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**The Role of Sports in Fostering Social Cohesion for a Sustainable Peace:
A Case Study of Syrian Refugees and Lebanese in Lebanon**

Maria Calvário da Paz e Pereira de Sousa

Masters in Humanitarian Action

Supervisor:

PhD. Annelien Groten, Integrated Researcher and Assistant Professor

CEI-ISCTE – Centre for International Studies

Co-Supervisor:

PhD. Jasmin Lilian Diab, Assistant Professor and Director of Institute for
Migration Studies

LAU – Lebanese American University

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Quote

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.”

- Nelson Mandela

Acknowledgments

This dissertation marks the successful conclusion of an academic journey that would not have been possible without the incredible support and encouragement I received along the way.

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Resumo

Esta pesquisa analisa o papel do desporto na promoção da coesão social para uma paz sustentável entre libaneses e refugiados sírios, no Líbano. Mais do que simplesmente atividades recreativas, o desporto serve como uma ferramenta para unir e fortalecer a resiliência entre diferentes grupos, especialmente em contextos marcados por divisão social. Com base na Teoria do Contacto e na Teoria do Capital Social, a pesquisa investiga como programas desportivos podem derrubar barreiras e promover a compreensão mútua. Através de uma abordagem que combina entrevistas semiestruturadas com funcionários e beneficiários de quatro organizações principais—GAME Lebanon, Jesuit Refugee Service, Right to Play Lebanon e Alsama Project—observação participante em Beirute e dados secundários, o estudo explora as experiências e perspetivas de participantes libaneses e refugiados sírios em projetos desportivos. Os resultados destacam quais os poderes do desporto para criar contactos intergrupais positivos, fomentar conexões com a comunidade e promover um sentido de identidade partilhada. No contexto dos libaneses e refugiados sírios no Líbano, a pesquisa revela como os programas desportivos podem reduzir preconceitos e construir confiança. As lições realçam práticas exemplares para iniciativas que promovem a coesão social, com implicações para formuladores de políticas, atores humanitários e investigadores, comprometidos em utilizar o desporto para o desenvolvimento, de coesão social e construção de paz, especialmente no âmbito da abordagem do triplo nexos.

Palavras-chave: Coesão Social; Desporto; Líbano; Triplo Nexus; Paz Sustentável;

Abstract

This research delves into the role of sports in fostering social cohesion for a sustainable peace among Syrian refugees and Lebanese communities in Lebanon. More than mere recreational activities, sports serve as tools for bridging divides and enhancing community resilience, in contexts marked by social fragmentation. Drawing on Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, the research investigates how sports-based programs can break down barriers and promote understanding. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews with staff and beneficiaries of four main organisations—GAME Lebanon, Jesuit Refugee Service, Right to Play Lebanon, and Alsama Project—participant observation in Beirut, and secondary data, the study explores the experiences and perspectives of both Lebanese and Syrian participants in sports-based projects. The findings highlight the power of sports to create positive intergroup contact, foster social networks, and promote a sense of shared identity. In Lebanon's refugee context, the research explores how sports programs can reduce prejudice and build trust. Lessons drawn highlight best practices for initiatives that build social cohesion, with implications for policymakers and humanitarian actors and researchers committed to harnessing sports for development, peacebuilding, and refugee integration, particularly within the framework of the triple nexus approach.

Keywords: Lebanon; Refugees; Social Cohesion; Sports-Based Programs; Sustainable peace; Triple Nexus.

Glossary

IOM International Organization for Migration

JRS Jesuit Refugee Service

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

SDP Sports for Development and Peace

UN United Nations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNOSDP United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sports have a unique power to connect individuals, transcend boundaries, and create a sense of community. While the competitive nature of sports can be one of the drawbacks in humanitarian context, nonetheless, sports have the potential to serve as a powerful tool for social cohesion and sustainable peace (Reiche, 2011). By providing a common ground for interaction, fostering cooperation, and promoting shared experiences, sports can bridge divides, change misconceptions, and build not just tolerance but also understanding between individuals and communities. In societies affected by conflict or social divisions, sports can offer a valuable tool for healing, reconciliation, and the construction of a more inclusive and cohesive future (Gillion & Keim, 2020).

This research delves into the transformative potential of sports in promoting social cohesion and contributing to sustainable peace, focusing on the specific context of Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon. By examining the dynamics of interaction, the development of relationships, and the impact on attitudes and perceptions within sports-based programs, this research seeks to understand the mechanisms through which sports can foster a sense of community, reduce negative interactions, and build a foundation for a long-lasting peace. The motivation for this study comes from a deep concern about the challenges to social cohesion and sustainable peace in Lebanon, particularly in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis (Anouti & Enna, 2023).

1.1. Background Overview

This study is particularly important in Lebanon, as it is a country with complex challenges, including its political system, economic crisis, and a large refugee population. The influx of a large refugee population has exacerbated existing social and economic tensions, creating a pressing need for interventions that can foster understanding, bridge divides, and promote peaceful coexistence. Lebanon, a nation marked by a history of internal conflict and political fragmentation, faces a complex web of social challenges. Deep-seated social divisions and a fragile balance of power among diverse religious and political factions characterise its social fabric. This inherent vulnerability has been profoundly exacerbated by the influx of over 1.5 million refugees fleeing the devastating Syrian conflict that erupted in 2011 (UNHCR, 2024). Lebanon now bears the weight of the highest number of refugees per capita globally, a reality that has placed unprecedented

strain on its limited resources and infrastructure. This massive influx has intensified competition for essential resources such as jobs, housing, and basic services, further straining social relations and exacerbating existing tensions between host communities and refugee populations (Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2023).

Lebanon political system is marked by sectarian divisions, a legacy of the 1975-1990 Civil War which involved various factions and foreign interventions (Makdisi, 2000). Lebanon's political and social systems are organized along religious lines, recognizing eighteen different sects. The population is primarily Muslim (67.6%), with the largest groups being Sunni (31.9%) and Shia (31%). Christians make up 32.4% of the population, mainly Maronite Catholics and Greek Orthodox. Druze represent 4.52% of the population (*U.S. Department of State, 2019*). Adding to this complexity is a crippling economic crisis that began in 2019, marked by currency devaluation, hyperinflation, and bank restrictions. The influx of a large refugee population, primarily from Syria following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, has further compounded these existing social and economic tensions (Annexes E.1. and E2). This creates a pressing need for interventions that can foster understanding, bridge divides, and promote peaceful coexistence, especially considering the recent escalation of violence in October 2023 involving various armed groups (Yasin, 2023).

The challenges to social cohesion in Lebanon are multifaceted and deeply intertwined. Sectarian divisions, with their legacy of historical grievances and mistrust, continue to shape the social landscape (Salloukh et al., 2015). The economic hardship fuelled by the refugee influx, coupled with rising unemployment and poverty rates, impacts both Lebanese and Syrian communities, creating fertile ground for social tensions and prejudice. Furthermore, the Beirut Port Explosion in 2020, caused by improperly stored ammonium nitrate, devastated the capital and further exacerbated the economic crisis, straining resources even further (Yasin, 2023). Furthermore, Lebanon's capacity to provide adequate support and services to both its citizens and the refugee population is limited, while the ongoing political instability and lack of a unified refugee policy further complicate efforts to address these challenges (Nassar & Stel, 2019). The absence of a clear legal framework for refugees contributes to their marginalisation and vulnerability, hindering their integration into the social and economic fabric of the country.

The Syrian refugee crisis has not only amplified existing social and economic challenges in Lebanon but has also created new layers of complexity. The influx of a large,

predominantly Sunni Muslim population has shifted the demographic balance in a country already marked by sectarian sensitivities. This has led to concerns among some Lebanese communities about the potential for social and political instability, further fuelling prejudice and discrimination against Syrian refugees (Fawaz & Salloukh, 2018).

In this context of fragility and tension, identifying effective strategies to promote social cohesion and foster peaceful coexistence between Lebanese and Syrian communities becomes paramount. Sports, with its universal appeal and inherent capacity to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, emerges as a promising avenue for achieving these goals. Through its ability to foster cooperation, build relationships, and promote shared experiences, sports can serve as a powerful tool for bridging divides and fostering a sense of community (Coalter, 2013). By bringing together Lebanese and Syrian youth in shared sport-based activities, these programs can create opportunities for positive interaction, challenge stereotypes, and build mutual understanding and respect.

1.2. Research Focus and Objectives

This dissertation delves into the potential of sports to promote social cohesion and contribute to sustainable peace in Lebanon, focusing on the interactions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities. The fundamental research question guiding this investigation is: **How can sports-based projects contribute to social cohesion and sustainable peace between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon?**

To address this question, the study has the following objectives: To explore the specific mechanisms through which sports-based projects can foster social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian youth, examining the dynamics of interaction, communication, and shared experiences within these programs, including how sports can facilitate positive contact, counter stereotypes, and promote empathy and understanding between participants; to assess the effectiveness of different types of sports-based interventions in promoting positive intergroup relations and reducing prejudice, considering factors such as program design, participant characteristics, and contextual influences, thereby evaluating the impact of sports on attitudes, behaviours, and relationships between Lebanese and Syrian youth; to determine the key factors that contribute to the success of sports-based projects in promoting social cohesion in conflict-affected contexts like Lebanon, encompassing aspects of leadership, community engagement, and resource

allocation, thus identifying best practices and critical elements for designing and implementing effective sports-based interventions; to identify the challenges and limitations of using sports-based projects to promote social cohesion in Lebanon, such as resource constraints, cultural barriers, and political sensitivities, and explore strategies to address these challenges effectively, which necessitates understanding the contextual factors that may hinder the effectiveness of sports-based interventions and identifying ways to overcome these barriers; to investigate how sports-based projects can be used to promote long-term social cohesion and peacebuilding in Lebanon, beyond the immediate benefits of the interventions themselves, examining their potential to foster lasting changes in attitudes, relationships, and community structures, including exploring the sustainability of sports-based interventions and their potential to contribute to long-term social change.

This research aims to contribute to more information in social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in Lebanon, a country with the complex challenges of social divisions and a large refugee population (Baytiyeh, 2018). By identifying effective strategies for fostering positive intergroup relations, this study can contribute to creating a more harmonious and inclusive society. The findings can inform the design and implementation of effective sports-based interventions to promote social cohesion and peacebuilding in Lebanon and other conflict-affected contexts. By providing evidence-based recommendations, this research can empower policymakers, humanitarian organisations, and community leaders to develop and implement effective programs that harness the power of sports for social good. Furthermore, the research aligns with the triple nexus approach (Duffield, 2019), highlighting the interconnectedness of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding, and examining how sports can contribute to all three areas. This holistic perspective is crucial for addressing the complex and intertwined challenges faced by Lebanon and promoting sustainable solutions. Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on sports for development and peace (SDP) (Levermore & Beacom, 2009), providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of sports-based interventions in promoting social cohesion and offering valuable insights for future research and practice in this field.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon two key theoretical frameworks to guide the investigation and analyse the data:

The Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) posits that positive intergroup contact, under specific conditions, can effectively reduce prejudice and improve relations between groups. The theory highlights four optimal conditions for contact to be most effective: equal status between participants from different groups within the contact situation; shared goals and cooperation towards those goals; cooperative rather than competitive interaction; and support from relevant authorities, laws, or customs.

In the context of this research, Contact Theory provides a framework for understanding how sports-based projects, by creating opportunities for positive interaction between Lebanese and Syrian youth under these optimal conditions, can contribute to reducing prejudice and improving intergroup relations. By fostering positive contact through sports, these interventions can challenge stereotypes, promote empathy, and build understanding between individuals from different backgrounds.

The Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986) emphasise the value of social networks and the relationships within them for building trust, cooperation, and mutual support within a community. It distinguishes between three types of social capital: bonding social capital, referring to strong ties within a group (e.g., among Syrian refugees); bridging social capital, encompassing connections between groups, - e.g., between Lebanese and Syrians -, and linking social capital, involving relationships that cross power or social hierarchies. Social Capital Theory helps to understand how sports-based projects can facilitate the creation and strengthening of social networks between Lebanese and Syrian communities, building bridges and strengthening social ties. This can lead to increased trust, cooperation, and ultimately, improved social cohesion. By fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity, sports can contribute to the development of a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Overall, two theories, Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, complement each other in providing a comprehensive understanding of how sports can contribute to social cohesion. Contact Theory focuses on the individual level, explaining how positive interactions can reduce prejudice and improve attitudes, while Social Capital Theory focuses on the community level, highlighting the importance of social networks and relationships in building trust and cooperation. By integrating these theories, the research can examine both the individual and community-level impacts of sports-based interventions, providing a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay between

individual experiences and social structures in fostering social cohesion. This interconnectedness is crucial for understanding how sports can contribute to sustainable peace, as it highlights the need to address both individual attitudes and community-level dynamics in building a more harmonious and inclusive society.

Furthermore, this research emphasises the contribution of sports for social cohesion by examining its potential to foster long-term social change. While many studies have explored the immediate benefits of sports-based interventions, this research delves deeper into the long-term impact of these programs on individuals and communities. By investigating how sports can contribute to lasting changes in attitudes, relationships, and community structures, this study aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of the role of sports in fostering sustainable peace. This focus on long-term impact is crucial for moving beyond short-term solutions and addressing the root causes of conflict and social division.

By examining the specific context of Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon, this research also contributes to a more contextually relevant understanding of the role of sports. While the general principles of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory provide a valuable framework, it is essential to consider how these theories manifest in specific cultural and social contexts (Schiefer, and van der Noll, 2016).. This study's focus on the Lebanese context, with its unique challenges and opportunities, will provide valuable insights into the complexities of promoting social cohesion and peacebuilding in a conflict-affected environment. By examining the specific dynamics of interaction and relationship-building between Lebanese and Syrian youth in sports-based programs, this research can contribute to a greater insight and contextually grounded understanding of the role of sports in fostering social change and sustainable peace.

1.4.Dissertation Overview

This research seeks to understand how sports can be harnessed as a powerful tool for fostering unity and building bridges between Lebanese and Syrian communities, offering insights potentially applicable to other contexts facing similar challenges (Levermore & Beacom, 2009).

The literature review section will delve into the existing body of knowledge, exploring the theoretical foundations of this research. It will examine the concepts of social sustainable peace, sports for development and peace, social cohesion, and the triple nexus

approach, drawing upon relevant academic literature and empirical studies. This section will also analyse existing research on sports-based interventions in various contexts, including Lebanon, with a specific focus on interventions involving refugees and displaced populations. This broader perspective will set the stage for a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by utilising sports for peacebuilding and social integration in diverse settings. Furthermore, it will delve deeper into Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986), examining how these frameworks have been applied in previous research on sports and peacebuilding, and how they can inform the analysis of this study and its broader implications.

Methodology will enlighten the path taken in this research journey, detailing the methodological choices that guide the investigation. It will outline the pragmatic philosophy strengthening the study, highlighting the commitment to creating knowledge, which can be used to inform practice and effect positive social change. The section will also explain the mixed-methods approach, combining the richness of qualitative data gleaned from interviews and focus groups with the analytical power of quantitative data obtained from secondary sources (Gillespie et al., 2024). The case study design, focusing on a specific sports-based project in Lebanon, will be elucidated, along with the specific data collection methods employed. Ethical considerations, researcher positionality, and the limitations of the study, including potential biases arising from language and cultural dynamics, will also be addressed to ensure transparency and rigor. While the study is grounded in the Lebanese context, the methodological framework and analytical approach can be adapted and applied to other contexts, enhancing the transferability of the findings.

The findings and results section will present the key findings derived from the qualitative and quantitative data analysis. These findings will be interpreted through the lens of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, shedding light on the mechanisms through which sports contribute to social cohesion. The section will explore how sports-based interventions can foster positive intergroup contact, break down stereotypes, and build social capital, leading to increased trust, cooperation, and a sense of shared identity. While the findings are rooted in the specific context of Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities. Furthermore, the section will identify challenges and limitations

encountered in utilising sports-based approaches, offering lessons learned that can inform future interventions in diverse contexts.

The final section, conclusions and recommendations, will synthesise the research findings and draw meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of sports in promoting social cohesion and sustainable peace between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities. It will then expand the analysis to consider the broader implications of the findings for other contexts, highlighting the transferable lessons and principles that can guide the development and implementation of sports-based interventions for peacebuilding and social integration in diverse settings. It will offer evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice, drawing upon the insights gained from the study and considering the triple nexus framework (Duffield, 2019). The section will also highlight potential areas for future research, acknowledging the limitations of the current study and suggesting avenues for further exploration to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between sports, social cohesion, and sustainable peace.

This dissertation, through its structured and interconnected chapters, aims to contribute to a better understanding of the transformative potential of sports in fostering social cohesion and building a more peaceful and inclusive society in Lebanon and beyond.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This research investigates the potential of sports to contribute to social cohesion and sustainable peace within the context of Lebanon, with a particular focus on the interactions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities. The study is guided by a pragmatic research philosophy, which emphasises the importance of generating knowledge that can inform practical applications and effect positive social change. This philosophical approach aligns with the study's aim to provide actionable solutions and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of sports-based interventions. These interventions are recognised as having the capacity to bring together diverse communities and foster a sense of unity and shared purpose. By adopting a pragmatic stance, the research seeks to uncover the specific design and implementation strategies that can enable sports-based programmes to effectively promote social cohesion and sustainable peace within the Lebanese and Syrian refugee context.

2.1. Research Philosophy and Design

Pragmatism serves as the philosophical anchor for this research, guiding both the research design and the methods employed. Its problem-solving focus allows the research to directly engage with the challenges of fostering social cohesion and sustainable peace. By prioritising practical outcomes and emphasising "what works", this research moves beyond theoretical discussions to examine the effectiveness of different approaches in promoting social cohesion within real-world settings. Furthermore, pragmatism acknowledges the complexity of the social world and encourages the integration of diverse research methods (Godfrey-Smith, 2015). This study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This mixed-methods approach is crucial for capturing the multifaceted nature of social phenomena, acknowledging that social reality is shaped by both individual experiences and broader social structures (Mason, 2006). Finally, pragmatism values research that can lead to practical applications and inform real-world practice. This study aims to generate knowledge that can be used to improve the design and implementation of sports-based interventions.

A significant aspect of this research is its action-oriented focus, aiming to provide practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners involved in designing and

implementing sports-based interventions. The emphasis on generating actionable knowledge that can inform practice and lead to positive social change is central to this goal (Mertens, 2009). By integrating this action-oriented perspective, the research seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, ultimately contributing to more effective strategies for enhancing social cohesion through sports.

The relevance of pragmatism to this study lies in its capacity to navigate the multifaceted nature of social phenomena, particularly in a setting where various social, cultural, and political factors converge (Gillespie et al., 2024). This adaptability ensures that the research design can evolve alongside the emerging insights from the field, leading to a better understanding of how sports can foster social cohesion. Through a commitment to practical solutions and the integration of diverse methodologies, this research aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the ongoing discourse on social cohesion and sustainable peace in Lebanon.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. This approach is particularly valuable in capturing both the richness of individual experiences, through qualitative data, and broader trends and patterns, through quantitative data (Mason, 2006). This methodological constructive collaboration is crucial for exploring social cohesion, as it allows for an examination of both interpersonal relationships and the structural factors that influence them.

The case study design facilitates an in-depth examination of a specific sports-based project, which include Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon, which aim at fostering social cohesion. This approach enables a focused exploration of the project's implementation, its impact on participants, and the contextual factors that contribute to its success or challenges. By delving deep into a particular case, this study aims to generate rich insights into the dynamics of social cohesion and the role of sports in fostering positive intergroup relations. The mixed-methods approach integrates primary qualitative data with secondary quantitative data to provide a more complete understanding of the impact of this specific sports-based project on social cohesion (Yin, 2018).

This study utilises a deductive approach, guided by the theoretical frameworks of Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and Social Capital Theory (Putnam,

2000; Bourdieu, 1986). These theories provide a lens for understanding how positive intergroup contact and the development of social capital can contribute to social cohesion. Contact Theory suggests that under certain conditions, intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. This theory will be used to analyse how sports-based interactions between Lebanese and Syrian refugees may lead to positive attitudinal and behavioural changes. In addition to, Social Capital Theory, emphasises the importance of social networks, trust, and reciprocity in building strong communities. This theory will be used to examine how participation in sports can create opportunities for building social capital between these two groups.

While deductive approaches offer valuable structure and a clear link between theory and empirical investigation, they also have limitations. One potential drawback is that a pre-existing theoretical framework may constrain the research, leading to a focus on confirming existing theories rather than exploring new possibilities. However, in this study, the deductive approach is employed strategically. By grounding the research in established theoretical frameworks, the study aims to provide a clear framework for analysis, enhance the rigor of the study, and contribute to theory development by testing these theoretical propositions in a new context. Ultimately, the deductive approach allows for a systematic examination of the relationship between sports participation and social cohesion, enabling the drawing of connections between theoretical constructs and empirical findings. This approach, combined with the pragmatic philosophy and mixed-methods design, provides a robust framework for investigating the potential of sports to foster social cohesion and contribute to sustainable peace in Lebanon.

2.2. Data Collection

The qualitative data collection for this study involved a combination of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, conducted between April 28th, 2024, and May 9th, 2024, in Beirut. This timeframe allowed for focused data collection while building upon the researcher's prior experience living in Beirut from August 23rd, 2023, to October 26th, 2023. During this earlier period, the researcher gained valuable familiarity with the cultural context and social dynamics relevant to the research, which informed the later stages of data collection and analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants, part of or participating in sports-activities at four main organisations, which included GAME

Lebanon, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Right to Play and Alsama Project. The participants included two groups, staff members and beneficiaries (Annexe F)

- Staff members: ten individuals involved in the implementation and evaluation of the sports-based project, including program coordinators, coaches, and trainers. They were recruited through contacting each organisation and arranging a time with the staff members that the organisation seem fitted. The interviews aimed to gain insights into their perspectives on the project's impact on social cohesion, methods for evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions, and strategies for adapting the program based on assessments. The inclusion of staff members in the study allowed for a deeper understanding of the project's goals, implementation strategies, and challenges, as well as the ways in which the project organisers themselves perceived the impact of the sports-based interventions on social cohesion and peacebuilding.
- Beneficiaries: ten individuals who had participated or were currently participating in the sports activities. Three beneficiaries started as participants when they were still younger and now they are currently working alongside the organisations, while the other seven were regular participants in the sports activities. All organisations were contacted first, informed about the beneficiaries' selection criteria and only then the interviews were schedule. The selection criteria included beneficiaries that were 18 years or older to ensure informed consent and the ability to participate in interviews, they needed to communicate effectively in English due to the researcher's limited proficiency in Arabic. This condition, while potentially limiting the diversity of the sample, facilitated a deeper understanding and a better understanding of the participant responses by enabling direct communication without a translator (Liamputtong, 2011).

Overall, the semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in exploring all participants' responses and pursuing emerging themes while ensuring that key topics related to the research objectives were addressed. The interviews were conducted in a conversational style, encouraging participants to share their experiences and perspectives openly and honestly.

Participant Observation was extremely important to gain a deeper understanding of the social dynamics and contextual factors influencing social cohesion within the sports-based program, participant observation was conducted at three sports events in Beirut.

The researcher attended the GAME Lebanon workshops for Playmakers (youth leaders), the JRS Sunday Cricket League and AlSama Cricket training. Detailed field notes were taken to document observations of the environment, participant interactions, and informal conversations, providing a description of the context and capturing the nuances of social dynamics within the sports programs. This allowed the researcher to observe firsthand the interactions between the participants, including Lebanese and Syrian refugees, the organisation and implementation of the sports activities, and the overall atmosphere of the events.

The observations provided valuable context for understanding the interview data and contributed to a more holistic understanding of the role of sports in promoting social cohesion. This approach aligns with Schulenkorf and Sherry's (2021) argument that are crucial for understanding the complexities of intergroup contact in sport-for-development settings and for capturing the nuances of social interaction and relationship-building within these programs. The observations also allowed for informal conversations with staff and beneficiaries, providing additional insights into their experiences and perspectives on the role of sports in promoting social cohesion.

The quantitative data were obtained from existing sources, such as reports from NGOs and NGOs, government statistics, and academic publications. These sources provided data on demographic information about participants, and measures of social cohesion or intergroup relations. The use of secondary quantitative data allowed for a broader contextualisation of the findings and provided a wider perspective on the impact of sports-based interventions on social cohesion in Lebanon.

2.3. Data Analysis

This study used a mixed-methods approach to data analysis, mixing both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sports can contribute to social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities for a sustainable peace. Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews and participant observation and analysed by using a thematic analysis. This method involved a systematic process of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data, which meant that thematic analysis went beyond simply describing the data, since it offered an interpretive approach that allows a deeper understanding of the meanings

and significance embedded within the participants' experiences and perspectives (Byrne, 2001).

In this study, the thematic analysis was conducted through a six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase involved familiarisation with the data. This meant immersing oneself in the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and field notes, taking notes, and reflecting on initial observations. The second phase is generating initial codes (in this research manually the codes manually generated). This involved identifying relevant features related to the research question and assigning labels to these features. codes (keywords), which are short, descriptive labels that help categorise and organise the data. For example, initial code include "intergroup connections," "trust," "shared goals," "cultural exchange," or "tolerance". The third phase involved searching for themes by gathering keywords into potential themes, collecting all data relevant to each potential theme, and identifying relationships between themes. Themes are broader patterns of meaning that emerge from the labelled data. For example, the keywords "intergroup connections" and "cultural exchange" are grouped under a theme of "Positive Intergroup Contact." The fourth phase was reviewing themes. The identified themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the meaning conveyed in the data and that they formed a coherent pattern. This involved refining, splitting, or merging themes. For example, the theme of "Positive Intergroup Contact" was refined to distinguish between different types of contact, such as " Connection Formation" and "Collaborative Activities.". The fifth phase was defining and naming themes. Each theme was defined and given a clear and concise name that captures its essence. This involved developing a detailed analysis of each theme, identifying its importance, and supporting it with relevant data extracts. For example, the theme of "Connection Formation" was defined as the development of close intergroups connections between Lebanese and Syrian refugee participants through shared experiences in the sports-based program. The final phase was writing, which involved merging the thematic analysis into a coherent narrative, supported by rich and descriptive data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This narrative connected the identified themes to the theoretical frameworks of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, which it explained how the findings contribute to our understanding of social cohesion in the context of the sports-based projects for a sustainable peace.

Through this rigorous process of thematic analysis, the study aimed to explore the following research questions: How does participation in the sports-based project influence relationships, attitudes, and interactions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee participants? This question was explored by examining themes related to intergroup contact, prejudice reduction, and the development of positive intergroup interactions, drawing on the principles of Contact Theory. How does participation in the sports program contribute to the creation of social networks, trust, and reciprocity between Lebanese and Syrian refugee participants? This question was addressed by examining themes related to the development of social capital and its influence on social cohesion, drawing on the principles of Social Capital Theory.

Quantitative data, obtained from secondary sources, such as reports and demographic data, was analysed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis. This analysis helped to identify trends and patterns related to participation rates, demographic characteristics of participants, and any available quantitative measures of social cohesion (Rihoux, 2006). The quantitative findings were used to provide context for the qualitative analysis and to triangulate the findings.

Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Jick, 1979). This involved utilizing multiple data sources (data triangulation), including interviews, observations, and secondary quantitative data, to ensure that the findings were consistent and robust. For instance, if qualitative data from interviews suggested that sports participation led to increased intergroup friendships, this conclusion was strengthened by quantitative data showing a positive correlation between sports participation and measures of social cohesion. Furthermore, investigator triangulation was employed by involving multiple researchers in the analysis process to ensure that the interpretation of the data was not influenced by individual biases. This multifaceted approach to triangulation strengthened the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from this research (Nightingale, 2020).

2.4. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study,

their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation (ISCTE-IUL, 2022). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research by securely storing data and using pseudonyms when agreed with the participant. The research followed the ethical guidelines (Annex A), of Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, also known as ISCTE-IUL.

2.5. Positionality and Limitations

Throughout the research process, the researcher demonstrated a commitment to reflexivity, continuously evaluating the role of the researcher to mitigate any unnecessary influence on data collection and interpretation. This reflective approach allowed critical examination of the researcher's positionality, ensuring that the research outcomes were not merely a reflection of the researcher's perspectives, but were firmly rooted in the lived experiences of the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The researcher's limited proficiency in Arabic required conducting interviews in English, which could have potentially shaped the participants' response, adding a degree of interpretive limitation. This linguistic constraint may have limited the depth of expression for some participants, particularly those with a stronger understanding in Arabic, and a limited understanding of English. Nonetheless, this limitation also presented a unique advantage, as engaging with the participants directly without a third-party enhanced the fluidity of the interviews, allowing for more comprehensive and considered insights without the potential bias of a translator interpretation. This direct interaction also facilitated a deeper connection and trust between the researcher and participants, enabling them to share more detailed and reflective responses. The lack of an intermediary allowed the researcher to maintain consistency and depth throughout the interview process, engaging in deeper follow-up questions when participants' responses indicated complex social dynamics. This approach provided a more detailed data for analysis, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

There were significant challenges accessing the field, due to the escalating conflict involving Israel and Lebanon. The volatile security situation required a shorter research trip than initially planned, as travel to Lebanon became restricted and safety concerns heightened. This limited timeframe reduced the scope of participant observation and may have constrained opportunities for deeper engagement with some communities. However, the concentrated fieldwork schedule allowed for focused observation within the accessible areas, and efforts were made to maximise data collection within the available

time. Although the relatively brief duration, of the field research period, could be seen as a limitation, the intensity of the schedule enhanced my observational focus, which facilitated the detection of subtle social interactions that may have been overlooked in a less concentrated study.

The specific context of sports-based projects in Lebanon, which involves interactions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities, presents another potential limitation, as the findings may have limited transferability to sports-based interventions in other countries with different social and political landscapes (Yin, 2018). However, by focusing on this specific case study, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the local dynamics that shape social cohesion efforts in Lebanon, thus offering practical, context-sensitive recommendations for policymakers and experts working in similar environments.

The inclusion of beneficiaries who were actively involved in the project as volunteers may have introduced potential bias, as these individuals may have had a vested interest in presenting the project in a favourable manner. However, their dual roles as both participants and facilitators offered an important insider's perspective on the social dynamics and organisational challenges within the project. This deeper understanding enabled the researcher to uncover the often-overlooked relational and operational details of the sports-based projects. While their insights may have been potentially biased, they were cross examined with data from regular participants to provide a more balanced assessment of the project's impact (Nightingale, 2020).

The reliance on secondary quantitative data does present certain limitations in terms of availability and scope (Ubaidullov, 2018). However, integrating this data with primary qualitative insights ensured a better and more comprehensive understanding of the research context. Despite the constraints in accessing updated quantitative data specific to Lebanon's refugee context, the available secondary data provided valuable broader perspectives, which were essential to provide contextual understanding of the interviews and observation findings.

Overall, while this research acknowledges some potential limitations, many of these constraints also offers opportunities for deeper insights, making the research more complete. The combination of reflexivity, direct engagement in data collection, and an intense yet focused research period allowed for a better understanding of the complexities of social cohesion Lebanon's context. By turning potential limitations into advantages,

this research contributes substantially to the broader understanding of how sports can improve social cohesion for a sustainable peace.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The increasing prevalence of humanitarian crisis, particularly in Lebanon, stresses the urgent need for innovative approaches to promote social cohesion and sustainable peace. Within this context, sports-based programs can be a valuable component of humanitarian action, offering opportunities for psychosocial support, education, and community building, while as sustainable peace (defined as a long-term state of harmony that addresses the root causes of conflict) plays a crucial role in shaping the goals of humanitarian assistance (Debarre, 2018).

This literature review will delve into the theoretical foundations of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, focusing on the mechanisms through which sports foster social connections and drawing on evidence from various contexts, specifically Lebanon. It also connects the concept of the triple nexus, which integrates humanitarian aid, development, and peace, to clarify the impact of sports on social cohesion for a sustainable peace.

The structure of the literature review unfolds as: First, it will address the global context and foundational aspects related to sports, social cohesion and sustainable peace (3.1.). Then, it will explore the relevance of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory within the context of sports and sustainable peace (3.2.). Next, it will then introduce the triple nexus, discussing its components and significance (3.3.). Finally, it will focus on existing sports-based programs in Lebanon (3.4.).

3.1. Sports for Social Cohesion and Sustainable Peace: Global Context and Foundation

To fully grasp the potential of sports-based programs, it is essential to first establish a clear understanding of the concepts of social cohesion, sustainable peace and other connected concepts. Social cohesion refers to a sense of solidarity among members of a community and the extent of connectedness, which is identified in two dimensions: the sense of belonging of a community and the relationships among members within the community itself (Manca, 2014). It is characterised by trust, mutual respect, a sense of belonging, and a shared identity. It is the glue that binds individuals and communities together, enabling them to function effectively and work towards common goals. Social cohesion is fundamental in order to build strong, resilient, and harmonious societies, by

fosters stability, reducing conflict, and promoting economic and social development (Fonseca et al., 2018).

As mentioned before, social cohesion is a multidimensional construct that encompasses the relational, normative, and affective dimensions of community life. Strong interpersonal ties, characterised by trust and reciprocity, are the foundation of social cohesion. Habib et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of social cohesion in promoting the health and well-being of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, highlighting its role in creating a supportive and protective environment. Shared values, such as a respect for diversity and a commitment to equality, establish a common foundation that enables individuals and communities to coalesce. Likewise, a sense of belonging, nurtured by a shared identity and the perception of being part of a broader community, reinforces social connections and facilitates collective efforts.

Social cohesion emphasises the connections and solidarity among members of a community, while inclusion ensures that all individuals, irrespective of their background or social standing, can actively participate in and derive benefits from these bonds. Fundamentally, inclusion is a necessary condition for genuine social cohesion. A society cannot be truly cohesive if it excludes certain groups or individuals from participating fully in it. This notion is supported by Djobova et al. (2020), who argue that social inclusion is essential for achieving social cohesion, as it ensures that all members of society feel valued and respected.

Promoting the active and equitable engagement of all individuals and groups, irrespective of their background, abilities or social status, is the essence of inclusion. It necessitates cultivating an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to society. Inclusion transcends mere tolerance; it involves embracing diversity and acknowledging the inherent value that varied perspectives and experiences bring to a community (Otten et al., 2018).

The relationship between social cohesion and inclusion is bidirectional. Inclusion fosters social cohesion by promoting understanding and respect, building trust, and strengthening communities. Inclusive environments encourage interaction and shared experiences between people from diverse backgrounds, breaking down stereotypes and prejudices. When everyone feels valued and respected, it fosters trust among community members, which is essential for social cohesion, making these communities more resilient and better

equipped to address challenges and achieve common goals (Fonseca et al., 2018). Simultaneously, social cohesion can cultivate inclusion by engendering a shared sense of identity and belonging that supersedes individual differences. When individuals feel a strong connection to their community, they are more likely to embrace diversity and be receptive to those who may differ from themselves. Social cohesion can help to overcome social barriers and foster a more inclusive societal environment where all feel a sense of belonging (Coalter, 2013).

Sport serves as a distinctive platform for fostering both social cohesion and inclusion. As Coalter (2013) highlights, the role of sport lies in cultivating a sense of community and shared identity, which are pivotal for social cohesion. Through sports, individuals from diverse backgrounds can unite, interact on an equal footing, and develop mutual respect and understanding. Furthermore, Schulenkorf (2010) emphasises the significance of interaction and shared experiences in promoting social cohesion among disparate communities. By encouraging participation from all members of society, sport can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and cohesive community where everyone feels valued and respected.

Sport's inclusive potential is particularly apparent in initiatives that target marginalised populations, such as refugees, women, and youth. By offering these groups opportunities to engage in sporting activities, SDP programmes can contribute to the disruption of social divides, the promotion of mutual understanding, and the cultivation of a heightened sense of belonging. For example, research by Djjobova et al. (2020) has highlighted the capacity of inclusive basketball programmes to enhance social capital and foster social inclusion within marginalised communities. Such initiatives not only promote the physical and mental well-being of participants but also create avenues for valuable social interaction and the development of essential life skills.

Sustainable peace goes beyond the mere absence of war (Sharifi et al., 2020). It encompasses positive relationships, the equitable distribution of resources, access to justice, and good governance. It is a dynamic process that requires continuous effort and investment in building inclusive and resilient societies. Sustainable peace is not simply the absence of war, referred to as negative peace, but the presence of just and equitable social structures that promote human flourishing, referred to as positive peace (Galtung, 1964, 1969). It requires addressing the root causes of conflict, such as inequality, injustice, and exclusion. Massey et al. (2016) highlight the importance of addressing

these root causes in promoting sustainable peace in conflict-affected regions. In the context of Lebanon, sustainable peace requires addressing the complex interplay of factors that contribute to social divisions and conflict, including sectarianism, political instability, and the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis (Baytiyeh, 2018).

Sports for development and peace initiatives play a vital role in fostering sustainable peace by providing safe spaces for dialogue and interaction, especially in conflict-affected or post-conflict communities. SDP initiatives have gathered considerable attention in recent decades for having the capacity to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, leading to the rise of numerous organisations and initiatives that use sports as a tool to address a wide range of social challenges, including conflict resolution, peacebuilding, health promotion, education, and social inclusion. (Levermore & Beacom, 2009).

On the other hand, while sports can foster reconciliation by uniting people across divides, in the Lebanese context, it often increases social divisions. This is particularly evident within professional leagues, where teams and fan bases align with sectarian identities, occasionally leading to heightened rivalries and even hostility, which contrasts with the aims of Sports for Development and Peace to promote social cohesion. Nonetheless, integrating sports into educational or community-based initiatives can serve as a potent mechanism for promoting healing and social cohesion, can make a constructive contribution to social dynamics and improve community resilience (Reiche, 2011). Kidd (2008) emphasises that SDP plays a crucial role in promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation, as it not only addresses the root causes of conflict but also fosters social cohesion, thereby contributing to sustainable peace.

The concept of sports for development and peace, gained significant attention, as the United Nations advocated for its role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, underscores the transformative potential of sports in fostering social cohesion and conflict resolution (Lemke, 2016). This approach recognises the inherent capacity of sports to bridge divides, promote understanding, and build a sense of shared identity and purpose among individuals and communities. By creating opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and shared experiences, sports can help to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and foster empathy, thereby contributing to a more peaceful and inclusive society.

Essentially, SDP involves utilizing the power of sport to address social issues and promote positive change. It is a multifaceted approach that encompasses various dimensions, including:

- Promoting physical and mental health: Sport and physical activity have been shown to have numerous physical and mental health benefits, including reducing stress, the risk of diseases, improving mental health, and promoting social and emotional well-being. (Bailey, 2006)
- Enhancing education: Sport can be a valuable tool for education, both in formal and non-formal settings. It can improve academic performance, increase school attendance, and promote the development of valuable life skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership (Coakley, 2021).
- Fostering social change: Sport can help to bridge divides between groups, promote understanding, and foster social cohesion. It can provide opportunities for marginalised groups, such as refugees, women, and youth, to empower them through sports by providing them with opportunities to participate, lead, and build confidence (Lyras & Peachey, 2011). Moreover, sports create opportunities for positive intergroup contact, which can reduce prejudice and enhance understanding, thereby promoting inclusion and social cohesion.
- Building peace: Sport can be a powerful tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. It can provide a safe and neutral space for individuals from different backgrounds to come together, interact, and build relationships. By fostering cooperation and teamwork, sport can help to create connections and overcome preconceived notions (Kidd, 2008).

SDP is based in the belief that sport has the power to transform lives and communities, recognising that sports are not just about competition and winning but also about participation, inclusion, and social development. These programs are designed to have a positive impact, by addressing social challenges and promote positive change. They are implemented in a variety of settings, including schools, community centres, refugee camps, and post-conflict zones. The effectiveness of SDP relies on well-designed and implemented programs that are tailored to the specific needs of the communities, fitted to each specific context. These programs often involve a combination of sports activities, educational workshops, and community engagement initiatives (Webb & Richelieu, 2016).

3.2. Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory in the Context of Sports

Earlier in the introduction chapter, the fundamentals principles of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory were outlined, providing a brief understanding of how these theories can inform the research. However, this section offers a detailed explanation of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory within the context of sports, social cohesion, and sustainable peace. Moreover, it will provide a better understanding of the connection between both individual and community-level dynamics essential for sustainable peace, while addressing the potential of sports as a catalyst for positive social change.

3.2.1. Contact Theory

Contact Theory, first introduced by Gordon Allport (1954), argues that intergroup contact, under specific conditions, can reduce prejudice and improve relations between groups. The theory suggests that structured interactions between groups can mitigate biases by exposing individuals to different perspectives, which promotes understanding and compassion. While initially applied in racial integration contexts, Contact Theory has since been used in various fields, including educational settings, organisational workplaces, and peacebuilding initiatives, such as Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) projects.

Allport (1954) outlined four ideal conditions for intergroup contact to be most effective:

- Equal Status: Participants from different groups should have equal status within the contact situation. This means that no group should be perceived as superior or inferior to the other.
- Common Goals: Participants should have shared goals and work cooperatively towards achieving those goals. This encourages collaboration and mutual support, fostering a sense of shared purpose.
- Cooperation: The interaction between participants should be cooperative rather than competitive. Promoting mutual respect and understanding, while avoiding the reinforcement of negative stereotypes.
- Support from Authorities: The contact situation should be supported by relevant authorities, laws, or customs. This provides legitimacy and stability to the contact situation, promoting a sense of security and trust.

In practice, Contact Theory is applied to numerous social interventions, where strategies are implemented to improve relationships between groups experiencing conflict or prejudice. For example, sports-based programs often use shared team goals and cooperation to encourage intergroup communication, allowing participants to see one another beyond stereotypical labels (Coakley, 2021).

Subsequent academic literature has both expanded and refined Contact Theory. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) comprehensive meta-analysis, which aggregated findings from over 500 studies, affirmed that intergroup contact generally reduces prejudice. Their research indicates that although Allport's four ideal conditions amplify the effectiveness of intergroup contact, they are not absolutely essential for achieving positive outcomes. Even minimal or less structured interactions between groups can still contribute to decreased prejudice, although the positive effects may be somewhat less effective (Yucel & Psaltis, 2020). Pettigrew (1998) also introduced the concept of "friendship potential," asserting that ongoing, close contact is particularly impactful in fostering long-term psychological and behavioural change.

Some scholars have offered critical perspectives on Contact Theory, however, arguing that it may be overly optimistic and context-dependent, with the potential for reinforcing power imbalances. Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2005) believe that intergroup contact may not always reduce tensions and could instead reinforce stereotypes and inequalities. They suggest that Contact Theory's effectiveness depends on both groups feeling equal and on strong institutional support for its goals.

Despite these criticisms, Contact Theory remains a widely supported framework for interventions aiming to foster cohesion between divided groups (Allport, 1954). It serves as a foundation for analysing social cohesion, offering insights into the ways in which intergroup interactions can either bridge or reinforce social divides (Schulenkorf & Sherry, 2020). Thus, Contact Theory provides a valuable lens for examining initiatives focused on breaking down barriers, particularly in contexts marked by historical or ongoing group tensions (Ramiah & Hewstone, 2013).

3.2.2. Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory provides an essential framework for understanding how social networks and community relationships foster trust, support and cooperation (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). Pioneered by academics Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and Robert Putnam

(2000), Social Capital Theory highlights the importance of interpersonal connections and common values in promoting social cohesion. Bourdieu viewed social capital as one's ability to gain resources through social networks, emphasising how such networks provide various benefits depending on one's position and influence within them. By contrast, Putnam's approach emphasised community-wide benefits, focusing on the role of social networks in generating societal trust and facilitating cooperative efforts, especially within diverse or polarized groups. In understanding the value of these networks in peacebuilding, Putnam's model, which encompasses bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, has become especially relevant (Putnam, 2000).

Putnam's three-part model of social capital includes bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, each with a specific role in strengthening community ties and supporting peacebuilding initiatives. Bonding social capital refers to close, often homogeneous connections within a specific group, such as tie or cultural affiliations. While strong and supportive, bonding capital can sometimes reinforce exclusivity, creating "in-group" loyalty that may limit broader social integration (Portes, 1998). In contexts involving Syrian and Lebanese communities, for instance, bonding social capital can reinforce internal group solidarity among Syrian refugees, creating a support network which alleviates certain challenges encountered during displacement. However, excessive reliance on bonding capital can sometimes contribute to social fragmentation if it limits intergroup interactions (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016).

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, consists of connections that cross social or cultural divides, such as between Syrian refugees and Lebanese nationals. In this context, bridging capital is often seen as critical for fostering understanding, empathy, and cooperation across group boundaries. Sports-based initiatives, where individuals from different backgrounds come together to achieve common goals, have been shown to facilitate bridging capital, thereby reducing stereotypes and prejudices between groups (Coakley, 2011). For example, a study by Djobova, Borukova, and Kirilova (2020) examined the role of inclusive basketball programs in building social capital among youth with and without disabilities. The researchers found that participating in these programs led to increased interaction and friendships between the two groups, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging. This research highlights the potential of sports to create bridging social capital and promote inclusion across social divides. Bridging capital's role in conflict zones has been widely studied, with scholars noting that structured contact

underpinned by shared objectives can improve attitudes and relationships between previously opposed groups (Putnam, 2000).

Lastly, linking social capital refers to connections that cross formal power structures, connecting individuals to institutions, organisations, and other entities with authority. This type of social capital is essential for providing marginalised communities access to resources, influence, and support. Within sports-based programs, linking social capital can manifest as relationships between participants and local NGOs, governmental bodies, or community organisations. Such connections not only enhance the legitimacy of peacebuilding initiatives but also provide participants with access to resources that can foster stability and support long-term integration efforts (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). In refugee contexts, linking social capital often will enable communities to interact with authority figures, of the organisations, in ways that strengthen institutional trust and the effectiveness of social programs.

In the context of sports for development and peace initiatives, social capital theory provides a valuable analytical lens for understanding how sports can foster social cohesion and support peacebuilding goals. Some studies suggest that structured sports programs create environments encouraging to forming all three types of social capital. Programs that encourage participants to work towards shared objectives enable bridging social capital, as individuals from diverse backgrounds engage in cooperative efforts. This interaction can help reduce prejudices and challenge preconceived notions, meaningful when teams include individuals from communities that have been in conflict, as such collaborations can foster understanding and reduce tensions (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2018). Sports-based initiatives have been used in various global settings to foster community cohesion and provide safe spaces for intergroup interaction, making them effective tools in SDP contexts (Coalter, 2013).

On the other hand, its widespread use, faces several critics, which argue that bonding social capital, while strengthening group solidarity, can sometimes reduce broader social integration by fostering exclusivity and an inward focus (Portes, 1998). In contexts where refugees rely heavily on bonding capital, this can limit their interaction with host communities, potentially reinforcing social divides rather than bridging them. Furthermore, academics like Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2005) warn that, in certain scenarios, intergroup interactions might fail to reduce tensions or even reinforce existing

stereotypes. They believe that while bridging capital is beneficial, it requires careful structuring to avoid reinforcing power imbalances or existing prejudices.

Regardless of these critiques, social capital theory remains an important framework for understanding and implementing peacebuilding and cohesion-focused programs. The theory's distinctions between bonding, bridging, and linking capital help to identify and address the ways in which sports-based initiatives can promote social cohesion. By enabling diverse groups to form connections across multiple levels, social capital theory offers critical insights into how structured social programs can mitigate conflict and build stronger, more inclusive communities.

3.2.3. The Interplay of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory

The interplay between Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory is particularly significant in the context of sports-based programs, as it reveals how personal interactions fostered through sports can build a wider social networks essential for community cohesion. This synergy enables a deeper understanding of how individual experiences contribute to collective social change, particularly in diverse and conflict-affected communities.

As previously mentioned, sports offer opportunities for meaningful individual-level interactions that are consistent with the principles of Contact Theory. When individuals from different backgrounds participate in team sports, they engage in structured activities that necessitate cooperation and communication. This process not only enhances mutual understanding but also helps dismantle entrenched stereotypes, as individuals learn to appreciate each other's strengths and perspectives (Coakley, 2011). The friendships formed in these settings often extend beyond the playing field, nurturing a culture of trust and respect that is foundational for long-term social cohesion.

On the community level, the implications of these individual interactions become evident through the lens of Social Capital Theory. The networks cultivated within sports contexts can significantly enhance both bridging and bonding social capital. While bridging capital facilitates connections between diverse groups, bonding capital strengthens relationships within existing groups, which can be equally crucial for instilling a sense of belonging and support among refugee populations. This bridging social capital is pivotal for fostering inclusivity, as it enables diverse groups to collaborate and work towards shared objectives. In conflict-affected settings, such as those involving Syrian refugees in

Lebanon, bridging social capital can be particularly transformative. It not only facilitates social integration but also bolsters resilience in the face of adversity by fortifying community bonds (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2018).

Moreover, the long-term impact of sports-based projects is a pivotal area where these theories intersect. While the immediate effects of sports—such as increased interaction and reduced prejudice—are well-documented, the sustained benefits that emerge from these programs are equally important. Research indicates that the social networks formed through sports can evolve into enduring relationships that encourage community solidarity and resilience over time (Coalter, 2013). This long-term aspect is essential for understanding how sports initiatives contribute to sustainable peace and social cohesion, particularly in contexts marked by historical divisions and conflict.

The integration of Contact and Social Capital Theories also sheds light on the potential for sports to act as a bridge in fostering social inclusion. As participants engage in sports together, they foster a sense of belonging that transcends individual identities. This collective identity, often forged through shared experiences and mutual support, can enhance social cohesion by fostering a culture of inclusion and cooperation. In this way, sports serve as a powerful tool for bridging divides, encouraging diverse groups to collaborate in pursuit of shared objectives (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of sports reinforces the importance of community involvement in shaping successful interventions. When local organisations, schools, and community leaders support sports initiatives, they can help establish the legitimacy and sustainability of these programs. In Lebanon, collaboration between NGOs, community centres, and local authorities is crucial for ensuring that sports programs are accessible and beneficial to both Lebanese and Syrian communities. This support improves the potential for bridging and linking social capital, creating pathways for marginalized individuals to access resources, services, and opportunities that contribute to their long-term integration (Djobova, Borukova, & Kirilova, 2020).

Overall, the interplay between Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory in the context of sports-based interventions underlines the vital role of both individual and community dynamics in fostering social cohesion. By exploring how personal interactions through sports lead to the development of robust social networks, this integrated perspective provides a richer understanding of the transformative potential of sports in promoting

sustainable peace and social integration within diverse communities. Specifically, this framework highlights how sports can contribute to positive intergroup relations, build community resilience, and foster a sense of shared identity among Lebanese and Syrian refugees. By facilitating both individual connections and broader social networks, sports can play a crucial role in achieving sustainable peace and social cohesion in Lebanon. Through sustained engagement and support, sports can serve as a powerful catalyst for fostering short and long-term social change, ultimately bridging divides and building more inclusive and cohesive societies.

3.3. Triple-Nexus

In the face of the current events and the increasingly complex humanitarian crises, in Lebanon, it is necessary to understand the concept of triple nexus concept. This concept seeks to bridge the divide between humanitarian, development, and peace to address the interconnections between the three components and achieve more effective and sustainable solutions, recognising the strong interrelationship between these areas and the need for greater collaboration across them (Brown et al., 2024). This section delves into the triple nexus concept, exploring its origins, principles, challenges, and opportunities, with a specific focus on its relevance and application in the Lebanese context.

3.3.1. Introducing the Triple Nexus

The triple nexus is a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility, promoting resilience, and building sustainable peace. It recognizes that humanitarian action, development, and peace are not separate and distinct components but rather interconnected and mutually reinforcing components of a comprehensive response to complex crises (Howe, 2019). By working together, these three concepts can create a collaboration that enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions, ensuring that immediate needs are met while simultaneously addressing the underlying causes of conflict and promoting long-term peace, which called for a greater emphasised in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (The ICRC and the “humanitarian–development–peace nexus” discussion, 2019). The triple nexus has gained significant importance within the humanitarian community, with various organisations and donors advocating for its adoption as a guiding framework for interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (Brown et al., 2024).

The triple nexus is highly relevant in Lebanon, due to the complex influx of a large refugee population, which has not only created humanitarian needs but has also intensified existing challenges, including in social cohesion. One of the key strengths of the triple nexus is its alignment with the core humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence (European commission, 2023). These principles are essential for ensuring that humanitarian action reaches those most in need, regardless of their political affiliation, ethnicity, or other distinctions. The triple nexus, by promoting coherence and collaboration between humanitarian, development, and peace actors, can help uphold these principles and ensure that interventions are needs-based and principled (Lie, 2020).

3.3.2. Challenges and Opportunities of the Triple Nexus

While the triple nexus offers a promising model for addressing complex humanitarian crises, its implementation faces certain challenges. A primary concern is the potential blur of sectoral boundaries, which may compromise the fundamental principles underpinning humanitarian action. There is a risk that the urgent needs of affected populations could be overshadowed by development or peace objectives, potentially leading to humanitarian actors facing pressure to align themselves with specific parties in ongoing conflicts, thereby undermining their essential neutrality (Brown et al., 2024). It is pivotal to ensure that the triple nexus is implemented in a way that respects humanitarian principles and prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable, especially in contexts like Lebanon, where political and social complexities are intertwined with humanitarian challenges.

Another challenge lies in the importance of effectively coordinating and collaborating between different actors, as each component should be complementary and connected. Achieving this can be difficult, as these components often have distinguished mandates, funding, and operational practices (Brown et al., 2024). Establishing trust and constructing effective coordination mechanisms are crucial, especially in the Lebanese context, where a multitude of stakeholders, including international organisations, non-governmental entities, and governmental agencies, should be engaging in addressing the Syrian refugee community.

Despite these challenges, the Triple Nexus framework presents notable opportunities to bolster the efficacy and longevity of interventions in humanitarian contexts. By synthesising humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding initiatives, the approach can enhance efficiency through the avoidance of duplicated efforts and optimal resource

utilisation. Additionally, the Triple Nexus framework can enhance the coherence of interventions by ensuring they are harmonised and mutually reinforcing (Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). Crucially, the approach also promotes sustainability by addressing the underlying causes of conflict and instability, thereby contributing to long-term stability and peace.

3.3.3. Sports as a Tool for Triple Nexus

Sports-based initiatives provide a compelling pathway to advance the triple nexus and foster a comprehensive approach to humanitarian action. By leveraging the core values inherent in sport activities, -such as teamwork, fair play, and mutual respect-, humanitarian actors can use the potential of sports to promote social cohesion, cultivate resilience, and support peace within vulnerable communities. Incorporating sports into the triple nexus concept has beneficial outcomes across its constituent elements (Howe, 2019).

Firstly, sports can significantly enhance humanitarian goals. Participation in sports provides psychosocial support for those impacted by conflict and displacement, assisting individuals in processing trauma, building resilience, and regaining a sense of normalcy in their lives (Sachs et al., n.d). This is particularly beneficial for children and young people, who derive health-promoting benefits from sports as well as the safe and structured environments they foster. Furthermore, sports can play a crucial role in fostering education, personal development, and empowerment for marginalised populations (Reynard, 2020). They support the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, promote skill development, and create pathways for economic opportunities and livelihoods within affected communities. By establishing environments conducive to learning and growth (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2018).

Furthermore, sports have emerged as a tool to bridge social divides, facilitate constructive dialogue, and challenge stereotypes, fostering trust and cooperation crucial for reconciliation. This approach aligns with the evolving field of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), which leverages the unique potential of sports to contribute to humanitarian relief (e.g., Right To Play), post-war reconciliation (e.g., Playing for Peace), and broad social development initiatives (e.g., Kicking AIDS Out) (Kidd, 2008). By incorporating sports into humanitarian initiatives within the triple nexus framework, practitioners can use its capacity to foster social cohesion, develop resilience, and support lasting peace, particularly in refugee and displacement contexts. For example, in Lebanon, where

certain organisations use sports to reinforce social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees (UNICEF, 2019), demonstrating how sports-based approaches can align with the comprehensive and balanced objectives of the triple nexus. By embracing the triple nexus and adapting it to the specific context of Lebanon, humanitarian actors can contribute to building a more peaceful and cohesive society for the communities. The triple nexus offers a framework for short-term and long-term solutions, while addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility, hereby facilitating sustainable peace (ALEF, 2024).

3.4. Sports-Based Interventions in Lebanon

In Lebanon, sports-based programs play a significant role in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis. These programs align with the “triple nexus” framework, which integrates humanitarian, development, and peace efforts to build resilient, inclusive communities (World Vision, 2022). Lebanon’s unique social landscape provides a complex environment where sports can serve as an effective tool for fostering trust, integration, and resilience (Baytiyeh, 2018).

These initiatives operate on multiple levels, addressing physical and mental health, enhancing social skills, and reducing intergroup prejudice. For example, organisations like GAME Lebanon, UNICEF, the Jesuit Refugee Service, Right to Play Lebanon, Alsama Project and Just Childhood design programs that foster safe spaces for refugees, migrants and youth to engage in inclusive activities. Through shared sports experiences, participants are encouraged to form meaningful bonds that challenge existing stereotypes and reduce social divides. Research suggests that these sports initiatives create environments conducive to positive social interaction, breaking down barriers and facilitating understanding among individuals from diverse backgrounds (Coakley, 2011).

The effectiveness of sports-based programs in Lebanon varies, often shaped by the specific approach and resources available. GAME Lebanon, for instance, uses street sports to engage Lebanese and Syrian youth, prioritizing inclusivity and community engagement. GAME’s model focuses on non-competitive sports, fostering cooperation and mutual respect among participants. These activities are designed to help individuals see each other as equals, promoting a sense of shared community rather than reinforcing social divides (GAME Lebanon, n.d.).

UNICEF’s sports program, particularly football, also played a significant role in Lebanon’s efforts to foster social cohesion. These programs aimed to provide a sense of

normality, support mental health, and build resilience among young participants affected by displacement. Through football, UNICEF offered Syrian and Lebanese youth structured opportunities to engage in teamwork, developing social connections and skills that extend beyond the sports field (UNICEF, 2016). The sports activities also provide an avenue for self-expression and emotional release, helping children cope with the stresses of their environments.

Just Childhood's skateboarding program, developed in collaboration with Make Life Skate Life, provides a safe and inclusive space for children and youth in the Palestinian refugee camps of Beirut. Recognizing the limited access to recreational activities and the particular exclusion of girls and children with disabilities, Just Childhood's program empowers marginalized groups through sports. By constructing Lebanon's first public skatepark, they address the psychosocial needs of these youth while fostering social cohesion within the community (Just Childhood, n.d.).

Additionally, The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) bring unique elements to this effort, since it focusses on providing space spaces, while helping participants process their experiences through structured physical activities, such as their Sunday cricket program where men and women play cricket in a safe environment and accessible (JRS, n.d.). Right to Play similarly offers play-based learning activities to develop social and emotional skills essential for resilience (Right To Play, n.d.). Through sports, Right to Play has successfully demonstrated the potential of play-based programs to create long-term social cohesion among diverse communities in Lebanon.

Lastly, the Alsama Project operates in refugee camps and densely populated urban areas, combining sports with academic support to promote holistic development for participants. By pairing sports activities with educational programs, the Alsama Project addresses both immediate and long-term needs, equipping refugees with the skills necessary for a better integration. An integrated approach which that contributes for Syrian refugees youth inclusion in the Lebanese society and promotes empowerment and encourages mutual respect (Alsama Project, n.d.).

In conclusion, sports-based programs in Lebanon represent promising models for fostering social cohesion for a long-lasting peace. By addressing both the psychosocial needs of youth and broader goals of social integration and community resilience, these initiatives highlight the potential of sports to bridge divides in conflict-affected societies.

Chapter 4: Findings and Result Analysis

This chapter reports the results of the research conducted to explore how sports can improve social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This chapter presents the key findings of the research, integrating data from semi-structured interviews and participant observations with insights from secondary sources. The analysis is guided by the theoretical frameworks of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, elucidating how sports-based programs contribute to social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 4.1 delves into the insights gained from the semi-structured interviews, organized thematically based on the analysis. Section 4.2 shares observations from the sports-based programs attended, describing the interactions, organisation, and overall atmosphere. Section 4.3 presents the results through the lens of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory, demonstrating how the programs fostered intergroup contact and the development of social capital, including bonding, bridging, and linking capital, among participants. Section 4.4 acknowledges challenges and limitations encountered in program implementation or outcomes. Section 4.5 explores the long-term impact of the programs and discusses the potential for sustained benefits and factors contributing to sustainability.

4.1. Result Analysis of Interview Data

As a theme-centred study, it was crucial to start by recognizing shared themes through the coding system, in which the data was analysis, while maintaining the participants experiences (Annex B).

1. Sports Participation Experiences
2. Impact of Sports on Social Cohesion
3. Barriers to Participation
4. Impact of Sports on Attitudes and Behaviours
5. Role of Sports in Bridging Divides
6. Challenges and Barriers
7. Measuring Success and Effectiveness
8. Effective Sports and Activities
9. Future of Sports-Based Initiatives

4.1.1. Sports Participation Experiences

A 25-year-old Syrian refugee who has been actively involved in sports-based programs, at GAME Lebanon, for several years, shared her personal journey of growth and transformation through sports. She started participating in the GAME Lebanon sports activities because her friend from Karantina zone, in Beirut, also attended to the sports session. Eventually she progressed into a leadership role as a zone manager. This transition not only reflects her personal development but also highlights the potential for sports-based programs to empower individuals and foster leadership skills. She mentioned a significant event that brought together around 200 children (10 to 16 years old) from diverse backgrounds, including Lebanese and Syrian refugees. Furthermore, she highlighted how sports got her a sense of responsibility and acceptance, changing her perspective.

Another participant, who is 20 years old Lebanese and has been involved in sports-based programs for seven years, shared his journey from being a participant/player to becoming a playmaker, giving him bigger sense of social responsibility. He emphasised the importance of accepting all people, regardless of their background, and how sports have contributed to his personal growth and development. This highlights the role of sports in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity.

Two 18-year-old Syrian refugees, who participate in the Alsama project, highlighted how sports provided them with a much-needed outlet for fun and stress relief amidst the challenges they faced. They also emphasised the importance of creating mixed teams while ensuring the safety and inclusion of all participants.

A 25-year-old Lebanese participant, of GAME Lebanon, who joined a sports program at the age of 15 years old and later became a staff member, emphasised how sports provided him with a sense of community and helped him develop valuable skills for the future.

Overall, the sports experiences shared by participants have had a largely beneficial impact, positively influencing various aspects of their lives. Many participants described these experiences as transformative, often emphasising the role of sports in fostering personal growth, building stronger social connections, and enhancing their sense of well-being. Even though there was one participant that mentioned having to deal with a

negative situation in the beginning, afterwards the situation was solved. So the majority reflected on how these activities contributed to a deeper sense of inclusion, belonging, and personal development, highlighting the meaningful, lasting effects of their involvement in sports programs.

4.1.2. Impact of Sports on Social Cohesion

The 20-year-old Lebanese who has been involved in sports-based programs for seven years, highlighted how sports can bring people together, stating that "(...) a lot of the kids just want to play, so they will play with different nationalities." This quote shows how sports can transcend national and ethnic differences, providing a common ground for individuals to connect and build relationships based on shared interests and goals rather than divisive labels. He further emphasised the role of sports in promoting peace and acceptance by mentioning an (sports)academy that actively encourages these values, which is Play4Peace. This suggests that sports-based programs can be intentionally designed to foster positive social interactions and instil values that contribute to social cohesion. In addition to his insights, other participants agreed the sentiment that sports have a unique ability to bridge divides and promote understanding. The 25 years old Syrian refugee, participant at GAME Lebanon, described a significant event, which was when she started realising that she had friends from many different regions in Lebanon because of the sports-based program, saying “(...) I created more connections, and I made friends from different part of the country. I made a lot of friends now, and from very different parts of the country. As you know Lebanon is a country, where different regions have very different cultures, religions and beliefs so if you visit a different region you are an intruder.”. This shows two main things, which are the still existing need to include Syrian refugee in the quotas of the sports-based programs, but on the other hand it shows how sports-based programs can create inclusive and cohesive spaces where individuals from different backgrounds can interact on an equal footing, fostering a sense of shared identity and community.

Moreover, 6 staff members of GAME Lebanon and Right to Play involved in organizing sports-based programs also emphasised the role of sports in promoting social cohesion and stated that "Sports can give them an identity and a sense of community." underscoring the potential of sports to create a common ground for individuals from diverse

backgrounds. This highlights how sports can transcend cultural and national differences, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose among participants.

Overall, the interviews revealed a strong consensus among both beneficiaries and staff members regarding the positive impact of sports on social cohesion. The experiences and insights shared by the participants highlight the power of sports to bring people together, break down barriers, and promote understanding and unity among diverse groups.

The sense of unity fostered through sports extends beyond personal anecdotes; it is a shared sentiment among the participants that reinforces the idea that engagement in sports activities transcends cultural and national identities. This perspective aligns with the findings from various studies that underline sports' capacity to bring diverse communities together, providing a foundation for mutual respect and understanding.

4.1.3. Barriers to Participation

Despite the evident benefits of sports in promoting social cohesion, participants also highlighted several barriers that hindered their engagement in sports-based activities.

The 20-year-old Lebanese, as shared his observation that some football academies, of first and second division, only accept Lebanese people, creating a barrier for other nationalities. This highlights the issue of exclusion and limited access to certain sports programs based on nationality, holding back the potential for social cohesion through sports.

Seven participants and six staff members have mentioned the cultural norms and expectations, particularly concerning girls' participation in sports, as a barrier. This highlights the influence of societal norms and gender stereotypes on limiting access to sports for certain groups, particularly girls and women. The 25-year-old Syrian refugee participant shared her experience of facing challenges in encouraging girls to participate in sports. She noted that while boys tend to participate promptly, girls require more encouragement and support to overcome cultural barriers and build confidence. Additionally, one of the GAME Lebanon staff, who has also gone from beneficiary to staff member, emphasised the importance of addressing cultural barriers and empowering girls through sports. She recommended involving sports influencers to reach more youth

and inspire them to participate, particularly girls who may face additional challenges due to cultural norms.

In the Alsama Project two 18 year old Syrian refugee mentioned that youth needs the consent from the parents, which mean that if the parents do not wish to let them participate they will not give the parental consent, hence it is so important to build trust with the families to ensure the inclusion of girls in sports programs, given that some parents do not want their daughter to play sports. Six member of staff, GAME Lebanon, Alsama, and Right to Play, have referred the same issue saying “(...) usually welcomed but we had some challenges with some refugees camp because of gender norms.”.

Additional, one of the biggest worries that could affect the participation on the activities, is ensuring beneficiaries safety, if the spaces are not space or in the moment is not safe to have Syrian and Lebanese in the same activities, they simply will not be happening. For example, from the 9th of April till May 2024, some sports activities had to be cancelled especially in the Bourj Hammoud area of Beirut. Due to the killing of Pascal Sleiman, a senior figure in the Christian Lebanese Forces party, who was abducted and killed sparking outrage among the Christian population in Lebanon, turning their anger on Syrian refugees. To ensure the safety of the participant and the staff some activities were postponed as the NGO needs to ensure the safety of people in their activities and environment.

Overall, these insights from the beneficiaries highlight the importance of addressing various barriers to participation in sports-based programs. Overcoming these barriers, whether they stem from nationality, cultural norms, or community perceptions, is crucial to ensuring inclusivity and maximizing the potential of sports to promote social cohesion and sustainable peace.

4.1.4. Impact of Sports on Attitudes and Behaviours

Participants shared insights into how their involvement in sports has positively influenced their attitudes and behaviours within their communities.

Seven of the ten beneficiaries have mentioned the importance of acceptance, stating, that sports had taught them to embrace people with different background. Additionally, 8 staff from JRS, Right to Play Lebanon, Alsama Project and GAME Lebanon mentioned, that

their will to play is bigger than their differences so when you play team sports like football and basketball they are more likely to start dialogue. This experience seems to be recurrent under the scope of wanting to play sports, not matter with who, showing that sports can promote tolerance and understanding among youth, cultivating an environment where differences are celebrated.

As mentioned previously, two of the beneficiaries at GAME Lebanon highlighted those sports gave them a sense of responsibility and acceptance. This suggests that sports can contribute to personal growth, promoting values such as responsibility, acceptance, and openness to others. Additionally, two staff members of GAME Lebanon who used to be beneficiaries when they were teenager, described how their involvement in sports helped them develop leadership skills and become a role model for younger children, contributing to the growth and strengthening of the community. This highlights the potential for sports to empower individuals and foster leadership qualities, which can positively impact community dynamics.

The two migrants, who participate in the JRS Sunday Cricket League, shared how participating in sports teams helped them gain confidence and build a supportive community. This highlights the social and emotional benefits of sports, which can contribute to positive attitudes and behaviours by fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth. They emphasized how sports provided them with a sense of fun and stress relief, helping them cope with challenges and develop valuable skills. This suggests that sports can have a positive impact on mental well-being and contribute to a more positive outlook on life.

The two 18-year-old Syrian refugees that participate on the Alsama Project, mentioned that sports are an escape from their household which make them more interested in building ties within their sports community.

Moreover, other participants noted that sports have helped them develop essential leadership skills, boost their confidence, and build robust relationships with peers from diverse backgrounds. These outcomes highlight sports' capacity to nurture personal development while fostering a sense of community and shared purpose among participants. By engaging in sports, individuals are not merely enhancing their physical

abilities, but they are also acquiring valuable life skills that extend beyond the playing field, including conflict management.

4.1.5. Role of Sports in Bridging Divides

Staff members of all four organisations consistently referred to sports' power to bridge divides and promote unity between Lebanese and Syrian refugees. A staff member of GAME Lebanon, articulated this sentiment, stating, "Sports can give them one identity, as in one team together." This perspective reflects the potential of sports to create a shared identity, sense of belonging among individuals from differed backgrounds, transcending cultural and national differences. By participating in sports, individuals can forge connections that are grounded in common experiences and aspirations, ultimately fostering a sense of unity and collective identity. Additionally, one of the beneficiaries helps organise the Sunday Cricket League, mentioned that "when we play cricket there are no differences, we only want to win as a team (...) when we have someone breaking the rules or having a disagreement we talk with the captains, and they are the bridge between other teams." In this case even when sports might get competitive the captains are still there to connect to each team and solve the problem, creating more space for dialogue and understanding.

Seven staff members, from Right to Play Lebanon, Alsama and GAME Lebanon, mentioned the importance of open practices for young people, stating that it "allows for dialogue from a young age and fosters respect." This highlights how sports can create opportunities for meaningful interactions and cultural exchange, contributing to greater understanding and acceptance between Lebanese and Syrian participants.

All ten beneficiaries believe that the sports activities that they have participated in have made them closer to people that before they would not be friends with. This was described by the beneficiaries as "the positive connections" that led them to feel more comfortable with a different dialogue. The ten beneficiaries mentioned their experience in these sport-based programs have been crucial into bringing Lebanese and Syrian refugee together to have an open dialogue, while supported by the organisations neutral space.

The idea that sports serve as a unifying force is further supported by majority of the interviewees, nonetheless three out ten staff that have mentioned that sports can be a tool

to bridge divides but should be accompanied by education studies or advocacy workshop. These three staff members did believe that sports are able to connect people, and bridge divides by following games specific strategy and workshops that would be talked about tolerance, respect and helping the next one, for example earlier mentioned the 200 people event at GAME Lebanon Beirut (on page 37). Accompanied by exercises of team building in youth sports engagement can help breaking down social barriers and encourage interaction among disparate groups. The ability of sports to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between individuals from different cultural backgrounds shows its significance as a tool for reconciliation and social cohesion.

4 .1.6. Challenges and Barriers in Implementation

While the positive impacts of sports-based interventions are evident, staff members acknowledged various challenges encountered in implementing these programs.

-Lack of public spaces: this issue was mentioned by 10 staff members and by three beneficiaries. Without public places for the youth to play it is not possible to do the projects planned events or activities. On top of that when the organisations require permission to do the sport-based activity, the NGO will have to deal with the municipality of Lebanon. For example, the staff members apart from one Alsama staff member, mentioned some municipalities that they try to work with, will not accept the Syrian refugees to join. It would only be accepted if it was a Lebanese only project. The 30-year-old GAME Lebanon staff stated “Many Municipalities do not want to have activities that are inclusive. Municipalities are political so some do not want to change the demographics, for example by integrate more Muslims in a Christian area or Sunni area in a Shiah area (each group follows a different interpretation of Islam). The municipality does not want to change these demographics because they need votes”. Overall, one of the main challenges is the negotiations within apolitical context, that often doesn’t want to integrate the Syrian refugees.

-Community resistance and tensions: It is important to give space for the Syrian refugees to go to school and to go to work will integrate Syrian refugees, since it was mentioned, by two staff members of Right to Play Lebanon and GAME Lebanon, that “a big percentage of Lebanese does not agree with the integration of Syrian refugees, they want them to go back to their country”. Furthermore, two of the Right to Play staff

members addressed the increasing tensions between the Syrian refugees and Lebanese, by saying that with challenges the country has gone through and the increase security instability in the country, the “hate” towards non-Lebanese, especially Syrian refugees, has increased.

Accessibility issues emerged as a significant concern, particularly regarding the availability of suitable venues for sports activities. Some staff members noted that “the lack of public spaces and difficulties in obtaining authorization from municipalities to use certain spaces posed challenges to organising sports activities.” These challenges can impede the effectiveness of sports programs and limits it, nonetheless, all organisations made clear, that is their project cannot include non-Lebanese, they would not be opening the activities.

-Cultural norms: five staff members (one from Alsama, one from GAME Lebanon, one from JRS and two from Right to Play mentioned the cultural norms challenges when implementing a sports-based program. These challenges require a comprehensive approach that involves engaging local communities and stakeholders to foster an environment conducive to participation and inclusivity. By creating trust with the community, these barriers can be overcome, leading to sports initiatives better serving their intended purpose of promoting social cohesion and integration.

4.1.7. Measuring Success and Effectiveness

The staff members explained that their organisations use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to measure the success and effectiveness of their programs. These methods included surveys, interviews, and quantitative data analysis.

One staff member mentioned the use of "pre- and post-service surveys to assess the impact of sports-based interventions on participants attitudes and behaviours. For example, one of the projects that we measure the success of was through a survey applied to everyone, and interviews with different questions regarding social cohesion in order to understand their change, after the data collection we used a software to analyse it. Our pre-survey indicated that 70% of the Lebanese did not want to play with children from other group and 90 % of the Syrian refugees wanted to play with children from another group. In the post-survey the on Lebanese scored lower on the section of not wanting to

play with kids from other groups, so in this case we could see based on the data that the sports-based activities were creating more acceptance”.

Another staff member from JRS highlighted the importance of monitoring participation rates and tracking the long-term engagement of individuals in sports activities. This quantitative data can provide insights into the reach and sustainability of sports-based interventions.

Right to Play staff mentioned that qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, were also used to gather in-depth information on participants' experiences and perceptions of the programs. These qualitative insights provide a richer understanding of the impact of sports on individuals and communities, complementing the quantitative data.

Overall, organisations employed various indicators and evaluation methods to assess the effectiveness of their programs in promoting social cohesion and peace among participants. Other organizations used standardised tools and frameworks to measure social cohesion and reconciliation outcomes. Others developed their own evaluation frameworks tailored to their specific program objectives and contexts.

4.1.8. Effective Sports and Activities

Staff members discussed various sports and activities that have been particularly effective in fostering unity and social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees. 90% of the staff and the beneficiaries chose football and basketball, for the best choice of sport for Syrian refugees and Lebanese. The other 10% of staff and beneficiaries suggested the use of Cricket and Athleticism activities. On the one hand, football and basketball seems like the best option given that it has a very big fan base and people like to “gather people in matches and create opportunities for interaction.”. This potential opportunity, given its popularity of a team sports highlights the likelihood to engage with participants and foster a sense of community through shared interests. However, on the other hand, the idea of creating an activity with sports that are not as known would be a great middle-term, like mentioned by the two 18-year-old beneficiaries at Alsama.

Moreover, the choice of sports activities plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of initiatives. By selecting sports that resonate with participants and

facilitate engagement, programs can maximise their impact on social cohesion and community building.

Staff members shared perspectives on how sports have positively impacted the lives of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. They noted that sports can contribute to personal growth, social inclusion, and the development of valuable skills. One staff member described how sports helped Syrian refugee participants develop leadership skills and become role models for younger children. It creates a community engagement and trust, factor, emphasising the importance of building a self-sufficient community and collaboration among stakeholders. Two GAME Lebanon staff members stressed the necessity of “building trust between parents, leaders, and players,” as this strengthens the sense of community and fosters a supportive environment for participation. Strong leadership and long-term commitment were also cited as essential components for sustaining sports programs. By ensuring consistent leadership and ongoing investment in the initiatives, organizations can enhance the likelihood of reaching more people and foster a sense of ownership among participants and community members.

Additionally, the effectiveness of mixed teams in promoting social cohesion and understanding between Lebanese and Syrian refugee youth was also discussed by staff members. Mixed teams create opportunities for meaningful interactions and collaboration, allowing participants to build relationships based on shared experiences and goals. One staff member emphasised that mixed teams can “help break down stereotypes and foster acceptance between communities, especially if the age group is from 6 to 10 years old” highlighting the role of sports in facilitating dialogue and understanding. By creating an inclusive environment where participants from diverse backgrounds can collaborate and compete together, sports programs can effectively contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding efforts.

4.1.9. Future of Sports in Fostering Social Cohesion

Looking ahead, the potential of sports to foster social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees remains relevant, however the majority of the staff of all four organisations were worried about the current tension, and three of have said that they believe that it does help social cohesion but not at a fast-paced level, giving the shift in the international funding due to the current humanitarian crisis. Additionally, two of Right

to Play staff members stated that it is necessary to have the sports-based programs active for least a one-year to start seeing results.

Furthermore, leveraging technology and social media can play a significant role in the future of sports initiatives. Two staff member of GAME Lebanon mentioned that digital platforms can facilitate communication and collaboration among participants, creating virtual communities that extend beyond geographical boundaries. By fostering online connections, sports programs can encourage ongoing engagement, support networks, and shared experiences among Lebanese and Syrian refugees.

Overall, based the interviews with the staff members of all four organisations, it is important to integrate sports into broader community development strategies can amplify its impact. Collaborating with other sectors, such as education and health, can create holistic approaches to social cohesion that leverage the strengths of sports while addressing underlying issues. For example, combining sports programs with educational initiatives can enhance young people's skills and opportunities, while promoting values of teamwork and respect (Barça Foundation & UNICEF, 2021).

Lastly, continuous evaluation and adaptation of sports programs will be essential for ensuring their relevance and effectiveness. By regularly assessing the impact of initiatives and gathering feedback from participants, organisations can identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments. This adaptive approach will help maintain the momentum of sports programs as vehicles for social cohesion and integration.

In summary, the future of sports as a tool for improving social cohesion among Lebanese and Syrian refugees pivot on inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation. By prioritising the needs of diverse communities, investing in training and resources, and leveraging technology, sports initiatives can continue to thrive and contribute to a more united and harmonious society. The potential for sports to bridge divides and cultivate understanding among individuals from different backgrounds remains a vital component of efforts to promote peace and coexistence in the region.

4.2. Participant Observation Result Analysis

In my participant observation, I explored three main sports-based initiatives aimed at promoting social cohesion among diverse communities in Lebanon. My field research was based in Beirut, where I went to see the initiatives, organised by GAME Lebanon, JRS, and the Alsama Project, offered insight into how sports create an inclusive space,

facilitating dialogue and cooperation in otherwise fragmented social landscapes (Annex E.3.).

-At the GAME Lebanon Start-Up Camp (3-day event), the collaborative theoretical and practical exercise. Each activity, designed to emphasise teamwork and creativity, fostered an environment where participants from different Lebanese regions come to Beirut to have the workshop. The infrastructure at Beirut GAME House itself—a reclaimed warehouse transformed into a sports space—reflected the adaptive spirit of the participants, symbolising resilience and renewal. Given their street project, they built, now a skate park and community sports space, though it awaits further funding for completion (Annex F.1.2.). This setting, with its evolving infrastructure, symbolized transformation, resonating with the participants’ own aspirations for change in their communities (See from Annex F.1.3. up to F.1.5).

Throughout the day, these future playmakers engaged in intensive workshops focusing on youth empowerment, sports initiatives, and community-building skills they would later apply within their own zone. One particularly important exercise was the balloon and hoop game. In this activity, participants had to keep a balloon aloft using only heads and leaving their hands on the hoop, they still had to work together as they were a team all holding the same hoop (Annex F.1.). This required a high level of unspoken coordination and trust, and participants quickly found themselves relying on each other, their focus shifting entirely to the task at hand. As a result, typical social boundaries were overshadowed by a shared purpose, fostering a sense of belonging among individuals who might otherwise remain distanced due to societal divides. Observing their interactions highlighted the unique way in which sports activities can reduce interpersonal barriers by shifting focus from individual differences to collective goals.

Additionally, while talking to the people in the event, including staff and beneficiaries, they mentioned that some experiences showed that the sports-based initiatives can also create better opportunities. One woman mentioned that she started with 14 playing sports with GAME Lebanon and now she works with them as a project manager; One man explained that he used to be a coach in the sports-based activities and now works in the logistics department. Most of the people attending the event, mentioned the importance of the sports-based programs combined with education, would enhance the likelihood of a better integration.

-The Sunday Cricket League organised by JRS provided another perspective on social cohesion. This league brought together migrant worker from Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and starting to have Syrian children, transforming a car park into a temporary community sports ground, as there is no public space that they can play in. Cricket's cultural significance to these participants facilitated easy engagement, but it was the collective experience of being migrants that fostered an inclusive atmosphere (Annex E.2.). Despite historical tensions between some of these nationalities, players frequently commented on the strong sense of community that had emerged through their regular games. Some players mentioned that such mix might not have been possible in their home countries due to social and cultural divides. The league's inclusive environment allowed players to overcome these divisions, creating bonds rooted in their shared enjoyment of cricket and their collective experience as migrants in Lebanon. Over time, cultural and language barriers became less significant, as players formed connections based on teamwork and mutual support, emphasizing how sports can bridge divides even among linguistically and culturally diverse participants. The Sunday Cricket league provides an interesting parallel to the Syrian refugees and Lebanese context, particularly when considering the historical tensions between certain nationalities within the league, such as those between Pakistanis and Indians, and Sinhalese and Tamils. While the observed connection among these migrant workers, in the match, highlights the potential of sports to bridge divides, the migrant workers, they bound by their shared experiences in a foreign land, which may lead to a more accelerated path towards acceptance and wanting to create sense of belonging. This key factor on the migrant worker that made they fast in bridging divides does not apply to the Syrian refugees and Lebanese dynamics which might make them more likely to take longer to get to bridge divides and reached social cohesion.

Additionally, the women mentioned how much effort they started putting into learning cricket as they had never played before, but now they are starting their own league. On top of that, the women mentioned how important this league is since it is where they started creating connection, even with other nationalities that don't speak the same language and feel like they have a community to talk to.

-The hardball cricket sessions run by the Alsama Project, primarily including Syrian youth from the Palestinian refugee camp Shatila, provided a contrasting environment to the more casual games observed in other settings. This training was highly structured and disciplined, with a specific focus on skill development. The rigorous

approach underscored the Alsama Project's commitment to not only fostering recreational outlets but also building sports skills and discipline among its participants. For many young female participants, these training sessions offered a rare opportunity to leave their home environments and interact socially, with Alsama providing transportation to and from the camp for accessibility and safety. They showed some willingness to include Lebanese players, if they adhered to the training rules and respected the training's social dynamics. This openness, though conditional, hinted at the potential of sports programs to navigate and gradually ease entrenched social tensions.

4.3. Triangulation Findings - Secondary Data Analysis, Challenges, and Sustainability Considerations

This section presents an integrated analysis of primary and secondary data findings, triangulating participant observations, interview data, and external sources to provide a comprehensive perspective on how sports-based programs contribute to social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian communities.

Triangulating data from interviews, observations, and secondary literature reveals that sports-based programs create valuable intergroup contact opportunities. Both primary and secondary data show how these interactions facilitate understanding and empathy among Lebanese and Syrian participants. Observations at GAME Lebanon highlighted those joint activities like team-building games encouraged participants to work collaboratively, reducing initial hesitations tied to cultural or social distinctions (GAME Lebanon, n.d.). Interviews reinforced this observation, with participants expressing that, over time, these games helped them see each other as equals with shared goals, despite their different backgrounds. Secondary data aligns with these findings by evidencing similar outcomes in sports programs globally, where structured, positive interactions reduce prejudice and foster respect between groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Such findings validate that, in the Lebanese context, sports programs play a significant role in challenging stereotypes and promoting understanding across communities (Allport, 1954).

Later on, the primary data revealed connection within groups, particularly among Syrian youth in the Alsama cricket program, where participants created strong support networks that offered practical assistance. Observational data further confirmed that these networks fostered solidarity, as participants expressed comfort in their ability to rely on teammates (Alsama Project, n.d.). Secondary data expands on this finding, demonstrating how sports can also foster bridging and linking social capital. Programs like the JRS Sunday cricket

league brought together people from various backgrounds, illustrating bridging capital through the connections formed across cultural and linguistic divides. Linking capital, which connects participants to resources and institutional support, was especially apparent where partnerships with local organizations provided stable venues and ongoing resources (Putnam, 2000; Djobova, Borukova, & Kirilova, 2020). This triangulated finding emphasizes how sports not only foster internal group support but also connect participants to broader networks that enhance their resilience and integration into the community (Bourdieu, 1986).

Overall, observations and interviews reflect that individual-level interactions fostered by the programs align well with Contact Theory, where positive intergroup contact reduces prejudice. Meanwhile, secondary data suggests that such interactions contribute to the formation of broader social networks, consistent with Social Capital Theory. Beneficiaries, especially part of GAME Lebanon sports-based programs and JRS, reported gaining trust and cooperation across communities, which gradually extended into support networks that connect people beyond their immediate circles (Schulenkorf & Sherry, 2020). This triangulated analysis suggests that Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory should not be isolated in their applications, rather, they reinforce each other, with individual interactions through sports catalysing the development of lasting social networks. Such networks enhance not only immediate intergroup relations but also the wider social fabric, underscoring the dual impact of these theories in practice (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016).

4.3.1. Challenges and Limitations

The triangulated findings also highlight notable challenges that impact the effectiveness of these sports-based programs. Interview data frequently referenced funding instability, which was echoed in the secondary data as a critical limitation affecting program continuity (UNICEF, 2016). Observations further confirmed that reliance on external funding restricted certain initiatives' long-term impact, as short funding cycles limited the scope and duration of interventions.

Another key challenge lies in the complexity of measuring social cohesion, particularly in the Lebanese context, where socio-political factors add layers of difficulty in evaluating program effectiveness. Both primary and secondary data indicate that the multifaceted nature of social cohesion and peace makes it difficult to attribute change directly to sports interventions (Schulenkorf, 2012).

Additionally, the experiences shared by the interviewees reflect several practical challenges that complicate program implementation. Some of the interviewees expressed concerns about safety, the challenges of integrating diverse community members, and the temporary nature of programs resulting from funding constraints. These factors highlight the importance of designing programs that prioritise sustainable structures and address participants' concerns, ensuring that the positive impacts observed in the short term can be sustained over time.

4.3.2. Sustainability Considerations

In summary, the data highlight the importance of sustainability for the success of these programs. Both interviewees and secondary sources emphasised the need for stable funding and long-term community engagement to ensure lasting benefits (UNICEF, 2016; Djobova et al., 2020). Observations suggested that community ownership played a pivotal role in program sustainability, as initiatives supported by local leaders and embedded within communities demonstrated greater continuity and effectiveness (Putnam, 2000).

Secondary data further corroborates the need for local partnerships, indicating that sports programs with strong community involvement and local organisational support are more likely to endure beyond initial funding cycles (Bourdieu, 1986). This triangulated insight highlights that sustainable sports interventions should prioritise self-sufficiency, fostering a sense of responsibility and commitment that enables programs to adapt to changing community needs over time.

Despite challenges related to funding and measurement complexities, the triangulated findings support the continued investment in and expansion of sports for development and peace programs as a powerful vehicle for social change and sustainable peace in Lebanon. The need for sustainable funding, community involvement, and local partnerships remains central to maximizing, not only short-term, but also long-term impact of these initiatives.

4.3.3. Implications for the Triple Nexus

This research holds significant implications for humanitarian action, particularly within the framework of the triple nexus. (Howe, 2019) The findings demonstrate the potential of sports-based programs to contribute to all three pillars of the nexus—humanitarian aid, development, and peace—in a mutually reinforcing manner. (Howe, 2019) By fostering

social cohesion and community resilience, these programs can address the immediate needs of refugees and host communities while simultaneously laying the groundwork for long-term development and sustainable peace. (Habib et al., 2020) This integrated approach is crucial in protracted crises like the Syrian refugee situation in Lebanon, where humanitarian needs persist alongside development challenges and the pursuit of lasting peace. (Howe, 2019)

By highlights the connection between sports-based programs and the triple nexus in several ways. In terms of humanitarian aid, these programs offer immediate psychosocial support to refugees and vulnerable populations, helping them cope with trauma, build resilience, and foster a sense of normalcy. (Sachs et al., n.d.) Regarding development, by promoting social inclusion, skills development, and access to resources, these programs can contribute to the long-term economic and social integration of refugees and host communities. (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2018) In the context of peacebuilding, by creating spaces for positive intergroup contact, fostering dialogue, and promoting shared identities, sports can play a crucial role in building trust, reducing conflict, and fostering reconciliation. (Kidd, 2008)

These findings stress the importance of integrating sports-based programs into humanitarian response strategies, particularly in contexts where social cohesion and community resilience are critical for achieving sustainable peace. (Kidd, 2008) By recognizing the multifaceted contributions of sports, humanitarian actors can leverage their potential to address immediate needs, promote long-term development, and build a more peaceful future. (Howe, 2019)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research delved into the multifaceted contribution of sports-based programs to fostering social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon, adding a nuanced perspective to the existing literature on the subject. Through a mixed-methods approach combining semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and secondary data analysis, the study explored the experiences and perspectives of both Lebanese and Syrian participants in sports-based projects. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the topic, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative insights. The research was grounded in Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) and Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), which provided a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of intergroup contact and the development of social networks within sports-based programs.

The dissertation is structured to provide a clear and coherent examination of the research topic. It begins with an introduction that sets the stage for the investigation, outlining the research focus, objectives, and theoretical framework. The methodology chapter then explains the research design and methods used to collect and analyse data. A comprehensive literature review follows, exploring the existing body of knowledge on sports for development and peace, social cohesion, and the triple nexus approach. The findings and results chapter presents the key findings from the primary and secondary data analysis, interpreting them through the lens of Contact Theory and Social Capital Theory. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the research findings, discusses the implications for policy and practice, and suggests areas for future research.

The primary data, gathered through interviews and observations, revealed that sports-based programs offer valuable opportunities for positive intergroup contact, breaking down stereotypes and fostering a sense of shared identity among participants. Beneficiaries and staff members consistently highlighted the pivotal role of sports in promoting unity and understanding between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, transcending cultural and national differences. The collaborative nature of sports activities encouraged participants to see each other as equals, fostering a sense of shared purpose and belonging. This finding aligns with Contact Theory, which posits that positive intergroup contact, under optimal conditions such as equal status, common goals, cooperation, and support from authorities, can effectively reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations (Allport, 1954).

Furthermore, the research demonstrated the development of social capital - encompassing bonding, bridging, and linking capital - within the sports-based programs, contributing to a deeper understanding of how these programs can facilitate the creation and strengthening of social networks between Lebanese and Syrian communities. Participants formed meaningful connections and support networks that extended beyond the immediate sports activities, leading to increased trust and cooperation. This is consistent with the core tenets of Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social networks and relationships in building a cohesive society (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

The findings reveal specific ways in which sports-based programs contribute to social cohesion and sustainable peace, such as:

- **Promoting positive intergroup contact:** Sports create opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds to interact in a positive and structured setting, fostering understanding and reducing prejudice. (Allport, 1954)
- **Building social capital:** Sports facilitate the development of social networks and relationships within and between communities, fostering trust, cooperation, and mutual support. (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000)
- **Developing a sense of shared identity:** Sports provide a common ground for individuals from diverse backgrounds, promoting a sense of belonging and shared purpose.
- **Empowering marginalized groups:** Sports can provide opportunities for marginalized groups, such as refugees, women, and youth, to develop their skills, build confidence, and participate actively in society. (Coalter, 2013; Djobova et al., 2020; Otten et al., 2018; Schulenkorf, 2010)
- **Promoting peacebuilding and conflict resolution:** Sports can create safe spaces for dialogue and interaction, fostering reconciliation and healing in conflict-affected communities. (Kidd, 2008; Levermore & Beacom, 2009; Reiche, 2011)
- **Contributing to the triple nexus:** Sports-based programs can contribute to the triple nexus approach by addressing humanitarian needs, promoting development, and building peace. (Howe, 2019)

These findings underscore the multifaceted role of sports in building social cohesion, not just through the creation of social networks, but also by facilitating positive intergroup relations and empowering individuals. The programs also facilitated access to resources and institutional support, further strengthening community ties and promoting integration.

The analysis of secondary data reinforced the primary data findings, substantiating the transformative potential of sports in promoting social cohesion and sustainable peace. (Schulenkorf, 2010) The literature review highlighted the relevance of the triple nexus approach, which integrates humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding, in addressing complex crises such as the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. (Gillion & Keim, 2020) Sports-based programs, by fostering social cohesion and community resilience, can contribute to all three components of the triple nexus, promoting sustainable solutions and long-lasting peace. (Howe, 2019) This research's findings further understanding on how sports-based initiatives respond to immediate humanitarian needs, facilitate long-term community integration, and support peace efforts. These programs provide vital psychosocial support to vulnerable populations, assisting refugees in processing trauma, fostering resilience, and restoring a sense of normalcy (Sachs et al., n.d.). Beyond immediate relief, sports initiatives encourage skills development, social inclusion, and economic participation, which are critical for the ongoing integration of refugees and host communities (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2018). Moreover, sports create environments where trust and mutual respect can increase, contributing to reconciliation and reducing conflict (Kidd, 2008). These findings suggest that incorporating sports into humanitarian strategies could be instrumental in addressing both immediate and enduring needs, driving cohesive community growth, and advancing peace in crisis-affected regions (Howe, 2019).

Despite the positive impacts, the research also identified challenges and limitations associated with sports-based interventions in Lebanon, providing a balanced perspective on the complexities and nuances of implementing such programs in a conflict-affected environment. These included barriers to participation, such as cultural norms and community resistance, as well as the critical need for sustainable funding and long-term community engagement. Addressing these challenges will require a comprehensive approach that involves actively engaging local communities, building capacity among

program staff, and ensuring the integration of sports-based interventions into broader community development strategies.

In conclusion, this research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of sports in fostering social cohesion and sustainable peace in Lebanon, offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers engaged in peacebuilding and social integration initiatives. The findings highlight the transformative potential of sports-based programs in bringing together Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities, promoting positive intergroup relations, and building social capital. By addressing the challenges and embracing the opportunities associated with sports-based interventions, policymakers, humanitarian actors, and community leaders can harness the power of sports to build a more inclusive, resilient, and peaceful society in Lebanon and other conflict-affected contexts. The insights gained from this research can inform the design and implementation of effective sports-based programs that contribute to sustainable peace and social change, help individuals, and communities to build a better future together.

5.1. Future Research

While this research has offered valuable insights into how sports can foster social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, further investigation is needed to better understand the long-term impacts and improve the design of sports-based interventions.

Longitudinal studies can track the sustainability of benefits observed in current programs, identifying factors that contribute to lasting social change. Additionally, focusing on the unique needs and challenges faced by specific demographics, such as women and girls, can help tailor interventions for greater effectiveness.

Investigating the role of policy in supporting sports-based interventions can create a more enabling environment for social cohesion initiatives. Community-based participatory research, involving not only beneficiaries but also other individuals who attend sports programs, can ensure that interventions are relevant, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

These research directions can enhance our understanding of how sports can promote social cohesion and sustainable peace in Lebanon and other conflict-affected regions, especially given the limited secondary data on this topic.

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Annexes

Annex A: Ethical Approval

Parecer Final da Comissão de Ética da ESPP

Title of the project: How can sports improve social cohesion for sustainable peace?

Investigator/ The proponent: Maria Calvário da Paz e Pereira de Sousa

a) RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

"This research problem is focused on whether sports-based projects can be used to promote long-term social cohesion and sustainable peace, beyond the immediate benefits. This inquiry is crucial, specially in the context of Lebanon, where social tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities have been exacerbated.

The study's significance lies in analysing sports as a key facilitator of lasting social change. By exploring how sports can nurture enduring connections, mutual understanding, and shared identities among diverse groups, the research aims to provide insights into developing sustainable peacebuilding strategies.

This research contributes original knowledge by focusing on long-term outcomes, moving beyond short-term impacts to assess sports' transformative potential in building resilient communities. By offering evidence-based recommendations, the study aims to inform policymakers and organizations, guiding them in utilizing sports to foster lasting social cohesion and peace in conflict-affected regions such as Lebanon.

Ultimately, the study seeks to strengthen societal resilience, alleviate intergroup tensions, and promote peaceful coexistence, benefiting individuals and communities impacted by conflict."

b) RESEARCH AIMS / QUESTIONS

"This study aims to:

- Investigate how sports-based projects can effectively promote social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon.
- Identify key success factors of sports-based projects in fostering social cohesion in conflict-affected contexts like Lebanon.
- Examine the challenges and limitations associated with using sports-based projects for promoting social cohesion in Lebanon, and propose strategies to address these obstacles.
- Explore how sports-based projects can contribute to long-term social cohesion and peacebuilding in Lebanon, beyond their immediate benefits, by fostering enduring relationships and collective identities among diverse groups."

c) METHODS

Qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews: Participants, both Lebanese and Syrian communities engaged in sports activities will be interviewed. Interviews will explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to sports-based initiatives promoting social cohesion. Additionally, staff members will also be interviewed to understand the challenges when

implementing this projects. Each interview will have around 10 question and it is predicted to take around 30min to 40min.

Participant Observation: Aim to actively engage in sports activities alongside the organizations that I will be interviewing, in order to observe interactions, dynamics, and social behaviors. Detailed field notes will be recorded in a field diary to capture observations and reflections (non-intrusive, focusing on naturalistic observation to gather rich qualitative data).

d) PARTICIPANTS AND RECRUITMENT METHOD

Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Individuals: Over 18 years old, that can communicate in english and have or are participating in a sports-based project.

The researcher informs that: "I contact the organisation related to sports-based projects, I will be able to contact some vulnerable groups such as syrian refugee. Meaning that all interaction are first agreed with the organisationa and then with the participant and the place of the interview will be a place considered safe by the participant."

Staff of Organizations: Interview staff members who are directly involved in implementing or managing sports-based projects aimed. Their insights into program design, challenges faced, and perceived impacts will provide valuable context.

e) INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

The researcher informs that" will be given a physical consent form and will orally explain what does the consent form include. All of these will be recorded and when not possible to handle a form I will have a recording to confirm that it was given permission to use this information. Additionally all participants will be informed that at any given point they can choose to become anonymous or withdraw their permission."

Since there are two models of informed consent, 1) for anonymous data and 2) for personal data, the researcher should follow the model appropriate to the research.

f)Related to *debriefing*, the researcher mention that an "document/text presented to the participant at the end of the participation and also an oral explanation given to the participant at the end ofthe participation"

g)The study includes a sample from vulnerable population and the first contact will me mediated by the organizations. Only those who show a willingness to participate will be contacted

h) The researcher identifies risks of the participation related to the collection of information on sensitive matters and."Participants will be briefed on the potential for sensitive memories during interviews, although such occurrences are unlikely. They will be assured that they can take breaks, decline to answer questions, or refuse the interview altogether at any time. Participants will be informed of the importance of their comfort throughout the process.In case that participants experience distress or negative

emotional responses, support will be offered immediately. This includes ensuring confidentiality, and respecting their decisions regarding participation. Ethical guidelines will be strictly followed to safeguard participants' well-being throughout the study."

i) The Statement of Responsibility and Ethical Conduct of Researchers complies with the provisions of the ISCTE Code of Ethical Conduct.

In conclusion, having ensured the voluntary nature of participation, free and informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality of the data collection, the Ethics Committee has a favourable opinion on the research, with the recommendation to amend the informed consent (e)

Lisboa, 17 de outubro de 2024



Relatora da Comissão de Ética da ESPP
Maria João Pena

Annex B: Interview Guide

Theme beneficiaries	Objective beneficiaries
Sports Participation Experiences	To understand participants' experiences and motivations for engaging in sports-based activities, exploring how these experiences have contributed to their well-being and integration in Lebanon.
Impact of Sports on Social Cohesion	To explore how participants perceive the role of sports in improving understanding and unity between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, focusing on the specific ways in which sports have facilitated positive interactions and reduced prejudice.
Barriers to Participation	To identify any challenges or obstacles that prevent individuals from participating in sports activities, particularly those related to their refugee status or the context of the Lebanese crisis.
Impact of Sports on Attitudes and Behaviours	To investigate how sports may influence participants' attitudes towards others and their behaviours within the community, examining whether sports have promoted empathy, tolerance, and cooperation.
Success Factors for Sports Programs	To determine the key factors that contribute to the success of sports-based programs in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity, considering factors such as program design, leadership, and community engagement.
Effective Sports and Activities	To explore which sports or activities are perceived as most effective in bringing people together and fostering social cohesion, considering the specific cultural and social context of Lebanon.
Theme Staff	Objective Staff
Role of Sports in Bridging Divides	To understand how staff members perceive the contribution of sports to promoting social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, particularly in the context of the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon.
Effective Strategies and Approaches	To identify the strategies and approaches that staff members find most effective in promoting understanding and unity through sports, drawing on their experiences and insights from implementing sports-based interventions in Lebanon.

Success Stories and Impact	To gather specific examples and success stories of how sports have positively impacted community relations and integration among refugees in Lebanon, highlighting the transformative potential of sports in humanitarian settings.
Challenges and Barriers	To identify the challenges and barriers encountered in implementing sports-based interventions for social cohesion in Lebanon, including those related to the refugee crisis and the country's socio-political context, and how they have been addressed.
Measuring Success and Effectiveness	To understand how the success and effectiveness of sports programs in promoting social cohesion and peace among participants are measured, exploring the specific indicators and evaluation methods used by organizations working in the field.
Key Elements for Success and Sustainability	To determine the key elements that contribute to the success and sustainability of sports-based initiatives in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity in Lebanon, not only in the short term but also in the long term, considering the specific challenges and opportunities in the Lebanese context.
Impact on Refugee Lives and Areas for Improvement	To understand how staff members perceive the impact of sports on the lives of refugees in Lebanon, including their psychosocial well-being, resilience, and integration, and what areas they see room for improvement in sports-based interventions to better address the needs of refugees.
Effective Sports and Activities	To explore which sports or activities staff members have found to be particularly effective in fostering unity and social cohesion among Lebanese and Syrian refugees in Lebanon, considering the cultural relevance and accessibility of different sports.
Future of Sports-Based Initiatives	To understand staff members' perspectives on the future of sports-based initiatives in promoting social cohesion and sustainable peace in Lebanon, considering the long-term implications of the Syrian refugee crisis and the evolving needs of the communities.

Annex C: Semi-Structured Interview Script

For the Beneficiaries:

1. Tell us a little about yourself. How long have you been in Lebanon?
2. Have you participated in any sports-based programs or activities that aimed to bring together individuals from different nationalities or migrant groups? How did you learn about these sports activities? If so, can you share your experiences?
3. How do you think sports can play a role in improving understanding and unity among diverse groups, such as Lebanese and Syrian refugees? (If not, why?)
4. Has anything prevented you from participating in sports-based activities?
5. Do you believe sports-based interventions can address social tensions within communities? (If yes, how?)
6. Can you share any specific examples where sports activities have helped to create a sense of belonging and inclusion among participants? How have sports changed your view?
7. In your opinion, what are the most important factors that contribute to the success of sports-based programs in promoting social cohesion and in being inclusive?
8. How do you think sports activities have positively impacted your life as a refugee living in Lebanon? And how could this be improved?
9. Are there any specific sports or activities that you believe are particularly effective in bringing people together and fostering social cohesion?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with sports-based programs and social cohesion in Lebanon?

For the Staff Members:

1. How have you seen sports-based programs contribute to bridging divides and fostering social cohesion among Lebanese and Syrian refugees in Lebanon?
2. What strategies or approaches have you found most effective in promoting understanding and unity among different backgrounds through sports activities?
3. Can you share specific examples or success stories where sports activities have had a significant impact on community relations and integration among refugees in Lebanon?
4. Have there been any challenges or barriers encountered in implementing sports-

based interventions for social cohesion? If so, how were they addressed?

5. How do you measure the success and effectiveness of sports-based programs in promoting social cohesion and peace among participants?

6. From your perspective, what are the key elements that contribute to the success and sustainability of sports-based initiatives in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity in Lebanon, not only in short term but also in long term?

7. In what ways do you believe sports activities have positively affected the lives of refugees in Lebanon, and what areas do you see room for improvement?

8. Are there specific sports that you have found to be particularly effective, especially in Lebanon, in order to foster unity and social cohesion among Lebanese and Syrian refugees?

9. Has mixed teams in sports-based projects been more effective, in bridging these 2 groups together? If not, what have been the main challenges with the mixed teams? /If yes, what are the main benefits in having mixed teams?

10. How do you envision the future of sports-based initiatives in Lebanon in terms of promoting social cohesion and sustainable peace?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences and insights into sports-based programs and their impact on social cohesion in Lebanon?

Annex D: Table of the Interviewees Scope

Annex D.1.: Table on the interviewees and the events

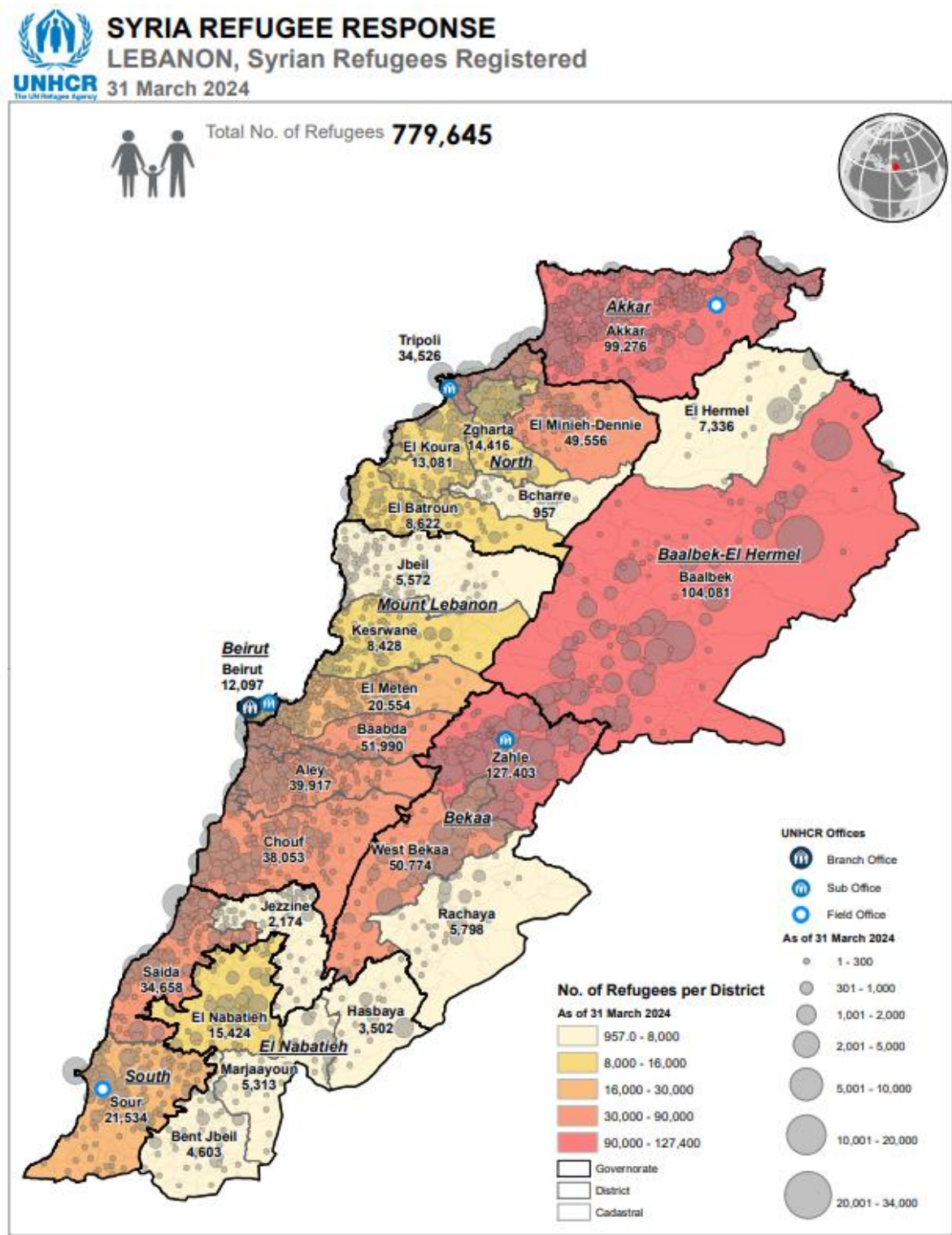
Nome	Staff	Beneficiaries	Events
AlSama	1	3	1
GAME	3	3	1
JRS	2	4	1
Right to Play	4	-	-
Total	10	10	3

Annex D.1.: Table of the interviewees gender

Nome	Female	Male
AlSama	3	1
GAME	3	3
JRS	3	3
Right to Play	3	1
Total	12	8

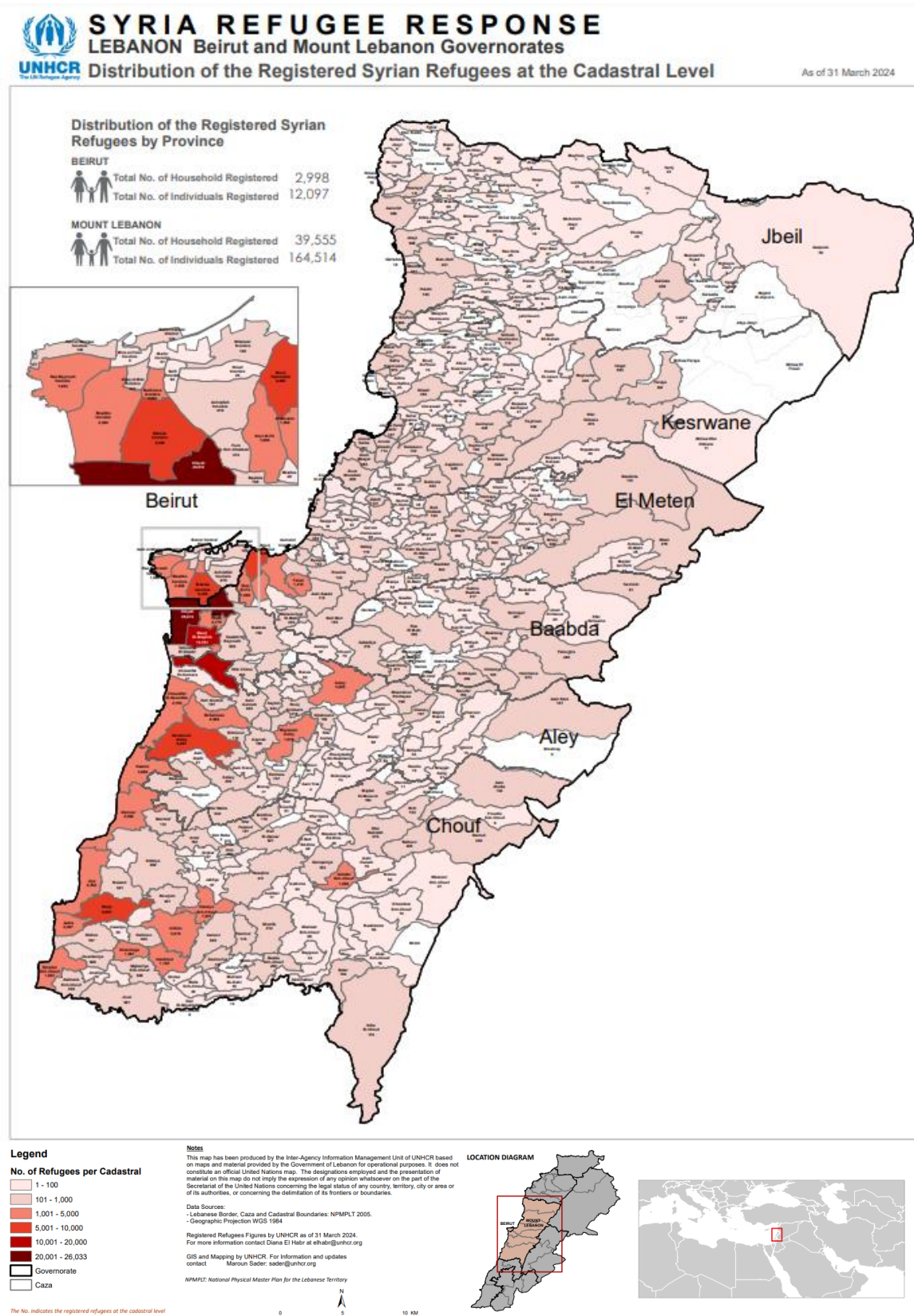
Annex E: Maps

Annex E.1.: Map of Lebanon | Syrian Refugees Registered



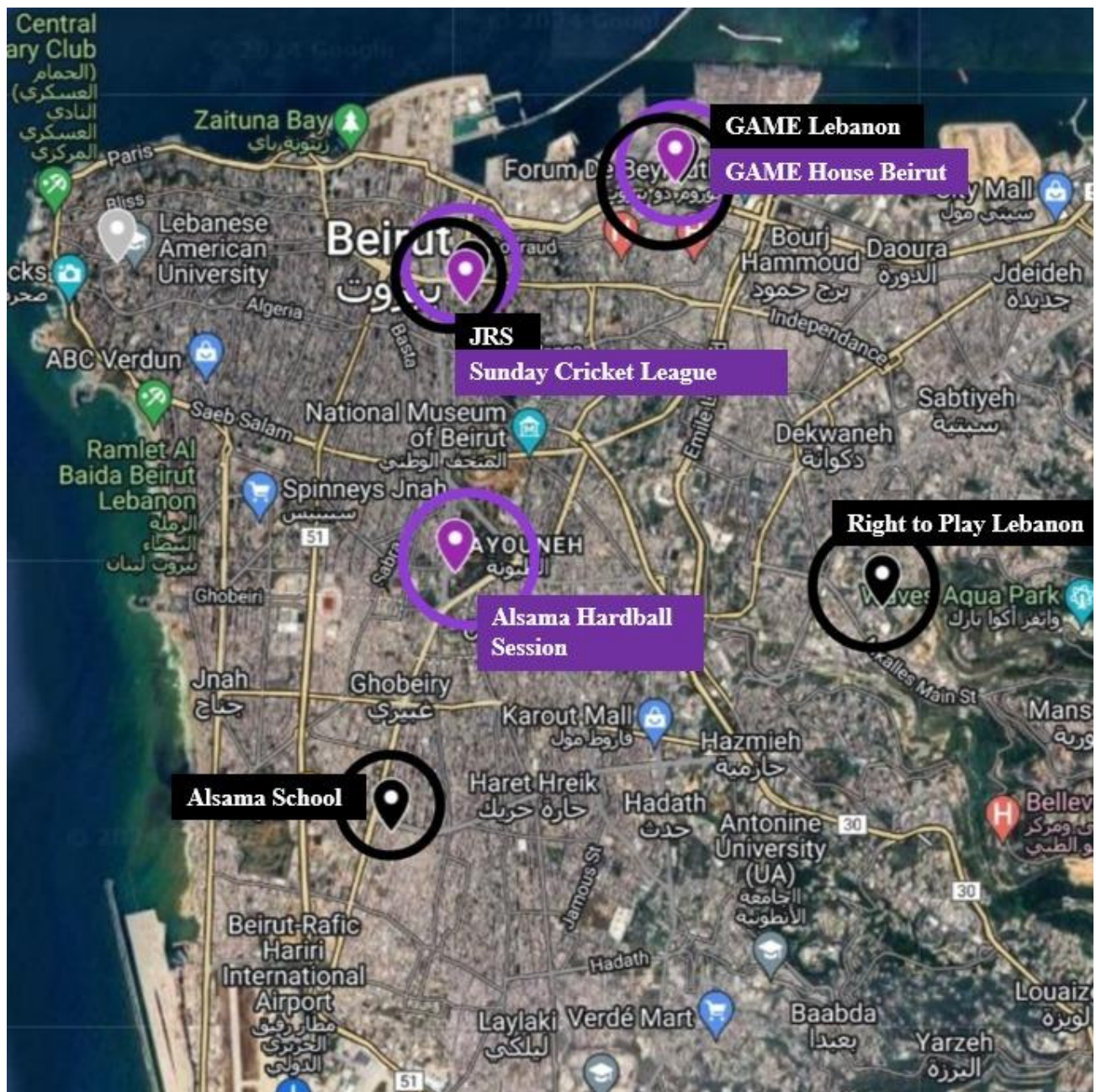
Source: adapted from UNHCR (2024)

Annex E.2.: Map of Beirut and Mount Lebanon Governorates | Distribution of the Registered Syrian Refugees at the Cadastral Level



Source: adapted from UNHCR (2024)

Annex E.3: Field Research Map | Beirut, Lebanon.



Annex F: Field Research Photos

Annex F.1.: GAME Lebanon Photos



Figure F.1.1. Teamwork Activity



Figure F.1.2. Skatepark



Figure F.1.3. The old warehouse



Figure F.1.4. The future renovation of the GAME House Beirut



Figure F.1.5. The current GAME House Beirut.

Source: adapted from @gamelebanon (2024)

Annex E.2.: Sunday Cricket League Photos



Figure F.2.1., E.2.2. and F.2.3. Women's Cricket training



Figure F.2.4. Birthday Celebration



Figure F.2.5 and F.2.6. Man's Cricket match