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Placing community at the heart of community sport development: introducing the community sport development framework (CSDF)

Kate Mori[a], Haydn Morgan[b] , Andrew Parker[c] and Iain Lindsey[d]

[a]Shift Insight, London, UK; [b]University of Bath, Bath, UK; [c]University of the West of England, Bristol, UK; [d]Durham University, Durham, UK

ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that the primary purpose of community sport development (CSD) is to increase participation rates in sport and build capacity to facilitate sporting opportunities. However, in England, Government funding for community sport has often been legitimised on the basis that it can also address a range of broader policy concerns. Despite this, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the precise boundaries of CSD, which has led to a variety of frameworks being presented to conceptualise and illustrate how CSD delivery might best occur. The aim of this paper is to reconceptualise CSD by proposing a model that places community at the heart of efforts to utilise sport to address wider social concerns. Our aim is to highlight the social, political, and economic interconnections that impact contemporary CSD work, and to underline the importance of maintaining a central focus on communities as the basis for CSD.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that the primary purpose of community sport development (CSD) is to increase participation rates in sport and build capacity to facilitate sporting opportunities (Harris and Houlihan 2016; Rich, Spaaij, and Misener 2021; Svenson et al. 2017). However, in England—the specific context for the present discussion—Government funding for community sport has often been legitimised on the basis that it can also address a range of wider policy concerns, including the promotion of a healthier population (Warburton 2006; Bailey et al. 2013), the fostering of community cohesion and social inclusion (Morgan and Parker 2021), and as a contributor to crime reduction (Morgan et al. 2020; Morgan and Parker 2023; Nichols 2007). Yet, amidst such legitimisation, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the precise boundaries of CSD, the optimal methods for its provision, and the agencies which are best placed to deliver its initiatives. Indeed, the aims and methods of utilising sport purely to develop sporting talent or to achieve social objectives differ significantly, yet both are perceived as falling within the parameters of community sport (Bloyce and

Smith 2010; Coalter 2007; Mori et al. 2021; Robson, Simpson, and Tucker 2013). Such differentiation within and across the CSD landscape has become an increasingly prominent point of contention and has often resulted in diluted attempts to address both (Bowers and Green 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, the lack of clarity around what constitutes CSD has led to a variety of frameworks being presented to conceptualise and illustrate how CSD delivery might best take place (see Eady 1993; Hylton 2013). Perhaps not surprisingly, these frameworks often differ on the basis of their emphasis towards increasing participation as a foundation for talent identification and development, or in using sport instrumentally to address wider community concerns (Collins 2010). Moreover, these frameworks often oversimplify (and, at times, disregard) the complexities of community-based work, treating CSD as something which operates in a social vacuum that is impervious to cultural, economic, and political forces. For this reason, it would appear appropriate for alternative models of CSD to be proposed that draw more directly upon a community development approach and which facilitate the identification of issues and priorities by communities themselves, whilst at the same time encouraging individuals and agencies to work together towards collective solutions to shared concerns (Gilchrist and Taylor 2016; Ledwith 2016; Ledwith and Springett 2010; Somerville 2016). Historically, such models have often been predicated on 'deficit' assumptions, where solutions are devised to 'fills gaps' and 'fix problems', which has often led to communities becoming disempowered and passive recipients of services rather than active agents in their own development (Somerville 2016).

In this sense, a shift towards community development approaches appears pertinent, particularly in light of recent governance agendas, which have emphasised the 'localisation' of policy (Hoogendam 2020; McCormack and Clayton 2017). Hence, the aim of the present paper is to propose an alternative conceptual model that seeks to place 'community' at the heart of efforts to utilise sport to address wider social concerns. In particular, this model aims to highlight the interconnections that frequently impact CSD work, and underlines the importance of maintaining a central focus on communities as the basis for CSD. At this juncture, it is worth noting that our proposition is neither a process or a normative model, in that it does not claim to provide some kind of treatise or directive on how community sport development should take place. Instead, we present this model simply as a heuristic by offering policymakers and practitioners a lens through which they might consider and reflect upon the interconnectedness of policy and practice which, in turn, may encourage those within the sector to develop a greater sense of awareness and understanding in relation to the cultural, political, and economic factors impacting their experiences of on-the-ground delivery. To this end, and to be clear, the model is derived in line with the English sport development context. That said, we recognise that it could be equally applicable to a broader range of countries and jurisdictions.

Defining community and community sport development (CSD)

The notion of community is a contested term, with conceptual clarity often elusive or open to debate and diverse interpretation (Rich, Spaaij, and Misener 2021). Traditional views of locality-based communities serve to portray them as fixed territorial entities or geographically bounded areas that act as spaces for friendship, hope, neighbourliness and place attachment (Harvey 2000; Rich, Spaaij, and Misener 2021). However, over time, the

importance and influence of neighbourhood communities has been challenged (Putnam, 2000) and concern has been expressed that purely geographical definitions of community fail to acknowledge the impact of global forces on the formation and experience of community (Harvey 2012). For example, in recent decades, changing patterns and locations of employment have led to increasing degrees of geographic mobility which have impacted spatially-defined communities. In turn, communities have become home to transitory populations who do not feel strong bonds to a particular geographical area and accept that the space which they inhabit may not be for life. This has the possible knock-on effect of individuals no longer recognising the need to establish strong communal ties and relying less readily on their neighbours for social contact or support. In this sense, community has begun to be expressed as a relational or symbolic concept, where articulations of, and connections to, community are more fluid and/or open to change, as individuals decide the extent to which they identify with a particular community (see Rich, Spaaij, and Misener 2021 for a fuller discussion). Against this backdrop, notions of 'community' have become more nuanced and notoriously difficult to define. For the purposes of this paper, it is with 'traditional' locality- or place-based articulations of community that we align.

In the same way, conceptual articulations of 'community sport development' (CSD) experience a similar level of ambiguity. The instrumental use of community sport to achieve social objectives has long been a staple of UK party political rhetoric, yet, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the boundaries of CSD, what it is and what it entails. As both Coalter (2007) and Hylton (2013) highlight, community sport development spans a wide spectrum from the identification and development of sporting talent, to the use of sport as a 'hook' to engage hard-to-reach groups. The differentiation between the development of sport to enhance participation and performance in sport as an end in itself, and development through sport, i.e. as an activity that is designed to use sport as a means to achieve a range of other social, economic and political ends, has become an increasingly topical issue (Houlihan and Lindsey 2013; Levermore and Beacom 2009). This lack of clarity has not been helped by policy-makers, who in recent years have placed the responsibility for increased sports participation onto NGBs (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2012). This is problematic simply because NGBs have had a historical focus on developing club sport and improving sporting performance and have often lacked the skills and confidence to work beyond this remit. Our contention is that before sport can contribute to community cohesion and development, those operating within these domains require an understanding of the complexities of working both with and within diverse communities. In turn, unless those working within community sport have an understanding of what 'community' means, then it may be difficult for them to fully understand the potential of sport in the development of these communities.

Conceptualisations of community (sport) development

One of the consequences of this conceptual ambiguity is that, in England at least, CSD appears to have become a 'catch-all' term for any aspect of sport which falls outside the dedicated promotion of activities for elite performance (Bloyce and Smith 2010). As a result of such breadth, the aims, priorities and focus for the CSD agenda have become blurred and imprecise. This lack of clarity has been compounded by successive shifts in government policy surrounding the purpose and utility of sport. Over the last three decades, for example,

the sport policy pendulum in England has continually swung between a focus on activities regarded as 'sport for sport's sake' (such as raising sport participation levels and developing physical and human infrastructure for sport), and a concern for utilising sport as an instrument to address a range of broader societal issues (such as social cohesion and inclusion) (see Coalter 2007; Harris and Houlihan 2016).

At a practical level, this constant ebb and flow of sport policy priorities has led to challenges in relation to developing effective delivery mechanisms. The lack of alignment between policy and delivery has rendered the achievement of objectives attached to CSD highly problematic, as levels of sport participation have remained largely unaltered in England over the last 20 years (Ramchandani, Shibli, and Kung 2018; Widdop et al. 2018). Furthermore, broader societal concerns, such as promoting good health and addressing inequality have deepened (Atkinson 2015; McKinnon et al. 2020). On occasion, the agencies which have been afforded responsibility to meet CSD targets have been misaligned. For example, National Governing Bodies for Sport (NGBs), who are specifically tasked with increasing participation within their respective sports and maintaining a structure to facilitate such participation, have often found themselves accountable for delivering CSD programmes in socio-economically deprived areas, where the focus has been on engaging 'hard-to-reach' groups through sport. Relatedly, the roles and responsibilities of CSD workers have become difficult to define (Mori et al. 2021; Pitchford and Collins 2010), with CSD employees situated within diverse professional contexts, such as the criminal justice system, mental health services, NHS trusts and youth work. Consequently, as the scope and remit of the community sport profession has diversified, so too has the requirement for the CSD workforce to possess a wider skill set.

In terms of conceptual frameworks to explain CSD, existing models have attempted to account for fluctuations in policy focus and the broadening remit of CSD. Possibly the most widely acknowledged framework for sports development (see Bowers and Green 2016; Green 2005; Ha, Lee, and Ok 2015) is the Pyramid Model (see Figure 1) (Eady 1993) which visualises a 'foundation' stage (typically school-based), whereby the fundamental skills of sport are introduced to provide a broad base of 'participation', from which talent is identified and nurtured through the stages of 'performance' and then 'excellence'.

In the Pyramid Model, sporting progression is hierarchical with participants sequentially graduating through each stage. Of course, such progression is often far from linear on account of variations in participant motivation and accessibility to facilities, support, and resources (amongst a plethora of other factors) (Robson, Simpson, and Tucker 2013).

**Figure 1.** Pyramid model of sports development.

However, this model has been used extensively by UK government and sports agencies to underpin policy agendas and as a basis for subsequent modelling. Despite its widespread use, critics of the sports development pyramid highlight how it lacks sustained empirical and conceptual integrity (Houlihan and Green 2013; Shilbury, Sotiriadou, and Green 2008), offering an overly simplistic and reductive account of sports development that does not easily accommodate community sport and its broader aims of contributing towards social welfare objectives (Coalter 2010; Houlihan and Green 2013; Hylton 2013).

In the interests of broadening debate in this area, Hylton (2013) proposed an alternative model which values the important social role played by CSD. This model presents CSD as occurring along a continuum (see Figure 2) in which pure 'sport' development (sport in the community) is located at one end, and community development, in which sport is utilised as a vehicle for achieving broader social objectives, is located at the other (Hylton 2013).

In this model, the interface between participation in sport and community development is acknowledged and the divergent aims of CSD are accounted for and, in this sense, the conceptualisation of community sport is broadened. However, it could be argued that this model is equally reductionist by failing to locate 'community' at the heart of CSD and ignoring the wider political complexities in play. Whilst simplicity of design can aid conceptual understanding, the community sports development continuum does little to portray the key drivers behind the development of community sport. That said, the model does serve to broaden debates concerning the location and definition of community sport and, in this respect, offers a foundation on which to build. Nevertheless, neither model acknowledges the complex network of policy makers, funders, and practitioners that influence the delivery of CSD, and which operate across national, regional, and local jurisdictions.

In response, Hylton (2013, 96) proposes the CSD Matrix (see Figure 3) as a lens through which to locate and capture this structural complexity and enable 'comparative analyses of organisations, initiatives and partnerships' involved in CSD. In short, the CSD Matrix takes into account criticisms of previous models by recognising that CSD does not operate in isolation but is subject to a number of competing contextual factors from the wider sport policy landscape. More specifically, the CSD Matrix appreciates the complex dynamic of CSD delivery, and how it operates at different 'levels' (transnational, national, regional, local) while at the same time is influenced by a mixed economy model incorporating public, commercial (private), and voluntary sector interest.

However, while the CSD Matrix outlines the complexities of CSD structure, provision, and policy, and recognises the importance of the various sectors and partnerships involved in CSD, the focus of the model concentrates firmly on mode of delivery rather than on the conditions and environment of delivery itself. Moreover, like other models, the CSD Matrix is restricted to the sport policy context and fails to account for broader social, political, and economic forces as they play out across the CSD landscape. Furthermore, the CSD matrix seems particularly opaque and unnecessarily complex for what it attempts to portray, offering little beyond a means to reflect upon the structure and organisation of provision, of

PARTICIPATION

SPORT DEVELOPMENT ⟷ COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
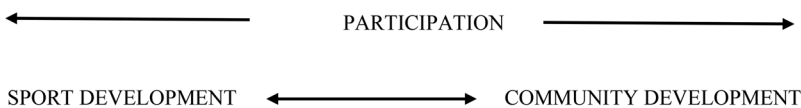
Figure 2. Community sports development continuum (Hylton 2013).
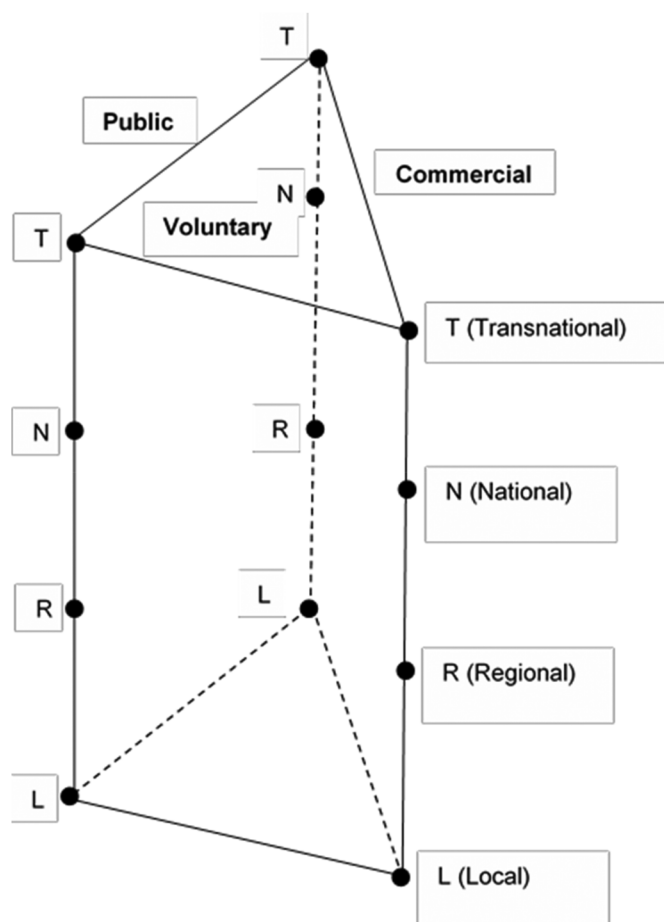
Figure 3. The CSD Matrix (Hylton 2013).

which there is already a substantial amount of accumulated knowledge (Grix and Phillpots 2010; Houlihan and Lindsey 2013; Parnell et al. 2019).

Clearly, it is difficult for one model of CSD to embrace all of the influencing factors across macro, meso and micro levels, while also addressing the intersectionality of relationships between politics, policy, and practice. Indeed, it is our contention that an acknowledgement of how political ideology and policy-making influence practice is vital to the determination of future models of CSD. In addition, a stronger articulation of where 'community' sits within the remit of CSD is a further pivotal consideration and one which the broader literature around community development helps facilitate. It is generally accepted that community development is concerned with individuals, groups, and networks that want or need to cooperate to achieve change at the local or community level (Craig et al. 2011; Gilchrist and Taylor 2016). Such cooperation ensures that issues and priorities are identified and agreed by the communities themselves, and that people are encouraged to work together to develop collective solutions to shared concerns (Gilchrist and Taylor 2016; Ledwith 2016; Ledwith and Springett 2010; Somerville 2016).

By way of example, an asset-based approach to community development (Garven, McLean, and Pattoni 2016; Gilchrist 2009) values individual capacity, such as skills,

knowledge, and connections, which have the potential to contribute towards the broader social wellbeing of a community. It also considers the more formalised assets of organisations and associations within the community, as well as infrastructure and physical resources. Such strengths-based approaches have been widely adopted within the fields of healthcare and social work (Clarke 2018; Minkler 2012; Saleebey 2000) and reinforces the benefits of local communities as the basis for improving community health and wellbeing. However, within community sport, asset-based approaches to development have received relatively little attention beyond the sport-for-development movement (Schulenkorf 2017). Where it has been applied (see, for example, Misener and Schulenkorf 2016), research has demonstrated how asset-based approaches have the potential to enhance the existing strengths of communities by positioning them as the source and beneficiary of development initiatives to ensure that community-centred outcomes are relevant, planned for and realised. Moreover, asset-based approaches seek to engage communities in an authentic way in order to create opportunities to gain knowledge of community perceptions and awareness of sport and identify assets that already exist.

Policy influences on community sport development

The pervasive presence of neo-liberalism as a guiding political philosophy across the United Kingdom has been significant in explaining how political ideology and policy have influenced the course of CSD. Consequently, discourses of efficiency, accountability, consumerism, choice, self-interest, and individual responsibility have become ingrained in policy rhetoric (see Andrews and Silk 2018; Dean 2010; Mori et al. 2021). In response, many publicly-funded organisations, including those within the community sport sector, have regulated their practices to adapt to free market expansion, acknowledging the need to operate in a more calculated and entrepreneurial way in order to meet pre-determined targets and ensure organisational survival (see Grix and Phillpots 2010; Mori et al. 2021; Walker and Hayton 2018). Moreover, since the 2008 global financial crisis, a number of national governments have adopted economic austerity as part of public sector reform (Parnell et al. 2019), thereby placing an increased emphasis on third sector organisations to deliver high quality services and to address gaps in Central Government provision (Mori et al. 2021). In England, austerity measures have intensified neoliberal ideals, forcing CSD providers to compete more forcefully forever decreasing resources, and the sector as a whole to become increasingly fragmented (Mori et al. 2021; Parnell et al. 2019).

A further by-product of neoliberalism has been the localisation of policy (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Hoogendam 2020). For McCormack and Clayton (2017), this is evidence of an attempt to encourage local people to influence their own communities, on the basis that individuals within a neighbourhood or municipality understand better than central government what is needed at the local level (Hoogendam 2020). Indeed, there has been growing recognition of the benefits of localisation, with proponents emphasising its ability to bypass the slow, bureaucratic, and expensive intermediary organisations that are inherent in 'top-down', centralised approaches (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2012). However, localisation can have significant implications for public professionals, including those in the CSD sector. As Hoogendam (2020) observes, such professionals can no longer be viewed as mere 'implementers' of public policy, using their discretion to 'make policy work', but instead routinely find themselves addressing a whole series of complex social issues, and, in this sense, inadvertently become the 'makers' of policy.

This shift towards more localised, community-oriented approaches has certainly been apparent in national sport policy and funding in England in recent years. An initial marker of this shift was Sport England's allocation of approximately 16% of its four-year funding budget from 2017 to a set of twelve 'Local Delivery Pilots'. These pilots were accompanied by the creation of a new Local Delivery Directorate in Sport England itself and were subsequently emphasised more widely in the publication of the organisation's 10-year strategy, titled *Uniting the Movement*, in 2021. This latter document placing particular importance on: '… a more bottom-up approach to our work and investment. Working with – not doing things to – communities, and helping those affected to play a role in what happens in their neighbourhood and how it gets done'. (Sport England 2021, 22).

In turn, Sport England have also indicated a desire to move away from a 'transactional' approach to funding decisions and requirements to one which involves working '… more collaboratively - at a local level, trusting and empowering our partners more, with fewer top-down national programmes' (Sport England 2021, 50). Increased value was also placed on the expertise of the CSD 'workforce' and building capacity for leadership amongst those involved in local sport and physical activity provision, to further underline how localisation may alter the role of CSD professionals from 'policy implementer' to 'policy maker'. Moreover, commitment to expanding what Sport England have termed as 'place-based working' has been accompanied by a consideration of wider systems influencing sport and physical activity at the local and national level. This represents an apparent shift in the analytic focus of sport policy (and perhaps intervention), from previous portrayals of potential participants as 'customers' with choice over physical activity habits (e.g. HM Government 2015; Sport England 2016), towards a recognition that a larger social, political, and economic system is in play to define the possibilities and opportunities available to community sport (Sport England 2021).

Given these contextual complexities, it is our argument that new models and frameworks are required to illustrate the competing tensions inherent within CSD which highlight how the interconnections between political ideology, policy shifts, and the organisations responsible for the delivery of sport policy, impact on what can be achieved at the community level. As we have noted above, critical here is the (re)positioning of 'community' at the centre of any such model so that the impact of social, political and economic variance is less likely to de-stabilise the primary purpose of CSD, and undermine efforts to utilise sport to address wider social concerns. Our attention now turns to an explanation of our proposed model, the Community Sport Development Framework.

Re-conceptualising community sport development

Our central aim in proposing the Community Sport Development Framework (CSDF) (see Figure 4 below) is to re-conceptualise the discursive backdrop against which CSD takes place by highlighting the contemporary drivers across the macro, meso, and micro levels of community sport policy and practice. As noted above, at one level we present the Framework simply as a heuristic device in order to intentionally generate further scrutiny, debate, and understanding about the complexities of community sport development. At the same time, we offer it as a theoretical lens to inform further empirical analyses of the way in which community sport development work might be designed. Consequently, and for clarification, the Framework is neither a process or a normative model which
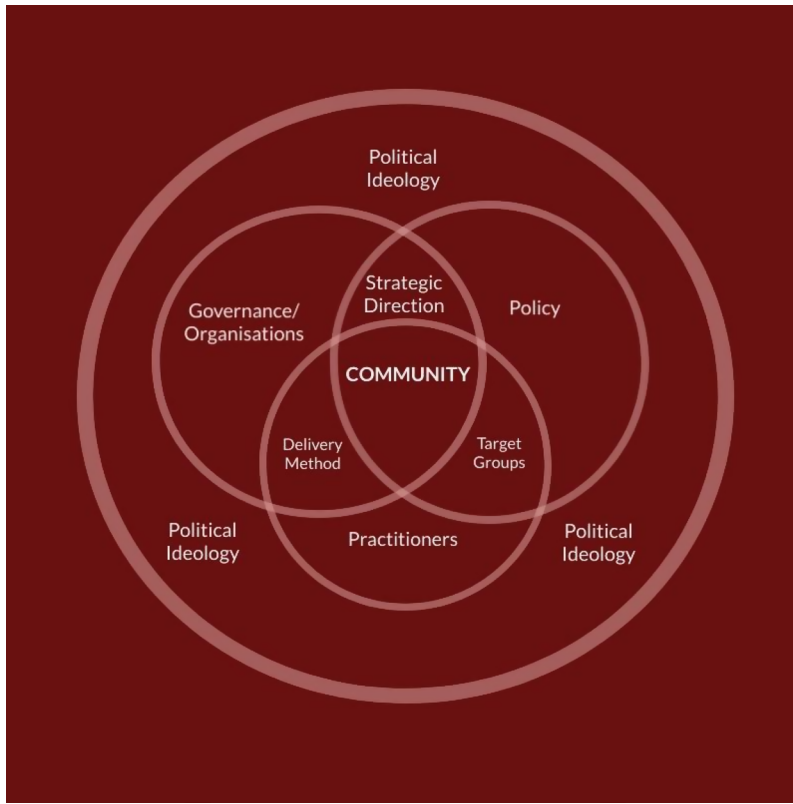
Figure 4. The community sport development framework (CSDF).

practitioners can adopt or apply directly to their work, but one which invites reflection on the elements of policy and practice that enable and constrain sport-based approaches to community development.

To this end, the Framework charts the way in which the inter-relationship between political ideology, policy, governance and organisations, delivery methods and practitioners (among others) are fundamental to the quality, delivery, and impact of community sport development. By examining the interactions across these different levels (referred to by some authors as a 'nested' paradigm – see Kuhn 1974; Nicholls and Teasdale 2017) – it is possible to identify how each level guides or facilitates the next. Consequently, the interactional framing across the macro, meso, and micro is pertinent to the development of the CSDF as it assists in re-conceptualising and critiquing the interaction between policymakers, sports organisations, and community sport development practitioners. Furthermore, because the CSDF highlights the intersectionality and interconnectedness between these different stakeholder groups, it brings strategic direction, delivery methods, and target groups to the fore. In turn, the Framework recognises the importance of practitioners within the context of the community sport development landscape, a factor which has too often been overlooked in previous models. In doing so, it focuses attention on delivery, whilst recognising the influence of sport policy objectives on practice. Sporting governance, and the agencies and organisations involved with community sport development, comprise another component of the Framework, given that these too are highly influential in shaping community sport delivery.

Locating 'community' within the community sport development framework (CSDF)

Perhaps not surprisingly, a critical aspect of the CSDF is the primacy afforded to notions of 'community', so that irrespective of changes across the policy and organisational landscape, community (however defined) remains a central consideration within community sport development work. As we have argued, traditional models of sport development and the practice of community sport development work often lack a central focus on communities (Bolton, Fleming, and Elias 2008; Eady 1993; Hylton 2013), and, indeed, this oversight, along with a limited conceptual understanding of the term 'community', is regularly cited as the root of programme failure (Schaillee et al. 2019). Communities are dynamic, evolving, and contradictory. On the one hand they offer a sense of security, belonging and acceptance, yet at the same time they can contribute to feelings of exclusion, isolation, and loneliness. For some authors, the definition of community in political discourse is seen as an overly optimistic, emotive, and unrealistic representation of modern-day society (Bauman 2007; Brent 2004; Dixon, Dogan, and Sanderson 2005). For others, 'community' is seen as '… a complex matrix of intense competition between contesting groups, often class-based, struggling for a slice of the social and financial cake' (Robson 2000, 132). Indeed, interpretations of community that assume unity and reciprocity are often regarded as somewhat naïve, with their over-emphasis on the positive masking of the fact that numerous communities are experienced as discriminatory, exclusionary, and even hostile (Berner and Phillips 2005).

The skills involved in community sport development work can sometimes be overlooked in a system that favours neoliberal ideals concerning market forces, individual choice, competition and new public management. Likewise, the focus on community can often be lost amid a pre-occupation with income generation, financial sustainability, and political expediency (among others). The CSDF offers recognition that all macro to meso level drivers (such as political ideology, policy, practitioners, delivery methods) will inevitably impact on communities and their involvement with CSD programmes. Understanding the varied definitions of community could assist in helping CSD work more holistically within the communities they serve, and time spent considering what is meant by the term 'community' may prove beneficial in this respect. Specific delivery methods have not been identified within the CSDF, as there is a desire to enable and accommodate the changing nature of practice over time and for the Framework to elicit reflection and (re)iteration rather than prescription in relation to specific approaches to practice. That said, further discussion within the sector regarding how a strengths-based approach to delivery could be utilised, asset mapping and appreciative enquiry (Stavros, Torres, and Cooperrider 2018; Cassetti et al. 2019), could be beneficial. Asset mapping involves working with members of the community to identify their strengths or assets and to articulate a future direction and desired outcomes (visioning) before working with community partners to mobilise strengths to help achieve goals (mobilising) (Fisher et al. 2009). This type of community-driven development can lead to external agencies engaging in a more supportive and enabling role, as opposed to pre-determined directional development of community sport (Mathie and Cunningham 2005). Fundamentally, the shift from a deficit-based to an asset-based approach requires a change in attitudes and values (Cassetti et al. 2019). Professional staff have to be willing to share power which means that instead of doing things for people, they have to help a community to do things for itself. Such working practices open up opportunities to develop a community-led ethos which has the potential to be more open-ended and sustainable.

Clearly, how practitioners understand and engage with communities is fundamental to the CSDF. Aligning with notions of community consciousness (Morgan and Bush 2016), unless those working within community sport understand the definitions and associated meanings of the term 'community' then it may remain difficult for them to fully understand sport's role in the development of the community. Nevertheless, community engagement is made more complicated by the fact that practitioners frequently find themselves having to (re)align their work with the (macro and meso) political tide, where ideals concerning market forces, individual choice, competition, and new public management have often left community sport on the shifting sands of short-term contracts and unreliable income streams (Mori et al. 2021). In this respect, community sport development practice can become preoccupied with strategies to retain and secure funding, all of which runs the risk of communities themselves becoming a reduced or forgotten element of programme delivery.

With all of this in mind, we argue that an understanding of the macro and meso-level influences that face any community is critical to the re-conceptualisation and effective operationalization of CSD, so that practitioners can fully consider any community sport offer and how it is delivered. These influences are highly contextualised and are unlikely to be the same across different locales, thus, placing 'community' at the heart of the model is a call to fully understand the community before attempting to articulate how political ideology at the macro-level and wider policy, practice, and governance influences at the meso-level might impact.

Macro-level considerations – political ideology

Analysis at the macro-level recognises the impact of the broader political-economic context and the interactions between state, markets, and society. Furthermore, an appreciation of the welfare regime or political ideology in place within a specific nation state gives rise to an understanding of the level at which decision-making takes place and insight into which voices are more prominent (or, more accurately, silenced) within policy debate and design. Macro-level comparative analyses of social policy, including those related to sport policy (see Bergsgard et al. 2007; Nicholson, Hoye, and Houlihan 2011), have often adopted Epsing-Andersen's (1990) landmark research on welfare regimes as a guiding framework. In short, Epsing-Andersen identified three types of welfare regime, (i) liberal, (ii) conservative-corporatist, and (iii) social democratic, which are distinguished by the level of public and private welfare provision evident in a state context, the extent to which the individual is protected against market forces (de-commodification), and the type of social stratification that results from the welfare regime. The liberal welfare regime is characterised by a minimal state, the individualisation of risk, and the promotion of market solutions to address welfare concerns. In contrast, the social democratic welfare regime provides more comprehensive risk coverage to its citizens, generous benefit levels, and a commitment to egalitarianism. Finally, the conservative-corporatist welfare regime promotes a family orientation to welfare policy (including limited support for female participation in the labour market), benefit schemes that are linked to occupational status, and modest levels of de-commodification (Bergsgard et al. 2007; Nicholson, Hoye, and Houlihan 2011).

Like a number of other Westernised nations, liberalism has long been the dominant political ideology in the UK. However, since the 1970s, the advance of *neoliberalism* as an

economic solution has subsequently shaped (sport) policy around discourses of efficiency, accountability, consumerism, choice, self-interest, and individual responsibility (see Andrews and Silk 2018; Dean 2010; Mori et al. 2021). While aspects of neoliberal ideology have been emphasised in accordance with the party politics in play at any particular time (to demonstrate its variegated and pluralised nature - see, for example, Goldstein 2012; Peck and Theodore 2012; Andrews and Silk 2018), the neoliberal influence on community sport development has been clearly evident. First, neoliberal ideals have served to shape and contextualise policy decisions at the meso-level (Nicholls and Teasdale 2017), yet its impact has been even more visible at the micro-level through its use of language and focus, where an emphasis on achieving key performance indicators and the diversification of funding (to name but two) has deeply affected community sport delivery (Grix and Phillpots 2010).

As a result, neoliberalism has been responsible for a number of consequences (intentional and unintentional) within community sport development. On the one hand, neoliberalism has intentionally sought to sharpen and regulate delivery, by transforming professionals into 'calculating individuals' (Dean 2010) who seek the most efficient means possible to achieve pre-determined targets. It has also enabled a flood of alternative service providers within community sport provision, moving the sector away from its traditional model of local authority delivery towards an entrepreneurial marketplace of private and social enterprise organisations (Morgan 2013). On the other hand, the ideological conditions in which community sport has operated have manifested a range of unintended consequences, such as: fragmentation of the community sport sector, job insecurity, workforce deskilling, the dilution and demise of quality assurance mechanisms, and a pre-occupation with quantitative metrics (see Mori et al. 2021).

Meso-level considerations – target groups

At the intersection between policy and practitioners, the CSDF aims to capture the considerations and decision-making processes around the direction of funding and the populations which should be engaged through sport development work. In this respect, sport policy often focuses on target groups, the rationale here being that there is a finite amount of funding available and, because of this, resources need to be distributed appropriately (Houlihan and Lindsey 2013; Widdop et al. 2018). However, the notion of funding being ring-fenced for certain target groups is somewhat at odds with the broader ideological intention of encouraging personal responsibility for health, wellbeing, and sporting participation (Andrews and Silk 2018), especially when those taking personal responsibility may be beyond the remit of policy specified target groups. Moreover, the particular target groups identified in policy typically offer a broad-brush indication of where the focus of practice and resource should be, and this has the potential to create blind-spots in relation to the nuances of community diversity, where local 'target groups' may be different to (or mis-aligned) with those prioritised in policy.

Within this context, the role of community sport development work becomes more challenging as practitioners attempt to navigate a changing political agenda of diversified funding and delivery whilst ensuring that policy constraints do not overly restrict their work within the communities which they serve (Berry and Manoli 2018; Grix and Harris 2017; Parnell et al. 2019; Skille 2011; Walker and Hayton 2017). However, research has

highlighted how practitioners who are pro-active in engaging with the rhetoric of policy, and who possess an intimate knowledge of the political landscape within which they operate, are more adaptable and resilient providers who can maintain support for specific communities (Mori et al. 2021; Roberts 2014). Indeed, by 'playing the game' and interpreting and reinterpreting policy to fit their own ends and the needs of their communities (Fischer 2003) is a key aspect of the CSDF. Furthermore, where practitioners are able to implement innovative approaches and re-invent their management and delivery of community sport services, potential exists to unlock opportunities to support target groups, aid organisational survival (and even flourishing), despite policy directives being focused elsewhere (Roberts 2014).

Meso-level considerations – strategic direction

While the interplay between policy and practitioners encourages community sport development personnel to tailor their provision to sustain certain target groups, the intersection between policy and the organisations responsible for the governance of sport (development) sets the 'rules' by which this 'game' is played. The most recent government strategy for sport firmly adheres to a 'sport for good' agenda, emphasizing the broader outcomes that sport can deliver (HM Government 2015). Historically, this instrumental use of sport has been adopted to drive outcomes linked to alleviating social and economic problems and promoting community development, economic regeneration, crime reduction, health improvement, and educational attainment (see Bloyce and Smith 2010; Coalter 2007; Hylton 2013). The current strategy highlights that for mental wellbeing, individual development, and social and community development, more work will need to be undertaken in the coming years to understand and evidence the precise impact that sport and physical activity can make on these overall outcomes (HM Government 2015). At one level, this would seem to take us no further forward than the 1990s (Coalter 2007), a period which was characterised by a lack of strong, cumulative evidence for such social welfare outcomes. According to Coalter (2007), this deficit is explained by conceptual and methodological weaknesses in defining sport and its associated outcomes, and a limited consideration of the conditions necessary to effect change. Because of this, CSD personnel have often struggled to evidence and understand the positioning of their work and have been offered little guidance along the way (Mackintosh 2012). Consequently, the pressure on CSD personnel to deliver and provide evidence for achieving the underpinning social welfare aims of their programmes remains strong, yet their inability to provide this evidence remains. In May 2019, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee reported to the House of Commons regarding the social impact of participation in culture and sport (House of Commons 2019). This report detailed several sport and arts initiatives that positively contributed to health and wellbeing, desistance from crime, educational engagement and attainment, and the regeneration of communities. Each section of the report highlighted individual initiatives evidencing the social impact of participation in culture and sport. However, it is questionable whether isolated case studies (however positive) can provide a national evidence base which is strong enough to mitigate Coalter's (2007) concerns. Likewise, focusing only on 'success stories' runs the risk of disregarding a consideration of unsuccessful initiatives, which may provide key insight and learning.

Micro-level – delivery methods

As we have seen, neoliberal ideology at the macro level, inevitably drives managerialist principles at a meso level, and this, in turn, influences micro level delivery. As is the case in a host of wider public service contexts, the stability of a career within a local authority setting, where jobs and lifetime service were once considered the norm, has been replaced by narratives surrounding performance management, restructuring, and redundancy, often for no obvious reason (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). Importing private sector principles into public sector contexts is often fraught with difficulties, with tensions routinely arising in relation to organisational environments, goals, structures, and management values (Denhardt and Denhardt 2015). Whilst the private sector may place a heavy emphasis on the customer, this is done largely to maximise profit. The public sector has different values and aims, in that it exists to cater for its local populations and to foster fairness and equality of opportunity. Forms of accountability are to the political leadership, central government, and its local population, rather than shareholders, and because of this private sector principles may work in direct opposition to public sector goals (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). For example, community sport services may not always be profitable, and may run at a loss, the rationale being that equality of opportunity and the promotion of citizen welfare is more important than income generation and profit maximisation. However, as public services are compelled to operate within a managerialist framework, regardless of whether such principles are appropriate, this focus can overlook the important aspect of external forces acting upon the public sector from politicians, the public, and wider society. This, in turn, can leave local authorities stuck between budgetary restrictions imposed by central government, and the dissatisfaction of local populations who bear the brunt of such measures *via* service cuts and increased council taxes (Bevir and Rhodes 2018). From a values perspective, participants may well believe that local authorities are best placed to operationalise sport strategy, however the practicalities of on-the-ground delivery may become increasingly problematic as more local councils face insurmountable funding pressures. Hence, even though sport policy may specifically outline the importance of local authority contribution towards achieving policy outcomes (see HM Government 2015; Sport England 2016), this is at odds with reduced funding within public health and public services. This dislocation of policy from practice is further deepened by sport, health, and wellbeing being implicated in a number of broader policy-making processes that span several government departments (i.e. school, community, elite sport) with seemingly limited interaction between those concerned (Department for Culture and Media and Sport 2015). This leads to funding, infrastructure, objectives, and the means of evaluating each policy being treated separately (Harris and Houlihan 2016). In turn, such dislocation has the potential to exacerbate a competitive and fragmented delivery at the grassroots level.

Conclusions

Community sport is delivered by varied and competing agencies. Some of these agencies may be focused on one sport that they wish to develop within the community (NGBs are a useful example in this respect) and others may have highly specific social objectives which they aim to achieve through sport. The aim of the present paper has been to draw together the key themes that have traditionally framed the CSD agenda and to propose the Community Sport Development Framework (CSDF) as a heuristic device *via* which to interrogate and analyse the modern-day CSD context. We argue that the CSDF demonstrates a utility for

a range of different organisations and contexts across the CSD landscape. Indeed, by highlighting the interconnectedness between political ideology, sport policy, sport governance, strategic direction, practitioners, delivery methods, communities, and specified target groups, the CSDF aims to offer those working in and around CSD a more holistic and broader interpretation and awareness of its principal drivers.

In addition, the CSDF highlights these drivers across the macro, meso, and micro levels of community sport policy and practice and in doing so, charts the way in which the interrelationship between political ideology, policy, governance and organisations, strategic direction, delivery methods, and practitioners (among others) are fundamental to the quality, delivery, and impact of CSD. As Hylton (2013) suggests, sports development models do not necessarily portray community sport as an entity in its own right; but instead conceive of it as a staging post to create a wider participatory base from which to identify talent and improve performance. Hylton goes on to argue that an alternative model can and should be developed which values the primacy of the social role played by CSD. The CSDF addresses this call and, at the same time, moves beyond the primacy of the social role played by CSD by encouraging policymakers and practitioners to reflect on the broader social, political, and economic factors influencing whether CSD initiatives can achieve their intended outcomes. In this sense, the CSDF acts as an enabling tool to assist deeper reflection around the impact of policy on practice and it is our hope that it will allow policymakers and practitioners alike to reflect upon how best to operationalize CSD within the contemporary ideological landscape of neoliberalism and the complexities which this inevitably brings.

To this end, we invite scholars, policy-makers and practitioners to consider how the CSDF has value or applicability within the context of their social, political, and economic circumstances. As we made clear at the outset, this articulation of the CSDF is derived from our analysis of policy and practice within the English sport development context, so wider applicability is not our specific aim. Indeed, and to reinforce this point, in presenting the CSDF as a conceptual model our aim is not to prescribe it as a specific approach to practice, but rather to invite further reflection on and reiteration of the model, encouraging future research which examines the potential applicability of the framework in different contexts and with alternative (relational) definitions of community to the ('locality') definition that we have used. Future iterations of the CSDF may also explore how best to capture diagrammatically the complex interaction of contextual forces in play, and present possible adaptations for practice in both specific and/or wider contexts.

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ORCID

Haydn Morgan http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1645-8599

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