



## Mind the gaps: On the North/South Nexus in the ‘Sport for Development and Peace’ discourse

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### Abstract

In this conceptual article, we present the “Sport for Development and Peace” (SDP) discourse as a case of scientific rationalization. First, we shed light on the ongoing theory debate around the “global/local problematique” in globalization and global policy research in comparative and international education. We then link up with the SDP discourse and show that academic work mostly features research related to the fact that the majority of the SDP programmes and ways of implementing them have been conceptualized in the Global North, yet are to be implemented in the Global South. In that context, we illustrate International Organizations as sites of scientized knowledge production and translation. Scientific rationalization occurs when specialized technical knowledge and management techniques enter the discourse.

**Keywords:** Sport for Development and Peace; Physical Education; Globalization; Global South; Scientific Rationalization

### Introduction

Already a decade ago, globalization and global policy researchers in comparative and international education participated in – or at least witnessed – a theory debate between representatives of World Culture Theory (WCT) on the one side (e.g., Meyer et al., 2010; Bromley et al., 2011; Ramirez & Meyer, 2012; Baker, 2012; Wiseman, 2010), and scholars who have been challenging the hypotheses claimed within that sociological neo-institutionalist scholarship, mobilizing on the other side alternative conceptual assumptions drawn from their own field research (e.g., Rapple, 2015; Carney et al., 2012; Silova, 2012). Out of this academic dispute, a third group of scholars joined the debate (see Schriewer, 2012a), consisting of researchers who tried to reconcile the disunited poles in the debate, by working on adequate

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solutions to what is since then being discussed as the “global/local problematique” (Schriewer, 2012b; Broschek, 2016; Parish, 2018) — that refers to the missing theoretical solution to the question, how to adequately conceptualize the intricate interaction between the global and the local (see Featherstone, 1990).

Scholars from all three mentioned academic directions employ different claims about the connection between locality and “globality in education” (Karvankova et al., 2015, p. 12). What is striking though, is that only the representatives of WCT, and perhaps also those researchers in comparative and international education who tend to sympathize with claims of WCT (e.g., Amos, 2014; Powell, 2020; do Amaral & Erfurth, 2021), provide scholarship on the role International Organizations (IOs) play in connection with *scientization*, while both the “interlocutors” (Anderson-Levitt, 2012, p. 443) of WCT representatives and the mediators between the neo-institutionalist and cross-culturalist camps fall short on theorizing scientization of global educational governance linked to educational policymaking and practice. However, even in the edited volume that was published four years after the first conciliatory attempt in that debate (Schriewer, 2016), IOs are not playing a major role — and “scientisation” is mentioned only once.

This conceptual article aims at contributing to the emerging body of work responding to the theory debate in globalization research in comparative education (see e.g., Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013; Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Silova & Rappleye, 2015; Baily et al., 2016; Hartong & Nikolai, 2017; Zapp, 2018; Parish, 2019; Grek et al., 2020; Steiner-Khamsi, 2021). Unlike other globalization and global policy studies in this line, our response reflects on scientization of international educational development programs in the Global South. By linking up with a definition coined by Mike Zapp, according to whom scientization is “an explicit emphasis on the ultimate value of the rational analysis of all physical and social phenomena” (Zapp, 2018, p. 5), we present an example of an increasingly *scientized* program that reflects how scientific rationalization occurs when specialized technical knowledge and management techniques enter the processes of transformation of knowledge, and IOs (first and foremost, *The World Bank*) are increasingly becoming sites of knowledge production and translation: the “Sport for Development and Peace” (SDP) discourse.

In the next section, we present the theory debate in globalization and education research in comparative and international education as a background. What follows then is the introduction of North-South discourses in SDP. Thereafter, we take a look at SDP from a perspective within Comparative and International *Physical Education*. In the end, we conclude by going back to the beginning of the scientization of the SDP discourse and tracing connections again (see Kiuppis, 2014).

## **Theory debate in Globalization and Education research**

On one side of the theoretical debate in globalization research in comparative and international education — we consider it with Bent Flyvbjerg, the side of “formal generalization”—, there is “the quantitative/structural researcher” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 239), in other words, the scholar who works mainly macro-analytically and formulates global development trends of standardization while doing world-system-analysis. That researcher makes common use of large-scale quantitative datasets and methods, focusing on the diffusion of educational models,

policies, and practices and tracing comparatively their institutionalization in nation-states. On this side, it is typically assumed that—as John W. Meyer and colleagues phrased it — “worldwide models [of Western origin\_the authors] define and legitimate agendas for local action, shaping the structures and policies of nation-states and other local actors” (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 145). And in line with WCT, it is claimed that “the two core features of modern world culture, rationalization and empowered actorhood [...] are constructed and expanded through scientization.” (Drori & Meyer, 2006, p. 56). In this connection, global forces are understood as the totality of the “symbolic universe” (Schriewer, 2012b; Ramirez & Boli, 1987), that principally result in convergent trends of development at the international level (see e.g., Baker & LeTendre, 2008; Wiseman & Anderson, 2013a; 2013b; Wiseman et al., 2013; 2014).

On the other side of the debate — borrowing again from Flyvbjerg, we could call it the side of “the force of example” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 239) —, there is the case-study researcher, or more precisely “cross-cultural researcher” (Crossley & Watson, 2003, p. 47), who tries to refine the generalizations made by WCT representatives. That researcher argues that doing that is based on empirical evidence she or he sees from her or his own research conducted “on the ground”, that there is “spatial differentiation” (Peck & Theodore, 2007) on the level of specific socio-cultural sites rather than a homogenization of structures and policies, as claimed by WCT. Unlike the typical researcher from the other side, those scholars participate in the issues they study (which is a notion of German-British sociologist Norbert Elias). They critique the neo-institutionalist work for making assumptions from a “bird’s eye view of the field” (Hasselbladh & Kallinikos, 2000, p. 697) and for having neglected the aspects of power (Dale, 2000), meaning (Mundy, 1998), process (Resnik, 2006) and agency and coercion (Carney et al., 2012). All these are aspects that cross-cultural researchers have observed in “local” and specific national sites, and which, as comparisons between these sites suggest, show “divergent manifestations” (Lan, 2002, p. 72) of structures and policies at the regional and national level. However, this side of the debate “has established a plausible analytical counter-narrative to one-world visions of globalization” (Peck & Theodore, 2007, p. 765).

### **Just a matter of context, or space?**

While we have a theory of diffusion from Sociology and by courtesy, Education (Strang & Meyer, 1993), we do not yet have a theory of reception in Comparative and International Education and therefore, we do not know how to adequately conceptualize the “dynamics of global diffusion and context-specific appropriations” (Schriewer & Caruso, 2005). Thus, what is missing here and could help to solve the problematique, is a “theory of embedded agency” (see e.g., Seo & Creed, 2002; Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009; Ma & Cai, 2021). However, the best theoretical solution to the question of how to adequately conceptualize the intricate interaction between the global and the local is supposedly *context-independent* and a somewhat *generalizable* one — but social science has not yet succeeded in coming up with a *general* theory of that kind (compare Flyvbjerg, 2001).

As Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus have already highlighted in this journal (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 12), quoting an argument by the Literacy Education scholars Kevin Leander and Margaret Sheehy: “context [...] has been overdetermined in its meaning by a seemingly natural interpretation of material setting or place” (Leander & Sheehy, 2004, p. 3). The way

globalization and global policy researchers in our field commonly conceive *space* suggests a pre-dominantly “physical locality” that can be experienced (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010). In the literature, we find notions, e.g., in terms of “transnational spaces, where social, political, and economic ideologies disseminate worldwide through development organizations and multilateral agendas” (Wiseman et al., 2013a, p. 34) or of “intra-national spaces of policy”, in which to “take part in public policies within and outside each national political system and where knowledge is constructed and diffused in order to be used in policy decision-making” (Viseu & Carvalho, 2018, p. 4). However, in sharp contrast to an understanding of space, ‘within which social practice occurs’, we borrow from Leander and Sheehy (2004), the notion that ‘practice and social space are produced in relation to one another’ (see also Ross, 2002).

In front of this backdrop, scientization, specifically scientific rationalization, is “identified as an important factor shaping the development of a global educational community” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 26). In this connection, IOs appear increasingly as “highly scientized”, as well as impactful regarding “national and international policy agendas through knowledge production” (Zapp, 2018, p. 5). However, the theoretical conclusions are *structuralist* and typically conform with the statement that “a surprising feature of the modern system is how completely the Western models [of socio-political organization] dominate world discourse about the rights of individuals, the responsibilities and sovereignty of the state” (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000, p. 106).

## North-South Nexus in Sport for Development and Peace

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is a symbolic value of sport and physical education harnessed to promote social and human development in different spheres (Chawansky & Holmes, 2015) and, more specifically, in education globally (see e.g., Meir, 2020). In the context of the global expansion of SDP interventions that have occurred in recent years, the Global South, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has been the largest target for organizations implementing these programmes. The argument that commonly arises in the context of SDP is that most of the programmes, as well as the ways of implementing them, have been conceptualized in the Global North, while the Global South is being put — as Teklu Abate Bekele, the guest editor of this Special Issue, outlined in his Call for Papers — “at the receiving end of educational aid and policy”. In fact, as Darnell and colleagues commented on a few years ago, with reference to a quasi-paradoxical finding of a review from Schulenkorf et al. (2016, p. 36), “researchers based in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand conduct the vast majority (some 90%) of English language SDP *research*, even though the majority of SDP *projects* are organized and implemented in Africa, Asia and Latin America” (Darnell et al., 2018, p. 134 - emphasis in the original). Schulenkorf et al. (2016) also found that most North American, European and Australian scholars investigate SDP projects in their “home” countries (Darnell et al., 2018, p. 145). Moreover, Darnell and colleagues assume on the basis of the findings of Schulenkorf et al. (2016, p. 34) “that it may [even] be relatively rare for scholars [in the Global North] to conduct research abroad, or to link the study of SDP to global trends and policies in international development” (Darnell et al., 2018, p. 139). Speaking of which, reference is made here — at least implicitly — of scholars from only one side of the theory debate, namely that of “formal generalization” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 239).

### **International Organizations as sites of scientized knowledge production and translation**

The SDP discourse is significant in two aspects (in the following, compare Mwansa, 2010): on the level of educational knowledge, in terms of the changes in meanings and common understandings of the concept of SDP which occurred little by little; and on the level of organization, in terms of the changing role International Governmental Organizations play as sites of scientized knowledge production and translation, as well as transformers of educational knowledge — in this case mainly *The World Bank* and for the last twenty years, both the *United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace* and the “New Partnership for Africa’s Development” (NEPAD), that is a program of economic development, initiated and carried out by the *African Union*.

For the understanding of the discursive changes in meanings of SDP in the context of IOs, it is worthwhile to take a close look, in a micro-sociological sense, directed at organizational sense- and decision-making that is interpreted as responses to institutional pressures. The theoretical framework that suggests itself be useful here is Organizational Institutionalism. Of particular relevance is Scandinavian Institutionalism (see e.g., Czarniawska-Joerges & Joerges, 1996) based on theorizing the construction and deconstruction of institutions, along with Brunsson’s analytic levels of “talk”, “decisions”, and “actions” (Brunsson, 1989). These works reflect a theoretical perspective according to which organizations are on the one hand driven by “pressures for legitimation” and “adaptions to environmental expectations”, and by self-intentions and self-interest on the other (i.e., that depend on the organizations’ identity) (Brunsson, 1989). Those studies considered to be part of the strand of Scandinavian Institutionalism depict organizations as embedded in an environment that provides them with expectations, identities, and rules for action. In this view, a phenomenon changes every time it is applied in a new organizational context because its meaning derives exclusively from this phenomenon’s connection to other elements in the organizational context (e.g., Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009, p. 189). Organizations are considered as embedded in enabling, as well as constraining institutional environments that mediate expectations from peers and competitors and other actors in respective fields.

However, of central importance for the understanding of the scientization of the SDP discourse is the false fundamental assumption that in the Global South there is “blind faith in the belief that Western ‘scientific’ methods are superior to traditional practices” (Remenyi, 2004, p. 22). Here we can see that the SDP discourse is a case for “one-way traffic (Global North-Global South) in knowledge and skill transfer which often disregards the wisdom, interest and general context of the Global South”.<sup>2</sup>

There is for the most part a major gap between the locality of the *conceptual development* of SDP programmes and their *implementation*. That has always been the case, even before the establishment of SDP. For the last 40 years, it has been mainly *The World Bank* that has fuelled neo-liberal ideas around development in terms of the elevation of the poor and powerless in the Global South “to the level of rational actors, free from the constraints of government policy” (Darnell, 2010, p. 56). However, the neo-liberal development, in the context of the SDP discourse, has not only been caused and fuelled by IOs from the Global North. There have even been “capitulations” of African leaders to NEPAD due to neo-liberal tendencies (Darnell,

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to one of the two peer reviewers who pointed that out for us.

2010). This we consider a “pressing issue” (Biseth & Holmarsdottir, 2021) in our field of study because the ideas connected with project planning and the “[acting of] knowledge in global education governance” (Zapp, 2020, p. 17) must not only be viewed as detached from the contextual realities and the challenges being addressed. This gap has arguably led to the proliferation of Global North world views, knowledges, expertise, and resources that have little transformative and liberating capacities in the Global South or other target communities. Accordingly, Langer’s (2015) review of literature on SDP, which only focused on the African continent, points out that there is an overwhelming indication that only a handful of local discourses in the Global South have inevitably been intertwined with the SDP programmes developed in the North – especially, suffice at the implementation level, narrowing through specific contextual approaches determined by the target group or community.

The consequence is that SDP standpoints that are originated in the Global North tend to be connected with simplified one-size-fits-all approvals of how to implement programmes in the Global South and neglect issues faced by certain groups or communities on the local level. In earlier research, Darnell (2012) observed that how SDP is positioned, constructed, and implemented is produced through social interactions within a cultural and political context between the powerful and the subordinates. For example, when implementing SDP programmes in the Global South using the Global North resource base, there is a lack of consideration of the local socio-political environment, making the SDP sustainability and transparency questionable (Akindes & Kirwin, 2009).

### **SDP from a perspective within Comparative and International Physical Education**

Put into the language of comparative and international education, studies that have analyzed the dynamics of production, diffusion and implementation processes in the context of SDP “have displayed a wide array of national, regional or context-specific (in other words “local”) interpretations, appropriations and implementations [in the South] that are at variance with purportedly global development trends, policies and models [mostly developed in the North]” (Schriewer 2012b, p. 414). In addition to the geographical and cultural gap, Schulenkorf and colleagues found a considerable divide as to how SDP programmes are theorized (Strang & Meyer, 1993) in the contexts of their conceptual development and of their implementation and state that: “(1) a large majority of SDP projects operating in the Global South do not engage with research/researchers in any significant way, and (2) if/when research is done in the Global South, it does not tend to involve researchers based and working in these locations”. Schulenkorf et al. further note that this means that there are hundreds of SDP projects—particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America—that do not benefit from any kind of research engagement or academic support (Schulenkorf et al., 2016, p. 34). Darnell et al. (2018, p. 137) argue with reference to that note, that SDP programmes that are designed in the North might tend to move away from institutionalized sport and towards play; so, in addition to the gaps in terms of geographical, cultural and “theorization” divides (Strang & Meyer, 1993), there are even North/South discrepancies in terms of imagined ways how to reach development and peace. And in connection with this, there are several answers to the question where “agency” can be located when looking at SDP from North to South; the target groups of SDP

programmes, which are mainly youth (Darnell et al., 2018, p. 135f.), are often wrongly perceived as passive recipients (see Clarke, 2019).

Unlike the former researchers, who are first and foremost based in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, conducting from there the vast majority (some 90%) of English language SDP *research*, even though the majority of SDP *projects* are organized and implemented in Africa, Asia, and Latin America" (Darnell et al., 2018, p. 134 - emphasis on the former), the latter scholars participate in the facts they study. However, the newest research sees the SDP movement as a controlled space benefiting more the already privileged and refers to it as the "SDP temple" (Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2019). The authors argue that the SDP temple (re)produces the marginalization of socially deprived communities while fostering the privileges of the elite few. Referring to how SDP has been practiced in the Global South, which is the target beneficiary of the concept, Mwaanga, and Adeosun (2019) claim that programmes are driven by donors' expectations, but lack local consultation, have been imposed from the Global North. Mwaanga and Mwansa (2013) also argue that the privileging of Global North forms of knowledge in defining and carrying out SDP leads to the systematic marginalizing of the seemingly under-resourced partners. The aforementioned is attributed to the SDP discourse that is enshrined within Global North simplified one-size-fits-all approvals of how to implement programmes in the Global South while neglecting issues faced by certain groups or communities at the local level (Mwaanga & Mwansa, 2013). Consequently, Darnell (2012) posits that the politics of the SDP sector rarely strives to challenge and/or rebuild the cultural and political economy of development inequalities in more equitable ways, nor does it regularly support or advocate for interventions that strive to level the playing field of political economy. Rather, the dominant ideology of SDP is perpetually attempting to "improve" the lives of people in the Global South within the structures of western centered achievement (Baker, 2012). Thus, the urgency of using the SDP discourse and the resources that goes with it does not arise within the confines of the Global North, as the ideology is more of a tool to improve lives in the under-served communities in the Global South (Kidd, 2008). Powerful international, multilateral, governmental, and non-governmental organizations are orientated towards supporting this culture of sport and the political economy of development and have often enjoyed success by which they disproportionately benefit (Darnell, 2012).

## Conclusion

The research project this article draws from is positioned in the field of SDP and analyzes sports-, and inclusive (physical) education-related strategies for the "social inclusion" of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors in different contexts. The part of the study presented here is conceptual considerations stemming from case study research in Norway, involving interviews and the Thematic Analysis of the transcripts. This article contributes to the emerging body of work that aims to clarify issues around the global divide in the context of SDP programmes. It sheds light on the question of how research on SDP conceptualizes the North/South Nexus, e.g., if the majority of research that is concerned with the outcomes and implications of SDP activities even argues that the Global North could be in a position to learn from the Global South how some SDP programmes have been implemented based on the context of each target group or community, as opposed to the one size fits all approach (Darnell et al., 2018;

Giulianotti et al., 2019). With Robert E. Stake we could state – again in the light of comparative and international education – that “[i]t is important to examine the common characteristics of [these] phenomena, but it is also important to examine situational uniqueness, especially complexity and interaction with background conditions” (Stake, 1995, pp. 9f.).

The article is connected with the theoretical assumption that—as John W. Meyer and colleagues phrased it— on the one hand, “worldwide models [of Northern origin\_the authors] define and legitimate agendas for local action, shaping the structures and policies of nation-states and other national and local actor“ (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 145). In the context of SDP research, we find what Jürgen Schriewer called in *Comparative and International Education* “the general hypothesis according to which an *abstract universalism of trans-nationally disseminated models, rules, and policies*” (Schriewer, 2017, p. 6) can be claimed. On the other side, there is empirical evidence “on the ground”, that there is “spatial differentiation” (Peck & Theodore, 2007) and there are context-specific deviations of the worldwide models at the level of specific socio-cultural sites rather than a homogenization of structures and policies. In other words, there is a “tendency for non-convergent, path-dependent evolution in national regimes [...]; a commitment to theoretically informed concrete research on distinctive, “local” forms of SDP in concrete contexts in the South; a recognition of the institutionally mediated, socially embedded nature of structures and relations; and a pluralistic intellectual culture, marked by various degrees of divergence from, or dissonance with [what was conceptualized in the North]” (Peck & Theodore, 2007, p. 732f.).

Already a decade ago, Joseph Maguire (Emeritus Professor of Sociology of Sport at Loughborough University) stated that there is a “continuing drift towards a restrictive ‘scientization of physical education discourses’” (Maguire, 2011, quoted from Maguire, 2013, p. 92). Concerning both the academic and political SDP discourses, the “reducing and dividing” of physical education “into discrete and quantifiable variables” turns in our case out to be “a political problem of power/knowledge with significant historical implications” (Kemple & Mawani, 2009, p. 236). Although SDP was traditionally associated with what Bruce Kidd (2008) summarized as

athlete activism and an idealist response to the fall of apartheid, [...] enabled by the openings created by the end of the Cold War, the neo-liberal emphasis upon entrepreneurship and the mass mobilizations to “Make Poverty History” (p. 370),

it is by now obvious that SDP deviated from its original meaning, and that how it is constructed and positioned (Darnell, 2012) became subject to a power imbalance between the West and the Global South, and thereby came closer to what Immanuel Wallerstein coined the “social scientization of all knowledge” (Wallerstein, 1999; see also Ascione, 2021). In the case of SDP that is also connected with rationalization processes, through which “research into human well-being, the quality of the sport experience and aesthetic values have been squeezed out” (Maguire, 2004, p. 303). Hence, SDP programs in the Global South arguably became more and more subject to scientization — a tendency that not only has negative connotations, as the “scientization of physical education discourses” also implies the proliferation and tolerance of research-based accounts as the basis for the organization of SDP interventions that otherwise would perhaps remain “unprofessional” (Naish, 2016, p. 297). However, certainly of high relevance is the consequent opportunity to motivate more qualified people to get involved in



the discourse, as scientization also involves the increasing importance of new experts from the Global South.

The article contributes a challenge for the one-way direction of North-South lending of SDP policies, as well as of the transfer of knowledge and skill, and thereby provides a critique of predominant notions of development and also foreign aid that either neglect or underemphasize the context-specificity of the Global South. Moreover, the article introduces IOs as sites of knowledge production and translation and — with particular reference made to the *World Bank* — presents them as catalysts that facilitate processes of policy borrowing and lending through mediation, moderation, and coercion. The uniqueness of the study this article draws from is the analysis of inclusive (physical) education-related strategies in the context of globalization and global policy research in comparative and international education. The article combines the theory debate in our field with North-South discourses in SDP research stemming from Sports Sciences. It contributes new knowledge about the SDP discourse and challenges the paradoxical custom that researchers based in the North commonly do research on SDP (and not seldomly remain where they are), although the actual projects that are implemented on the ground are organized in the Global South. The article contributes to a new standpoint that puts SDP as a relevant tool in countering glocalised challenges within the boundaries of the Global North. In the end, and we close with a quote by John McKay that finishes his chapter in the book *Key Issues in Development which sums up it all up quite clearly*: “[d]evelopment is certainly about power, and the poor have, as always, little or no power either to set their own goals or to mobilize the resources needed to achieve them.” (McKay, 2004, p. 66).

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