



Academic Engagement in Sport for Development: Niche or Growing Community?

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

Louis Moustakas^{*A-D} , Karen Petry^{A,B,D,E} , Katrin Bauer^{A,B,D}

Institute for European Sport Development and Leisure Studies, German Sport University, Cologne, Germany

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***Correspondence:** Louis Moustakas, l.moustakas@dshs-koeln.de

Abstract

Over the last two decades, the sport for development (SFD) sector has grown significantly, and there has been a concurrent increase in research and educational activities to support the field. In particular, academic institutions are taking a more significant role, contributing to a growing body of literature and developing numerous SFD-specific courses. Despite these initiatives and the important role assigned to academia, academic activities related to SFD have remained fragmented along geographic or disciplinary lines, and our knowledge of academic activities and collaborations is limited and focused on actors in the Global North. This study seeks to address these gaps and, through an international survey of academic institutions, aims to (1) establish the teaching, research and partnership activities within and between academic institutions around the globe; and (2) identify challenges and inform solutions for greater cooperation within and between academic institutions in the SFD context. Overall, our results show that the SFD is a highly multidisciplinary field involving institutions from a perhaps wider-than-expected range of countries. However, funding, support and recognition of SFD and associated academic actors, especially in the Global South, remains limited. To conclude, we propose potential ways forward to address some of these issues.

Keywords: universities, academia, research, cooperation, global south

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the sport for development (SFD) sector has grown significantly, with an increasing array of programmes and policies working at the intersection of sport and development. Today, SFD programmes target a wide range of objectives, including increased employability (Coalter et al., 2020), improved educational outcomes (Moustakas, 2020) or peacebuilding (Cardenas, 2013; Clarke et al., 2021). Flowing from this, there has been a concurrent growth in research and educational activities to support the field (McSweeney et al., 2021; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). In particular, academic institutions appear to

be taking a more prominent role in the sector, contributing to the ever-growing body of SFD literature and developing numerous SFD-specific courses and degrees (McSweeney et al., 2021).

Academia is seen as crucial for the continued development and legitimation of the SFD sector. As Sanders and Keim (2017) have noted, “academic institutions can strengthen research, teaching and learning in SFD and help inform evidence-based practice and policy” (p. 121). Different initiatives have attempted to document and formalise the contribution of academia

to the field of SFD. On a more theoretical level, there have been numerous literature and conceptual reviews of the topic (Sanders & Keim, 2017; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). On a more applied level, there have also been actions taken. For instance, almost ten years ago, there were efforts to develop an international, multidisciplinary network of academic organisations engaged in sport for development curricula, programmes and policies (German Sport University, 2013). At the digital level, the SportandDev.org platform has likewise sought to bring together institutions, researchers and practitioners from the field (The International Platform on Sport and Development, n.d.) And, more recently, the German Development Corporation (GIZ) has been active in engaging with local universities in the countries in which they operate (German Development Corporation [GIZ], 2022c).

Despite these initiatives and the important role assigned to academia, academic activities related to SFD have remained fragmented along geographic or disciplinary lines (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Whitley et al., 2022), and recognition of the field is limited outside of the realm of sport. In turn, this risks relegating SFD to permanent niche status within sport sciences and academia writ large. Exacerbating these challenges, our knowledge of academic activities and collaborations is limited and predominantly focused on actors in the Global North (Mwansa & Kiuppis, 2021; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Thus, mapping institutions, activities, and challenges is essential to understanding and improving the contribution of academia to SFD. Though the literature has documented research outputs, practice and some educational offers within the field (e.g. McSweeney et al., 2021; Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson & Woods, 2017), little has explored the multi-faceted activities of academic institutions involved with the field globally. In particular, engaging with and understanding the realities of institutions in both the Global North and South can be a crucial step to better address the lack of recognition and unequal power dynamics often inherent to SFD and development research more broadly (Molosi-France & Makoni, 2021; Mwansa & Kiuppis, 2021; Nicholls et al., 2011).

It is against this background that this mapping exercise has taken place. Broadly speaking, this study has two main goals. First, this mapping seeks to establish the teaching, research and partnership activities within and between academic institutions around the globe. For instance, the disciplines involved in SFD activities, key thematic areas, and current cooperation activities are all relevant aspects. Second, this mapping aims to identify challenges and inform solutions for greater cooperation within and between academic institutions in the SFD context. As such, the findings generated in this activity will help both map the field and provide the basis for critical discussion and recommendations to improve academic engagement in the SFD sector.

Moving forward, this paper progresses in four steps. First, the literature on the role of academia in SFD will be discussed. Second, the methodology of the present study will be outlined. Third, the results of the study will be presented. Finally, these results will be brought together, and recommendations will be made to support further collaboration across countries and disciplines.

Role of Academia in Sport for Development

According to Sanders and Keim (2017), there are various ways in which academia can play a role in SFD, not only in research, monitoring and evaluation activities but also in “policy and agenda setting, teaching, learning, professional preparation and community development, including service and outreach” (p. 129). That academic institutions play a vital role in the field of SFD is usually due to the fact that researchers are hired as external evaluators by national and international development cooperation organisations. These agencies expect measurement and evaluation of the initiatives they support, leading many SFD organisations to interact with university-based researchers (Peachey & Cohen, 2016). These agencies also play a significant role in disseminating research and establishing guidelines or policies. Indeed, “donors from the Global North dominated initiatives in finding platforms for promoting their work and research agendas” (Burnett, 2015, p. 386). In particular, this allowed researchers to share results and shape important standards within the field. As a result of this engagement, numerous scholars have contributed to guidelines or policies published by agencies such as the United Nations or the Commonwealth (e.g. Commonwealth Secretariat, 2019; Kay & Dudfield, 2013; Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group, 2007).

The strong influence of Northern national and international development agencies has, in turn, contributed to a highly Northern-driven research field. Up to now, the vast majority of research in SFD has taken place in the Global North. When research does take place in the Global South, it is nonetheless typically undertaken by Northern institutions (Clarke et al., 2021; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). And, even when Global South institutions are involved, Northern priorities and ways of doing are frequently favoured. Local universities or SFD organisations are often used to access target groups and as data collectors, but they are seldom placed in leadership positions (Collison et al., 2016; Darnell et al., 2018; Jeanes & Lindsey, 2014; Kay, 2012). As Nicholls and colleagues (2011) argue, these “donor-driven priorities thus often subjugate the knowledge” of SFD practitioners and researchers in the Global South. Despite these challenges, such partnerships are considered important for researchers (Darnell et al., 2018; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2015; Whitley et al., 2020) and practitioners alike (Shin et al., 2020). The contribution of local insights

and the co-creation of knowledge are seen as critically important (Darnell et al., 2018; Nicholls et al., 2011).

Of particular relevance for the paper here, the struggle for equal partnerships between institutions themselves has been noted as an important barrier to research collaborations (Mavhunga, 2018). Even in other research collaboration structures, such as the South-South-North model, there can be difficulties in creating a transparent decision-making process, which in turn can lead to an unequal contribution from the different partners (Weinrib & Sá, 2020). Additionally, these problems are accompanied by communication barriers and diverging research priorities between institutions (Matenga et al., 2019). Based on their experiences, Lindsey and colleagues 2016 highlight the benefits and limitations of their North-South academic collaboration. The equal partnerships and open dialogues “that literature somewhat idealistically suggests” (p. 205) could not be achieved in practice – if they ever “can be realised in a context of structural inequalities” (Jentsch & Pilley, 2003, p. 1964). As Molosi-France and Makoni (2021) summarise,

“research collaboration between the institutions of higher learning in the Global South and North may be beneficial if carefully carried out. However, for many researchers in the Global South, the inherent power and trust issues in partnerships have constantly reflected their status of unequal partners in knowledge creation” (p. 21).

In parallel to challenges around international and inter-institutional collaboration, SFD has also historically struggled to move from a multidisciplinary field to an interdisciplinary one. Academics from a wide range of disciplines, such as sociology, management, education and development studies, have explored SFD and its ability to contribute to a wide range of development objectives (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Predominantly, these scholars have approached the field using the theoretical assumptions and methodologies connected to their fields (Burnett, 2015). Despite this, research up to now has remained isolated in disciplinary silos. Collaboration and exchange are recognised as essential for the further development of the field (Whitley et al., 2019).

It is with these challenges in mind that the following paper has come to be. In a similar vein to Svensson and Woods (2017), who argued that mapping SFD “practice is critical for identifying future directions for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers”, we contend that mapping out academic actors carries a similar relevance. As such, the purpose of the following is to provide a first global overview of academic actors involved in the SFD area and to contribute to ongoing discussions about the role of research and academia in SFD.

Methodology

Design

As part of the German Sport University’s cooperation with the German Development Corporation (GIZ), a mapping survey featuring a mix of closed questions and open-ended qualitative questions was designed. This survey aimed to help us map academic activities in the SFD sector as well as identify current challenges and areas for improvement.

The survey consisted of two main question types. First, there were a number of specific, closed questions to map the activities and relationships of academic institutions in the field of SFD. These questions helped us obtain information about the teaching activities, research activities, publications, projects, partnerships, thematic areas, and academic disciplines connected to SFD within individual institutions. Lists of academic disciplines were based on common disciplines used to organise the Scimago journal index (Scimago Lab, 2022) and further expanded with sport-specific subfields that reflect common areas connected to sport (see, e.g., German Sport University, 2022). SFD thematic areas were organised according to the focus areas defined within the GIZ’s SFD activities (GIZ, 2022b). Second, open-ended questions allowed us to explore the realities, challenges and opportunities respondents see with regard to (a) academic involvement in SFD, (b) interdisciplinary collaboration in SFD and (c) international collaboration in SFD. Before launching the survey, a draft was developed and shared with internal and GIZ colleagues for feedback and improvement. Once revised and finalised, the survey was translated from English into French, Spanish, German and Bahasa. These languages were chosen to reflect the regions targeted by current and future GIZ activities.

Data Collection

Survey data were collected in two waves. In the first wave, an initial group of 24 countries was identified in collaboration with the GIZ as potential targets for this study. These countries reflected current or future locations for GIZ’s SFD activities. Relevant institutions in these countries were identified through three main channels: (1) suggested contacts from colleagues at the GIZ; (2) contacts identified through our previous SFD activities; and (3) a structured online search. The online search included a scan of members from relevant thematic networks such as the Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA) and the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), as well as via sport-related journals from those countries listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and Scimago. In addition, a Google search using the boolean search string *sport AND university*

And country name was conducted to add further institutions. In particular, this search helped us unearth sport departments and sport-based programmes within the targetted countries. Institutions were included in our potential sample if they engaged with social or developmental topics (e.g. sociology, positive youth development, policy, etc.) in relation to sport or physical education. In the end, a total of 88 institutions in the 24 countries were approached for the first wave.

The identified institutions were approached individually via e-mails in English, French, Spanish, German or Bahasa. General reminder e-mails were sent approximately two weeks after the initial invitations. All initial invitations and reminders were sent in October and November 2021.

To expand the survey and ensure a greater representation of the field, a second wave of the survey was also conducted. This second wave aimed to include many active and prominent institutions that were, by its nature, not included in the first wave. Three largely purposive approaches were used to achieve this. Firstly, an open invitation to participate in the survey was distributed through English and French language posts on SportandDev.org. Second, we sent direct e-mail invitations to participants in an online event that we hosted about academic cooperation in SFD (see SportandDev.org, 2022). Finally, to ensure representation of some of the most prominent institutions in the field, we sent direct e-mails to the top 20 most cited authors in the SFD field as de-

termined by a Scopus search. Thus, this second wave allowed us to expand our sample to include numerous prominent institutions located in both the Global North and Global South, as well as representatives from fields such as sport management or sociology.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from closed questions were imported into Microsoft Excel 2020. Descriptive statistics were generated for items such as teaching activities, research activities, cooperation activities, academic disciplines and thematic areas.

For the qualitative data, we engaged in a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of the open-ended survey responses. To support this process, all Bahasa and Spanish language responses were translated back to English. As a multilingual team, we could easily engage with the other responses in their original languages, and these were not translated. To analyse the data, we first read through the results and made notes of our impressions and initial analysis. These first impressions allowed us to determine our coding scheme. In particular, our codes directly related to the types of challenges identified by respondents (e.g. lack of awareness, lack of funding). Afterwards, we revisited the data and coded responses according to the codes developed. We then sorted coded segments into related categories, and used these categories to structure our presentation of results. To ensure rigour and trustworthiness, all authors

Figure 1. Overview of responding countries

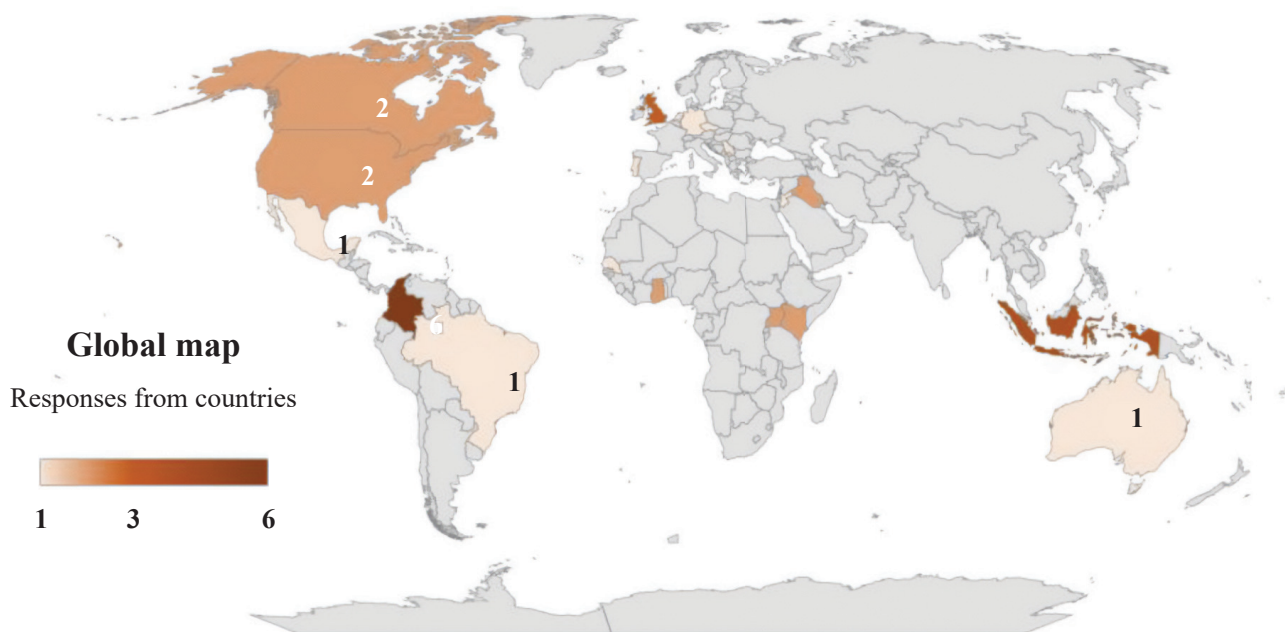


Table 1. Overview of SFD thematic research areas of institutions (n=26) engaging in research activities

Thematic Area	Responses
Education	18
Social Cohesion	11
Impact Measurement	11
Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes/projects	11
Health	10
Inclusion of people with disabilities	10
Sustainability of programmes/projects	10
Gender Equality	8
Violence Prevention	8
Other	6
Development in the Refugee Context	5
Environment	5
Employability	4

Note: Multiple answers per respondent were possible. Thematic areas based on GIZ, 2022a, 2022b

reviewed the analysis, and preliminary results were shared with external colleagues for further feedback.

Findings

Descriptive Results

The first wave helped us obtain 24 responses, and the second wave 13. In total, we obtained responses from 37 institutions in 21 different countries. Broadly speaking, 11 of these countries can be said to be part of the Global South, while ten countries belong to the Global North. An overview of the participating countries is shown in Figure 1. Of note, most responses were received from Colombia (n=6), followed by Indonesia (n=4) and the United Kingdom (n=3). For 12 of the 21 countries, only one institution responded to the survey. Further countries included the Czech Republic, Ghana, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Senegal, Serbia, Togo and Uganda.

In terms of the individuals responding on behalf of the institutions, they represented a wide range of academic disciplines. Sport education was mentioned the most (n=19), followed by general education (n=15), sport coaching (n=10) and sport science (n=10). In total, 26 pre-defined distinct disciplinary areas were highlighted by respondents. Moreover, “Adapted Physical Activity” and “Sport for development” were named as additional disciplinary areas.

Sport for Development Teaching and Research

In total, three institutions report having SFD programmes and SFD courses, while another three report having SFD programmes and 17 institutions report having at least SFD courses. However, of those reporting having a programme, few were adequately described. One South American respondent explained that “the university has a specialisation in sport and social development, it is a postgraduate program”. In addition, another European institution described their *MSc Management, Politics and International Development* as having a “curriculum mixed with SFD elements in one module plus the project in some other modules (e.g. Sport Integrity).”

Elsewhere, 26 out of the 37 institutions report undertaking research related to sport for development. In total, 13 different sport for development fields were identified by the 26 institutions. What stands out is that 18 institutions focus on education, which is more than 60% of the institutions conducting research in our sample. This is followed by a focus on social cohesion (n=11), impact measurement (n=11) and monitoring and evaluation (n=11). The focus of health, inclusion and sustainability were each selected by ten institutions. The list of thematic SFD research areas is presented in Table 1.

In terms of academic disciplines, this research touched 35 different disciplines. For illustrative purposes, we have merged sub-disciplines together, and see that Physical Education, Education, Teacher Education and Sport Pedagogy (n=41) is the most prominent area,

Table 2. Overview of academic disciplines associated with SFD research.

Field	Responses
Physical Education, Education, Teacher Education, Sport Pedagogy	41
Sociology, Sport Sociology, Social Sciences	26
Sport Management; Strategy and Management, Marketing	16
Sport Science, Sport and Movement Science	14
Health Science, Health and Prevention	12
Sport Psychology, Psychology	13
Sport Coaching	8
Gender Studies	7
International Development	6
Social Work	5
Anthropology	4
Business and International Management	4
Other (Geography, Development)	4
Cultural Studies	3
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	3
Political Science and International Relations	3
Arts and Humanities	2
Communication	2
Environmental Science	2
Medicine	2
Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management	2

Note: Multiple answers per respondent were possible. Disciplines based on German Sport University, 2022; Scimago Lab, 2022

followed by (Sport) Sociology (n= 26) and (Sport) Management (n = 16). The complete list of disciplines identified as part of SFD research areas is presented in Table 2.

Sport for Development Cooperation Activities

32 out of the 37 institutions stated that they have some sort of cooperation with other institutions or organisations

in the sphere of SFD. Cooperation around research (n=23) or projects (n=22) were the most common. Furthermore, exchange and mobility activities (n=14), as well as teaching cooperation (n=12), were noted by the institutions. Here, we understand projects to include a variety of cooperation activities, including the development of teaching materials, implementation of a sports programme

Table 3. Overview of types of partners engaging in SFD cooperation with academic institutions.

Partner Type	Responses
Foreign Universities	14
Local/National Government	9
Local Universities	9
GIZ	8
Foreign NGOs	8
Local sport organisations	5
Local NGOs	5
Foreign Government	2

Note: Multiple answers per respondent were possible.

or the creation of digital tools. On the other hand, research is more narrow and focuses on the collection, analysis and publication of data. However, there may be some overlap between the two, as evidenced by the seven responses indicating that institutions participated in both activities.

The 32 institutions engaging in cooperation activities were also invited to list their main cooperation partners over the last three years. This data was subsequently summarised and coded to reflect the major categories of partners present. Foreign universities (n=14, i.e. universities located outside of the respondent's countries), local, regional or national governmental bodies (n=9), as well as local universities (n=9) and the GIZ (n=8) and foreign NGOs (n=8), were the top partner types reported. Overall, 22 of 32 (69%) institutions indicated cooperating with at least one form of foreign or international partner. The full summary of reported cooperation partners is in Table 3.

Realities and Challenges in SFD Cooperation

The coding and analysis of the open-ended answers highlighted several challenges for cooperation within and between institutions in the sport for development field. Broadly speaking, two main categories of challenges were observed: lack of resources and awareness, and structural or external challenges. In the following, the main findings, supporting quotes and some initial analysis are presented together as one. As such, this should be understood as a qualitative report that combines results and preliminary discussion.

Lack of resources and awareness

The struggle to find financial resources was mentioned several times by both respondents from the Global South and the Global North, highlighting this as a general and prominent challenge for many institutions working in the field of SFD. As one respondent put it, the main challenge is “to obtain resources for research since it is not considered a priority topic of high social interest” (Respondent 60). Nonetheless, it is reasonable to conclude that the problem is more acute in the Global South. As noted in our review above, various literature documents the Northern-focused nature of funding. In addition, recent reports illustrate how funding for the overall SFD sector continues to be stronger in the Global North (Oaks Consultancy, 2021).

Interestingly, as the above quotation illustrates, the issue of insufficient resources is seen by many as closely connected to a perceived lack of awareness and interest in the topic of sport for development. In other words, a lack of interest or awareness was seen as a crucial barrier to funding SFD projects and initiating cooperation in the field. Certainly, this lack of interest does not necessarily mean that the participating researchers do not have access to connections or contacts to initiate cooperation

activities. As we have seen above, 32 out of the 35 institutions stated that they have some form of cooperation activity. Nonetheless, a lack of awareness and related support from the governmental and institutional levels are seen as severe impediments:

“The main challenge is the lack of interest. Contacts and previous cooperation already exist. The only thing missing is the interest to sit and agree on a cooperation format that will result in a concrete cooperation.”
(Respondent 47)

Internally, this lack of awareness or interest negatively affects cooperation within institutions, thus hindering potential interdisciplinary collaboration in SFD. As one respondent noted, SFD “is kind of new study area and many do not understand” (Respondent 32), while another noted that there is a “lack of institutional interest and financing on this topic. At my university, it doesn't exist” (Respondent 58). Other departments within an institution, even if they have a connection to sport, often do not have the necessary knowledge about sport for development to engage in collaboration, and there is a “lack of awareness about the concept” (Respondent 30) or an absence of “openness in accepting sport/PE as a tool that is worth studying” (Respondent 73). Therefore, as another participant noted, “a workshop/training to introduce the SFD concept to these institutions would be a triggering point in this respect” (Respondent 47). Outside of the academic setting, there is also a sense that local or national governments do not sufficiently understand or value SFD, thus limiting the ability to develop long-term projects or activities sustainably. As we will see next, however, structural barriers further exacerbate this lack of awareness and support.

Structural and External Barriers

Beyond awareness and resources, respondent comments bring to light more administrative or political challenges around academic cooperation in sport for development. The often-rigid structure that exists within funding structures creates certain barriers. For instance, “the short-term nature of projects” or difficulties collaborating with “state institutions” (Respondent 31). In turn, this contributes to challenges ensuring “that collaborations are sustainable over time” (Respondent 54). In particular, the short-term, project-based nature of funding and projects also hinders the development of long-term relationships and networks. As cooperations last for short, pre-defined periods, afterwards, there can be a “lack of coordination, and lack of time to start and maintain links with other institutions” (Respondent 86). Likewise, for institutions interested in international collaborations, it can be “hard to identify partners in other countries” (Respondent 107). Broadly speaking,

these responses echo Lindsey's (2017) critique whereby the project-based nature of SFD inhibits communication, coordination and impact within the field.

This networking and partnership development is further inhibited by a lack of unified guidelines and language in the field. Namely, "different guidelines and policies in different countries" (Respondent 64) and the "specific language in each field" (Respondent 88) were noted as significant barriers to collaboration. Policies, especially related to funding applications and project reporting, are poorly aligned and often confusing, limiting the ability of institutions to access funding and initiate collaboration (Adams & Harris, 2014; Whitley et al., 2020). In that sense, respondents here very much align with the recommendations from Whitley and colleagues (2020), who notably called upon funders to better align their standards and reduce the complexity of their structures. Compounding this issue is a lack of clear, shared language around SFD. Terms including positive youth development, community development or, in Latin America, social sport are regularly used in connection with the field.

Such barriers also exist within the confines of individual institutions. Responses suggest that different departments within an institution do not actively communicate, and collaboration may not be actively supported. One participant noted that there is "no serious engagement from the scientific institutes" (Respondent 31), while another observed there is "absolute incommunication [sic] between the health, training and psychology disciplines with the social sciences approaches" (Respondent 57). Though it is not explicitly mentioned, this can perhaps be partly due to the way many academic departments are funded, whereby limited funds are competitively allocated between institutes based on research and teaching outcomes.

Finally, it is worth noting that further external disruptions can hamper research and collaboration. Changing political situations or crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, were inevitably brought up in our responses. For instance, one respondent noted that "this kind of international collaboration in time of Covid-19 pandemic" (Respondent 23) is challenging for them. Another external barrier is social unrest and unstable political situations. As another participant reported, the "social protests that are taking place in most of [our] territory, have not allowed us to carry out or execute the field work required" (Respondent 64).

Discussion and Ways Forward

Through a survey of 37 academic institutions, we have attempted to establish activities, cooperation and disciplines involved in SFD. Our approach is certainly not without limitations, which are worth mentioning before delving into a deeper discussion. For one, our sampling strategy

certainly excluded some potential respondents, both in the Global South and North. Likewise, our survey-based approach only allows us to make general or descriptive statements about projects or teaching activities. A more systematic review of curricula, course outlines, or project descriptions would help unearth further data and nuance. Despite this, as we expand on below, our data does allow us to draw several conclusions and suggest ways forward for the field.

For one, our results here show that there is much active cooperation in the SFD field, but this cooperation is often structured according to existing power structures, and there are significant challenges for institutions to initiate or participate in further cooperation activities. Likewise, the data here confirms the multidisciplinary nature of SFD, with 35 disciplines/sub-disciplines represented. Nonetheless, as the open-ended answers show, this has not yet translated into a fully interdisciplinary field.

Most notably, these responses show that SFD remains a relatively small academic field, yet paradoxically may be larger than previously acknowledged. Numerous countries not commonly associated with SFD publications or projects, including Mexico, Indonesia, Togo or Iraq, provided responses. Conversely, many countries with a strong presence in the SFD space, such as the United Kingdom, Canada or the United States, are likely undercounted (cf. Schulenkorf et al., 2016). This suggests that, globally, there is a relatively large pool of untapped interest, activity and expertise in SFD. Indeed, the 'missing connections' in SFD may not only be between academia and practice but between academic institutions themselves (cf. Bardocz-Bencsik & Doczi, 2019). Numerous responses highlight that funding and support for day-to-day academic activities, such as research, conferences or exchanges, are limited and impede interaction between academic institutions. To address this, many institutions engage in partnerships with foreign universities or organisations. Namely, nearly 70% of institutions rely on some form of foreign partnership. However, it is likely that these collaboration initiatives often come from institutions or organisations that already have the necessary resources to create collaborations. This unequal distribution of resources thus creates the risk of generating or reinforcing unequal partnerships between institutions (Molosi-France and Makoni 2021). This points to a need for institutions, funders and implementers to directly support and fund the work of actors in the Global South. In particular, we feel compelled to note that many of the prominent disciplines – including sport management, sport sociology and physical education – highlighted in this study could provide considerably more support and opportunities.

Despite longstanding calls to decolonise sport for development and connected disciplines (e.g. Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011), only the international association for

physical education provides some form of targeted support for scholars in the Global South (International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education, 2022). International, European or North American associations for sport management or sport sociology do not appear to do so (e.g. International Sociology of Sport Association, 2022; World Association of Sport Management, 2022). Similarly, the journals affiliated with these fields scarcely include editorial board members from the Global South. For instance, out of 65 editorial board members at the *International Review of Sociology of Sport*, four can be classified as located in Global South Institutions. Likewise, in the *Journal of Sport for Development*, only one or two members could be plausibly classified as such. Though we recognise that resource limitations are a challenge for all actors in the SFD sector, we must also be aware of our significant advantages in the Global North and act in allyship while redistributing some of the resources or opportunities at our disposal (Nixon, 2019). Outside of the sport-related academic community, funders and agencies must directly fund researchers in the Global South without constantly imposing the presence, or norms, of Global North institutions. Though certainly beyond the scope of the current piece, this kind of support likely requires an important shift of attitudes and standards around research and evaluation, whereby methods or perspectives from the South are subjugated and devalued (Chilisa, 2020; Nicholls et al., 2011).

A lack of awareness of SFD at all levels further exacerbates these challenges. Recognition of the field from research funders, governments and other academic disciplines is tepid and limits cooperation, exchange and opportunities in the field. Though we recognise that much of the current, English-language literature has moved beyond debates around evidence-building or legitimising the field, for many respondents, this has remained a significant issue. Numerous quotes spoke directly to this topic, and the overall sense is that, without greater awareness or understanding of SFD, it is difficult to convince authorities to allocate resources or colleagues to cooperate on projects. Changing this will require sustained awareness-raising, advocacy and political work. Despite the appearance of a growing and vibrant academic field around SFD, there is still a need to convince “coaches, teachers and parents about the sport for development” (Respondent 75). Doing this will require a multi-pronged approach. In part, this means directly integrating SFD concepts such as inclusion and human rights within the training of current and future physical education teachers (McLennan & Thompson, 2015). Consistent advocacy will be needed to convince government agencies and funders to support the field.

The development of further SFD-related UNESCO Chairs, which are institutions dedicated to a specific sub-topic related to education, the natural and social sciences, culture or communication, could be of particular

value. These chairs gain additional visibility and profile and can thus act as “bridgebuilders between academia, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making” (UNESCO, 2022). Indeed, research and advocacy networks outside of governmental structures such as the Commonwealth are likely also needed to provide a clear, consistent, and inclusive voice for the field. Likewise, it is of utmost importance to include the new generation of young researchers, who are mainly located in the Global South, in the academic communities.

Ethics approval and informed consent

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and written informed consent was provided by all participants.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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