



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Citation:

Bates, D and Hylton, K (2020) Asset-based community sport development: putting community first. *Managing Sport and Leisure*. ISSN 2375-0472 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2020.1822754>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/7059/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Managing Sport and Leisure* on 24 Sept 2020, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/23750472.2020.1822754>

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Asset-based community sport development: putting 'community' first

Rationale

Community sport practitioners often face the dual challenge of creating and sustaining inclusive provision, whilst also aspiring to demonstrate the wider social impacts of their interventions. This enduring challenge has prompted a growing interest in the adoption of 'asset-based' approaches as a way to facilitate provision without the resource intensive commitments of programme delivery.

Approach

This article draws upon a case study of asset-based community sport development to reveal an application of this innovative approach.

Findings

A community-orientated ethos and participatory processes are identified as key components of an asset-based approach. The findings provide much needed theoretical and practical insight into the actualities and implications of their adoption.

Practical implications

The paper concludes that an asset-based approach has the potential to aid practitioners and policymakers in their laudable aspirations of inclusive provision and pursuit of social goals through sport.

Research Contribution

This research is the first to examine the use of an asset-based approach in community sport provision, providing insights into a particular 'family of mechanisms' crucial to understanding the potential of Community Sport Development.

Keywords: community sport, asset based community development, physical activity, sport for all

Asset-based community sport development: putting 'community' first

Introduction

Community sport development (CSD) in the UK encompasses a wide range of practices, reflecting a mixed economy of sport provision and a multitude of rationales underpinning practice (Hylton & Totten, 2013; Reid, 2017). Several decades of community-focused sport-based programmes for change in the UK and internationally have produced a raft of policies, organisations, and initiatives designed to increase participation in sport and harness sport in the pursuit of wider development goals (Whitley, Farrell, Wolff, & Hillyer, 2019). As an ideal type, CSD is a "flexible, adaptable, informal, consultative, people-centred approach" to delivery that embodies the spirit of 'Sport for All' and inclusive sport provision (Hylton & Totten, 2013, p. 122). However a number of other salient themes continue to shape the development of CSD in both theory and practice, namely: the pursuit of sporting and/or social objectives (Coalter, 2007; Collins, 2010; Kelly, 2011), changing politics of provision and models of governance (Grix, 2010; Houlihan & White, 2002), and 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' provision design and implementation (Black, 2017; Bolton, Fleming, & Elias, 2008; Rich et al., 2019). Such recurrent tensions demonstrate the malleability of CSD as a label for a range of different provision, whilst also highlighting the inherently political nature of community sport provision as a site of hegemonic cultural struggle (Hylton & Totten, 2013).

Despite differences and tensions in community sport practice, the enduring attraction of CSD is the underpinning philosophy of inclusion and the flexibility it affords practitioners in their approach (Hylton & Totten, 2013; Schailée, Haudenhuysse, & Bradt, 2019). It is this malleability that makes CSD an attractive option for 'sport evangelists' keen to capitalise on the supposedly beneficial qualities of sport participation, and direct sport towards the alleviation of a range of social issues (Coalter, 2013). However, the notion that sport participation leads to specific social outcomes has been widely criticised. Such criticisms highlight the nuance of sporting and social experiences, the limitations of individualising social change, and the complex relationship between the individual and their social milieu (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2013). These critiques, along with an emphasis on developing the evidence base underpinning sport-based interventions, have led to an increased focus on the design and implementation processes underpinning practice (Schailée et al., 2019; Schulenkorf, 2017).

More recently, asset-based approaches that highlight the value of supporting and building community assets for sustainable change have been promoted (Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2015). Though the potential utility of asset-based approaches have gained traction in some sport-specific research (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016), theoretical insights into the application of asset-based community development (ABCD) approaches in community sport development have not been explored. It is therefore not clear how asset-based approaches complement existing practice, or provide a distinctive and desirable alternative. Nor is it clear how ABCD principles could offer potentially novel avenues through which to reconcile enduring tensions within CSD theory and practice. Given this dearth of insight, this study aimed to address the following two research questions:

- 1) How has the notion of asset-based development been incorporated into community sport practice?
- 2) What are the salient principles and processes of an asset-based approach in CSD?

Literature Review

Community-orientated models of sport delivery emerged in the UK in the early 1980s, reflecting the recognition that despite the rapid development and expansion of leisure facilities between the late 1960s and early 1980s, the egalitarian ideals of 'Sport for All' were unlikely to be realised through 'mainstream' provision. Supporting sport clubs and the development of new facilities was suggested to simply widen the choice for established participants (Roberts & Brodie, 1992), and promote a paternalistic and bureaucratic approach which did not adequately meet the needs of target groups (Haywood, 1994; Schailée et al., 2019).

Though community models of practice are far from homogenous, key characteristics can be identified. Regardless of their sporting or social objectives, such models typically emphasise consultation and decentralised decision making in order to illuminate and prioritise local need. They employ an implicit recognition of the limits of facility-orientated provision and universal community interventions. They are also wary of the opportunistic use of the prefix 'community' to depict an array of expedient sport policy measures (Doherty & Cousens, 2013; Vail, 2007; Walpole & Collins, 2010).

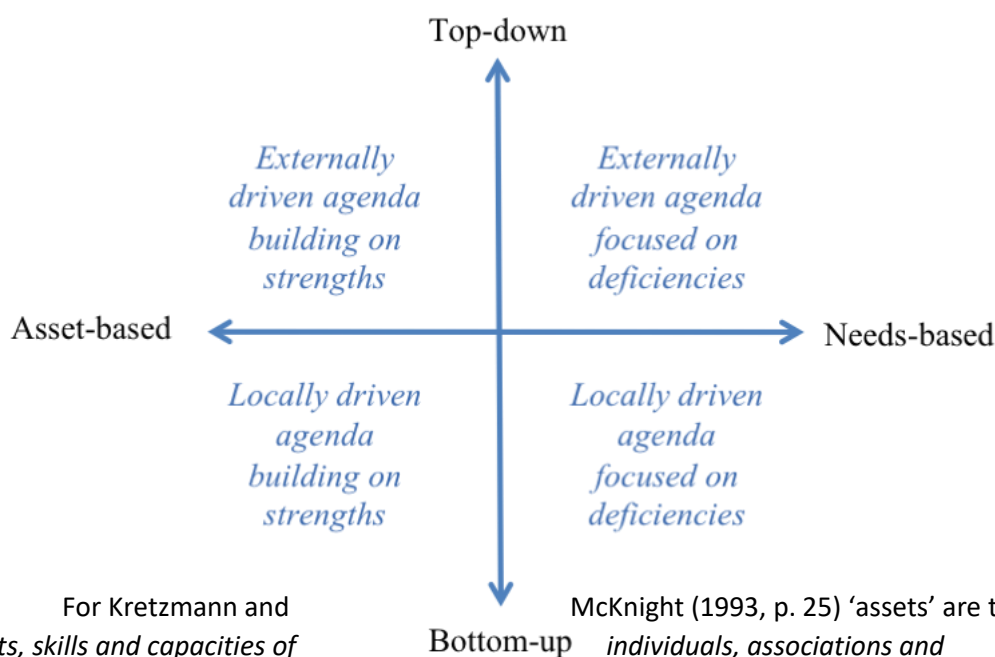
More recently a focus on community needs has come under closer scrutiny, with an emphasis on community assets identified as a more desirable avenue for development (Nurture Development, n.d). ABCD is an *asset-based, internally focused, relationship driven* development *path* initially conceived by Kretzmann and McKnight (1996, p. 25), and is predicated on the philosophy that individuals and communities should inform social change (Emejulu, 2013; Russel, 2015). In identifying and mobilising latent community assets, people in communities are deemed capable of directing their own sport and recreation opportunities. For Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) ABCD is a way of countering 'needs-based' provision that, despite the benevolent intention of professions and external agencies, can produce a myopic approach to community practice. 'Needs-based' approaches that focus purely on community problems may unintentionally exaggerate them in pursuit of scarce resources. This has the potential to engender a culture of dependency on state provision (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Furthermore, 'need' and 'asset'-based provision tends to position communities in different ways. The former often conceives people and communities as lacking or deficient, and as consumers of service provision, the latter positions people as citizens capable of deliberation, insight, and action (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

ABCD approaches aspire to support endogenous processes whereby the capabilities of individuals can coalesce around a shared vision for change, and capitalise on new/existing networks and resources (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The role of external sport and community agencies in this process is not to determine the agenda, but to facilitate opportunities for meaningful participation, decision making, and action (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016). Such an approach reflects concerns for the ways in which 'top-down'

externally driven development initiatives often fail to sufficiently transfer power and resources at a local level.

The relationship between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ directives, and ‘asset’ versus ‘need’ based provision is characterised in figure 1. Though in practice these characteristics may be harder to distinguish, the ‘Community Sport Development Compass’ provides a useful tool for understanding the general approach and resultant orientation of provision. However, if the distinctiveness and potential of ABCD is to be further understood, the fundamental concept of ‘asset’ requires further clarification.

Figure. 1: The Community Sport Development Compass



For Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p. 25) ‘assets’ are the *gifts, skills and capacities of individuals, associations and institutions*. Working to connect these multiple and varied assets means a focus on social relationships is central to ABCD (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). One of the few applications of ABCD principles in sport research is provided by Misener and Schulenkorf (2016), who have used it to reflect on the social value and impact of sport events. Their six step process entails: 1) appreciating what is good, 2) organising an initiating group through the identification of active citizens, 3) mapping community capacities and assets, 4) building a community vision and plan, 5) mobilising assets, and 6) leveraging resources and investments. These steps weave together existing ideas on ABCD, and reflect common themes around the use of appreciative inquiry, the centrality of social capital, and active citizenship (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). ABCD can therefore be understood as a guiding ethos and set of practical imperatives, providing a way to appreciate and mobilise community assets in a shared vision of desirable change.

However, ABCD is not without issues, nor is an increased interest in this approach in the UK surprising. Since the late 2000s the UK government’s austerity and localism agenda have ushered in an unprecedented reduction in public sector funding, and with it, significant (often adverse) impacts on the community sport ‘landscape’ (Parnell, Spracklen, & Millward, 2017). Within this political and economic context public sector community sport providers have been forced to adapt to a reduction in funding, with third sector organisations

increasingly filling gaps in provision (Reid, 2017). Scarce public sector resources means the adoption of ABCD principles may demonstrate an economically expedient and politically palatable adaptation in community sport provision. The following case study captures the actualities of asset-based CSD provision in this context.

Methodology

A qualitative case study approach with *Community First* (pseudonym) was adopted in order for this study to illustrate how a community sport development (CSD) organisation utilised asset-based community development (ABCD). The essentially qualitative nature of programmes that use sport and recreation for community development is well documented, with social processes and interaction identified as central to programme efficacy (Kay, 2009; Lindsey, Kay, Jeanes, & Banda, 2017; Spaaij, 2012). A qualitative case study facilitated the capture of crucial social processes central to understanding sport-based interventions (Long & Sanderson, 2001), and ensured that the perspectives and day-to-day interactions of staff and participants could be understood within a particular organisational and operational context. A case study approach enabled a holistic characterisation of a specific real-life empirical example (Yin, 2018), and meant that *Community First* could be grasped within its economic, political and policy context.

This case study was the second and final stage of a larger study examining community sport practice in England. The first stage captured the range and characteristics of practice understood as ‘community sport development’ drawn from the perspectives of practitioners (n.26) who described their roles as working in community sport. Data generated during this earlier research provided knowledge of potentially suitable case study organisations. Insights from the first stage of fieldwork coupled with a review of the extant literature provided the theoretical sensitivity that contributed to the development of the CSD Compass (fig. 1). The CSD Compass informed the selection of case studies (n.2) that met key criteria emerging from this typology. Criteria included the utilisation of community development principles and processes in CSD, a focus on community and social outcomes, and established practice in order for practitioners to be able to reflect on experiences and changes over time.

Moreover, during the first stage of the study some community sport practitioners’ operationalised discourses around ‘assets’. Whilst rhetoric is no guarantee of authentic practice, initial findings from the first stage of fieldwork highlighted that *Community First*’s practice was indicative of ABCD provision. *Community First* was therefore the most illustrative for the purposes of this paper, and was selected “not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something” (Eysenck, 1979, p. 9). A case study approach supported the use of multiple methods and data sources to converge and illuminate different aspects of *Community First*’s practice. A summary of fieldwork is provided in Table 1, broadly in chronological order.

Table 1: Summary of fieldwork

Method	Respondents or setting	Number	Duration
Semi-structured interviews	Project Manager	Two	40-50 minutes
	Project Workers	Four	40-50 minutes
	Session coaches or volunteer leaders	Three	40-50 minutes
Documentation Analysis	Community First reports and advertising material available in the public domain	Two annual reports and multiple internal case study 'success stories'	Duration of study
Participant observations	Staff meeting	Three	1-3 hours
	Physical activity session	Four	1-2 hours
	Project workers conducting community mapping and consultation	Four	1-2 hours
Informal group interviews	Project participants following activity session	Three. Group size between 4-8 people.	30-60 minutes.
Field Diary	Author 1	Single diary	Duration of study

Data collection commenced with attendance at a monthly staff meeting. This setting provided opportunities for the gatekeeper to provide initial introductions, and for the researcher to begin the process of familiarisation. Over the duration of fieldwork staff meetings provided insight into the day-to-day priorities and challenges faced by practitioners, and becoming a 'familiar face' made future interviews and observations more affable. An interview with the project manager followed, and provided an authoritative account of the purpose and principles central to the organisation that could be explored in the subsequent fieldwork. The project manager also acted as a gatekeeper for suitable project workers, relevant projects for data collection, and provided access to existing organisational reports and written material.

An iterative process followed, whereby the researcher interviewed project workers and accompanied them to a range of community consultations and activity sessions to become more familiar with the project. During this observation work the researcher was introduced to session leaders and participants whose perspectives were captured through individual and group interviews. The exact total of each method was not predetermined prior to fieldwork. Instead, opportunities encountered during fieldwork were taken on the basis that they enabled the practices and perspectives of those from different 'levels' of the case study (management, delivery staff, participants) to be captured, with subsequent data collection providing additional depth, rigour and 'richness' (Tracy, 2010).

Interview transcripts, observation fieldnotes, organisation reports, and field diary extracts were imported as word documents into Nvivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis package. A priori codes were generated deductively based on key concepts identified in the literature review, providing a consistent way to explore aspects of the data that were known to be of interest (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). Inductive coding was used simultaneously to ensure a thorough 'fit' between data and findings. Concurrent data generation and coding enabled subsequently collected data to be brought to bear on a priori and inductively generated codes. As coding progressed it was possible to group codes into themes and sub-themes, and identify patterns and relationships in the data (Miles et al., 2020). The 'memo' function in Nvivo was used throughout, enabling the researcher to 'step back' from the data and capture ideas and thoughts (Bryman, 2016). Memos enabled previous trains of thought to be reviewed, and provided a valuable record of how and why themes had emerged or how data could be interpreted differently. When drawing conclusions, senior research colleagues were presented with themes and supporting data in order to critique the interpretation, coherence and rigour of the findings.

Community First

Community First was established in 2010 in the midlands of England to support sustainable opportunities for physical activity in communities identified as 'hard to reach' or 'disadvantaged'. The programme claims to have engaged in excess of 5000 adults and 3500 young people in physical activity. As a charitable trust with annual funding of around £200,000, Community First has a flat organisational structure: a single project manager who reports to a board of trustees and manages nine community workers based in specific boroughs of the county (data collection occurred during a change in the project manager role, hence two noted in table 1). With the aim of 'getting more people more active', Community First works to increase the opportunities and demand for recreational activities through a distinctive approach to provision development.

The community-based approach of Community First is enabled through a network of partner agencies and local community groups. Community First practitioners often referred to their work as a 'partnership project' operating between: the regional County Sport Partnership (CSP); county and district councils; their own accountability to the Community First charitable trust; and the communities they support. The CSP is a supportive conduit for access to Sport England funding, ensuring that Community First are nested within national and regional strategy, though the county council are also significant contributors to funding and the steering of strategic targets.

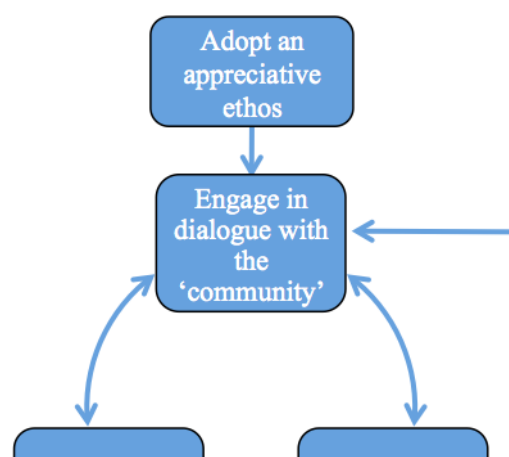
Community First's approach identifies communities and community members as central to any effective and sustainable project for change, which resonated with a number of principles underpinning community-based practice. These principles included a non-prescriptive way of working that privileged local knowledge in addition to outsider 'expertise', a recognition of intersecting inequalities and their adverse impact on sport and social participation, and a concern for the vibrancy of civil society and citizen power (Butcher, Banks, Henderson, & Robertson, 2007; Coalter, 2002; Ledwith, 2011). Community First provided the opportunity to explore ABCD processes and principles within community sport practice. It was through this deeper and more sustained attempt to convert a professed commitment of community participation and empowerment into tangible action, an uncommon achievement if actualised (Cornwall, 2008), which distinguished Community First from other prospective case study organisations.

Findings

Community First's approach to facilitating sporting inclusion and social relationships is central to their asset-based approach. Practitioners identify existing and latent community assets (individual and collective, social and material), which provide the foundations for working with others to create opportunities for engagement in sport and recreation. Bottom-up community participation is central from the beginning, with provision becoming increasingly less reliant on input from Community First practitioners as 'the community' assume greater ownership and control. Community First would be located in the lower-left quarter of the CSD compass which is indicative of an organisation at an intersection of 'asset-based, bottom-up' practice. The following sections are therefore an exploration of this orientation.

Building on existing conceptual and analytical insights (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016), the following discussion presents the key 'steps' of ABCD with the intention of portraying the connection and interdependence of these activities on one another. These tessellating steps can be understood as a 'family of mechanisms' that operate collectively to shape the process and ultimately influence outcomes of such practice (Coalter, 2013). Figure 2 illustrates the interconnection of these mechanisms and the iterative character of Community First's ABCD approach, and is used to structure the discussion below. It is through the illumination of these mechanisms that the desirability and limitations of ABCD principles and processes within CSD practice can be grasped. It is to the ethos underpinning those mechanisms that we first turn.

Figure 2. Asset-Based Community Sport Development model



Appreciative ethos

The Project Manager (pseudonyms used throughout) at Community First hints that 'communities' are the location and mechanism for change, both a solution and resource providing the practical means of furthering social development (Giddens, 1998). It is existing and potential assets that should be valued and central to stimulating change. In relation to this the project manager stated that,

Actually, those communities are really strong and there's so much knowledge and understanding and intelligence within that community that you've just got to kind of tap into that and almost show them that they can do it, show them that they can make a change if that's what they want. (Nadine, Project Manager for five years)

Nadine's desire to orientate practice around the knowledge and capabilities of individuals and existing community groups was reiterated by other senior colleagues during a meeting of Community Workers, where they were encouraged to "take it further" and asked rhetorically "what is there in the community? What social capital is there? What skills are there?" (Dom, Community Worker for three years). Such ideas that emphasise working with communities are indicative of 'asset-based' approaches: identifying and connecting local people, capacities, and skills in order to magnify their power and effectiveness for sustainable change (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Nurture Development, n.d). Furthermore, this orientation of practice recognises the pragmatics of 'community' as perceived by 'outsiders', but more importantly self-defined by those on the 'inside'.

In our experience a community could be two streets, it might be an estate, it might be a village, you know, the communities tend to define themselves, so although we might have set wards that we want to go into, what we try find out within that area is how the communities identify themselves and you can only do that by getting in and talking to people. (Nadine, Project Manager)

Such a pragmatic approach to 'community' connections prioritises indigenous understandings and knowledge. For Butcher et al. (2007) it is an essential starting point for working in ways that assist communities to mobilise and exercise a greater degree of influence and control over factors that affect their social experiences. It is Community First's desire to facilitate participatory processes which goes some way to addressing the

potentially exclusionary imposed nature of 'community' (Blackshaw, 2010). This inclusive ethos was demonstrated in their perspective on consultation.

Community consultation is not about doing f***ing questionnaires. (Nadine, Project Manager)

Community First practitioners strived to engage in *authentic dialogue* with individuals and groups in order to gain an understanding of 'the community', prescribing questionnaire forms to be filled was seen as an inadequate 'top-down' approach. Though practitioners drew upon national data from a range of secondary sources (e.g. Lower Layer Super Output Areas, Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Active Lives Survey) to gain initial insights, an 'insiders' view of community life was deemed essential. For Community Worker, Bell, a non-prescriptive approach was fundamental.

The most important thing to be mindful of is the fact that every area is different...So you need to be flexible, you need to be completely open and not have any preconceived ideas about what people are going to want. (Bell, Community Worker for three years)

This also involved a commitment to dialogue according to Club Leader, Lorna,

Whilst we all might love sports, not everybody does and a lot of people wouldn't be doing it for the love [...] there is that understanding throughout the [Community First] team [...] they listen... help where they can, and don't impose their own views. (Lorna, Community Club Leader for two years)

In essence, Community First try to enter the community with an 'open mind, but not an empty head' (Fetterman, 1998). It is through this appreciative approach that their provision strives to go beyond being community focused, to embodying that key tenet of ABCD in being *community driven* (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Participatory processes

Putting into practice these professed commitments, Community First practitioners worked in a number of ways to engage in dialogue, map assets, and develop a vision for change. The interconnected nature of these activities is reflected in the iterative process illustrated in figure 2. A common way that Community Workers initiated these processes was through a form of 'detached working'. Familiar to youth and community workers (c.f. Buchroth & Parkin, 2010; Kaufman, 2001), yet a currently uncommon practice for CSD practitioners (for a rare example see Walpole & Collins, 2010), 'detached' working enabled Community First practitioners to enter an area and develop an 'insider's' view through walking, talking, and observing.

Initially the most important thing is going out and getting to know the area. If I'm given a new village or town or a key area to work in, I'll go out and just walk around it and get to know it inside out. So, it's number one, get to know the area. At this point, it's purely just seeing if there's any village halls about, churches, schools, anything like that. (Bell, Community Worker)

Such foot-work provides insight into the lived experience of community life, whilst also enabling practitioners to identify potential assets and build connections with community members. In starting where communities are 'at', both literally and symbolically, practitioners do not just walk around communities, rather they begin to walk themselves into 'community'. This immersion is crucial, as Lucy (Community Worker for two years) attests, "becoming a trusted member of the community is really really important". As this familiarisation process continues, individual and communal assets are identified, and the process whereby interest in shaping provision can be galvanised. In Author 1's field diary he wrote,

Jasmine [community worker for 18 months] has invited me to join her during some of her 'consultation' work at a local community centre. We spent approximately two hours chatting to the group, Jasmine occasionally posing questions about 'the community' and the types of things people like to do. I notice Jasmine's questions are often open-ended, sometimes on the topic of health and wellbeing, but never about sport. (Field diary extract)

The field diary captures a seemingly uneventful visit. What is highlighted though is the tone of interactions that community workers may have with individuals and groups on a daily basis. This is an approach that emphasises learning through listening and questioning (Ledwith, 2010). For Nadine too, "it's that listening to the motivations of the people in the community that help practitioners figure out what's best". Tellingly, this 'consultation' work, like several others observed during fieldwork, took place in pre-existing communal spaces with pre-established groups. Identifying and working with community groups was a common way in which new provision was gestated, as such groups and 'spaces' are infused with the meanings and norms of the individuals who constitute them (Cornwall, 2008), and are therefore indicative of the social capital upon which future practice could be formed.

One of the common ways through which Community First engage people is through community cafés. Community First have drawn upon and adapted the 'World Café' method to drive their own specific approach, enabling the creation of participative spaces for engaging people in 'conversations that matter' (Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

Rather than saying 'okay we are going to have a community meeting, and we'll sit in rows' and the quiet ones don't talk and the loud people shout...you get people sat around tables in groups of no more than four to six. It would be a very informal vibe, with very open questions, *but then you get talking*". (Dom, Community worker. Emphasis original)

Furthermore the use of such group-based participatory approaches can contribute simultaneously to psychological and collective benefits, whereby groups are able to determine desired change through individual stories being recognised as shared experiences (Christens, 2012; Ledwith, 2010; Nurture Development, n.d). Community First's activities demonstrate ways in which dialogue, mapping and visioning are woven together. This enables the collective recognition of shared concerns, identified as vital to the process of mobilising and leveraging resources for change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Sustainable change

Through the identification of assets and aspirations, Community First practitioners can begin to work with people to mobilise their assets further and begin the process of 'stepping-back' to begin embedding sustainable local ownership. Mobilising assets means, for example, building connections between those interested in particular activities with local self-employed coaches or volunteers capable of leading. This is also the point in which external resources can be leveraged to support budding activities, such as small grants for equipment or training. Practitioners often negotiate access to facilities or suitable community spaces at a reduced or subsidised rate to assist in establishing a session. Often the most assessable and culturally appropriate spaces were more informal 'alterative spaces' (Kural, 2010) not usually associated with sport, such as community centres and church halls. It is the practitioners' aptitude for facilitating fitting social connections that helps to foster change.

I want it to be Pete's [Community Club Leader] session and I want the community to have the relationship with him. I want to be able to walk away from it. (Lucy, Community Worker)

Unsurprisingly, practice driven by communities requires practitioners to operate in particular ways. Instead of engaging in the direct delivery of sessions, Community First practitioners are positioned as conduits, supporting individuals, community groups, volunteers, and paid coaches to coalesce effectively. Whilst those delivering the sessions may be voluntary or paid for by participants, a key element in sustaining practice is community ownership and the identification of session leaders. Whilst the leader's ability to deliver engaging sessions remains important, soft-skills, empathy and the capacity to connect with others were identified as fundamental in supporting sustained engagement. For Nadine (Project Manager),

"they're like gold dust [a good leader] because if you can get somebody who understands how difficult it is for somebody else to get active, then they are going to create an environment that is welcoming to sedentary people".

What remains central to this process is that participants' are able to influence the style, atmosphere, and organisation of their recreational opportunities through dialogue with the coach or leader. An advantage of Community First's approach can be identified in its commitment to supporting ongoing recreational opportunities that avoid the perils of creating a dependency on external resources or expertise. An experience clearly reflected in the comment of one session participant.

It's more than just going walking together. If we want people to come and do different activities or health talks, or if we want to petition the council about the park, we can. It can just be about what we want and what works for us. (Walk group participant)

Conclusion

This paper presents ABCD principles and practices as a promising avenue for CSD. Though this is only one example in a diverse 'sector', this paper also illustrates the broader potential of CSD in fostering sporting and civic participation through socially democratic associations. 'Bottom-up' participatory processes are identified as enabling practitioners to deepen their knowledge of social issues and the potential solutions, whilst also positioning community members as knowledgeable agents capable of deliberation and insight. An appreciative ethos and the creation of participatory structures means that CSD processes can provide opportunities for citizens to exercise their agency: interpreting, developing, and modifying their social realities. For Bevir (2013), when community participation and deliberation are valued in themselves and not purely as a means to an end, practice demonstrates a deeper commitment to participatory democracy.

For Community First a participatory approach serves a dual purpose, providing rich insight into existing and potential community assets, whilst also building relationships with individuals and groups that foster mutual trust, honesty, and commitment. Such relationships are essential for gaining an accurate understanding of individual and communal determinants of sport and social participation (Coalter, 2012; Crabbe, 2008). Indeed failing to 'start where people are' means practitioners risk being irrelevant to the lives and conditions of many people (Labronte, 1994).

However, in shifting the focus away from citizens' rights and community needs, Community First (and by extension other advocates of ABCD) risk pushing responsibility further away from the state and purely into the hands of those citizens most in need of additional support. Swallowed whole, a preoccupation with 'assets' may result in sport-based interventions being blinkered to the social and political systems that shape enduring material inequalities, thereby blunting the vision, potency, and efficacy of projects for change. An asset-based approach to CSD thus demonstrates innovation consistent with a 'Sport for All' ethos, but also a degree of capitulation to the political individualisation of social issues and 'hollowing out' of UK public and welfare services.

Despite these misgivings, this paper demonstrates that an asset-based approach enables individuals and communities to better frame and influence local recreational opportunities. The study provides novel insights into how the principles of ABCD have been interpreted and applied in community sport, as well as providing the conceptual foundations for further research and critique of asset-based CSD. Future research that illuminates the actualities and implications of practice from different points of the CSD compass could further contribute to understanding 'what works and why' in sport-based programmes for change. Nonetheless, this paper contributes to the growing body of empirical research on inclusive community sport provision, and highlights that if the oft-quoted 'power' of sport in communities is to be realised in theory and action, insights from ABCD could be central to such future endeavours.

References

- Bevir, M. (2013). *A Theory of Governance*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Black, D. R. (2017). The challenges of articulating 'top down' and 'bottom up' development through sport. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 2(1), 7-22. doi: 10.1080/23802014.2017.1314771
- Blackshaw, T. (2010). *Key Concepts in Community Studies*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Bolton, N., Fleming, S., & Elias, B. (2008). The Experience of Community Sport Development: A case study of Blaenau Gwent. *Managing Leisure*, 13, 92-103. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13606710801933446>
- Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter*. California: Berrett-Koehler.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buchroth, I., & Parkin, C. (2010). Theory and Youth and Community Work Practice. In I. Buchroth & C. Parkin (Eds.), *Using Theory in Youth and Community Work Practice* (pp. 4-19). Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Butcher, H., Banks, S., Henderson, P., & Robertson, J. (2007). *Critical Community Practice*. Bristol: Polity Press.
- Christens, B. (2012). Targeting empowerment in community development: a community psychology approach to enhancing local power and well-being. *Community Development Journal*, 47(4), 538-554. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bss031>
- Coakley, J. (2011). Youth Sports: What counts as "positive development?". *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 35(3), 306-324. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723511417311>
- Coalter, F. (2002). *Sport and Community Development: A manual*.
- Coalter, F. (2007). *A Wider Social Role for Sport: Who's keeping the score?* London: Routledge.
- Coalter, F. (2012). 'There is loads of relationships here': Developing a programme theory for sport-for-change programmes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(5), 594-612. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690212446143>
- Coalter, F. (2013). *Sport for Development: what game are we playing?* London: Routledge.
- Collins, M. (2010). From 'sport for good' to 'sport for sport's sake' - not a good move for sports development in England. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2(3), 367-379. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2010.519342>
- Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'Participation': Models, Meanings and Practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269-283. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010>
- Crabbe, T. (2008). Avoiding the numbers game: Social theory, policy and sport's role in relationship building. In M. Nicholson & R. Hoye (Eds.), *Sport and Social Capital* (pp. 21-37). London: Elsevier.

- Doherty, A., & Cousens, L. (2013). Introduction to the Special Issue on Community Sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 27(6), 419-421. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.27.6.419>
- Emejulu, A. (2013). Searching for the state and the market in American community development: Reflections on editing *Community Development in the Steel City*. *Community Development Journal*, 48(1), 158-162. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bss062>
- Eysenck, H., J. (1979). Introduction. In H. Eysenck, J. (Ed.), *Case Studies in Behaviour Therapy* (pp. 1-15). London: Routedledge.
- Fetterman, D. (1998). *Ethnography: step by step* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Giddens, A. (1998). *The Third Way: The renewal of Social Democracy*. London: Polity.
- Grix, J. (2010). The 'governance debate' and the study of sport policy. *International Journal of Sport Policy* 2(2), 159-171. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2010.488061>
- Haywood, L. (1994). *Community Leisure and Recreation*. London: Butterworth-Heinmann.
- Houlihan, B., & White, A. (2002). *The Politics of Sports Development: Development of sport or development through sport?* London: Routledge.
- Hylton, K., & Totten, M. (2013). Community Sport Development. In K. Hylton (Ed.), *Sports Development. Policy, process and practice* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Kaufman, S. (2001). Detached Youth Work. In F. Factor, V. Chauhan & J. Pitts (Eds.), *The RHP Companion to Working with Young People*. Lyme Regis: Russel House.
- Kay, T. (2009). Developing through sport: evidencing sport impacts on young people. *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 12(9), 1177-1191. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430430903137837>
- Kelly, L. (2011). 'Social Inclusion' through sports-based interventions. *Critical social policy*, 31(1), 126-150. doi: 10.1177/0261018310385442
- Kretzmann, J., & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building Communities from the inside out: A path towards finding and mobilising a community's assets*. Chicago: ACTA.
- Kretzmann, J., & Mcknight, J. (1996). Asset-Based Community Development. *National Civic Review*, 85(4), 23-29. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ncr.4100850405>
- Kural, R. (2010). Changing Spaces for Sports. *Sport in Society*, 13(2), 300-313. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430430903523002>
- Labronte, R. (1994). Health Promotion and empowerment: Reflections on professional practice. *Health, Education and Behaviour*, 21(2), 253-268. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819402100209>
- Ledwith, M. (2010). *Participatory Practice: Community-based action for transformative change*. Bristol: Polity Press.
- Ledwith, M. (2011). *Community Development: A critical approach* (2nd ed.). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lindsey, I., Kay, T., Jeanes, R., & Banda, D. (2017). *Localizing global sport for development.*: Manchester University Press.

- Long, J., & Sanderson, I. (2001). The Social Benefits of Sport: Where's the proof? . In C. Gratton & I. Henry (Eds.), *Sport in the City: The role of sport in economic and social regeneration* (pp. 187-203). London: Routledge.
- Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, 13(5), 474-486. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452032000125857>
- Miles, M., Huberman, M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (4th ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Misener, L., & Schulenkorf, N. (2016). Rethinking the Social Value of Sport Events Through an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Perspective. *Journal of Sport Management*, 30(3), 329-430. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2015-0203>
- Nurture Development. (n.d). *Asset Based Community Development*. Retrieved from <https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/>
- Parnell, D., Spracklen, K., & Millward, P. (2017). Sport management issues in an era of austerity. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 17(1), 67-74. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2016.1257552>
- Reid, G. (2017). A fairytale narrative for community sport? Exploring the politics of sport social enterprise. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9(4), 597-611. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2017.1349827>
- Rich, K., Nicholson, M., Randle, E., Donaldson, A., O'Halloran, P., Staley, K., . . . Belski, R. (2019). Participant-Centered sport development: A case study using the leisure constraints of women in regional communities. *Leisure Sciences*, 1-20. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2018.1553124>
- Roberts, K., & Brodie, D. (1992). *Inner City Sport: Who plays and what are the benefits?* Culemburg: Giordano Bruno.
- Russel, C. (2015). Asset Based Community Development (ABCD): Looking Back to Look Forward: In conversation with John McKnight about the intellectual and practical heritage of ABCD and its place in the world today Retrieved from <http://www.nurturedevelopment.org/looking-back-to-look-forward-the-intellectual-heritage-of-asset-based-community-development-cormac-russell-new-book/>
- Schaillée, H., Haudenhuyse, R., & Bradt, L. (2019). Community sport and social inclusion: international perspectives. *Sport in Society*, 22(6), 885-896. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1565380>
- Schulenkorf, N. (2017). Managing sport-for-development: Reflections and outlook. *Sport Management Review*, 20(3), 243-251. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2016.11.003>
- Schulenkorf, N., & Spaaij, R. (2015). Commentary: Reflections on Theory Building in Sport for Development and Peace. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 16(1/2), 71-77. doi: 10453/42184
- Spaaij, R. (2012). Building Social and Cultural Capital among young people in disadvantaged communities: lessons from a Brazilian sport-based intervention program *Sport, Education and Society*, 17(1), 77-95. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.607913>

- Tracy, S. (2010). Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Vail, S. (2007). Community Development and Sport Participation *Journal of Sport Management*, 21(4), 571-596. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.21.4.571>
- Walpole, C., & Collins, M. (2010). Sports Development in Microcosm: Braunstone Sport Action Zone. In M. Collins (Ed.), *Examining Sports Development*. London: Routledge.
- Whitley, M., Farrell, K., Wolff, E., & Hillyer, S. (2019). Sport for development and peace: Surveying actors in the field. *Journal of Sport for Development*, 7(12), 1-15
- Yin, R. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.