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# “They play together, they laugh together’: Sport, play and fun in refugee sport projects

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## ABSTRACT

Whilst the role of sport for those working with refugees has become a recent area of academic analysis, these predominantly focus on the Global North (Spaaij et al. 2019). Drawing on participant observation and interviews with volunteers in Rwamwanja, this article critiques the role of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) projects that invariably use sport as a hook to engage participants. Focussing on games that promote play and encouraging fun are potentially beneficial for young inhabitants of refugee settlements. Unlike sport projects, which often have other aims or outcomes (such as education or health), play in and of itself is important. Play can open an imaginary world which can contribute to having fun and relaxation by helping young people in refugee settlements to stop worrying about the past or future and live wholly in the present. This reframes the focus of projects. Rather than focusing on specific outcomes, such as education or health, promoting fun through play can provide the foundations for these and other outcomes to develop.

## KEYWORDS

Refugees; fun; play; sport for development and peace; global south

## Introduction

Although Europe has experienced a heightened awareness of forced migration since 2015, eighty percent of refugees stay in countries neighbouring their home nation (UNHCR 2020). At the time of writing over seventy million people are forcibly displaced in the world (UNHCR 2020). Of this amount almost twenty-six million people are refugees who can be described as “people fleeing conflict or persecution” and therefore cross the border to find safety (UNHCR 2020). One of the main countries receiving refugees is Uganda with over a million refugees predominately coming from South-Sudan and Democratic Republic Congo (DRC) (Refugees Operational Portal 2019). Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operate in the East African country, including those that use sport to engage the local and refugee populations. Consequently, Uganda is an apposite case study to understand the use of sport and play in a refugee settlement.

Whilst physical activity cannot tackle the structural issues around forced migration, there is a growing interest in the role sport can play with refugees (Spaaij et al. 2019). In

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particular, these studies focus on the barriers to participation, as well as the health and integration benefits (Spaaij et al. 2019). There are increasing studies on refugees and sport in the Global North, particularly from Canada (Campbell, Glover, and Laryea 2016), Australia (Olliff 2008; Spaaij 2012; 2015), the UK (Amara et al. 2004; Doidge, Keech, and Sandri 2020) and Europe (Pizzolati and Sterchele 2016; McGee and Pelham 2018; Mohammadi 2019). Despite the majority of refugees staying in neighbouring countries, rather than moving to the Global North there are only four articles specifically addressing physical activity and refugees in the Global South: Kenya (Russell and Stage 1996); Sierra Leone (Harris 2007); Tanzania (Wright 2009) and Indonesia (Apriadi and Juliantoro 2018). This article fills part of this lacuna by being the first study that analyses sport projects in a refugee camp in Uganda.

Many studies of sport in the Global South are located within the literature of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) which analyses a form of international development where organisations aim to achieve social change by using sport (Coalter 2010). This literature addresses specific projects that are invariably run from the Global North and seek to educate the Global South on economic, health and social outcomes. Fundamentally, these projects engage an understanding of sport that involves physical activity, institutionalisation, competition and play (Tamboer and Steenbergen 2000; Wheaton, Roy, and Olive 2017). Most use football, due to its global popularity (Schulenkorf, Sherry, and Rowe 2016; Darnell et al. 2018), but the competitive aspects of football need to be carefully managed so as not to exacerbate divisions or encourage conflict (Rookwood and Palmer 2011). Projects focussed on play are notably absent from studies in the Global South. This article argues that although sport can be useful when working with refugees, the playful and fun aspects of physical activity should be emphasised. Play helps open up an imaginary world which can seize a player completely, and which makes players open for new possibilities (Huizinga 2007[1949]; Tamboer and Steenbergen 2000; Larsen 2015). As play is imaginary, the player has complete control over what happens and its outcomes, which is the complete reversal of the refugee's situation. This cannot change the structural issues associated with their material conditions, but these positive emotions can help build confidence and self-actualisation.

This article represents the first analysis of a SDP project working with refugees in Uganda. It argues that play and fun can operate as a positive goal for projects working with refugees. Fun and Play can be affirming outcomes, in and of themselves, without having to be tied to other outcomes such as education or health. Focussing on play and fun encourages emotional expression and well-being, builds confidence, and could be foundational in supporting other SDP outcomes such as building more trusting communities. This article does this through reviewing the literature on sport and refugees, before doing likewise with the literature on sport and play. After the methodology section, the article will address three specific threads of the argument around: fun; play; and the role of volunteers. Having fun helps participants emotionally step away from the other issues in their life. Fun can be promoted through play, and as an activity in itself. Play is less structured than formal sport and this permits greater inclusivity, which in turn encourages the participants to have fun. Within this, the volunteers have a central role to play in order to create the bounded safe space that allows play to flourish, as well as undertaking the emotional labour of promoting fun to the participants.

## Refugee camps and sport

Uganda hosts over a million refugees coming from predominately South-Sudan and Democratic Republic Congo (DRC) (Refugees Operational Portal, 2019). With its Self-reliance Strategy, Uganda has been praised as having a progressive policy towards refugees (UNHCR 2019). The strategy seeks to provide refugees the freedom to move, to work, and also have access to education and healthcare (UNHCR 2019). The goal of this approach is that the refugee response will shift from receiving to self-reliance. However, this strategy has been criticised for providing insufficient resources, whilst also placing the burden upon refugees to improve their own lives, and thus not become dependent on humanitarian aid (Ilcan and Rygiel 2015). Supporting young people in camps must recognise the structural limitations for refugees as they imagine their future (Schiltz et al. 2019).

Refugee camps are social and political spaces (Agamben 1998; Agier 2011). For Agamben, they are a politico-legal space distinct from the nation state, but still asserting the jurisdiction of the state. Camps are rigidly controlled and protest and dissent policed heavily (Agier 2011). Redfield (2005) observes that camps are provided with the most basic of human needs to cover basic medical provision, water and sustenance. Whilst refugees are subject to the same legal framework as other citizens, they are not afforded full citizenship rights, and consequently, exist in a liminal space and a constant state of transition (Ong 2003). Despite this punitive framework, camps are also spaces of collective solidarity, resistance and community which produce informal economies, places of worship, and cultural activities, such as music and sport (McGee and Pelham 2018).

Whilst refugee status confers certain rights under the Convention, refugees remain marginalised, often forced to remain in camps without opportunities for employment, education or housing within the wider society. Consequently, the label and identity of 'refugee' is ascribed upon individuals and groups, rather than being chosen (Zetter 1991). Frequently, this label is polarised between a powerless, traumatised victim or a beneficiary of generous aid and welfare (Ludwig 2016; Marlowe 2010; McKinnon 2008; Ong 2003). In particular, the image of the traumatised refugee is amplified in order to 'sell' the story of flight and relocation; yet these narratives present a veneer of the individuals and ignore the 'ordinary' aspects of their lives, sheering them of depth and humanity (Marlowe 2010). This transitional identity "objectifies" individuals, as McKinnon (2008: 398) argues, and turns refugees into objects "in need of assistance, training and a host of other resettlement services, though never to speak and act of their own accord in the public". These one-dimensional narratives frame governmental and humanitarian responses. Consequently, this reflection informs the methodological approach outlined later.

## Sport, play and fun

Within the preceding discourse and framework on refugees in Uganda, we wish to situate the mythopoeic aspects of sport (Coalter 2013). Modern sport is increasingly rationalised and stratified through various criteria, including gender, age, disability and sporting skill. Ultimately, Sterchele (2015: 99) argues, sport's "formal and structural features tend to produce boundaries and separations rather than enable social mixing". Whilst Sterchele did not theorise the playful dimensions of these activities, he identified four ways sporting activities become de-sportised (made less stratified than codified sport) - mixed teams,

downplay competition, multifocality and players/spectators. The latter is particularly important within organized tournaments and festivals, but less relevant in refugee camps. The other three theoretical aspects remain important when organising and managing activities. By having mixed teams, sporting events can start to challenge some of the results-focused participants. Downplaying competition helps manage these activities, and also provides new opportunities for success to be celebrated (such as fewest number of fouls, rather than number of goals). Multifocality, shifts the attention from the single, highly-focused match or activity, into a plurality of activities taking place at the same time. This shift of focus also creates a plurality of expressive emotions, particularly laughter and excitement. This can dissipate collective energy, so needs to be carefully managed.

The philosopher Huizinga (2007[1949]) suggested that humans are fundamentally playful animals. He describes play as a free action without any material interest and which can seize someone completely (Huizinga 2007[1949]). Playing is seen as an action without force and is linked to an experience of freedom and being open to new possibilities (Tamboer and Steenbergen 2000). Additionally play can function as an imaginary world in which everything is possible. This way pleasure is derived from play in the way that it helps an individual to imagine things that are not there (Larsen 2015). This liminal space helps participants reassert their sense of self. As Gray (2015) observes, play is not forced but self-chosen, this allows participants to impart their own meaning on the activities, which are invariably developed by the players themselves. Elias and Dunning (1986) highlighted how sport was a 'mimetic' activity that permitted the expression of extreme emotions. In this way, sport upheld wider social structures by providing a regulated safety valve for emotions. Rather than focussing on the social function of regulating extreme emotions, play can encourage other emotions, as well as developing emotional well-being, self-confidence and expression. Within a refugee camp, sport and play cannot change the social structures, but can provide space where emotions can be expressed in different ways.

Sport (and play) provides many feelings of fun. There is limited academic literature on the importance of fun in sport projects (Fincham 2016). When it has been analysed in relation to sport, the studies have taken place in the Global North, such as Norway, the US and UK (Seippel 2006; Visek et al. 2018; Wellard 2014). Fun has different meaning depending on the context (Bengoechea, Strean, and Williams 2004; Visek et al. 2018). Fincham's (2016, 42) observes that fun:

is escape from present concerns or anxieties. During fun attention is directed away from responsibility towards a more carefree attitude—however short-lived that may be. It is not necessarily the case that fun is defined through irresponsibility but that responsibility is not a concern during periods of fun.

The crucial feature of fun in refugee contexts is its ability to generate a temporary emotional escape, even if it does not significantly change the political or social structures.

While fun is a major element of the experience of sport (Seippel 2006; Wellard 2014; Visek et al. 2015), there is little research on fun in SDP. In a study on the meanings of sport activities in Norway 'joy and fun' are considered the most important reasons for participating in sport activities (Seippel 2006). Elsewhere, the terms fun and enjoyment are also conflated (Bengoechea, Strean, and Williams 2004). Joy is a feeling of happiness from an activity that one enjoys. Strean and Holt (2000) suggest that fun is a subset of enjoyment, because not all enjoyable activities are fun, but fun is always enjoyable. This can lead to

moralistic judgements, where fun is 'fooling around', or 'not paying attention' (Bengoechea, Strean, and Williams 2004). Consequently, there is a power dynamic where fun can take place, as Podilchak (1991, 145) argues,

The feelings of fun only emerge in this social bond and require an equality condition among members. I propose that the interactants have temporarily deconstructed their biographical and social inequalities. The establishment of a sharing friendship, where the 'fun is spread' is identified. Fun only lasts as long as these inequality and power differentials are negated.

Creating a space of equality ensures that fun can take place. Where there are hierarchies, it is likely that fun is inhabited to some members.

The element of is also considered as an important factor of the joyful experience of sport (Seippel 2006). This does have to be carefully managed as the competitive element of sport is also considered as having a negative effect through domination over others (Sterchele 2015). These positive experiences of sport are not just singular moments. They are remembered and add to a 'personal memory bank' (Wellard 2014). These memories bring the participants together and provide positive experiences in the present (Fincham 2016).

## Research methodology

This study is based on a qualitative six-week participatory research project of World at Play in Rwamwanja refugee camp. Rwamwanja is located in the South-West of Uganda. The settlement reopened in 2012 and covers an area of 50 square miles, hosting approximately 68,000 inhabitants that predominantly come from Democratic Republic Congo (Refugees Operational Portal 2019). World at Play (WAP) is a charity based in Wales that organises sport and play projects for marginalised people with the aim to create joy in their lives (World at Play 2009). It believes that the access and freedom to sports and play should be part of every childhood. In February and March 2019 a six-week pilot project took place where an international team of seven volunteers, including the lead author, was sent by WAP to deliver sports and play sessions in Uganda. The project was established in partnership with Finn Church Aid (FCA), an organisation originating in Finland that works in several locations in Uganda and who provided two employees to assist with school and pupil liaison, and facilitating the sport and play sessions. The six week, 'fly in, fly out' dynamic of the research is a limitation of the research as it provided limited depth and context of the findings. Consequently, both authors also drew on previous experience in the field, as outlined below.

Approximately one thousand young people (aged 7-25 years) were part of the sports and play sessions. In keeping with the Ugandan policy, roughly thirty percent of the participants were Ugandan Nationals and seventy percent was from DRC, mainly Hutus, with some Tutsis. The participants were students from the seven primary schools, a secondary school, and a vocational college in Rwamwanja refugee settlement. Sessions took place during school hours. To receive feedback from the young people on their involvement in sports and play sessions, a five minute debrief chat was led by two members of the team who spoke local languages to minimise language barriers. Sitting all together in a circle the participants were asked their opinion on the games. The short duration of the project meant that this data could not be collected robustly; however it helped to provide some context for the analysis by recognising the voices of the young people participating.

The data for this article is based primarily on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The first author undertook participant observation throughout the six-week project. Although participants and volunteers shared information in interviews and surveys, observations were useful because information perceived as ‘normal’ by a participant are not always shared (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Weekly reflections and field notes were written in order to create distance for objectivity and overview. The observations were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with the six volunteers and two FCA employees at the camp. Demographics of the interviewees is outlined in Figure 1.

Both authors have experience of volunteering in refugee camps (Author 1 in Rwamwanja; Author 2 in Calais). Author 2 has also volunteered with refugee activities (including sport) in his city. Both are from Europe and were undertaking this research for a combination of academic and activist outcomes. Critically reflecting on these positions and perceptions throughout the research process aimed to mitigate preconceptions, and identify new knowledge. In particular, Author 1, as a white woman from the Global North will have been recognised as someone working with an humanitarian project and behaviours of volunteers and participants will have reacted accordingly. In order to obviate cultural bias and misunderstanding, the two local volunteers became important gatekeepers. This was an important way to narrow these barriers (Raymond and Hall 2008). Both volunteers had experience in working with refugees, spoke the local languages, and were familiar with local customs. Consequently, they led the group chats so that participants could express themselves in their preferred language.

Ethics were central to the research design. Working with refugees, particularly in camps, reinforces significant power differentials between the foreign volunteers and participants. For this reason, research cannot be neutral. Being a researcher from a university still confers privilege and power, and can still induce refugee participants to feel obligated to provide information (Jacobsen and Landau 2003; Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010). A danger of interviewing is that refugees might reveal information that can be used against them (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). Especially young people might not be aware of the consequences of actions. It is for this reason, that informed consent with young refugees was

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>
Volunteer A	Male	28	Uganda/Ugandan
Volunteer B	Female	27	Wales/Welsh
Volunteer C	Female	31	England/English
Volunteer D	Male	25	Democratic Republic Congo/Congolese
Volunteer E	Female	30	United States/American
Volunteer F	Female	35	Singapore/Singaporean
FCA A	Male	32	Uganda/Ugandan
FCA B	Female	27	Uganda/Ugandan

**Figure 1.** Details of interviewees.

difficult and why their data is not used, other than informing participant observation. Informed consent was granted by the interviewees.

### **‘Play for development’ rather than ‘sport for development’**

World At Play (WAP) can be better understood as an example of ‘Play for Development’. Overwhelmingly, SDP projects have focussed on organised sport, particularly football (Wheaton, Roy, and Olive 2017; Darnell et al. 2018). Removing the structured, organised and competitive aspects of sport can help. WAP deliberately did not play football, netball and volleyball due to their familiarity, as well as due to the gendered traditions understood by the young people (aged 7-25). A wide variety of games, as well as some traditional sports were played, such as rounders, hockey, and rugby, which hadn’t been played before so did not come with preconceived gendered perceptions. When a sport was played it was always adapted to ensure inclusivity. For example when hockey was played, points were scored when every team member had been passed to.

Play was facilitated through the games. The games were developed by WAP, but adjusted in cooperation with local volunteers or teachers. So a tag game that was normally a cat chasing a mouse now became a lion chasing an impala. Where there were repeat sessions with a group of young people, they provided feedback and games adjusted accordingly, yet when the volunteers only saw the group once, WAP decided the games. The games captured the imaginations of the children in a number of ways. In some cases it was due to the innovative and unfamiliar aspects of the game; for others it was the teamwork. Ballgames such as benchball and merkbball were enjoyed “because you work as a team to win” (participant). Similarly participants mentioned tug of war as enjoyable because of the cooperation it required. Thus the element of teamwork that occurs in many games and sports played during the sessions was a factor that participants recognised and enjoyed. Unfamiliarity also played a role as participants liked to learn new games and skills. The school teachers and employees from FCA also identified new games as beneficial because it challenged the physical and emotional skills of young people. A benefit of new sports and games was equality; every participant started from the same point because the games or sports played were new to them. Volunteer C explains how this can build confidence: “So it was really great seeing, for example, girls excelling in sports because they were brand new sports. Ditto seeing, like, the small boy being great. You could see some people being surprised at themselves”.

As Huizinga (2007[1949], 8-9) argued, play is ‘stepping out of “real” life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own... It is “played out” within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning. Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is “over.” This spatial and temporal boundary helps create a space where imagination, fun and enjoyment can develop. The games reinforce this imaginary world (Larsen 2015). In ‘octopus tag’, the tagger is the octopus and when a person is tagged they stand still and pretend being seaweed and attempt to tag other people. With this game the players are invited into an imaginary world that gives the mind freedom to be creative.

Informal liminal space permits the young people to make mistakes and learn that this is common (Elorduy 2020). According to Volunteer B, children in Rwamwanja are not always given this opportunity as school is competitive and at home they can be chastised for making a mistake. When a mistake is made in a session participants are always given

another chance to try until they succeed. This happened for instance during a game of rounders where a girl could not hit the ball at first. “Some were like ahah, now you just go, because they are used to that. But we said no leave her, let her try. When she hit the ball at last she was showing the best moves, she felt good” (Volunteer A). This example provides a dual learning process, both for the girl who was given time to practice, and to the other participants who saw that you can keep on trying and succeed in your goal. Relating to this, a participant fed back on the supportive element of the session: “During the game we are clapping for our friends. And then you feel happy, it shows love between each other”. By supporting each other to always keep on going, a person can learn and grow from making mistakes and the project can function as an environment to practice this. This also contributes to the affective dimension of a safe space, a place to feel supported and improve interpersonal skills (Spaaij and Schlenker 2014).

The liminal quality of play can help balance out the power dynamics inherent within these projects. The coach-player dyad is intrinsically unbalanced as the coach is the organiser, rule-giver and governs who can participate. This is exacerbated as many of the coaches come from the Global North before working in the Global South. This comes with its own colonial, gendered and racialised legacies. The coaches have to balance out this power imbalance and welcome the participants into the activities as equals. At WAP, every session started with a chant or dance in a circle which promotes equality and brings all participants and volunteers together and get everyone’s mind focussed on the session. This moment is useful for volunteers to make connection with the children and to lower hierarchies between the volunteers and participants:

Sometimes kids may fail to smile, fail to engage, it is because of the respect they have for you. The respect creates a sense of fear in them. So doing what we do at the start is like putting yourself at their level so they are comfortable with you. They see you as their friends so they can easily understand you. (Volunteer A)

Sterchele (2015) argues that ‘play-for-development’ removes competition, minimises hierarchies and creates more inclusive activities. The Volunteers play an important role in facilitating this; laughing and acting funny is a way for volunteers to get participants involved. It creates a connection with the participants which makes it easier for them to engage and learn. This also occurred when the teachers joined in a game of Frisbee. As Volunteer C observed, ‘The teachers played with the kids and laughed with the kids and made fools of themselves... with Frisbee the kids could see that the teachers were worse than the kids’. As many of the participants, whether children or teachers, had to learn how to play the games, they all started as equals which minimised power dynamics and hierarchies (Podilchak 1991) and opened up the possibilities for new relationships and ways of seeing the world.

Balancing local ownership and partners’ expectations is an important way of maintaining the liminal quality of the sessions (Sterchele 2015). The partner, FCA, preferred the volunteers to explain the rules and purpose of the games before playing: “like you explain someone this game is called this and we are going to play it in this way and the reason therefore is this. So they capture everything instead you play the game without explaining it... if you don’t tell me the importance of the fun at first maybe I might think what is this?” (FCA). However, the participants’ wrap up session at the end of the day provided very different feedback. During the game called ‘rainbow’ participants had to figure out themselves, as a

team, how to catch a ball coming ‘blind’ from behind a wall without using hands. No instructions are given because the goal of the game is to stimulate thinking and creativeness. The element of thinking was mentioned positively by a participant who said, “I liked rainbow because it makes me think and we had to work as a team to catch the ball”. This opinion was shared by several participants who fed back that they like a game like this because it forces them to think. The importance of play is balancing out power disparities and promoting equality (Sterchele 2015). Giving the participants a voice and enacting their wishes maximises the benefits of playful activities. These camps are not conducive to child development as education facilities are poorly designed, and the home is cramped and unsafe (Elorduy 2020). Promoting informal and empathetic spaces for young people can promote their learning development.

Both volunteers and partners mention the importance of the session functioning as a safe space for participants. Several elements contribute to the session functioning as a safe space (Elorduy 2020). First of all, the focus on an inclusive session contributed to a safe place. The sessions were focused on letting participants play together despite their ethnic background, sex, or skill. The participants were always mixed into groups of boys and girls. Regarding skills, volunteers tried to equalise the starting point in order to give every participant a fair chance. One time a boy missing the lower part of his arm was part of the session. To make every participant start on the same level during the hockey game, everyone had to hold the hockey stick with only one hand. This way all participants involved could play the game under the same conditions. The element of inclusion is part of creating a safe space, because it contributes to a feeling of togetherness and thus to ‘a context for mutual social and emotional support’ (Spaaij and Schulenkorf 2014, 639). The liminal aspects of play also help create a safe space. By engaging in play, the safe space is created precisely because it is liminal and temporary; it is removed from everyday concerns, threats and worries.

### **The importance of fun in SDP projects with refugees**

Besides safe spaces, having fun is considered as an important element of the project. To have joy and fun is something that every child deserves, according to volunteer C, “and if you can learn at the same time great. But even for the sake of fun, I think fun is important for children”. Furthermore, joy is helpful for playing the games during the session as volunteer D explains: “We also teach how to laugh with others. You cannot work together with someone you don’t like that would be very difficult for you”. Fun could be indicated by laughing and smiling, yet many of the participants in the wrap up sessions outlined that fun was an important part of their favourite games. For instance one stated, “I like booma-laka the best game because it was really fun” or “octopus tag was the best because it is funny and a bit silly”. One participant said that “zookeeper was the best because it is competitive and funny”. Even though the volunteers explicitly tried to bring equality into the games, this did not prevent competition. This is in line with Seippel’s (2006) observation that competition was considered as a factor for fun as the young people could test themselves and their newly developed skills.

Fun is an important feeling for refugees in the Rwamwanja camp. Switching the brain to new challenges, coupled with feelings of fun, is mindful; it takes their mind off other things impacting their life. Volunteer A observed that,

Especially with my experience working with refugees, myself being a refugee, sometimes you are at home and there is no hope of having supper. You are so stressed. Tomorrow you go to school and you didn't eat. But, you go to this place where everyone is smiling, it helps you forget.

Consequently, a session can contribute to relieve stress because playing sports and games can make participants happy and forget about the negative things in life and relax mentally (Seippel 2006).

Having fun helps build a mnemonic community that brings the participants together (Fincham 2016). Fun experiences are not just a moment, but a memory that can stay with the participant (Wellard 2014). Volunteer C observed that

when you are a kid, one day can be huge in your memory, in your life. You never forget it and it can feel like a really big turning point. I would like that, well not all of them but for some of them that to have been what it felt like. That they realise that there is something out there, whatever it is for them. Them to be children, free to be children. That's all we ask from them the hour we are with them. That they are not refugees, that they are not poor, that they are as kids together.

Sugden (2014) identified the 'ripple effect' where the impact of SDP projects can ripple out from the individual to the community. Issues of trust are significant amongst refugee communities in Uganda (Lyytinen 2017). Volunteer B observed how the parents of the children brightened up as the children had fun.

People are always sceptical of new faces in the community but when they come over and they see their children laughing, really laughing, laughing like they maybe haven't laughed in years, it is such a beautiful thing. Even when they are laughing at us in our weird and wonderful ways of working it definitely created some joy and I think that was what the aim was.

Having fun, signified through laughter and smiles, can positively impact the young people participating in the project. The transformation that occurs within the liminal space and activity of play extend beyond the activities. The feelings of fun can emanate out to the parents and other members of the community which can help relieve the emotional difficulties within the camp. The point of having fun is much more profound than simply giving children a break. It helps emotional expression, developing confidence and wellbeing and potentially proving the foundations for other SDP outcomes, like stronger communities, health and education.

## Conclusion

Whilst playful activities cannot challenge or change the structural issues affecting forced migrants in Rwamwanja, play (as exercised through games) can still be a beneficial activity for young people in the settlement. Reiterating the observation of Sterchele (2015), this article argues that play was an important way of breaking boundaries and fostering different community dynamics through the creation of safe, playful spaces. Play is informal, unstructured and liminal. New games require learning new rules and skills, that give the young people space to practice, and also stimulate cooperation and teamwork. Competition must be controlled in order to promote cooperation, rather than focusing on 'winning at all costs' (Rookwood and Palmer 2011). Play permits, as Huizinga (2007[1949]) argues, enables the participant to step out of real life and imagine themselves anew, either as supportive participants or an octopus.

Volunteers are crucial in creating the safe space that facilitates fun. The volunteers help manage the competitive aspects and help adapt the games. Feedback from local volunteers and the participants translate activities into culturally appropriate games. The volunteers help to adapt rules, such as playing hockey one handed so a boy missing his arm could participate, but also incorporate feedback from participants. In addition, the volunteers also need to be prepared to make fools of themselves, make mistakes and mess about. These acts help balance out the hierarchies, and promote fun within the young people. Participants mentioned that they liked sports and games for the reason that it was fun. They experienced fun because of enjoying a game with friends, because a game was silly and made them laugh, because of competition in a game, and also learning something new was considered fun. When one's life is characterised by the difficulties of living in a refugee camp, playing and having fun can help create solidarity and community, both a mnemonic community within the group, but also rippling out to other friends and family members.

Rwamwanja refugee camp in Uganda is just one settlement that houses those fleeing war and persecution. Each inhabitant has their own story of conflict, migration and belonging. As the inhabitants struggle to build new lives, playing games may not be high on the list of priorities for them, or for various agencies and NGOs. But play, and the fun that grows from it, have an important role in helping to learn new skills and build new relationships. It also provides a safe space to switch off from the rest of everyday life, providing opportunities for creativity and relaxation. Play also allows participants to make mistakes, which in turn, lets them develop skills and confidence. During play a person has the freedom to express oneself and it can be an imaginary world. Potentially, for future research, it produces change in the participants that is difficult to measure but whose impact can be felt throughout the camp and beyond as they are invigorated and motivated. Rather than the more structured sports used in SDP, play equalises the participants by removing many of the traditional (gendered) aspects of sport (Podilchak (1991)). The implications for SDP are about reframing the focus of projects. Rather than focusing on specific outcomes, such as education, health or community, promoting fun through play can provide the foundations where these other outcomes can develop.

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