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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2013.839466>

**Sport for Development and Peace: a Critical Sociology**, by S.C. Darnell, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2012, 192 pp., £50.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-849-66344-1

In recent years, the field of sport-for-development (SFD) has steadily risen in prominence within development policy and practice. Around the world, programmes designed to make a positive difference through sport-based interventions have mushroomed and SFD initiatives have focused – at times naively and over-enthusiastically – on improving economic, social, educational or health-related conditions within and between disadvantaged communities. Research about this field, however, remains in its infancy. Existing literature is characterised by an international perspective on broad policy themes, with ongoing debates around the functional ‘utility of sport’ as a vehicle towards achieving different development objectives including those highlighted by the UN Millennium Development Goals. Only recently has there been an increased focus on empirical work within an international context that attempts to assess or ascertain the effectiveness of SFD activities. Much of this work has resulted from pressures exerted by donor agencies and sponsors who are eager to ‘prove’ that SFD actually achieves promised outcomes. As a consequence, SFD programmes have conducted their own internal assessments in which simple tick-box approaches to empirical research, as well as overly optimistic reports of development outcomes have been provided. This is hardly a surprise given the lack of independent voices within the research process.

Simon Darnell’s (2012) book *Sport for Development and Peace: A Critical Sociology* represents a significant departure in a number of ways. First, in contrast to simplistic or evangelistic attempts to justify the existence and support of SFD, this text offers a demonstrably critical approach to investigating the burgeoning SFD field. Second, the book builds on strong sociological theory as the basis for a discussion of empirical findings from international development work. This includes pressing issues around power, culture and social relationships, each of which are eloquently analysed and discussed. Third, Darnell offers new and important insights into two areas that have largely been avoided by development researchers: (1) the often claimed contribution of mega-events and sporting celebrities to SFD outcomes; and (2) the roles and responsibilities of international volunteers and their experiences as facilitators within the development process.

Presented in seven chapters, *Sport for Development and Peace: A Critical Sociology* models a dynamic use of theory and praxis, raising critical questions about the social and political implications of the SFD genre. In Chapter 1, the reader is introduced to contemporary social theories and perspectives through which SFD can be contextualized and brought to life. In particular, Gramscian, Foucauldian and post-colonial theories are presented as salient approaches to analysing and understanding SFD discourses. The first chapter also draws connections between sports and universal human rights, reminding

readers of the importance of power, negotiation and context within the study of sport. Chapter 2 outlines a brief history of international development and the politics therein. This background is essential for any critical engagement with development politics in and through sport, as well as development outcomes resulting from participating in sport. Various strands of development theory are discussed which prepare readers for the empirical investigations of SFD presented in the subsequent chapters.

Chapters 3 and 4 take the reader to a more applied, empirical analysis of international SFD activities. In particular, Darnell provides accounts of original research that critically investigates the experiences of SFD volunteers at an international development programme, as well as the stakeholder perceptions of approaches to SFD work more broadly. Within this environment, a clear message is the importance of understanding underlying issues such as the politics of power and privilege when engaging in international contexts. Building on an in-depth investigation of the 'subjectivation' processes of volunteers from the Global North, Chapter 3 discusses the learning experiences of SFD volunteers and provides implications of knowledge production and subjectivation within SFD internships. Here, the implicit need of listening to local voices in designing realistic, meaningful and relevant SFD projects is advocated – an approach that has often been neglected in SFD theory and praxis. An important, underlying message communicated throughout Chapters 3 and 4 – and indeed the book at large – is the recommendation for SFD activists and researchers to critically reflect on their social position, engagement, goals and approaches in realizing desired change. Only then, argues Darnell, can sport be 'part of the process of re-imagining and in some cases challenging international development and its political economy' (p. 101).

Two important yet often ignored aspects of SFD research are debated in Chapters 5 and 6. First, against the background of a strong rhetoric that praises the social and economic benefits of Olympic Games and World Cups, the role of mega-events in contributing to different forms of 'development' and 'capital' in the Global South is analysed. In particular, through the conceptualisations of development promoted by the state, civil society and popular culture, the author responds to the current lack of critical engagement with development theory within the study of sport mega-events. Moreover, drawing on insights from the largest sport organizations in the world, FIFA and the IOC, and current examples of event hosting nations such as South Africa, India and the Republic of Korea, different opportunities and limitations regarding the use of large-scale events as drivers or catalysts for development are discussed. Second, in Chapter 6, Darnell investigates celebrity athletes and their contested status and potential contribution as 'role models' or 'ambassadors' for the SFD movement. Implications for their involvement in the SFD field are provided based on critical questions that are raised regarding the suitability – or indeed the sustainability – of the positive change imagined and arguably personified by sport champions. Importantly, in both Chapters 5 and 6, Darnell leaves the door open for future research on celebrity athletes, mega-events and international volunteers in the context of more innovative, non-traditional approaches to SFD.

Finally, in Chapter 7, Darnell offers a number of conclusions and recommendations for the SFD sector to move forward. Focusing on key issues of power and privilege, concluding thoughts are provided regarding questions around ethical concepts and values that underpin (sport-for-) development work and research. To achieve a praxis that is oriented towards mobilising SFD in ways that challenge inequality and marginalisation, Darnell calls for SFD to be informed by critical pedagogy. In short, he argues for increased engagement and critical reflection around topics such as power, cultural oppression or paternalism; he sees the critical pedagogy approach as the basis for ongoing

theoretical and practical commitment and improvement to – as well re-imagination of – the field. Against this background, a key argument of the book is the need for a stronger focus on solidarity and engagement with people in disadvantaged communities instead of what is described as a hegemonic neoliberal development philosophy that builds on concepts such as power in its productive sense.

Overall, for those working and researching within the sport and international development space this book convincingly draws out the balancing act required between rigorous academic theories on the one hand, and the politics and pragmatism of policy on the other. Darnell delivers a deep and varied analysis of the ways in which contemporary sport meshes with principles of sociology and international development. The book provides a theoretically and empirically rich account of SFD critique, yet at the same time it is an endorsement of SFD significance. As such, the book is a valuable asset to SFD academics and postgraduate students with an interest in engaging in critical, meaningful and relevant discussions of sport sociology, policy and politics. *Sport for Development and Peace: A Critical Sociology* is a powerful addition to the growing literature on SFD, particularly as to date there has been very little critical sociological exploration by academia. Due to its depth and academic rigour, the book is undoubtedly useful across a variety of disciplines, including sports studies, management, cultural studies, sociology, international relations and development studies. The author should be congratulated for the depth of information provided and the boldness to present readers with critical insights into a burgeoning area in which established beliefs, assumptions and assessments often remain superficial and/or imbalanced.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2013.839468>