

## **Narrowing the Gap through Sport, Education and Social Capital?**

**Grant Jarvie**

### **Introduction**

In addressing the promise and possibilities of sport, education and social capital this chapter begins by making a number of introductory remarks. First the notion that a relationship between sport and education may contribute to impacting upon people's life chances may be unfamiliar to some. At the heart of this approach is the simple recognition that individuals, groups and even nations located or born into different circumstances face different chances of enjoying desirable outcomes and differential life chances. In the UK one in five children is still growing up in poverty and young people from different backgrounds continue to have unequal chances of enjoying good health, living in a secure environment or doing well at school. More than 11 million live in poverty. One of the most intransigent aspects of twenty-first century welfare reforms in Britain is that the poorest 15 per cent cannot afford to put cash aside to save for retirement- because they lack capital either in terms of savings or real estate (Rutherford and Shah, 2006:11). Africa, the world's second largest continent, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century contained 18 Of the top 20 countries worldwide with the highest infant mortality rate. Sixteen African countries are in the top 20 poorest in the world, with 70% of Africa's population surviving on less than \$2 a day (Jarvie, 2007: 24). The first point then is that a gap exists both within countries and between countries in terms of life chances, the reasons for this gap are complex, differentiated, relational and in many cases unjust. Despite almost a decade of progressive policies in the UK the gap in life chances

between disadvantaged children and their peers has failed to narrow significantly since 1997 (Fabian Society, 2006: xiv).

Second, with specific reference to the theme of this book both sport and education have historically been aligned with both notions of social mobility, social capital and to some extent social transformation. The common denominator in all of these terms being the word *social*. The term is generally invoked to suggest a commitment to the broader welfare of society rather than the narrow interest of particular elites. Recently, radical versions of the notion of social forums and social empowerment for not only groups, or areas but also different parts of the world have been at the heart of a number of actions calling for a fairer more just world-rather than an unbalanced, unfettered form of globalization or market led capitalism-in which the gap between rich and poor is narrowed significantly. It is easy perhaps to be pessimistic about the future and it is important not to overestimate the power of sport and education but it is also vital not to ignore the potential capacity and possibility of the combined impact of sport and education to be a resource of hope for many people(s). It is also critical not to ignore the ‘social ‘in either sport, education or ‘social’ capital.

The third introductory point builds upon the second one and that is to highlight the potential for education through sport to be a catalyst for social change. It is self-evident that attempts to narrow the gap through sport, education and building any sustainable social capital must not attempt to analyse or explain situations but ultimately change situations. What I am suggesting here is far from utopian or indeed new but while it is vital not too overestimate what sport can do, at the same time sport has helped to (i) change some people’s lives (ii) symbolize change but also contribute to social change and

(iii) work across societies and agencies to help or attempt make the world a better place.

Yet, in all of this it is valuable to have a notion of the sort of social change or vision of a better society that might be influencing the way in which sport might be a catalyst of social change.

### **Education through Sport**

Education through sport projects have long since been viewed as agents of social change.

The following are some of the many popular answers that are given when asked what does education through sport provide us with? (i) it can increase knowledge and skills and in a broader sense contribute to the knowledge economy; (ii) it can help to provide opportunities for life-long learning and sustain not just education but an involvement in sport and physical activity; (iii) the voluntary contribution to informal education through sport can make a positive contribution to helping young people; (iv) that education through sport can help foster and develop critical debate about key public issues ; (v) programmes in different parts of the world which involve sport as part of an approach to tackling HIV education clearly view education through sport as an important aspect of international and humanitarian aid efforts; and (vi) and that education through sport helps to foster social capital through fostering relationships, networking and making connections. The effectiveness of this latter point is at the heart of the debate about social capital in the sense that associational activity through both education *and* sport can help people connect through a series of networks and these networks in themselves then constitute a form of social capital particularly where networks tend to share common values. These networks through education and sport therefore have the potential to act as

a form of resource that can be seen, according to Field (2003:1), as forming a kind of capital.

All of this tends to come alive when you look around the world and see some of the empowering things that are going on as a result of education through sport in some of the poorest areas of the world. There is no single agent or group or movement that can carry the hopes of humanity but there are many points of engagement through education and sport that offer good causes for optimism that things can get better.

#### *Higher Education, Sport and International Aid*

Universities through sport and related activities are increasingly involved in forging partnerships which are adding value to both Scotland and the United Kingdom's own international development efforts. Narrowing the Gap through Education in Sport is about the contribution that education in sport, in particular Higher Education, can make in relation to developing people, raising aspirations and being a real resource of hope. Education in and through sport has been making a difference as a result of UK Universities undertaking a significant amount of international work in sport in for example, Zambia, India, Kenya, Israel and Palestine.

#### *European Year of Education through Sport*

Education in Scotland has historically always been associated with preparing people for life as equal citizens in a common culture of community. The 2004 National Debate on Education in Scotland identified that the very purpose of education in Scotland should be broad and wide ranging and should be concerned not just with providing skills to enable people to become 'active citizens of a modern Scotland' (Scottish Executive, 2004b). It is interesting to compare the priorities for education which were identified by the then

Scottish Executive with the aims outlined by the European Parliament for the European Year of Education through Sport. They both (i) highlight social inclusion of disadvantaged groups to be a main priority; (ii) place emphasis on the development of appropriate attitudes and values and focus on active citizenship and community development; (iii) lay emphasis on life long learning and (iv) the European Parliament also places an emphasis on life long sports participation.

Furthermore the data base informing the European Year of Education through Sport, the European survey on sport and physical activity, saw sport as contributing to the development of certain values such as team spirit (61%); discipline (47%), sense of endeavour (43%) and friendship (42%). What Europeans wanted most from sport was a more citizen focused, cleaner model. The former Secretary General for the Council of Europe in defending sport in Europe did not highlight, the European Football or Athletic Championships or other high profile events but rather she stated that the real value of sport and physical activity was the hidden face of sport, the tens of thousands of enthusiasts and volunteers who find in their football, rowing and athletics a place for meeting and exchange but above all the training ground for community life. Sport, for her, was seen par excellence as the ideal school for democracy (sportengland, 1998). The Secretary General had an idea about sport that was informed by a set of values and ideas and that education through sport carried with it significant added value in terms of citizenship, democracy and building trust among Europeans.

Sports participation in Scotland tends to get headline news because sports participation is viewed as being important in health terms and yet the civil renewal argument is just as compelling. It is an argument that has a particular resonance for

volunteers and non-governmental organisations. A 2005 Department of Culture Media and Sport Report which included Scotland in the aggregate UK data, evidenced the part played by sports participation and organisation in being a catalyst to create civil renewal. The key messages were that (i) the UK is above the European average for both membership of sports groups and sports participation, and average for volunteering; (ii) 26% of the UK population were members of sports clubs; (iii) 21% actively played sport in the context of a sports organisation and 6% volunteered in clubs- Scandinavian countries in general displayed higher levels of associational involvement but the UK was ahead of many European Countries; (iv) sport was found to be the most popular type of group activity in the UK; (v) British people were more likely than the average European to belong to sports club and participate in sport and are as about as likely as the average European to volunteer in sports.

Membership of sports clubs appeared to have a number of beneficial impacts, in that members were more likely than non-members to vote, contact an official and sign a petition. Countries with high levels of sports participation tended to have higher levels of social and institutional trust. The correlations were substantial for the level of sports participation in a country and levels of social trust. Life satisfaction was also strong although perhaps not as significant. Countries with high levels of membership of sports groups tended to have high levels of membership of cultural and social groups, suggesting that participation is cumulative. In short membership and participation of sports clubs was associated with being more satisfied with life, more trusting, more sociable, healthier and more positive towards state institutions. Sports members also tend to have slightly more liberal views about immigration.

*'Candle Who Brings a Ray of Hope'*

There is the reality of Maria Urrutia the women from Colombia who lifted 245 Kilos to win Colombia's first ever Olympic Gold Medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. The country as you know usually hits the headlines for other reasons but speaking to her nation following her success she was clear about what sport had helped her to do:

“ She hoped that her success would reach others like her poor, black and female”- she went on –“ I hope others see that you can make a living, see the world and get an education, through sports, or even in music and other arts” (*The Herald* 7 October 2000:18).

In a country where the average wage is less than a euro or a dollar a day, the lucrative European and American road race circuits are attractive career options for Kenyan athletes. When Catherine Ndereba broke the world record in the Chicago marathon in October 2001, she received a \$75,000 prize purse, \$100,000 for breaking the world record and a Volkswagen Jetta worth \$26,125. This was in addition to a not insignificant appearance fee merely for turning up (Schontz, 2002). A world championship gold medal has been estimated to be worth \$60,000, as well as opening other lucrative avenues in terms of qualification for appearance fees in big races (*East African Standard*, 17 November, 2003). Money is perhaps more of a motivation to women due to the independence it buys them. “Once a woman begins to earn her own money, she is valued immediately by her family and her community” (Schontz, 2002, online). The barriers for women acquiring wealth in Kenya are inherently unequal, for

instance, women cannot inherit land and they often invariably live on land as a guest of their male relatives, but athletic wealth in some cases can help buy land. Therefore as Kenyan women win road races and track meets, they can acquire control of substantial amounts of money which allows them to invest in their own land – a once unlikely prospect for women not born into wealthy families.

Founded in 1987 the Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya, lies in one of the countries poorest slum areas (Hogenstad and Tollisen, 2004). An area with a population of nearly one million people and with an average household income, for a family of eight, of about 63 pence a day. Here, sport is placed at the centre of a humanitarian aid programme precisely because it is a point of contact with young kids that can entice young people to learn. It is a vehicle for facilitating mutual self-help and education on a massive scale. Sports leagues far in excess of 14,000 children run on a ‘pay it back’ approach in which in return for help with facilities and organisation players help keep the neighbourhood clean, plant trees, attend aids, pregnancy and drug awareness classes. Scholarships exist for photography, music and drama classes. Teams got points for their work as well as their sport. Reflecting back on the impact of MYSA one former goalkeeper said:

“Older kids who have been involved since it’s beginning have become leaders and role models in the community and football has been the catalyst for their social, physical and intellectual development”



The ethos here was pretty straight forward, ask kids what they want, use sport and physical activity, as a basis for developing economic and social capital, local solutions to local problems, education and a track record of success all of which has been recognised internationally through a number of awards. The Mathare Youth Sports Association was short-listed, indeed got down to the last five, for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for its contribution to attacking poverty. Other nominees included Tony Blair, George Bush and Jacques Chirac.

There is Maria Mutola from Mozambique the 2000 Olympic women's 800 Champion, five time world indoor 800 metres champion and thrice outdoors world record holder and subject of an article entitled 'Candle Who Brings a Ray of Hope'. The article referred to the humanity of the athlete –what the athlete herself calls a moral duty to her country- in that athletic winnings from grand prix victories were often returned home to Mozambique to assist in the purchase of farms and small businesses, wells drilled, schools endowed, children sent abroad to University and in some cases life-saving surgery all dependent upon a track victory (Gillon, *The Herald* 22 January 2004:20). In 2003 when Mutola became the first athlete to collect \$1million for outright victory on the Golden League Athletic Grand Prix Circuit she routinely sent track winnings back to her country of origin. Chamanchulo, the suburb of Maputo in which Mutola grew up, is ravaged by HIV, passed on in childbirth or breast milk to 40% of the children (Gillon, 2004).

Whether the current international arrangements for education through sport or education and sport are robust enough are open to question but they continue to have the potential to provide pathways of hope for many people in different parts of the world. It

is a partnership that if given the opportunities to thrive perhaps could light many candles of hope all over the world but more importantly provide opportunities for better life chances for some. What is clear from these and other examples is that active partnerships involving education through sport at all levels is desirable, perhaps inevitable and certainly a popular agent for bringing about change but that the conditions need to be created to let the social forces, social forums and social empowerment thrive through building new forms of social capital.

### *Sport, Education and the Knowledge Economy*

#### *'Following the National Dream'*

In a relatively autonomous Scotland some of the richest and poorest sectors of society identify with forms of sport in different ways. Contemporary patterns of sports participation in Scotland are illustrative of the fact that sport in Scotland is socially differentiated. Sport's social and commercial power in Scotland makes it a potentially potent force for good and bad. Education through sport in Scotland is important because it can be a symbol of democratic change, it can promote internationality, it can contribute to different ideas of community but it can do all of this within a context that everyone has the right to education. Education in Scotland has historically always been associated with preparing people for life as equal citizens in a common culture of community (Paterson, 2003).

It is arguable that football is the national sport in Scotland but its popularity and potential attraction for young boys and increasingly girls in Scotland should not be underestimated. Football in Scotland has during 2002 undergone a national review and an audit of its structures, responsibilities and provision for youth footballers who do not

make the grade of the professional footballer (Scottish Executive, 2004a). The following example is not atypical of the youthful cultural patriot who wanted to live the dream of Scottish football and found out that he was being released from a premier professional football league club? His mother worrying about the effect this would have on her son said:

‘I would have done anything for him not to experience the hurt, but I didn’t have a choice because all he has ever wanted to be is a footballer. I wouldn’t mind my son being a footballer, but it would be better if he was one with letters after his name and educational qualifications in his pocket’ (*The Scotsman Magazine* 10 June 2004:17).

In 2002, Scottish football clubs released 350 players. That was 30% of the workforce with the most common age being that of 19. Numerous developments have attempted to tackle the issue of youth football and education. There is the Johan Cruyff Academy that in conjunction with European institutions offers programmes in sports management direct to athletes. The Learning in Football Initiative launched at Hampden in 2003 was also aimed at helping footballers find a new career path (Scottish Government 2003). Yet the picture is not the same for women youth footballers. Indeed an essential addition to the 2002 review of Scottish football would have been to include women’s football as part of the review. Stirling University research has found that women footballers in Scotland are by comparison with their male counterparts very well qualified whether it is in terms of standard grades, higher grades, further or higher education degrees (Macbeth, 2003). There were just over 1200 professional male footballers in Scotland but also according to

2001/2002 figures 786 registered women footballers playing in the senior leagues. In many cases this group of women footballers in terms of qualifications are higher than national adult population figures for Scotland as a whole with : (i) 32.9% of women footballers have first or higher degree compared to 2001/2002 figures for the national adult population of 16% of males and 15% of females; (ii) 97.64 % of registered women footballers hold standard grades compared to national adult population figures of just over 67% of males and 72% of females and (iii) in terms of higher grades just over 64.18% of women footballers held higher grades compared to the national adult male population figure of 59% and with the national adult female population of 52% having higher grades in 2001/2002.

A critical comment about education through sport might reflect upon agents who maybe the product of the Scottish education system. A system which itself has been critically reviewed but remains internationally respected. Scots have always been ambivalent about freedom but the story of what the education system has given to the Scottish people is the priceless ability to recognise the bigger questions, situate your own position in a wider context and think things out for yourself about what to do about it- Is it worth holding on to the idea that education through sport and can contribute to this sense of what Paterson (2003) refers to as ordered freedom? It maybe suggested that in many ways the partnership of education through sport can really make a difference to the quality of life in Scotland and many other places. Yet an effective partnership in action means that in a country such as Scotland that has often been cited as having a good education system perhaps needs to do more to help sport with it's challenges. It might be useful to evaluate whether the partnership of education through sport and continues to

provide pathways of hope for many people in different parts of the world, including Scotland. It is important not to let down or forget the boy or girl who wanted to live the Scottish dream but look after them better, help to create the conditions to let the relationship of education through sport thrive- that would truly be a partnership in action worth trusting and striving for because education through sport has much to offer.

### **Narrowing the Gap through Education and Sport?**

Is education through sport about citizenship, social cohesion and social responsibility? When the former first Minister for Scotland, Jack McConnell, in his St Andrews day speech talked of talking Scotland up, about starting with Scotland's young people, about renewing democracy, about the importance of cultural activities, including sport, he could have almost been paraphrasing Tom Johnston the former Secretary of State for Scotland who in November 1942 charged the then Advisory Council of Education in Scotland with being a parliament of education and seeking how schools could ensure that young people were properly equipped to discharge the duties and exercise the rights of citizenship (Paterson,2003).

The notion of citizenship, like the word community, is very slippery indeed. Both of these terms carry with them notions of trust and mutual obligation involving others. For the current Prime Minister the notion of citizenship is straight forward in that it implies that individuals owe a duty to one another and the broader society. The collective power of all should be used for the individual good of each. Gordon Brown, has continually argued that in recognition of our inter-dependence upon one another people must accept their responsibilities as individuals (Brown, 2002). Community action should never be allowed to be a substitute for personal responsibility to others. There is material

to suggest that education through sport can help with some of this. Programmes such as First Tee Golf in America which had Tiger Woods playing golf with hundreds of inner city kids in New York is based upon nine core values, including trusting others, but also making golf more accessible.

However,

### **Concluding remarks**

Current debates about social capital and social cohesion may, at one level, raise questions concerning the direction of sport within social policies. Sports have been at the heart of city life in many parts of the world for sometime and yet urban policy needs to address the issue of whether the role of sport remains that of entertainment or whether sport is a social right or both. If sport were to facilitate social capital then cities rather than using sport as a basis for attracting the national and international destination of major events or sports festivals might wish to resurrect the notion of sport as a social right rather than a spectacle or form of entertainment. Cities in all parts of the world are first and foremost places to live for millions of people and yet access to sport remains problematic for many vulnerable groups of people. The citizens who seem the most ignored are those with the fewest resources (Harvey, 2003). The Canadian Council on Social Development points out that more than 60 percent of children in the poorest households almost never participate in organized sports, whereas the figure is 27 percent for children from affluent homes. The Council also confirmed the theory that cities that give young people a voice in policy development are more inclusive than others. Thus it might be argues that if sport does help to facilitate notions of social capital and/or community then a pre-

requisite of any such approach necessitates viewing sport as a social right rather than a form of entertainment. Harvey (2003) is insightful when he suggests that the sociability networks that may develop in and around community sport and recreation initiatives may help to strengthen social bonds and consequently a potential source of social capital. If this is the case then sport as a social right for children and all vulnerable groups cannot be left to chance.

The concept of social capital carries with it a heavy burden of claims that it only recently has been subjected to critical review (Johnston and Percy-Smith, 2003). At its heaviest, as typified by writers such as Putnam the presence or absence of social capital is used as an explanatory factor for economic and political performance. More modest claims are also made for social capital in that it allegedly contributes to the formation of strong formal and informal networks, shared norms and trusting social relationships. In relation to communities it is asserted that high trust communities typically experience less crime, anti-social behaviour and social fragmentation. For individuals social capital it is suggested contributes to better health, higher levels of educational attainment and access to employment. Social capital it is maintained is a factor that contributes to higher levels of civic and voluntary activity and in turn such activity enhances democracy by offering citizens greater choices and opportunities.

On the other hand Portes (1998) has identified at least four negative consequences associated with social capital. First, the exclusion of outsiders as a result of strong ties that exist within a particular group or community. Second, group or community closure which inhibits the economic success of its members as a result of free-riding on the part of some group members. Third, conformity within the group or community resulting in

restrictions of personal freedom and autonomy. Finally social capital is partly responsible for a downward levelling as a result of group solidarity that arises out of opposition to mainstream society and inter-generational experiences of exclusion and discrimination. In all of these ways social capital is viewed as excluding outside influences and enforcing damaging group norms if you do not belong to a community or group. Thus it is important to be aware that the notion of social capital has a dark side as well as a positive side and that discussion of sport, education and social capital must be sensitive to both the positive and negative aspects of social capital in action.

This chapter has looked at some of the arguments and some evidence which would support the fact that sport and education or education through sport provides a potential resource of hope which can make a difference to people's lives. Historically sport and education have been key avenues of social mobility and an escape from poverty for some. It has been suggested that rather than capital the emphasis should be on the 'social' in social capital and aligned to that it is necessary to think of ways in which the 'social' in social science, social change and social empowerment may contribute to alternative practices and ways of thinking about sport and education. Thinking systematically about emancipatory alternatives and the part played by sport and education is only one way or element in the process by which the limits of the possible can expand and the promise and possibilities of the power of education through sport can become more of a reality for more people. It is important to remember that around the world many new proposals are continually being tried.

The social challenge is enormous and the promise of education through sport should not detract from the fact that increasing competition within some of the poorest



areas of the world often depletes social capital and leaves its potential fragmented. The informal sector sometimes dissolves self-help networks and solidarities essential to the survival of the very poor and it is often women and children who are the most vulnerable. An NGO worker in Haiti, describes the ultimate logic of neo-liberal individualism in a context of absolute immiseration (Davis, 2006:184):

‘Now everything is for sale. The women used to receive you with hospitality, give you coffee, share all that she has in her home. I could go get a plate of food at a neighbour’s house; a child could get a coconut at her godmother’s, two mangoes at another aunt’s. But these acts of solidarity are disappearing with the growth of poverty. Now when you arrive somewhere, either the women offers to sell you a cup of coffee or she has no coffee at all. The tradition of mutual giving that allowed us to help each other and survive- this is all being lost’

Narrowing the Gap through Education in Sport is about the enormous almost unique contribution that education in sport, in particular Higher Education, has made in relation to developing people, raising aspirations and being a real resource of hope, nationally, internationally and locally. Yet the relationship between social capital and education in a recent review calls for an increasing awareness of not only the need for alternative conceptualizations of social capital but an awareness of the diverse number of ways in which this relationship is examined, defined and operationalised (Dika and Singh, 2002). The conceptual umbrella of social capital is often stretched to include a variety of social factors that do not always coherently hand-to-gether. Problems with the

conceptualization and measurement of social capital have resulted in a body of research that does not always acknowledge the differential access to social networks and social resources. Thus much remains to be done of the *social* in social capital is to be fully realized.

The promise of education through sport to narrow the gap or forge new forms of social capital should not be overestimated. A final issue might be the right of all people to have access to education and/ or sport and the small contribution that education through sport can make to this goal. With the international campaigns against world debt in abeyance new ideas and progressive ideas are needed to cure the problems in part caused by international finance institutions attempting to solve the debt problem of the global South and other places. Football is popular in places such as Brazil where it is estimated that some 250 million children work and a further 250 million who are not working are in school. The need to raise money for the family unit through the informal economy means that children often do not have access to education and the failure to study only serves to maintain poverty (Landman, 2004). Yet some of the projects and illustrated in this chapter highlight the promise, possibilities and limits of education through sport to make a difference, be a ray of hope. Sport cannot do this on it's own but swapping international debt for education, including education through sport, maybe one of the possible strategies open to a progressive, humanitarian international approach to education through sport which could challenge the very values at the heart of global sport . It may assist in creating the conditions that may allow education through sport to thrive. In short swapping debt for education including education through sport may assist millions of

children and others to gain substantive education, transferable skills and enable some ultimately to become more active participants in a national economy, secure better life chances and escape the cycle of poverty.

### **Acknowledgements**

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