

Sport and Peace Building

By Pelle Kvalsund

Introduction

For decades Sports nature and intrinsic values have been questioned. In 1970's George Orwell stated that "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words: it is war minus the shooting." At the same time sport evangelists started preaching that sport offered more than a temporary haven for the suspension of conflict. For this group sport, locally and globally, can solve those problems that politicians and militaries palpably cannot. "...if sport was good for them... it must be good for others..."¹

In 2005 with *the International Year of Sport and Physical Education* the added value of sport as peace building factor was given almost unanimous recognition by the international development community. The UN regards sport as an effective tool and a strong unifying factor in the process of conflict transformation and peace building. This has for instance led to the use of sport-related activities as an integral part of nation building and to foster goodwill within local communities by a number of UN peacekeeping missions worldwide.

Not only has sport been recognized as a powerful apparatus, but the fundamental values of the sports and play alone have been acknowledged as very important elements in the building of a strong civil society and states where tolerance and friendship is being built. More than a conflict transforming tool, sport has been granted the potential as a conflict-prevention measure, helping forestall processes that generate aggression, hatred and fear.

¹ G. Stidder & J. Sugden, 2003

Understanding Conflict

Sport does not primarily aim to prevent conflict. On the contrary, it initiates conflict. All sport is based on healthy competition against opponents trying to reach a similar goal. Sport is on the other hand trying to facilitate constructive conflict in a peaceful form, accepting the fact that there have to winners and losers.

In order for us to better assess the use of sport as a peace building tool we have to gain understanding in the nature of the antagonism and conflict in the various cultural and geographical areas we choose to work. It is also advantageous for us to reflect upon some common values and principles that seem to guide most sport and development project working to address conflict prior to program implementation.

A balanced level of conflict is not only healthy, but also needed in order for us to craft change and development. Conflict is always difficult, and often end with a positive solution.

The negative sense of conflict is violence.

This has many forms and shapes from personal disagreements, inner-city gang crime, and ethnical conflicts to full fledged clashes and war between countries. These conflicts have a broad impact on the society and a number of innocent bystanders usually become targets and victims. War and violently performed conflict breaks down communication and erects barriers for interaction between people. The social unity between people is often disturbed and neighbors and friends become rivals and enemies based on identities like e.g. ethnicity and religion. Propaganda is often used to maintain the image of an enemy and prolong and increase the division between the people involved.

Defining conflict:

"War and conflict can be defined as contest between groups of people based on perceived opponent needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals".

There are numerous examples of sport (and football in particular) actively been used as a tool to create and to ad fuel to conflicts, e.g. Balkan, South America, England.

Conflicts are never one-sided and one can never point at one reason why conflict escalates to clashes or acts of hostilities. There is therefore no one response or method for conflict transformation, peace building or to reconciliation. The more we understand about the complexity of a conflicts nature, its parties, history and cultural settings the better we can craft activities adapted and suitable to the various situations.

Even though no conflicts are identical, factors like reduced communication and movement, increased perception differences as well as increased stress and uncertainty, limited resources and services, and reduced safety are often common limitations and outcomes.

Table 1 - Some aspects influencing decisions to act and partake in a violently performed conflict

Conflict factor	Explanation	Examples
Instability, scrimmage for resources and desperation	Self-preservation is one of the primary forces in life. If basic needs are not covered and safety not secured aggressive acts of desperation becomes more frequent and "legitimate".	
Division of people based on collective identities Distance in relationships - collective pressure	Group belonging (e.g. ethnicity, religion, culture) and collectivism is in many cultures stronger than individuality and personal relationships. As much as this is a positive thing it can be a strong decisive factor for aggression against other groups when resources are scarce or unequally distributed between people. The theories that it is harder to act in violence towards someone you have close personal bonds with does not hold in extreme situations On the positive side, all wars have shown tremendous acts of human compassion across ethnic and conflicting barriers. Even in the bloodiest conflicts people has sacrifices own safety to help people on the "conflicting" side.	Ethnic cleansing in Balkan and Rwanda.
Hierarchical structures	In cultures and structures with strong hierarchal systems, control mechanisms like misinformation is easier spread and used to create and uphold conflicts. Building of a strong civil society, with open access to communication and interaction. This makes it more difficult to spread propaganda and to have a totalitarian control of the population.	In Burma the regime successfully managed to put the different groups up against each other by controlling information and using it ...
Lawlessness	International law seems to have very limited consequence and impact on people's decisions of acting in extreme aggression. Chaotic situations might erase rational judgment	
Damage of mental health	Use of child soldiers, Rape and Terror is commonly used techniques to traumatize, degrade and break down people's mental health. When the mind is broken people are capable to do anything.	Sierra Leone – mutilation and systematic amputations

Human rights and democracy:

Two common values that seem to guide sport programs implementations are particularly interesting to dwell upon, **Human Rights and Democracy**.

The 1993 world conference of human rights concluded that democracy; development and respect of human rights are interdependent, and might mutually reinforce and strengthen peace building processes.

Priorities should therefore be given to this work.

Building of democratic principles is lengthy, multifaceted and complex. It includes processes that build civil society, and getting in place self-governing mechanisms based on agreed upon and culturally accepted regulations. Democracy is also hard to measure as it might incite dissimilar understandings in different cultures.

Defining democracy:

"..Government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.."

(Webster Dictionary)

Sport can, by establishing self governing clubs, leagues and structures based on the above criteria, actively participate in the democratization process by strengthen civil society and thus become one of the building blocks for a more stabile and peaceful state.

Some of the challenges aforementioned in regards to democracy also go for human rights.

Though the Universal Declarations for Human Rights are signed by most of UNs member states violations are common, and the question of the validity of the declarations sometimes challenged. Both Democracy and Human Rights are therefore at times viewed as a western ideal; therefore, the imposition of such rights on non-western nations seen as a form of cultural imperialism.

This might challenge sport projects that actively promote HR through its activities in certain parts of the world. As we adapt these values and principles into our programs or sport activities it is necessary for us to reflect on what this means in practical terms.

What can sport do?

Sport is indisputably the most popular leisure activity in the world, not only for children and youth, but for men and women as players, coaches, leaders, administrators and spectators. And even though the intrinsic values and inherent qualities in sport and play lie entirely in how the participation in the activity is experienced and perceived, play is a natural part of people's physical, mental and social development and growth.

The popularity of sport and games among children and youth and the widespread acceptance of sport and games from the parents side, make sport a low entry point for social change. Projects can be labeled as leisure activities and bring about a change of attitudes and behavior. It all depends on how you play. This is the reason why appropriate training of coaches is so crucial.

Sport can be a low entry point for persons who are skeptical about peace and social cohesion. "Just play for fun!" helps to integrate persons who would never ever participate in activities labeled "sport for peace with e.g. Kurds, Tamils, Serbs or Hutus". Sport and games allow therefore to work with the critical voices or even with persons who are against intercultural dialogue and nonviolent conflict transformation.

Sport and games integrates an important part of the human being, which often gets forgotten in peace building: the body and its emotions. Sustainable conflict transformation means that you address also the participant's feelings. Sport and games offer the space for joy, fun, creativity and happiness, but also for rage, sadness and frustration. The latter emotions can be worked on by the coach (if necessary) and be transformed.

The power comes with its popularity, and the effect and impact comes with its implementation.

Focusing on conflicting parties' mutual interest rather than using the problems as starting points for intervention, sport activities can create safe spaces for interaction where communication can be restored and understanding and tolerance can be built provided we have acquired the adequate knowledge of the situation.

Some guiding principles working with sport and peace building are:

- Understand the conflict and the culture where the conflict takes place
- Base the activities on commonalities and mutual interests/identity
- Base the activities on local premises, situation and resources
- Use of Peer educators to ensure openness and interaction rather than teachers-student and a top-down approach
- Be conscious of the distribution of services across conflicting lines. A one sided support might spawn conflict rather than reduce it.
- Know how to handle immediate conflicts within the group
- Know how to handle differences in groups and how to perceive them as an asset
- Observe; Look, listen and learn

Sport as part of the peace building factors:

Peace building covers a range of activities designed to reconstruct the social, economic and legal fabric of a society following a conflict. Many NGOs are active in different sectors trying to build a stronger society on fragile peace accords. These organizations work in all areas of peace building including enhancing security, trying to address poverty, building infrastructure and strengthening the political framework. I will in this part of the paper look at the different factors influencing the peace building process and try to identify and illustrate some of the potential areas where sport might be of influence, or be a piece in the puzzle.

Security

Even though peace building efforts should start early (also during conflict), basic security of people involved in the programs must be provided. Governments are responsible for demobilizing former combatants, but it is often the NGOs that are instrumental in re-integrating these former soldiers into society, clearing mines and establishing programs for handing over weapons and small arms so that they are not circulated to criminal elements, fuelling insecurity.

The reintroduction of child soldiers back into the community is a long, difficult and sometimes unsuccessful process, and many ex-combatants get lost on the way. It requires community-based rehabilitation projects, which enable former child soldiers to obtain education, to address the trauma of the conflict years, and to create opportunities for an alternative to military life.

Rebuilding economies

The reconstruction of socio-economic foundations and a functioning political framework complement security. The physical reconstruction of cities, development of healthcare, education, water provision, electricity, roads, livestock, and crop production all need to function for a country to get back on its feet and return to some kind of normality.

Political framework

Democratization, re-installing the rule of law, building institutions and ensuring that human rights are being safeguarded systemically are other aspects that the UN and NGOs focus upon to strengthen a society emerging from upheaval.

Reconciling torn societies

How to bring about some form of reconciliation and healing in a society which has witnessed genocide, widespread rape, torture or systematic limb amputation is a problem with no easy answer, not least when the preconditions to violent conflict may still be present and unchanged.²

Practitioners of transitional justice advocate a holistic approach to the issue including:

- Criminal prosecutions
- Truth commissions to uncover what occurred and to give the victims a voice
- Financial reparations for those who have suffered egregious violations
- Reform of state institutions to root out those who were involved in the human rights abuses
- Meaningful dialogue between various parties including victims' groups.

² Adapted from; "Justice of a Lawless World" (IRIN 2006)

But reconciliation is also about finding a sense of belonging and about reaching unity and harmony based on commonality greater than the forces that divide and separate people.

Where does sport fit in?

The table below shows the ways in which sport can contribute at specific stages during the peace-building process.

Table 2 - Peace Building Factors and contribution of Sport

Factor:	Issues:	How can sport contribute?
Security	Demobilization and stabilization	
	Reintegration of child soldiers and ex-combatants	Sport may help those who have been involved in military conflicts by drawing them out of the routines of violence and towards more rule-governed and socially acceptable patterns of behaviour. Consider, for example, the case of former child soldiers in West Africa: sports participation may assist in bringing these groups out of a social existence in which violence and terror are a part of day-to-day experience, and into patterns of social relationship in which personal initiative and collective endeavour are rewarded in peaceful and socially accepted ways.
Rebuilding economies	Construction of socio-economic foundations and a functioning political framework	
	Physical reconstruction of cities, roads, water provision, electricity, etc	Reconstruction of open sport facilities where people can meet and play has been recognized as an important and early step in the normalization process
	Education and/or vocational training	
	Livestock, crop production and employment/income generation	
	Access to other social benefits e.g. pensions and social services	
Rebuilding mental health of traumatized population	Healthcare - Trauma treatment for men, women and children (rape victims, etc)	The very process of participation in sport may also have a personally therapeutic and publicly engaging function with regards to assisting the emotional and social rehabilitation of these traumatized individuals (Giulianotti 2005) Even though there is limited evidence of the impact sport has to overcome trauma, it is believed that participation in sport can have a positive effect (Wolters, 1998).
Political framework	Democratization	Working with, and if necessary, supporting in transforming national sport bodies e.g. Ministries of Sport, Sport Commissions and Councils, and Olympic Committees
	Re-installing the rule of law	Sports are founded upon specific laws that regulate play, thereby ensuring that participants must behave in a rule-governed way.
	Building institutions and a strong civil society	Establishment of sport clubs, teams and league systems based on

		democratic processes and clear and agreed upon rules and regulations of involvement contributes not only to building civil society, but to foster recognition of acts and laws by the participants
communication-lines and access to information	Access to information e.g. radio, TV, internet and telephone	
	Reestablish means of communication and free movement	
Reconciling torn societies	Criminal prosecutions	Sport can act as a unifying tool and a buffer for conflict. It can help build relations, bridge division between groups and create unity and tolerance.
	Truth commissions to uncover what occurred and to give the victims a voice	Sport and game activities can create the necessary space through confidence to discuss after several months about problems in the family or school emerging from the war. The coach can become a confidant of children and youth and therefore empowering them.
	Financial reparations for those who have suffered egregious violations e.g. Repossession of property and reconstruction assistance	Equal access to resources, activities and assistance regardless of collective belonging is a key factor.
	Reform of state institutions to root out those who were involved in the human rights abuses	
	Meaningful dialogue between various parties including victims' groups.	Sport can be used as an important pedagogical forum for peace-building and reconciliation. During or after the playing of sports, participants can engage in talks or educational programmes regarding the benefits of social integration, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. e.g. Cross boarder sport projects where people from conflicting sides come together and focus on commonalities rather than guilt and problems

Gender issues:

A UNHCR study found that three factors influence the ability of war-affected women to return and effectively engage in reconciliation processes: (a) lack of family or community support; (b) personal security; and (c) psychological trauma. For women whose trauma is associated to sexual violence, there is significant stigma as well as real risks of being re-traumatized and victimized upon return. Very few of the perpetrators have been arrested and prosecuted – and still live in their original municipalities (UNHCR, 2000).

Women play a central role in all societies, but have a particular important role in the reconciliation and re-establish process. In many cultures women are the family providers and breadwinners. After a conflict, in a reconstruction phase, where (most often) a large number of men have been killed and mutilated due to direct involvement the women must take a lead in rebuilding entire communities. This includes support and empowerment for women partaking in sport programs as coaches, leaders, administrators and participants. Something women often are deprived of.

It is important to stress that trauma work to a large extent focuses on women and children. Men are often perceived as the perpetrators or already dead as result of direct conflict, while much of the funding goes to trauma healing for the “classical trauma victims”.

Powerful tool and responsibility

But sport being such a “powerful tool” must leave the implementers with a huge responsibility.

Sport, in its traditional form, is not a conflict preventative instrument. On the contrary, the nature of sport is exactly the opposite “a physical contest between people or teams with different goals”. For us to be able to effectively use sport as a peace building tool and to control the results and impact we must know what we are doing. The implementation and how sport is being preserved is the key not sport alone. The balance between developing sport in its traditional form and using sport to achieve peaceful coexistence can only be managed by conscious and planned implementation, increased research, concept development and understanding and increased training of field implementers.

There is a compelling need for more research in the area of sport and development, in order to validate that the psychological sport programs are truly being helpful for children and how.

Dr. Robert Henley,
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