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**Together on the Field, United off of it? Defining, Mapping  
and Understanding Sport for Social Cohesion Programmes in  
Europe**

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by

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Hereby I declare:

The work presented in this thesis is the original work of the author except where acknowledged in the text. This material has not been submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other institution. Those parts or single sentences, which have been taken verbatim from other sources, are identified as citations.

I further declare that I complied with the actual “guidelines of qualified scientific work” of the German Sport University Cologne.



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## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CoE	Council of Europe
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
GIZ	German Development Corporation
ICT	Intergroup Contact Theory
IMISCOE	International Migration Research Network
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SFD	Sport for Development
SSCL	Sport and Social Cohesion Lab
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNOSDP	United Nations Office for Sport, Development, and Peace

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Research Problem

Social inequalities, changing demographic profiles, ageing populations, and the structural transformation of economies have posed significant challenges to numerous European communities. Recognising these converging trends and the need for holistic development approaches, policymakers have increasingly shifted towards promoting greater social cohesion to tackle these issues (Council of Europe [CoE], 2010; Mac Fadden et al., 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). Often presented as a holistic and multi-dimensional concept, social cohesion is considered the ‘glue’ that holds societies together (Langer et al., 2017) and is seen as essential to addressing challenges and moving together in a common direction. For instance, the Council of Europe (2010) defines social cohesion “as the capacity of a society to ensure the wellbeing of all its members – minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation – to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members” (p. 8).

Mirroring the growing recognition of social cohesion, national governments such as in Ireland have set up national strategies (Government of Ireland, 2019), whereas European actors such as the European Union (EU) or the Council of Europe (CoE) explicitly support social cohesion activities through policy and projects (CoE, 2018; European Commission [EC], 2020b). Numerous thematic research or civil society networks have also emerged, including the *International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe* network (IMISCOE, 2020) and the *Social Cohesion Hub* (German Development Institute, 2021).

Relatedly, a growing number of policies explicitly call on sport to support the goal of greater social cohesion (Commission of the European Communities, 2007; Council of the European Union, 2011; KEA European Affairs, 2020). The European Commission has noted that sport “contributes to social cohesion by breaking down social barriers” (EC, 2011, p. 4). Elsewhere, prominent international actors, including the Commonwealth, UN agencies and the International Olympic Committee, recognize the potential link between sport and social cohesion (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017; United Nations General Assembly, 2015; United Nations Office of Sport for Development and Peace [UNOSDP], 2015).

Due to its popular appeal, relatively low cost, and interactive nature, sport has been presented as a vehicle to support objectives such as employability (Coalter et al., 2020), health promotion (Hansell et al., 2021), education (Moustakas, 2020), or peacebuilding (Cardenas, 2013; Clarke et al., 2021). Of these goals, social cohesion is arguably the most prominent and widespread. According to recent reviews in the sport for development (SFD) area, social cohesion is the thematic focus of about

25% of literature and 10% of all implementing organisations (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson & Woods, 2017).

Current work in the academic and policy domains indicates that this increasing focus on social cohesion may well be justified. Research suggests that greater social cohesion delivers benefits in numerous areas, including economic productivity, greater social stability, increased peace, and higher sport participation (Kamphuis et al., 2008; Larsen, 2013; OECD, 2018; Stigendal, 2010). Urban areas, in particular, are facing increasing levels of polarisation and segregation, and these trends have important consequences on social cohesion in cities and their neighbourhoods (Miciukiewicz et al., 2012). Indeed, within urban areas, low social cohesion is often associated with “deprived areas characterised by poverty, high levels of unemployment, overcrowded households, low housing standards and despair” (Stigendal, 2010, p. 13). More recently, stronger social cohesion has also been associated with an effective response to and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic (Dayrit & Mendoza, 2020; Jewett et al., 2021; Razavi et al., 2020).

Despite the growing recognition and support for social cohesion activities, there remain significant debates and gaps in sport and beyond. Specifically, there are important gaps between our theoretical understandings of social cohesion and actual practice in sport for social cohesion. This gap manifests itself in three ways. First, even with the multitude of definitions for social cohesion, these definitions do not necessarily reflect the needs, expectations or understanding of practitioners and participants in different contexts. Numerous researchers suggest that there is a disconnect between formal definitions of social cohesion and how the concept is understood by community members, programme managers or programme participants (Fonseca et al., 2019; Raw et al., 2021; Sabbe et al., 2020). Yet, when this local understanding is not taken into account, programmes will not necessarily be able to adequately meet the needs of their target groups as these programmes should be designed to specifically respond to local contexts and specific community needs (Skinner et al., 2008; Svensson & Woods, 2017).

Second, we have limited knowledge about the organisations delivering programmes and the approaches within those programmes. Though the field of sport for development is becoming better understood and mapped, the full range and number of organisations delivering sport and social cohesion activities remain unknown, and there is limited information concerning practices employed in the field (Coalter, 2017; Svensson & Woods, 2017).

Finally, though increasing resources are being invested in sport and social cohesion programming, there is a lack of evidence regarding the impact of these programmes (Beutler, 2008; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014) and the process through which these programmes generate social cohesion remains poorly understood (Spaaij et al., 2014). Unlike other areas (e.g. life skill transfer), how sport programmes can generate social cohesion outcomes is poorly understood and undertheorized. Indeed,

as other scholars have argued, there is a lack of specific theories connecting SFD activities to specific outcomes such as social cohesion (Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2015; Welty Peachey et al., 2019).

Against this background, the following doctoral dissertation seeks to build on the current knowledge and relevance of social cohesion and sport. Specifically, it aims to contribute to the gaps and debates outlined above by engaging in a multi-method study of literature and programmes from across Europe. Moving forward, this dissertation progresses in five main sections. First, I will set the scene by documenting the history, definitions and prominent frameworks associated with social cohesion. After that, I will connect the debates and research gaps presented to the research questions animating this dissertation. Then, I will outline the overall design, structure and logic underpinning the articles that form this cumulative doctoral dissertation. Thereafter, the six individual articles will be presented in separate chapters. Finally, the results will be summarised and discussed, highlighting their theoretical and practical implications as well as potential future directions.

## **1.2 Definitions and Frameworks of Social Cohesion**

Most likely, the first ideas around social cohesion can be traced back to the work of Ibn-Haldun in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Dragolov et al., 2016c; Hassan, 2006). In particular, Ibn-Haldun put forth the idea of *asabiyyah*, which has often been translated as group feeling or social cohesion (Alatas, 2006). He presented *asabiyyah* as a mix of unity and group consciousness. Central to his theory was that ruling dynasties or civilisations are destined to be eventually replaced as the ruling classes become less concerned with maintaining *asabiyyah* and more concerned with preserving their status. In turn, this allows groups with stronger *asabiyyah* to emerge (Alatas, 2006; Hassan, 2006; Ibn-Ḥaldūn, 2015)

In more modern times, numerous political scientists and economists, including Hobbes, Smith and Tönnies, have engaged with social cohesion and related concepts (Dragolov et al., 2016c). Arguably, the most prominent and influential contemporary work comes from Emile Durkheim's conceptualisations of solidarity. Most notably, Durkheim (1893) argued that the maintenance of social order rests on one of two forms of solidarity. One is through the mechanical solidarity inherent to traditional and small-scale societies, whereby social cohesion stems from homogeneity as individuals share similar work, personal, educational, and religious backgrounds. The other is via organic solidarity, which emerged in more modern or capitalist societies and comes from the inherent interdependence of individuals as a result of the division of labour (Durkheim, 1893).

Building on this history, numerous disciplines became involved in the study and conceptualisation of social cohesion, leading understandings of the concept to be strongly influenced by disciplinary boundaries based on the theoretical assumptions" of a given discipline (Bruhn, 2009, p. 31). Indeed, since the 1990s, there has been tremendous growth in literature and research

concerned with social cohesion (Dragolov et al., 2016c; Mac Fadden et al., 2021). However, as more disciplines became involved, additional perspectives, causes, and outcomes became associated with social cohesion. For example, psychology has often focused on processes within and between small groups (Bruhn, 2009), whereas in anthropology, cultural practices and rituals are at the centre (Taylor & Davis, 2018). The contributions across these different disciplines have contributed to enriching but also confusing or inflating the meaning of social cohesion. As research around social cohesion has expanded, several related behaviours or concepts have been included in its definition. Today, shared values, shared experiences, civic participation, mutual help, trust in others, social networks, social order, acceptance of diversity, wellbeing, equality, and social mobility are but a handful of the dimensions considered by some to be constituent parts of social cohesion (Delhey & Dragolov, 2016; Fonseca et al., 2019; Forrest & Kearns, 2001; OECD, 2011; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Despite the debate around precise definitions and dimensions, literature broadly agrees that social cohesion manifests itself at the micro, meso and macro levels of society (Dragolov et al., 2016c; Fonseca et al., 2019).

As a result of the expanding ideas around social cohesion, there have been numerous attempts to summarise, define and conceptualise the term. These have led to either maximalist or more narrow definitions. On the one hand, authors such as Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier (2019) take a maximalist view of social cohesion. Summarising academic literature and policy on the subject, the authors put forward a broad definition of social cohesion that encompasses elements of wellbeing, belonging, social participation, tolerance, and equal opportunities. Specifically, they define social cohesion as “the ongoing process of developing well-being, sense of belonging, and voluntary social participation of the members of society, while developing communities that tolerate and promote a multiplicity of values and cultures, and granting at the same time equal rights and opportunities in society” (p. 246). Many prominent policy documents take similar stances, integrating many dimensions into their definitions, including inequality, well-being and social mobility (CoE, 2010; OECD, 2011).

Advocates of narrower definitions challenge these broad conceptualisations, arguing that these confuse core components of social cohesion with its causes or consequences (Friedkin, 2004). Indeed, as Beauvais and Jenson (2002) have noted, debates around social cohesion have often presented it as both cause and consequence of numerous other aspects of social life. As such, numerous other scholars propose narrower definitions and concepts (Chan et al., 2006; Dragolov et al., 2016c; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). For these authors, social cohesion is generally reduced to three core aspects: a sense of belonging, social relations and an orientation towards the common good. Most prominently, Chan et al. (2006) contend that social cohesion is a state of affairs “characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations” (Chan et al., 2006, p. 290). Elsewhere, one prominent and widely

used narrower conceptualisation of social cohesion comes from the radar model by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Dragolov et al., 2016c). In their work, they define social cohesion as the:

“quality of social cooperation and togetherness of a collective, defined in geopolitical terms, that is expressed in the attitudes and behaviors of its members. A cohesive society is characterized by resilient social relations, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community, and a pronounced focus on the common good” (Dragolov et al., 2016c, p. 6).

This framework, presented in Table 1-1, contains three core dimensions, each broken into three related sub-dimensions. The first is *social relations*, and includes social networks, trust in people and acceptance of diversity. The second is *connectedness*, which includes notions of identification, trust in institutions and perception of fairness. Finally, there is a *focus on the common good* and contains solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules and civic participation. In line with the criticisms detailed above, the framework excludes numerous potential antecedents or outcomes of social cohesion, such as material wealth, social inequality or wellbeing (Dragolov et al., 2016c; Schiefer et al., 2012). In that sense, it echoes the other narrower models cited here and has been used as the basis for numerous national-level measurements of social cohesion (Delhey et al., 2018; Delhey & Dragolov, 2016).

Table 1-1 Dimensions and sub-dimensions of social cohesion. Adapted from Dragolov et al., 2016c.

Dimension	Sub Dimension	Description
Social relations	Social networks	Strong, resilient social networks
	Trust in people	High level of trust in other individuals
	Acceptance of Diversity	Accept individuals with different backgrounds and lifestyles as equal members of society.
Connectedness	Identification	Individuals feel strongly connected with their geographic area and identify with it.
	Trust in Institutions	Individuals have a high level of confidence in political institutions.
	Perception of fairness	Individuals believe that they are being treated fairly in society.
Focus on the common good	Solidarity and Helpfulness	Individuals feel a responsibility for and willingness to help others.
	Respect for social rules	Individuals respect the fundamental rules of society.
	Civic participation	Individuals participate in society and civic and political life.

Nonetheless, as this dissertation aims to explore the potential understandings and definitions of social cohesion for individuals and programmes, there is a need to have a broader view of the areas typically associated with social cohesion. To that end, Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) identify six main dimensions commonly associated with social cohesion: social relations, sense of identification, orientation towards the common good, shared values, equality, and quality of life. These dimensions provide a helpful benchmark for how social cohesion is understood across various definitions and contexts and will provide a framework for analysis in subsequent studies associated with this dissertation. More precisely, social relations speak to the quality, tolerance, trust and participation within different social networks. Sense of identification refers to feelings of attachment or identity towards a social entity such as a sports club, a city or a country. Orientation towards the common good includes feelings of responsibility towards others and acceptance of the social order. Shared values refer to consensus around lifestyles, values and beliefs. Equality speaks to the distribution and access to societal resources, such as education, employment or social support. Finally, quality of life includes several subjective and objective measures of wellbeing, including physical health, psychological health and living conditions (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). The elements above are likewise summarised in Table 1-2.

*Table 1-2 Common Dimensions of Social Cohesion. Adapted from Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Sub-Dimensions</b>
Social Relations	Quality and strength of relations between groups and individuals	Social networks; participation; trust; mutual tolerance
Sense of Identification	Feelings of attachment and belonging to a social entity	N/A
Orientation towards the common good	Feelings of responsibility for the common good and compliance with social order.	Feelings of responsibility; acceptance, and compliance with social order
Shared values	Shared, commonly held values across societal groups	Value consensus; preference for values that enhance cohesion
(In)Equality	Level of equality in the distribution of social and economic resources	Distribution of resources; diversity; social exclusion
Quality of Life	Objective and subjective levels of quality of life	Psycho-social wellbeing, physical health, living conditions

### 1.3 Causes and Consequences of Social Cohesion

Related to the definitional and conceptual debates outlined above, extensive work has sought to disentangle the variables around social cohesion and identify both causes and consequences of social cohesion. One prominent area of exploration looks at the role of wealth and inequality in relation to social cohesion. Though the connection between absolute wealth and social cohesion is tenuous (Delhey et al., 2018; Dragolov et al., 2016a), the role of inequality is much more well-supported. A significant body of research looks at how income inequality affects overall social cohesion at different geographic levels. In general, there appears to be a negative relationship between high inequality and social cohesion (Burgard & Kalousova, 2015; Coburn, 2000, 2004; Iammarino et al., 2019; Manstead, 2018; Musterd et al., 2017). For instance, Coburn claims that higher income inequality produces lower levels of social cohesion (Coburn, 2000, 2004). Likewise, in studies using European and Asian statistical data, high levels of inequality affect social cohesion negatively (Delhey et al., 2018; Dragolov et al., 2016a), though the relationship is not always strictly linear. Theoretically speaking, this relationship may be explained by human capital accumulation theory, which argues that inequality undermines education opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, lowering social mobility and limiting the accumulation of human capital (see, e.g., Cingano, 2014)

Much literature has also looked at how a country or community's demographic composition or diversity impacts social cohesion. Though some individual-level experiments find negative associations between perceived diversity and related dimensions such as trust (e.g. Koopmans & Veit, 2014), broader literature hardly supports such a clear relationship (Schaeffer, 2013). Other studies find that diversity leads to higher perceived social cohesion (Sturgis et al., 2014). Of note, Portes and Vickstrom argue that “diversity contributes to the long-term viability of nations dependent on modern, not backward, forms of association” (2011, p. 475). Adding to this debate, numerous other scholars argue that segregation, and not diversity per se, negatively contributes to social cohesion (Cassiers & Kesteloot, 2012; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2009; van der Meer & Tolsma, 2014). The consequences of social cohesion, however, are far less contested. Numerous theoretical and statistical analyses argue that higher social cohesion leads to higher levels of wellbeing (Coburn, 2000, 2004; Dragolov et al., 2016a; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). This also plays out at the individual level, with numerous studies tracing associations between perceived social cohesion, physical activity and overall health (e.g. Kamphuis et al., 2008; Mulvaney-Day et al., 2007).

Elsewhere, literature has concerned itself with more meso or micro ideas of education, norms and values and their potential connection to social cohesion. Various authors argue that education can play a positive role in the generation of social cohesion, as education can be used to instil common norms that increase social cohesion (Gradstein & Justman, 2000). Relatedly, research has explored what norms or values are important for social cohesion. Values are often vaguely defined, and not all values

are per se conducive to social cohesion (Nowack & Schoderer, 2020). Shared values around the exclusion of other groups may provide cohesion in the short term for the dominant in-group, but long-term is not sustainable (Dragolov et al., 2016c). Other values, such as individualism or personal responsibility, may be widely shared but clash with ideas of common good embedded in many understandings of social cohesion. However, emerging literature suggests that individual values around acceptance of diversity and benevolence towards others are positively associated with social cohesion (Dragolov et al., 2016b; Nowack & Schoderer, 2020).

Using broader SFD literature as a guide, this is certainly where some of the first connections between sport and social cohesion can be identified. On the one hand, sport is discursively positioned as a vehicle for values such as tolerance, respect and fair play (EC, 2020b; Koh et al., 2017). On the other hand, sport for development has become increasingly presented as a tool to promote education and foster the development of a variety of life skills (Hermens et al., 2017; Moustakas, 2020). Though there remain significant gaps related to our understanding of the practice and mechanisms behind sport for social cohesion programmes, the next section will introduce some potential theoretical mechanisms in more depth.

## **1.4 Potential Theories in Sport for Social Cohesion**

Existing literature and organisational documents concerning sport for social cohesion and SFD more broadly provide some initial hints concerning the practices and theoretical mechanisms within sport for social cohesion programmes. As this thesis seeks to unearth definitions, practices and mechanisms, there is not one theoretical approach or idea structuring this work. Rather, below, I present a select few concepts that appear to animate many sport for social cohesion programming. In particular, intergroup contact, experiential learning and social capital appear to be three core mechanisms inherent to many of these activities.

As alluded to in the previous section, inherent to social cohesion are ideas about developing social relationships, networks of mutual support and an acceptance of diversity. As a result, many programmes and SFD methodologies advocate for diverse, mixed group activities that focus on shared goals and cooperation (e.g. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ], 2018; Fox et al., 2013). Intentionally or not, these approaches mirror many of the conditions of Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) (Allport, 1954). In short, ICT suggests that intergroup contact can be used to combat bias and promote tolerance between groups. However, this intergroup contact must be predicated upon the equal status of all groups, sharing of a common goal, intergroup cooperation, and support from authorities. Later, other authors debated and expanded these four core conditions. Most prominently, Pettigrew (1998) has argued that sufficient time and space to develop friendships



is a fifth key condition. Within sport for development literature, Schulenkorf and Sherry (2021) contend that cultural relevance and excitement potential is an additional condition whereby programmes should be culturally appropriate and provide sufficient added excitement to entice young people to engage and build relations.

Much SFD programming (e.g. GIZ, 2022a) and literature (e.g. Hermens et al., 2017) is further concerned with the development of various life skills associated with the development of social relations and participation in society. Indeed, various programme documents highlight skills such as teamwork, empathy, communication and conflict resolution as essential for the development of social cohesion (GIZ, 2022a; R. Scott et al., 2020; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021). When it comes to developing these skills, programmes often use sport in modified ways to generate new experiences, discussion, and reflection, which in turn promote interaction, cooperation and mutual understanding. For instance, the football3 method is one especially prominent approach. Named after its “three halves” – a pre-match discussion, football match, and post-match discussion – the football3 methodology aims to encourage communication, exchange, and conflict (Fox et al., 2013; Segura Millan Trejo et al., 2018). In mixed-gender or mixed-background teams, players collectively decide on the rules before the match. Mediators replace the referees and support discussions, only intervening when players cannot resolve their disagreements. After the match, the teams come back together to reflect on the match, discuss key incidents and award fair play points. Other methods follow similar approaches and propose a mix of new games, common objectives and collective reflection (Gieß-Stüber, 2010; Reynard et al., 2020). Such approaches can be said to reflect many of the mechanisms within Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). ELT suggests that learning occurs through a cycle of practical experience and reflection. This cycle includes four phases: (1) a concrete, often new, experience for the learner encounters an experience; (2) reflective observation on the experience in the light of the learner's existing knowledge; (3) abstract conceptualisation of new ideas or modifications based on the reflection; and (4) active experimentation with the newly created or modified concepts (D. A. Kolb, 1984). In short, ELT suggests that idea learning is supported through concrete, reflective practice and that every new experience is informed by this cycle of previous experience, thought and reflection.

Finally, away from the pitch, further engagement in the programme or the community is often seen as crucial for participants to gain social capital and promote greater social cohesion, especially within European policy and European-funded programmes. The European Union, for instance, claims that volunteering “can contribute to the growth and strengthening of social capital” and “integrate immigrants and other marginalised social groups” (Council of the European Union, 2011, pp. 3–4). In this view, civic participation is not explicitly a constituent component of social cohesion but rather an instrument to achieve social cohesion outcomes such as social relations or a sense of belonging. For

instance, a study of Freiburg's Bike Bridge programme argues that sustained engagement in the programme as volunteers was necessary to enable the accumulation and the possible transformation of multiform capital and to provide chances for upward social mobility and social inclusion" (Mohammadi, 2019, p. 1096). Broadly speaking, this approach strongly reflects Robert Putnam's perspectives on the development of social capital (Coalter, 2007; Putnam, 1995). Essentially, the contention is that civic participation fosters social capital – which includes ideas of social networks, common norms, solidarity and trust – by improving the ability of communities to pursue common goals and interests.

However, despite this initial mapping, the definition and practice of sport for social cohesion remain underexplored. Even though it has been identified as one of the core thematic areas for sport for development research and programmes (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson & Woods, 2017), how the concept is understood within the field remains unclear and is often conflated with narrower ideas of social capital (Raw et al., 2021; Sabbe et al., 2019; Sabbe et al., 2020). Furthermore, authors have observed that there is little consistent documentation of how programmes are designed. Elements such as type of sport, duration of participation, frequency of participation, target groups, and non-sporting activities remain under-reported (Coalter, 2017; Svensson & Woods, 2017). This means that, regarding sport for social cohesion, we neither have a clear definition of *what* is being achieved, *how* or for *whom*. As I will present next, the gaps and debates illustrated above lend themselves to numerous questions about the definition and delivery of sport for social cohesion programmes in Europe.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

### **1.5.1 Research Question 1: How is social cohesion understood within European sport for social cohesion programmes?**

Despite the many definitions of social cohesion, there is a disconnect between formal definitions and how the concept is understood by community members, programme practitioners or programme participants (Raw et al., 2021; Sabbe et al., 2020). For instance, as Raw and colleagues (2021) note, the way social cohesion has been applied in sport "means that it is often used as a catch-all to describe a broad range of sociological concepts, and that this has led to exaggerated claims about how well this area has been researched" (p. 19). And, when social cohesion is defined, it is often conflated with narrower, individual-focused ideas about social capital (Cubizolles, 2015; Raw et al., 2021; Sabbe et al., 2020). In other words, social capital is often presented or conceptualised as a more individual-focused concept that considers the quantity and quality of social relationships, whereas

social cohesion is often a holistic, multidimensional, multi-level construct (cf. Dragolov et al., 2016c; Fonseca et al., 2019). As such, this narrow focus on social capital or social relations dismisses many other components potentially associated with the definition of social cohesion, including shared values, shared experiences, civic participation, mutual help, social order, acceptance of diversity, wellbeing, equality, and social mobility (cf. Delhey & Dragolov, 2016; Fonseca et al., 2019; Forrest & Kearns, 2001; OECD, 2011; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017).

To truly unpack the potential connections between sport and social cohesion, and understand how programmes define and target specific social cohesion dimensions, it is essential to explore the understanding of social cohesion at the local and programme levels (Novy et al., 2012; Raw et al., 2021; Sabbe et al., 2019; Sabbe et al., 2020). In particular, this research question seeks to understand how programmes define social cohesion, which social cohesion outcomes they target, and how they perceive potential causes and consequences of social cohesion within their local context. Understanding these local definitions, assumptions, and specific social cohesion goals, can help implementers and policymakers better tailor their approaches and develop relevant measurement and evaluation tools, while it can also support greater theoretical development around sport for social cohesion.

### **1.5.2 Research Question 2: What practices or activities are European sport for social cohesion programmes employing?**

Beyond understanding the definitions embedded in specific communities or programmes, there is also a need to understand better the scope and approaches within various sport for social cohesion programmes, including their target groups, locations, sporting activities, and non-sporting activities. Put differently, we still know relatively little about how, in general, social cohesion is supported through these programmes. Elements such as the duration of participation, frequency of participation, sporting activities, and non-sporting activities remain under-reported (Coalter, 2017; Svensson & Woods, 2017). As such, there is a need to investigate the practice around sport for social cohesion (Raw et al., 2021). Without such information, it is difficult to identify successful (or unsuccessful) approaches, connect specific activities to specific outcomes, develop measurement or evaluation tools and, eventually, build theories around sport for social cohesion.

### **1.5.3 Research Question 3: What theoretical processes or mechanisms underpin European sport for social cohesion programmes?**

Finally, we need to unearth the potential mechanisms or processes that generate or inhibit social cohesion outcomes within sport for social cohesion programmes. In other words, there is a need to move beyond simply describing definitions, goals and activities to understand the theoretical concepts that underpin the potential outcomes associated with sport for social cohesion programmes. Understanding this process is highly relevant, as literature on sport-based interventions or SFD are undertheorized, and there is a need to develop theories related to specific outcomes such as social cohesion (Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2015; Welty Peachey et al., 2019). There is also a related need to connect current practice and research with existing theories, as the field can benefit from engaging with wider literature and theories (Giulianotti et al., 2019).

In terms of sport for social cohesion, that means understanding the definitions, activities, assumptions and mechanisms associated with specific goals, and connecting these to relevant theories. As such, for this question, it is crucial to take into account findings generated via the previous research questions, including the approaches used by programmes, the understanding of local stakeholders, and the desired outcomes.

## **1.6 Design and Structure of the Dissertation**

A multi-method approach combining literature-based and qualitative approaches is used to support the data and analysis presented in the following articles. In addition, this research has been further strengthened via its integration into the Sport and Social Cohesion Lab (SSCL) project. The SSCL is a multi-national Erasmus+ project led by the Institute for European Sport Development and Leisure Studies. It features a consortium of 10 partners, including four national NGO-University pairings in Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic. Launched at the start of 2021, the project aims to promote social cohesion in diverse urban neighbourhoods and support practitioners in delivering high-quality sport for social cohesion programmes. To do so, the project adopts a Living Lab approach to directly engage programme participants, generate an understanding of the elements that promote social cohesion in a sport setting and to co-create relevant tools to allow for the exploration, understanding and improvement of social cohesion outcomes (see Institute for European Sport Development and Leisure Studies, 2021). Broadly speaking, Living Labs are a multi-method design and research methodology for developing and testing approaches in co-creation with beneficiaries in real-life settings in cooperation with public, non-profit and private stakeholders (see European Network of Living Labs, 2021; Galway et al., 2022). In the context of this dissertation, the project and Living Lab approach also provided a valuable, participatory framework to engage practitioners and participants in the research documented here. Having said that, though the initial ambition of this work was to

engage in a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the scope and nature of the dissertation did not allow me to truly meet the high standards for participation and power sharing associated with PAR (see, e.g. Baum et al., 2006; Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Hughes, 2003; Spaaij et al., 2018)

Through the different methods used in the context of this work, six articles were produced that constitute the core of this dissertation and directly contributed to answering the research questions outlined above. Table 1-3 provides an overview of the articles, and in the following sub-sections, I will summarise each article's contribution and connection to the research questions.

*Table 1-3 Overview of journal articles associated with the doctoral thesis*

No.	RQs	Publication Title	Journal	Publisher	Scopus (Citescore)	Web of Science (2-year impact Factor)
1	N/A	A Bibliometric Analysis of Research on Social Cohesion from 1994–2020	Publications	MDPI	Yes (3.5)	Yes (Not yet available)
2	1, 2	Sport for social cohesion: from scoping review to new research directions	Sport in Society	Taylor and Francis	Yes (2.3)	Yes (1.578)
3	1, 2	Sport and social cohesion within European policy: a critical discourse analysis	European Journal of Sport and Society	Taylor and Francis	Yes (2.3)	No
4	1, 2	From Evangelical to Structural: A Typology of European Sport for Social Cohesion Programmes	Journal of Global Sport Management	Taylor and Francis	Yes (2.2)	No
5	1, 2, 3	Sport for Social Cohesion: Transferring from the Pitch to the Community?	Social Sciences	MDPI	Yes (3.4)	Yes (Not yet available)
6	3	Sport for Social Cohesion: A Conceptual Framework Linking Practice and Theory.	Sport in Society	Taylor and Francis	Yes (2.3)	Yes (1.578)

### **1.6.1 Article 1: Overview of Social Cohesion Literature**

The first article expands on the literature background presented above and uses a bibliometric approach to review recent general literature on social cohesion. This article does not per se directly answer the research questions but rather maps out the key topics and debates embedded within the general scientific literature. In particular, this article serves to identify the disciplines engaged with social cohesion and further illustrates the status of current debates about the role of education, diversity, segregation and inequality in promoting or inhibiting social cohesion.

### **1.6.2 Article 2: Research on Sport for Social Cohesion**

The second article uses a Scoping Review methodology to document the current literature on sport for social cohesion, including the definitions and programme components embedded in that literature. As such, this article serves two distinct purposes. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive overview of existing research connecting sport participation and social cohesion and allows for the identification of trends and gaps within that literature. Consequently, this article provides significant groundwork for the research agenda pursued through this dissertation. Secondly, as the review explicitly maps out definitions, dimensions and activities associated with sport for social cohesion programmes, it contributes to answering RQ1 and RQ2.

### **1.6.3 Article 3: European Policy on Sport for Social Cohesion**

The third article uses a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how European policy defines, describes and supports social cohesion activities. As such, it partially contributes to RQ1 and RQ2 by unearthing how social cohesion is defined and supported and how that translates to activities on the ground. And, equally saliently, this article helps establish the general policy and funding framework in which many sport for social cohesion programmes operate and illustrates the impact thereof.

### **1.6.4 Article 4: Typology of European Sport for Social Cohesion**

#### **Programmes**

The fourth article uses the results of a mapping survey done in the context of the SSCL project to create a typology of European sport for social cohesion programmes. In particular, this survey sought to map out the different definitions, goals and programmatic elements of organisations using sport to generate social cohesion. Using these results, this paper qualitatively analyses open-ended answers to generate a typology of common sport for social cohesion approaches and describes the goals, programme components, target groups and delivery organisations associated with each type. As such, this article directly contributes to answering both RQ1 and RQ2.

### **1.6.5 Article 5: Promotion and Transfer of Social Cohesion in Three European Sport Programmes**

The fifth article reports on fieldwork and qualitative research in three different European NGOs engaged in sport for social cohesion activities. This research relies on extensive interviews, observations, visits and documentary analysis. This article illustrates the definitions, activities and assumptions underpinning the studied programmes while also addressing the issue of transfer to the broader community. As a result, this article directly contributes to answering RQ1 and RQ2 while also partially contributing to RQ3.

### **1.6.6 Article 6: Linking Practice, Theory and Outcomes**

The sixth and final article acts as a theoretical and conceptual reflection on the results of this dissertation. Therefore, it brings together the results from the previous work into a conceptual framework that maps out common programme practices and connects them to potentially relevant theoretical mechanisms. These practices are further mapped out according to the social cohesion dimensions targeted and the socio-ecological level addressed. As such, this article helps provide a clearer understanding of the (potential) theoretical mechanisms behind sport for social activities, offers avenues for clearer study or measurement, and directly contributes to RQ3.

## 2. Recent Literature on Social Cohesion

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This chapter was **published (open-access)** as:

Moustakas, L. (2022). A Bibliometric Analysis of Research on Social Cohesion from 1994–2020. *Publications*, 10(1), 5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/publications10010005>

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**Abstract:** Social cohesion is recognised as the ‘glue’ that holds societies together and is connected to numerous positive social outcomes. Many authors have defined the term and its dimensions, leading to a wide range of different perspectives. Indeed, an array of dimensions have emerged as researchers have conceptualized social cohesion based on the theoretical assumptions of their disciplines. This wide range of disciplinary contributions has created a rich but muddled research field. In line with the growing recognition of social cohesion, there is a need to better understand social cohesion's evolution and status within broader academic research. Thus, this study has two main objectives: (i) to analyse the nature and evolution of literature related to social cohesion and (ii) to identify the thematic areas related to social cohesion research and their connections to specific disciplines. To achieve this, a bibliometric analysis of 5027 journal articles listed in the Web of Science (WoS) has been conducted. Through this, a substantial increase in research activity has been noted, and the broad, multidisciplinary nature of the research is also illustrated. However, there remains room for further collaboration across disciplines, as well as research exploring how different social groups and institutions contribute to social cohesion.



### 3. Research on Sport for Social Cohesion

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This chapter was **published** as:

Moustakas, L. & Robrade, D. (2022). Sport for Social Cohesion: From Scoping Review to New Research Directions. *Sport in Society*, Ahead of Print, [www.doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2022.2130049](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2022.2130049)

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**Abstract:** There have been growing efforts to harness sport to tackle social issues and promote development. Social cohesion is, arguably, the most prominent objective of these activities. However, social cohesion remains a contested concept subject to many definitions, and we do not have a clear picture of how social cohesion is defined or supported in sport programmes or organisations. This makes it difficult to identify successful approaches, develop measurements and build theories. To begin addressing these gaps, we have conducted a systematic scoping review, leading to an analysis of 35 studies exploring sport for social cohesion. Overall, we find that the literature fails to consistently define social cohesion, though it tends to coalesce around a set of core dimensions. Likewise, programme elements are inconsistently reported. Moving forward, we call on researchers to clearly define social cohesion and explore its sub-dimensions in more depth, which in turn can foster greater theoretical development.

## 4. Policy on Sport and Social Cohesion in Europe

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This chapter was **published** as:

Moustakas, L. (2021). Sport and social cohesion within European policy: a critical discourse analysis. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, Ahead of Print, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2021.2001173>

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**Abstract:** Social cohesion is increasingly present and prioritised on the European political agenda. Generally defined as some combination of trust, solidarity and identity, social cohesion is considered the 'glue' that binds societies together. Due to its interactive nature and supposedly universal appeal, sport has been called upon to play a role in fostering social cohesion across the continent. Accordingly, the European Union has invested considerable policy attention and financial resources into related sport projects. Despite this growing attention, we still have little understanding of how social cohesion is conceptualised in EU sport policy or how political priorities and funding requirements influence funded projects. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to discussions on the role of (sport) policy and funding priorities on our understanding of social cohesion as well as the implementation of sport for social cohesion projects. This paper's findings are generated through a Critical Discourse Analysis of European policy texts and over 200 Erasmus+ Sport project descriptions. Based on this, I argue that the Erasmus+ funding mechanism and its associated policies take a broad, politically convenient view of social cohesion and endorse a predominantly individual-centred, technical approach to fostering social cohesion. Ultimately, this ignores the systems or privileged groups that inhibit social cohesion and fails to address the root causes of and barriers to social cohesion.

## 5. Typology of European Sport for Social Cohesion Programmes

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This chapter was **published** as:

Moustakas, L. (2023). From Evangelical to Structural: A Typology of European Sport for Social Cohesion Programmes. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, Ahead of Print.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2023.2197004>

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**Abstract:** Despite growing activity connecting sport to social cohesion, in sport-related literature, social cohesion is poorly defined and primarily organised along narrow dimensions of social relations or social capital. Yet social cohesion is a complex, multidimensional concept that encompasses ideas of belonging, shared values, trust, and civic participation. Much literature does not explore these other components in-depth, and we know little about how sport programmes understand and address these components of social cohesion. Against this background, using qualitative data from a mapping survey completed by 84 European sport organisations, this study aims to create a typology of the main sport for social cohesion approaches in Europe. In the end, four main types are identified: evangelical approaches that rely solely on the power of sport; value approaches that mix sport participation with the promotion of values; integration approaches that combine sport and civic participation to foster social capital and cohesion; and belonging approaches that encourage trust, dialogue and a greater sense belonging. To conclude, these types are critically discussed and situated against existing literature, and the outline of a fifth, more structural type is presented.

## 6. Promotion and Transfer of Social Cohesion in Three European Sport Programmes

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This chapter was **published (open-access)** as:

Moustakas, L. (2022). Sport for Social Cohesion: Transferring from the Pitch to the Community? *Social Sciences*, 11(11), <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11110513>

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**Abstract:** European sport policies and programmes have increasingly focused on promoting social cohesion. Often presented as a multi-dimensional concept, social cohesion is considered the ‘glue’ that holds societies together and is seen as essential to addressing common challenges. However, the term remains contested, and it is not always clear how programmes conceptualise or support social cohesion. Thus, this paper explores how three European sport programmes conceptualise and foster social cohesion. Findings are generated from a thematic analysis of inter-views, group discussions, observations and documents. The themes developed show how organisations adopt an individual-centred view of social cohesion, focusing mainly on social relations, tolerance and mutual help. In turn, this translates to an individual-focused practice of social cohesion, emphasising personal skills, behaviours, and social relations, with the transfer of social cohesion to the broader community left mostly in the participants' hands. Due to a number of systemic barriers, programmes struggle to implement more holistic and structural approaches. As such, if we want to facilitate a move towards more structural or interventionist approaches, we as researchers must play an active role in questioning, challenging, and reshaping the systems that underpin sport-based social interventions.

## 7. Linking Practice, Theory and Outcomes

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This chapter is currently **under review** as:

Moustakas, L. (2023). Sport for Social Cohesion: A Conceptual Framework Linking Practice and Theory. *Sport in Society*.

A non-peer-reviewed **preprint** is available at <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/um69c>

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**Abstract:** The development of theories in sport for development has increased over the last decade, with numerous general theories or frameworks being put forth by scholars. Nonetheless, theories exploring connections to specific outcomes are lacking, and this gap is especially striking regarding the vaunted connections between sport and social cohesion. Sport has been prominently positioned as a vehicle to promote social cohesion, yet the theoretical mechanisms that support sport and social cohesion remain largely underexplored. Literature and programmes have been criticised for failing to define social cohesion, and there remains a lack of knowledge concerning practices, activities, and mechanisms within programmes. As such, we neither have a clear picture of the goals being addressed nor the mechanisms supporting those goals. The following paper seeks to address these gaps by presenting a conceptual framework connecting common practices within programmes with existing theories and specific social cohesion outcomes. To do so, findings from extensive previous work in Europe are contextualised against existing theories. In turn, this generates a better understanding of the mechanisms in sport for social cohesion, provides guidance to implementers, and identifies areas for future development.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion

### 8.1 Summary of Main Findings

This dissertation recognised the growing importance and relevance of social cohesion, the increasing role of sport, and existing gaps in our practical and theoretical knowledge. In particular, this dissertation worked to elucidate the definition of social cohesion within European sport for social cohesion programmes, unearth the practices and conditions within these programmes, and holistically connect these definitions and practices via clear theoretical mechanisms. More precisely, this dissertation was structured along three main research questions: (1) how is social cohesion understood within European sport for social cohesion programmes?; (2) what practices or activities are European sport for social cohesion programmes employing?; and (3) what theoretical mechanisms underpin European sport for social cohesion programmes? In the following, I will summarise the main findings with respect to these three interrelated questions.

#### 8.1.1 Understanding of social cohesion within sport for social cohesion programmes

Though the various definitions or conceptualisations of social cohesion at the academic or policy levels associate a wide range of dimensions with social cohesion, the findings here suggest that sport organisations working in the field employ a definition aligned to the narrower characterisations of the term (cf. Chan et al., 2006; Dragolov et al., 2016c; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). As illustrated in the scoping review, a majority of current sport-based literature focus on ideas of social relations, a sense of belonging and, to a lesser extent, shared values and focus on the common good (see [Chapter 3](#)).

The focus on these general areas also manifested itself within the survey ([Chapter 5](#)) and qualitative work ([Chapter 6](#)) associated with this dissertation. Ideas of shared values, developing social relations, and promoting civic participation are inherent to many European sport for social cohesion organisations. Though some organisations engage rather nebulously with the concept of values, for many, this manifested itself through activities focused on developing tolerance and promoting an acceptance of diversity. In other words, though values are often vague or ill-defined (Nowack & Schoderer, 2020), for many of the organisations analysed here, there was a rather clear focus on issues of diversity and acceptance. For instance, one German interviewee captured this connection within their understanding of social cohesion:

“A peaceful, appreciative interaction of several groups of our society, from any dimension of the diversity model, with different backgrounds” (Transcript, James, Germany)

As such, broadly speaking, sport for social cohesion programmes in Europe view social cohesion as a mixture of positive social relations, a sense of belonging, a focus on the common good and shared values of acceptance or tolerance. It is also worth considering what is missing from the conceptualisations or ideas of social cohesion within these organisations. Though many narrower definitions of social cohesion propose dimensions related to perceived fairness or institutional trust (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017), these elements did not organically emerge as part of individual or programmatic definitions of social cohesion. And, though broader literature somewhat concerns itself with these issues, they play a relatively limited role in comparison with social relations, identity or civic participation (see [Chapter 2](#)). This suggests that such dimensions may not form a core part of common understandings of the term, and this contrast will be further unpacked in the discussion of implications below.

### **8.1.2 Practices or activities within European sport for social cohesion programmes**

The literature ([Chapter 3](#)), programmes and organisations (Chapters [4](#), [5](#) and [6](#)) analysed reveal a core set of five practices or activities common to sport for social cohesion programmes across Europe. First, a combination of regular sporting activities and occasional special events or outings provide continuous engagement within a programme. Second, mixed group activities aim to bring different or sometimes conflicting groups together and improve relationships. Third, life skill development activities, delivered either through workshops or modified sport activities, aim to foster (individual) skills seen as essential for social cohesion. Fourth, there are civic participation initiatives whereby participants are encouraged and supported to take more active roles in their communities. Finally, there is an increasing number of participatory programme approaches (e.g. Living Labs) that seek to holistically engage participants, implementers and stakeholders while directly empowering participants in the design, implementation and evolution of a programme. These activities vary in complexity and, as I discuss in the next section, can further be tied to specific dimensions and (potential) theoretical mechanisms. However, before doing so, it is also worth reflecting on how organisations typically combine these activities together.

As highlighted in the survey-based typology ([Chapter 5](#)), different definitions and practices often come together to form distinct approaches within the sport for social cohesion sphere. At its most basic, some organisations rely on what they perceive to be sport's inherent potential to achieve often vaguely defined social cohesion goals, thus engaging in an *evangelical* approach almost solely reliant on traditional, sport-based activities. Other organisations mix regular and modified sport activities and primarily seek to promote the (shared) *values* of their club or organisation. In other words, in this *value*

approach, the norms and beliefs of the organisation in question are primarily transmitted through a mix of sporting activities. A third branch works more consciously on social cohesion via an *integration* approach. These organisations use modified sport activities and civic participation as tools to promote social relations amongst vulnerable or marginalised groups. Finally, a fourth branch takes a more holistic *belonging* approach, whereby modified sport activities, often with a strong reflection component, and various educational offers are combined to help develop a sense of belonging and, eventually, support greater civic participation. Finally, it should be said that participatory methods, though increasingly common, are not yet widespread. Participatory methods can perhaps better be assigned to more transformational or structural approaches. However, the practices described above – be it individually or in combination within these different approaches – clearly illustrate that the more structural or transformational approaches called for by research over the last decade have yet to truly take hold in the sport for social cohesion area.

### **8.1.3 Theoretical mechanisms underpinning European sport for social cohesion programmes**

The above practices can also be tied to potential explanatory theoretical mechanisms. Indeed, many common activities or practices have emerged from or can be directly connected to theoretical mechanisms from various fields, even though these connections may not always be explicit amongst practitioners or within related pedagogical manuals. Combining the findings generated here with extensive scientific literature, the five core practices or activities outlined above can be connected with specific social cohesion outcomes, socio-ecological levels, and further linked with specific theoretical mechanisms. These connections are simplified and summarised in Table 8-1 and can also be reviewed in more depth in [Chapter 7](#).



Table 8-1 Overview of practices, theories, levels and social cohesion dimensions

Practice	Theory	Socio-Ecological Level Targetted	Social Cohesion Dimensions Targetted
Regular and Special Activities	Rituals Theory	Interpersonal	Social Networks; Identification
Mixed Group Activities	Intergroup Contact Theory	Interpersonal	Social Networks; Trust in people; Acceptance of diversity
Life Skill Development	Experiential Learning Theory	Individual	Social Networks; Acceptance of diversity
Civic Participation	Social Capital	Interpersonal	Social Networks; Trust in People; Solidarity; Respect for social rules
Participatory Approaches	Interactional Empowerment	Community	Identification; Civic Participation

I further summarise those main practices, outcomes and associated theoretical mechanisms below. It is worth noting that three of the mechanisms were already hinted at elsewhere in this thesis, including in [section 1.4](#). However, two other mechanisms – the interplay between regular and special events, as well as the role of participatory programme approaches – add themselves to our understanding of the field and represent one of the ways in which this thesis expands current knowledge about practice and theory within sport for social cohesion.

- The combination of regular and special events can be associated with anthropological ideas of rituals, whereby a combination of regular, “low-arousal”, and special, “high-arousal” activities are required to form and deepen social networks and feelings of identification (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014).
- The mixed group activities inherent to many programmes can likewise be associated with Allport’s (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory, which provides the basis and conditions for how such mixed group contact can improve trust and acceptance.
- The focus on life skill development through various modified games or pedagogical approaches largely patterns itself on Kolb’s (1984; see also A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2010) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which posits that learning occurs through a continuous, cyclical occurrence of concrete experiences, abstraction and reflection.
- The focus on encouraging or providing opportunities for civic participation aligns with Putnam’s (Putnam, 1995; Putnam et al., 1994) views on civic participation, who contends that formal civic participation is crucial to developing social capital and strengthening communities.

- Finally, the participatory approaches documented can be connected to psychological notions of interactional empowerment, whereby they act as empowering processes that allow participants towards greater awareness, understanding and control over their environment (Peterson et al., 2005; Zimmerman, 1995) while in turn contributing to improved levels of civic participation, as well as a stronger sense of belonging.

As discussed in [Chapter 7](#) and in the following sub-section, understanding common practices against the lens of these theories and their associated literature allows us to more clearly map practices to outcomes and therefore provides crucial insights for measurement, implementation and further theoretical development. Illustrating these linkages also clearly demonstrates how common practices, though potentially underpinned by various theories, tend to work almost solely at the individual and interpersonal levels. Indeed, this further highlights one of the common and most prominent findings of this thesis: structural or transformational practices that engage with the community, organisational and systemic levels remain vanishingly rare. Instead, put together, the practices and mechanisms highlighted here illustrate a reproduction of neoliberal ideals, whereby individual behaviours and skills are viewed as central to societal progress, and these behaviours and skills are largely divorced from broader systemic forces (Coakley, 2011). In the upcoming discussion, I will expand on how such structural or transformational approaches could be implemented and supported.

## **8.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The findings described above not only address the existing gaps surrounding sport for social cohesion, but they also have important theoretical and practical implications. From a more theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to further our understanding of the dimensions of social cohesion and how to measure them in the context of sport for social cohesion. Practically, the activities and mechanisms mapped out here also reveal gaps and opportunities within current sport for social cohesion programmes. Though I touch on some of these implications in the respective chapters, due to the word limits and format requirements associated with the article-based nature of these chapters, it was not always possible to expand on and fully discuss these implications. Freed of these constraints, these implications are expanded upon in more depth in the following sub-sections.

### **8.2.1 Definition and dimensions of social cohesion**

As the presence and importance of social cohesion have grown in research and policy, so have the range of definitions and dimensions associated with the term (see [Chapter 2](#)). This has led to a fairly extensive debate about the meaning and nature of the term. For instance, there has been some tension regarding social cohesion's occasional presentation as a process as opposed to a state of affairs

(cf. Chan et al., 2006). Mainly, however, these debates have focused on identifying the core components of social cohesion and differentiating those from possible causes or consequences. Broadly speaking, this has led to two schools of thought when defining the term. On the one hand, there are expansive, more maximalist definitions that encompass ideas of identity, social relations, and common good, as well as notions about quality of life, mobility and equality. Academically, the work from Fonseca and colleagues (2019) illustrates such a view, while policy actors such as the OECD or Council of Europe also have fairly expansive definitions (CoE, 2010; OECD, 2011). On the other hand, some authors argue for a more narrow view of social cohesion that divorces the core components from its antecedents. These narrower definitions focus on concepts of social relations, common good and identity or belonging and instead posit that inequality or wellbeing are causes and consequences of social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Dragolov et al., 2016c; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017).

As highlighted in [Chapter 7](#), the findings of this dissertation underscore how more narrow definitions of social cohesion are closer to existing understandings within communities and programmes. Indeed, literature in sport coalesces around the three broad dimensions highlighted above, and programme stakeholders also highlight those as key components. For example, one Dutch stakeholder described social cohesion “as, on one level, having networks of people who can help each other. On the other level, it’s about living together and respect.” (Notes, Observations, NL). Likewise, the narrower definitions converge around similar wording and dimensions (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017), and the dimensions inherent to these narrower definitions form a core part of numerous national-level or European measurements of social cohesion (e.g. Bottoni, 2018; Delhey et al., 2018; Delhey & Dragolov, 2016; Langer et al., 2017). This suggests that, from a purely rhetorical or textual point of view, definitions such as those from Dragolov et al. (2016) or Chan et al. (2006) are adequate and reflective of broader local understandings:

“Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations” (Chan et al., 2006, p. 290)

"quality of social cooperation and togetherness of a collective, defined in geopolitical terms, that is expressed in the attitudes and behaviors of its members. A cohesive society is characterised by resilient social relations, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community, and a pronounced focus on the common good" (Dragolov et al., 2016c, p. 6).

Nonetheless, the dimensions inherent to those definitions can be questioned. These narrow definitions give a prominent place to the relationship or interaction with institutional actors, operationalising those ideas into dimensions about institutional trust, confidence in public figures, political participation, or perceptions of fairness. In their seminal article on social cohesion, Chan and colleagues (2006) contend that a definition “should be judged in terms of two criteria: (1) minimal in scope and (2) close to ordinary usage” (p. 280). If we accept their logic, the findings presented here should lead us to reconsider the dominant dimensions associated with social cohesion. Common practices do not explicitly target the sub-dimensions related to institutional trust or perceptions of fairness. In my work, these sub-dimensions seldom came up within literature, from survey responses, or in interviews. Indeed, in the broader literature, ideas of perceived fairness or inequality and the role of institutions are often presented as antecedents or predictors of social cohesion, if they are mentioned at all. Therefore, as I argued previously, it is worth considering displacing these dimensions from the core set that constitutes social cohesion. That is not to say that these factors are not important, as they certainly play a role in supporting or eroding social cohesion. For instance, perceptions regarding fairness or institutional performance may drive individuals to participate more or less in political or civic life. And that is precisely the point: these dimensions are direct drivers of other core dimensions of social cohesion and may, therefore, better be classified as potential antecedents.

Regardless of one’s position on this – the debate on definitions and dimensions of social cohesion is sure to persist for some time – two crucial, further implications derive from this discussion. The first is that, though there is a broad alignment between local and formal understandings of social cohesion, there remains a certain tension between concepts such as fairness or trust in institutions present in academic or policy conceptualizations of social cohesion and understandings at the programme or community levels. As such, this highlights the need to continue exploring how local practitioners and participants understand and experience social cohesion within their communities, as opposed to simply taking existing top-down definitions for granted. Second, the potential interplay between dimensions remains largely unexplored. Currently, definitions or measurements of social cohesion are presented as a blob where each dimension is of similar value and interact with each other in a more or less equal fashion. The relative importance of each dimension and their patterns of mutual influence has yet to be adequately addressed, despite long-standing calls to explore such interactions (Bernard, 1999; Friedkin, 2004). Both in-depth qualitative work, as well as innovative quantitative or statistical explorations, can potentially be well-suited to address these related gaps.

## 8.2.2 Mechanisms and measurement

As highlighted at various points throughout this dissertation, social cohesion is often poorly defined or conflated with narrower notions of social relations or social capital. This is, of course, problematic, as these social relations are merely one dimension of social cohesion and do not necessarily represent the complete social cohesion picture. Nonetheless, numerous qualitative or measurement-based studies use concepts related to social relations (or capital) as a proxy for the more holistic and multi-dimensional concept of social cohesion (see Chapters [2](#) and [3](#); also, e.g. Ahlborg et al., 2022; van der Meer & Tolsma, 2014). The accompanying focus and measurement around social relations, however, leaves significant gaps in our understanding of other dimensions, such as identification, solidarity or respect for social rules, and how they connect to sport-based practices.

The conceptual framework presented in [Chapter 7](#) helps at least partially address this gap. The framework illustrates other sub-dimensions connected with sport for social cohesion programmes and clearly connects them to common practices. As such, this opens up opportunities for much more specific research and measurement in the context of programmes and interventions. Specific activities and likely outcome areas can be identified, which can further be tied to specific, fit-for-purpose research approaches or tools. Though how each sub-dimensions can be researched or measured will be context-dependent, it is worth expanding on some potential approaches that may help explore these further sub-dimensions. In addition, this is not to say that exploring social relations or social capital is a futile endeavour. These represent core components of any conceptualisation of social cohesion, and there are many validated social capital questionnaires that at least partially capture individual-level responses related to social networks, trust, tolerance, and civic participation (e.g. Forsell et al., 2020; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Williams, 2006).

The latter sub-dimension, however, is an excellent place to begin expanding our view. Civic participation is viewed as essential to social cohesion and, in Putnam's view, essential to the development of social capital (Putnam, 1995; Putnam et al., 1994). The conceptualisation of civic participation embedded in Putnam's views and many associated questionnaires reflects a highly traditional and formalised perspective, whereby community organisations, political groups or workplaces are the main venues for such participation (Harris, 2010; H. Scott, 1996). Yet these formal organisations are often culpable of excluding the very groups targeted by sport for social cohesion initiatives (see, e.g. Nobis & El-Kayed, 2019), and this view ignores the increasingly digital or informal ways youth engage in society (Harris, 2010). Much of the current literature and questionnaires do not consider these realities. Further qualitative work is needed to shape and expand our understanding of how marginalised youth define and contribute to civic participation, and this work could contribute to the further development of scales or measurements as well.

Relatedly, the social capital-based questionnaires or perspectives tend to focus on behaviours and feelings of belonging in these formal contexts or programmes, but they less readily address issues of identification or belonging in a broader community or country. Yet unearthing and understanding these feelings are crucial if we are to avoid the trap of confounding micro-level outcomes related to identification with a particular programme with wider notions of belonging or identification to a geographic entity. It is undoubtedly essential to create a safe, comfortable space where participants feel a strong sense of belonging (GIZ, 2022b). However, practitioners and researchers should remain mindful that working towards social cohesion, by definition, implies generating positive outcomes outside of the programme context.

Elsewhere, accepting and even celebrating diversity are perceived as core components of social cohesion (see [Chapter 6](#)). Likewise, some of these ideas are captured by current social capital questionnaires. However, such questions are fraught with social desirability risks and do not capture the complexity of this issue. There are numerous scales related to tolerance, acceptance or intercultural competence that can help capture additional nuance around this crucial sub-dimension (Bennett, 2009; Chen & Starsota, 2000), while various qualitative or experimental methods may also add significant depth and insight.

Finally, social cohesion as a whole and its various sub-dimensions, in particular, can significantly benefit from exploration through various participatory research approaches. Engaging in Participatory Action Research (PAR) was an initial ambition for this dissertation, but the cross-national project-based approach underpinning the work and an associated lack of resources limited these possibilities (cf. Smith et al., 2022). Despite this admitted failure, it is worth reconsidering PAR as a valuable approach in the social cohesion context. PAR is a highly collaborative, bottom-up approach whereby responsibility for the research and decision-making is shared between the researcher and participants. Thus, the goal of PAR is to build the capacity to solve self-identified problems and to promote equality (Hughes, 2003). PAR can be understood as:

a continual reflective dialectic between theory and application of knowledge gained as a continuous research cycle. This reflective dialectic, involving ‘outsider’ professional university-based researchers, working collaboratively with ‘insider’ community-based researchers, opens traditional scientific knowledge to substantive incongruencies, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies (May et al., 2003, p. 6)

Democracy, shared power, and safe spaces are crucial pre-conditions for PAR. Certainly, PAR or other participatory approaches can be resource-intensive, time-consuming and rife with challenges or even failures (Meir & Fletcher, 2019; Smith et al., 2022; Spaaij et al., 2018). However, the very nature of

these approaches offers significant potential, as it allows researchers to unearth the complex meaning and interrelations between social cohesion and its sub-dimensions while also contributing to social cohesion by creating opportunities for interactional empowerment (see [Chapter 7](#)). In addition, such approaches can allow deep insights to develop and address the often vague or top-down nature of current definitions of social cohesion. Though I have presented numerous alternative approaches and questionnaires as potentially viable methods to assess different aspects of social cohesion, ultimately, such a holistic, participatory and in-depth approach is likely best suited to capture the inherent complexity of social cohesion.

### **8.2.3 Moving towards structural approaches**

Practically, the results illustrate a clear focus on individual and interpersonal levels and select sub-target groups. As shown in the conceptual framework, practices target predominantly the individual and interpersonal levels and completely ignore the organisational or system levels. Furthermore, the individuals targeted are often from a variety of so-called marginalised or vulnerable groups. Many of the organisations documented in the typology highlighted working with groups such as migrants, refugees, vulnerable youth, or people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Likewise, the programmes studied tend to focus almost exclusively on ‘outgroups’. For instance, as one practitioner readily admitted, one of their sport groups “could also be perceived as grouping those that are different together” (Transcript, Amy, Ireland). Such narrow focus on vulnerable individuals is further reinforced by policy and associated funding mechanisms, which explicitly target these vulnerable groups and support largely neoliberal, technical, and individual-focused mechanisms (see [Chapter 4](#)). And, once outside of the programme context, participants are largely held responsible for supporting and developing social cohesion in their broader communities (see [Chapter 6](#)). In other words, though social cohesion is a multi-dimensional and multi-level construct, only individual actors - in the form of participants - are expected to sustain its development. These two strands were reflected most clearly in the Dutch approach, which not only predominantly targeted various ethnic minorities but primarily aimed to improve the relationships and integration between minorities themselves. Put together, this means that the various vulnerable groups targeted are expected to support social cohesion independently, and programmes seldom acknowledge or challenge the systemic factors that may limit that cohesion in the first place. Individual skills and behaviours are viewed as central, and the role of institutional or systemic forces is dismissed. As C. Wright Mills (1959) critiqued over seven decades ago, such perspectives arbitrarily divorce “individual life from the larger institutions within which that life is enacted” (p. 3).

These results are, of course, nothing new. Rather, they reinforce long-standing criticisms levied against the SFD sector and other various forms of societal action. These criticisms date at least as far back as Fred Coalter's influential 2010 article, where he criticised SFD programmes for employing a limited focus to tackle broad societal problems. In particular, he emphasised how programmes may confuse individual outcomes with community impact and ignore the wider socio-political contexts in which they operate (Coalter, 2010). Other scholars have concentrated their criticism on neoliberal tendencies within programmes or their focus on marginalised groups (Coakley, 2011; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). Of note, Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) highlighted how many programmes reproduce dominant power relations and align vulnerable youth with current social norms:

“sport is not only posited as an intelligible tool for normative, reproductive development but also believed to function as a mechanism for educating and recalibrating underprivileged or deviant individuals into ‘upstanding’ citizens” (p. 288)

This focus on marginalised groups and social reproduction reinforces notions that these groups are primarily responsible for their condition and “invisibilises” the responsibility of people or institutions in positions of privilege (Nixon, 2019). And, as Kelly (2011) has noted, the emphasis on individual deficits and ideas of self-exclusion within these approaches further help mask structural inequalities.

Recognising these limitations and criticisms, numerous scholars have proposed more transformational or systemic programme approaches (e.g. Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Giulianotti, 2011; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Sabbe et al., 2021) which, for this discussion, I will commonly refer to as structural approaches. Yet, despite these calls, there is significant work to be done in order to transfer these structural approaches into common practice (Sabbe et al., 2021). Thus, in the following, it is worth expanding on three core, related elements: (1) what does a structural approach look like in practice; (2) what policy or systemic interventions are needed to support structural approaches; and (3) what can research(ers) do to support such structural approaches.

From an implementation perspective, structural approaches share several common traits. At their most general, these approaches concern themselves with reducing powers of exclusion or marginalisation as opposed to simply working towards altering so-called vulnerable individuals (Sabbe et al., 2021; Veit-Wilson, 1998). As Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) contend, one way of doing this is by actively reflecting on and challenging dominant systems while simultaneously giving participants the tools they need to thrive in society as it is currently constructed. Thus, there is a need to develop more radical, critical pedagogies. As Meir (2022) outlines, such critical pedagogies can be realised through dialogue, negotiation, and a participant-centred approach that allows programmes to “be built around



the themes and conditions of people's lives, rather than as a pre-packaged curriculum delivered without consultation" (p. 313). Connected to this, structural approaches give voice and power to participants and community stakeholders. Whether through action research, Living Labs or other methods, power should be shared or equalised within structural approaches. Indeed, though such extensive dialogue may consume more time or resources, they can meaningfully contribute to "building resilient, peaceful communities" (Giulianotti, 2011, p. 225).

Yet, as I underscore in Chapters 4 and 6, these individual-focused approaches did not simply emerge in isolation but are the product of a policy landscape that focuses on members of specific (marginalised) groups and chiefly funds a range of technical or neoliberal approaches. Thus, for structural approaches to truly emerge as a viable, common practice, policy must move away from this inflexible, top-down, outgroup-focused scheme (Sabbe et al., 2021). At a most basic level, policy should explicitly highlight the role of privileged groups in developing social cohesion, hence at least rhetorically shifting the sole blame and responsibility away from already marginalised populations. Funding and associated conditions should also become more flexible and bottom-up, as programmes are often constrained to spend resources on areas of minimal value to their communities, such as transnational events or dissemination materials (cf. EC, 2020a), as opposed to addressing more relevant local needs or longer-term strategic objectives. Indeed, most organisations likely have longer-term structural objectives but are forced to compose with shifting policy landscapes, short-term funding and various conditionalities (Creamer, 2015; Dowling, 2020; Sabbe et al., 2021). Nonetheless, organisations should not see themselves merely as passive victims of policies. In particular, the set of tools or approaches broadly associated with policy advocacy can provide an opportunity for organisations to take an active role in shaping their environments (Mosley, 2010). Though more research and development are needed to understand how such activities translate to the (European) SFD sector, given the connection between sport and numerous social areas, avenues such as coalition building, information campaigning, or demonstrations may be especially appropriate in this context (cf. Gen & Wright, 2013). In addition, engaging in policy advocacy not only contributes to creating an environment suitable for structural approaches, but such active advocacy is arguably a core part of structural approaches. By definition, advocacy can play a crucial role in combatting exclusionary or discriminatory forces.

Finally, researchers must play a key role in translating structural approaches into day-to-day practice. A lack of knowledge, expertise, critical reflection and common language around structural approaches is perceived as a limitation by practitioners (Sabbe et al., 2021), and researchers have played a not-insignificant role in deepening this gap. Though it is easy to critique the content of policy or SFD-related pedagogical approaches, it is worth remembering that numerous academics (including myself) have played a role in shaping these documents. Academics have made significant contributions

to the development of international sport policy documents, especially regarding SFD guidelines (for an overview, see Bauer, 2022) or European recommendations (e.g. Coalter et al., 2017; Čujko et al., 2020). Likewise, academics have played a role in countless practical manuals that propose pre-packaged, individual-focused exercises, activities and general theories of change that predominantly address the supposed deficits of marginalised groups (e.g. GIZ, 2018; Jobse et al., 2019). Though research and academic life are increasingly marked by precarity, short-term contracts and publish-or-perish culture, the fact remains that those of us in academia are in positions of influence, and it is our duty to ensure that the values embedded within structural approaches trickle down the policies and practical tools we help shape.

### **8.3 Conclusion and Outlook**

The above dissertation has significantly contributed to the understanding and development of sport for social cohesion. Not only have programme and community understandings of the term been brought to the fore, but common practices and related outcomes have also been identified. Still, after six published articles and around 200 pages, one core question, as always, is left: now what? Though I argue that this dissertation has contributed to addressing numerous gaps in the area of sport for social cohesion, there remains much work to be done. In particular, three main avenues offer particular promise for future research and activity.

Firstly, this dissertation has primarily focused on practices and understandings in European programmes or organisations that claim to have a specific focus on social cohesion. Thus, given their intentional use of sport to support social objectives, these organisations can be described as part of the broader SFD movement. Yet how other SFD organisations, be it in Europe or elsewhere, understand and support social cohesion remains an open question. Though I suspect that the results in this dissertation are transferrable to other similar SFD organisations in Europe, that is hardly a certainty, and there is a need for continued exploration of local understandings and practices around sport for social cohesion. Likewise, the realities and experiences of programmes operating in different geographic locations (e.g. Southern Africa, North America) or contexts (e.g. refugee camps, conflict areas, rural areas, etc.) can add valuable insights. In short, further in-depth exploration and work in this area would be most welcome.

Secondly, as highlighted above, there is tremendous work to be done around developing structural programme approaches. On the one hand, there is a need to counter the slew of neoliberal or individual-focused guidance in current pedagogical and educational materials. The predominant focus on marginalised groups and life skill education is antithetical to the values embedded in structural approaches and, I would argue, counterproductive to the formation of sustainable social cohesion

across groups. I further suspect that many practitioners would like to move away from such a model. To support this, researchers and practitioners should collaborate to provide examples of structural approaches, suggest pedagogical activities, and develop ways to engage in genuinely participatory programme approaches. Though some recent work is concerned with developing participatory approaches, other practices and pedagogies associated with structural approaches lack such development. Relatedly, there is a need to provide tools and resources to support organisations in engaging in more political and advocacy-related activities. As highlighted above, advocacy allows organisations to contribute to shaping their environment and to work towards structural change. Certainly, generating the necessary resources for sustained policy advocacy is highly challenging. However, at a minimum, developing guidance, resources and tools around policy advocacy would be a valuable starting point to address at least some of the knowledge or capacity deficits faced by organisations in this area.

Finally, tools for measuring social cohesion, especially in the SFD context, could help provide more precise and holistic evaluations. To be clear, by no means am I advocating for a positivist, quantitative focus to measurement, study or evaluation. As highlighted above, participatory, largely qualitative approaches are very well-suited for this area. Nonetheless, I am not blind to the utility and occasional necessity of quantitative tools. Quantitative measurements can give researchers and practitioners simple and easily comparable results over time or between groups, allowing a glimpse into changes or the effectiveness of different approaches. And, in a world where funders often require ‘hard numbers’, the need for such quantitative measurement is often a fact of life in the SFD sector. Recognising this, I suggest that there is a need to develop holistic, SFD-relevant tools in an inclusive, participatory manner. Doing so would allow measurements to capture the range of sub-dimensions relevant to a specific programme, context or region while ensuring that top-down, academic definitions of social cohesion are not thoughtlessly applied. The participatory approaches described above, as well as other indigenous research methods (see, e.g., Chilisa, 2020 for practical examples of participatory quantitative tool development), can directly support the development of such a tool.

Overall, the core message here is that we must move away from top-down, individual and neoliberal approaches within practice and research and instead shift to inclusive, structural and participatory ways of doing. We need to gain deep insights into the understandings and experiences of communities and translate those insights into systemic, structural actions within research, policy and programmes. Otherwise, failing to do so means we will have to content ourselves with another generation of limited focus programmes and micro-level outcomes.

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## Appendix 1: Coding Scheme for Critical Discourse Analysis (Chapter 4)

Code System	Frequency
SPORT	0
SPORT > Padel	1
SPORT > Winter Sports	1
SPORT > Adapte Martial Arts	1
SPORT > Adapted Badminton	1
SPORT > Adapted Basketball	3
SPORT > Adapted Fencing	1
SPORT > Adapted Parachuting	1
SPORT > Adapted Physical Activity	15
SPORT > Adapted Rowing	1
SPORT > Badminton	1
SPORT > Ballet	1
SPORT > Basketball	0
SPORT > Boccia	2
SPORT > Chess	0
SPORT > Cycling	3
SPORT > Dance	2
SPORT > Equestrian	2
SPORT > Fencing	1
SPORT > Fitness	1
SPORT > Football	11
SPORT > Golf	1
SPORT > Gymnastics	1
SPORT > Hiking/Nordic Walking	2



SPORT > Integrated (Disability) Football	3
SPORT > Martial Arts	3
SPORT > Multisport	68
SPORT > No Sport	30
SPORT > Outdoor Sports	5
SPORT > Rugby	2
SPORT > Running	3
SPORT > Snooker	1
SPORT > Softball	1
SPORT > Street Football	2
SPORT > Street Sports	1
SPORT > Table Tennis	1
SPORT > Traditional Sports	7
SPORT > Walking	1
SPORT > Watersports	8
WHAT (GOALS)	0
WHAT (GOALS) > Combat Racism / Discrimination / Violence	27
WHAT (GOALS) > Cross-Cultural Competence	11
WHAT (GOALS) > Education (academic) (+)	7
WHAT (GOALS) > Equal Opportunities	4
WHAT (GOALS) > Gender Equality	10
WHAT (GOALS) > Healthy Behaviour Promotion	4
WHAT (GOALS) > Knowledge transfer	5
WHAT (GOALS) > Life Skill Development (+)	20
WHAT (GOALS) > Mental Wellbeing	1
WHAT (GOALS) > Networking	4
WHAT (GOALS) > Physical Activity/Sport Participation Promotion	95
WHAT (GOALS) > Professional (non-sport) skill development (+)	16

WHAT (GOALS) > Promote Access to Sport (+)	21
WHAT (GOALS) > Promote Civic Participation	3
WHAT (GOALS) > Promote Employment / Economic Opportunities	8
WHAT (GOALS) > Promote Volunteering (+)	28
WHAT (GOALS) > Social Inclusion	119
WHAT (GOALS) > Social Integration	15
WHAT (GOALS) > Sport skill development (+)	9
WHAT (GOALS) > Value promotion (e.g. ethics, fair play)	17
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES)	0
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Policy	6
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Financial Support	1
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Multipliers	1
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Benchmark / Label / Quality Seal / Certificate	1
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Capacity Building	3
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Cultural/international exchange	2
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > E-Learning / Apps	4
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Equipment	5
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Knowledge generation/research	117
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Knowledge sharing dissemination/awareness-raising	165
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Manuals / Toolkit / Best Practices / Media Content (+) (+)	105
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Mixed group activities	6
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Networking	34
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Project Creation	1
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Sport (Modified/Social)	15
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Sport (Regular)	7
HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Sport approach development	10

HOW (MEANS/ACTIVITIES) > Sport Events (e.g. workshops, sport games, multiplier training)	112
BY (WHO DELIVERS)	0
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Academics	2
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Politicians/Polymakers	2
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Sport Professionals (Generic)	11
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Athletes	1
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Social/Youth Workers	0
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Coaches	3
BY (WHO DELIVERS) > Teachers	2
FOR (TARGET GROUP)	0
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Athletes (+)	8
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > 0 Indirect 0	16
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Academics / Researchers	1
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > At-risk/Vulnerable Groups (Generic)	21
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Children	14
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Coaches	8
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Elderly People	6
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Families	1
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Fans	1
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Homeless / Formerly Homeless People	1
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > LGBTQI+	6
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Migrants	14
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Minorities	4
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Parents	3
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Patients	0
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > People with disabilities	56
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > People with low SE Status	7

FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Politicians/Polymakers	11
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Public (Generic)	21
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Refugees	10
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Social/Youth Workers	1
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Sport professionals (generic)	67
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Students	14
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Teachers	14
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Volunteers	12
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Women	11
FOR (TARGET GROUP) > Young people	40

## Appendix 2: Coding Scheme for Typology (Chapter 5)

Code System	Memo/Description
Social Cohesion Goals ()	
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Generic Definition	Undefined or generically defined goals (e.g. cohesion/inclusion, etc.)
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Acceptance of diversity (+) (+)	Goals or statements related to promoting tolerance, respect and acceptance of diverse people/groups (or related to combatting discrimination)
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Access to resources / Equality (+)	Goals or statements related to supporting equal access to various social services, such as healthcare, justice or others as well as access to education or employment opportunities.
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Civic Participation / Common Good (+) (+)	Goals or statements related to promoting/supporting civic participation (e.g. voting, democratic processes, etc.) as well as volunteering or helping others, which is a common expression of 'common good' in studies.  Goals or statements related to promoting/supporting attitudes and behaviours of mutual help (i.e. an orientation towards the common good).
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Institutions	Goals or statements related to promoting relationships and trust in formal institutions (e.g. government).
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Shared values	Goals or statements related to promoting common, shared values (e.g. respect, generosity, etc.).
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Shared goals	Goals or statements related to promoting common goals or the sense of a common/shared destiny.
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Shared identity/belonging	Goals or statements related to promoting a common sense of identity or belonging with a club/organisation/community/country.
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Social order and peace	Goals or statements related to promoting general social order, such as by promoting respect of rules, reducing crime, promoting peace etc.

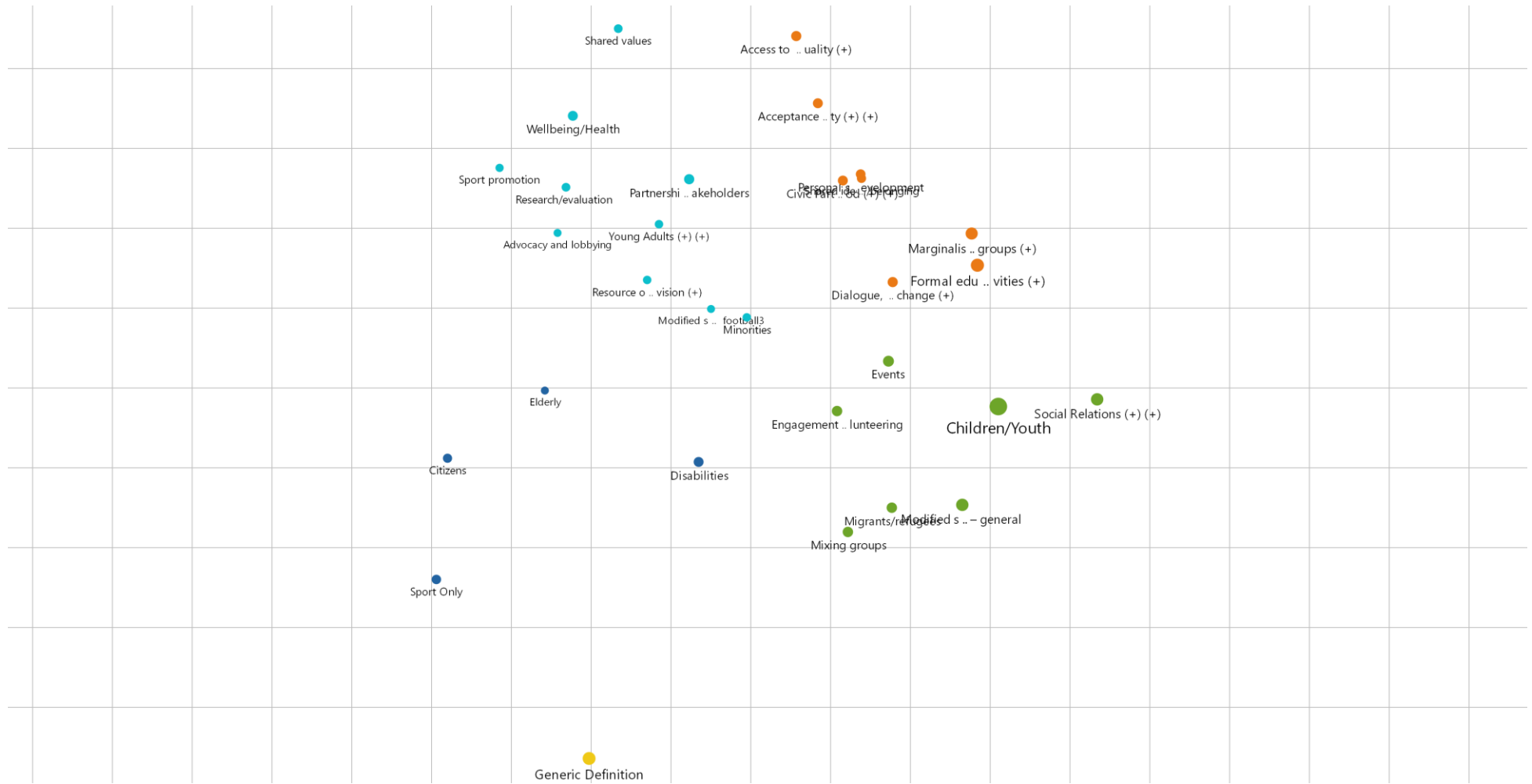
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Social Relations (+) (+)	This code reflects goals or statements related to bringing members of the same groups together / improving relations between members of the same groups, OR bringing members of different groups together / improving relations between members of different groups. In other words, both bridging and bonding are included here, as those categories were too precise for many of the programmes here.
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Sport promotion	Goals or statements related to promoting or providing access to sport.
Social Cohesion Goals (Impact)\Wellbeing/Health	Goals or statements related to improving individual physical and/or mental health/wellbeing.
Activities	
Activities\Advocacy and lobbying	Activities related to awareness-raising and lobbying for related issues (e.g. economic equality, human rights) via media or political action.
Activities\Creative/artistic activities	Activities related to participation in the music or arts (e.g. drama festivals, music classes, poetry, etc.)
Activities\Engagement / Volunteering	Activities related to engaging participants in or cascading responsibility to participants for community/programme activities. This includes involvement in the programme as a volunteer/leader, or involvement in community-based activities.
Activities\Events	Activities related to the delivery of both sporting and non-sporting events (e.g. conferences, tournaments, festivals, etc.)
Activities\Formal education activities (+)	Activities focusing on support formal education, or formal qualifications or employment-specific competences, such as experiential learning or workshops
Activities\Dialogue, reflection and exchange (+)	Activities related to fostering or organising dialogue between participants or between participants and other organisations/other community members/stakeholders.
Activities\Resource or service provision (+)	Activities related to providing material or financial resources, such as food, learning materials, school fees, etc., as well as services such as health care or legal aid.

Activities\Media Dissemination	Related to dissemination via radio, tv, web, etc.
Activities\Mixing groups	Activities that mix groups from different backgrounds together (e.g. mixed class, mixed gender, mixed ethnicity)
Activities\Modified sports – football3	Activities that used football3 or similar methodologies (i.e. have no referee, include participant decision-making and fair play points)
Activities\Modified sports – general	Activities that used modified, ‘participatory’ or ‘social’ forms of sport to promote their social cohesion goals.
Activities\Partnerships / Stakeholders	Activities related to developing partnerships, dialogue and knowledge exchanges between organisations/institutions. (e.g. Community of Practice).
Activities\Personal skill development	Activities focusing on developing individual ‘life skills’ or ‘soft skills’, such as experiential learning, training or workshops
Activities\Research/evaluation	Activities related to monitoring, evaluation or research of programmes and communities.
Activities\Sport Only	Programmes/organisations where participation in sport alone is considered the main mechanism
Target Groups	
Target Groups\Prisoners/convicts	Target group including prisoners/ex-convicts
Target Groups\Children/Youth	Organisations targetting children and youth (0-18 y.o.)
Target Groups\Citizens	Targetting the public or citizenry at large
Target Groups\Disabilities	Targetting people with mental or physical disabilities
Target Groups\Educators or coaches	Targetting teachers, trainers, coaches or other educators.
Target Groups\Elderly	Targetting elderly people (65 y.o+)
Target Groups\LGTBQIA+	Targetting members of the LGTBQIA+ community
Target Groups\Marginalised and vulnerable groups (+)	Targetting generically defined marginalised or vulnerable populations
Target Groups\Migrants/refugees	Targetting people understood as refugees or migrants or asylum seekers

Target Groups\Minorities	Targetting people understood as ethnic/religious minorities in the country of delivery
Target Groups\Parents	Targetting parents or caregivers of programme participants
Target Groups\Politicians	Targetting local or national politicians, policymakers or government officials
Target Groups\Sport organisations	Targetting sport organisations such as clubs or federations
Target Groups\Students	Targetting primary or secondary school students
Target Groups\Victims	Targetting people who were victims of violence
Target Groups\Women/girls	Targetting women and girls
Target Groups\Young Adults (+) (+)	Programmes targetting young adults (18-30 y.o; including higher education students)



## Appendix 3: Sample Code Map for Typology (Chapter 5)



## Appendix 4: Coding Scheme for Fieldwork (Chapter 6)

Code System (+ indicates other codes have been merged with this one)	Memo/Description
Attachment to organisation	Statements reflecting individual attachment as a participant/volunteer/staff to a specific organisation or programme
Children and youth as key to change	Statements reflecting the idea that children and youth are key vehicles for change
Community segregation	Statements or observations noting how a community is segregated, be it by design or not
Competitive nature of sport as a challenge or negative	Statements or observations depicting how the sometimes competitive nature of sports can be an issue or challenge in the context of SfSC programmes.
Difficult relations, conflicts or racism vis-a-vis majority (+)	Statements or observations depicting how minority groups face tense relations, conflicts or racism with/from majority
Ethnic groups struggle to 'integrate' with each other	Statements or observations depicting the idea that there are issues/problems with how different minority ethnic groups interact with each other
High number of participants in a session as a challenge	Statements or observations indicating that the number of participants in a session or programme is a challenge.
How parents take care of the kids	Statements that are critical of how parents take care of, raise or support their children.
Informal moments	Statements or observations relating to the value and importance of free, unstructured, informal moments for interaction. In a way, this is a flip-side of the 'lack of time with participants' code.
Internal communication and planning challenges (+)	Statements or observations depicting some level of internal communication challenges within an organisation
Issues with employment status, pay or turnover (+)	Statements or observations depicting how the lack of pay or employment status or turnover of implementers are a challenge

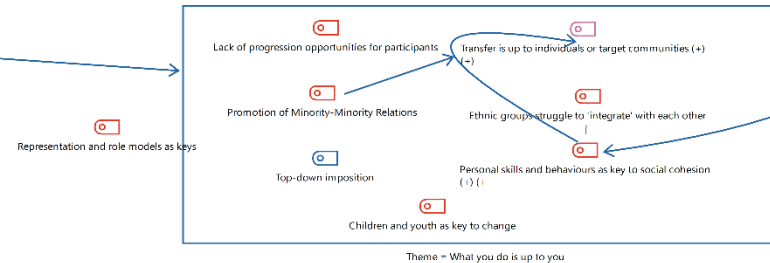
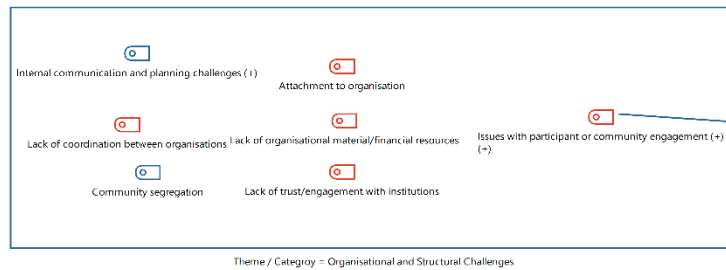
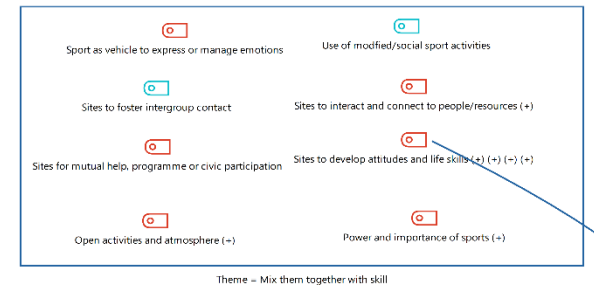
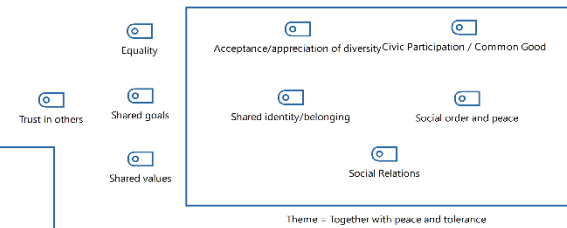
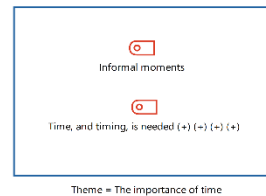
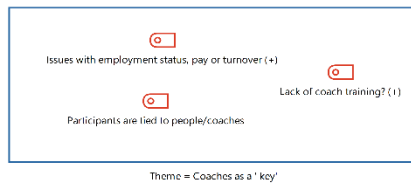
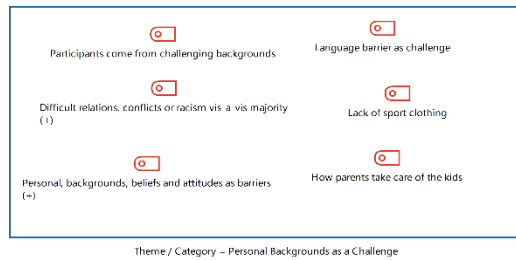
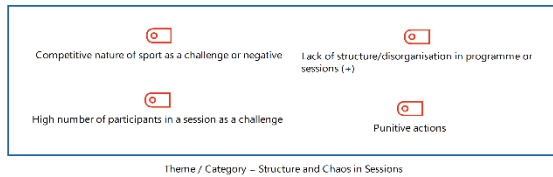
Issues with participant or community engagement (+) (+)	Statements or observations related to the challenges or limitations, or mistakes, in trying to engage participants and the community in programme implementation/co-creation.
Lack of coach training? (+)	Statements or observations depicting a potential lack of training/education for coaches/trainers/implementers
Lack of coordination between organisations	Statements or observations depicting a lack of communication or coordination between different local organisations working in the same area.
Lack of organisational material/financial resources	Statements or observations depicting a lack of financial or material resources as an obstacle for the programmes
Lack of progression opportunities for participants	Statements or observations depicting a lack of progression opportunities for participants, either in terms of accessing opportunities (education, professional) or other further resources (e.g. social services)
Lack of sport clothing	Statements or observations related to a lack of typical sport clothing or equipment
Lack of structure/disorganisation in programme or sessions (+)	Statements or observations regarding the lack of structure, or chaotic nature, of sport or workshop sessions/activities
Lack of trust/engagement with institutions	Statements or observations depicting how individuals lack engagement or trust in formal institutions.
Language barrier as challenge	Statements or observations depicting how language differences can be a challenge for programmes
Open activities and atmosphere (+)	Statements reflecting the idea that an open, inclusive atmosphere is created within a programme. That all kids are heard and no one is excluded/mockered.
Participants are tied to people/coaches	Statements reflecting how kids/participants are very close to, and reliant on, coaches/trainers/facilitators.
Participants come from challenging backgrounds	Statements describing programme participants as coming from weak/difficult backgrounds, neighbourhoods, or some sort of 'marginalised' group

Personal skills and behaviours as key to social cohesion (+) (+)	Statements or observations depicting how implementers or participants believe that personal behaviours and skills are essential for the development of broader social cohesion.
Personal backgrounds, beliefs and attitudes as barriers (+)	Statements reflecting the idea that personal beliefs and attitudes, be it for participants or external individuals, are barriers to positive social change
Power and importance of sports (+)	Statements reflecting the idea that sport is somehow inherently beneficial and worth pursuing. This can be a bit latent at times, like comments suggesting that developing sport structures are a first step.
Promotion of Minority-Minority Relations	Statements or observations depicting how a programme supports relationships between 'minorities' or 'outgroups'
Punitive actions	Statements or observations regarding punishing 'non compliant' participants
Representation and role models as keys	Statements depicting how representation and role models are key for social cohesion
Sites for mutual help, programme or civic participation	Statements or ideas about how programmes can be used a vehicle to promote/encourage civic participation, volunteering or engagement in the programme itself - or mutual help more generally
Sites to develop attitudes and life skills (+) (+) (+)	Statements or observations depicting how programmes support attitudes, life skills and the like (e.g. communication, self-confidence, tolerance, respect).
Sites to foster intergroup contact	Statements or observations depicting activities that mix groups from different backgrounds together (e.g. mixed class, mixed gender, mixed ethnicity) and promote, generally speaking, ideas of cooperation and shared goals
Sites to interact and connect to people/resources (+)	Statements reflecting the idea that sport programmes and clubs/centres can be sites to support interaction and connect individuals to people, opportunities and resources.
Sport as a vehicle to express or manage emotions	Statements depicting the idea that the programme activities, and especially sport, are good vehicles to manage or express emotions (e.g. communicate, reduce stress, etc.)

Time, and timing, is needed (+) (+) (+) (+)	These statements or observations refer to the general idea that time is needed for programmes to establish themselves, connect to a community, build trust, and have an impact (e.g. foster relations, change attitudes, etc.). Conversely, observations and statements regarding a lack of time or need for more/different time are also included here.
Top-down imposition	Statements or observations documenting how programme elements are imposed in a top-down way by certain members.
Transfer is up to individuals or target communities (+) (+)	Statements that either explicitly or implicitly suggest that the transfer of programme goals outside of the programme context resides mainly on the participant's shoulders or their broader communities.
Use of modified/social sport activities	Activities that used modified, 'participatory' or 'social' forms (e.g. pedagogical activity, football3, etc.) of sport to promote their social cohesion goals or communicate certain values/skills/attitudes seen as germane to social cohesion (e.g. tolerance).
<b><i>Dimensions (of Social Cohesion)</i></b>	
Dimensions\Acceptance or appreciation of diversity	Goals or statements related to promoting tolerance, respect and acceptance or appreciation of diverse people/groups (or related to combatting discrimination)
Dimensions\Civic Participation / Common Good	Goals or statements related to promoting/supporting civic participation (e.g. voting, democratic processes, etc.) as well as volunteering or helping others (e.g. helping neighbours, mutual help, etc.), which is a common expression of 'common good' in studies.
Dimensions\Equality	Goals or statements related to supporting equal access to various social services, such as healthcare, justice or others, as well as access to education, resources, or employment opportunities.
Dimensions\Shared goals	Goals or statements related to promoting common goals or the sense of a common/shared destiny.

Dimensions\Shared identity/belonging	Goals or statements related to promoting a common sense of identity or belonging with club/organisation/community/country.
Dimensions\Shared values	Goals or statements related to promoting common, shared values (e.g. respect, generosity, etc.).
Dimensions\Social order and peace	Goals or statements related to promoting general social order, such as promoting respect of rules, reducing crime, promoting peace etc.
Dimensions\Social Relations	This code reflects goals or statements related to bringing members of the same groups together / improving relations between members of the same groups, OR bringing members of different groups together / improving relations between members of different groups. In other words, both bridging and bonding are included here, as those categories were too precise for many of the programmes here. This category can also be understood along the lines of social capital or 'ties'
Dimensions\Trust in institutions	Goals or statements related to promoting relationships and trust in formal institutions (e.g. government).
Dimensions\Wellbeing/Health	Goals or statements related to improving individual physical and/or mental health/wellbeing.

# Appendix 5: Thematic Map for Fieldwork Coding (Chapter 6)



## Summary

Social inequalities, changing demographic profiles, ageing populations, and the structural transformation of economies have posed significant challenges to numerous European communities. Recognising these converging trends and the need for holistic development approaches, policymakers, governments, and community programmes have increasingly shifted their attention towards supporting and developing social cohesion. Sport, in particular, has been increasingly called upon to play a role in achieving social cohesion objectives. Due to its popular appeal, relatively low cost, and interactive nature, sport is understood as a potential vehicle to foster social cohesion and contribute to broader social development. Indeed, within the burgeoning sport for development (SFD) area, social cohesion is recognised as a core thematic focus within research and programmes alike.

Despite the growing recognition and support for social cohesion activities, there remain significant debates and gaps in sport and beyond. Specifically, there are important gaps between our theoretical understandings of social cohesion and actual practice in sport for social cohesion. This gap manifests itself in three ways. First, even with the multitude of definitions for social cohesion, these definitions do not necessarily reflect the needs, expectations or understanding of practitioners and participants in different contexts. Numerous researchers suggest that there is a disconnect between formal definitions of social cohesion and how the concept is understood by community members, programme managers or programme participants. Second, we have limited knowledge about the organisations delivering programmes and the approaches within those programmes. Though the field of sport for development is becoming better understood and mapped, the full range and number of organisations delivering sport and social cohesion activities remain unknown, and there is limited information concerning practices employed in the field. Finally, though increasing resources are being invested in sport and social cohesion programming, there is a lack of evidence regarding the impact of these programmes, and the process through which these programmes generate social cohesion remains poorly understood.

Against this background, the following doctoral dissertation seeks to build on the current knowledge and relevance of social cohesion and sport. Specifically, it aims to contribute to the gaps and debates outlined above by engaging in a multi-method study of literature and qualitative research within programmes across Europe. In particular, document analysis, surveys, fieldwork and interviews are used to generate data and analysis is conducted through a variety of more critical or constructive qualitative techniques.

From this, we find that programmes in Europe adopt a fairly consistent view of social cohesion, with specific focus given to dimensions of social relations, common good, sense of identity and acceptance of diversity. To support these dimensions, programmes engage in a number of common



practices, including regular sport activities, mixed group activities, civic participation, life skill development and participatory approaches. However, within these practices, there is a distinct focus on individual-level interventions and specific marginalised sub-groups. This individual-level focus on marginalised groups reinforces notions that these groups are primarily responsible for their condition and “invisibilises” the responsibility of people or institutions in positions of privilege while also helping mask structural inequalities. Thus, to conclude, this dissertation proposes ways forward for programmes, policy and research to support more structural or transformational approaches.

## Zusammenfassung

Soziale Ungleichheiten, sich verändernde demografische Profile, alternde Bevölkerungen und die strukturelle Transformation der Volkswirtschaften haben zahlreiche europäische Gemeinden vor erhebliche Herausforderungen gestellt. Angesichts dieser konvergierenden Trends und der Notwendigkeit ganzheitlicher Entwicklungsansätze haben Politiker, Regierungen und Gemeindeprogramme ihre Aufmerksamkeit zunehmend auf die Unterstützung und Entwicklung des sozialen Zusammenhalts gelenkt. Insbesondere der Sport wird zunehmend eine Rolle bei der Erreichung von Zielen des sozialen Zusammenhalts gefordert. Aufgrund seiner Popularität, seiner relativ geringen Kosten und seines interaktiven Charakters wird Sport als potenzielles Instrument zur Förderung des sozialen Zusammenhalts und als Beitrag zu einer umfassenderen sozialen Entwicklung angesehen. Tatsächlich wird der soziale Zusammenhalt im Bereich Sportentwicklung (SFD) als zentraler thematischer Schwerpunkt sowohl in der Forschung als auch in Programmen anerkannt.

Trotz der wachsenden Anerkennung und Unterstützung für Aktivitäten zur Förderung des sozialen Zusammenhalts, gibt es noch immer erhebliche Debatten und Lücken im Sport und darüber hinaus. Insbesondere gibt es wichtige Lücken zwischen unserem theoretischen Verständnis des sozialen Zusammenhalts und der tatsächlichen Praxis im Bereich Sport für den sozialen Zusammenhalt. Diese Lücke zeigt sich auf drei Arten. Erstens spiegeln selbst bei der Vielzahl von Definitionen für den sozialen Zusammenhalt diese Definitionen nicht unbedingt die Bedürfnisse, Erwartungen oder das Verständnis von Praktikern und Teilnehmern in verschiedenen Kontexten wider. Zahlreiche Forscher weisen darauf hin, dass es eine Diskrepanz zwischen den formalen Definitionen von sozialem Zusammenhalt und dem Verständnis des Konzepts durch Gemeindemitglieder, Programmleiter oder Programmteilnehmer gibt. Zweitens haben wir nur begrenztes Wissen über die Organisationen, die Programme durchführen, und die Ansätze innerhalb dieser Programme. Obwohl das Feld Sport für Entwicklung besser verstanden und kartiert wird, ist die gesamte Bandbreite und Anzahl der Organisationen, die Sport- und Sozialzusammenhalt-Aktivitäten durchführen, unbekannt, und es gibt nur begrenzte Informationen über die in diesem Bereich angewandten Praktiken. Schließlich gibt es trotz der zunehmenden Investitionen in Sport- und Sozialzusammenhalt(s)-Programme einen Mangel an Nachweisen über die Auswirkungen dieser Programme, und der Prozess, durch den diese Programme sozialen Zusammenhalt generieren, ist schlecht verstanden.

Vor diesem Hintergrund zielt die vorliegende Doktorarbeit darauf ab, auf dem aktuellen Wissen und der Relevanz von sozialem Zusammenhalt und Sport aufzubauen. Konkret soll sie dazu beitragen, die oben beschriebenen Lücken und Debatten durch eine multimethodische Studie von Literatur und qualitativer Forschung innerhalb von Programmen in ganz Europa zu untersuchen. Insbesondere werden Dokumentenanalysen, Umfragen, Feldarbeit und Interviews eingesetzt, um

Daten zu generieren, wobei die Analyse durch eine Vielzahl kritischer oder konstruktiver qualitativer Techniken durchgeführt wird.

Daraus ergibt sich, dass die Programme in Europa eine ziemlich konsistente Sichtweise auf sozialen Zusammenhalt haben, wobei ein spezifischer Fokus auf den Dimensionen sozialer Beziehungen, Gemeinwohl, Identitätsgefühl und Akzeptanz von Vielfalt liegt. Um diese Dimensionen zu unterstützen, setzen Programme eine Reihe von gemeinsamen Praktiken ein, einschließlich regelmäßiger Sportaktivitäten, gemischter Gruppenaktivitäten, Bürgerbeteiligung, Lebenskompetenzentwicklung und partizipative Ansätze. Innerhalb dieser Praktiken liegt jedoch ein deutlicher Fokus auf individuellen Interventionen und bestimmten marginalisierten Untergruppen. Dieser individuelle Fokus auf marginalisierte Gruppen verstärkt die Vorstellung, dass diese Gruppen hauptsächlich für ihre Situation verantwortlich sind und "invisibilisiert" die Verantwortung von Menschen oder Institutionen in privilegierter Position, während sie auch strukturelle Ungleichheiten verschleiert. Daher schlägt diese Dissertation abschließend Wege vor, um Programme, Politik und Forschung zu unterstützen und strukturelle oder transformationsorientierte Ansätze zu fördern.