



Utrecht University



Decolonizing the Playing Field with Seed Grants: How Champions are Breaking Gender Barriers for Girls and Women in Europe

MASTER THESIS

Youth, Education & Society: Pedagogy and International Development

Utrecht University

by

Catherine Schulter

4362381

June 2022

Supervised by

Semiha Sözeri, Utrecht University & Kitty Macklin, Women Win

Internship Supervisor: Marije Holman, Women Win

Second Assessor: Bodine Romijn, Utrecht University

SUMMARY

This thesis investigates how a bottom-up feminist approach to sports programming can offer a solution to the postcolonial critiques of the sport-for-good sector. So-called seed grant programs fund young women to design and implement grassroots, community-based sports projects. After exploring the presence – and absence – of seed grant programs in research and practice, postcolonial and intersectional feminist theory as well as the philosophy of servant leadership build the theoretical framework of this research. This paper presents findings from a small-scale, qualitative study of two European seed grant programs: ROLL Models and the adidas Breaking Barriers project. To mitigate the traditional power imbalance between researcher and subject and to follow a decolonized approach, this thesis puts the experiences of the champions, i.e. the young women who receive the seed grant, at the center of analysis and investigates the following question: *Based on champions' shared experiences, how are seed grant programs contributing to more gender equitable and inclusive spaces in sports and beyond?* Through thematic analysis, the following themes resulted as the main contributing aspects: (1) a network of learners and leaders, (2) the feeling of empowerment and confidence, (3) the incentive to act as gender champions, shedding light and challenging outdated norms as well as (4) the principles of servant leadership. The paper concludes by positioning seed grant programs in the broader discussion on decolonizing the playing field and offers recommendations for both research and practice.

Keywords: sport-for-good, gender barriers, leadership, postcolonialism

SAMENVATTING

Deze scriptie onderzoekt op welke wijze een feministische, bottom-up benadering aangaande sport programma's een oplossing kan bieden voor de postkoloniale kritiek op de sport-for-good sector. Subsidie programma's bieden jonge vrouwen financiering om grassroots, community-based sportprojecten te ontwikkelen en te implementeren. Het theoretisch kader van deze studie omvat zowel de postkoloniale en intersectionele feministische theorie als ook de filosofie van dienend leiderschap. Dit artikel beschrijft de resultaten van een kleinschalig, kwalitatief onderzoek naar twee Europese subsidie programma's: ROLL Models en het adidas Breaking Barriers project. Daarbij wordt een gedekoloniseerde onderzoeksbenadering gehanteerd waarbij de ervaringen van de jonge vrouwen die de subsidie ontvangen, de zogenoemde kampioenen, centraal staat. Op deze wijze wordt de volgende onderzoeksvraag beantwoord: *hoe dragen subsidie programma's bij aan meer gendergelijkheid en een inclusievere omgeving binnen sport en daarbuiten?* De thematische analyse toont aan dat de volgende thema's de belangrijkste bijdragende aspecten zijn: (1) een netwerk van lerenden en leiders, (2) het gevoel van empowerment en zelfvertrouwen, (3) de stimulans om als genderactivisten op te treden en verouderde normen te bekijken en betwisten, en (4) de principes van dienend leiderschap. Tenslotte positioneert dit artikel subsidie programma's in het bredere debat betreffende het dekoloniseren van de sportsector en biedt het aanbevelingen voor zowel onderzoek als in de praktijk.

Sleutelwoorden: sport-for-good, genderbarrière, subsidie programma's, leiderschap

ABBREVIATIONS

BB	adidas Breaking Barriers project
EU	European Union
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
LSA	Leadership Self-Assessment
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
RM	ROLL Models
SGP	Seed grant programs
TA	Thematic analysis
WW	Women Win

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	5
Defining key concepts.....	6
Social partner in this research.....	6
Seed grant programs: Research and practice.....	6
The case studies.....	7
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
Postcolonial and intersectional feminist theory.....	8
Servant leadership.....	9
METHOD.....	9
Interviews.....	10
Leadership self-assessments.....	10
Data analysis.....	11
Positionality.....	12
RESULTS.....	12
A network of learners and leaders: “We are all women, and we support each other”	13
Empowerment as driver: “I feel inspired, confident, and empowered”	14
A rebellion of gender champions: “I can see the change in them ... because I am there.”	15
Turning the leadership pyramid upside down: “It is about everybody, not about me.”	16
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	17
Context matters.....	17
Reflecting on power and servant leadership.....	18
Reflecting on gender barriers.....	19
Limitations.....	19
Final thoughts and recommendations.....	20
REFERENCES.....	21
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	25
APPENDIX	
Appendix A: Interview guide.....	26
Appendix B: Overview of codes.....	28

DECOLONIZING THE PLAYING FIELD WITH SEED GRANTS:

How Champions are Breaking Gender Barriers for Girls and Women in Europe

Sport can be a powerful tool to dismantle gender barriers and develop girls and young women's economic, emotional, and physical independence (Chawansky & Hayhurst, 2015; EIGE, 2015; UNESCO, n.d.). With millions of sport fans worldwide, the sport industry has considerable social power and hence, the responsibility – and privilege – to lead by example and change the narrative of women in sports and leadership positions. The reality of sport participation and governance, however, has been (and continues to be) triumphed by men's domination, systemically excluding, and discriminating anyone who diverges from the norm of a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual man. Girls and women have faced and continue to face an array of structural, cultural, and capacity-based barriers hindering their access to participation and leadership positions in sports (cf. Schweickart & Moragues Costa, 2022; SUE, 2020). Barriers include lack of role models and sexism in its broadest sense, such as gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination and harassment (Kerner, 2017).

Inclusion and diversity are much more than facts and figures; most importantly, it is about reshaping the men-dominated structures and power hierarchies (see Ely & Thomas, 2020) and creating safe spaces for everyone. Yet, increasing women's participation and leadership roles in sports by, for example, recruiting more woman coaches is a good start and promotes positive spill-over effects into other areas of life. Women's sports “never [have] been and never will be just about sports... As anyone who's played or watched knows – it is about a whole lot more” (Mertens, 2022, para. 38). For example, men who respect women as athletes and leaders are more likely to respect women in other areas of their lives (LaVoi, 2016). On a more systemic level, women in leadership positions become role models for others and can provide advice and advocate for others to climb the ranks (LaVoi, 2016).

The aim of this research is to understand how a specific kind of sports programming, so-called seed grant programs (SGP), contribute to young women's leadership competencies and with that, support them in their missions as champions to challenge gendered norms and break down inequitable barriers in sport. The findings of this research may be used for critical reflection to reimagine programming in the field of sport, gender and development and more broadly, the sport-for-good or sport-for-development sector. Moreover, this research aims to bring more awareness to feminist sports programming interventions in research (and practice) and demonstrate how non-traditional programming and leadership have the potential to lay the path to gender equality. The research question at the heart of this thesis is: *Based on champions' shared experiences, how are seed grant programs contributing to more gender equitable and inclusive spaces in sports and beyond?*

Defining key concepts

In this study, the phrase ‘women and girls’ includes everyone and anyone who *identifies* as such. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people and other underrepresented communities face similar, yet very distinct challenges (Úbeda-Colomer et al., 2020), equally important, however, they go beyond the scope of this research. It is also crucial to distinguish between some core concepts: *Gender equality* determines same access to rights, responsibilities, and opportunities regardless of (gender) identity (UNICEF, 2017). *Gender equity* acknowledges individual differences and seeks to address imbalance to level the playing field (UNICEF, 2017). A society which has corrected inequities and has created safe spaces for everyone is *socially just*. Working on gender equity is thus the journey towards ultimately achieving equality and social justice (George Washington University, 2020). The focus of this research lies on the concept of gender equity.

Social partner in this research

This research is conducted in partnership with Women Win (WW), a global multi-dimensional women’s fund based in the Netherlands. As part of its daughter brand GRLS, WW partners with relevant stakeholders, providing them with the necessary resources, to advance girls and women’s rights through sports (Women Win, n.d.). Since 2019, the organization has designed and contributed to the implementation of several SGP with a diverse range of partners and funders, pioneering a novel approach to programming at the intersection of sport, gender, and development.

Seed grant programs: Research & practice

WW’s SGP fund grassroots, community-based projects which are designed and implemented by young women. A financial contribution is usually accompanied with mentorship and capacity training (Feminist Sports Champion Toolkit, n.d.). This research conceptualizes SGP as approach to *decolonize the playing field*. It is about developing programs *with* rather than *for* girls, and hence SGP provide a practical solution to the postcolonial critiques of the sports-for-development sector (cf. Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; 2013). Decolonizing in this context is understood as a process of disrupting, reimagining, and reshaping ways of playing and organizing sports, particularly in terms of power and leadership structures. SGP have been implemented on the assumption that the bottom-up, community and girl-led methodology follows a feminist and decolonial vision and has significant potential for girls and women’s leadership development. However, WW has collected monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) data of individual SGP only; the learnings have generally not been applied across programs and similarities and differences remain unexplored. In practice, the sport-for-good sector has seen a surge of programs funding local organizations to design and implement their own programs. However, few embed a gender-sensitive perspective and none of them fund

individual girls and women – they fund organizations. There appears to be a trend towards localizing and decentralizing sports-for-development programs – even if, currently without much attention to gender. Edwards (2015) discusses the importance of “local leadership”, shifting the focus from external organizations ‘copy-pasting’ their programs in various contexts to supporting local experts to design and implement programs themselves. The potential and impact of programs funding individual girls and women, such as WW’s SGP, however, remain fundamentally unexplored in academia.

Existing research at the intersection of sport, gender and development has explored how specific sport programs bring awareness to gender-based violence (Macklin, 2018) or empower girls and young women economically (Yalcin, 2018). However, limited studies address programs’ potential to challenge and eliminate gender barriers in the pursuit of creating more equitable and inclusive spaces (Zipp & Nauright, 2018). The current literature on the sport-for-development sector faces a gap in understanding the experiences of those at the “receiving end” (Hayhurst, 2009, p. 223). Only a handful of studies have directly examined the views of participants and their communities to understand the realities of programmatic impacts (Lindsey & Gratton, 2012; Spaaij, 2011). In terms of leadership, studies have looked at the potential of programs in the broader sport-for-good sector to influence leadership only on an organizational level (Svensson et al., 2019). However, what has largely been overlooked is the potential of program participants to take on leadership roles themselves. There is a lack of research investigating the possibilities of encouraging leadership among participants and through that localizing sport-for-development programs – a gap that WW’s SGP attempt to fill in practice.

The case studies

This research investigates the experiences of champions, i.e. the young women who have received a seed grant, from two European programs. First, *ROLL Models* (RM) supports female leadership in skateboarding by giving young women across Europe the opportunity to develop their skateboarding projects. The goal is to build girls’ confidence and life skills on and off their boards (Good Push, 2020). Since 2020, 56 young women have participated in the program. Second, the *adidas Breaking Barriers project* (BB) offers an in-depth curriculum on gender equity and inclusion in sports on three levels: in the organizations, on the sidelines, and on the pitch (Breaking Barriers, 2022). Since 2019, 70 champions from twelve non-profit grassroots sports organizations have been recruited and provided with the opportunity to design and implement their own projects.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on postcolonial and intersectional feminist theory (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2013; Kerner, 2017). Kerner (2017) has argued for why these two theories are best

understood as complementary. Building on that understanding, we can discuss how feminist leadership styles, and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) specifically, are fostered through SGP and how such programs can contribute to more gender equitable and inclusive spaces.

Postcolonial and intersectional feminist theory

“Feminist theory has addressed relations of difference, heterogeneity, and hierarchy within gender groups as well as the entanglement of various forms of differentiation, power, and inequality for a long time” (Kerner, 2017, p. 846). There is a wide array of different (analytical and political) approaches to feminist theory, two of which are relevant to the understanding of this research: intersectionality and postcolonialism. Intersectionality, first introduced by Crenshaw (1989), originates from the feminism of women of color “which could never restrict its critical analysis to a single axis of differentiation, or to a single aspect of inequality” (Kerner, 2017, p. 848). Thus, in general, intersectionality scholarship focuses on the concept of *inequality* and is methodologically tied to the local and present. The postcolonial path on the other hand centers on the concept of *power*, and employs a transnational and historical perspective (Kerner, 2017). Intersectional feminist theory is “more interested in demonstrating the interplay of socially and politically relevant differences in the present than in theorizing ways of overcoming the social and political relevance of current differentiations in the future” (Kerner, 2017, p. 859), which is precisely where postcolonial feminist theory can support to achieve a more holistic understanding. Postcolonial feminism challenges practices and ideologies which sustain structural inequalities (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011), critically reflects on who is benefiting from development programs (e.g. Rankin, 2010; as cited in Darnell & Hayhurst, 2013, p. 35) and advocates to redistribute power to those who are experts in their work and their specific contexts.

A postcolonial and intersectional feminist lens can therefore help us dissect the bottom-up, community-based approach of SGP and help understand its value beyond the local. Combining the two feminist strands – one focused on the intersection of multiple levels of differentiation and inequality, the other dedicated to highlighting and reflecting on historic imbalances of power – provides a suitable framework to discuss gender inequity in sports and beyond. SGP aim to give power to those who are experts in their fields by funding young women and their project ideas directly. Funding grassroots, community-based projects aims to decentralize power and the focus on girls and women seeks to make space for more gender equity. As a result, more girls and women are empowered to participate in, design and lead sports programs, and hence, women’s representation in sports is increased. Through the incorporated capacity training of many SGP, the concept of leadership is being reimagined and reshaped. *Reimagined* in the way that ‘good’ leadership is being questioned, more feminist leadership styles introduced, and traditional/vertical approaches to leadership challenged; the leadership landscape is being *reshaped* and diversified in a way that girls and women are given the opportunity to fill leadership positions.

Servant leadership

Leadership theories have evolved from trait and behavioural approaches (Ford et al., 2008) to understanding leadership as a socially constructed identity (De Rue & Ashford, 2010). As such, there is a diverse range of leadership definitions with the only agreement in the understanding that leadership is important (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). “When leadership is ineffective, absent, or toxic the result is that people, organizations, communities, and even entire societies are impacted, sometimes in the most devastating ways” (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018, p. 262). Effective leadership, on the other hand, is a key enabler for social change (Alain, 2012; Astin, 1996). Feminist leadership styles are participatory, relational, open, reflective, critical and can challenge traditional conceptions of authority and decision-making (Batliwala, 2014). Feminist leadership is not only about creating horizontal and democratic power and decision-making structures but also about being transparent, fostering accountability, and celebrating diversity (Batliwala, 2014).

Servant leadership is one approach to feminist leadership, built on the idea of ‘turning the pyramid upside down’ (Greenleaf, 1970). A servant leader adopts an approach that is horizontal, people-centered, collaborative, consensus-building and focused on positive psychology. The servant leader shares power, and involves people in the decision-making – she exists to serve the people, and not the other way around (Greenleaf, 1970). Vision, honesty, integrity, trust, pioneering, appreciation of others, empowerment and building community constitute some of the key characteristics of a servant leader (Hannay, 2009). As such, servant leadership resembles other styles of moral leadership such as transformational, authentic, or virtuous leadership (Reid et al., 2018). Its distinctiveness, however, lies in the service aspect, putting the focus on building community, helping others, and developing others’ potential (Akella & Eid, 2020). By turning the pyramid upside down, servant leadership helps achieve two feminist objectives: from an intersectional standpoint, it addresses accounts of inequality and creates space for marginalized groups and from a postcolonial perspective, it challenges notions of power structures and leadership styles. Servant leadership can be considered a core tool on the quest of creating more gender equitable and inclusive spaces through SGP. To what extent principles of servant leadership matter in the context of champions’ experiences and how these relate to the wider discussion of decolonizing the sports-for-good sector will be explored in this study.

METHOD

This research is based on qualitative data. Considering the limited amount of research available on bottom-up, community-based programming in the field of sport, gender and development, a qualitative approach is useful as it allows to build the data analysis inductively from particular to general themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study applied a phenomenological approach, particularly suited for research that seeks to understand the “lived experiences of persons about a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 241). The unit of analysis for this research are the experiences of the BB and RM champions. Case studies are useful for exploring ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions and are valuable for research settings where behaviors cannot be manipulated, the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred, but also where context does

play a relevant role (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this research, exploratory multiple case study design was chosen as it allows for the exploration of differences *within* and *between* cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). “The goal is to replicate findings across cases” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 548).

Interviews

The core of this research’s analysis is based on primary data, collected through semi-structured online interviews throughout April 2022. Each interview was conducted in English, lasted approximately thirty minutes, was audio-recorded and transcribed. Before the interview, the participants received an information letter, outlining the objectives of the research and signed an attached consent form. At the start of the conversation, the participants also gave verbal consent for audio-recording. In total, nine champions were interviewed, five of which followed BB and four RM. The champions’ nationalities across the sample were divided as follows: German (2), Italian (2), Croatian (2), Greek (1), British (1), Dutch (1). To ensure anonymity of the research participants, the sample will not be described in more detail (Boeije, 2009).

Before starting data collection, an interview guide with seventeen questions was prepared (see Appendix A). The guide was divided in the following sections: warm up, impact and learning, project design and post-program effects. Example questions from the interview guide include: *How would you describe a leader? Would you consider yourself a leader? How has this changed throughout the program?* The sequence of questions was flexible and adapted to the information the participants provided, allowing for a more natural conversation. The semi-structured, open-ended nature of the questions gave the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and allowed to gather relevant information that was not originally considered when preparing the interviews (cf. Boeije, 2009; Merriam, 2016).

To strengthen validity of the data collection, each section of the interview guide included short explanatory prompts to provide the participants with the same information. To ensure the interviews were targeting the right questions and topics, multiple MEL experts from WW provided feedback before starting data collection. The questions were formulated clearly and as concisely as possible and the participants were given enough time to answer without disruptions. Moreover, the audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews ensure reliability of the analysis. The interview sample is representative for the European context, including participants from different socio-economic and cultural regions and participants from two different programs.

Leadership self-assessments

Triangulating the interview data with the LSA that WW had previously collected, strengthened this research’s construct validity. For both BB and RM, LSA were handed out to the champions to assess the champion’s leadership competencies. BB collected base-, mid- and endline data, whereas RM only collected

data at the start (baseline) and end of the program (endline). The data is primarily quantitative and supported by some qualitative answers. The LSA were designed by WW's impact team in collaboration with their respective project partners. While an external MEL assessment would increase the validity and reliability of the data, there are no direct vested financial incentives that could compromise the relevance of the data.

Limited by the extent of this research and with the focus on the champion's lived experiences and own interpretations of the programs, this research included only the qualitative answers of the LSA. For BB, four questions from the datasets of *cohort one* (midline: 20 responses, endline: 9 responses) and *cohort two* (midline: 15 responses; endline will be collected at the end of 2022) were relevant to be included in the analysis. For RM, two questions were deemed suitable. The data therefore was taken from the endline assessment of both 2020 (11 responses) and 2021 (9 responses) cohorts. The prompts were different across the two programs; however, both were asking for reflections on and learnings from the program. The survey data is anonymized and hence, it is not possible to know which LSA responses match the interview cases. It is very likely that some of LSA responses come from champions who also participated in the interviews.

Data analysis

Both interview and LSA data were analyzed in the qualitative data analysis software *Dovetail*, using thematic analysis (TA). TA is “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). The three general aims of TA are to examine commonalities, differences, and relationships (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 128). TA thus, helps understand aspects of SGP that champions frequently talk about or talk about in-depth. TA allows to connect the themes to gain a more holistic understanding of leadership development and the overall value of SGP as well as it provides insights in the similarities and differences across BB and RM.

For the most part, inductive analysis was used, i.e. coding the data without predefined concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive analysis allows for exploration of new themes and findings and is thus, data-driven analysis. ‘Servant leadership’ was the only deductively defined code, as defined in the theoretical framework. After a first reading and initial coding, the data was re-read and codes re-defined. Examples of emerging codes included: ‘connecting with likeminded people’, ‘leadership skills’, ‘inspiration’, ‘new opportunities’ and ‘challenging others’ perceptions’ (for an overview of codes see Appendix B). In inductive analysis, themes are built bottom up by progressively structuring the data into more abstract units of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 257). Examples of the super-themes that emerged, include, ‘empowerment’, ‘community’ and ‘definitions.’

Positionality

Reflexivity is a key element of all qualitative research, but particularly important within feminist research practices. “Inquirers reflect about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to data” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 258). There are two main aspects of my positionality that may affect the research findings: First, my background from a wealthy western European country may subconsciously affect my understanding of and responses to experiences from other European contexts. Second, due to my position as intern/employee of WW, who is also actively working on one of the case studies as part of the internship, my credibility as researcher may be compromised. By making this reflexive process explicit and clear, I, however, hope to improve the transparency and data reliability of this research (Jootun et al., 2009).

RESULTS

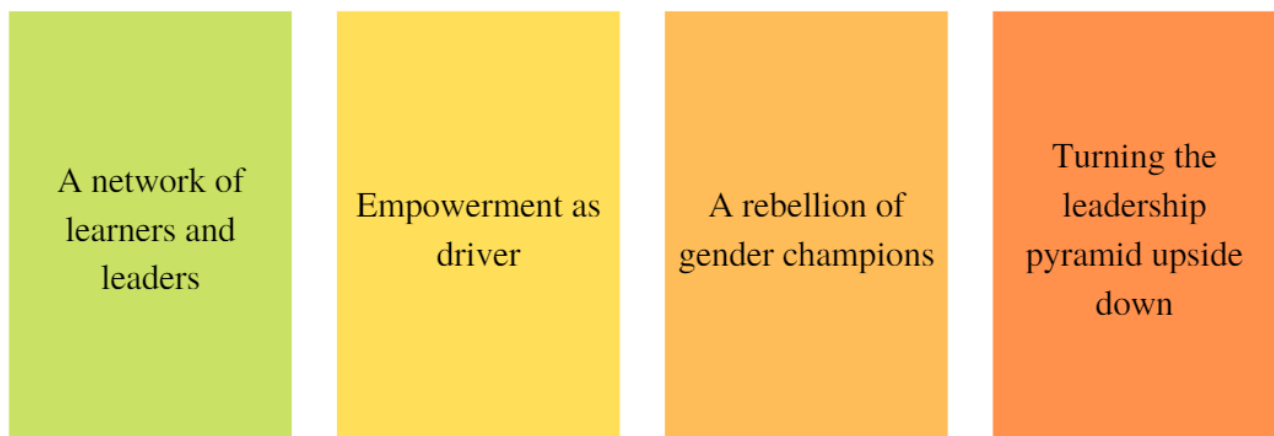


Figure 1. 4 Pillars of SGP

This section presents answers to the research question: *Based on champions' shared experiences, how are seed grant programs contributing to more gender equitable and inclusive spaces in sports and beyond?* The answer to the research question is structured into four pillars: (1) a network of learners and leaders, (2) empowerment as driver, (3) a rebellion of gender champions, and (4) turning the pyramid upside down (see *Figure 1*). The arguments are based on and substantiated by (anonymized) quotes of the champions. While the references #1-9 relate to specific interviews, the references #A-F refer to the chosen LSA questions. The alphabetic references thus, do not reflect the thoughts and experiences of one individual but include all responses to a specific question.

A network of learners and leaders: “We are all women, and we support each other”

The value of a community and the sense of belonging were mentioned throughout all interviews and appeared repeatedly in the LSA. Thus, three codes were defined: *connecting with likeminded people*, *mentoring*, and *role models*.

Connecting with likeminded people. Champions across both programs repeatedly discussed the value of connecting with other likeminded people with similar interests and worries. “*We heard our thoughts from other people’s mouths*” (RM#7). Many expressed a sense of belonging as they could identify with one another. “*I could meet people like me*” (RM#9). Even though the champions were in different countries across Europe, the programs managed to bring together a group of people who share a passion for sport and girls’ empowerment, who are motivated to organize a project in their local communities. The value of community is also highlighted beyond the timespan of the program: a support network and a community of learners was created in which champions felt confident and encouraged to ask questions and learn from one another. Throughout all interviews, the people who the champions met and worked with as part of the programs stood at the core of their experiences.

Mentoring. Beyond connecting with one another through the webinars or workshops, champions received some form of mentorship. BB champions were mentored by adidas staff members and ROLL Models received support from the project coordinators. Champions expressed that they felt supported and guided by their mentors and that they felt reassured in knowing that there was someone they could ask for help if needed. One champion mentioned that “*the continuous support throughout the project*” (RM#E) was the aspect she liked the most. Others state that “*our mentors...helped us put together everything on the project*” (BB#5). One emphasized that the mentors particularly helped them with “*bureaucracy [and] ... technical things*” (BB#5). There were, however, also some champions who felt more neutral about their mentors. One champion reflected that by the time they were assigned a mentor, they had already completed their project plan and hence, felt they did not need mentoring anymore (BB#1). Overall, champions liked the idea of having a mentor to support them in the tasks most relevant to them, whether related to organization or motivation.

Role models. Beyond their dedicated mentors, champions repeatedly spoke about various people who were role models to them offering them a good example, inspiration and guidance. Many champions reflected about how “*powerful role modelling can be and how rewarding [it is] to see the impact first hand*” (RM#F). Some considered another champion as role model, whereas for others it was an expert in the webinar or a professional athlete who inspired them. “*Seeing other leaders and role models during the webinars... positively impacted my understanding of leadership and also helped me in a very practical sense in becoming a better coach*” (BB#3). Champions also reflected on their own positions as role models for the girls participating in the projects and the importance of taking action in their local communities. “*If I do not do it, no one else will; because I am a woman and there are a lot of girls looking for some role models to follow or just visualize themselves*” (RM#D). Girls will be “*more willing to do things because they feel they will be supported*” (BB#C). Another champion noticed that girls “*do not mind if their coach is female or male, they*

only need someone to guide them” (BB#2). Hence, while woman role models are important for representation, the power and influence of a good role model is not related to anyone’s gender and men as allies are equally important as women’s representation.

Empowerment as driver: “*I feel inspired, confident, and empowered*”

The second pillar that was identified to answer the research question regards the feeling of empowerment. The Oxford Dictionary defines empowerment as “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights” (Arnaz-Pemberton, 2018). The following codes were created under this pillar: *knowledge and skills, new opportunities, inspiration, and increased self-confidence*.

Knowledge and skills. Two forms of knowledge and skills were predominant throughout the data: *project design skills* and *language skills (gender-inclusive language and English language competencies)*. **Project design skills.** Champions perceived that learning how to create elaborate action plans with achievable outcomes made them feel confident and capable of implementing their own programs and being gender champions in their communities. These notions are reflected in multiple statements (BB#D; RM#E). “*The program gave us the confidence and skills to budget and plan activities... to deliver sessions professionally*” (RM#E). Examples therefore include “*parents’ permission and media permission forms, a skill tracking activity booklet or sign-up sheets*” (RM#E). The practical, workshop-based nature of the webinars was perceived as extremely helpful. **Language skills.** Another recurring topic was the value of new language skills. On the one hand, champions spoke about how their English competencies improved and how important they considered the international aspect of the program (BB#5). “*The program also revealed my language deficiencies, which I need to quickly make up for in order to be able to continue to operate freely*” (BB#B). Champions liked that the program was implemented in English as this allowed them to improve their “*communication skills especially with people from other countries*” (RM#7). On the other hand, there was a conversation on how champions have become more aware of gender-inclusive language since the program provided them with “*some more vocabulary to present [their] thoughts and ideas*” (BB#A). This notion was more pronounced in BB as it was part of the program objective. “*One of the things that has stuck to my head, is how I speak with others, changing the way of saying the verbs and pronouns and everything like female/male, she/her... A lot of times, in my country it is normal to say everything in the male way*” (BB#4).

New opportunities. Champions spoke about how the newly acquired skills and knowledge from the program helped them become better professionals, guided them towards new career paths, or supported them in finding new opportunities to grow and implement their projects in other contexts. “*For us, [the program] was a starting project that is going to help us launch a much bigger project within our community and this will help so many other young people*” (RM#F). Several champions spoke about how the program has had positive impacts on their carriers. “*I do not know if it is just a coincidence but after [the program], I started working on my own, I stopped being an employee for someone*” (RM#7). One champion expressed that the

program not only opened a new professional role for her but also allowed her to feel more comfortable and confident as women in the skatepark (RM#8).

Inspiration. Champions spoke repeatedly about being inspired by the other champions, the girls who participated in their projects and the overall programs and their missions. *“The most enjoyable and inspiring aspect was simply hearing various people’s stories, projects and ideas”* (RM#E). Champions inspired each other to improve their own projects and implement other ways of working and coaching (BB#5). Many were amazed by the knowledge and motivation of the girls who participated in their programs. *“I realized that we had set out to get more girls active and on boards and for some of them this was much more than just learning to skate”* (RM#E). Several champions also stated that it felt rewarding to see girls return for the following session or bring along their friends because it showed the immediate impact the program had on the girls (BB#2).

Increased self-confidence. Moreover, throughout the programs champions felt acknowledged in their abilities and ideas. The webinars empowered them with more knowledge and skills but the fact that the champions had much creative freedom and decision-making power in how to design and implement their own projects, increased their confidence. *“I think the program has pushed me to come out of my comfort zone... and gave me the confidence to build something because you believed in the project”* (RM#F). Sometimes someone else’s trust in one’s abilities is needed to recognize one’s own potential. *“It felt like ROLL Models had a lot of trust in our knowledge and abilities. I liked that kind of support they have enabled”* (RM#E).

A rebellion of gender champions: “I can see the change in them ... because I am there.”

The third aspect of how SGP contribute to more gender equity and inclusion in sports is ‘the rebellion of gender champions.’ Champions spoke about how the programs helped them *increase visibility* on gender issues within their communities, *challenge others’ perceptions* on women in sport and leadership positions and *mobilize others* also to take action to contest outdated stereotypes.

Increasing visibility. Champions have noticed that through participating in the programs they are not alone with their struggles and that through the program gender issues became more apparent on many different levels. *“I have seen senior staff members, especially the male ones, to be more curious, to ask our opinions and more inclusive with us in the past few months [since starting the program]”* (BB#B). Another champion spoke about her family members, *“I see that they want to be part of the change, but they maybe do not know how to... and with this project I can [better] explain [things to them]”* (BB#5). Another champion reflected that these kinds of programs are important because *“people learn the importance, the needs, the challenges, the hard times that women have”* (BB#4). The champions perceived that designing and leading programs with girls in their communities already contributed to more visibility of women’s roles within the specific sport environment and depending on the content of the program may have revealed other barriers and inequities.

Challenging perceptions. After putting the spotlight on gender issues, many champions expressed that the program encouraged them to challenge outdated and inaccurate perceptions of women in sports. *“It is*

important for them to see that you do not have to fit into any box... you can be sporty and nerdy or whatever (RM#6). Some expressed that it was scary at first to challenge others' perceptions and be bold in organizing their own projects because they were unsure of how people in their communities could react. The champions' drive and commitment to be gender champion as well as the support of the community, their role models and mentors allowed them to commit to their projects and challenge the status quo regardless – this notion was particularly pronounced in less gender-equal societies. *“But I feel confident to implement gender equality measures... because I believe in this cause”* (BB#A).

Mobilizing for action. After increasing visibility and challenging norms, action needs to be taken to make a change. However, mobilizing others for action can be challenging. *“I feel inspired to take action in girls' sports, but I still think it is difficult to apply theory with the real world”* (BB#D). One champion elaborated on how the program has motivated her to focus on girls and women in all her work (BB#1). Another champion spoke about her experience as the only woman in the football club and how she noticed that everybody who is working with her has changed their perspectives on women in sport. She elaborated how the president of the men's team asked her for advice to create a women's team in the club, for example. *“I can see the change in them and the way they think ... because I am there”* (BB#4). Mobilizing for action is very context dependent but this is a great example of how one champion influenced others, especially men, in her environment.

Turning the leadership pyramid upside down: “It is about everybody, not about me.”

The fourth and last pillar which forms the answer to the research question is servant leadership. Based on the champions' way of talking about their experiences, it becomes apparent that SGP apply a servant leadership approach. Two codes comprise this pillar: first a general *servant leadership* code, reflecting sections with one or more characteristics of servant leadership such as building community, listening or safekeeping (cf. Spears, 2004). The second is *leadership definition* which highlighted text where champions spoke about their own conceptualizations of leadership – some but not all related to servant leadership.

The champions' different conceptualizations of good leadership all resonated with feminist interpretations. Champions mentioned that a leader needs to be determined and have empathy towards others (RM#9), be a good listener (BB#4) and provide support and guidance (RM#8). Some also highlighted that leaders need to be flexible (RM#6; BB#5) and *“should not dictate but help each girl find their own goals and reach them”* (RM#9). The focus on serving others and building community shined through many parts of the data. *“We could observe how the participants kept on coming and how the community... has grown exponentially since we started receiving the support of the ROLL Models”* (RM#F). The program *“has given an opportunity to invest more in the community”* (RM#F). Some projects also included picnics or pizza nights in their activities to foster community-building (RM#7; BB#8).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this research was to better understand how SGP can contribute to more gender equitable and inclusive spaces in sports and beyond. Each of WW's SGP is unique in their objectives, application and selection process, program duration, intensity of support or mentorship, grant size and target group. As such, they are not directly comparable. However, the underlying logic of SGP, i.e. giving power to girls and women in their local contexts and equipping them with valuable skills and knowledge is arguably the same across programs. This research found that SGP bring together likeminded people with similar interests and challenges and form a community of learners. People identify with one another and experience a sense of belonging and support through role models and mentorship. Moreover, SGP empower champions through transfer of knowledge and skills which is correlated with increased self-confidence. The champions repeatedly spoke about how their participation in the program has led to new opportunities professionally and personally. These findings – sense of community and empowerment – resonate with previous research on sport, gender and development programs (e.g. Jeanes & Magee, 2013).

This research found that SGP also foster a rebellion of gender champions who take the lead in making gender issues more visible, challenging outdated norms and perceptions and mobilizing others to break down barriers. Previous research found that challenging gender stereotypes were merely aspirations but did not translate into reality – for example, in Jeanes and Magee's (2013) study, young women did not believe that their participation in sports programs alone can influence gender norms. Lastly, this research found that SGP, directly and indirectly, encourage servant leadership styles by placing those traditionally at the bottom of the pyramid on top. When asked to define what leadership meant to the champions, the answers included mainly feminist interpretations, i.e. relational, transparent, empathetic, and focused on creating safe spaces and community. Previous research in the field of sport, gender and development has not considered interventions' potential for leadership development of girls and young women. Efforts are needed to extend the trend of localizing sports-for-development– and international aid in general – not only on the organizational and community level (e.g. Edwards, 2015) but also on the individual participant level.

Context matters

While much of the postcolonial critique of the sport-for-development field (cf. Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; 2013) applies to programs implemented in historically colonized or majority world contexts, it is also applicable and relevant in the minority world. There are considerable socio-economic and cultural differences between different regions in Europe. Yet, many sport-for-good programs are implemented without context-specific adaptations. Instead, they apply traditional top-down approaches, working *for* rather than *with* girls (see e.g. Jeanes & Magee, 2013). SGP attempt to give power back to the local by putting those benefitting from the programs in the driver's seat and therefore, seeking to overcome postcolonial critiques. In the conversations with champions from less gender-equal countries, it became obvious, however, that SGP need to draw attention to country-specific challenges. Greece, for example, is at the bottom of the European Union

(EU) gender equality index, way below the EU average. Champions operating in Greece experience distinct challenges which do not resonate with those in more gender-equal countries such as Sweden or the Netherlands, and vice versa (Statista, 2020). The ranking of the index follows a geopolitical division, with wealthier, northern countries on top, and south-eastern countries at the bottom. Several champions from southern European contexts reflected that feminist thinking and sports infrastructure were scarce or absent in their communities, making it difficult to recruit girls, build community and implement their programs (RM#7/9). The support from their local community seemed therefore, particularly important.

Thus, the extent to which SGP can have an impact on creating gender equitable and inclusive spaces depends on the country-specific context. Champions from less gender-equal cultures may require different kind of support and input to be adequately equipped to address the gender barriers they are faced with. These findings resonate with the defined theoretical framework of postcolonial and intersectional feminist theory (Kerner, 2017). Through the lens of postcolonial feminist theory, SGP attempt to overcome power hierarchies by giving local women and girls the power to implement their own projects. However, when also taking intersectionality into account, it becomes clear that SGP which target women across different countries need to pay more attention to country-specific barriers when designing and implementing programs. For example, an open conversation around gender-related differences across the participating countries could bring awareness to how cultural, religious, or socio-economic differences impact the champions' work and leadership roles. Highlighting differences could champion from less gender-equal contexts feel more valued and included, which ultimately is at the core of driving long-term change. Reflecting on the kind of support champions require in different countries may also be valuable to consider for program design and implementation.

Reflecting on power and servant leadership

Gender-based sports interventions, especially when implemented in less gender-equal contexts can also have negative side effects (Donnelly et al., 2011). First, those whose power and authority positions are (perceived to be) in jeopardy when turning the pyramid upside down are more likely to resist women's empowerment through sport initiatives (Meier & Saavedra, 2009), which can lead to increased discrimination and disempowerment of women (Jeanes & Magee, 2013). Second, if programs are implemented without consulting local communities, no matter how well intended they may be, it is likely they contribute to colonizing and patriarchal knowledge and practices, following the dominant narrative of neoliberal globalization (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2013). However, when adopting a postcolonial feminist mindset, the work at the intersection of sport, gender and development can challenge "deep-rooted social relations and therefore [requires] transference of power" (Jeanes & Magee, 2013, p. 140). As such, SGP – with adequate local adaptation and cultural considerations – provide a practical approach to fill this gap.

To address traditional gender relations and instigate a power shift, SGP adopt a servant leadership philosophy. From a purely programmatic point of view, SGP take a servant leader approach by putting girls and young women in the driver's seat. Like postcolonial critiques, servant leaders recognize that local knowledge has been and continues to be lost due to increasingly institutionalized, global, one-size fits all practices. As response, Greenleaf (1970) states that "enough servant leaders [need] to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant leader demonstrating his or her unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group" (p. 53). This is precisely the gap SGP aim to fill: encouraging many young women to take agency and dedicate to their local communities' needs. Moreover, a critical reflection that arises is whether SGP nurture or attract servant leaders. In other words, to what extent are the champions already servant leaders before participating in the program (pull factor), and to what extent is their experience and learnings from the programs contributing to developing their servant leadership skills (push factor)? Depending on the design of the SGP, servant leadership can be encouraged to different extents. For example, for RM, the champions had to take initiative and apply with a concrete project idea whereas the recruitment approach in BB was different. BB project partners reached out to organizations which then identified suitable champions for the SGP. More in-depth and long-term research is required to understand causation and correlation of SGP and servant leadership development; presumably, it is a combination of both push and pull factors. A more elaborate understanding of these processes could help to reach a more diverse population of young women to recruit as champions.

Reflecting on gender barriers

The barriers champions alluded to in their stories correspond with recent research in the European context (Schweickart & Moragues Costa, 2022; SUE, 2020). High in number, SGP have the potential to address structural barriers such as unsupportive environments and institutional discrimination by disrupting and reimagining traditional ways of sports programming. Moreover, SGP help address cultural barriers such as gender stereotyping by giving young women the opportunity to disprove conscious and unconscious biases by taking on the role of leaders in sport. Lastly, the capacity gap as defined by SUE (2020), can be addressed by the knowledge and skills component of SGP.

Limitations

One limitation of the data is that the LSA were anonymized. Thus, no country-specific insights or other learnings such as the differences of champions' experiences who were supported by an organization as opposed to those who were not could be derived. Moreover, a limited number of interviews from only two programs were conducted which may not be representable for the experiences of all champions and may not be applicable to other SGP. The data distribution between programs was uneven, with four LSA questions and five interviews conducted for BB, yet only two LSA questions and four interviews conducted for RM.

Counting occurrences of codes is hence automatically skewed towards BB. Lastly, crucial to acknowledge is the fact that most likely there are overlaps of people from the interview data and the answers given in the LSA. However, because the LSA data is anonymized it cannot be differentiated which LSA answers match which interviews. Regardless of these limitations, investigating two SGP in the same study is unprecedented and strengthens this research.

Final thoughts and recommendations

Future research should focus on monitoring and evaluating the collective impact of similar SGP rather than each program in a vacuum. There are many insights to be gathered from the different components of the interventions (e.g. grant size, support and mentorship, content of workshops) and their impact on champions' development, knowledge, and skills as well as their impact on changing gendered norms and values within local contexts. This research has shown that two programs quite different from one another still share many similarities in how they contribute to more gender equitable and inclusive spaces. SGP seek to address the many critiques of sports-for-development programs (e.g. Darnell & Hayhurst, 2013) – and international development as an overarching field. WW's SGP are bottom-up, community-based, and women-led programs which create a community of learners through knowledge exchange, mentorship, and role modeling. BB and RM demonstrate how sports-for-development interventions can combine the local with the global: they consider the local by giving power to those who know their contexts best, applying a decolonized approach and turning the pyramid upside down with principles of servant leadership. Yet, they also provide a cross-national lens by connecting likeminded people with similar projects to one another to learn from one another, and exchange ideas and experiences.

The champions' experiences and insights as shared in this research provide learnings for those already involved in designing and implementing SGP and may mobilize a shift in approach to programmatic work in the field of sport, gender and development. This research offers increased visibility and credibility to the decolonized and feminist approach of SGP and may incentivize professionals to apply similar program designs in their work. Insights from this research should further be of interest to postcolonial and feminist scholarship as they offer practical applications of their critiques and lead the way to decolonizing the playing field for good.

REFERENCES

- Akella, D., & Eid, N. (2020). Social entrepreneurs as servant leaders: Revealing the implied nature of power in servant leadership. In C. Dogru (Eds.), *Leadership styles, innovation, and social entrepreneurship in the era of digitalization* (pp. 73-100). IGI Global.
- Alain, P. (2012). The impact of a good leader and good leadership in society. *Industry Leaders Magazine*.
<https://www.industryleadersmagazine.com/the-impact-of-a-good-leader-and-good-leadership-in-society/>
- Arnaz-Pemberton, E. (2018). Empowering yourself and others. Association for Project Management.
<https://www.apm.org.uk/blog/empowering-yourself-and-others/#:~:text=The%20Oxford%20dictionary%20defines%20Empowerment,life%20and%20claiming%20one's%20rights>
- Astin, H. S. (1996). Leadership for social change. *About campus*, 1(3), 4-10.
- Batliwala, S. (2014). *Engaging with empowerment: An intellectual and experiential journey*. Women Unlimited.
- Breaking Barriers (2022). *Adidas Breaking Barriers project: Advancing gender equity in sports for good*.
<https://adidasproject.thinkific.com/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H.E. Cooper, P.M. Camic, D.L. Long, A.T. Panter, D.E. Rindskopf & K.J. Sher, *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol 2.: Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological*. American Psychological Association.
- Chawansky, M., & Hayhurst, L. M. (2015). Girls, international development and the politics of sport: Introduction. *Sport in Society*, 18(8), 877-881.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140, 139–167.
- Darnell, S. and Hayhurst, L. (2011). Sport for decolonization: Exploring a new praxis of sport for development. *Progress in Development Studies*, 11(3), 183–196.
- Darnell, S. C., & Hayhurst, L. (2012). Hegemony, postcolonialism and sport-for-development: A response to Lindsey and Grattan. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 4(1), 111-124.
- Darnell, S. C., & Hayhurst, L. (2013). De-colonising the politics and practice of sport-for-development: Critical insights from post-colonial feminist theory and methods. In N. Schulenkorf & D. Adair (Eds.), *Global Sport-for-Development* (pp. 33-61). Palgrave Macmillan.

- De Rue, D., & Ashford, S. (2010). Who will lead and who will follow? A social process of leadership identity construction in organizations. *Academy Of Management Review*, 35(4), 627-647.
- Donnelly, P., Atkinson, M., Boyle, S. and Szto, C. (2011). Sport for development and peace: A public sociology perspective. *Third World Quarterly*, 32(3), 589–601.
- Edwards, M. B. (2015). The role of sport in community capacity building: An examination of sport for development research and practice. *Sport Management Review*, 18(1), 6-19.
- Ely, R. J., & Thomas, D. A. (2020). Getting serious about diversity: Enough already with the business case. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/11/getting-serious-about-diversity-enough-already-with-the-business-case>
- European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE] (2015). *Sport*. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/sport>
- Feminist Sports Champion Toolkit (n.d.) Introduction. *Women Win*. <https://www.feministsportschampion.org/introduction>
- Ford, J., Harding, N., & Learmonth, M. (2008). *Leadership as identity*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gandolfi, F., & Stone, S. (2018). Leadership, leadership styles, and servant leadership. *Journal of Management Research*, 18(4), 261-269.
- George Washington University (2020). Equity vs. equality: What’s the difference? *Milken Institute School of Public Health*. <https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/>
- Good Push (April, 2020). *Announcing our 2020 ROLL Models*. <https://www.goodpush.org/blog/announcing-our-2020-roll-models>
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Center for Applied Studies.
- Hannay, M. (2009). The cross-cultural leader: The application of servant leadership theory in the international context. *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies*, 1, 1-12.
- Jeanes, R., & Magee, J. (2013). Promoting gender empowerment through sport? Exploring the experiences of Zambian female footballers. In N. Schlenker & D. Adair (Eds.), *Global Sport-for-Development* (pp. 134-154). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kerner, I. (2017). Relations of difference: Power and inequality in intersectional and postcolonial feminist theories. *Current Sociology*, 65(6), 846-866.
- LaVoi, N.M. (2016). *Women in sports coaching*. Routledge.

- Macklin, K. M. (2019). *The GOAL programme: A critical analysis. To what extent do girl-centred sport for development programmes impact participant awareness of gender-based violence?* [Master's thesis, Utrecht University].
- Meier, M. and Saavedra, M. (2009). Esther Phiri and the Moutawakel Effect in Zambia: An analysis of the use of female role models in sport for development. *Sport in Society*, 12(9), 1158–1176.
- Mertens, M. (2022). 50 years of Title IX: How one law changed women's sports forever. *Sports Illustrated*. <https://www.si.com/college/2022/05/19/title-ix-50th-anniversary-womens-sports-impact-daily-cover>
- Reid, S. W., Anglin, A. H., Baur, J. E., Short, J. C., & Buckley, M. R. (2018). Blazing new trails or opportunity lost? Evaluating research at the intersection of leadership and entrepreneurship. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), 150–164.
- Schweickart, M., & Moragues Costa, C.A. (2022). *More obstacles than achievements: An exploration of the key hurdles to girls' participation in sport in Europe and opportunities that remain* [White paper]. Adidas, Breaking Barriers Project. <https://www.breakingbarriersacademy.com/white-paper>
- sportanddev.org (n.d.). *The role of sport in addressing gender issues*. <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/learn-more/gender/role-sport-addressing-gender-issues-0>
- Statista (2020). The EU gender equality index 2020, by country. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1209683/the-eu-gender-equality-index-by-country/>
- Step Up Equality [SUE] (2020). A handbook of best practice: Women's leadership and decision making within sport. European Commission. <https://stepupequality.geacoop.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Ahandbookofbestpractice-StepUpEquality.pdf>
- Svensson, P. G., Kang, S., & Ha, J. P. (2019). Examining the influence of shared leadership and organizational capacity on performance and innovative work behavior in sport for development and peace. *Journal of Sport Management*, 33(6), 546-559.
- Úbeda-Colomer, J., Gil-Quintana, J., Pereira-García, S., López-Cañada, E., Pérez-Samaniego, V., & Devís-Devís, J. (2020). Development and validation of the barriers to physical activity and sport questionnaire for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning persons. *Public Health*, 185, 202-208.
- UNESCO (n.d.). Values education through sport. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/sports-values-education#:~:text=Sport%20can%20teach%20values%20such,%2C%20inclusion%2C%20perseverance%20and%20respect.>

UNICEF (2017). Glossary of terms and concepts. *UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia*.

<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Gender%20glossary%20of%20terms%20and%20concepts%20.pdf>

Wetton, A.R., Radley, R., Jones, A.R., & Pearce, M.S. (2013). What are the barriers which discourage 15-16 year-old girls from participating in team sports and how can we overcome them? *BioMed Research International*, 2013, Article ID 738705 1-8.

Women Win (n.d.). *About us*. <https://www.womenwin.org/about-us/>

Wright, E.M., Griffes, K., & Gould, D.R. (2017). A qualitative examination of adolescent girls' sport participation in a low-income, urban environment. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 25(2), 77-88.

Yalçın, O. K. (2018). *Women Win: Study of a holistic approach to girls' empowerment*. [Master's thesis, Utrecht University].

Zipp, S., & Nauright, J. (2018). Levelling the playing field: Human capability approach and lived realities for sport and gender in the West Indies. *Journal of Sport for Development*, 6(10), 38-50.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the first half of 2022, I had the pleasure of conducting an internship with Women Win. From day one, I have felt really at home in the *Equity and Inclusion in Sports* team, and I am immensely grateful for having had the opportunity to learn from and work with so many driven and passionate women in this organization. Heartfelt words of gratitude to the entire GRLS team, particularly Marije, Sol, Mia, Manue, Kitty, Marielle and Alex – thank you!

A special word of gratitude goes to my internship supervisor, Marije Holman, who has gone above and beyond to guide me and encourage me to learn and grow. You have been a truly wonderful role model to me, Marije. You are performing your work with so much passion and dedication, leading your team as an outstanding servant leader, it is only commendable.

I would also like to thank my thesis supervisor, Semiha Sözeri, who has provided me with exceptional support, a listening ear, words of encouragement and helpful feedback – even on a Sunday morning, if needed. I could have not asked for anyone more capable and caring to bring along this endeavour. Thank you for everything, Semiha.

Above all, a huge THANK YOU to all the ROLL Models and Breaking Barriers champions who have made time in their busy agendas to share their experiences with me. Without you this thesis would have not been possible. It was an honor meeting all of you, if only virtually. You have truly been the biggest source of motivation that helped me finish this project.

Last but not least, a big shoutout goes to all my friends who have written their theses alongside me, shared the many feelings of the thesis rollercoaster, and filled the days with much understanding, encouragement, love, and laughter. You all know who you are, but a special mention goes to Ioana and Anika. Thank you for being loving, caring, and understanding. I could not have asked for better friends, roommates, and frontline supporters.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview guide

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your experiences with the [adidas Breaking Barriers project/ROLL Models programme]. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions. Your responses build the foundation of my thesis research and will help me gain a better understanding of the impact and potential of the similar programs. Everything that you say will be anonymized and treated confidential, so nothing can nor will be traced back to you.

I have a few questions prepared regarding the project you designed and implemented as part of this program, the impact this process had on your growth and development, what you learned from it and how you incorporate these learnings in other contexts. Whenever you have a question or do not understand something, please let me know right away. If you are ready, we can get started. Is that okay with you?

Warm up

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself?
2. Can you briefly tell me about the project that you designed and implemented as part of the grant you received in the RM/BB program?
 - a. *PROMPT*: What motivated you to work on this project?
3. What was your favorite moment from implementing your project?
 - a. What did you learn about yourself in this moment?
4. What aspect of RM/BB did you particularly like? What aspects did you not particularly like?

Impact & learnings

The next few questions will be about your learnings and the impact the entire program and the process of designing and implementing your own project had on you.

5. Can you tell which experience had the biggest impact on you throughout the program?
 - a. *PROMPT*: Did this experience correspond with the expectations you had on at the start of the program?
6. How would you describe a leader?
 - a. Would you consider yourself a leader? How has this changed throughout the program?

The next question is specifically about leadership competencies. At Women Win, we define 5 core leadership competencies. They are: I use voice; I am confident; I have vision; I take action; I think globally.

7. What leadership competency would you say you developed the most through your experience in this program?
 - a. Why did you choose this competency? Could you share an example?
8. In your opinion, what characteristics and skills does a role model have?

- a. *PROMPT*: Has your understanding of what a role model is changed throughout the program? If so, how?
 - b. *PROMPT*: Do you consider yourself a role model? Why?
9. Is there something that you wish you learned but didn't have (enough) opportunity to work on during this program?

Project design

The following questions are specifically about how you experienced the process of designing your own project.

10. How do you think your experience in this program would have differed if you had organized the project alone/together in a group? [*ask the opposite of what they did*]?
11. How did you experience the webinars before getting started with your project?

For BB:

12. In what ways did the support & mentoring of streetfootballworld impact your project (either in design or implementation)?

For RM:

13. Was there a person that you felt most supported you during the program?
 - a. *PROMPT*: If yes, who was that person? How did they support you?
 - b. *PROMPT*: Would you have wanted any other form of support? If yes, please elaborate.

Cool down: post-program effects

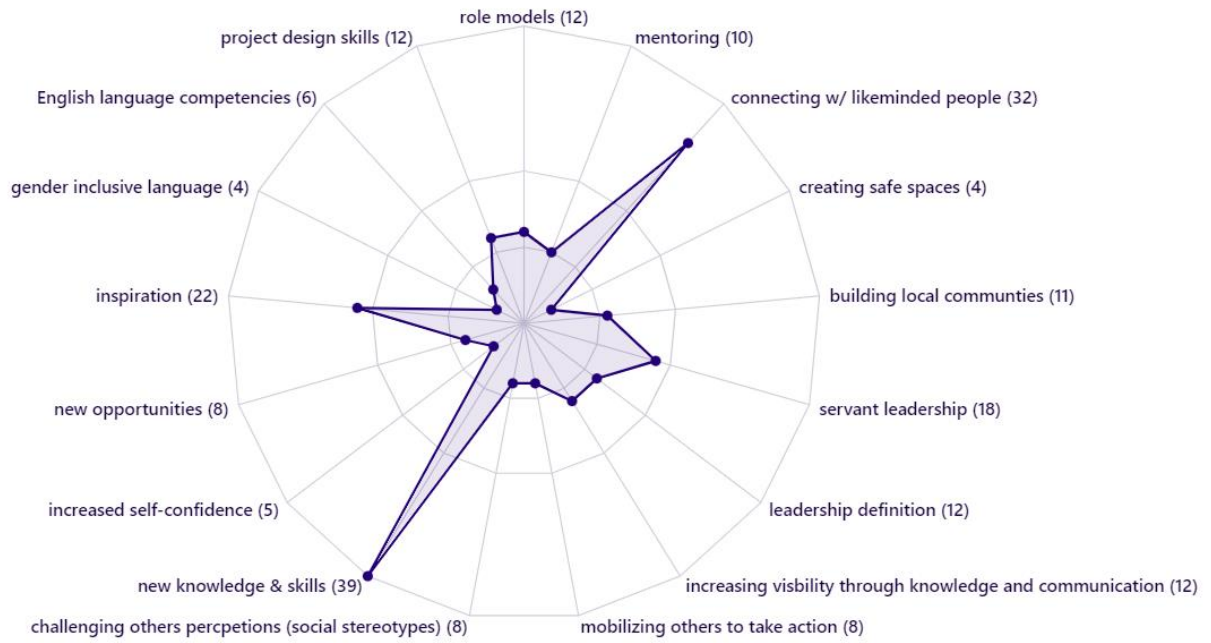
The last few questions I am interested in how incorporated your experiences and learnings from this project after going through the program.

14. Since implementing your project, do you feel there has been a change in the way people around you perceive you?
 - a. *PROMPT*: What do you think was the key element that changed this perception?
15. Have your experiences and skills learned in this program been useful to you after the program?
16. How do you think this program is going to help you to achieve the goals you have for the future?
17. Would you recommend this kind of project to a friend?
 - a. *PROMPT*: If yes, why?/If not, why?

Thank you very much for taking your time to speak to me today. Your answers are extremely valuable to my research. If you are interested in the final thesis, I will be happy to share it with you this summer. If you have any follow up questions, you can reach me via email. Is it also okay if I contact you should I have any follow up questions about the answers you gave me today?

Appendix B: Overview of codes

1. Radar plot with all codes used for the 4 pillars



2. Bar chart of most used codes

