Peace and Reconciliation

Critical Reflections Across Theory and Practice

J.T. Sugden and J.P. Sugden

Abstract

This chapter is written from the distinct perspective of father and son who have worked in and around the world of sport for peace and reconciliation – for 30 and 13 years respectively, both on the ground and at study. In this contribution, we consider the real and potential capacity of sport as a vehicle for building and sustaining peace in the context of societies that are deeply fractured and which, resulting from these fissures, have experienced and/or continue to experience a range of socio-political trauma and conflict across multiple levels. This narrative is constructed around critical reflections of the field and draws sporadically from three case studies in regions of which we both have overlapping experience: Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and South Africa. Across these contexts, with varying degrees of success, sport has played a more or less significant role within the prolonged peace processes. We reflect on the successes and failures – and the role of critical sociology across these contexts – concluding with some key lessons and potential ways forward.

Introduction and Opening Observations

Aside from shared experience in the field, the chapter authors both share an affinity for the American sociologist C. Wright Mills, who has proven to be a major influence on our development as academics and activists. This being the case, inevitably our diverse yet conjoined roles in the evolution of sport for development and peace (SDP) and interpretation of that experience has been – and continues to be – an application of a particular "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959). A perspective that has led to the articulation and mobilisation of critical pragmatism as a central pillar to the theoretical and methodological paradigm that has driven our work in this space. In this chapter, we conjoin this foundation with our practical experience across various peacebuilding fields to share the many lessons learned along the way. We finish with some key recommendations, and warnings, for the future theory and practice of sport for peace and reconciliation.

This leads us to the first observation we want to make: SDP does not flourish in an a-theoretical or methodological vacuum and has benefited greatly from gaining access to – and drawing eclectically from – the multi-disciplinary perspectives of critical sociologists; social anthropologists; ethnographers; social historians; and related academic fields of inquiry. Likewise, these academic fields themselves are enhanced when they draw upon the evidence and wisdom accumulated by practitioners and professionals working in the SDP field; in this regard, SDP is a praxis-based endeavour, that is to say, SDP is a flexible and dynamic enterprise wherein the construction and articulation of theoretical models and policy development and the undertaking of research and the evaluation of practical interventions and programmes undertaken on the ground, are mutually inter-dependent. To begin with, SDP is not a one-size-fits-all garment and no SDP initiatives should be undertaken before the agent or agencies involved in their design, delivery and promotion have undertaken an in-depth and thorough-going analysis of the transcending socio-political and ethnocultural context within which the initiative is planned to take place. Once furnished with this contextual information, any given sport-based peacebuilding/conflict-resolution/development programme can be designed and tailored to fit the specific needs of the different communities that populate the regions and locales in question.

This brings us to a second key observation; SDP encompasses two distinct arms with fundamentally different endeavours, seeking distinct outcomes. First, there are SFD projects that focus on disadvantaged communities with goals like social inclusion, healthcare, gender equity and socio-economic development. And second, there is the use of sport in the pursuit of peacebuilding (hereafter SFP). In short, SFP projects focus on societies under extreme stress, with goals of peacebuilding in the wake of turmoil (Darnell, 2012; Coalter, 2013). In SFD the sport generally becomes the classroom with a facilitator/change agent (local or otherwise) driving the process. While in SFP the facilitator is an active observer, their outsider status and neutrality can be an asset and the planning of such work is encompassed in the overall goals of reconciliation and relationship building among local partners. Though these endeavours share certain characteristics, such as the use of sport as a “honey pot” to attract vulnerable peoples or their inclusive nature and design, in our experience SFP can be less morally/ethically fraught, in that regardless of the origins of the organisation or facilitators, the key assumption is universal, in that peace is generally considered preferable to conflict, though there are exceptions (see Spears 2017).

Our next observation is that; as much as possible SFP work should be a bottom-up, not a top-down undertaking. That is to say, having done the contextual analysis agencies should identify and work with local actors and peace-orientated activists and grass-roots organisations to help to frame the nature and content of any given sport-based intervention. As part of this collaborative framing process, any major obstacles to peacebuilding should be jointly identified looking through the lens of “critical pragmatism”, to chart a navigable route around and through such obstacles in ways that the advancement of human rights and social justice - key foundations that underpin and anchor any peacebuilding process - can be put in place. This collaborative framing process will necessitate the building of partnerships between external agencies alongside regional and local organisations involving a give and take of resources, ideas, and technologies. Ideally, this will lead to the evolution of symmetrical power relations among external and local organisations. Evidence suggests that when local stakeholders have a shared sense of ownership of a particular project, the chances of achieving sustainable success are considerably higher (Schulenkorf, Sugden & Burdsey, 2014). In this regard, rather than parachuting into a conflict zone bringing prefabricated apparatus to roll out, sport-based peacebuilding programmes should gradually build up knowledge-exchange relationships with local organisations whereby imported materials and know-how can be adapted and enhanced through local grass-roots input. But it is worth adding a cautionary note.

Whilst partnerships are important, they can come with costs and challenges. In other words, each partner may come to the table with differing interests and agendas which will need to be carefully juggled and balanced for equilibrium to be achieved and maintained, so permitting the initiative in question to move forward with an even momentum, allowing for progressive and cumulative learning and sharing to take place This is an evolving procedure whereby learning gleaned in one particular theatre of conflict can be disseminated and shared to be adapted and implemented in other theatres. We refer to this as the “snowballing process” as in the analogy of a child who – starting with a small snowball – rolls it in a field to make it bigger so that eventually it is large enough to form the body of a snowman. During this process the snowball does two things: firstly, it accumulates additional snow from the new terrain covered (let’s call this “learning”); secondly, it leaves behind deposits of material that it has picked up on its journey across the lands covered (let’s call this “depositing”). Drawing upon our own experience, an example of how this snowballing effect works is revealed in the evolution and adoption of a values-based approach to teaching and coaching SFP in the Football4Peace (F4P) programme.

F4P: The Foundations

The roots of F4P reside in Northern Ireland where in the 1980s and 1990s, John Sugden led the development of 'Belfast United', possibly the world's first-ever sport-based peacebuilding project. Belfast United had a fairly simplistic approach at the heart of which was the view that using sport to promote friendly contact between the rival Loyalist (Protestant) and nationalist (Catholic) communities in Belfast was a step - albeit a small one - in the direction of resolving conflict, to contribute what was then a fledgling and more wide-ranging political peace process. In the mid-1990s, circumstances took John's family from Northern Ireland to England where he became involved in a project that had aspirations to use sport to help build peace among Jewish and Arab communities in Israel.

Beginning with the template John had helped to develop for Belfast United and working with a team of colleagues and a small number of student volunteers, a similar pilot project involving Christian Arab and Jewish communities in the Galilee region of Northern Israel was undertaken. The pilot project was deemed as successful. However, in evaluation meetings that took place after the event, it was agreed that more could be done with the content and quality of the sport-based contact experience to enhance and make more potent the peacebuilding potential of the cross-community contact. It was determined that rather than simply focussing on the enhancement of technical aspects of the teaching/coaching experience, more might be achieved if the activities in question could be impregnated with a series of values which once imbibed and absorbed by the participants could travel with them beyond the boundaries of the sports field, so making them more receptive to other ideas and strategies seeking to promote harmonious inter-community relations and peacebuilding. The values/principles that form the spine of this approach were derived from the United Nation's universal declaration of human rights (1948) and are: neutrality, equity and inclusivity; trust and respect. This values-based approach to sport-based peacebuilding work has become a central tenet of the F4P model and method as it has been further rolled out around the world. Through the snowballing process, the F4P model has since been further elaborated and strengthened through working with partners in South Africa, Gambia, South Korea and Columbia before coming full circle to Northern Ireland where it all began.

Along with the propagation of the values-based model, there is the need for and importance of competent and comprehensive training for those who get involved in the delivery of sport-based peace programmes. To this end, F4P offers bi-annual training camps for volunteers, many of whom are undergraduate or postgraduate students studying sport-related courses, some of which have considerable content directed towards SDP endeavours. In recent years, there has been an expansion of the number of institutions worldwide offering courses such as these, and there are several clear advantages to be gained by recruiting such student volunteers into SDP programmes more broadly. With such backgrounds, they come into any chosen SDP programme with a grounding in some of the academic disciplines and debates that feed into and strengthen SDP activity, such as an awareness of post-colonialism (Darnell and Hayhurst, 2011) the role of gender (Oxford and McLachlan, 2018) and the critical proactivism discussed here. Many of them will also be well versed in the professional and practical skill sets in areas such as physical education and sport coaching which will help them to meet and overcome challenges encountered when working in the field. They will also have been vetted with regard to their suitability to work with children and young people and are equipped with training in research and evaluative methodologies. This is something that should be a minimum standard for anyone who wants to work and/or volunteer in the field of SDP more broadly.

Research and evaluation is an important element of the F4P training curriculum. This means that overseen by more experienced staff, volunteers who have come through this sort of training programme can be placed at the sensitive sharp end of evidence gathering, helping to fulfil monitoring and evaluation strategies, perhaps helping reduce costs by avoiding exorbitant fees levied by outside consultants for monitoring and evaluation work. This training does not have to be exclusive for educated elites but can and should be accessible to different varieties of grass-roots community organisations and volunteers. For instance, as well as recruiting and training students from a variety of academic institutions, F4P's training is also done collaboratively and in situ with partner organisations in the various regions where F4P operates its programmes. These local partner organisations also send their own workers/volunteers to F4P training camps. Through this sharing and cascading of appropriate training, SDP programmes can become more professional, robust and sustainable. This raises the issues of standardisation and quality assurance, the consideration and oversight of which may be taken on by an external overseeing body such as the U.N or one of its departments. The challenge here will be to introduce effective and impartial levels of oversight without turning it into a heavy-handed bureaucratic exercise undermining the autonomy, rich diversity, flexibility and creativity of the SDP field as it currently operates.

Returning to SFP more specifically, working in conflict zones adhering to the principle of neutrality is of paramount importance. To be successful and productive, SFP must be seen to be unshackled by ideology: those agents and/or agencies involved should be seen not to be associated with one particular religious creed or political philosophy. Taking sides cannot be an option for individuals or agencies engaged in SFP work. Any conflict-resolution initiative that is perceived by some to have adopted a prejudicial position or operate from a particular ideological perspective that favours one side or another, is doomed to failure. For instance, in the case of F4P those who take part, whether they be children, volunteer coaches, parents or local officials, must agree beforehand that they will leave their ethnoreligious persuasion /affiliation and their politics outside the F4P venue. Not only should SFP be ideology-free, but it should also be idealistically free.

In our view, the credibility of broader SDP efforts has been undermined by those we and others (Coalter 2013), have referred to as SDP evangelists. These are people who regularly trot out the fabled mantra of sport as a panacea, having the capacity to save the world. "Sport has the power to save the world" was a phrase first uttered by Nelson Mandela (2000). While Mandela could rightfully draw from his own experience as someone who used sport as a vehicle to heal wounds and build peace in post-apartheid South Africa, many of those who have subsequently and sometimes opportunistically invoked Mandela's sermon have failed to supply supporting evidence to lend credibility to their own forays into this space. Just because a great figure says something it does not make it true! The same can be said of the utterances of celebrities we like to refer to as the SDP celebrity chasers - those that adopt a publicity-driven celebrity approach to bolster the cases for their involvement in SDP work. This usually involves trying to cultivate and harvest the photo and sound-bite support and endorsements of current and former sports stars along with A and B-list film and media celebrities. In our experience, while this may generate media exposure which might be used as bait to lure in corporate financial sponsorship, this is all too often done at the expense of putting time and effort into engaging with and practising community-level grassroots endeavours. Critical efforts that are locally grounded and theoretically informed.

The sociological imagination and pragmatic peace processes

In terms of his own ontological/epistemological positioning, Mills (1959) was highly influenced by the subject of his doctoral studies, that is, pragmatism, which advocates the

science of the possible whereby action and intervention are linked to outcomes that are themselves based upon a critical assessment of what can be achieved within a given set of situational circumstances (see Kadlec, 2007). Critical pragmatism emphasises theoretical development and refinement through critical, practical, empirical engagement, rather than fixating upon abstract debate and unmoveable theoretical principles. This view recognises that the construction of society is not passively structural but is an embodied process of individual and collective actions. An informed and engaged sociological imagination can determine strategies for progressive and pragmatic engagement with social problems, with a view to influencing local policies and interventions that could improve the conditions of society's most vulnerable groups. It is towards the synergy between this approach and elements of modern peacebuilding discourse that we turn next.

Models of Practice in the SFP Field

Before we return to the consideration of sport as a vehicle for peacebuilding, it is useful to look briefly at what can be learned from theories and models of practice that have been developed by other researchers and scholars working in the general field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. We do not aim to review all such interpretations and typologies, rather to consider those most relevant in informing and strengthening our own critical positioning. Some of these are based on the pioneering work of Paulo Freire (1970), who in his classic statement, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was one of the first to point out that development programmes implemented from outside in a top-down in nature, tend to augment rather than ameliorate the circumstances of exploitation and oppression felt by impoverished communities in Brazil and Chile. Similarly, Adam Curle (1994) drew on fieldwork experiences in the war-torn Balkans in the 1980s and 1990s to advocate the notion of "peacebuilding from below". A strategy whereby external forms of intervention and mediation concentrate on facilitating the organic empowerment and active participation of local actors and agencies in conflict-resolution and reconciliation.

Galtung (1990) identifies the interrelationship between visible and less visible violence. To begin conflict transformation and achieve sustainable peace, it is necessary to address less visible violence. Building upon this, Marie Dugan (1996) developed a "nested paradigm" model which is a "sub-system" approach linking the challenges of conflict-resolution to the broader necessity of peacebuilding. Put simply, at a macro and micro level, a peacebuilding strategy could be designed to address both the systemic concerns and problematic issues and relationships existing at a local level. The sub-system approach allows one to shape both grassroots relationships, as well as contribute to wider systematic change.

In concert with the thinking of Dugan, John Paul Lederach (2005), who has had a profound influence on the authors' perspectives on peace and reconciliation, has theorized a "web approach" to peacebuilding. He encourages interventions that explicitly focus on strategic networking or "web making", a term used to describe the building of a network of relationships and partnerships with significant local entities and actors drawing upon cultural modalities and resources to deal with conflict within its setting. The model he uses to help us envisage holistic and sustainable peacebuilding is a triangle or pyramid, the apex or level one of which represents international and national political actors. In the middle level are found regional political leaders and constituency representatives, including religious, business and trades union leaders and so forth who have connections with and access to level one actors. Finally, at level three, the grassroots level, there is the vast majority who are most affected by the conflict on a day-to-day basis. Lederach (2005) argues that for a peace process to be successful and sustainable, it must operate across and include all levels of the pyramid,

especially level three: in the communities where conflicts are routinely and regularly played out.

Notably, such perspectives emerged from critique of the "liberal peace" model – which holds that societies would achieve a sustainable peace when their systems and structures more closely resemble those further down the line to fabled "developed" status (see Doyle, 2005). This critical mass, spurred by the failure of US-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, has now led to the "pragmatic turn" wherein neoliberal institutions and adjunct schools of thought have begun to note the efficacy approaches such as Lederach's (see De Conning, 2018). Indeed in 2016 the UN recognised that peacebuilding approaches should now be focused on "sustaining peace" (UN, 2016), or multilevel, multifaced strategies that seek to build and maintain the house of peace across multiple levels. This "pragmatic turn" joins the "local turn" – the empowerment and engagement with local actors over purely external intervention – in characterising the contemporary peacebuilding discourse (see Paffenholz, 2015). The recognition by neoliberal institutions that linear modalities are unworkable in favour of long-held beliefs by peacebuilding scholars that foreground multidimensional approaches, is significant. Yet for some, the key translation of policy into practice from such organisations is yet to be seen (Autessere, 2019; De Coning and Gelot, 2020). There are several reasons for this, but among them are the difficultly and, therefore, unwillingness of donors and UN member states to implement new frameworks; a lack of understanding from the peacebuilding community around the sustained peace agenda; the restrictive nature of funding protocols, and a "lack of courage on the part of decision-makers to embrace complexity and uncertainty" (Paffenholz, 2021, p. 373). For us, the closure of the United Nations Office for Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) in 2017 so that such work can be brought further in line with the activities and agenda of the IOC, is indicative of this institutional rigidity.

However, the above does not mean that effective and contemporary peacebuilding praxis must desist elsewhere, where the flow of communication between different peacebuilding efforts is essential, across and between Lederach's (2005) three levels. Gavriel Salomon (2002) refers to this as "the ripple effect" through which the impact of peace education programmes spreads to wider social circles of society and eventually permeates overarching institutional and political frameworks. The key values in this process are represented by those middle-level actors who have one foot in community cultures and the other in higher-level policy-making circles. The potential here is that through the absorption of new peacebuilding modalities and fledgling cross-community dialogue at lower levels, mid-range actors can translate and transfer such work to buttress a progressive policy agenda at the macro level. After all the UNOSDP was initially formed in such a way.

This ripple effect is most effectively created by identifying and building active partnerships with individuals representing organisations that have the proven capacities to operate between levels one, two, and three. As middle-level actors, they are ideally located to bring people together and weave dialogue, ideas, and programmes across boundaries. By capitalizing on key social spaces, they can spin a web of sustainable relationships. Critical to all these approaches is the praxis element and through it the empowerment of subordinate actors and groups through their active participation in peacebuilding programmes and processes. Through this, the micro (personal) experience of conflict can be connected and problematised in relation to the macro (public) system of division that can become ingrained and self-perpetuating as a result of prolonged violence. In Israel/Palestine for example, division is the primary colour in the fabric of social, economic and political culture (Shafir, 2017). Yet, in the face of such systemic malaise, perhaps grassroots, civil society activism

can be the only way of influencing the thinking and manoeuvring of powerbrokers by creating a ripple effect that eventually washes over the shoes of those who walk in the corridors of power (see Sugden and Tomlinson, 2017).

Implications: SFP as a piece of the puzzle

Analysing the active role of sport in the relationship between political and civil society is a key to understanding any role it can have in promoting progressive social change. It is also useful in helping us understand the underlying dynamics of peace processes which, in their own way, require a revolution in established social and political relations. While there can be little doubt that the final deals and treaties that are characteristic of the formal phase of a peace process are crafted and agreed in political society, this level of political concord cannot be achieved and successfully implemented without significant support in civil society. Cultural movements are not passive partners in this relationship. At times, it is possible that events and movements shaped in civil society outpace and lead to radical change in the circumstances of political society.

Peace processes are messy affairs: hugely complex enterprises that move forwards or backwards according to conditions prevalent in the transcending social and political order. Usually, they are driven by activities and actors in political society. However, if there are major social and cultural impediments, "road maps to peace" that take account of the political sphere alone are doomed to failure. Profound changes in perceptions of the "other" rarely take place due to political accords, for those who have known, lived and experienced conflict and violence it lives long in the memory. This is why sustained efforts at mediation and innovative approaches to humanise opposed groups to one another are worthwhile. To illustrate, we like the "peace bus" analogy. Politicians may be in the driving seat but for the bus to get anywhere meaningful along its road map there must be passengers willing to climb on board. This comes gradually through social and cultural engagement in everyday life. The challenge for peace activists is to discover ways to join up specific grassroots, civil society interventions with more broadly influential policy communities and those elements of political society. In doing so, disparate communities may begin to imagine travelling the road to peace together. We have found sport, like other cultural artefacts such as art and music, to be useful in this regard – yet it is important not to overstate such work. A safeguard against this is effective and honest analysis of practice.

Monitoring and evaluation

As Coalter (2009) and others have argued, paper declarations and accompanying rhetoric are well-meaning but useless without evidence and analysis. Sport in and of itself has no magical qualities but is a very flexible crucible into which we can pour ideas and ideals based on notions of human rights and social justice. Realistic and objective evaluation is a crucial element of successful SDP programmes. As already discussed, at every level of its articulation, applied research and evaluation are essential features of any credible SDP programme. The research has a complex, two-way dynamic: ongoing learning about the transcending social and political context that is used in the pragmatic design and development of the programme of intervention; and detailed evaluation of the impact of the project at each level, up to and including, where possible, tracking its influence on the transcending social and political context. Such circular and inclusive approaches to research and evaluation can enable projects to develop organically, from the bottom up, as the knowledge and viewpoints gleaned from all key actors and stakeholders are used to refine and reform interventions year on year. It has also helped to facilitate growth and development of local ownership and sustainability of the project as the communities themselves take increasing responsibility for

the design and delivery of SFP events, as well as using ideas drawn from this experience in the development of programmes of cross-community cooperation outside of the SFP framework in question.

Conclusion and Outlook:

The work of F4P in areas such as Northern Ireland and Israel, where the authors have spent most time as practitioners, has been difficult to measure in terms of overall success. Numbers can be one broad indication – in over 10 years, F4P in Israel grew from engaging with a handful of children in Northern Galilee to the facilitation of 14 Cross Community Sports Partnerships (CCSPs), bringing together 40 Jewish and Arab communities and approximately 1500 children and hundreds of community leaders from both sides of the divide (Brighton.ac.uk, 2021). The role and involvement of international F4P volunteers then rolled back as local leaders and other NGOs took the reins. Due to this catalyst, the Israeli Sport Authority itself began its own programs that specifically dealt with the formation and sustenance of CCSPs. Yet division and conflict remain and, at the time of writing, seem worse than ever. In Northern Ireland the case is somewhat similar, with the humble beginnings of Belfast United discussed above pollinating across the region into broader programs and partnerships that are locally led and supported. Yet divisions remain, despite the good Friday agreement and subsequent steps towards reconciliation at the local and national level.

In South Africa, a place where both authors spent a great deal of time (in mainly scholarship over practice), sport was heralded, by arguably the greatest statesperson of modern times, to have healed the wounds of the rainbow nation, forming a bridge between disparate communities and healing the deep and festering wounds of division. In this context, sport transformed from a stick employed by the apartheid regime to force its longevity, into a carrot that pulled both sides of the divide towards acceptance and reconciliation (Höglund and Sundberg, 2008). Yet once again division remains evolving into socio-political fractures within which sport has had a less positive influence than before. Indeed, the South African "Springboks" rugby team, once a talisman of reconciliation, have now been dubbed a vessel for a "rainbow nationalism" that legitimises and deepens inequality (Layman, 2021). Seen from these perspectives, it seems that SFP efforts have failed and are doomed to do so.

At this point, in search of a way forward, it's helpful to draw, once again, from peacebuilding literature. Societies are messy and complex, constituting multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power (Mann, 1986, p. 1), therefore the lived reality of any peacebuilding intervention is decidedly more fluid, complex and fickle than sport-based interventions might imply. In many ways the reality is more like Lederach's "web approach", connecting the levels of actors and action. The success and transferability of interventions or innovative practices will depend on the animation and agency provided by key actors operating across and between each level of activity set against the prevailing politics of the times. Yet once again a measure or even the goal of "success" is fraught. Contemporary peacebuilding is viewed as non-linear, indeed a World Bank and UN joint report (2018, p. 77) admitted that "Pathways to peace" consist of a number of "entry points" and that the cessation of conflict requires "flexibility [and] adaptability". For Paffenholz (2021), reflecting on the positive peace processes in Kenya and the failed attempts at liner peacebuilding efforts in Syria by the UN, this necessitates engagement in "perpetual peacebuilding". This, among other things, requires the recognition of the "complex realities of peacebuilding" along with "the abandonment of notions of 'success' and 'failure'" ideas

around "peace" itself must be understood as "subjective and utopian" (Paffenholz, 2021, pp. 376-378). These perspectives mean that we can recognise our efforts for what they are – efforts. In this regard, forward momentum is not and should not be viewed as inevitable. For this, we would like to borrow a useful analogy from Kleinfield (cited in De Conning, 2018, p. 312) where progress in peacebuilding

> …looks less like a freight train barrelling down a track, whose forward motion can be measured at regular increments, and more like a sailboat, sometimes catching a burst of wind and surging forward, sometimes becalmed, and often having to move in counter intuitive directions to get to its destination.

Viewed thusly, one can better understand the efficacy of sport for peace and reconciliation efforts across our three contexts, as part of a complex jigsaw, with no picture on the box, a puzzle in which the pieces must be continually shifted, tested for fit or reshaped entirely. South Africa is again a useful example as the role of sport shifts, at the community level, from one of ethno-racial reconciliation to one of provision and education through the plethora of SDP organisations that have formed to fill this vacuum suffered by nation's most deprived groups (see Burnett, 2009; 2015). Agility and flexibility are, again, strategically crucial in this space and though the idea of "success" in peacebuilding might be unobtainable or even misleading, there are a number of strategies and theories one can apply to ensure the winds driving our SFP sailboat are blowing in the right direction.

In the first instance, applying a sociological imagination towards working collaboratively and dialogically with local communities, so that they can themselves imagine a society free of conflict, is a strategy that has served us well in searching for solutions and connections between the micro and macro realities of conflict. Second and connected is the application of the ripple effect model. Understanding, adapting, and applying this model is, for us, essential in maximising both impact and sustainability of SFP interventions. Third, a constant critical rethinking of our own biases, assumptions, positionalities, contributions, and potential in contributing to sustained peace must be maintained through both personal reflection and effective monitoring and evaluation. And, finally, for too long SFP work has taken place in relative isolation from more mainstream peacebuilding and international relations scholarship and practice. Engagement with mainstream peacebuilding literature reveals more commonalities than differences, and as scholar/practitioners (we should look to be both) this is a rich well from which to draw. Unwittingly or otherwise, SFP praxis was ahead of the game when all those years ago in Belfast it was realised that cross-community sport, alongside a network of other processes, could contribute to a rolling back of violent conflict in Northern Ireland. This idea has, to varying degrees, formed a web of positive contributions in deeply divided societies across the globe. Yet we finish with a note of caution. In a results-based world of NGO, governmental, and academic endeavour, there are vast pressures to overstate and simplify the role and size of SFP's contribution to the peacebuilding puzzle. Doing so can undermine any progress, alienate local communities, and limit the capacity of such work to do good. In this and many other respects, promoting peace and reconciliation through sport is a difficult, complex and fraught undertaking, however we still wonder if there is another out there more worthwhile?

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