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To cite this article: Verity Postlethwaite, Claire Jenkin & Emma Sherry (2022): Sport diplomacy: an integrative review, Sport Management Review, DOI: [10.1080/14413523.2022.2071054](https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2022.2071054)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2022.2071054>



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Published online: 07 Sep 2022.



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Sport diplomacy: an integrative review

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ABSTRACT

In the fields of politics, history and international relations, the phrase sport diplomacy has attracted a growing multi-disciplinary interest in debate around relations between different actors. In this article we trace the emergence of academic literature connected to sport diplomacy and further identify the relevant empirical, conceptual and theoretical frames used to study sport diplomacy. Using an integrated review approach, we collected peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2020, with 224 articles subsequently analysed for key attributes such as research location and type of diplomacy. The results and discussion support and challenge some current tropes connected to sport diplomacy research, such as the overreliance on case studies, lack of theoretical consistency and dominance of research from higher-income countries. Further, we highlight opportunities for scholars to develop empirical and theoretical bridges between fields to overcome disciplinary differences and engage with the growing organisational interest to operationalise sport diplomacy. This review of sport diplomacy literature and opens up lines of inquiry for sport management and sport development scholars to further advance our understanding of sport diplomacy.

KEYWORDS

Sport diplomacy; international relations; integrated review; sport management; sport development; nation building

1. Introduction

In the fields of politics and history (amongst others), the phrase sport diplomacy has attracted a growing amount of multi-disciplinary attention in the debate around relations between different actors (Beacom, 2012; Black & Peacock, 2013; Murray & Pigman, 2014). The elements of the phrase include interactions between nation states and territories, non-state actors and individuals across the broad spectrum of global sporting, cultural, economic and political activities. The sport diplomacy lens has been used to understand interactions in a range of settings from traditional modes of communication, negotiation and representations across different sites. An illustrative example of this range can be seen in the 2014 special issue in *Sport in Society* on sport and diplomacy by Geoffrey Pigman and Simon Rofe, where the focus of the articles includes the theoretical relationship between sport and diplomacy, London 2012 Olympic Games, Manchester United, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), New Zealand 2011 Rugby World Cup, Ilie Natase and Romanian tennis, the Commonwealth Games Federation and Blake

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Skjellerup's experiences connected the Pride House at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games. The variety of contexts within this special issue illuminate the use of the phrase sport diplomacy to consider nation states, international sports federations, private clubs or organisations and individual athletes' role in some form of diplomatic mode.

Beyond the Pigman and Rofe (2014) collection, there have been multiple sport diplomacy themed special issues in peer-reviewed journals in the past decade (Murray, 2013; Nygård & Gates, 2013; Pamment, 2019; Rofe & Dichter, 2016), in addition to edited book collections (Dichter, 2020; Dichter & Johns, 2014; Esherick et al., 2017; Rofe, 2018). These demonstrate a spike in academic engagement with the phrase. However, what appears evident from this brief list of collections is the lack of sustained sport management or sport development-focused contribution to this academic context. An initial consideration to why there is a lack of sustained engagement could be due to the disciplinary communities where these special issues are published. Only one is in a sport-specific journal *Sport in Society*, and the other examples are specific to diplomatic and international studies, for example, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* or *International Area Studies Review*. As such, the fields of sport management and sport development might not have been actively engaged with these broader humanities and social science academic communities. It is our view that this is a missed opportunity, as sport diplomacy could be a valuable asset in the fields of sport management and sport development. Of course, studies already exist in this realm, with a particular focus on the international relations aspect of management activities (such as, Garamvölgyi et al., 2021). Management and development studies explicitly adopting nation branding, public diplomacy and other understandings of sport diplomacy do exist. However, the lack of *sustained* engagement by sport management and sport development scholars, coupled with a significant growth in published work from other disciplines and communities around sport diplomacy, underpins the academic rationale for this integrative review.

Further to the academic landscape, the distinctive role sporting activities can play in diplomatic domains is prominent in recent strategic discussions by public, private and civic actors. The context to this integrative review is connected to such discussion, as all the research team have recently contributed to contemporary national sport management/sport development exercises to formally recognise the role sport can play in diplomatic activities. For example, the research team have respectively contributed to the Australian Government (2019) commissioned "Sport Diplomacy 2030" strategy and the British Council Wales (2020) commissioned "Towards a Welsh Sport Diplomacy Strategy" project. Yet, when informally discussing the terminology, strategies and operational aspects of sport diplomacy, it remains unclear if indeed it is a distinct field of research or practice. This review will seek to better understand, via an empirical approach, the multi-disciplinary academic engagement with the term *sport diplomacy*, whilst paying specific attention to how the term has, and could be, translated into sport management and sport development domains.

Beyond the research team's own experiences, sport diplomatic efforts continue to be formally acknowledged and codified by a range of actors. Included in this increase are sporting organisations in international settings, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), whose President gave an opening address to a 2021 conference entitled "Can sport diplomacy contribute to building a stronger Europe in the World?" (International Olympic Committee, 2021). The use of the term "can" in the conference

title is notable and implies that to date, there has been little in the way of consensus to the significance or adoption of conventions to what the phrase sport diplomacy means or is underpinned by. To an extent, this lack of agreement can be explained by the historic and traditional state-centred underpinnings of diplomacy, in particular, the notion that only sovereign nations and trained diplomats can contribute to formal diplomatic actions which are largely focused on high-level political themes, such as economic agreements (Dichter & Johns, 2014; Esherick et al., 2017). The expansion in *who* and *what* constitutes diplomatic activities both in *sport as diplomacy* and *diplomacy in sport* ruptures the state- and diplomat-centred notions of diplomacy. In doing so, this opens up a plethora of opportunities for academics and practitioners to use the phrase to consider the role of non-state actors, such as multi-national corporations, international sport organisations or individuals (Black & Peacock, 2013; Murray, 2018; Rofo & Dichter, 2016).

This integrative review seeks to unpack the academic use of the term sport diplomacy through a transparent, explicit and comprehensive overview of peer-reviewed scholarship engaging with this phrase, with a further ambition to relate this to industry discussion and the sport management and sport development fields. Such literature exercises are frequent in sport management journals, such as Schulenkorf et al.'s (2016) overview of Sport for Development scholarship. As there has been no prior literature review of sport diplomacy published in a peer-reviewed journal, this review of sport diplomacy-related literature will be a starting point to consider existing literature from across disciplines and postulate future conceptual, empirical or theoretical considerations. To achieve this point, the study adopted Whittemore and Knaf's (2005) five-step process to integrative reviews, with the main aims being to identify

- (1) the emergence and scale of academic literature connected to the phrase sport diplomacy.
- (2) the trends in the empirical, conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of literature connected to the phrase sport diplomacy, in particular, in those explicitly connected to sport management and sport development scholarship.

1.1 Tenants of the phrase sport diplomacy

To date, there has been no formal, agreed or universal theory or convention to what the phrase sport diplomacy constitutes, although there are two clear types of sport diplomacy research. First, the use of the phrase in early scholarship retrospectively analysed the complexity of interests connected to international relations from a nation-state perspective focusing on *sport as diplomacy*. Examples of early scholarship include Peppard and Riordan (1992) and Soares (2007) who consider the use of ice hockey at international sporting events during the Cold War to symbolise ongoing diplomatic issues between the United States and the Soviet Union. Sport diplomacy in early academic studies is framed as a tool to enact a larger political agenda by governmental actors. This understanding of sport diplomacy forms part of a state's broader diplomatic endeavour, and other notable examples include the claimed successful Ping-Pong diplomacy between the United States and China in the 1970s, which helped lay the groundwork for establishing official diplomatic relations (Hong & Sun, 2000), and the global relations and boycotts of sporting events in isolating Apartheid South Africa

(Macintosh et al., 1994; Cornelissen 2008). The phrase sport diplomacy, therefore, has been applied to contexts where sport has been used as a vehicle for governments to drive a broader diplomatic agenda using direct or indirect means.

As others have done, such as Beacom (2012) and Murray (2018), Richard Espy argued in 1979 for a more expansive view of sport in global affairs:

Sport symbolises the international environment and is also a pragmatic tool of that environment. Its manifold uses serve a variety of interests in international relations, a usefulness that can only increase as the effects of sport become more widely recognised and understood. (p. 8)

This argument, now well versed, captures the opportunity and challenge of considering sport in international relations, as first, it has not traditionally been seen as a credible or significant form of diplomacy, second, it can be both a symbol and tool of diplomatic affairs, and finally sport as an accessible form of diplomacy for many actors, not simply reduced to a tool of the nation state. Sport diplomacy in this less traditional view, therefore, is a dense spectrum of actors, networks, activities and outcomes in international affairs. A more contemporary turn in the use of the phrase is to be proactive and connected to non-combative and non-state contexts, such as the use of the phrase to promote peace (or divisive) agendas. Non-state actors involved in such activities include the United Nations (UN), IOC or European Union (EU). In an EU-commissioned report, the importance of harnessing the “unconventional” and “soft power” tools of sport diplomacy was a key aim for the body to “amplify key EU diplomatic messages” with an expanded understanding of who are “agents of this diplomacy” (Zintz & Parrish, 2019. p. 3). This framing by the EU is similar to that of the activities by the IOC (2021), Australian Government (2019) and British Council Wales (2020), where the discussion centres around the more expansive view of sport diplomacy in an attempt to operationalise the term in a strategic, non-combative and proactive manner.

Stuart Murray (2018), in the first comprehensive monograph on the topic *Sport Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice* articulates in the opening that the traditional notion of sport diplomacy as “estranged relations between peoples, nations and states” sits against a more contemporary notion of sport diplomacy being “understood as the conscious, strategic and ongoing use of sport, sportspeople and sporting events by state and non-state actors to advance policy, trade, development, education, image, reputation, brand and people-to-people links” (p. iii). The activities by organisations and the growing wealth of academic literature connected to the phrase sport diplomacy pose an intriguing moment to how and when to use the traditional and more contemporary notions of the term. Murray (2018) suggests this point to scholars of diplomacy and sport, summoning such scholars to move beyond a trend of empirical case studies and sport diplomacy towards a theoretical debate. The current moment for sport diplomacy scholarship, therefore, is intriguing as leading academic figures in the area call for the phrase to be better theorised.

Of particular note is the published and discussed observation that to date, sport diplomacy scholarship emanates from Western and Higher-Income Countries. In reference to sport history, Heather Dichter (2021) states “much of this work [diplomatic turn in sport history] has come from a narrow group of countries, primarily the US and western Europe” (p. 248). Barriers and influences cited by Dichter for this domination are the type and location of sporting powers and sport mega-event hosts, plus methodologically the

access to untapped archival materials. These observations are not dissimilar to comments made about other areas, including sport management and sport development scholarship, and therefore, this review will consider such mutual issues between fields and how this relates to research on sport diplomacy. Then, as outlined by the IOC and EU (amongst other industry bodies), the will is to operationalise the term, in particular, challenging people to think about measures or value of sport diplomacy in the international space and efforts for a range of actors.

2. Material and methods

The decision to undertake an integrative review was based on the paper's purpose, main aim and multi-disciplinary engagement with the term sport diplomacy. This type of review does not presuppose to be exhaustive on any given topic but rather thorough within its boundaries or scope (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Whitemore & Knafl, 2005). Further to this, we acknowledge this exercise focused on collecting peer-reviewed academic journal articles, as including monographs and/or book chapters did not provide clear search and evaluation boundaries. However, as seen in the above discussion, the contributions from scholars via book chapters and monographs on this topic have been included in underpinning the aims of this review and the analysis of the data. An integrative review sits on the spectrum of systematic and narrative literature reviews, and this particular style of review is based on a methodology where a combination of different types of research designs can be collected and evaluated from different disciplinary perspectives to help shape future research (Whitemore & Knafl, 2005). The five-step process for an integrative review consists of (a) problem identification (already presented in the introductory sections), (b) literature search, (c) data evaluation, (d) data analysis and (e) presentation of results.

Concerning step (b) literature search, there were two distinct variables: "sport" and "diplomacy" that informed three separate searches using a database, ancestry and purposive search techniques. For the database search, three databases (SPORTDiscus, JSTOR and Scopus) were examined yielding 335 papers (69 duplicates removed), resulting in 266 to screen. The ancestry searches to identify additional papers involved manual searches of key author and special issue articles' reference lists (such as Murray, 2013; Rofe & Dichter, 2016). This search yielded an initial search of 31 papers (17 duplicates were removed), resulting in 14 articles to screen. Finally, the purposive search involved targeting specific peer-reviewed journals and doing a direct search (using the same terms and scope as the databases) to pick up any additional sport management and sport development-specific publications (including *Sport Management Review*, *European Sport Management Quarterly* and *Journal of Sport Management*). The purposive search yielded 11 papers (3 duplicates were removed), leaving 8 articles to screen. In total, the three separate searches yielded 288 papers.

As part of step (c) data evaluation, the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1) formed the basis of member checking, where the authors independently reviewed each of the 288 papers against the criteria and screened these using Covidence software. The inclusion and exclusion criteria, including the publication type and date, were based on a combination of academic and practical considerations. The academic rationale stems from the points raised in the introductory sections and an initial search for peer-reviewed

journal articles. For example, the decision was taken to include publications published after the year 2000, as first, from a practical point of view, there was no guarantee of all previous journal articles being searchable or available via an electronic database. Second, from an academic point of view, the year 2000 represents the moment when sport diplomacy works began to gain traction in journals.

As an overview, academic outputs that were peer-reviewed, theoretical and/or empirical studies (including reviews), written in English and with a publication date between 2000 and 2020 were considered. The Covidence software programme allows for challenges to be flagged and discussed for resolution between the research team during the member checking. Based on the stages of member checking and disagreements, three screening cycles were performed to evaluate the data and confirm the included articles. An example of disagreement surfaced around including articles where globalisation or domestic affairs were the primary focus of the piece, and using the screening process and distinctions of sport diplomacy (activities in an international space) described in the opening sections, the authors successfully agreed on what studies to include. Following the screening process, the total number of articles included was 224.

Moving into steps (d) data analysis and (e) presentation of results, the research team used the NVivo software programme to analyse the data and present these results in the following integrative review. As outlined in the Results section, the articles were categorised against ten attributes (year of publication, researcher location, lead researcher gender, location of research, research approach, data collection method, references to theories, type of diplomacy, agent of diplomacy, type of sporting activity and theme of diplomatic outcome). The attributes linked to gender have been published separately and are not presented in this review paper (Postlethwaite et al., 2022a). The ten attributes were influenced by step (a) of the review. For example, themes in the literature and field, such as the significance of the research and researcher location, were explored, as previous literature had suggested that there was a perception that most sport diplomacy literature was based in, or influenced by, Higher-Income Countries (HICs).

We assigned nominal data options to each attribute, for example, for the research and research location attributes the options were North America, South and Central America, Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand), Asia (including the Middle East and Sub-Continent), Europe, Africa and International. For some of the attributes and results, the researchers made additional notes through manual analysis using the Microsoft Excel software programme, such as for the references to a theory, we manually noted down the specific theory adopted. This manual analysis was used to identify and further scrutinise sport management and sport development-specific studies (expanded on in Table 2 and throughout the results and discussion).

Table 1. Article screening inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion	Exclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Includes studies that focus on sport diplomacy, international/foreign relations and city/nation branding ● Published between 2000 and 2020 ● Peer-reviewed articles (empirical/conceptual) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Excludes studies that focus on globalisation, compliance to international rules, sport for development, domestic political strategies and dance ● Unclear study design ● Full text not in English

Finally, with step (e) presentation of results, the authors utilised the varying diagram options and functions across the three software programmes to present the results in the following sections. The three software programmes also acted as a data corroboration mechanism. The research team could cross-check the data gathering and analysis in the varying software files. In the following section, the attributes explored in this review will be presented (apart from the lead researcher's gender attribute as previously explained, Postlethwaite et al., 2022a). Alongside the figures and tables in the results section, a table of all 224 studies included in this review is available to view via the corresponding author or data repository link (Postlethwaite et al., 2022b).

3. Presentation of results

3.1 Year of publication and journal types

Figure 1 demonstrates the limited number of sport diplomacy publications in peer-reviewed journals in the first ten years of the sample (2000-2010), followed by significant growth in the volume of texts in the last ten years of peer-reviewed publications. There appears to be a watershed year in 2013 when 32 peer-reviewed articles were published. This jump could be credited to several special issues on the topic as discussed in the Introduction. Further to this spike in 2013, there have been a continuous high number of publications in the past five years, with an average number of publications of 24 papers a year, compared to an average number of publications of three papers a year between 2000 and 2010. This result suggests a surge in interest in the phrase and topic around the early 2010s and an ongoing trend of an increasing average of papers per year published on sport diplomacy.

Beyond the trends around growth in amounts of papers over time, the claim that previous sport diplomacy studies have predominantly been explored by academics from a social sciences or humanities background is empirically confirmed by the results of what types of journals and disciplinary underpinnings. The journals with more than 10 papers published on the concept were *The International Journal of Sport History* (43 papers), *Sport in Society* (20 papers), *Diplomacy & Statecraft* (13 papers) and *Journal of Sport History* (11 papers). Of these journals, only *Sport in Society*, a multidisciplinary journal, is likely to be considered a relevant journal for those from contemporary sport management or sport development fields. From a disciplinary perspective, the underpinning for the 224 articles, based on the journal type, article keywords or author biography, support the claim that a significant majority of sport diplomacy scholarship is from the social sciences and humanities. More specifically, the scholarly fields of politics and international relations (119 papers) and history (82 papers) were the most frequent disciplinary origin of the papers. Comparatively, sport management (13 papers) and sport development (4 papers) demonstrated a lower number of papers. These are presented in detail in Table 2.

Noteworthy, of the 17 explicitly sport management or sport development pieces identified in this review, the increase in articles has been most rapid during the past five years. Ten of the 17 papers have been published since 2016 (Blom et al., 2020; Desmarais & Wallace, 2018; Dixon et al., 2019; Dubinsky & Dzikus, 2019; Fairley et al., 2016; Knott et al., 2017; Nam et al., 2018; Richelieu, 2018; Rookwood, 2019; Zeineddine, 2017). In contrast to the 2013 spike in publications more broadly, the acute growth for



Table 2. Focus on sport management and sport development studies.

PAPER	Focus	LOCATION of research	Research approach	Data collection	REFERENCE to theory	Type of diplomacy	Agent of diplomacy	Type of sporting activity	Theme of diplomatic activity
Baker et al. (2015)	Sports United Sports Visitors Program	North America	Quantitative	Questionnaire/ survey	Theory E and Theory O	Education	Public organisation	Sport-for-development	Cultural
Beacom (2007)	Engaging in development assistance	Europe	Qualitative	Interviews and document analysis	None specified	Development	Public organisation	Sport-for-development	Cultural
Berg et al. (2012)	Olympic Games	North America	Qualitative	Document analysis	Realist international theory	Foreign policy	Public organisation	Sport mega-event	Political
Blom et al. (2020)	USA State Department's international sports programmes	International	Qualitative	Workshops, survey and interviews	Lens of grassroots diplomacy	Development	Athletes (or individuals)	Sport-for-development	Cultural
Desmarais and Wallace (2018)	Adidas sponsorship and the All Backs	International	Qualitative	Document analysis	Lens of rhetorical arena	Trade	Private organisation	Other	Economic
Dixon et al. (2019)	Sports United Sports Visitors Programme	North America	Mixed approach	Document analysis, observation and interviews	Lens of sport-for-development	Education	Public organisation	Sport-for-development	Cultural
Dubinsky and Dzikus (2019)	Maccabiah Games	Asia	Qualitative	Ethnography and document analysis	Nation branding and public diplomacy	Cultural	Athletes (or individuals)	Large sport events	Multiple
Fairley et al. (2016)	Football Federation of Australia	Oceania	Conceptual/ essay	Secondary data	None specified	Not applicable	National sport organisation	Sport mega-event	Multiple
Heere et al. (2012)	FIFA Men's World Cup	Asia	Qualitative	Longitudinal secondary data and interviews	Lens of bilateral relationships	Multiple	Athletes (or individuals)	Sport mega-event	Multiple
Johnson (2014)	Brand Jamaica	South and Central America	Conceptual/ essay	Secondary data	Nation branding	Multiple	Public organisation	Other	Multiple
Knott et al. (2015)	FIFA Men's World Cup	Africa	Qualitative	Interviews	Nation branding	Other	Other	Sport mega-event	Multiple
Knott et al. (2017)	FIFA Men's World Cup	Africa	Qualitative	Interviews	Nation branding	Other	Other	Sport mega-event	Multiple
Na and Dallaire (2015)	Sport diplomacy research on Korean programmes	Asia	Conceptual/ essay	Literature search and review	Social capital and critical theory	Development	Athletes (or individuals)	Sport-for-development	Social

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

PAPER	Focus	LOCATION of research	Research approach	Data collection	REFERENCE to theory	Type of diplomacy	Agent of diplomacy	Type of sporting activity	Theme of diplomatic activity
Nam et al. (2018)	Partnership between the Korean Government and U.S. A. University	International	Qualitative	Mixed methods	Social and cultural capital	People-to-people links	Public organisation	Other	Social
Richelieu (2018)	Place branding strategies	International	Conceptual/ essay	Secondary data	Place branding	Investment	Public organisation	Other	Economic
Rookwood (2019)	FIFA Men's World Cup	Asia	Qualitative	Interviews	Nation branding and soft power	Multiple	Public organisation	Sport mega-event	Multiple
Zeineddine (2017)	Abu Dhabi Formula One	Asia	Conceptual/ essay	Secondary data	Nation branding	Multiple	Public organisation	Large sport events	Multiple

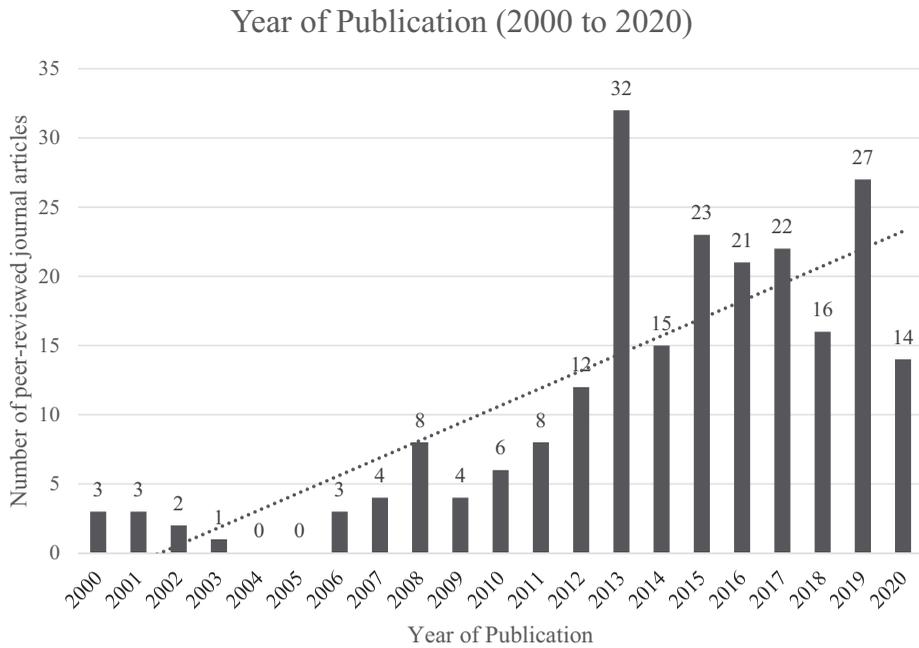


Figure 1. Year of publication.

these specific disciplines is far more recent (with other publications released after this review was conducted, such as Garamvölgyi et al., 2021). This demonstrates a significant change in engagement and volume of published research from scholars in sport management and sport development.

3.2 Location of researcher and research

Figure 2 demonstrates an interesting contrast between the researcher's location (at the time of publication) and the site of the research. On the one hand, Figure 2 shows a well-versed trend in academic research around sport diplomacy, management and development that most of the researchers are in HICs and predominantly write about other countries (Dichter, 2021; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Europe and North America are the two main researcher locations representing 65% of the papers, yet make up only 26% of the location of research in the papers. Considering this further, a significant number of papers cited the United States of America (USA), Russia or Germany; however, these pieces were written to consider international events or case studies, rather than specific to those nation's sport diplomacy strategies or policies. This extends Murray's (2018) observation that engagement with the phrase sport diplomacy has often been on "sporadic and case-study articles on important but familiar narratives" (p. 3) rather than sustained or substantial debate about state or non-state actors in particular regions of the world.

The two predominant research areas are international studies (focusing on global relations or movements, such as the Cold War, IOC or the UN) and Asia (including the Middle East and Sub-Continent). Notably, concerning the pieces written about Asia, the



Figure 2. Comparison of research and researcher location.

focus shows peaks in pieces about South-East Asia, including China, South Korea and Japan, and Qatar in the Middle East. These countries and contexts for research relate to significant political contexts for hosting sport mega-events in non-Global North nations, such as Japan's multiple Winter and Summer Olympic and Paralympic bids and Games, the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup in Qatar or the 2008 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing, China. Yet, of the 65 pieces focusing on Asia, only 34 researchers were based in the geographic region. The least represented areas of the world are Africa and South and Central America. Given the rich connection to sport mega-events, in particular, the recent FIFA Men's World Cup and Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Brazil, or the historical connections to sport, South Africa and the Apartheid, this imbalance is concerning, but unfortunately reflects wider low academic representation from these geographical regions.

The 17 pieces from sport management and sport development scholars show similar traits to the greater sample. For example, of the 17 pieces, there are five focused on Asia (including the Middle East and Sub-Continent) as the site of the research, including the 2017 Maccabiah Games (Dubinsky & Dzikus, 2019), the 2002 FIFA Men's World Cup co-hosted by Japan and South Korea (Heere et al., 2012), a review of sport diplomacy research on South Korean development programmes (Na & Dallaire, 2015), the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup in Qatar (Rookwood, 2019) and the Formula One events hosted in Abu Dhabi (Zeineddine, 2017), with three more involving Asia (including the Middle East and Sub-Continent) in the international context of the study, the USA State Department's programme involving Jordan and Tajikistan (Blom et al., 2020), the Australia Football Federation's move from Oceania to Asia Football Confederation (Fairley et al., 2016) and a partnership programme between the South Korean Government and a USA-based university (Nam et al., 2018). Further to this Asia trend, there is only one paper explicitly focusing on Europe, which is Beacom's (2007) piece on the United Kingdom's (UK) engagement with development assistance. Surprisingly, beyond Beacom's piece, there were no pieces on other UK events, such as the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games or other European focuses. This result suggests that

sport management and sport development scholars are yet to substantively consider European sporting activities through a diplomatic lens. The sport diplomacy project by the EU highlighted in the introduction, amongst other activities, showcases the level of industry engagement in the European region and provides a clear opportunity for scholars to engage.

3.3 Research approach

In relation to the research approach, 74% of the papers were classified as conceptual or essay-based, with qualitative studies representing 22% and quantitative or mixed approaches representing 4%. This finding cross-references with the most frequent journal types and disciplinary representation presented above, as sport diplomacy publications largely originate from historical and political studies publications, such as the *International Journal of Sport History*. Therefore, the majority of sport diplomacy studies to date take on political or historical disciplinary and journal traits, such as tendencies to embed the materials and methodology approach implicitly into the sources used and the argument developed rather than an explicit qualitative or quantitative approach. Elsewhere, scholars have noticed this difference, such as McDowell (2015) who examined the possibilities of a critical dialogue between sport historians and sport management. Points made by the author are relevant here, for example, the “essay” format is most typical in history where the “author’s own rigour and critical analysis of archival material is largely assumed, rather than explicitly stated” (McDowell, 2015, p. 1754). Consequently, a challenge for translating approaches from sport diplomacy research into sport management or sport development studies is to engage in interdisciplinary dialogue and consider what approaches and formats are possible or useful.

This challenge speaks to the contemporary sport management/sport development industry projects connected to sport diplomacy, such as Australia, EU or British Council Wales exercises, where the historical relevance is understood and evidenced, but the ability to measure or operationalise the term in the contemporary moment remains contested. A point made by a number of scholars, including Murray (2018) and Dichter (2021), regards access to governmental stakeholders or archives as a practical challenge for those empirically studying sports diplomatic activities. To date, studies on sport diplomacy largely rely on archival sources, and in sport management or sport development communities, these types of data are classified as “secondary data”, as the researcher did not produce the data set themselves. This review found that the use of secondary data was the most dominant form of data collection at 69%. The remaining studies were split between a variety of data collection methods: document analysis (8%); interviews (7%); mixed methods (6%); and focus group/observation, literature search/review, questionnaire/survey or others (combined 10%). Again, this can be attributed to the common approach taken by political or historical scholars, as these disciplines largely use documents as their primary source of empirical data (such as policy papers, media reports and government archives).

In considering the 17 sport management and sport development studies (see, Table 2), a number of papers showcased possible ways to study sport diplomacy beyond using archival materials. In particular, Baker et al. (2015), Blom et al. (2020), Dixon et al. (2019) and Nam et al. (2018), demonstrated a trend in scholars having direct access or

engagement with a sport diplomacy initiative and doing a formal or retrospective evaluation of the programme outcomes. Another notable trend is for scholars to adopt a document analysis approach, arguably a more formalised method of archival research, such as Beacom (2007), Berg et al. (2012) and Heere et al. (2012). The examples here highlight the possibilities of cross-disciplinary translation of approaches and sources plus the potential to access and engage with contemporary sporting activity related to diplomacy. When designing such studies, the cautions and opportunities debated by scholars, such as McDowell (2015), Murray (2018) and Dichter (2021), would be beneficial for grounding why and how a scholar seeks to engage with the phrase sport diplomacy to build disciplinary bridges and enrich the sport diplomacy literature even further.

3.4 Theoretical underpinnings

The attribute connected to theoretical engagement demonstrated that some articles explicitly use theory (33%), others have an explicit but unspecified use of theory (21%) and a majority of papers implicitly utilise theoretical underpinnings to understand the data (46%). Once again, there are quite stark differences in how different disciplines approach theory/theoretical underpinnings, which could cause tension or complications within the multi-disciplinary field of sport diplomacy. Therefore, this section discusses the multi-disciplinary challenges related to conceptualising sport diplomacy from different theoretical perspectives and theoretical underpinnings. A key trend to come out of the analysis of the data is around the explicit use of theory, i.e., operationalising a theory to study sport diplomacy, and then the use of sport diplomacy or other theories as a lens, i.e., to present an argument about a particular problem or event through sport diplomacy theory(ies). A significant portion of the peer-reviewed studies had either no specified theory or unspecified but explicit connection to a concept or broad theory (67%). These approaches are primarily related to historical papers, where sport diplomacy is used as the analytical framework or thesis statement to understand and explain the historical evidence being presented. In many cases, there was an unspecified but implicit connection to the broad conceptual use of diplomacy. Frequently, these pieces adopted a sport diplomacy conceptual or analytical lens to contextualise or measure the significance or impact of the events being described by the data. Yet, did not formally or explicitly provide a theoretical framework.

In contrast, 33% of the peer-reviewed studies included in this integrative review explicitly referenced and listed a theoretical standpoint to analyse varying diplomatic outcomes and activities. This was most commonly found in diplomatic and sport management papers. The most frequently listed theories were from political, social and diplomatic underpinnings, with an emerging pattern of more recent studies using management theories. Regarding political theory, many studies listed forms of international power as their theoretical standpoints, such as globalisation, neoclassical realism, hegemony, geopolitics, soft power or imperialism. The most prominent academic reference here was Joseph Nye (1990) and variations of his conceptualisation of soft power. Upon further analysis, the 19 studies that adopted this understanding in varying forms did not define or use it uniformly. Although beyond the scope of this review, it is a line of further inquiry to do an in-depth and critical review of how scholars adopt and interpret

soft power with sports diplomatic activities. It would be particularly interesting to explore how different disciplines utilise and understand this concept. The other cited theoretical framing for the politically based studies was nationalism and Benedict Anderson's (2006) notion of the imagined community. When specifically reviewing social theories, several scholars adopted various perspectives on how to measure and analyse power, such as Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) sports field and capital. The presence of social and political theoretical underpinnings was often used to complement the concept of sport diplomacy, particularly to outline the study's position on power or community.

Further to engagement with theories of power, the studies in this review engaged with a plethora of diplomatic theories to underpin their research. Of the 224 studies, 62 either made an unspecified but implicit reference to a diplomatic theoretical underpinning in a sports context. However, productively, or problematically, there is no uniform use, specific phrase, or definition of sport diplomacy as a theory. The closest to a consistent theoretical stance were scholars in five studies that used para- or proto-diplomacy or in 11 studies that used public diplomacy to denote markers of sports diplomatic activities and adopted the diplomatic theory for analysis. The other 48 studies made variable references to 13 types of diplomacy: sport diplomacy, niche diplomacy, city diplomacy, Olympic diplomacy, corporate diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, hockey diplomacy, grassroots diplomacy, football diplomacy, multi-stakeholder diplomacy, baseball diplomacy, cricket diplomacy and celebrity diplomacy. These listed examples from multiple papers demonstrate the dilution of theoretical engagement when scholars use a form of diplomacy and an additional suffix or prefix to denote a specific type of sporting-related diplomatic event or activity. This use of diplomatic theory does not necessarily mean that it is a negative or inadequate use of the theory. Still, it reduces the ability to review sport diplomacy as a field, as it is disparate in the concept's theoretical application. There is, however, a valuable opportunity for sport management and sport development scholars to take a closer view of how this disparate field is, or could, related to the disciplines and studies.

The theoretical approaches used in the 17 sport management and sport development studies demonstrated distinct differences from the whole data set. First, 64% (nearly double the overall data set percentage of 33%) had an explicit theoretical approach. These studies were informed by a variety of theories, including nation or place branding, soft power, public diplomacy, social and cultural capital, social exchange theory, stakeholder theory and rhetorical arena (see Table 2). In these studies, the theoretical approaches appeared to be tied to the particular framing or hypothesis in an explicit methodology section to analyse some form of an empirical data set. As discussed above and by McDowell (2015), the disciplinary conventions found in sport management and sport development journals, such as explicit methodology or theoretical sections, influence the format and engagement of the studies. Yet even though there was a trend to adopt a specific theory in the 17 papers, the theories listed did not demonstrate a consistent or universal framing or usage of sport diplomacy. In contrast, the sport management and sport development pieces generally made no explicit use of sport diplomacy or other types of diplomacy as a theoretical or conceptual underpinning. The most frequently cited theoretical framing was a form of nation or place branding, where scholars utilised and adopted tenants from tourism and business studies to inform the impact of

sporting activity on a particular brand or context (Dubinsky & Dzikus, 2019; Johnson, 2014; Knott et al., 2015, 2017; Richelieu, 2018; Rookwood, 2019; Zeineddine, 2017). Where studies did make specific reference to sports or other forms of diplomacy, it was to a specific programme or outputs, for example, Dixon et al. (2019) and Blom et al. (2020) operationalise the concept to evaluate the explicit sport diplomacy activity. Thus, from this integrative review, there are both opportunities and challenges for theoretically using sport diplomacy in sport management and sport development studies. A significant opportunity is to develop and translate nation or place branding into the established debate about sport diplomacy as this could be a valuable addition to current literature. A notable challenge though is the ability to define or measure sport diplomacy empirically beyond specific programmes or activities.

3.5 Types of sport diplomacy activity and agents

In consideration of the traditional and expansive understandings of sport diplomacy, a source of challenge in the integrative review is around *who* do these activities and in *what* contexts can these activities be studied. This section presents findings to help unpack this challenge and understand current patterns of scholarship. First, in relation to the type of diplomacy, agent of diplomacy and theme of the diplomatic outcome, the overwhelming majority of research focused on foreign policy (92 papers, 41%), public organisations (111 papers, 49%) and political outcomes (83 papers, 37%). For each of these three attributes, the nation state to nation state, traditional, political and formal foci on sport diplomacy (*sport as diplomacy*) were leading. The dominance of politically underpinned activities, agents and outcomes makes sense, given that sport diplomacy's origin disciplines are political and diplomatic bases. Moreover, diplomacy has traditionally been a closed, practical field where only trained diplomats or government-employed officials were viewed as sources of diplomatic activity. Yet, as discussed in the opening section, there is increasing visibility of diplomatic efforts via athletes and leaders in the sport sector (*diplomacy in sport*), for example, political activism by elite athletes. From this review, research on non-traditional agents of diplomacy, such as athletes (or individuals) (25 papers, 11%), international sports organisations (22 papers, 10%) or private organisations (11 papers, 5%), is a neglected area of the research in the sport diplomacy field and thus a recommended area for future research. The most frequently cited non-state actor was an international sports organisation, the International Olympic Committee.

Although representing a fraction of this integrative review, there are a trend and development in both the academic and practical fields of sport diplomacy to include and focus on non-traditional activities and outcomes classified or labelled as sport diplomacy. In considering the 17 sport management and sport development pieces (Table 2), they do differ from the results from the whole sample, as they contain pieces that span a global set of contexts rather than a trend towards one event, actor, or outcome. The 17 pieces range from national government-funded sport diplomacy visitor programmes, to sport mega-events, to understanding private sponsorship dynamics. The list of activities and actors (in Table 2) showcases the potential of sport diplomacy as a concept or theoretical lens that could be applied across the various disciplines within

sport management and sport development research. The similarity between the 17 pieces and the whole sample was the dominant focus on public organisations, notably national governments. However, there were distinctions between the 17 pieces in this review regarding the type of public organisation, such as a city, national or subnational government agency.

The final attribute in this review was the type of sporting activity the research focused on, and the results showed the dominance of research on events, with sport mega-events (81 papers, 36%) and large sport events (26 papers, 11%) being the top two most frequent focal points of the articles (Figure 3). Of the named sports organisations and events, the most frequently used were the IOC and Summer Olympic Games, FIFA and the Men's Football World Cup, then the Asian Games Federation and Asian Games. Beyond the Olympic Games and Asian Games, the single sports most frequently cited were football, rugby union, cricket and ice hockey. A further observation is the prevalence of male teams or tournaments, in particular, the foci on football, rugby union, cricket and ice hockey are all the male iterations of the events or the men's teams. Little scholarship focuses on the sport diplomacy of female teams, athletes or events. The rise in popularity and scale of events, such as the FIFA Women's Football World Cup, or the growth in visibility and prominence of athletes and administrators, such as Serena Williams or Naomi Osaka (tennis players) or Marisol Casado (President of World Triathlon), warrants attention in terms of diplomatic messages or outcomes specifically through women's sport and gendered aspects of international sport more broadly (Postlethwaite et al., [Forthcoming](#)).

Notably, the least researched sporting activity in this review was sport-for-development (9 papers, 4%) and five of those nine papers were in the 17 sport management and sport development pieces looked at in more detail. The other four were historical (American imperialism and Sports Aid in Francophone African Countries) or nation-specific accounts (Cuba and Nigeria) on Global South efforts to utilise sport. The dominance of sport mega-events and international sport events in this integrative review highlights the neglect of non-elite sporting activities connected to diplomacy (or other agendas, such as sport for development and peace). There is an opportunity, therefore, to develop understandings across different activities, in particular, non-elite or event activities related to sport development.

Of the 17 sport management and sport development pieces, a significant number of pieces were about sport mega-events or large international events or infrastructures related to these, such as sponsorship or Federation classification (Berg et al., 2012; Desmarais & Wallace, 2018; Dubinsky & Dzikus, 2019; Fairley et al., 2016; Heere et al., 2012; Knott et al., 2015, 2017; Rookwood, 2019). Further to this, the organising committee for the event unsurprisingly featured heavily as the agent of diplomacy. Research on an entity, such as the organising committee, is an opportunity for sport management to contribute to the field of sport diplomacy, as these entities (especially, organising committees or National Sports Federations) differ depending on the sport, nation or legal system. For example, such organisations diverge in whether they are public or hybrid public-private organisations. More depth in the discussion of the types of agents of diplomacy (or stakeholders), in particular, organisations beyond governmental or public governance structures, would be a useful line of inquiry for the broader field of sport diplomacy. This emphasizes a link between traditional and expansive understandings of

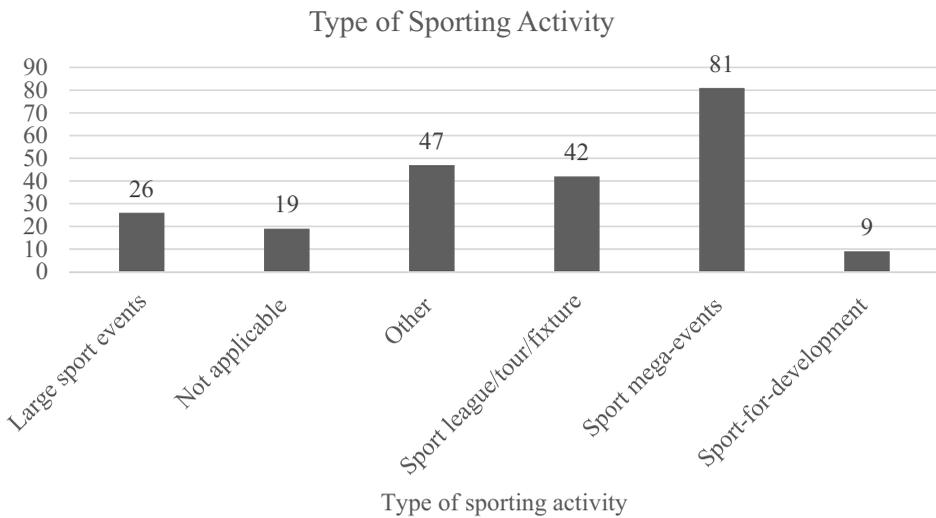


Figure 3. Type of sporting activity.

sport diplomacy and sport management scholarship, as the management of these organisations and agents warrants further attention, in particular, how they contribute to, or connect to, sports diplomatic practices.

4. Discussion

This integrative review serves to encourage scholars from the global fields of sport management and sport development to consider the term sport diplomacy and how it is recognised and understood. As discussed in the opening sections of this paper, there are inherent limitations to an integrative review, in particular, to the inclusion/exclusion criteria selected by the researchers. Specifically, for this review, the decision to focus on peer-reviewed journal articles between 2000 and 2020 has excluded monographs, book chapters, periodicals and peer-reviewed articles before 2000 and after 2020. However, efforts have been made throughout to include significant and highly cited publications outside of the criteria, such as engagement with Black and Peacock (2013) and Murray (2018) in the conceptual and introductory statements. As presented throughout the results section, there has been substantially less engagement with this concept in the fields of sport management or sport development in comparison to counterparts in sports history and politics or with other disciplinary scholars translating the concept into sport management or sport development debate. This paper aimed to survey the multi-disciplinary engagement with the traditional and more contemporary understanding of this phrase, considering trends in and beyond sport management and sport development.

The integrative review presented here has provided an analytic overview of the burgeoning area of sport diplomacy research. As identified, this area has grown substantially in the past ten years and is becoming more prominent in the sport management field, yet there is still neglect of non-elite and sport development-related studies. Of particular interest is the global scale of the research and that the scope of the study goes from individual and local settings to the most prominent sport mega-events. In

addition, there are dominant organisations, contexts and activities, particularly the political and diplomatic outcomes connected to the IOC controlled Summer Olympic Games and the FIFA controlled Men's Football World Cup.

The strength of the research included in this integrative review is the breadth of case studies, empirical sources and connections to different contexts across the globe. Sport diplomacy research, contrary to previous assertions, is no longer sporadic or dominated by a particular sport or area of the globe. The results of this review show that the past seven years have produced a consistent number of publications focused on sport diplomacy. That said, there is a dominance of historical research, focus on nation-state to nation-state relations and foreign policy, and frequently no listed or implicit theoretical underpinnings. A weakness of the research included in this integrative review, therefore, is the lack of depth in what constitutes a theory of sport diplomacy. From the findings of this integrative review, there is a clear need to move beyond the nation state and consider more contemporary notions of diplomacy in sport, including other actors, global agendas and diplomatic outcomes. As noted in the introductory sections, the scholarship on sport as diplomacy has been the dominant trend in research and thinking, yet our review and calls by others demonstrate the need to further unpack *diplomacy in sport* in a more contemporary and expansive manner (Beacom, 2012; Black & Peacock, 2013; Dichter, 2021; Murray, 2018).

Implications for theory and scholarship from this integrative review would be, first, to consider the multi-disciplinary challenges around defining and theorising what sport diplomacy is and how that can be translated into a sport management or sport development context, for example, identifying a clear unit of analysis, accessing individuals or records to review and observing or participating in industry projects or programmes. As seen in this review, traditionally, papers have used secondary data and documentary sources to produce conceptual or essay papers. If in the future, scholars wish to operationalise and evolve the field of sport diplomacy, there will be a need to consider decision-making to what approach, data collections methods and references to theories are utilised. This comes with challenges, as noted by other scholars (such as McDowell, 2015), around access to governmental materials or the measures to assess the effectiveness of activities connected to sport diplomacy.

Secondly, there is a sizable opportunity to expand on the work of 17 studies from sport management and sport development featured in this review (and others not included in the forms of monographs or edited collections) to pursue comparative studies between different nation's strategies and consider non-elite contexts of sport diplomacy and a more thorough theoretical and conceptual engagement with political or historical scholars. Specifically, to explore the conceptualisation of who constitutes a diplomat and to take a more expansive approach to consider non-state actors, in particular, private organisations and international sports federation's role in international affairs. Theoretically, this would need to stretch sport management and sport development applications of models and theories alongside underpinnings of global power and diplomatic means from other disciplines, such as history and politics.

This integrative review has demonstrated a depth of scholarship around nation and place branding; although we do not advocate that these become the dominant framing of sport diplomacy referenced by scholars in sport management or sport development, there is an opportunity to how this theoretical underpinning complements or challenges

recent theorisations by diplomatic scholars, such as Murray (2018), who utilises the concept in their attempts to understand non-state sporting actors and diplomacy. At present, this review concludes that there is no specific theory for sport diplomacy research across the 224 studies cited, due to the multi-disciplinary nature of this area. Yet, this is not problematic and instead demonstrates an opportunity for approaching sport diplomacy from different academic lenses to enhance the field. Further to this, there should be a more sufficient engagement by scholars to the plethora of research intersecting with sport diplomacy to enable a richer understanding of such activities. For example, scholars branching into neglected empirical areas of the field, such as non-elite settings or women's international sporting events, should consider the considerable body of work presented here to develop their lens and utilisation of the phrase, sport diplomacy. Consequently, this review does not propose that a specific sport diplomacy theory should be developed; instead, we recommend that scholars consider the discussions provided in this review to enhance their interpretation of the phrase alongside other complementary methodological and theoretical framings, as demonstrated by studies in [Table 2](#).

One of the most notable discussion points raised throughout this review is the conflicts and challenges in this cross-disciplinary field, resulting in a need for different disciplines (historical/humanities, sport management and sport development) to better understand and appreciate each other. Those from a humanities background tend to interpret and apply sport diplomacy more philosophically, whereas sport management tends to be more applied and operational. Both perspectives have their strengths and weaknesses, and where sport management and sport development scholars can make a clear contribution to the sport diplomacy field will be to stretch the operational aspects of sport diplomacy. A recommendation from this review is for sport management and sport development scholars to better consider and acknowledge the historical or humanities approaches, in order to apply/enact understandings of sport diplomacy in a more nuanced and considered way.

This review has documented that most sport diplomacy research by the sport management and sport development fields have focused on sporting events in particular regions of the world, notably Europe, Asia and North America. This paper has demonstrated the potential scope of future sport management research, mainly engaging in more cross-disciplinary research and the opportunity to utilise diplomacy theory better to underpin such activities and expand on the types of events and different global contexts, for example, Grand Slam Tennis, international E-sports events, or the Youth Olympic Games and activities in Africa, Oceania and South and Central America. Another area that was shown to be very under-researched was the area of sport for development from a sport diplomacy perspective, extending the trope of sport diplomacy research focusing on Higher-Income Countries (Dichter, 2021). Many sport development activities are often funded and supported by national governments or international organisations for numerous reasons, arguably including diplomacy, and engage with Lower-Income Countries. Therefore, this is a prime area for future research and engagement with stakeholders beyond academia, such as FIFA, EU, IOC or UN. As discussed, most sport diplomacy research has been historical. Of particular future research interest to sport management and sport development scholars would be understanding the operationalisation of contemporary sport diplomacy activities, such as the sport industry's contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As noted in quotes in the introductory sections of this

paper by the IOC President in 2021 and Richard Epsy in 1979, sport can symbolise and be a pragmatic tool of the international environment, and the challenge now is to build on the rich body of literature to further both traditional and contemporary constructs of sport diplomacy. This paper serves to be a substantive survey of the peer-reviewed journal articles published on this topic, with multiple opportunities and cautions for scholars in sport management and sport development to consider.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the generous funding and support from the University of Hertfordshire's Department of Psychology, Sport and Geography *Fifty for Fifty* fund and Swinburne University of Technology's Sport Innovation Research Group internal fund. We would also like to thank a number of contributors to this publication and the larger project, including all the reviewers and staff who hugely improve this script during the Sport Management Review publication process. Finally, we would like to extend gratitude to colleagues at the European Sport Management Association and UK Sport for dialogue and feedback on earlier iterations of this integrated review and the wider project.¹

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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