

The quest for legitimacy: Discussing the rational myth inherent in 'Sport for development and peace'

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Abstract

During the twenty-first century, the sport for development and peace (SDP) movement has emerged, which conceptualizes sport's contribution to international development. As of today, there are hundreds of programs worldwide where sports are used to obtain different development and peace objectives. The SDP movement has subsequently turned into a recognized and legitimate component of the global development sector. In this respect, it has evolved into an institution, not least given the social construction of sport as a vehicle to bring about development and peace. In this article, two Scandinavian SDP programs serve as examples: LdB FC for Life in South Africa (sport and HIV/AIDS prevention) and Open Fun Football Schools in Moldova (sport and peace building). Drawing on a case study methodology, representatives (i.e., initiators, sponsors/donors and local personnel affiliated with the two programs) have been interviewed. Furthermore, observations in South Africa and Moldova have been made targeting the practical implementation of each endeavor. Finally, websites and additional written documentation about current programs have been analyzed to see if the proclaimed objectives match the practical outcome. Consequently, the aim of the article is to analyze the relationship between rhetoric and practice surrounding both projects. Even if both programs have good intentions, the result in this article shows it can be hard to align the proclaimed objectives with the practical implementation. Drawing on neo-institutional theory, this relationship is further investigated using the concepts of rational myths, decoupling, organizational hypocrisy, mimetic isomorphism, and moral legitimacy. On this basis, the findings suggest that the presumed positive notion of sport as a means for different societal outcomes can be both praised and criticized.

Keywords: sport for development and peace, football, rational myths, decoupling, organizational hypocrisy, mimetic isomorphism, moral legitimacy

1. Introduction

The last decade, especially since the United Nations launched the Global Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has seen a significant expansion in the use of sports to initiate social change throughout the world (Hafen 2023; McSweeney et al. 2021). Projects involving sports have included attempts to educate young people about health concerns, discourage antisocial and criminal behavior, and increase gender-awareness, as well as assisting with reconciliation of communities in conflict (Schulenkorf & Adair 2014). Darnell (2012) amongst others have referred to this trend as Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), which implies the intentional use of sports, physical activity, and play to attain specific development and peace objectives. In recent years SDP has progressed from a “movement” of organizations to a recognized and legitimate component of the international development landscape. Accordingly, it has evolved into its own institutionalized sector comprised of a plethora of organizations operating worldwide (McSweeney et al. 2021).

2. Aim and research question

As of today, there are more than 120 SDP initiatives around the world (McSweeney et al. 2021; Svensson & Woods 2017). A distinguishing feature is the belief that sports create beneficial synergy effects on society. In this respect, sports are exclusively used as a means, not an end. Consequently, SDP initiatives are permeated by an assumption that sports generate societal effects, which in turn extend the physical activity and/or realm of sports (Darnell 2012; Schulenkorf & Adair 2014). Given this background, SDP initiatives are usually guided by two principals: one that alludes to the development of sports and one that alludes to development through sports. However, this means they often must deal with conflicting demands as these principles can be difficult to combine (Raw et al. 2022; Hafen 2016). On this basis, scholars, most notably Coalter (2013), have divided SDP initiatives into two categories based on how and to what extent sports are put into practice. This dichotomy is labeled sports development or *Sport Plus* (i.e., activities designed to enhance participation and performance in sport as an end in itself) versus sport for development or *Plus Sport* (i.e., activities designed to use sport as a vehicle to achieve a range of social, economic, and political objectives) (Coalter 2013). As

an illustration of the latter, two Scandinavian SDP initiatives can serve as examples: Swedish LdB FC for Life in South Africa (football and HIV/AIDS prevention) and the Danish initiative Open Fun Football Schools in Moldova (football and peace building). A common feature is thus the assumption that sports, and more specifically football, are appropriate and that they can be used in a wide range of settings to stimulate change. In this respect, sports (football) are exclusively used as a means, not as an end. In addition, both initiatives have strong ties to the business community using corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an essential part of their SDP activities (Hafen 2016).

Even if SDP initiatives have good intentions, research has shown that it is difficult to translate the idea into action (Svensson & Cohen 2020; Hafen 2016). Furthermore, many SDP initiatives tend to emphasize the development of sports rather than development through sports (i.e., addressing broader social issues), which highlights an important as well as problematic discrepancy between intention and implementation (Coalter 2013). On this basis, the aim of this article is to analyze LdB FC for Life and Open Fun Football Schools from an organizational perspective (i.e., internal/external processes leading to different forms of organizational action). Consequently, it seeks to explore the relationship between rhetoric and practice surrounding both projects.

3. Theoretical framework (neo-institutional theory)

With the objective to explore the relationship between rhetoric and practice surrounding LdB FC for Life and Open Fun Football Schools, this article takes a neo-institutional theoretical approach, not least given the social (i.e., institutionalized) construction of sport as a vehicle to bring about development and peace manifested through both SDP organizations. On a general level, neo-institutional theory is suitable when studying the social interaction between organizations and their environments. Given the article's aim and explicit focus on two SDP organizations, it thus becomes appropriate to use it here. According to the theory, formal organizational structures arise in highly institutionalized contexts, meaning organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by dominant, rationalized concepts of organizational work deeply rooted in society. Organizations that do so will increase their legitimacy and chance

of survival independent of the effectiveness of the attained practices and procedures. Meyer and Rowan (1977) claim that institutionalized products, such as services, programs, and policies, just to name a few, function as powerful myths (i.e., rational myths), which many organizations adopt ceremoniously, that is, unreflective and without critical review. In this respect, their legitimacy is primarily gained based on assumptions that they are rationally effective.

Conducting business based on rational myths thus generates credibility, even if it often conflicts sharply with efficiency criteria. As a result, organizations tend to protect their formal structures by becoming loosely coupled (i.e., creating a division between supposed outcomes and actual results) (Meyer & Rowan 1977). According to Brunsson (2002), this means that two organizational structures evolve. One is the formal organization, which obeys the institutional norms and can easily be adapted to current trends, fashions, or laws. In this way, organizations can use a different structure in “reality” to coordinate action. This is generally referred to as the informal organization. Similarly, two forms of organizational processes arise where one generates action, but the other does not. The two forms are, nonetheless, kept for the purpose of demonstration or display to the outside world. In that regard, rational myths play an important role since they give organizations much needed legitimacy. In connection to this, Brunsson (2002) makes a distinction between so-called action organizations and political organizations. The former implies that there is a consistency between ideology and action, whereas the latter suggests the opposite. Brunsson (2002) labels this inconsistency ‘organizational hypocrisy’, which implies a fundamental type of behavior for any political organization: to communicate in a way that satisfies one demand and acts in another way to satisfy other demands.

However, it is important to stress that organizational hypocrisy is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a necessity for all organizations dealing with contradictory demands in their environment, especially in their quest for legitimacy and, hence, survival (Brunsson 2002). Here, Suchman’s (1995) reasoning on moral legitimacy becomes relevant since it reflects a positive normative evaluation of an organization and its activities. As a result, it rests primarily on assumptions that a specific activity or activities, undertaken by an organization, are the “right” things to do (Suchman 1995). One could argue that both LdB FC for Life and Open Fun Football Schools acquire moral legitimacy by the mere fact that they promote something that most, if not all, perceive as righteous, good, or honorable in society as a

whole, namely sports and charity. In this respect, Schulenkorf et al. (2014) stress that the “power” of sport is often seen as a rhetorical stand-alone facilitator for peace and prosperity. Consequently, the presumed sociopolitical benefits of sports are simply taken for granted and without any critical review. Furthermore, and according to DiMaggio & Powell’s (1983) terminology, the fact that so many SDP organizations try to solve problems in a similar way (i.e., the use of football to address HIV/AIDS and peace building processes) makes it justified to describe the whole SDP community as an organizational field characterized by mimetic isomorphism in the sense that most interventions unreflectively copy how others do it (i.e., the use of sport, and more specifically football in similar settings).

Much homogeneity in SDP organizational structures thus stems from the fact that despite considerable search for diversity there is relatively little variation to be selected from (DiMaggio & Powell 1983), especially in a context of SDP and the frequent use of football being the largest and most popular sport worldwide (Giulianotti & Robertson 2009). Thus, one could argue that mimetic isomorphism creates pressure that cause homogeneity within organizational SDP (McSweeney et al. 2021).

4. Material and methods

The article is predominantly based on data gathered through fieldwork in Sweden, Denmark, South Africa, and Moldova during a two-year period (2011-2013) and in accordance with a previous PhD project (Hafen 2016). For this article a selection of empirical data has been made.

The methods used for this article are qualitative, ranging from observations to interviews, and in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with initiators, sponsors/donors, and coaches from each program. A total of 29 people were interviewed, ranging from initiators, sponsors, and donors in Sweden and Denmark to local coaches and affiliated personnel in South Africa and Moldova. The interviews (ranging from 20 minutes to two hours and 18 minutes) resulted in over 25 hours of recorded data. In addition to interviews, participatory, and non-participatory observations (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011) were made in each country. The observations were documented through field notes (Emerson et al. 1995) and were rewritten coherently. The observations are based on roughly 80 hours of documented activities. In addition to interviews and observations, home pages and documents relating to the two projects were analyzed, with pri-

mary foci on activity reports, evaluations, and newspaper articles. All in all, the chosen methods and empirical data have been crucial to analyze the relationship between rhetoric and practice surrounding both projects.

A case study research methodology (Yin 2003) was applied. This methodological approach is suitable when focusing on specific existing social phenomena (e.g., organizational processes) to generate in-depth knowledge about things in a particular context. Moreover, they enable an inductive methodological way of working (Yin 2003). Since the aim of this article is to explore the relationship between rhetoric and practice within LdB FC for Life and Open Fun Football Schools, the case study methodology thus fills an important function. Furthermore, the groundwork of examining both projects in each country has been crucial since it has generated valuable insight into the two projects and helped analyze if the proclaimed objectives match the practical outcome.

5. LdB FC for Life

As with many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has devastated South Africa. With over seven million people infected, it stands out as one of the world's most exposed countries. In KwaZulu-Natal, the poorest of South Africa's nine provinces and with the highest number of young people, the vast majority of the population is infected (Soogun et al. 2022). Several attempts have been made to address sexual education in South Africa (Shamagonam et al. 2006). Similar to broader health education initiatives, SDP programs deliver sexual education through sports (Shamagonam et al. 2006). Swedish LdB FC for Life is one example. Between 2007 and 2013 it operated in rural KwaZulu-Natal, near the border of Mozambique. It was conducted as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project between the former professional Swedish women's football club LdB FC Malmö and an event company called World Village of Women's Sport from the same city. On this basis, it is seemingly fair to say LdB FC For Life embodied the characteristics of a hybrid organization (i.e. mixed elements of various sectors – mainly private and voluntary – of society) within the field of SDP (Raw et al. 2022).

Through the use of football, LdB FC For Life aimed to empower young women and teach awareness about HIV/AIDS. Consequently, it aimed to strengthen their self-esteem and social reputation by challenging traditional gender barriers. In many respects, the idea of mitigating the spread

of HIV/AIDS through sports rests on assumptions that the epidemic depends on the absence of relevant information resulting in a lack of informed choice and risk-taking sexual behavior. Furthermore, an implicit assumption seems to be that participation in sports leads to the strengthening of perceived self-efficacy and the confidence to make positive decisions. Accordingly, the idea is that increased knowledge, understanding, perceived self-efficacy, and self-esteem among participating women will lead to changed sexual behavior (Coalter 2013).

For several years, LdB FC for Life was implemented in connection with various high schools in KwaZulu-Natal, involving hundreds of coaches, leaders, and volunteers, all trained by the former Swedish women's football club LdB FC Malmö (Hafen 2016). LdB FC for Life was founded in 2007 and experienced rapid growth and prosperity in women's football at that time. This marked a new beginning of a commercialized brand (i.e., Lait de Beauté, a renowned skincare brand) marketing women's football as a product with the aim to attract women consumers by accenting a feminine approach. Consequently, it had to be associated with different forms of value-creating measures, mainly through corporate social responsibility (CSR). Given this background, and the club's primary target group at the time, LdB FC for Life filled an important marketing function in order to attract consumers (Hafen 2016).

6. Open Fun Football Schools

The collapse of communism in the Soviet Union caused several conflicts in its former satellite states, including Moldova (Kolstø & Malgin 1998). The Transnistrian region wanted to break free by establishing itself as an independent republic. The conflict escalated in 1992 into a civil war resulting in hundreds of deaths. Today, the Moldovan government lacks political control of Transnistria, making it de facto an autonomous region. Moreover, and due to the ongoing tension, the border between Moldova and Transnistria is guarded by Moldovan, Transnistrian, and Russian military. The European Union and the United Nations have also assisted with help to stabilize the political situation (Chinn & Roper 1995; Roper 2001). In addition, efforts like Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) have been launched to facilitate dialogue between members of each side.

OFFS uses joyful and pedagogical football activities for children to promote peace, unity, and social cohesion in former war-torn countries. The

program is operated by a Danish nongovernmental organization (NGO) called Cross Cultures (formerly known as Cross Cultures Project Association). In a five-day football program, organized in the summer during the school holidays, OFFS brings together children from different ethnic and religious groups to play football. Using a variety of games and exercises, OFFS works to develop the participants' confidence, skills, and ability to work together as a group (Cross Cultures 2023; Gasser & Levinsen 2004).

OFFS was first launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998 after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. In 2006, OFFS expanded to Moldova. Since then, close to 40 000 children aged 6–12 have participated. In addition, thousands of coaches, leaders, and parents have been involved (Cross Cultures 2023). As of today, the project is still in progress funded by a range of stakeholders including the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Novo Nordisk Fonden and the European Union (EU) (Cross Cultures 2023).

OFFS is based on the concept of “fun football,” developed by the Danish Football Association. The philosophy derives from a Scandinavian sports culture characterized by a strong local focus, democratic principles, volunteerism, parent support, and the basic principle of “sports for all” (Gasser & Levinsen 2004; Hafen 2016).

Initially, all schools were organized by the municipalities, but in 2000 OFFS adopted a “twin city” approach, meaning that neighboring municipalities with different ethnic, political, and religious orientations had to cooperate in organizing each football school. This broadened the utility of OFFS to build peace and facilitate unity, applying it not only to promote contact between children but also between adults in terms of coaches, volunteers, and spectators from antagonistic communities. On this basis, OFFS aims to engage all participants sufficiently to help them forget the fear and discomfort of crossing the lines (Gasser & Levinsen 2004; Hafen 2016).

7. Results: from rhetoric to practice

LdB for Life and Open Fun Football Schools position themselves as two SDP initiatives using sports primarily as a means, not an end. In the former case, football is used to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS by empowering young black South African women challenging traditional gender barriers.

As a result, they will be strengthening their self-esteem enabling them to say no to unprotected sex and, hence, taking control over their own lives. This notion is manifested through interviews with the representatives as well as during observations conducted in South Africa and Moldova (Hafen 2016). A former representative of LdB FC Malmö captures the essence of this notion:

Through this program the girls learn a lot of things. Like life skills and discipline. It is also about empowering them to take responsibility over their own lives. Football as a team sport builds character and bring good things to the community, like learning about the consequences of early pregnancy. I think football is a powerful tool in that sense.

In addition, information about the social and health benefits of football in South Africa is communicated on the program's website, through interviews with the CSR partners, observations and in available documents (Hafen 2016). Even local football coaches in South Africa support this view. As one stated during a visit to the uMkhanyakude district:

The program helps our community in many ways. Most importantly, it teaches life-skills. Through football, the girls learn how to avoid drugs, unsafe sex, early pregnancy, and other pitfalls that will prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Furthermore, LdB FC Malmö represents a self-image characterized by social responsibility beyond the football pitch. Through the project in South Africa and other domestic commitments, the club believes in contributing to a more equal and healthier world. This can be illustrated by information about the project previously available on the club's website:

It sends clear signals that the role of girls in society is about to change. Through football traditional gender barriers will be challenged. This project enables this challenge. (LdB FC Malmö 2011)

Subsequently, a concluding assumption is that football is of subordinate importance compared to the main objective of mitigating the spread of HIV/AIDS. The same thing can be said about OFFS where football primarily is used to bridge the ethnic divide between Moldovans and Transnistrians, thus stimulating integration and, hence, political stability. To support this interpretation, the representatives emphasize the power of football in the sense that it provides a neutral and joyful meeting ground where Mol-

dovans and Transnistrians can interact on equal terms based on a common interest in sports (Hafen 2016). One of Cross Cultures former case managers expresses this view:

Football is healthy and you meet people in eye level. When you meet people eye to eye in teams, the dynamics will make you forget where you are and who you are. You are just there to be in a team and to have a common goal. It puts out those prejudices people hold against each other. It also helps making new friends. Sport is a good way to understand each other and facilitate dialogue, especially in divided communities.

A corresponding view can be found through another of Cross Cultures representatives:

In times of war and conflict, the most important thing is to facilitate dialogue between the conflicting parties. It is important to focus on the things that unite, rather than on what separates. Open Fun Football Schools gives people a chance to meet through joyful activities where dialogue and cooperation can be facilitated.

The importance of OFFS in terms of bridging the ethnic tensions in Moldova is also communicated through the program's website, as well as available documents and interviews with CSR partners and donors (Hafen 2016). As an example of this last type, the following quote from a representative of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) – a significant financial supporter of OFFS at the time – strengthens this assumption:

By supporting Open Fun Football Schools, we see that children, teenagers and adults can cooperate and communicate. It can create a breeding ground of trust between people from different regions, including Transnistria and Gagauzia.

Consequently (and once again), football seems to have a subordinate role in relation to building peace. From interviews and observations in South Africa and Moldova, however, an opposite reality emerges. Here, the main objective seems to be the development of football. Implemented activities are dominated by training, competition, and performance, not combatting HIV/AIDS through sex education, or facilitating peace talks between two ethnic groups struggling to coexist (Hafen 2016). In the case of LdB FC for Life, this can be illustrated by following statement from one local representative in South Africa:

The biggest challenge right now is to facilitate durability. To be honest, our intentions with the program don't matter much if the girls don't have any opponents to play against. We must find continuance by establishing a well-functioning league system for women's football. That is how the program can be successful in the long-term.

A corresponding view can be found through this quote from one of the Swedish initiators:

As you can see from today's practice, the girls are learning how to move on the field without the ball. It shows they are slowly learning the basics of football through position play. It means they have learned not to run towards the ball all at the same time. Instead, they wait before attacking the ball. This is fundamental, even if it must be improved.

The explicit focus on the development of sports (football) is also strengthened in the words of another of the local football coaches from the uMkhanyakude district:

The physical conditions of our young players are extremely good. Already as children, they learn how to run and play barefoot with the ball. They also know how to train hard. This means they have what it takes to make it as professional footballers. Through this program, we can develop South African football.

A strong emphasis on the development of sports (football) can also be found in OFFS. The following quote from one former representative of Cross Cultures expresses this view:

Sports is what we do and what we are good at. I love sports. We need to focus more on that instead of trying to do too many things simultaneously. There are other organizations better suited for that. We are specialized in sports and we should continue with this and develop it further, at least from my point of view.

Similar reasoning can be traced to several of the Moldovan coaches, and as one of them puts it:

There are a lot of girls involved in this program which is positive. In the future, girls will have the possibility to play football professionally. Right now, we have a lot of teams in Moldova and women's football is getting stronger and stronger. We hope that this program will help to develop women's football further. Historically in Moldova, we have never had any

women's football teams from the southern parts of the country and now we have two. I hope this region will be the future of women's football and that we will qualify for the Champions League and other competitions. I hope Open Fun Football Schools will be the start of this.

Moreover, during observations onsite in Moldova, a strong emphasis on training, performance, and competition became evident. The activities were implemented in close relation to the Moldovan Football Federation (FMF), not least by having them lend their training facilities to the program. Eventually it turned out that several Moldovan football coaches enrolled in OFFS worked to recruit new personnel for the National Football Federation (Hafen 2016). This can be illustrated by the following quote from another coach during a football school in the outskirts of Moldova's capital, Chişinău:

I used to work as a volunteer in different grassroots initiatives throughout the country and was recruited by the Moldovan Football Association to work with Open Fun Football Schools. Many of the coaches and staff members have been recruited. We are all working for the Football Association.

It is evident that OFFS is operating in close relation with the National Football Association aiming to strengthen the infrastructure of Moldovan football by recruiting new personnel, and thus the program seems to be underpinned by sports development rather than sports for development.

8. From rhetoric to practice: a neo-institutional analysis

Based on the empirical examples given, one could argue that two fragmented SDP initiatives emerge where intention and outcome have been lost, at least in respect to the proclaimed objectives. Both initiatives thus embody an explicit focus on development of sport, not development through sport. This is strengthened by the fact that both initiatives aim to improve the sporting infrastructure in each country, mainly by facilitating various training initiatives for coaches and leaders. Albeit to a varying degree, both initiatives have used football to find and develop talented players for the higher divisions, and each initiative gained significant support from the governing body of football in their respective countries, namely the South

African Football Association (SAFA) and Moldovan Football Federation (FMF). As an illustration, both organizations designed many of the sporting activities. They also assisted with funding, provision of equipment, and help with training facilities. Their significant influence is also reflected in the recruitment of new trainers, leaders, and officials. In this respect, FMF proved to gain the most influence. Consequently, one could argue FMF and SAFA have become partners merely to secure their own existence. All in all, this indicates LdB FC for Life and OFFS give the appearance of being SDP initiatives using sports explicitly as a means for societal development, but in reality they are leaning in the opposite direction by developing and strengthening the infrastructure of sports. To use Coalter's (2013) terminology, they therefore embody the features of *Sport Plus* (i.e., sports development) rather than *Plus Sport* (i.e., sports for development). In other words, representatives of each initiative have not exactly been practicing what they preach.

The question is how this discrepancy between theory and practice can be understood. From an analytical standpoint, the discrepancy can be explained by two interrelating factors, one being sports-related and the other related to organizational processes. The former is rooted in sports as a social and cultural institution. As a result, sports' widespread appeal with an emphasis on performance and competition makes it difficult balancing this typical, one could argue, characteristic logic with other, nonsporting objectives, using sports primarily as a means, not an end. In other words, it can be difficult not to focus on sports-related outcomes even in settings that ultimately have other proclaimed societal goals. An equivalent illustration to this problem is the imbalance between the concepts association education (*föreningsfostran*) and competition education (*tävlingsfostran*) that has been heavily debated by Swedish sports scholars (Peterson 2011). Even from this standpoint, the main challenge seems to be balancing sports' own logic with other intentions that ultimately become secondary because of the reasons presented.

From an organizational point of view, the discrepancy between theory and practice can be explained and further analyzed using the aforementioned neo-institutional theory and the concept of decoupling. On this basis, organizations must deal with different institutional environments, which means they often, both internally and externally, must adapt their activities to contradictory demands stemming from these specific environments. Meyer and Rowan (1977) state that decoupling functions as an effective approach by which this inconsistency can be handled. Organizations

can always make decisions. This, however, does not always imply they will act accordingly. Nor does it mean decisions automatically give rise to the desired effects. At the same time, it is assumed their decisions are being adhered to, both by employees and the surrounding society. Here, decoupling plays an important role as everyday organizational routines need to be disconnected or “loosely coupled” to meet different institutional requirements (Meyer & Rowan 1977). However, the concept of decoupling cannot be understood without a further discussion of legitimacy. When an organization is perceived as legitimate its behavior and activities are in accordance with society’s norms and values. If an organization acquires this consistency, it avoids being questioned while at the same time making it easier for it to generate the resources it needs. An organization’s success thus very much depends on how well it manages to adapt to prevailing institutions and myths in its surroundings (Meyer & Rowan 1977; McSweeney et al. 2020). On this basis, it seems fair to argue that LdB FC for Life and OFFS gain legitimacy through their mere existence as they engage in what society considers “good,” namely sports and charity. This corresponds to Schulenkorf et al. (2014) and the rhetorical power of sport, in the sense that it is often seen as a stand-alone facilitator for peace and prosperity.

An organization’s legitimacy alludes to and can be seen as proof of a general perception that it is acting in the right way and that its undertakings are meaningful and valuable, while, in turn, this becomes crucial for survival. Suchman’s (1995) idea of moral legitimacy illustrates this in the sense that it reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organization and its activities. On this basis, moral legitimacy does not rest on judgments as to whether a given activity benefits the evaluator, but rather on judgments as to whether the activity is the “right” thing to do. In specific terms this means organizations reflect socially acceptable or desirable norms in their way of acting. Subsequently, representatives of LdB FC for Life and OFFS, as well as involved CSR partners, need to plan their strategies and actions in tune with these norms to gain legitimacy. By doing so, they will be perceived as needed in all given settings, meaning they must act accordingly in Sweden, Denmark, South Africa, and Moldova. However, one must stress that legitimacy varies depending on the contextual meaning organizations need to act in, in accordance with local conditions and adapt their strategies to prevailing circumstances. As a result, LdB FC for Life, OFFS, and involved partners simply cannot take for granted that the same reasoning that gives legitimacy in Scandinavia (i.e., confronting so-

cial problems) will yield the same outcomes in South Africa and Moldova. On the contrary, it is seemingly fair to assume an excessive focus on the countries' problems in the form of the HIV/AIDS epidemic or an ethnic conflict risk being perceived as provocative and critical, while efforts to strengthen local conditions for football can reasonably be met with greater benevolence and understanding. The discrepancy between stated ambitions and actual outcomes that has appeared can thus be seen as a way for LdB FC for Life and OFFS to gain and further maintain legitimacy in different environments by satisfying dissimilar needs. As a result, in Sweden and Denmark the aspect of social responsibility becomes imperative for legitimacy, especially to provide and secure long-term financial support from sponsors and donors.

In South Africa and Moldova, however, legitimacy is gained differently through cooperation with the governing bodies of football aiming to develop South African and Moldovan football. LdB FC for Life and OFFS have consequently developed two parallel strategies to obtain moral legitimacy: one in Scandinavia and one in South Africa and Moldova. In this context, decoupling becomes a necessity for their *raison d'être* but at the same time incompatible with their proclaimed objectives. In relation to Meyer and Rowan (1977) this has, therefore, given rise to two different organizational structures, one formal emphasizing the social aspects and one informal emphasizing the sporting aspects. This relates further to Brunsson (2002) and the division between action organizations and political organizations. On this basis, political action from an organizational standpoint always requires legitimacy. LdB FC for Life and OFFS can, therefore, only operate and function as political SDP initiatives if the intended recipients ascribe legitimacy to them. No matter how good the intentions are, they cannot be put into practice without compliance from local stakeholders. Accordingly, LdB FC for Life and OFFS must adapt their strategies in alignment with local interests in South Africa and Moldova, which have proven to lean more towards the development of sport. Similarly, they must adapt to local conditions in Sweden and Denmark by taking into account what is considered legitimate in the Scandinavian context. The empirical data generated by interviews and observations suggests LdB FC for Life and OFFS primarily gain legitimacy in Sweden and Denmark based on the preconceived notion that sport is an effective remedy to worldly problems. However, they also gain legitimacy using CSR as a part of their endeavors (Hafen 2016). Today, there are high demands on organizations and companies taking responsibility for societal issues, both domestically and internationally (Du et al.

2010). The quest for legitimacy plays an important function as it facilitates differentiating opportunities and enables competitive organizational advantages. Applied to the empirical examples given, one could argue that SDP as a catchphrase and the concept of CSR have become decisive labels through which LdB FC for Life, OFFS, and involved stakeholders can demonstrate action and credibility towards the outside world. As a result, they will gain legitimacy while at the same time strengthening their brands. Following reasoning from one of LdB FC Malmö's former representatives provides a clear emphasis on this:

Today, you are expected to engage and show social commitment in different forms. Through CSR we can show this commitment, we can put a value on ourselves while at the same time strengthening our brand.

Brunsson (2002) has developed the theory of decoupling by introducing the concept of organizational hypocrisy. According to the theory, organizations that want to be successful need to adapt to the conditions existing in their surroundings. This means reforms and initiatives are seen as valuable symbols of decision-making and action, not least to gain legitimacy. LdB FC for Life's and OFFS's proclaimed objectives can thus be seen as a way for initiators and sponsors to demonstrate this power. In addition, and as previously mentioned, they can be said to signal participation in something that the public perceives as "good" (i.e., sports and charity). The legitimacy of both initiatives, therefore, very much depends on good rhetoric.

As the theory of organizational hypocrisy is based on the idea of decoupling (Meyer & Rowan 1977), organizational hypocrisy occurs when organizations disconnect their practical action from their formal organizational structure (i.e., from what the organization says it does). It nonetheless also occurs when organizations make use of what Brunsson (2002) defines as "the logic of trust and good faith," meaning the will and faith of doing the right thing outweigh the actual outcome. This has been illustrated both in Moldova and South Africa as well as in Sweden and Denmark. Accordingly, LdB FC for Life and OFFS make use of two organizational structures: one formal that alludes to sports for peace and to combat HIV/AIDS and the other informal that alludes to the development of football. By disconnecting the former from the latter, organizational hypocrisy has occurred as a direct consequence because the two structures have generated different forms of required legitimacy (Hafen 2016). It is, nonetheless, important to stress that organizational hypocrisy is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a

necessity for all organizations dealing with contradictory demands in their environment, especially in their quest for legitimacy and, hence, survival.

According to Brunsson (2002) decoupling is an organizational strategy for increased legitimacy bridging the gap between theory and practice. The point to be made is that organizations cannot survive solely by making decisions; they must also act. On this basis, they usually benefit from being irrational in the sense that it may be easier to act in a certain way even if talk and decisions testify to the opposite. Moreover, organizations seldom formulate objectives from the beginning but rather do so in hindsight, aiming to correspond to the consequences of a certain decision being made (Brunsson 2002). A clear example of this is the changed and pronounced focus on developing the prerequisites for South African and Moldovan football. This relates to the concept of “translated ideas” referring to intended ideas being changed and modified to meet different needs. As many ideas are vaguely formulated (i.e., that sports can reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS or foster peace and integration), they tend to facilitate local interpretation. Seen from this perspective, the recipients often become transformers of the ideas they are exposed to (Latour 2005). This could explain why LdB FC for Life and OFFS have changed character, as the governing bodies of football in South Africa and Moldova have taken the opportunity to act on the basis of what is legitimate for them, which is ensuring and developing the quality of their own sporting ambitions.

8. Conclusion

After the presentation, analysis, and summarizing of the empirical examples given in this article, an incoherent picture of two SDP initiatives emerges, particularly due to an obvious conflict between theory and practice. Even if both programs were striving to make the world a better place, it is evident that the proclaimed objectives do not match the practical outcome. Based on this result, it is reasonable to raise the question of whether or not organizational hypocrisy is a legitimate argument to shut down both operations or if it is a logical outcome of all organizational activities that simply needs to be accepted. Since the analysis has shown that the divergence between theory and practice is a question of dealing with conflicting demands, the empirical examples of LdB FC for Life and OFFS show that organizational hypocrisy through decoupling is an inevitable consequence of these specific conditions. Consequently, the discrepancy between theo-

ry and practice is not an argument to shut down the operations. Above and beyond, it had probably not been possible to implement the activities at all without a certain degree of hypocrisy. To put it differently: the initiatives would never have gained legitimacy for their cause if they focused exclusively on issues concerning HIV/AIDS prevention in South Africa or integration and political stability in Moldova. Rather, they have been forced to adapt to given conditions. Brunsson's (2002) theory of organizational hypocrisy is thus an important contribution to a more general discussion about whether SDP initiatives ought to be seen as either idealistic and good, on the one hand, or commercial and/or evil, on the other – the duality constitutes two sides of the same coin. Following quote from one of the sponsors captures the essence of this dualism:

There is a great deal of self-interest here, undeniably. However, committing to a good cause making others feel better is equally important.

At the same time, this article has painted a nuanced picture of two SDP initiatives given the perception of sports as a universal remedy for peace and prosperity. From that perspective, it has shown how the dichotomy between idealism and self-interest as well as *Sport Plus* (Coalter, 2013) comes into practice and how they can be analyzed and further problematized. It has also shown how hybridity within organizational SDP comes into play given the obvious mix of private, public, and voluntarily elements (Raw et al. 2022).

As a concluding remark, this article has shown that the notion that sports can act as a means for different societal outcomes can be both praised and criticized. It has also shown that the current notion has the features of a rational myth according to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) way of reasoning. Accordingly, it is so firmly rooted today that it has been taken for granted. To some extent, I would argue that this relates to the fact that sports have become an influential institution in today's society. As a result, it is rarely questioned due to its strong position as a popular cultural phenomenon. The rational myth of SDP has thus been institutionalized by tradition. On this basis, one could argue that it has sanctioned the use of sports in the field of international development supported by powerful institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). All in all, the rational myth of SDP fulfills an important legitimacy-creating func-

tion while at the same time running the risk of preventing other, potentially more effective, strategies for development and peace.

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