

# Cultural Relations Collection

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# Sport, cultural relations and peacebuilding

Grant Jarvie

Cultural relations  
and peacebuilding

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# Acknowledgements

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Grant has had a life-long commitment to widening access to education.

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## The contributor

**Rebecca Gould** has just completed a 18 month secondment to the Barbican Centre in London, where she led work on Barbican Futures; a new creative, education and community vision for the centre. She joined the British Council in 2017, from the Soho Theatre, London where she was Creative Producer. Originally from Cardiff, Rebecca is currently on the board of Dirty Protest New Writing Theatre Company, Gentle Radical. She was an education associate artist for the Royal Shakespeare Company for 10 years and has worked extensively as a theatre director, including as an associate director at the Theatre Royal Plymouth, primary classics director at the National Theatre, director of the Education Company at the English Shakespeare Company and as associate director at the Made in Wales Stage Company. Rebecca co-founded TheatreScience, working closely with the Wellcome Trust to foster a wider awareness through theatre of biomedicine and she is currently writing a chapter for a book on Theatre and Science for Routledge.

## The series editor

**Christine Wilson** has worked in the British Council since 2004. As Director Research and Insight, she oversees a global portfolio spanning education, arts and culture, youth and skills, as well as exploring the role of cultural relations in supporting the UK's soft power aims. She is accountable for global standards and practice, ethics, programmes, partnerships and networks. She directs the Next Generation research series, which aims to engage youth voices around the world and contribute to improved policymaking. She previously directed the Hammamet Conference, which brought together leaders from the UK and North Africa, and co-chaired the steering group for Peace and Beyond, which marked the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement by exploring international approaches to sustainable peacebuilding. Christine is an Advisory Board member at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) at the University of Edinburgh, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

## The British Council

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## DOI

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# Foreword

The Cultural Relations Collection essay series, produced by the British Council's Research and Insight Team, asks early-career and established researchers to examine the theory and practice of cultural relations. We invite fresh perspectives on what has been the British Council's business for almost 90 years – building connections, understanding and trust.

This edition explores how cultural relations can contribute to peacebuilding in different settings and contexts.

Peacebuilding, and the erosion of peace, are intimately connected to many major challenges facing us nationally and internationally. No community that is divided by conflict, or the expectation or experience of conflict, can give adequate attention to less immediate but equally destructive threats, such as environmental degradation or economic instability.

Yet those same factors, left unaddressed, can only increase the likelihood of conflict. The result is a vicious circle which is increasingly difficult to escape.

These essays help us to understand what is meant by a cultural relations approach to peacebuilding and to demonstrate that this approach is both valid and valuable.

Each of the essays comes from a different disciplinary and regional perspective, but some common themes are evident.

One is Galtung's concept of positive (as opposed to negative) peace: peace as an active participatory experience, rather than simply the absence of violence. This supports proponents of cultural relations – and is a riposte to those who argue that soft power interventions in hard power situations are mere wishful thinking.

Also implicit in many of the essays is the importance of enabling safe spaces in which cultural relations can take place. Inclusivity and an atmosphere of trust are a sine qua non if citizens and communities are to experience a sense of their own agency.

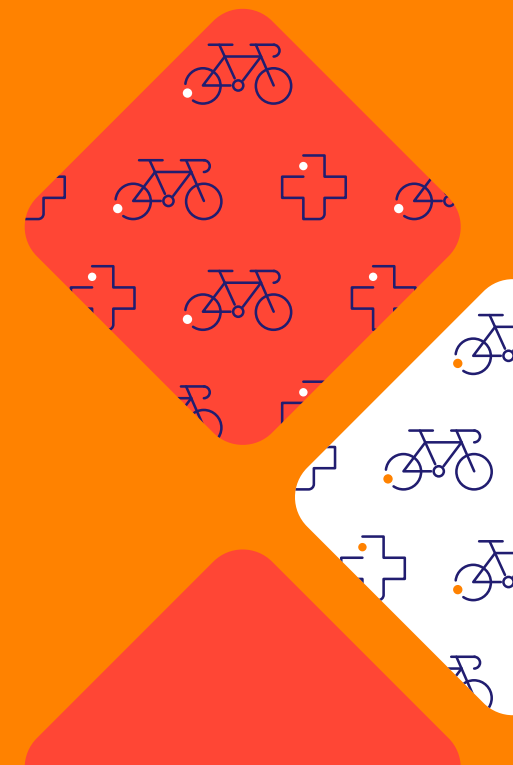
Related to this is deep listening (listening experienced as a positive and empathetic activity, rather than simply an absence of interruption), a topic explored in depth by one of our essayists. Listening to others' truth and speaking our own, not only to power but to ourselves, is at the core of cultural relations – and especially in our peacebuilding efforts. No true or lasting peace is built on half-truths and evasions.

Indeed, the importance of facing up to our own organisational and national history is addressed directly in one of these essays; and behind several authors stands the shadow of colonialism.

As in previous editions of this series, there is much here for readers, and the British Council itself, to reflect on and absorb. Peacebuilding is a complex and constantly developing subject, to which these essays make a valuable contribution.

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. To meet that goal, we will continue to explore with researchers, artists and peace practitioners how our cultural relations work can contribute to peacebuilding globally; this series is just the start.

**Scott McDonald**  
Chief Executive, British Council



# Preface to the Cultural Relations Collection

Welcome to the latest edition of the Cultural Relations Collection. As always, it has been stimulating to read fresh perspectives on cultural relations by new voices in the field. Previous editions in the Collection have examined cultural relations and climate change, and the impact of COVID-19 on cultural exchange. In 2022, we invited submissions on cultural relations and peacebuilding, given our renewed emphasis on the role of building trust and connections as central to the conditions required for sustainable peace, and in the spirit of what John-Paul Lederach calls ‘an approach that addresses the culture of violence by transforming it into the culture of dialogue’.

This is not a new area for the British Council, which emerged from the global crisis leading up to the Second World War in the realisation that building trust and understanding between the UK and the rest of the world was crucial. In 2018, which marked the centenary of the end of the First World War, the centenary of Nobel Peace Laureate Nelson Mandela, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, the British Council worked with partners in Northern Ireland on the conference *Peace and Beyond*<sup>1</sup>, an examination of global approaches to building lasting peace including reflections from contributors from countries including Lebanon, South Africa, and Colombia.

In 2023, the need to examine the conditions for peacebuilding are as relevant as they were in 2018. Colleagues around the world continue to work in communities affected by conflict, such as Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Yemen, to name but three. At the time of writing, we are working on research on the role of cultural events in addressing conflict and sharing the values of freedom and international co-operation, given the UK’s role in hosting Eurovision on behalf of Ukraine.

And so, to the individual contributions herein. At the 2018 *Peace and Beyond* conference, Judith Thompson, Chief Commissioner for the Commission for Victims and Survivors<sup>2</sup>, said: ‘Building social trust [...]in a society transitioning from

conflict is an essential ingredient to [...] building a better future for everyone and the generations that follow.’ This collection builds on that imperative by breaking down varied approaches to the building of trust.

Alice Naisbitt examines the role of science as a peacebuilding tool in two ways: that the connections built reinforce the trust vital to harmonious relations; and that the outcomes of scientific co-operation address drivers of conflict, such as resource scarcity. As with Hannah Dalgliesh’s contribution on the soft power of astronomy in a previous collection<sup>3</sup>, Naisbitt underpins the role of science as providing neutral, common ground for collaboration.

Naisbitt does not shy away from the historic challenges that have been presented to the British Council over the years, and the accusation that cultural relations – in science, arts, language, or education – run the risk of being instrumentalised for the soft power outcomes, rather than their development objectives. This theme is picked up in Daniel Feather’s fascinating history of educational co-operation between the UK and South Africa, including through the apartheid era when South Africa was globally isolated. He draws the distinction between cultural

diplomacy and cultural relations, although highlights where those lines can become blurred. While not uncritical of the role of the UK and the British Council over this period, his essay makes a powerful argument for the place of education in supporting a country’s transition from structural violence to a more equitable and peaceful state.

Three essays focus on arts and culture as tools for building peace. George Wilkes et al. consider the role of the cultural relations organisation in bridging the local and the global; the need not to overlook the smallest detail of any given conflict, while still recognising the power of building links across borders and amplifying the voice of those affected by conflict. Their emphasis on the need to deal with memory, whether of previous friendships, or of deep trauma, also harks back to contributions in *Peace and Beyond*<sup>4</sup> by Candice Mama and Cindy Mizher.

The role of the arts to make visible what may previously have been hidden, as well as to imagine new futures, is central to the essay of Daniela Fazio-Vargas and Carlos Pineda-Ramos. They make a powerful case for artistic expression as a means by which different voices can be elevated and building a space in

1 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace>

2 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace>

3 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/cultural-relations>

4 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace>

which difference is recognised and valued, and that only in this way, can true peace be achieved. Nar Bahadur Saud takes this up in his essay that reminds us that before the arts can support peace and justice, they too must recognise difference. His contribution centres on the need to empower and enable disabled people to express themselves through the arts, and that in doing so not only addresses the inequalities they face as individuals but will contribute to more equitable and peaceful societies.

2022 brought sport to the fore in the discourse on positive peacebuilding – that is, not just addressing violent conflict, but addressing the drivers of conflict, such as inherent violence against marginalised communities, or the continuation of structural inequities. Many people looked to the World Cup in Qatar with mixed feelings, as to whether this was ‘sportswashing’ or an opportunity to open up a human rights dialogue on the world stage. In his essay, Grant Jarvie explores the link between sports and diplomacy, and suggests a more prominent role for sport in development, particularly in peacebuilding, given its emphasis on team spirit, co-operation, and solidarity.

Lastly, Emily Kasriel examines a concept at the heart of peacebuilding – listening. Her essay on deep listening illustrates an approach that prepares individuals for encounters across any divides they find within their communities, however they are experiencing conflict. Drawing on both theory and practice, she draws out the transformational nature of this method, and the impact it has had on individuals and communities around the world, enabling them to truly see, hear and understand the person opposite them.

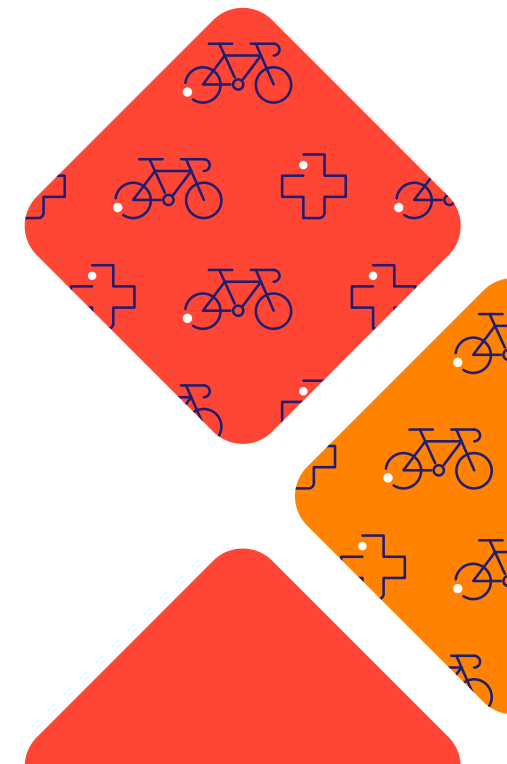
One of the participants in a deep listening exercise said it allowed her ‘to create an atmosphere of inclusivity, trust and positive discourse’. It feels as if we are in a time in which that approach is urgently needed. I hope too that this Cultural Relations Collection makes a similarly positive contribution, and I urge all readers to embrace that spirit.

**Christine Wilson**

Director of Research and Insight,  
British Council

## Abstract

The essay will examine the use of sport as an enabler of cultural relations and peacebuilding in the 21st century. It evidences the linkages between sport, culture and peacebuilding. It asserts that sport matters, has scale, is a pillar of connectivity, and is an invaluable tool but also that those involved with cultural relations and peacebuilding need to be smarter about how, when, and where to use sport. The essay identifies sport as a unique exemplar of a globally powerful, yet locally adaptive, community embedded implementation tool that can add value to cultural relations and peacebuilding. The research is cautious about grand claims. A credible way forward requires at least four elements: (i) mutual respect for sport as culture, (ii) additional reach including to marginalized communities (iii) evidence of effectiveness and (iv) potential for growth and scaled up cultural solutions. The essay encourages national institutes for culture, sports organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that use sport to recognise the value in a cultural relations approach as they seek to integrate the contribution of sport to enable peace, stability, and development in fragile contexts and communities.



# Introduction

The essay examines the case for sport as an enabler of cultural relations<sup>5</sup> and peacebuilding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The role of the arts, heritage and music have long since been recognised as effective cultural relations tools that can help a world that is tense, uncertain, fragile in places and seeking new solutions.<sup>6</sup> Reports from multi-lateral organisations have repeatedly called for more of the groundwork, engagement, choice, and co-operation to be aligned in order to enable sustainable pathways for peace.<sup>7</sup> The British Council's use of the arts, education and English language teaching to forge trust and understanding has been at the heart of efforts to building peaceful international relations for more than eight decades.<sup>8</sup> The role of art is recognized as a social tool in helping traumatized communities heal, but sport less so. The significance and recognition afforded sport as a valued aspect of culture is often forgotten.

The objective of this essay is to assert two propositions: firstly, that sport is a valuable component of cultural relations building in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and secondly that sport has a part to play in enabling peace processes.<sup>9</sup> Sport, it is argued, is not just a good entry point into contemporary notions of cultural relations and peace building but also a sustainable space that can hold multiple stakeholders over a long-term period.

What we are talking about is the intentional use of all forms of sport and physical activity to deliver not just sporting outcomes but also non-sporting outcomes. Sport therefore is not just valued for the pursuit of medals but rather as an enabler of sustainable development goals (SDGs). A cultural relations approach to sport and peacekeeping can help cultural organisations work for more individuals, communities, and nations more often.<sup>10</sup>

5 That means through the development of mutually beneficial exchanges leading to long-term, sustainable collaborations.

6 UNDP. (2022). *Uncertain times, unsettled lives, shaping our future in a transforming world*. Human development report 2021/22. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

7 The World Bank. (2018). *Pathways for peace: inclusive approaches to prevent violent conduct*. Washington: The World Bank.

8 British Council. (2019). *The art of peace – The value of culture in post-conflict recovery*. London: British Council; Balta, J. (2021). *Cultural relations – key approaches in fragile contexts*. Brussels: EUNIC.

9 Clarke F, Jones, A and Smith L. (2021). Building peace through sports a scoping review. *Sustainability* 2021, 13, 2129.

10 Grant, L, Reid, C, Buesseler, H and Addiss, D. (2022). A compassion narrative for the sustainable development goals: conscious and connected action. *The Lancet*. July 02, 2022.

# Beyond sports, soft power and culture

There are advantages in sport being embraced more fully by culture and being recognised as part of a cultural relations approach. The role of sport in delivering soft power, sports diplomacy and advancing trade, business, and influence through the hosting of major sporting events has been evidenced.<sup>11</sup> Comparative analysis of soft power and cultural relations tells us that the overwhelming policy priorities for countries' soft power and cultural relations activities are support for foreign policy and economic growth followed by the need to face global challenges and promote values such as human rights, democracy, peace and harmony.<sup>12</sup> Soft power and cultural relations while similar are different things.<sup>13</sup>

The role of sport in soft power building is not new but what is new is the times in which we live. The contemporary world needs tools that

can facilitate long-term engagement and spaces that can hold several diverse stakeholders. There is a need to move beyond thinking about sport purely in terms of soft diplomacy or soft power or sportswashing or notions of culture that exclude sport. Let us consider each of these in turn.

## Beyond sports diplomacy

Recent integrative reviews of sports diplomacy have helped to create a dialogue about terms, the use of theory, methods of analysis and the location of studies and researchers<sup>14</sup>. Postlethwaite, Jenkin and Sherry identified several issues including:

- A predominance of case studies, use of documentary sources and secondary data.
- A lack of consistency in the way the term sports diplomacy is utilized.

11 Grix, J and Brannagan, P. (2016). Of mechanisms and myths: conceptualising states' "soft power" strategies through sports mega-events. *Diplomacy and Statecraft*. 27(2): 251-272; Murray, S and Price, G. (2020). *Towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy*. Cardiff: British Council Wales.

12 British Council (2022). *Soft power and cultural relations: a comparative analysis*. London: British Council.

13 British Council (2022). *Soft power and cultural relations: a comparative analysis*. London: British Council.

14 Postlethwaite, V, Jenkin, C, and Sherry, E. (2022). Sport diplomacy: an integrative review. *Sport Management Review*, DOI: 10.1080/14413523.2022.2071054, 7 September:1-22; Murray, S, and Pigman, G. A. (2014). Mapping the relationship between international sport and diplomacy. *Sport in Society*, 17(9): 1098–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.856616>; Murray, S. (2018). *Sports diplomacy: Origins, theory, and practice*. London: Routledge.

- A call for a greater dialogue between a range of scholars using the term.
- A dominant focus upon parts of the world, such as Europe, Asia and North America.
- The need to move beyond the nation state and consider more contemporary notions of diplomacy through sport, including other actors, global agendas and diplomatic outcomes.
- The pre-dominance of research coming out of high-income countries.

There are opportunities and challenges for those working with sports diplomacy. The term is usually presented as forms of public diplomacy in which sportspeople undertake diplomatic activities in collaboration with governments to advance foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Conceptually, Murray talks of sports diplomacy as the

*“Use (of) sportspeople and sporting events to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organizations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government’s foreign policy goals”.*<sup>16</sup>

When U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken visited the Middle East in 2022 he didn’t go there just to talk about oil and natural gas, terrorism or the war in Ukraine. He also went there to talk about soccer.<sup>17</sup> Before the U.S. national team’s World Cup opener in Qatar, Blinken joined representatives of the American squad and dozens of young Qatari boys and girls for a soccer clinic, where he talked about one of the most useful implements in his diplomatic toolbox: sports. He went on to say that:

*“We use sports as a way of connecting people, connecting people to our country. Whenever I go around the world — whatever, again, our differences may be — sports brings us together, unites us, connects us.”*<sup>18</sup>

Australia launched its first sports diplomacy strategy in 2015 and its second in 2020. The aim was to ensure that Australia’s domestic culture, identity and love of sport was included in its diplomacy. Sport was identified by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as a key soft power asset. Working in tandem with Australia’s overseas embassies, posts and missions, sports diplomacy was seen as vital to helping shape an environment that

was positively disposed to Australian foreign policy interests around maintaining stability.

Sports diplomacy alone may be delivered in different formats but sports diplomacy as personal or public or cultural diplomacy cannot and should not be seen as a sole tool or key mechanism in advancing either soft power or long-term cultural relations building.

## Beyond major sporting events

A number of evidenced case studies have drawn attention to the exercise of the use of sport as UK soft power tool.<sup>19</sup> Ernst and Young’s study of soft power, trade, and investment impacts through MSE’s in the city of London drew attention to £4 billion worth of potential soft power trade and investment impacts through MSE’s in the coming decade.<sup>20</sup> The report called for such potential to be recognised and realised through enhanced strategic planning, encouragement of effective collaboration and the promotion of purposeful engagement.<sup>21</sup> In 2019 sport contributed £48.9 billion gross

added value, about 2.6% of the UK total.<sup>22</sup>

Big events such as the hosting of the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics are regularly viewed as major soft power opportunities. France, Japan, and Qatar have all been using major sporting events to influence perceptions of the country.<sup>23</sup>

Looking forward to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, a new role for French sport was envisaged, one that delivers not just health outcomes but also as greater solidarity between France and Africa. *Sport En Commun*<sup>24</sup> was launched in September 2020, supported by a coalition of Public Development Banks and partners but with the specific purpose of using sport to deliver social and economic development in Africa. The 2024 Olympic Games as a major sporting event is being used to fund, support connect and influence perceptions of France through sport.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, with both sports diplomacy and major sporting events the tendency in most cases has been one of short-termism, reacting to given opportunities and delivering against a

15 Murray, S. (2012). The two halves of sports-diplomacy. *Diplomacy and Statecraft*. 23(3): 581.

16 Murray, S. (2017). Sports diplomacy in the Australian context: Theory into strategy. *Politics and Policy*. 45(5): 845.

17 Baxter, K. (2023). The best kept secret in the State Department- How sports help U.S. diplomats. *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 29, 2023.

18 Baxter, K. (2023). The best kept secret in the State Department- How sports help U.S. diplomats. *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 29, 2023.

19 Jarvie, G. (2021). Sport, soft power and cultural relations. *Journal of Global Sports Management*. 4 August: 1-18.

20 Ernst and Young, (2021). The impact of major sporting events: soft power, trade and investment impacts. London: Ernst and Young.

21 Ernst and Young, (2021). The impact of major sporting events: soft power, trade and investment impacts. London: Ernst and Young.

22 Ernst and Young, (2021). The impact of major sporting events: soft power, trade and investment impacts. London: Ernst and Young.

23 British Council (2022). *Soft power and cultural relations: a comparative analysis*. London: British Council.

24 Sport En Commun. <https://sportencommun.org/en/> [Retrieved 27 February 2023].

25 Jarvie, G. (2021). Sport, soft power and cultural relations. *Journal of Global Sports Management*. 4 August: 1-18.

cycle of foreign policy priorities. Sport might be able to do some of its best work by keeping one eye on a longer time horizon, rather than a government of the day, or an ambassador on a three or four year posting or a specific major sporting event.

## Beyond sport as soft power and sportswashing

There has been a plethora of works on sport as soft power including the aforementioned themes of sports diplomacy, the use of major sporting events and the use of sport for development purposes.<sup>26</sup> The interest in sport as soft power both historically and currently has tended to rest upon a number of arguments. That sport matters because it can:

- Create influence and forces of attraction.
- Develop feel-good factors- albeit only temporarily.
- Provide access to specific and high net value networks.
- Have an appeal that can cross linguistic and cultural barriers.
- Foster opportunities for conversations between countries and stakeholders that take place

around sporting events and overseas visits by sports clubs and sports celebrities.

- Intentionally deliver outcomes that are important to countries, embassies, foreign ministries and a range of national and international stakeholders and coalitions.

Critiques of soft power have not been hard to find.<sup>27</sup> Soft power interventions can invariably be short-term since the agencies, institutions, quasi- governmental organisations at arm's length from government are often constrained by operational cycles tied to short-term funding and planning. The increase in soft power by one actor does not necessarily mean the decrease in soft power by another actor. It remains problematic to see soft power solely in terms of the accumulation of soft power resources or seeing soft power as purely being framed by national soft power strategies that align with a country's foreign policy.

Critiques of the use of sport as a soft power tool are also not hard to find. There is no agreed definition of sportswashing, but it is regularly used to describe the situation where sports are used by a state or non-state actor to launder the actor's

reputation. It equally applies to states and cities.<sup>28</sup> The most common forms being the hosting of sport events and the ownership and sponsoring of prominent sports teams. What sportswashers seek is non reputational gain.<sup>29</sup> Resistance to sportswashing can come in different forms including, better governance in sport, tougher criteria involved in the bidding process for major sporting events, tighter screening of bids and owners of sports clubs and fan and athlete activism all have a role in resisting sportswashing. *The Centre for Sport and Human Rights*,<sup>30</sup> of which more shall be said later, is a welcome addition to the international sporting ecosystem.

The use of sport for entertainment and cases of corruption should not mask or be used to deflect the added value that sport brings in helping to advance the common good<sup>31</sup>. The use of sport to enable better culture relations and peace building should

not be side-lined because of the limits of soft power and aspects of sport. There is a need to move beyond seeing sport as simply soft power and sportswashing. There is a need to recognise that as modalities of sports delivery elite sport and major sporting events make up a very small per centage of the sporting effort.

## Beyond culture without sport

The role of sport as an integrated aspect of culture has still to be fully grasped by many cultural organisations.<sup>32</sup> Sport at times does not hold the same importance as other facets of cultural policy. A word search, in *The Missing Pillar: Culture's Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>33</sup> fails to find the word sport or sports-based approaches or the thousands of agencies, sports bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

28 Towriss, D. (2022). What is sportswashing and how does it threaten democracy? International institute for democracy and electoral assistance. Stockholm. [Retrieved at 19 February 2023]- <https://www.idea.int/blog/explainer-what-%E2%80%98sportswashing%E2%80%99-and-how-does-it-threaten-democracy>

29 Towriss, D. (2022). What is sportswashing and how does it threaten democracy? International institute for democracy and electoral assistance. Stockholm. [Retrieved at 19 February 2023]- <https://www.idea.int/blog/explainer-what-%E2%80%98sportswashing%E2%80%99-and-how-does-it-threaten-democracy>

30 Centre for Sport and Human Rights - <https://www.sporhumanrights.org/> [Retrieved 27 February 2023].

31 To talk of sport and the common good means that sport is part of a set of commitments and practices aimed at using not just public power, but certainly public power to deliver the right to sport to people, regardless of their personal identity, political affiliation, and/or geographic location. For an extended discussion of the common good see British Academy. (2017). Navigating inclusion in peace settlements: Human rights and the creation of the common good. London: Author.

32 Jarvie, G. (2016). A tool for cultural relations. A global game, sport, culture, development and foreign policy. Culture Report: EUNIC Yearbook 2016. 9-15; Jarvie, G, Thornton, J, and Mackie, H. (2018). Sport, culture and society. London: Routledge.

33 British Council (2021). The missing pillar- culture's contribution to the sustainable development goals. London: British Council.

26 Jarvie, G. (2021). Sport, soft power and cultural relations. Journal of Global Sports Management. 4 August: 1-18.

27 Ohnesorge, H. (2020). Soft power: The forces of attraction in international relations. London: Springer Publishing.



delivering sport for development and peace (SDP) interventions in different parts of the world.

Definitions of culture are rarely neutral or value free but approaches to culture that fail to acknowledge the potential of sport as forms of social, economic, human, and cultural forms of capital remain problematic.<sup>34</sup>

There is hope for optimism in a few recent studies. The work of Cull, for example, considers culture, including sport, as a mechanism to bring people together and that sport as a substance of the cultural component of public diplomacy.<sup>35</sup> This is in addition to the considerable contribution that sport makes to the arts, literature, film, heritage and music. Residual historical and at times elitist closed approaches to culture do sport or culture no favours. Closed definitions of culture that fail to optimise the scale and reach that can be realised through the sporting toolbox are problematic. Sport is culture but it is also a pillar of connectivity.

### *Sport and Cultural Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Sport and cultural relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century could help to shift the dial

beyond sport being seen simply in terms entertainment, corruption and sportswashing. The exercise of sport and soft power is not the same as the exercise of sport and cultural relations. Both are needed but they are different in both principle and practice. As the name suggests cultural relations seeks to create a relationship. The medium of exchange is culture and what is argued for in this essay is that the sports tool is seen as part of a variable, context specific approach that seeks to enable mutuality, trust, co-operation over the short, medium but crucially the long term. In other words, sport should be grasped as part of a cultural relations approach in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

If the primary purpose of cultural relations is to create the conditions for long-term collaboration between like-minded people and countries in pursuit of the common good, then sport needs to be at the table.<sup>36</sup> The work of the Wallace Group of Universities in supporting education through sport workshops to enable better health outcomes in partner countries or the use of sport to enable the SDGs or the 25 million young people reached and 55 policies influenced or initiated

through the British Council *International Inspiration programme*<sup>37</sup> or 7,600 coaches trained and 1.2 million young people reached through *The British Council Premier Skills programme*<sup>38</sup> or the programmes supported by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation<sup>39</sup> might all be cited as helping to enable mutual cultural relations outcomes within and between communities.

A cultural relations approach is distinct because of how and why it leverages cultural capabilities.<sup>40</sup> The mode and variety of cultural relations matters in terms of sustaining long-term resilience.

The UK soft power activities bring direct benefits to the UK internationally. In the current international and domestic context, urgent consideration is needed as to how to magnify the impact of soft power and cultural relations resources including a nation's sporting assets. As is how it uses its cultural assets and how best to compete and collaborate with both allies and strategic rivals to leverage soft power in support of the UK's prosperity, security and influence. As a recent report suggested:

*“In today's world, given geopolitical and economic pressures on resources, there is a need to consider realistically what the UK can do independently, and where co-operation would be beneficial, particularly in working with like-minded countries to promote the values and interests of the UK”.*<sup>41</sup>

Today the consequences of failing to act together are alarmingly evident. The call for urgent collaborative action around common agreements and common good has perhaps never been clearer. The contemporary world needs spaces that can hold a plurality of politics. Spaces which engage with ordinary people and cultures with all their varied histories and disagreements. Sport can be one such space. The sporting toolbox is deep and varied. Sport has an international mandate through the UN to deliver non-sporting outcomes. The use of sport within a cultural relations approach can help to enable mutuality, understanding, dialogue and co-operation. That is why it matters.

34 Smith, R, Spaaij, R, and McDonald, B. (2019). Migrant integration and cultural capital in the context of sport and physical activity: a systematic review. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. 20:851–868.

35 Cull, N. (2019). Public diplomacy: Foundations for global engagement in the digital age. Polity. [Kindle]

36 British Council (2022). *Soft power and cultural relations: a comparative analysis*. London: British Council. p7.

37 British Council (2023) *Our work in sport*. [Retrieved 7 February 2023]- <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/sport>

38 British Council (2023) *Our work in sport*. [Retrieved 7 February 2023]- <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/sport>

39 Laureus Sport for Good Foundation (2023). <https://www.laureus.com/sport-for-good> [Retrieved 7 February 2023].

40 British Council. (2021). *Cultural relations, dialogue and co-operation in an age of competition*. London: British Council.

41 British Council (2021). *Cultural relations, dialogue and cooperation in the age of competition*. London: British Council.

For this to progress further:

- Cultural organisations and institutions need to further embed sport as a pillar of connectivity that can deliver cultural outcomes.
- Sport needs to add more evidenced value as culture thus enabling culture becoming more of a recognised pillar of SDG activity.
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs should include sport as a cost-effective component of both soft power and cultural relations strategies and optimise the scale and reach that sport can bring.
- The significant contribution that sport is making to the peace process, human rights<sup>42</sup> and humanitarian assistance is not insignificant and should become more of a recognised form of intervention.

It is the latter that this essay moves on to consider. Should all of these be advanced then sport would be better positioned as a crucial space through which cultural relations can be forged in a way that helps more people, more communities, more often.

42 Said, A. (2018). The use of sports initiatives to promote human rights in Palestine. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/sport-matters/2018/04/> ; Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) (2018). Championing human rights in the governance of sports bodies. Mega sporting- events platform for human rights. [Retrieved 20 January 2023]- <https://www.ihrb.org/focus-areas/mega-sporting-events/championing-human-rights-governance-sports-bodies>.

## Sport, the peace process and cultural relations

When Ministers think about sport at all they tend to do so around a small number of limited areas such as nation branding, economic benefits, major sporting events, legacies, inspiration participation and health being a few of the terms that are talked about repeatedly when the question of sport is raised. Media headlines are dominated by elite or professional sport that contributes to only a small per centage of the sport effort. The narrative around sport needs to change, or at least must include other areas, just as much as the narrative about culture needs to be more inclusive of the positive work that sport delivers in communities. There are mutual benefits from sport both adopting and being part of a cultural relations approach.

Although slightly out of date now, sport could be seen to be contributing to Foreign and Commonwealth Office Development (FCDO) plan and priorities such as supporting sustainable development and humanitarian needs and

promoting human rights and democracy.<sup>43</sup> While this surprisingly does not talk about peacebuilding it did identify risk arising from weaknesses in influences and engagement. Furthermore, the European Union (EU) talks about:

*“Promoting peace and fighting radicalisation through intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue can build and promote understanding within and between societies. It helps to demonstrate the value of cultural diversity and human rights.”*<sup>44</sup>

*Sport can help with all of these.*

The first half of this section introduces some themes where sport connects with the above. The second half returns to a consideration of key factors, some principles, that might guide the delivery of subnational and international cultural relations through sport. A set of five observations about sport are offered. All of these might benefit from and certainly contribute to a cultural relations approach.

43 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Development (2021). Foreign and Commonwealth Office outcome delivery plan 2021-2022. London: UK Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-commonwealth-development-office-outcome-delivery-plan/fcdo-outcome-delivery-plan-2021-to-2022>. [Retrieved 27 February 2023].

44 European Commission (2023). Culture and creativity: international cultural relations- <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/international-cultural-relations> [Retrieved 27 February 2023].

## Sport and the Sustainable Development Goals

The first observations are about sport being valued as an enabler of the SDGs, including SDG 16.<sup>45</sup> In 2003 the United Nations coined the term Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) to refer to an international approach to using sport to enable change. SDP has grown into an expansive range of activity.<sup>46</sup> Diverse, pluralistic and at times innovative development using sport-based approaches to deliver non-sporting outcomes. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs houses the international mandate for SDP. The legitimacy for SDP activity was empowered by (i) having a United Nations (UN) mandate to assist with the enabling of the sustainable development goals and (ii) being evidenced and encouraged through a series of reports and reviews. These included, for example, *Sport for Development Peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)*<sup>47</sup>, *Enhancing the Contribution of Sport to the Sustainable Development Goals*<sup>48</sup>

(2017) and UN SG Report 2022– *Sport: Catalyst for a Better Stronger Recovery*<sup>49</sup> which recorded the progress made in advancing the SDGs since the passing of UN resolution 75/18 in 2020 on sport as an enabler of sustainable development.<sup>50</sup>

The UN SG Report (2022) recognised the role of sport in assisting with COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts. It reinforced a series of classic conventional themes such as:

- Leveraging sporting events to promote peace and sustainable development.
- Delivering technical assistance on sport for development and peace.
- Strengthening the global framework for SDP.
- Early evidencing of sport being a catalyst in pandemic recovery in relation to selected SDGs.

A series of nine recommendations were made to the General Assembly including:

- Acknowledging the work of the Inter-Agency Group on SDP.
- Encouraging UN entities to work collaboratively through the Inter-Agency Group to strengthen coherence, efficiency, collaboration and the sharing of tools.
- Strengthening the capacity of the Secretariat to enable a “one United Nations” approach to SDP.<sup>51</sup>

Annual reports<sup>52</sup> from private organisations such as *Laureus*<sup>53</sup> have helped to provide updates on sports-based interventions involving 250 programmes, as of 2020, including:

- Indochina Starfish Foundation in Cambodia.
- Luta Pela Paz Foundation responding to domestic violence in Rio De Janeiro.
- Soccer in the Streets in Atlanta.
- Boxgirls Kenya in Nairobi.
- Sustaining education through sport in disenfranchised suburbs of Milan, Naples, Rome, Turin, Genoa and Catania.

- Helping to fight drug addiction, alcohol abuse and poverty within the Tacubaya neighbourhood in Mexico City.
- Forging Laureus Sport for Good partnerships and programmes in 51 countries.

In 2020 the programmes supported 98,354 children and young people to complete education, 97,960 young people feeling less isolated, 58, 641 young people with an increased sense of belonging in their community, 45,935 people reporting an increased sense of trust towards others in the community and 39,772 young people having access to work experiences and internships.<sup>54</sup>

Sport has a UN mandate to deliver non-sporting outcomes against the 2030 SDGs. A substantive body of evidence, programmes, monitoring and evaluation has helped to consolidate sports position as an enabler of the SDGs. At the same time, it has been argued that culture is a missing pillar of SDG activity. There is scope for mutual benefit where sport as a recognised pillar of SDG activity, with a UN mandate, can

45 Svenson, P, and Woods H. (2017). A systematic overview of sports for development and peace organisations. *Journal of sport for development* 5 (9): 36-48.

46 Including policy, programmes, indicators of measurement, private and public, government and non-government stakeholders, local, national and international agencies and NGOs.

47 Commonwealth Secretariat (2015). *Commonwealth Analysis: sport for development and peace and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

48 Commonwealth Secretariat (2017). *Enhancing the contribution of sport to the sustainable development goals*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

49 United Nations (2022). *Sport: catalyst for a better stronger recovery for all (77/161)*. New York: United Nations.

50 United Nations (2020). *Sport as an enabler of sustainable development (75/18)*. New York: United Nations.

51 United Nations (2022). *Sport: catalyst for a better stronger recovery for all (77/161)*. New York: United Nations.

52 Laureus Annual Review. (2020). *Fighting against the odds*. London: Laureus Sports for Good Foundation.

53 Laureus works with stakeholders from local mayors to the United Nations through to corporate, private and non-governmental partners to leverage resources for the SDP community while fostering and developing advocacy to mobilise more interest in harnessing the power of sport to help achieve the SDGs.

54 Laureus Annual Review. (2020). *Fighting against the odds*. Laureus Sports for Good Foundation. London.

assist culture becoming further recognised as being able to deliver SDG outcomes at scale. Sport on the other hand would benefit from being part of a broader cultural relations approach helping to deliver change.

## Sport and the peace process

A second set of observations are about the use of sport to enable the peace process. It is more than a hundred years since the Xmas day football truce during World War One<sup>55</sup>, fifty years since two British athletes, later to become politicians, penned their account of the Olympics as a *War without Weapons* and the place of sport enabling change in South Africa and the brokering of diplomatic relations between nations<sup>56</sup>, sixteen years since the footballer Didier Drogba, the current Vice-President of Peace and Sport,

intervened in the civil war embroiling the Ivory Coast at the time<sup>57</sup>, ten years since sport based approaches helped to reduce rates of violence in the Colombian City of Medellín<sup>58</sup>, and three years since a then sixteen year old tennis star Coco Gauff spoke at a rally in her hometown of Delray Beach, Florida in support of anti-racism.<sup>59</sup>

Parnell accounts for how the Colombian City of Medellín, once labelled the most dangerous city on earth by *Times Magazine*, used sport as part of a package of measures that resulted in the Rockefeller Foundation listing Medellín being in the top third of its most resilient cities.<sup>60</sup> In 1991 the city drug cartels were reported as being responsible for 6,349 killings, a rate of about 380 in every 100,000 being killed.<sup>61</sup> In 2017 this has reduced to 577 at a rate of about 23

per 100,000.<sup>62</sup> The claim made by both Cardenas and Parnell was that a network of sports-based social programmes in Colombia expanded the government's perception of sports as a tool for national development while informing future policymaking on the role of sports within the post conflict setting of this nation.

The work of Cardenas is illustrative of a body of work that has helped to substantiate the claim that sport-based programming can promote respect and understanding across groups involved in conflict.<sup>63</sup> The research was conducted with local and international NGOs, the national government, sports federations, the private sector, international organizations, and SDP practitioners, all of which incorporated recreational sports as a pillar of peacebuilding. The findings supported the view that sport was a modest but valuable role in building peace in Colombia. Sport was seen to welcome those at the margins of society into a space where

vulnerable populations could play safely, learn new skills, and (to some extent) develop a life plan. Sports were found to be useful in -

- Teaching children and youth skills that would allow them to make proper decisions if (or when) they face recruitment by illegal armed forces (or criminal networks).
- Creating jobs and related economic opportunities.
- Fostering peaceful coexistence and tackling urban violence, and
- Promoting social inclusion.<sup>64</sup>

There is also a broader normative proposition that adopts, develops, and applies Galtung's work on peace processes to include sport. For Galtung the key processes were (i) reconstruction<sup>65</sup> of peoples and places after violence, (ii) reconciliation of the parties in conflict, and (ii) resolution of animosities.<sup>66</sup> Cardenas substantiates that sports-based interventions can

55 Football and the 1914 Xmas day truce. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/sport-matters/2017/12/19/football-1914-xmas-day-truce/>

56 Chataway, C. and Goodhart, P. (1968). *War without weapons*. London: UK Allen.

57 BBC Sport (2020). Didier Drogba: How Ivory Coast striker helped to halt civil war in his home nation. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/52072592>.

58 Parnell, D. (2014). *How investment in sport has helped Medellín shake off its violent past*. *The Conversation*. 17 September. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://theconversation.com/how-investment-in-sport-has-helped-medellin-shake-off-its-violent-past-31695>.

59 Jarvie, G., Trimbur, L. & Xu, Y. (2020) Sport has always been political: Now is a time to listen, learn and act. Edinburgh: Academy of Sport: University of Edinburgh. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/mh-aos-sport-observations-briefing-paper-20200912.pdf>

60 Parnell, D. (2014). **How investment in sport has helped Medellín shake off its violent past**. *The Conversation*. 17 September. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://theconversation.com/how-investment-in-sport-has-helped-medellin-shake-off-its-violent-past-31695>.

61 Parnell, D. (2014). **How investment in sport has helped Medellín shake off its violent past**. *The Conversation*. 17 September. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- <https://theconversation.com/how-investment-in-sport-has-helped-medellin-shake-off-its-violent-past-31695>.

62 Cárdenas, A. (2019). Sport and peacebuilding. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- [https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports\\_and\\_peace\\_building.pdf](https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports_and_peace_building.pdf)

63 Cárdenas, A. (2013). Peacebuilding through sport? An introduction to sport for and peace. *Journal of Conflictology*, 4 (1): 24-33; Cárdenas, A. (2019). Sport and peacebuilding. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- [https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports\\_and\\_peace\\_building.pdf](https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports_and_peace_building.pdf)

64 Cárdenas, A. (2019). Sport and peacebuilding. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- [https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports\\_and\\_peace\\_building.pdf](https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports_and_peace_building.pdf)

65 The first process, reconstruction, is in turn divided into four categories: rehabilitation, rebuilding, restructuring, and reculturation.

66 Galtung, J., Fischer, D., Fischer, D. (2013) *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of peace research*. New York: Springer: Volume 5. Galtung, J. (1996) *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development, and civilization*. New York: Sage: Volume 14. It should be noted that Galtung talked of positive and negative peace. Negative peace referred to the absence of violence and the absence of war while positive peace referred to the integration of human society.

support rehabilitation and healing through psychosocial support and treatment. In restructuring, sports interventions can facilitate the building of relationships, fostering social inclusion and strengthening inter- and intracommunity ties. Sports programmes can aid the process of reculturation through the establishment of sports tournaments and leagues based on accepted cultural regulations. Sports tournaments and festivals can help to integrate groups that have been in conflict and can help community members regain a sense of normalcy and security. Sports training and competitions can benefit resolutions as they provide a controlled environment where participants can be taught about resolving conflict.

While such interventions were not framed by a cultural relations approach there are clear elements, particularly in the work of Cardenas, of how sport can be a tool for cultural relations and peacebuilding. The work is illustrative of a body of work that has helped to substantiate the claim that:

- Relationships and networks can be built through sport-based programmes and dialogue in a way that may not be possible in other settings.

- Sport adds value in terms of scale and connectivity.
- Sport-based programming can promote respect and understanding across groups involved in conflict.<sup>67</sup>
- Sport can connect people and communities to support structures aimed at addressing both the roots causes and effects of conflict.
- The implication for policy makers and agencies supporting the use of sport in efforts to build peaceful and inclusive communities is that they need to ensure that there are adequate interventions and activities that build upon sporting activity.
- Sport can contribute to the stated intentional objectives of enabling, for example, SD6 16.
- Sports-based interventions are not merely about sport but about the vital social processes that occur through the channel of sport and the intentional use of sport to help with reconstruction resolution, reconciliation, and resilience.

67 Cárdenas, A. (2013). Peacebuilding through sport? An introduction to sport for and peace. *Journal of Conflictology*, 4 (1): 24-33;  
Cárdenas, A. (2019). Sport and peacebuilding. [Retrieved 13 February 2023]- [https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports\\_and\\_peace\\_building.pdf](https://deportedesarrolloypaz.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/sports_and_peace_building.pdf)

## The Olympic Movement and cultural engagement

A third related but smaller set of observations relate to the Olympic Movement and cultural engagement.<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that the second principle of Olympism laid out in the Olympic Charter is:

“To place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity”.<sup>69</sup>

One of the ways in which such an ideal has been operationalised has been through the activation of the Olympic Truce. The Olympic Truce uses the profile of sport as a tool to promote peace, dialogue, and reconciliation in areas of conflict during the period of any Olympic and Paralympic Games. There is also the advent of the Cultural Olympiad attached to the Olympic host city. In June 2022, Paris 2024 launched its Cultural Olympiad and invited the world of culture to join the momentum of the Games to develop a cultural identity for Paris 2024. Sport during this period is being used

as a vector to access art and a broad range of multidisciplinary artistic and cultural initiatives running until September 2024 in all French territories.<sup>70</sup>

Beyond the period of any Olympic and Paralympic Games and Cultural Olympiad is the development of several Olympic Centres, often located in universities, and Olympic cultural engagement programmes. The spectacle of the Olympic Games in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century remains closed to those countries that cannot afford or do not want to hold the spectacle. The Olympic and or Paralympic Games have never been held in Africa. Yet if the Olympics were more about the Olympic Movement and less about the spectacle it could be used to further the case that the world needs international sport as a medium and option to help enable people to people intercultural dialogue, respect and understanding.<sup>71</sup>

## Sport as humanitarian assistance

A fourth set of observations are about the use of sport to enable

68 Spaaij R, and Buleson, C. (2015). *The Olympic movement and the sport of peacekeeping*. London: Routledge.

69 The Olympic Charter (2021). *Fundamental principles of olympism*. – [Retrieved 29 December 2022] - <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/General/EN-Olympic-Charter.pdf?ga=2.198512428.2086446984.1672349839-1967387396.1672349829>

70 IOC (2022). Paris 2024 launches its Cultural Olympiad. – June 2022 [Retrieved 23 February 2023]- <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/paris-2024-launches-its-cultural-olympiad>

71 Kidd, B. (2021). *A runners journey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p331.

humanitarian assistance. While acknowledging that cultural work is Overseas Development Agency (ODA) funded there are several other reasons why a body of research on the role of sport in disaster recovery connects with a cultural relations approach or lens. These include:

- That place based local approaches to sport can help to connect humanitarian disaster with local recovery assistance.
- That sustained recovery requires the use of sport to be intentionally planned over a long period.
- That where sport is used as a form of sports aid, such as US SportsAid<sup>72</sup>, the right fundamental conditions need to be in place for such a resource to be optimised.
- That while sport is not part of a first order humanitarian response it can have a part to play as a second order humanitarian response.

- That sport is not a solution, but it can be part of solution.

An advocate of sports role in enabling humanitarian assistance is Thorpe<sup>73</sup> whose research, over a decade, has explored the way young people are engaging with informal, non-competitive sports (i.e., skateboarding, parkour, surfing) in facilitating their own and others' processes of recovery in contexts of disaster and conflict. Her work gives voice and agency to the resilience and creativity that can be found in youth rebuilding lives.

Listen to the voices of displaced Gaza youth testifying to the value of parkour helping manage the day-to-day frustrations, fears, anxieties, and pains of living in the Khan Younes refugee camp.<sup>74</sup>

*"I have witnessed war, invasion and killing. When I was a kid and I saw these things, blood, and injuries, I didn't know what it all meant ... this game [parkour] makes me forget all these things".*

72 USAID (2023). The role of sport as a development tool. [Retrieved 25 February 2023]- [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADE352.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADE352.pdf)

73 Thorpe, H. (2015). "Natural disaster arrhythmia and action sports: The case of the Christchurch earthquake." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 2 (1): 64–71; Thorpe, H. (2016a). "Look at what we can do with all the broken stuff! Youth agency and sporting creativity in sites of war, conflict and disaster." *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health* 8 (5): 554–570; Thorpe, H. (2016b). "Action sports for youth development: Critical Insights for the SDP Community." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 8: 91–116; Thorpe, H. (2017a). "Action sports, social media, and new technologies: Towards a research agenda." *Communication and Sport* 5 (5): 554–578; Thorpe, H. (2017b). "Youth and alternative sporting (im)mobilities in disrupted and conflicted spaces." *Transfers* 7 (3): 56–75; Thorpe, H. (2021a). Informal sports for youth recovery: grassroots strategies in conflict and disaster geographies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24 (6) 708-730.

74 Thorpe, H. (2021b). Informal sports for youth recovery: grassroots strategies in conflict and disaster geographies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24 (6) 708-730.

*"We have wars regularly and the sanctions make our lives miserable, but parkour has given me the ability to overcome many obstacles. It's made me steadfast and has given me the strength to face the pressures of the occupation".*

Or

The testimonies from youth in Christchurch, New Zealand following on from the 2011 earthquake and the significance of surfing and climbing in building a sense of resilience and normality when all around was not normal.

*"It was really good to get back into the routine of going and checking the waves. It just felt like being home again. Without the beach and the surf, it's just not home. Being immersed in the ocean again just felt sooo good! It was like the waves just washed away all of my worries".<sup>75</sup>*

*"When we go to Castle Hill, it's an escape. I found climbing is a way just to carry on, move forward".<sup>76</sup>*

A common theme was a reminder of the value of agency, in this case youth agency that still existed in extreme situations. Surfing, skateboarding, free running, and

other tools were all part of a changing landscape that contributed to a sense of agency about future optimistic possibilities.

## Sport and Human Rights

A final set of observations is about the use of sport to enable and carry messages about human rights including the right to sport. The emergence of the *Centre for Sport and Human Rights* is a welcome addition to the sport, peace-keeping and cultural relations landscape.<sup>77</sup> Chaired by the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, it is supporting international organizations such as the IOC and the International Labour Organization. Its mission is to advance in and through sport a world that respects and promotes human rights by generating awareness, building capacity, and delivering impact.

75 Thorpe, H. (2015). "Natural disaster arrhythmia and action sports: The case of the Christchurch earthquake." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 2 (1): 64–71

76 Thorpe, H. (2015). "Natural disaster arrhythmia and action sports: The case of the Christchurch earthquake." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 2 (1): 64–71

77 Centre for Sport and Human Rights - <https://www.sporhumanrights.org/> [ Retrieved 27 February 2023].

The value of the human rights in forging sustainable peacekeeping is recognised in a multi-million-pound Peace Settlements Research Project and the subsequent PeaceRep evidence platform.<sup>78</sup> It concluded that:

- The current context is one in which the international norms and architecture that have been developed to support peace-building processes are in a period of global renegotiation and transition.<sup>79</sup>
- In a tense world there is a need for politically smarter ways of deepening commitments to peace processes.
- The greater the number of stakeholders involved in the construction of human rights the greater the chance of the peace process being sustained longer term.
- The central problem with the orthodox construction of human rights was that the vision of the state during periods of transition was often seen to serve the interests of only one group.

- That the construction of human rights agreements had to be carried out both during and after conflicts had ceased, in other words over a long term.

There are similarities between the human rights approach advocated for in the peace settlements research and the cultural relations approach being advocated for in this essay. Furthermore, it is being suggested that sport is a space capable of holding a plurality of politics and stakeholders over a long period. The value of using sport to support human rights in the forging of any peace process requires that sport is seen as a set of commitments that can help to hold holds open a space through which social and political construction can be negotiated.<sup>80</sup>

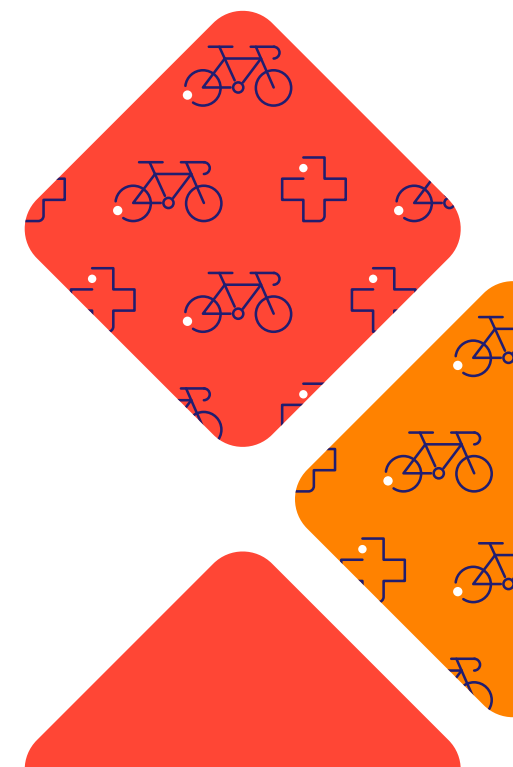
The value of an alternative approach that allows for negotiated human rights and a negotiated common agreed purpose is that it offers the possibility of a much more shared concept of the state and/or community. One that serves a broader set of interests operating beyond that of the individual and a single-interest group. One that needs long-term spaces to be held open.

A cultural relations approach to sport and human rights supports the notion of sport, SDP and human rights offering such spaces that can help in the negotiation, construction, and sustainability of the peace process.

78 The Political Settlements Research Project (PSRP) is now PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform. PeaceRep research will re-think peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes. PeaceRep is a seven-year research consortium led by the University of Edinburgh Law School. PeaceRep - <https://peacerep.org/2022/12/08/political-finance-development-ethiopia-sudan/>

79 Molloy, S. (2017). Justice, rights and equality in search of the common good in an era of transition. London: British Academy. [Retrieved 20 January 2023] - <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1852/Molloy.pdf>

80 Molloy, S. (2017). Justice, rights and equality in search of the common good in an era of transition. London: British Academy. [Retrieved 20 January 2023] - <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1852/Molloy.pdf>



# The Second Half

Having suggested in the first half of this section that sport can demonstrate its effectiveness as an enabler the second half returns to the cultural relations approach. It highlights several themes that help to consolidate the proposition that there is mutuality in sport being seen as a key component of a cultural relations approach and both helping to address fragility and conflict at many levels.

There is a need to align sport, the peace process and cultural relations in a much more effective way. This requires sport, in particular SDP, and cultural organisations fostering a cultural relations approach to talk to each other more often. There is a need for national sports organisations and national human rights associations to talk to and co-operate with one another. Sport needs to continue to advocate for sports involvement in the language of foreign policy and international relations. Cultural organisations, cultural policy, and cultural diplomacy all need to be less aloof about what counts as culture. Sport can support the delivery of selected SDGs under pressure, while strengthening communities.

## Scale, variety and connectivity

It has already been suggested in this essay that the sporting toolbox is deep and that those using it need to be far more nuanced about what works where and when and under what circumstances. A cultural relations approach helps to foster the circumstances through which sport as culture can be a more effective tool. The modalities of delivering outcomes are much more varied than simply elite sport and major sporting events. In the United Kingdom, for example, as is the case in other countries, the major modality of delivering sport is through local, grassroots, community focused delivery in the form of recreational sport. The tools and modalities of delivery require scale, must be able to connect and be sustained at both subnational and transnational levels.

Sport adds scale to the cultural offering. In 2020, 3.05 billion viewers watched the televised Tokyo Olympic Games,<sup>81</sup> there was a 10 million increase in social media followers at the Beijing Winter Olympics,<sup>82</sup> over

half the global population (3.57 billion) tuned in to watch the football World Cup in Russia 2018 and Qatar 2022 with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) strongly represented.<sup>83</sup> Sport is a unique exemplar of a globally powerful, yet locally adaptive, community-embedded implementation model that can assist cultural relations building. Sport has global reach to connect with people and cultures. Sport is a pillar of connectivity that happens at many levels including cities, communities, nations and cultures.

## Relationships and capability building

A former Secretary General to the Council of Europe (COE), once suggested<sup>84</sup>:

*“That the hidden face of sport is also the tens of thousands of enthusiasts who find, in their football, rowing, athletics and rock-climbing clubs, a place for meeting and exchange, but above all, the training ground for community life”.*

Perhaps more importantly, she went on to assert that:

*“Within this microcosm, people learn to take responsibility, to follow rules, to accept one another, to look for consensus and to take on democracy, and that, ‘seen in this light sport, is par excellence, the ideal school for democracy’<sup>85</sup>*

Relationships are formed through sport and because of sport. Sport helps foreign leaders meet and form relationships. Social networks are formed and worked through sport, often in informal settings. Many such relationships are built over time, may not be in the first instance transactional but the relationships and social networks that sport can facilitate can still help. Relationships and networks can be built through sport-based programmes and dialogue in a way that may not be possible in other settings. Building sustainable relationships in and through sport allows countries and communities to talk to each other. It is not utopian to suggest, that in the language of Sen and Nussbaum, that sports functioning can enable a common conversation about key drivers of conflict, inequality, safety, rights, and more.

81 International Olympic Committee. Tokyo 2020 audience and insights report. 2021. Available at: <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/International-Olympic-Committee/IOC-Marketing-And-Broadcasting/Tokyo-2020-External-Communications.pdf> [Accessed 23 February 2023].

82 International Olympic Committee. Beijing 2022 Facts and Figures. 2022. Available at: <https://olympics.com/ioc/beijing-2022-facts-and-figures> [Accessed 23 February 2023].

83 FIFA World Cup Russia 2018. 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia: Global broadcast and audience summary. Available at: <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/2589b77c20-849beb/original/njqsntvrdvqv8ho1dag5-pdf.pdf> [Accessed 23 February 2023].

84 Jarvie, G. Thornton, J and Mackie, H. (2018). Sport, culture and society. London: Routledge, p233.

85 Jarvie, G. Thornton, J and Mackie, H. (2018). Sport, culture and society. London: Routledge, p233.



## Influence, inter-cultural skills and shifting perceptions

Effective international relations are also about perceptions, projection and how other see us. How sport helps to project an image of a place and how others see and act upon that image is beginning to be understood more. If local professional teams, athletes, and organizations are ever-more engaged with global audiences and stakeholders, creating a space that inspires the public to participate through people-to-people cultural, technical, and knowledge exchanges then sport can help to bridge divides and make the other a little less foreign. If the UK based Homeless World Cup, operating in 74 countries of the world can help to change perceptions of homelessness this helps not only homeless people but also UK cultural relations building.

## Compassion and an enlarged common good

We need compassion as well as an enlarged common good.<sup>86</sup> Compassion involves noticing suffering and taking action to prevent or alleviate it.

Compassion was at the heart of Collier's<sup>87</sup> plea to help the bottom billion and has more recently has been seen as the key to recharging the SDGs.<sup>88</sup> Compassion encourages solidarity, humility, transparency, stability, service to each other and a sense of the greater goal or good.

Sport and the common good may best be understood as a project of ongoing political construction that responds to contemporary calls for sport to serve humanity<sup>89</sup>. Making sports policy, sports investment, sports research, sports advocacy, commitment, sport and civil society work for more people, places and communities more often.

With specific reference to transition through the peace process a negotiated common good, offers the possibility of a much more shared concept of the state and/or community. One that can serve a broader set of interests operating beyond that of the individual, community, single interest group or country. Sport can be a space that facilitates the construction of a common good while fractured communities and societies move through phases of transitional justice.

Compassion and a cultural relations approach are crucial ingredients of the glue that helps to make this happen.

## Cultural relations trends and sport

While the UK, the EU and Germany operate through a cultural relations approach other countries tend to deliver soft power and cultural relations outcomes through three main (overlapping) models. These being a public diplomacy model which delivering soft power/cultural relations activities through Embassies and Missions (e.g., USA, Russia, Korea); a cultural diplomacy model in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) deliver a well-developed policy and delivery framework for activities directed mostly at national promotion through culture (France, Brazil, Qatar, UAE, turkey, India and Japan) and a cultural relations model. There is also a unique Chinese model primarily involving campus-based language and culture partnerships (Confucius Institutes) funded and managed as joint ventures between host country universities and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF).

The key points to be made are that:

- Sport operates as a tool within all these models.
- The UK can continue to be open to learning from what other countries do.
- The delivery of soft power and cultural relations activities are dynamic, fluid and ever changing with new trends emerging.<sup>90</sup>

Such trends include:<sup>91</sup>

- *Digitalisation* and the digital turn in delivering activities as institutions learn from Covid-19, *new actors* as digitalisation have enabled new informal, even individual, actors operate at subnational level.
- *Values* as countries often with illiberal regimes are increasing their soft power activity (e.g., China and Russia).

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.ed.ac.uk/global-health> [Retrieved 27 February 2023].

<sup>87</sup> Collier, P (2008). Compassion and enlightened self-interest. Retrieved 29 January 2023] - <https://ethanzuckerman.com/2008/03/01/ted2008-paul-collier-compassion-and-enlightened-self-interest/>

<sup>88</sup> Grant, L. Reid, C. Buesseler, H and Addiss, D. (2022). A compassion narrative for the sustainable development goals: conscious and connected action. *The Lancet*. July 02, 2022.

<sup>89</sup> See for example Hain, P and Oddendaal, A (2020). *Pitch battles: sport, racism and resistance*. Rowman and Littlefield. New York; or Kidd, B (2021). *A runners journey*. Toronto. University of Toronto Press. 2021.

<sup>90</sup> British Council (2022). *Soft power and cultural relations: a comparative analysis*. London: British Council.

<sup>91</sup> British Council (2022). *Soft power and cultural relations: a comparative analysis*. London: British Council.

- *Audiences as countries* are engaging in soft power and cultural relations with their domestic populations, reflecting the need for public support for foreign policies, and a recognition that populations include foreign (inward) diasporas.<sup>92</sup>

*Activities*, where for example sport plays a major role for most countries at the policy (national, regional, city) and identity politics.

Sport, in the form of esports, activities involving and engaging with diaspora, the delivery of bespoke online education through massive online open courses, such as *Football More than a Game*, are all part of a flexible sporting toolbox that can adapt to trends and help to deliver soft power and cultural relations outcomes today.

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92 Carmen, D and Sajed, A. (2017). *Diasporas as cultures of co-operation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; McSweeney, M. and Nakamura, Y. (2020). The “diaspora” in sport? A systematic review of empirical studies. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Vol. 55(8): 1056–1073; Scottish Government. (2021). Literature review for the Scottish Government’s Scottish connections (diaspora) work. [Retrieved 12 February 2023]- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/literature-review-scottish-governments-scottish-connections-diaspora-work/>; Ratten, V. (2022). The role of the diaspora in international sports entrepreneurship. *Thunderbird Int. Bus. Rev.* 64:235–249; Spaaij, R and Broerse, J. (2019). Diaspora as aesthetic formation: community sports events and the making of a Somali diaspora. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 45(5): 752-769.

## Conclusions

Sport may seem trivial in times of tragedy but a growing critical mass of studies, when viewed collectively, provide a sense that sport can, when used in a nuanced culturally informed way, be a tool that can enable cultural and political outcomes. Sport alone will not solve the world’s challenges, but it is a proven pillar of connectivity that has a part to play. This author is not alone when he says that sport like music, food, art is one of the great cultures to be shared and owned by people everywhere.<sup>93</sup> Sport is not a one size fits all tool, but it is a cultural tool, long-term enabler and space with scale and popularity.

The contemporary world needs spaces that can hold a plurality of politics, spaces which engage with ordinary people and cultures with all their varied histories and disagreements. Sport can be one such space. Sport itself should fully grasp the opportunity to be part of

the building of more effective cultural relations, being part of both soft power and cultural relations strategies and moving beyond the orthodoxy of sport as simply a soft power or cost-effective sports diplomacy tool.

What is clear amid this complexity is that sport provides a valuable space in a softer way than more formal diplomatic channels allow. Sport can do good work, and perhaps do its best work under the radar for a long period of time. Those working in and through sport are well served by the notion of sport being part of a cultural relations approach that can help with making the art of the possible, possible. Sport cannot do this alone—nor should it. Sport should be argued for as formidable popular aspect of culture and the peace process and one that, when all is considered, provides net value and not net loss.

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93 Kidd, B. (2021). *A runner’s journey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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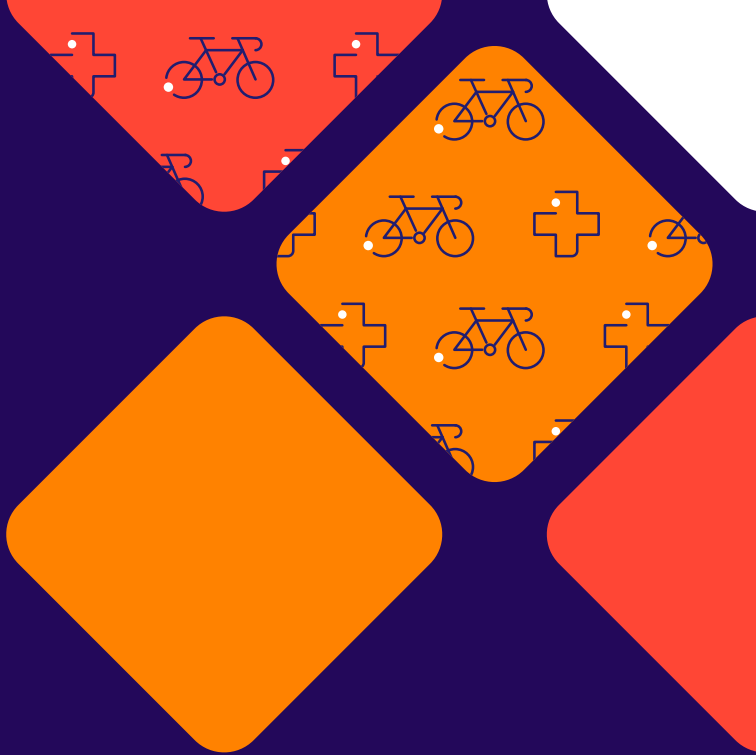
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