linkages between sports peacebuilding programme and a key challenge facing externally-directed to build pro-peace civil society structures, namely that of ensuring that donors’ interests do not result in the purposes of such structures being skewed away from local needs (Belloni 2008:184). In this respect, the issue of gender was particularly significant. It is relevant to note that funding from the project donor was conditioned on the programme meeting a target of 20% female participation (Rockwool Foundation). Achieving this target was a substantial challenge due to the propensity in Lebanese society (especially in Muslim communities) for football – and sport in general – to be considered as an exclusively male activity. Interviews with participants confirmed that the notion of girls playing football was an alien concept to many, particularly in the Shiite-dominated south. According to one coach, encouraging girls to play was ‘mission impossible’. Despite substantial efforts of CCPA to instil liberal gender norms into the ethos of the clubs, this had modest success, and female participation remained below the donor’s target benchmark (CCPA 2012:21).

The setting of gender participation quotas reflects the tendency for international donors to consider peacebuilding as a process inextricably linked to the building of liberal democratic polities. In such a conceptualisation the transformation of conservative gender norms in Southern societies is commonly perceived as an integral element of the broader project, and sport programmes are often considered to constitute a particularly useful mechanism for refashioning such norms. For example, Right to Play, one of the most powerful INGOs in the field of sports-for-development, aims to achieve a 60% female participation rate in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.
The case study suggested that such gender-programming may be vulnerable to inadvertent outcomes. In some cases, there is a danger that programmes reinforce conflict lines within the local society by instigating tensions between between ‘liberal’ girls and women on the one hand and their more conservative communities on the other. More generally, dogmatic adherence to non-local gender norms may reduce the ability of peacebuilding initiatives to resonate with wider society, with the consequence that programmes merely ‘preach to the converted’ – typically westernised and well-educated elements of society – while mainstream society remains marginalised. In such scenarios, not only are limitations placed on the ability of initiatives to instigate meaningful cross-cutting ties in society but they may result in further deepening (vertical) social divides along education or socioeconomic indices.

Efforts to instigate cross-cutting social structures (bridging social capital) constituted a second thematic area in which the case study highlighted the friction between local and external norms. The formation of (ethnically and religiously) mixed associations constituted the prime objective of the programme’s donor, which consequently impressed upon the implementing agency the necessity for each Community Club to hold a cross-cutting membership. Yet the commitment to establishing heterogeneous associations raised two sets of issues concerning the compatibility of this objective with local realities.

First, the (generally) physical segregation of Lebanese society whereby different communal groups reside in separate geographical areas of the country, challenges efforts to build multi-communal community-based organisations (CBOs). The case study illustrated the resultant dilemma facing peacebuilders between prioritising the development of locally-grounded CBOs (often dominated by a single community) versus promoting communally-mixed CBOs. The study indicated that international actors’ preference for the creation of ethnically or religiously diverse associations may ultimately not be achievable.
without creating wholly artificial structures which are dependent upon outsiders’ continued input, and thus with poor prospects for sustainability.

A second problematic feature of an inflexible pursuit of associations with cross-cutting membership is that *intragroup* civil society organisations may often themselves play valuable functions. With regards to the case study, participants cited a range of benefits deriving from the Community Clubs, including in the fields of health and counteracting anti-social behaviour. Whilst inter-group mixing may be the most obvious proxy of peace from the perspective of external actors, the case study suggested that it may not be the most significant of valued amongst local populations. However, the case study exemplified a tendency for external actors to view societies primarily in terms of divisions and conflict rather than as populations with a wide range of development needs, of which inter-group trust-building is merely one aspect. The core point is that the case study indicated sports interventions to be vulnerable to a tendency for intervening parties to have a preconceived notion of what local societies need, particularly in terms of gender norms and promoting ‘tolerance-building’ civil society structures, which may not fit with local priorities.

**Sustainability**

Ensuring sustainability through building sufficient local capacity constitutes a well-documented challenge to externally-led efforts to create civil society structures and organisations (Belloni 2008: 203). On this issue, the case study suggested the merits that the programme’s bottom-up locally-driven approach had with respect to garnering local ownership. Because activities within and between clubs were organised by the local coaches and club volunteers, and not by international staff, local stakeholders were conceptualised as change-agents rather than as passive beneficiaries. Interviews with club coaches indicated that the investment of responsibility in them played an important role in fostering a sense of local ownership of the programme. Discussions between the author and club leaders suggested that the community leadership role which was conferred upon the latter had the effect of instilling enthusiasm and pride. Through organising community events, club leaders enjoyed a respected position within the local community.

A second finding from the case study was the significance of scale with regards to the achievement of financial and organisational sustainability. It has been suggested in the literature that an important way through which sports development initiatives can attain sustainability is through engaging with governmental and other institutional actors. The theory holds that such partnering can provide communities with access ‘to valuable external resources like money, support or political leverage’ (Skidmore *et al* 2006 in Coalter 2010b:1384).

However, the case study illustrated the difficulties that can challenge the attainment of such resources, especially in the case of micro-level organisations. Whilst individual Community Clubs appealed to local municipalities for financial resources, this strategy was only modestly successful due to municipalities’ favouring ‘hard’ development such as infrastructure projects over social
Consequently, it became apparent that sustainability required the development of an institutionalised framework through which clubs could access resources collectively rather than individually. Towards this end, steps were taken to institutionally link the network of Community Clubs to the national Lebanese sports sector through the development of a Community Club Federation (CCPAa). Although at time of writing the Community Club Federation was yet to be created, and therefore its effectiveness could not be assessed, it was anticipated that the Federation would act as a mechanism through which the Community Clubs could access a range of resources necessary for their sustainability, including: financial (through funding from governmental and national sports bodies’ budgets; political (through the advocacy of grassroots sports and the concept of sport-for-all); and organisational (through the Federation’s functioning as a source of sporting, educational and administrative expertise) (CCPA 2012: 32). The core finding is that institutionalisation promised to be an effective way of leveraging resources that could otherwise not be attained on a micro scale. This has important policy implications regarding the long-term impact of micro-level initiatives that are isolated from national policy and institutional frameworks.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following section outlines a number of concluding themes.

Local vision

There is significant support among the ‘sport for development sector’ for predominately top-down approaches which entail substantial agenda-setting and management roles for international actors. An example is the model advocated by Schulenkorff which entails a phased local capacity-building process, whereby ‘control’ is gradually transferred from external to local actors.

![Programme development over time](image)

*Figure 1: Model of sports intervention management, adapted from Schulenkorff (2010)*
In this conceptualisation, achieving sustainability is an exercise in building-up local capacity to implement externally packaged interventions. However, the findings from the present study suggest that the long-term effectiveness of sports peacebuilding programmes requires that initiatives are underpinned by local vision and consensus. Local participation – which often in reality amounts to the obtaining of local approval of externally developed concepts and fails to deliver the local empowerment which it promises – is insufficient. Rather than being passive beneficiaries, this study has suggested that local communities themselves are the primary change agent and that it is therefore crucial that civil society initiatives are grounded in local agendas.

A key factor in the effectiveness of the Community Club programme was the harmonisation between local interest in grassroots sport development and the objectives of the programme. Crucially, the programme garnered local legitimacy and popularity by not attempting to engage participants in an overt ‘peace’ project. In contrast, as the case study illustrated with regards to gender and ‘bridging’ strategies, in cases where there is disconnect between sports initiatives and local agendas two outcomes are particularly prone. First, if the underlying logic lacks widespread support, it is doubtful that the initiative will continue beyond the withdrawal of international management. Second, there is a risk that broad participation will be undermined and that programmes instead engage only with a narrow spectrum (often westernised) of civil society, constituted by those who are already convinced of the programme’s objectives. Local ownership therefore requires not just local organisational capacity but also local support for ideas and values.

**Strategic deployment of sport**

The frequently rehearsed debate between whether or not sport constitutes an effective vehicle for transforming attitudinal conflict fails to engage with the more important issues concerning the manner in which sport is strategically deployed and the consequent implications of this for social cohesion. Most obviously, strategic deployment may entail adapting fundamental properties of sport, such as minimising its competitive elements.

Programmers should also ensure that activities are contextually appropriate. For example, in conservative societies gender segregated rather than gender mixed activities may be more appropriate, whilst the choice of sport should reflect cultural preferences. It is crucial that initiatives are responsive to the nature of conflict. In settings well into the ‘post-conflict’ phase, overt reconciliation activities between groups may be appropriate. Conversely, the case study illustrated that in contexts of ongoing or protracted conflict, peacebuilding initiatives may be controversial and it may be prudent to pursue more indirect initiatives. If external initiatives precede local readiness to engage in inter-group activities, there is a risk of sewing deeper divisions.

**Link to broad development processes**

In order that interventions enjoy widespread support and legitimacy, it is important that peacebuilders do not conceptualise sports programmes in isola-
tion but rather that such initiatives are designed to support the broader development context. A finding of the case study was that local communities are likely to be more responsive to activities which they perceive as contributing to developmental objectives, than to activities designed to pursue peaceful inter-group relations as an end in itself. Sports activities are particularly well placed to link and contribute to local development priorities such as the development of grassroots sports, health initiatives and countering of crime and anti-social behaviour through the engagement of youth.

In addition to linking to local development, there are benefits of linking to large-scale/national development processes. The incorporation of local initiatives within institutional frameworks, such as national sports bodies, can be an effective way of safeguarding programme sustainability through the accessing of resources not available to local initiatives. In addition, linking with institutional stakeholders can be beneficial with respect to ensuring the programme’s alignment with national development priorities.

Management of expectations

In post-conflict contexts, the failure of meeting expectations is often a contributing factor to relapse into violence. Sports initiatives may build expectations through delivering a range of collective benefits which can be both of a collective (such as building associations for strengthening social cohesion) and individual nature (such as socially or financially empowering sports coaches or other individuals). If such initiatives prove to be temporary due to a lack of sustainability, the result can be an increase in disillusionment and cynicism. It is important therefore that peacebuilders are transparent regarding the envisaged long-term outcomes of their interventions. The fate of the programme beyond the ending of the project cycle should be a key consideration at the outset of designing a programme. Feeding into the previous point, sustainability may be effectively pursued through linking the intervention to the society’s institutional sports structure.
Notes

1 Liberal peacebuilding is understood here as the form of peace-promotion undertaken by leading international states, intergovernmental organisations, international financial institutions, and non-governmental organisations (Mac Ginty, 2006: 33).

2 The study followed a composite research methodology (see Barakat et al 2002), combining literature analysis with field research. Data was collected during March and May 2012 throughout Lebanon, in both urban and rural locations, but was focused specifically on locations in which the Community Club programme operated. The primary data collection tools were semi-structured interviews with programme stakeholders (individual and group), direct observation, and academic and ‘grey’ literature.

3 Conflict resolution and transformation are often considered to be relationship-based approaches, in contrast to ‘top-down’ strategies such as conflict settlement and management which are considered power-based and in which social capital has been deemed comparatively unimportant (Paffenholz 2009).


5 Azar(1990) identified four sources of internal conflict: ‘communal content’ which created conflicting identity needs between groups and between groups and the state; the ‘deprivation of basic needs’; ‘governance and the state’s role’; and ‘international linkages’.

6 The purpose of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon is to try those accused of being responsible for the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005.

7 The latter objective was also central to the resignation of pro-Syrian Lebanese government ministers in January 2011, precipitating the collapse of the ‘national unity’ government led by Saad Hariri, and leading to the formation of a Hizbollah-dominated government in June 2011 (BBC 2011).

8 This is calculated based on a range of variables (trust, volunteering, helping strangers, donating to charity, perceptions of social support, church attendance, and marriage). Of the eight sub-indexes of prosperity measured, Lebanon fared worst of all countries surveyed, contrasting sharply with its relatively high rankings in the Education (48th) and Economy (58th) sub-indexes.

9 The report by Bertelsmann Stiftung cited above concludes that, ‘there is little evidence to support the idea that associational life may build trust or ‘bridging social capital’ which would make individuals and groups resistant to ethnic and sectarian sentiment. Rather, in a situation of conflict, the majority of the members will revert to their primary identity as part of a sectarian community,'
and only a small minority who has severed their ties with its community – and is, consequently, marginalized – remains committed to cross-communal, secular positions.’

10 Among the requirements for the formation of a sports association, was the condition that members were professionals and that the association had ownership of sports infrastructure (e.g. land or buildings in which to organise sports) These restrictions were only removed as a consequence of the intervention of Cross Cultures Project Association (CCPA's), whose programme is discussed below. CCPA's intervention (resulted in the MOYS activating a ‘dormant’ decree (213) which stipulated conditions under which ordinary Lebanese could organise local clubs (CCPA 2012).

11 Cost quoted is for a Men’s Single membership for the 2012–13 fiscal year.

12 Tickets revenue has decreased to almost negligible levels because of the ban enforced by the government between 2006 and 2010 on supporters attending matches. The lack of spectators has correspondingly reduced the interest from television broadcasters (Reiche 2011).

13 See http://ccpa.eu/

14 Relations between the two communities have been characterised by periodic violence for several decades and since 2011 tensions have been escalated by the intensifying civil war in Syria (Hodeib2012).

15 Interview with Community Club coach, 29.04.12, (9)

16 Interview with Community Club coach, 27.04.12, (6)

17 The following have been identified as necessary preconditions for the contact hypothesis to take effect: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, law or customs.


19 This corresponds to the requirement stipulated by the contact hypothesis that intergroup contact must have support of law, authority and custom.

20 Interview with Senior NGO staff member, 8.5.12, (13)

21 Interview with Community Club coach 28.04.12, (6); interview with community club coach 6.5.12 (12)


23 Interview with parent, 28.04.12, (7)

24 Interview with Community Club coach, 28.04.12, (6)
For example, through ‘gender equality’ workshops

Interview with regional director of sports-based development NGO, 18.4.12, (1)


Interview Community Club coordinator, 6.5.12, (10)

Interview with Senior NGO staff member, 8.5.12, (13)

This process involved the lobbying of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) in order to bring about the necessary enabling national legal framework. Lobbying culminated in the amendment of a Lebanese national law, namely Decree 213, which stipulated the legal conditions and requirements under which the Community Club Federation would be governed (CCPA 2012: 31). At the time of writing the text had been agreed in writing between the Director General of the Ministry and CCPA Lebanon and was pending the Lebanese Parliament’s adoption.

See Cooke et al 2001
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Mission Statement
The PRDU links theory and practice for the enablement and development of war-affected societies.

The Unit’s work focuses on three core areas:

**Conceptualisation:**
Facilitating the development of a vision for reconstruction with participatory needs assessment, context analysis and strategy development.

**Institution Development and Transformation:**
Supporting the development of human resources, appropriate administrative systems and institutional responses in the transition from crisis management to long-term development programmes.

**Participatory Evaluation:**
Promoting people-centred evaluation of progressive goals and strategies and the dissemination of good practice.