Sport events and ethnic reconciliation: attempting to create social change between Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim sportspeople in war-torn Sri Lanka

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Bio

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Abstract

Reconciliation is about bringing disparate communities together and creating the intercommunication necessary to reduce intergroup barriers, generate understanding, and connect with others to achieve a peaceful togetherness. This paper investigates the role of sport events in contributing to reconciliation and inclusive social change between disparate communities in ethnically divided Sri Lanka. Following an interpretive mode of enquiry, findings suggest that if strategically designed, sport events allow the establishment of interpersonal friendships and the creation of inclusive social identities along national lines, organisational lines, common interests and imagined factors. Events can create 'momenta of togetherness' for members of disparate ethnic groups and as such may contribute to positive social change and a sense of *imagiNation*. While sport events provide a starting point, booster and catalyst for positive social change and development on a community level, they need to be integrated into a larger agenda of socio-political support to make a significant contribution to reconciliation and peace in divided societies.

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The island of Sri Lanka is home to different ethnic and religious groups, including Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays, Parsis, and the indigenous inhabitants the Veddas. Despite claims that these groups – and in particular the Sinhalese and the Tamil communities – are 'natural enemies', there was little trouble between them during Sri Lanka's colonial era, nor in the first few years after Sri Lankan independence in 1948 (Nesiah, 2006). However, in recent history, Sinhalese-Tamil relations have been fraught with severe difficulties. In 1976, as a response to perceived discrimination against the Tamil population, the separatist underground movement *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) unilaterally claimed an independent Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka. This claim in a civil war between the Sinhalese-dominated Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the LTTE, which has deeply divided the Sri Lankan people.

While the GOSL's understanding of 'conflict development' remains focused on combating terrorism on the one hand and achieving economic growth on the other (*Daily News*, 17.01.2009), aid organisations and NGOs have highlighted the importance of integration and social development projects for Sri Lanka's estranged ethnic groups. On the community level, it is argued that efforts can and should be made to foster dialogue, advance inter-ethnic understanding and achieve social (intergroup) development. In this respect, inter-community sport events are an innovative and potentially significant medium for establishing contact and, in turn, starting localised reconciliation processes.

The Asian-German Sport Exchange Programme (A.G.S.E.P.) is an NGO that has been conducting 'sport events for development' projects in Sri Lanka since 2002. This organisation has focused mainly on youth integration projects in rural western Sri Lanka and – during the cease-fire period from 2002-2007 – on community sport events in the heavily war-effected northern parts of the country. Against the background of worsening relations between the GOSL and the LTTE, the sport event projects attempt to make a modest contribution to overcoming intergroup rivalry and reducing ethnic distance on a community level. This paper investigates how A.G.S.E.P.'s 2007 Intercultural Sports Meeting (ISM) contributed to inclusive social change among the participating Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities.

Socio-Cultural Context and Rationale

When using sport events as a medium to construct dialogue and advance inter-ethnic relations in a deeply divided society, it is important to take into account the historical, geographical, and socio-cultural context of the country in question. The conflict in Sri Lanka has deep historical roots and complex contemporary manifestations; it is therefore only possible to provide a brief overview of the key political, demographic, and socio-cultural features that are most pertinent to A.G.S.E.P. and its sport for development projects.

Historically, Sri Lanka has always been a multi-ethnic society. Around 500 B.C. the Sinhalese, the island's predominant ethnic group, came to the country from northern India (Dunung, 1995). The other major ethnic group, the Tamils, arrived from Southern India about 200 years later. In 1505 the Portuguese were the first European settlers to colonise and take control of parts of the country. As part of this process they not only brought external trade to Sri Lanka, but also Christianity in a country where Buddhism and Hinduism were the predominant religions (Campbell & Niven, 2001). Subsequently, the Dutch came to Sri Lanka in the early seventeenth century and re-named the island Ceylon. During a battle in 1798, the Dutch were defeated by the British, who made Ceylon a colony of the expanding British Empire (Dunung, 1995). The British introduced English as a third official language (the other two being Sinhala and Tamil) and instituted a well-organised educational system. Despite a growing separation of the Sinhalese-inhabited south and the Tamil-settled north, the British managed to control the whole island and established principles of democratic government (Auswärtiges Amt, 2008). When Sri Lanka became independent on 4 February 1948, the transfer of power between the British and local parties was achieved by peaceful means.

Since Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the Tamil minority has been anxious about the country's unitary form of government and apprehensive that the Sinhalese majority will abuse Tamil rights. In 1956, the newly elected Sinhalese nationalist government arranged a series of legislative steps that proved discriminatory to Tamils. One of these was the declaration of Sinhala as the country's one and only official language; others were agricultural and university reforms that privileged the Sinhalese population (Dunung, 1995; Orjuela, 2008). Consequently, the Tamils started to rebel, asserting their collective identity and social, cultural and religious rights. In the 1970s, they started to seek an independent state by force. Tamil politicians were moving from support for federalism to a demand for a separate Tamil State *Tamil Eelam* in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka, which were areas of traditional Tamil settlement.

Under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran the LTTE was formed in 1976; this was after long, peaceful, yet unsuccessful demonstrations by Tamil leaders against Sinhalese oppression. Seeing themselves as the acting representative of the Tamil people, the LTTE's violent demands culminated in a civil war that lasted from 1983-2002, and which resulted in over 70,000 casualties (Bilger, 2006). In 2002 the LTTE controlled 15% of the island and claimed another 20% as their traditional homeland. In north-east Sri Lanka, the Tigers had established a de facto state with its own military, police, schools, laws and courts.

In 2002, the GOSL and the LTTE entered into official negotiations aimed at solving the country's ethnic and political divides; peace negotiations were facilitated by an independent party – the Norwegian Government. While the LTTE withdrew from active peace talks after six rounds in April 2003, a cease-fire agreement (CFA) remained in place. However, the CFA was constantly violated by both parties, which resulted in the Sri Lankan Government withdrawing from the CFA and returning to a full-blown civil war in January 2008. Fourteen months later, after considerable military victories and the regaining of valuable territory from the LTTE in northeastern Sri Lanka, the Government was able to announce victory over the Tamil Tigers and an end to the civil war in May 2009. However, civil society in Sri Lanka is still suffering heavily from the social, economic, and political consequences of the war. In 2009, Amnesty International described the overall social and human rights situation in the country as "alarming and dramatically deteriorating". This estimation was confirmed by the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) (2008), which ranked Sri Lanka as South Asia's No.1 human rights violator in its latest 2008 Index.

As a result of historic circumstances and the recent socio-political struggle, Sri Lanka today is an ethnically, religiously, linguistically, and geographically divided society. Of the 20 million people living on the island 74% are Buddhist Sinhalese who speak Sinhala, 18% are Hindu and Christian Tamils who speak Tamil, and 7% are Indian and Sri Lankan Moors – generally labelled and referred to as 'Muslims' in Sri Lanka – who speak either Sinhala, Tamil and/or English (Nesiah, 2006). Two thirds of the overall Tamil population resides in the north and east of Sri Lanka, where they form a demographic majority (Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics, 2001). The Sinhalese community resides predominantly in the central and southern areas of the island. This underscores the potency of ethnic divides along geographical lines in Sri Lanka.

Over the last 25 years political rapprochement has not been particularly successful in Sri Lanka, but many liberal-minded Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim people have expressed a strong desire to put an end to the brutal ethnic conflict. Lately, the call for community-based projects and initiatives has been made by political experts and peace activists, who argue that division needs to be overcome and inter-community cooperation has to start in order to achieve peaceful relationships among groups:

> [In Sri Lanka], along with the concern for human rights is the imperative of reconciliation between and within communities after two decades of armed conflict. (…) Before the establishment of formal Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, if this is the route chosen, community-based peace and reconciliation [projects] are an urgent need. (Saravanamuttu, 2006: 16-17)

A.G.S.E.P. attempts to contribute to peace and reconciliation as a self-declared impartial 'change agent' between Sri Lanka's ethnic communities. Based in the rural western Sri Lankan town of Marawila, two hours north of the capital Colombo, A.G.S.E.P. works in cooperation with the local community and international donors. Thus far it has been able to establish a sport complex and a functioning community sport event program to encourage active social and inter-group development.

Sports, Events, Social Development and Change

If strategically organised, inter-community sport programs encourage healthy competition, promote friendship and develop intergroup understanding, resulting in social development (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004; Schulenkorf, 2009; Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2009; Stidder & Haasner, 2007; Sugden, 2006). Conceptually, social development can be divided into three main interrelated constructs: social capital, capacity building, and social change (Moscardo, 2007). While social capital refers to the development of trust, networks and reciprocity among people, capacity building describes enhancement of material opportunities and the particular skills, talent and knowledge that contribute to community empowerment. Social change refers to the establishment of emotional connections and bonds among communities, such as the creation of shared social identity and a sense of belonging. While all three constructs present important goals for A.G.S.E.P.'s work in Sri Lanka, this article focuses predominantly on the socio-psychological component of social change.

The theoretical concept underpinning social change is Tajfel's and Turner's (1979; 1986) Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT explores how people come to see themselves as members of

one group (ingroup) in comparison with another (outgroup). Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978: 63). Having a particular social identity means being at one with a particular group or groups, being like others in the group, identifying with the group, and seeing things from the ingroup's perspective. SIT therefore combines both psychological and sociological aspects of group behaviour (Hogg, 1992).

Once individuals identify themselves with their group, one of the first things they do when meeting others is to 'locate them on their social map'; in other words categorise and identify them in terms of the group or groups they may belong to. Putnam (2007) argues that social identities and social categories are not a *fixum* but can be actively influenced and socially de-constructed and re-constructed. Consequently, a change of social identity is likely to lead to a change in behaviour, as people's sense of 'who they are' influences them to behave and act accordingly. For example, if different groups engage with each other and work towards common goals, then emotional distance between them can be reduced and common identity feelings with former outgroup members may be created (Allport, 1954; González & Brown, 2003; Sherif, 1979).

SIT has provided the basis for four categorisation models that aim to improve intergroup relations, perceptions and attitudes (Figure 1). These are the De-Categorised Contact Model (DCM), the Mutual Ingroup Differentiation Model (MIDM), the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) and the Dual Identity Model (DIM).

Figure 1: The four different group categorisation models

Separate individuals De-categorisation (Me / You)		Two groups Mutual categorisation (We / They)
One group Re-categorisation (We)		Two subgroups in one group Dual Identity (Us / Them + We)

The Brewer and Miller (1984) De-Categorised Contact Model (DCM) suggests that by reducing the salience – the relative importance – of group categorisation, people have the

opportunity of getting to know and appreciate outgroup members as unique individuals. This means that group stereotype disconfirmation can be achieved via a 'personalisation' and 'differentiation' of the contact situation. Personalisation means an increase in personal contact, communication, and direct exchange, while differentiation requires a distinction amongst members of a given outgroup category, who are then no longer stereotyped with a larger superordinate category (González & Brown, 2003; Vivian, Hewstone, & Brown, 1997). For example, at the Olympic Games a participant would see a foreign competitor not in terms of his nationality (group) or ethnic background (sub-group), but as an athlete (individual). Vivian et al (1997) conclude that if the personalisation process is successful, then unique personalities, styles, attributes and preferences are more important within the contact situation than the groups people belong to.

The second model towards the reduction of intergroup bias is the Mutual Intergroup Differentiation Model (MIDM), which was proposed by Hewstone and Brown (1986) and later reformulated by Vivian et al (1997). This approach suggests that equal status interaction can reduce intergroup bias even if the original group identities remain salient and each group keeps its distinctiveness in the direct contact situation. As long as groups have differentiated areas of expertise and do not threaten each other by contact, they should be able to admire the distinctive characteristics of the outgroup and derive positive self-esteem from their own (see Brown, 2000; González & Brown, 2003). However, building on Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, Oh, Chung and Labianca (2004) argue that the MIDM's focus on separation is likely to be ineffective in intergroup contact settings. Evidently, the MIDM model avoids contact more than it encourages it, as groups in 'contact situations' are paralleled rather than combined.

The third model aiming to reduce intergroup conflict and bias is the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM), proposed by Gaertner et al (1989) and later reformulated by Gaertner et al (2000). This approach emphasises that strategies should be implemented to re-categorise the intergroup situation, and to redraw the group boundaries with the final aim of subsuming the in- and outgroup into an inclusive overriding superordinate category. This re-categorisation into a common ingroup can, for example, be achieved through cooperation towards shared superordinate goals (Allport, 1954; Sherif, 1979). If groups work together towards a superordinate goal, the newly created team of former ingroup and outgroup members has a connecting point, which allows people to count 'others' as ingroup members. Making use of

the emotional bonds that sport events can create, governments all over the world have increasingly used sports and events as superordinate goals. Sport events are believed to contribute to closeness and integration among groups even when other forms of (political) negotiation have been unsuccessful (Chalip, 2006; Croft, 2005; Stidder & Haasner, 2007; Sugden, 2006). Governments use public events to try and forge a shared sense of national purpose and identity, with the final aim of emotional connection and nation building (Jarvie, 2003; Nauright, 1997; Vinoker, 1988). In other words, the governments' aim is to achieve a submersion of sub-communities into a superordinate community as a whole, and sporting events appear to be one catalyst for this change.

The most recent approach to reducing intergroup distance is the Dual Identity Model (DIM) (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Gaertner et al, 1999; González & Brown, 2003; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Upon considering the constraints and advantages of all previous models, the DIM represents a rapprochement of the CIIM and MIDM, thereby seeking to reap the benefits of both. By having the original and superordinate group memberships simultaneously salient, it is suggested that even when racial, ethnic or religious identification is strong, the perceptions of a superordinate connection can enhance acceptance, trust and harmony. A dual identity status can often be witnessed at international sport matches. For example, in Sri Lanka, sport on a national level has for a long time bridged differences between multiple groups and in this context has achieved a unifying atmosphere amongst communities. The country's most popular sport, cricket, is played, watched and supported by millions of people; Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers alike. Members of Sri Lanka's ethnically mixed national cricket team are celebrated regardless of their ethnic affiliation by *all* Sri Lankans (Harrison, 2004). This reflects a fluid process of identity construction and represents the opportunity for multiple identity formation (Chryssochoou, 2000; McGlynn, Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2004; Orjuela, 2008). Within the Sinhalese dominated cricket team, the most interesting case presents Sri Lanka's cricket legend, spin bowler Muttiah Muralitharan, who is universally considered a national hero despite his Tamil background. What is more, his manager is Sinhalese.

While sporting occasions and sporting heroes may help to keep alive ideas of what a certain nation is, was, or should be, competitive sporting encounters also provide the opportunity for thousands of spectators to collectively reaffirm their commitments to beliefs, values, myths, and social identities that may reflect or even reinforce rivalries and hostilities (Amirtash, 2005; Sack & Suster, 2000; Sugden, 2006; Sugden & Bairner, 2000). According to Tomlinson

(1994), the social identity of belonging to the same group is seldom more strongly felt than in competitive special events, which can result in a feeling of belonging or bonding with favourite ingroup members, but on the other hand may also result in collective antagonisms towards outgroup members. Apart from the potential worsening of intergroup relations and negative social change, sport events may even provide a platform for propaganda and terrorist activity. This was recently the case in Sri Lanka, when in April 2008 thirteen people were killed and sixty wounded at the official opening of a marathon in the Gampaha district north of Colombo. An alleged LTTE suicide bomber carried out an attack at the starting line, targeting the Guest of Honour, Minister of Highways and Road Development Fernandopulle (Spiegel Online, 06.04.2008). The LTTE accused Fernandopulle of being a propaganda spokesman for the government, and they accused the event of being Sinhala-centrist and non-inclusive of Tamil demands (TamilNet, 06.04.2008).

This example underlines the point that if organisers want to create social benefits from sport events there is the need to hear the voices of *all* communities and stakeholders, and to include them in the event planning and design. While active and inclusive community participation has been praised as an innovative and practicable approach to social development and change (Midgley, 1986; Orjuela, 2008; Uruena, 2004), in a developing world context communities often do not possess the trust, skills, knowledge and expertise to conduct reconciliation projects by themselves. Therefore, external 'change agents' have been introduced to support local development activities under the principle of 'help with self-help'.

Asian-German Sports Exchange Programme

Philosophy

The *Asian German Sports Exchange Programme* (A.G.S.E.P.) is an NGO which has been conducting sport events and international exchanges between Asian and European sport teams since 1989. The organisation was founded by its current CEO Dr. Dietmar Döring, who saw an opportunity to use sport events as an avenue to enhance tourism and overseas visitation in the touristically neglected town of Marawila (for a more detailed analysis of A.G.S.E.P.'s sport tourism program see Schulenkorf 2008). Since 2002, A.G.S.E.P. has turned its focus towards staging inter-community sport events with the social aim of improving the relationships between estranged Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka. As an active 'change agent' between communities, the philosophy of A.G.S.E.P. is that sport is a neutral platform and an ideal way of connecting people and transcending social, cultural, ethnic, and

religious divides. Today A.G.S.E.P. is supported by four full-time staff members, more than one hundred voluntary co-workers, several sport associations in Sri Lanka and Germany, as well as interns – predominantly from European-based universities. In steady co-operation with Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim community groups, A.G.S.E.P.'s vision is to "contribute to the re-establishment of peace" in the divided country, while its overall mission is "to popularise social values such as respect, courage and commitment through sport events" (A.G.S.E.P. Website, 2008).

Location and organisation

A.G.S.E.P. stages its reconciliation and social development projects in the relatively safe but underdeveloped rural parts of western Sri Lanka. Here, apart from occasional school sport activities, locals do not have the opportunity to experience any type of sport tournament or inter-cultural festival in their towns or villages. In 2005-6, as a first initiative towards capacity building, A.G.S.E.P., in cooperation with the local Nattandiya community, constructed the *Peace Village*, a multi-purpose sports facility with a small-scale football ground, a 25 metre swimming pool, a basketball/netball court, and a playground. This was supplemented with four houses offering accommodation for up to 80 people. The project was supported by the German-based aid organisation *Friedensdorf International* and several other international donors.

In late 2006, after the *Peace Village* was completed, A.G.S.E.P. invited community representatives from Nattandiya (western Sri Lanka; Sinhalese and Christian), Anamaduwa (northwestern Sri Lanka; Sinhalese) and Nilaveli (northeastern Sri Lanka; Tamil and Muslim) to participate in the design of a first ever inter-community sport weekend for 8-16 year old children and their families. At a community sports forum, a managing committee was elected to organise the inaugural Intercultural Sports Meeting (ISM) event. The organising team consisted of members of all three participating communities, as well as the CEO of the A.G.S.E.P. and several volunteers (mainly from European universities), who spent a semester working in Sri Lanka.

The ISM event

The pre-event phase included several months of preparation, planning, and active discussion about the management and implementation of the sport event. Intensive negotiations with the Government and its Sports and Education Ministries, the Tamil Sports Council and the

Ministry for Disaster Relief, were held to guarantee institutional support from all sides. While the communities were in charge of the marketing the event towards their respective groups, A.G.S.E.P. arranged the travel permits to and from the war-torn northeastern community of Nilaveli, provided the transport for participants, teachers and supervisors, and organised sport coaches, event experts, and social workers to conduct and supervise the events.

On Saturday 20 January 2007, the ISM was officially opened by the Guest of Honour Mr. Dassanayake, the Minister for Nation Building in Sri Lanka. After a number of cultural performances from the Kandy Dancers and the playing of the Sri Lankan and German national anthems, welcome speeches from Mr. Dassanayake, Dr. Döring, and both Sinhalese and Tamil community representatives followed. From 10am to 6.30pm about 150 children took part in intercultural sport activities such as football, creative sports, and swimming; for the adult community members the day was supplemented with the educational workshop 'Social Impacts of Sport Events'. In all activities ethnically mixed groups were created and competition was played down to preserve the fun and enjoyment aspects of the games. Football was chosen for its potential in team-building and co-operation; creative sports promised to allow for the expression of talent and interest in 'something new and different'; while swimming had the educational advantage of teaching the children a new skill. Learning to swim had a further purpose because water was widely feared as dangerous for Sri Lankan youth after the Tsunami disaster of 2004 (Straubinger, 2005). Finally, cultural performances and dance shows provided a special flair during the evening program. The first day ended with a joint dinner of all groups followed by cultural performances from the three different ethnic communities, which led into a night of music and dancing at the *Peace Village* complex.

The following morning, the event organisers allocated some free time for the children to play with each other and enjoy the company of their old and new friends. Swimming sessions were again on offer and students frequented the pool in great numbers. After lunch the official program ended, however many people did not leave for several hours after that. Throughout the day a mix of Sinhalese, Tamil and international music was played, which supplemented the intercultural theme of the event. Well-known songs with an integrative peace message were purposely chosen to support the event's conciliatory purpose. For example, English songs included John Lennon's *Imagine*, Delta Goodrem's *Together We Are One* and Scorpion's *Wind of Change*.

In times of high civil unrest in Sri Lanka, the mere staging of this event was considered a great achievement, as the organising, fund-raising, provision of equipment, recruitment of volunteers, and support by VIPs, parents and spectators proved a great challenge for the organising team. Moreover, the positive official feedback and personal anecdotes from participants and spectators suggested that the ISM event contributed to positive social development within and among different ethnic communities. To empirically support this claim, the organisers decided that a more structured approach to research was needed to understand in-depth the event's contribution to social development and change. However, the researcher was not contracted by A.G.S.E.P. and conducted the study as an independent researcher on site.

Method

Sport and event development projects have been criticised for their lack of rigorous empirical evaluation and a reliance on subjective experiences and anecdotes suggesting that they can contribute to nation building and peace (Chalip, 2006; Lea-Howarth, 2006). Therefore, this research employed an in-depth case study approach to examine in detail the development (or otherwise) of social change resulting from the inaugural 2007 ISM event. Following an interpretive mode of inquiry (Glesne, 1999; Neuman, 2003), findings from this research were derived by conducting 31 semi-structured interviews with Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, and international event stakeholders. The interviewees talked from an *ex post* perspective on their experiences of the ISM event, and how it contributed (or otherwise) to social development within and among the participating communities.

The interpretive paradigm underpinning this study acknowledges that research questions and data emerge through a process of induction (Crotty, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Neuman, 2003). That is, the researcher constructs and reconstructs meaning in relation to the evolving research questions and the experiences of the participants related to the particular phenomenon under inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). According to Myers (1997), interpretive studies aim to understand the context of a phenomenon through the meanings that people assign to it. Therefore, the participants' experiences inform the process of data collection and subsequently its analysis through textual coding, identification of key themes and pattern development. This is a contrast to deductive studies that impose *a priori* an agreed upon set of criteria to be examined and a hypothesis to be tested.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to investigate people's sport event experiences. This method was chosen because, as Hoepfl (1997) argues, in-depth interviews are the most promising method to ascertain, from the perspective of participants, the 'reality' of their experiences in particular cases. In cooperation with the A.G.S.E.P. and the major Sri Lankan ethnic groups, key individuals from the three participating communities – Marawila/Nattandiya, Anamaduwa and Nilaveli – were identified for the initial round of interviews. Further respondents were pursued and accessed through the use of a snowball sampling technique. The combination of community representatives previously known by A.G.S.E.P. and the snowball method resulted in access to a wide spectrum of interviewees, ranging from local fishermen to high profile Members of Parliament. A detailed overview of respondents' ethnic background and their involvement in the event is provided below.

Table 1: Overview of interview respondents

Event Stakeholder Type	Number	Ethnic Background
Event Organisers	5	3 European, 1 Sinh., 1 Tamil
Volunteers	4	3 European, 1 Muslim
Event Spectators	4	2 European, 1 Sinh., 1 Tamil
Sinhalese Community	5	5 Sinhalese
Tamil Community	2	2 Tamil
Muslim Community	2	2 Muslim
Government Ministries	2	2 Sinhalese
LTTE Official	1	1 Tamil
Sport Associations	2	2 Sinhalese
Aid Organisation	1	1 Sinhalese
Media	2	1 Sinhalese, 1 Muslim
Sponsor	1	1 Sinhalese
Total	31	14 Sinhalese, 5 Tamil, 4 Muslim, 8 European

The interviews were conducted between January and April 2007. They ran for between 35 and 120 minutes and included questions on the social behaviour between people at the event, feelings of a common spirit or attitudinal changes between people and groups, and impacts on the social identities and feelings of group belonging at the event. In cases where the respondents' English proficiency did not allow adequate responses, they were assisted by a local Sinhala or Tamil speaking interpreter. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and subsequently transcribed into text. To guarantee a confidential yet personal presentation of findings, respondents were given pseudonyms.

The computer software used to support the analysis was NVivo 7, which assisted the researcher in storing, integrating, indexing, and coding the large amount of textual data collected. Within NVivo, the coding processes are reflected in the creation of free and tree nodes. While free nodes can be described as containers for storing data that "do not assume relationships with other concepts" (Beazley & Richards, 2000: 25), tree nodes allow for hierarchical organisation into categories and sub-categories. During the data analysis process both free nodes and tree nodes were used. This resulted in a better understanding of relationships between the data and the structure of emerging arguments, and allowed for the coding and reconceptualising of data according to different themes and social identity levels.

Findings

The ISM event in Nattandiya was purposely designed to construct dialogue and achieve inclusive social change among participants from Sri Lanka's disparate ethnic communities. In this context, social change refers to the development of superordinate social identity feelings and inclusive socio-psychological group categorisations between members of the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities. As a consequence of being involved in the event, different interview respondents identified inclusive social change on both the interpersonal and intergroup levels.

The DCM: The interpersonal level

The event gave many of the Tamil contributors the chance to directly experience Sinhalese groups and 'territory' for the first time in their lives. Mark described this first step towards community approximation and 'normalising' as a positive impact of the sport encounters, and supported this view by highlighting an example for behavioural change that occurred during the ISM:

> Most of the people don't have any contact to other ethnic groups, you know. In your daily life you don't walk up to a foreigner and say 'Hi, I am whatever', so this event gave the people the possibility to get to know each other, to get to know other ethnic groups and come together to see that the others are just normal people like I am.

On the interpersonal level, one-on-one training activities provided an opportunity for continuous interpersonal contact, which resulted in the development of new friendships between sportspeople and the breaking down of socio-psychological barriers. Muslim community member Waahid reflected on his experiences:

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> When [the children] came they were always with their friends, only some children were mixing around with the others. ... But the next day they just go and touch their hands, or say hi. So it was just like that ..., it was like a cat and mouse game .... But then all of a sudden you see them playing together. ... So then in the end they were more open minded after they met these people for a certain time and became friends.

Both Mark's and Waahid's comments highlight that the events provided an opportunity for positive interpersonal contact and the development of new friendships. Kumi explained the process of de-categorisation of 'others':

> The [participants] were behaving very friendly towards each other, [showing] respect. You know, nothing like: you are not a Tamil, or you are not a Sinhalese – they were not thinking like this anymore. There was respect for each other and having kind of, I don't know, personal friendship, respect and friendliness and support on a personal level.

The friendly and supportive atmosphere at the event and small gestures of support allowed people to engage on a personal level, getting to know and appreciate 'the good' in others. These examples suggest that the *active participation* as an athlete led to a more personal and intimate atmosphere and decreased barriers of ethnic mistrust between sportspeople. However, this raises the issue of how to facilitate de-categorising one-on-one experiences for other stakeholders at such events.

The MIIM: Group Differentiation

Respondents argued that the cultural aspect of the ISM allowed for one of the few opportunities to showcase differentiated, ethnic-specific talent. International volunteer Anja believed that through dancing, performing or arts and craft "the kids had the possibility to show something from their culture to everyone else". Anja appreciated the contributions from each group and believed that the cultural performances contributed to a better understanding of the outgroup and an appreciation of their talents. For her, culture and traditions are an integral part of community life, and something special that "should be worshiped, passed on, and shown to other groups".

On the other hand, A.G.S.E.P. staff member Dan experienced negative impacts of differentiated group building, something that happened spontaneously after the event. He noted:

> In the end there was still this separated group forming because people knew each other already for five, six, seven years, and so it's a normal effect that they want to play together. And once we had different groups of Sinhalese here and Tamils there, then it became more stressful and somehow more tense.

To avoid ethnic-specific group building, the ISM organisers placed a strong focus on ethnically mixed activities during the event. This may explain the small number of comments made in regards to clearly differentiated contact situations affecting intergroup relationships.

The CIIM: Common identity feelings

Some respondents compared and linked A.G.S.E.P.'s inter-community events with Sri Lankan national cricket events, where they have experienced common ingroup feelings previously. For example, Marco supposed that although the ISM "is a very small event compared to a very big cricket event, to a certain level, on a micro level, we have felt this Sri Lankanness here, too." Spectator Jaly added that the atmosphere at the events "was very friendly, we all felt like a family", and the categorisation of people was not done in relation to ethnic backgrounds, "not east, not south, not Sinhalese, not Muslim, not Tamil. Here we are Sri Lankans!". Gerd further highlighted the inclusive behaviour and the affection of adults at the ISM event, who came to witness and support the children:

> The parents supported the other groups as well, not only their own. Actually, I have seen, I have felt, that the parents are thinking: 'not only is this my child, these are all our children!

'Caring for others' was an important factor in the process of creating a common social identity. Similarly, Dan argued that the team building exercises, the mixing of people from different ethnic backgrounds into a newly formed group, was instrumental in creating a feeling of inclusiveness and spirit:

> Unity is achieved because of this team building. Yeah, in their groups – even if the people are mixed – they have the feeling that they are in ONE group and then this *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* (feeling of togetherness and belonging) starts.

The German term *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* stands for togetherness, belonging, feelings of attachment, unity and spirit, and characterises the impact or outcome of the team building exercise. The A.G.S.E.P. organisers and local community members agree that the proactive community team work led to an overall unifying atmosphere and the creation of a common group identity. For example, Tom believed:

> [The children] play together, they have a sense of unity and they are all together 'as one' at the Peace Village. They are the 'Peace Village Children'. I think that's something we achieved, and that's something they remember!

This comment suggests that during the event the ISM was successful in creating new common (superordinate) identities such as 'Peace Village Children', sportspersons or event participants. Similarly, Didi explained that at the event a "uniting spirit was seen through the expression of all the people – participants, organisers, sponsors: a united wish for peace in Sri Lanka." In this case, the superordinate goal of peace building contributed to the establishing of a superordinate group feeling.

Different community members mentioned the importance of using symbolism to achieve unity and a common ingroup feeling at sport events. The Sri Lankan flag, the national anthem, and the national jerseys all contributed to feelings of attachment and to perceiving former outgroup members as ingroup members. In reference to the opening ceremony of the ISM event, Sudu said:

> We know that all of our groups, Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim, are proud of the national flag. And that is one symbol of unionism, where all groups can stand together for the same values and beliefs. You can just feel that people are moved when hearing the anthem and looking up to our flag. It brings us closer together.

Sudu's view was supported by Gerd who believed that "symbols are very important for this event. The Sri Lankan flag is for example a symbol of all three ethnic groups – we are all united under one flag. We are one group! And the A.G.S.E.P. flag means that we are all sportspeople". Common feelings of unity were not only experienced by the different communities but, according to Raj, were extended to international groups and their members:

> Personally I would say that at this event I did not think about being a Tamil or Sri Lankan or something. When I was running with some Germans and all that, I felt that I was part of this world community! ... I felt as an internationalist. And then no one can expect me to feel Sri Lankan. In other circumstances yes, but not here.

Raj perceived the other domestic and international sportspeople as members of a common 'world community' ingroup, as he felt a 'sense of oneness' with the other participants. While Raj felt like an 'internationalist' at the ISM, he may still identify according to ethnic or national lines at other times. He goes on to say:

> For some hours – I had become an internationalist. It's not that thereafter I stayed an international, but those three or four hours have had a real impact on me, a real-life experience of being ONE with all the others. I was not like I am dreaming of being an internationalist, wanting to be an internationalist, but those three or four hours I WAS a real internationalist.

Raj's comment hints at the challenges for event managers and communities, who have to realise that the positive feelings of being an internationalist were limited to the time of the event. Raj saw the event as a starting point or catalyst for social change between communities, not as an endpoint to changing people's social identities.

The DIM: Dual identity feelings

Several interviewees said they experienced and/or witnessed feelings of a dual identity status during the event. They generally described their ethnic background as one part of the dual identity, while the other part consisted of (1) a sports team or A.G.S.E.P. layer, or (2) a national Sri Lankan layer. First, Waahid believed that the Tamil people experienced positive dual identity feelings at the ISM, because "when the Nilaveli people were here they didn't say 'I'm a Tamil'. They knew of course, but when we went in the A.G.S.E.P. bus we were all A.G.S.E.P." While ethnic differences were recognised, they were not dominating people's identity and behaviour. Instead, they remained as a sub-identity under a dual identity status dominated by the added superordinate A.G.S.E.P. identity.

Second, when talking about his experiences of being part of an ethnically mixed Sri Lankan sports team, Kappa provided an example of dual identity feelings combining ethnic and national layers. He explained:

> When I played in a [mixed] Sri Lankan team, that was definitely fostering my connection to all the people, or if you want so my identity with this country. It was a great feeling, we were proud of supporting our team and we did not care who is playing in the team – ok, I know where I come from and where I belong, and I knew who was Tamil, Sinhalese or Muslim, but we mainly supported the flag!

This comment shows that both ethnic and national identities were simultaneously salient during the event. While people felt a belonging and connection to their ethnic group, they combined on the national level. Sinhalese community member Sudu adds:

> We could see a big development: first day [the Tamils] were really afraid and hiding and shy. After that they forgot that they were Tamil [and] were hanging around with Sinhalese people playing football and everything. So slowly slowly they feel that they also belong to Sri Lanka, that they are Sri Lankan.

This comment confirms Kappa's belief that simultaneous feelings of ethnic and national belonging were created at the event. While feeling predominantly connected to their ethnic communities, people added a national identity layer to their mindset and saw themselves as 'Tamil Sri Lankans', which describes a step towards overall inclusiveness. Significantly, some respondents mentioned the creation of multiple social identities during the event. Niro argued that "at times I felt like a sports player, when the anthem played then I felt proud to be Sri Lankan, at other times I talked to other sponsors and, you know, I was also an event supporter". A similar comment was made by volunteer Axel, who "felt like an international, a peace maker and a volunteer – depending on the context!"

Discussion

The civil war and intergroup tensions in Sri Lanka are based on ethnic conflict and hostility. Over the years the Sinhalese, the Tamils and the Muslims have developed distinct social identities and members generally identify themselves not as Sri Lankans but according to their ethnic background (Dunung, 1995). The political, physical, and socio-psychological barriers between the ethnic communities have been the main reasons for avoidance of intergroup contact. The aim of this paper was to understand how contact at an inter-community sport event can impact on people's social identities and group categorisations, and through this contribute to inclusive social change and reconciliation.

The De-Categorised Contact Model (DCM) suggests that by reducing the relative importance of group categorisation, the ingroup-outgroup category-based judgements decrease and intergroup bias is minimised (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Miller & Brewer, 1986). In relation to the DCM it was found that positive one-on-one experiences, such as the genuine sharing of drinks or exchange of equipment, facilitated personalisation among people, who were no longer stereotyped with a larger superordinate category of 'others'. Respondents argued that the sporting atmosphere during participation allowed them to see 'the good' in others, which led to personal liking and friendship building. These findings are consistent with both Höglund and Sundberg's (2008) and González and Brown's (2003) arguments that under conditions that promote interpersonal dialogue and exchange, negative biases can be reduced and stereotypes broken down. While this study supports the claim that a personalisation process improves relationships on the individual level, de-categorisation impacts were only experienced by the *active participants* and not by the larger group of event stakeholders. This suggests that the

DCM approach may not be an appropriate framework to reduce overall intergroup bias when using one-off events with larger sport groups.

The Mutual Intergroup Differentiation Model (MIDM) suggests that equal status interaction can reduce intergroup bias if the original group identities remain salient and each group keeps its distinctiveness in the direct contact situation (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Vivian et al., 1997). Respondents mentioned the cultural elements of the ISM as the only example of separate group activity leading to positive intergroup attitudes at the event. They highlighted cultural activities and shows that allowed showcasing of ethnic-specific talent through dancing, performance, and arts. People appreciated the contributions from other groups and believed that the cultural demonstrations contributed to an increase in outgroup appreciation and admiration. This suggests that differentiated group activities can generate positive socio-cultural impacts, and that they should be strategically included as supportive side-elements at inter-community events. However, while differentiated group performances have helped to spread an understanding of 'others' culturally, they are not designed to create inclusive social identities among sportspeople. By definition, cooperation under the MIDM approach avoids direct contact between groups, which is contrary to the purposely inclusive character of inter-community events.

The two models for creating inclusive social identities through intergroup contact are the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) (Gaertner et al., 2000; Gaertner et al., 1989) and the Dual Identity Model (DIM) (Dovidio et al., 1998; González & Brown, 2003; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). The CIIM emphasises that group boundaries can be re-drawn with the final aim of subsuming the in- and outgroup into one inclusive overriding superordinate category. The DIM, on the other hand, argues that a dual identity status can be created so that people hold two group memberships at the same time, generally combining one sub-identity with a superordinate identity. This research found that members across all ethnic communities, event stakeholders and organisers were able to actively create and experience superordinate ingroup feelings at the ISM event. While during these processes some people 'forgot' about ethnic differences or simply "didn't [care] whether people are Sinhalese, Tamil, or Muslim", others still felt connected to their ethnic sub-identity. In both cases, the events contributed to inclusive social identities along national lines; common interests; imagined factors; and organisational lines.

ImagiNation

Respondents argued that by including Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities as 'one team' into the event mix, a common Sri Lankan pride and feelings of *imagiNation* were established. Experiences of 'Sri Lankanness' during the events were advanced through purposeful integration of marginalised groups, and by careful selection of overarching national symbols, such as the Sri Lankan flag, anthems and jerseys. Respondents argued that the team spirit generated in ethnically mixed groups was a 'key experience' that contributed to an inclusive change in group categorisations. People *"completely forgot their differences in nationalities, who they were and where they came from"*, which allowed feelings of a "Sri Lankan family" to emerge. While Wehling (2002: 523) has argued that collective *Schlüsselerlebnisse* [key experiences] impress people and help to shape their political worldview, this study found that such experiences can impact on people's intergroup relations, attitudes and collective identities. While feelings of 'Sri Lankanness' are clearly linked to the specific context of this study, it is the wider notion of creating *ImagiNations* that is important and more widely applicable to other scenarios.

Interest Identity

Participation at the events connected people from different backgrounds through their shared interest identity as 'sportspeople', 'event supporters' or 'peacemakers'. Their love of sport and desire to contribute to reconciliation efforts was valued and shared by all; a communality that allowed people to forget differences and combine and identify with others. While it has been shown that sports can emotionally connect people as supporters or dedicated fans (Fairley & Gammon, 2006; Wann, 2001), this research highlights that sport events can combine people from deeply opposed groups under the common umbrella of a created interest community.

Imagined Identity

During the events people felt as though they were part of 'something larger'. Many of the German speaking respondents said that the multicultural flair of the event contributed to a feeling of attachment, or *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*. A Tamil respondent explained that being with the international athletes made him feel as part of a 'world community'. Here, being part of a world community expands the narrow focus of existing group memberships and instead creates a common social identity at a broader level; this was first described by Anderson in 1983 as an 'imagined community'. In the current research project, it was found

that sport events can contribute to the creation of an imagined community, which makes people connect through a shared behavioural spirit and deep emotional sentiments.

Organisational Identity

Respondents commented specifically on the creation of a shared organisational identity for event participants. At the ISM event people were able to identify under an A.G.S.E.P.-layer, which allowed them to engage with others on a neutral level. Organisational symbols such as flags, logos and slogans provided a neutral link for different people to experience a sense of unity. Similar to Eller and Abrams's (2004) finding that business companies can provide a social identity for their multi-national employees, this research found that an institution can act as a positive change agent by providing a 'point of connection' for sportspeople from different backgrounds. For example, the constructed identity of 'A.G.S.E.P. children' reduced anxiety and social distance, and provided young people with a 'taste of unity'.

Overall, experiences of connection points with 'others' was not limited to one superordinate social identity, but comprised a mix of different inclusive social identities, which helped people to create emotional bonds with members from outgroups. Some respondents indicated that they experienced multiple social identities during the events and bonded with others through the most suitable inclusive identity relevant to them. For example, at different times Niro connected with others through his social identity as a sports player (interest), a Sri Lankan (national), or an event supporter (interest/organisational). Similarly, Axel identified and bonded with others as *"an international, a peace maker and a volunteer – depending on the context!"*. While academics and practitioners tend to see and treat identity as a singular given (Orjuela, 2008), this research has revealed the opportunity to actively create and advance multiple social identities. This reflects a fluid process of identity construction and suggests the that in the right environment multiple aspects of identity formation can lead to togetherness, conflict mediation, forgiveness, and reconciliation (see also Chryssochoou, 2000; McGlynn et al., 2004).

The research findings provide empirical support to Tajfel and Turner's (1979; 1986) SIT. The events allowed people to see and define themselves as members of (newly created) ingroups, and the knowledge of this membership together with the value and emotional significance attached to it resulted in strong social identity feelings. During the event, individuals perceived social reality in terms of social categories or groups to which they belonged – a self-

categorisation process that turned 'Me' into 'Us' and reduced the distance between 'Us' and 'Them' (see Simon, 1999). As this new 'Us'-feeling resulted from common overarching interests, goals and visions, this research confirmed that sport events as superordinate goals are a suitable vehicle to reduce socio-psychological distance between people and groups.

Overall, the inaugural ISM event was considered a great success, as it enabled disparate communities to work together, children to play together, and spectators to cheer together. The analysis of impacts on people's socio-psychological categorisation processes shows that at the ISM event inclusive social identities and a 'taste of togetherness' could be actively created. However, even though people had fun and engaged emotionally with each other – the question remains if a lasting change in intergroup relations and social identities was achieved through the inter-community sport event. For the future, a continuum of community activities and more regular engagement in sport development projects are recommended to maintain relationships and to keep the common spirit growing. At the same time, long-term evaluations are required to assess the sustainability of social change and the salience of newly created social identities. It will be crucial to determine whether projects actually continue, friendships endure and networks continue to flourish. Moreover, the questions of how to leverage newly created social identities beyond event borders, and how to reach people who are currently opposed to interethnic development, need to be addressed.

On a theoretical level there is the need for a new categorisation model that is capable of allowing parallel inclusive social identities to be experienced. Building on the existing contact approaches, the new model must reflect opportunities for actively creating multiple social identities during contact situations, which allow individuals to think, feel, and behave on the basis of the emergent inclusive social identity most pertinent to that context. It should therefore encourage people to connect with others according to one (or more) of the inclusive social identities prevailing. Simultaneously, the model has to allow individuals and groups to retain their sub-identities, which has proven to be important at intergroup encounters between disparate groups (see Dovidio et al., 1998; Gaertner et al., 2000). Further conceptual and empirical research is needed to determine a model or framework that can guide the study on multiple inclusive social identities and categorisations.

Conclusion and Outlook

Inter-community sport events have the capacity to function as active and exciting vehicles for inclusive social change. In this study, the leisure atmosphere at participatory inter-community events was conducive to people making interpersonal and intergroup contact with 'others' on a community level. Positive contact experiences allowed for the establishment of interpersonal friendships and the creation of inclusive social identities along national lines, organisational lines, common interests, and imagined factors. It was found that these social identities can be experienced simultaneously as people were able to bond with 'others' through the most suitable inclusive identity prevailing at a certain time. The ISM event created 'momenta of togetherness' for members from disparate ethnic groups and as such contributed to positive social change and, for the participants, a sense of *imagiNation*.

This paper concludes that inter-community sport events can provide a starting point, booster and catalyst for social development and inclusive social change, and as such should be encouraged and expanded as part of an active and dynamic social development process. However, it is too much to expect sport events to have a major impact on overall community relations in the absence of a political settlement in divided societies. Taken alone, they stand little prospect of achieving lasting social outcomes beyond the events' borders. Therefore, they should be integrated into a larger agenda of social and political support to make a modest contribution to reconciliation and positive social change between disparate communities.

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