

**From Fields to Friendships for Winnipeg's Young Emerging Adult Male
Newcomers: How Soccer Facilitates Social Cohesion, Integration, Cross
Community Relationships and Peacebuilding**

By

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies of The
University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of MASTER OF ARTS

Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies

University of Manitoba / University of Winnipeg

Winnipeg, MB

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Abstract

Winnipeg is a major Canadian destination for immigrants and refugees and a multicultural urban space where many young emerging adult male newcomers (18–25 years) confront structural and interpersonal barriers to integration, including racism, precarious employment, constrained access to education and work, social conflict, and risks such as exploitation and gang recruitment. Sport participation can also be constrained by cost, transportation, and exclusionary environments. Against this backdrop and building on critical and emancipatory peacebuilding perspectives that prioritize localized, youth-centered, and justice-oriented practices, this qualitative master's thesis explored how soccer can function as a peacebuilding intervention that fosters social cohesion, social integration, and builds cross-community relationships among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg.

Primary data were generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with four newcomers who had immigrated to Winnipeg within the past five years and were participating in programs delivered by the IPAC-Ukraine Soccer Club and Sport Without Boundaries. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Using a generic qualitative research methodology to foreground lived experience, the study found that soccer participation supported the formation and deepening of friendships that extended beyond the soccer field contributing to a sustained sense of belonging and community through repeated interaction and shared interests, serving as a mechanism for stress release that participants associated with a more peaceful everyday outlook. However, benefits were tempered by practical accessibility barriers, notably inadequate transportation to soccer fields and prohibitive registration fees. Overall, the findings suggest that soccer can meaningfully contribute to everyday peacebuilding and newcomer integration in Winnipeg, and its impact depends on reducing structural obstacles to participation as targeted policies and program investments that enhance affordability and mobility may strengthen social cohesion outcomes and inform locally grounded peacebuilding interventions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who supported me throughout my studies and whose contributions were instrumental in bringing this thesis to fruition.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation and admiration to Dr. Sean Byrne, my advisor, for his unwavering support, guidance, and availability. One invaluable lesson I have learned from him, which I will cherish for a lifetime, is his ability to always make time for his students despite his busy schedule. A piece of advice he shared with me, which proved crucial in completing this study, was: ‘When doing research, ensure you maintain the motivation and passion to pursue it every morning. Otherwise, it will be challenging.’ This insight has been profoundly helpful and will remain with me always. I am also very grateful to my thesis committee members, Dr. Leisha Strachan and Dr. Saad Khan for their insights and constructive feedback. I also wish to thank Dr. Uchenna Azubuike for his support during the early stages of this thesis. Our discussions and his advice were truly invaluable.

Second, I am deeply grateful to Jason Brennan from the Mauro Institute of Peace and Justice. I doubt this thesis would have come to life without his support. Jason, a friend and mentor, consistently made himself available whenever I had questions or simply needed a chat. Our shared interest in soccer and the discussions surrounding it inspired me to choose this particular topic for my thesis. Thank you, Jason, for everything; I am forever grateful.

Third, I extend my sincere thanks to Duane Brothers for his mentorship and leadership advice. Additionally, I am immensely thankful to Chimezie Eleme, Pastor Alexander Brandt, and the Grace Communion Winnipeg community for their support, spiritual guidance, and prayers, which helped me stay grounded and focused on what truly matters.

Fourth, to my PACS colleagues and friends, thank you for being part of this incredible journey. To my 753 musketeers, Roy and Bash, thank you for your editing, discussions, support, encouragement, and laughter. You have been an integral part of this journey, and I doubt I could have reached this stage without you all by my side.

Finally, to my participants, thank you for making all this possible by sharing your experiences and insights, shaping this thesis into what it is today. Your contributions are deeply valued, and I will always be grateful.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, whose sacrifices and unwavering support made this journey possible. Their love and encouragement sustained me throughout this journey.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Chapter One – Introduction	1
Introduction	1
Statement of Purpose	2
Research Question	2
Significance of the Study	2
Chapter Overviews	3
Conclusion	4
Chapter Two – Context	6
Introduction	6
The Story of Newcomers in Winnipeg.....	7
Historical Background and Current Demographic	7
Challenges Faced by Newcomers	12
Soccer and Peace in Winnipeg.....	17
The Evolution of Soccer in Winnipeg	17
Peacebuilding Efforts in Winnipeg.....	22
Conclusion	25
Chapter Three - Literature Review	26
Introduction	26
Critical and Emancipatory Peacebuilding.....	26
Soccer and Peacebuilding.....	27
Soccer As a Tool for Integration and Peacebuilding.....	27
Soccer As a Tool for Facilitating Togetherness	34
Youth.....	43
Youth in Peacebuilding	43
Newcomer Youth	49
Social Integration and Social Cohesion, and Community Building	52
Conclusion	62
Chapter Four - Methodology	63
Introduction	63
Generic Qualitative Research.....	63
Research Objectives and Research Question	66
Positionality and Standpoint	66

Research Participants	68
Research Location	70
Data Generation	70
Recruitment Strategy, Confidentiality, and Privacy	72
Data Analysis	73
Human Research Ethics	73
Limitations of the Study	75
Conclusion	76
Chapter Five – Soccer as a Pathway to Social Integration and Cohesion	78
Introduction.....	78
Relationships	78
Community Building.....	81
Fostering Peace and Understanding	84
The Relationship Between Soccer and Peace	85
Key Findings.....	86
Soccer as a Tool for Motivation, Personal Development and Well-being.....	89
Motivation and Personal Development	89
Enjoyment and Stress Release	90
Key Findings.....	93
Barriers, Challenges, and Resources.....	95
Challenges	95
Community Resources and Accessibility	98
Key Findings.....	100
Chapter Six- Conclusion.....	105
Introduction	105
Overall Key Findings	105
Policy Recommendations	108
Future Research	110
Final Remarks.....	111
Conclusion	112
References	113
Interview Questions.....	124
Appendix A: Consent Form	126
Appendix B: Email Script to Organizations.....	130
Appendix C: Letter of Invitation.....	131
Appendix D: Phone Call Verbal Script for Organization Staff	132

Appendix F: Social media text to be used for social media posts	133
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Chapter One – Introduction

Introduction

How does soccer contribute to peacebuilding efforts among young emerging adult male newcomers in Winnipeg from the perspective of those individuals participating in Winnipeg's soccer programs? Understanding this relationship is crucial, as cities like Winnipeg continue to experience growing diversity and an influx of immigrant newcomers. Winnipeg is a growing city with more newcomer immigrants each year. In 2021, the city was one of the destinations for newcomers with approximately 33,795 immigrants coming in (Manitoba Immigration, 2021). A recent national report highlights the growing recognition of sport as a key tool for newcomer integration, social connection, and well-being in Canada (Sport for Life, 2025).

Young emerging adult male newcomers, in that category, face unique challenges integrating into their new communities so that it is essential to create peacebuilding interventions for them to foster social harmony in the city. That said, another recent report emphasizes persistent structural barriers to newcomer emerging adult's participation in soccer like cost, accessibility, and inclusion that continue to limit participation for equity-deserving groups (Future of Sport in Canada Commission, 2024). The objective of peacebuilding is to promote sustainable peace by addressing the underlying causes of conflict and cultivating connections between diverse groups (Barnett et al., 2007). The peacebuilding process aims to incorporate individuals into the social fabric of society by encouraging mutual respect and understanding. The widespread appeal and capacity of football or soccer to unite individuals across cultural and national boundaries makes it a perfect peacebuilding intervention method for enhancing the peaceful social integration of newcomer youth in Winnipeg.

Statement of Purpose

This qualitative research-based thesis aims to explore the role of soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg. The study explores the way social cohesion, integration, cross community relationships and peacebuilding are being formed among those young newcomers through soccer. The research is based on primary data generated through semi-structured interviews with four young emerging adult male newcomers who immigrated to Winnipeg within the past five years.

Research Question

The principal thesis research question is: How does soccer facilitate social cohesion, integration, and the formation of cross-community relationships among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg?

- Sub-questions:

- (1). How does soccer promote the formation of social bonds among young emerging adult newcomers from diverse backgrounds in Winnipeg?
- (2). How accessible are soccer programs to young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg?
- (3). What is the impact of soccer programs on their social life and their interactions with each other?
- (4). How do young emerging adult newcomers' experiences and perceptions regarding soccer contribute to social cohesion, integration, and community building in Winnipeg?

Significance of the Study

Despite the well-established advantages of sport in fostering social unity, comprehensive research on how soccer specifically contributes to peacebuilding among young newcomers is seemingly scarce. This study aims to address this research gap by exploring the research

participants' experiences and perceptions of how soccer might promote social cohesion, integration, and community building among young newcomers in Winnipeg.

This study is significant at two levels. First, previous research has shown in other contexts that soccer promotes social cohesion and reduces conflict among diverse groups of people (Ajibola, 2023; Cardenas, 2016; Cwik, 2008; Gennaro, 2023; Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2019; Participation, 2023). However, research specifically examining the role of soccer in peacebuilding efforts among young emerging adults in Winnipeg is lacking. Therefore, this research focuses on young newcomers considering their formative years and potential long-term impact on community cohesion. Second, this exploratory case study surveys respondents' experiences and perceptions of how soccer might facilitate social cohesion and integration and community building understanding among young newcomers in Winnipeg, and how these outcomes may contribute to peacebuilding efforts in the community.

Chapter Overviews

There are six chapters that comprise the body of this thesis. The first chapter provides an overview of the study, its purpose, guiding questions, and the significance of the study in the literature.

Chapter two highlights how immigration to Winnipeg happened, how it developed over the years, and the challenges faced by newcomers adapting to city life, especially young adults. Additionally, the chapter explores the history of soccer in Winnipeg, from the time it was brought into the culture of the city to how it has developed to have a key impact regarding young newcomers. The chapter also discusses the concept of peacebuilding and the plethora of peacebuilding efforts and initiatives that have been developed in Winnipeg which relates to newcomers.

Chapter three reviews the relevant literature on concepts related to the current study. It is divided into four different parts: Critical and emancipatory peacebuilding, soccer and peacebuilding, youth and social cohesion, and integration and community building. It explores the implications of conversations around youth and their interaction in peacebuilding initiatives with a particular focus on newcomer youth and the experiences and challenges they encounter. Finally, the chapter highlights the relevance of social cohesion, integration and community building as it relates to the study.

Chapter four describes the research methodology and methods used in conducting this study. It also reports on the research site, the research participants, human ethics, my positionality, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter five presents the results and discussion of the research findings, focusing on the key themes that emerged from the data. These themes are closely tied to the participants' experiences and perceptions of soccer as a tool for peacebuilding. The chapter organizes these themes into four categories: Soccer as a pathway to social cohesion and integration; soccer as a peaceful way; soccer as a tool for motivation, personal development and well-being; and barriers, challenges, and opportunities.

Chapter six concludes the thesis and offers some recommendations to soccer coaches and policymakers in Winnipeg, which if adopted might improve the experiences of young newcomers and their overall lives by creating a conducive atmosphere whereby everyone, especially young newcomers, feels at home away from home.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the thesis outline indicating how it is going to proceed. Chapter two provides information on the evolution of immigration in Winnipeg as well some historical

background about soccer. Further, it will highlight peacebuilding initiatives around Winnipeg and how it relates to newcomers' experiences.

Chapter Two – Context

Introduction

Winnipeg has emerged as a global hub for young emerging adult newcomers seeking opportunities and a fresh start. Winnipeg is one of the cities where resettled refugees considered newcomers live and where economic integration, that is employment and refugee earnings is facilitated by government agencies, private sponsors, service providing organization as well as community and ethnic networks (Rahman, 2021). As diverse communities continue to shape the urban landscape, this multicultural metropolis has become a microcosm of the nation's commitment to inclusivity and cultural integration (Ahmed, 2017). The influx of newcomers has undoubtedly enriched Winnipeg's social fabric, contributing to its economic growth and cultural diversity (Ahmed, 2017; Kraft, 2006). However, beneath the surface of this welcoming facade lies a complex reality faced by many newcomers.

Newcomers, especially immigrants, make up 30 percent of the employed residents and have significantly contributed to Winnipeg's workforce, with a 45 percent increase in the number of immigrant workers from 2011 to 2021 which has been crucial in supporting the local economy by filling job gaps as these workers bring new skills, creativity, and ideas into the job marketplace (Government of Canada, 2024). Yet, some of these newcomers often encounter a myriad of obstacles as they navigate their new surroundings. From language barriers and cultural adjustments to employment challenges and social integration, the path to establishing a fulfilling life in Winnipeg is not without its hurdles (Ahmed, 2017; Christmas, 2017; Fast, 2017; Marmah, 2017). Therefore, Chapter two explores the historical background and current demographic of newcomers and their multifaceted experiences, shedding light on the difficulties they face in this evolving urban metropolis. It also discusses the history of sport and

soccer in Manitoba and Winnipeg, as well as peacebuilding and how they all relate to each other.

The Story of Newcomers in Winnipeg

Winnipeg has seen its population burgeon over the years through the influx of newcomers. This new demographic has contributed to the diversity of the city. Therefore, this section discusses the historical background and current demographic of newcomers and the challenges they face.

Historical Background and Current Demographic

Generally, the term ‘newcomer’ refers to individuals or families who have recently migrated or immigrated to a new country or community (Caxaj & Berman, 2010). In Canada in particular, it is an inclusive term which encompasses different groups of people. In fact, newcomer refers to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sometimes even foreign students who have immigrated to Canada for work, school, or to live there within the past five years (Heisler, 2022; Koshy et al., 2023). Also, since this research focuses on young emerging adult newcomers’ experiences, it is important to operationalize what is meant by the variable newcomers. A newcomer is a person who is or has been a landed immigrant or permanent resident, has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities, and/or has obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization (Statistics Canada, 2022). This study focuses then on young newcomers with a particular exploration of emerging adults in that category. According to Rathwell and Young (2018), emerging adults are individuals in the developmental stage spanning from 18 to 25 years of age. This age period is characterized by an individual’s increased independence, self-experimentation, and discovery as they experiment and try out new roles in society and learn the consequences of their actions. Therefore, young emerging adult newcomers are any individuals within the age range of 18 and

25 years that have immigrated to and live in Canada and hold either a permanent residency or citizenship status.

According to Kraft (2006), during the early 20th century Winnipeg was marketed as a land of opportunity, with promotional materials emphasizing its accessibility and safety. The population grew from 300 in 1870 to nearly 175,000 by 1919, fueled by waves of immigration. There were two different places that were historically important in the newcomers' experience, namely the Forks and the North End's immigrant community. The Forks is seen as a symbolic location for newcomers as it served as a significant entry point for immigrants and was a focal point in their narratives. Immigrants often first encountered the city at the Forks, where the Red and Assiniboine Rivers meet. Also, the immigrant sheds at the Forks represented both hope and hardship for newcomers. Over time the area evolved from a simple settlement to a bustling urban landscape, reflecting the changing demographics and economic conditions.

In contrast the North End became a hub for various immigrant groups, each contributing to the cultural tapestry of Winnipeg (Kraft, 2006). Also, as Kraft (2006) noted, Central and Eastern European immigrants, particularly Slavs, formed tight-knit communities in the North End. The area was characterized by overcrowded housing and economic struggles, yet it fostered a sense of belonging among its residents. Over the years, there has been a growing number of newcomers in Canada. Statistics Canada (2016) revealed that over 17 million immigrants have come to Canada since Confederation in 1867 while the number of annual landed immigrants fluctuated significantly due to policy changes and world events; the highest recorded immigration was in 1913 with over 400,000 arrivals. It can therefore be assumed that Canada was and still is a hub for newcomers, a home away from home for them.

However, immigration dropped during World War I and the Great Depression but boomed post-World War II with an average of approximately 235,000 new immigrants per year since the early 1990s (Statistic Canada, 2016). This report demonstrates realistically the impact

of world events in Canada and its politics of immigration. For example, McCormark (1984) reveals that British immigrants to Winnipeg (1900-1914) utilized family and community networks for social and economic adaptation to Canadian society. They established social relationships based on their pre-emigration culture. The nuclear family was the primary institution facilitating adaptation, providing them with emotional and material support. Other institutions like churches and benefit societies acted as surrogate families, enhancing community cohesion. They operated based on chain migration which is a process through which “prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants” (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1964, p. 82).

Through this process, extended families played a crucial role in facilitating migration by providing financial and informational support to immigrants. Personal letters from Canada were vital for prospective migrants, offering specific advice and warnings about economic conditions. As a result, British immigrants maintained their cultural identity through endogamous marriages and community organizations. The Anglican Church grew by 53 percent from 1901 to 1911, serving as a social center for immigrants while British societies provided mutual aid and cultural activities, reinforcing group identity and support networks (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1964).

The Manitoba Immigration Facts 2014 published by the Government of Manitoba (2015) revealed that Manitoba welcomed 16,222 permanent residents in 2014, representing 6.2 percent of Canada’s total immigration. This was the highest number of newcomers received in a single year since 1946. Out of this number, 79.2 percent (12,849) of newcomers arrived under the economic class category, including provincial nominees and federal economic immigrants, 11.3 percent (1,831) of newcomers arrived under the family class category, while 9.2 percent (1,495) of newcomers were refugees, including government-assisted and privately sponsored

refugees. Manitoba received the highest number of refugees in its history in 2014, including nearly 6 percent of Canada's government-assisted refugees and 22 percent of privately sponsored refugees, the highest per capita in Canada. Newcomers came from over 150 countries, with the top source countries proving newcomers from the Philippines, India, and China.

The report also mentioned that, while 85.1 percent (13,811) of newcomers settled in Winnipeg, 14.8 percent chose to live in regional communities. Since 2000, according to Manitoba's Immigration Facts 2014 (2015), over 30,000 immigrants have settled in rural Manitoba. The median age of newcomers was 28 years, younger than the median age of Manitobans (38 years). Male and female numbers were roughly equal. The most common mother tongues among newcomers were Tagalog and Punjabi, representing 42.4 percent of all immigrants. The percentage of immigrants with English language ability increased to 73.7 percent in 2014. Another important point that was highlighted in the report is that many newcomers were highly educated, with 42.4 percent holding a bachelor's degree and 12.6 percent holding a master's degree. They contributed to Manitoba's labor market with skills in various fields, including healthcare, education, business, and the trades. The top occupations included registered nurses, secondary school teachers, industrial butchers, and cooks, and 74 percent of economic immigrants were considered highly skilled. In terms of integration and support, Programs like Manitoba Start provided services to about 6,000 immigrant newcomers in 2014, achieving a 75 percent job placement rate. Manitoba also led in international qualifications recognition, helping newcomers gain certification in their chosen professions. Manitoba achieved a high retention rate of 86.7 percent of the immigrants it attracted to the province.

According to Bucklaschuk (2018) most permanent residents in Manitoba settled in Winnipeg in 2016, accounting for 83.7 percent of all newcomers to the province. Moreover,

Manitoba Immigration Facts Report 2021 by Government of Manitoba (2021), explains that the population of Manitoba increased through the arrival of all categories of immigrants with 16,560 immigrants choosing Manitoba as their immigration destination and becoming permanent residents marking a 91.9 percent annual growth from 2020. There was also a significant increase in the number of international students and temporary foreign workers declaring Manitoba as their intended destination. Most newcomers arrived through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP), which is the primary tool for bringing skilled immigrants, international student graduates, and business investors to meet the province's labor and economic needs (Bucklaschuk, 2018). Manitoba's newcomers are diverse in terms of age, culture, gender, language, education, and occupation. The age-gender structure shows a roughly equal number of male and female immigrants, with most age groups having more male immigrants. In terms of language, newcomers communicated in over 160 languages, however, English was the official language spoken by 86.5 percent of immigrants, while 3 percent declared their fluency in French or both French and English. Regarding education, over 50 percent of permanent residents aged 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2021. The majority of economic class principal applicants were considered highly skilled, and there was an increase in low-skilled immigrant arrivals, aligning with Manitoba's labor market needs. Sales and service professions accounted for nearly 40 percent of assessed occupations of economic immigrants in 2021.

According to Manitoba Immigration's report (2021), Winnipeg ranked seventh among Canadian cities as a destination for immigrants in 2021 with approximately 33,795 immigrants declaring Winnipeg as their intended destination between 2019 and 2021. The city is also among the top five landing places for newcomers, even though it is not part of the top five largest cities in Canada chosen by newcomers demonstrating an increase of newcomers in the city according to the same report. The city is home to a vibrant and diverse community including Indigenous

communities that contributes to its beauty and diversity. It is also a multicultural city with a rich diversity of faith-based, ethnocultural, and non-governmental community organizations (Ahmed, 2017). In addition, immigrant groups such as Ukrainians, Jewish, Africans, Mennonites, French, Asian, Southeast Asian, and Eastern Europeans influence the city's cultural landscape. The top languages spoken by newcomers in 2021 were Punjabi, Chinese, Tagalog, Yoruba, and Spanish (Manitoba Immigration, 2021). The north end of the city is a diverse immigrant neighborhood facing challenges and opportunities, in contrast with the more affluent South side. These diverse communities are accepted in the city, yet newcomers are always subject to a myriad of struggles as they desire to live their dreams and thrive.

Nearly one-quarter (23.9 percent) of Winnipeg's population consists of immigrants, and almost half (49.3 percent) of these individuals have arrived since 2006 with 49.1 percent of this predominantly young population under the age of 25 and 91.8 percent under the age of 44 (Bucklaschuk, 2018). These statistics highlight the significance of newcomer's contribution to Winnipeg's economy and culture as well as the need to fully integrate Winnipeg's newcomers into this diverse community.

Challenges Faced by Newcomers

It is not always the perfect life those newcomers have dreamt of when they come to Winnipeg as most are facing a plethora of challenges that sometimes have a negative impact with some ending up in gangs (Fast, 2017). Within the city of Winnipeg, newcomers face many significant challenges related to racism including structural violence like inadequate wages; lack of access to educational and employment opportunities; sexual exploitation and trafficking; and social conflicts, particularly involving Indigenous peoples, and inter-group misunderstandings are often rooted in systemic issues like racism and socio-economic inequalities (Ahmed, 2017; Christmas, 2017; Silver, 2015) which these newcomers are unprepared for. It is also difficult for them to integrate and participate fully in city life due to

the diverse experiences and expectations of both refugee and host societies (Boli, 2016). Additionally, they face challenges when attempting to join sports teams, which may be due to several factors. A recent report from Anti-Racism in Sport Campaign (2021) noted that several newcomers in Winnipeg are faced with the difficulties of paying the costs associated with participating in sports because of how high the cost is, which impedes their inclusion. Further, the report mentions that transportation to sport events is a barrier for newcomers, as they may not have the means to travel to games or practices (p. 5).

Newcomers feel isolated in predominantly white led sports organizations due to the lack of friends or family connections to invite them to join teams and as a result, this can make sports organizations feel hostile and unwelcoming. The Anti-Racism in Sport Campaign report (2021) also mentioned a couple of other challenges faced by newcomers with regards to participating in sports such as cultural and language barriers, and discrimination. While newcomers face challenges in understanding and completing forms or navigating the system to access grants for sports participation, they and other racialized groups may experience racism, exclusion, and microaggressions, which can discourage their participation in sports (Anti-Racism in Sport, 2021). And these experiences can lead to social disengagement, high school dropouts, and other negative consequences for newcomer youth (Anti-Racism in Sport, 2021). These barriers indicate that there is a lack of robust inclusive practices in place to facilitate the life of newcomers in Winnipeg. It also shows that there is a need for intentional efforts to reduce these barriers and create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for newcomers in sports.

Further, in terms of cultural navigation, Marmah (2017) noted that African newcomer youth, especially those living in Winnipeg, navigate between their 'Africanness' and their developing Canadian identities. This involves balancing traditional cultural norms with the more liberal Canadian societal values that becomes a challenge because Canadian culture is different from their cultures of origin. Other challenges range from adapting to a new

educational system, facing language barriers and socio-economic marginalization, experiencing a lack of interaction and understanding, social distance and segregation, racism, cultural differences and stereotypes (Fast, 2017; Gyepi-Garbrah et al., 2014). These challenges play a significant role in shaping the identity, experience, and mindset of these young newcomers.

A study completed by Wilkinson et al. (2012) discussed the school-to-work transitions with a particular focus on Canadian newcomer youth, focusing on their educational experiences and labor market outcomes. The research revealed that the educational trajectories of newcomer and refugee youth in Canada aged 15 to 29 over a four-year period were found to have higher rates of early high school dropouts compared to other immigrant entrance classes. There are multiple factors that explain this situation including discrimination, the language of instruction, and country of origin, and even though refugee youth often faced educational challenges, they showed improvement in catching up over time (Wilkinson et al., 2012).

Another key point is the evolution of gang violence in Winnipeg targeting young newcomers. In fact, the city has witnessed an increase in gang activity, with newer gangs like the African Mafia joining older established prominent gangs like the Mad Cowz that recruit immigrant and refugee youth, and displaced youth who have experienced violence in their homelands leading to tragic outcomes like shootings and stabbings (Fast, 2017; Macdonald, 2007). Macdonald (2007) discussed that the emergence of violent gangs in Winnipeg's inner-city immigrant communities became evident after the 2005 shooting of 17-year-old Philippe Haiart, a bystander caught in gang crossfire. In addition, The Mad Cowz and African Mafia gangs, formed by youth from war-torn countries like Somalia and Sudan, target vulnerable immigrant youth for recruitment. Many of these young individuals, such as Hussein Jilaow and Mandela Kuet, have faced deportation due to committing serious criminal activities, despite fleeing violence in their home countries. The gangs exploit the disorientation and trauma of refugee youth, who often struggle with language barriers and cultural differences, leading them

to seek belonging and identity within gang structures. Evidently, these challenges become an obstacle for their well-being and growth in the city.

Carter and Osborne (2009) recall that young refugees face several challenges that hinder their experiences and adaptation into their new environment. The first is the demographics challenge. Refugee households tend to be larger and younger, with an average household size of approximately four persons compared to 2.4 persons for all Winnipeg households. Also, about 35 percent of refugees in their study were under 15 years old, compared to 18 percent of the general Winnipeg population. Looking at young people's education skills, many young refugees arrive with limited formal education and lack urban skills. For example, 29 percent of refugees of school age or older in Winnipeg had no formal education, and 55 percent had not graduated from secondary school. This lack of education and skills makes it difficult for these youth to adapt to their new environment and find stable housing (Carter & Osborne, 2009). Young refugees are also facing health challenges. They often suffer from health issues due to long periods in refugee camps, including malnutrition, trauma, and other physical and mental health problems. These challenges can hinder their ability to integrate into society and access stable housing. Another challenge is housing challenges.

Carter and Osborne (2009) reveal that larger, younger refugee households require three- or four-bedroom units, which make up only 2 percent of Winnipeg's rental market. This leads to overcrowding, with over 30 percent of refugee households living in units that do not meet National Occupancy Standards. Looking at neighbourhood safety, young refugees are exposed to safety and security concerns in Winnipeg's inner city. Crime rates are high, and many families worry about the negative influence of the environment on children, including exposure to gangs, drugs, and violence. Also, high mobility rates among refugee households are partly driven by the search for better housing and safer neighborhoods. This instability can negatively impact young newcomers' ability to establish roots and access education and social services. In general,

this demonstrates that young refugees face significant barriers that hinder their resettlement and integration into Canadian society. One might also observe that refugee women face several challenges in Winnipeg. McCluskey (2022) reveals that there are persistent challenges faced by refugee women in their integration experiences, highlighting systemic issues. Women expressed gratitude for feeling safe in Canada and they identified ongoing challenges in integration. These challenges are numerous and are identified through language barriers which were a significant obstacle to accessing services and employment; transportation issues which hindered job opportunities, with public transit being unreliable; employment challenges which include skill recognition and discrimination based on attire; and the fact that access to services was inconsistent (McCluskey, 2022).

Despite these challenges, various community-led and government-supported initiatives have been instrumental in driving up improvements in the lives of these young people (Silver, 2015) which showcases their resilience and determination as they continue to contribute positively to the society, culture, and economy of Winnipeg. Further, there have been several services offered to newcomers, especially refugees in term of their settlement in Winnipeg. However, those services are inefficient requiring a re-evaluation of how they work. Boli (2016) argued that Winnipeg's settlement organizations require a re-evaluation of methodologies and focus as their services are insufficient to meet the diverse needs of refugees. There are gaps in housing, language support, mental health services, and tailored programs for specific groups, such as refugee men. Also, while many Settlement Provider Organizations (SPOs) adopt a holistic approach, this method often leads to duplication and overlap of services, competition for the same clients, and challenges in sharing sensitive information among agencies (Boli, 2016).

Exploring gender disparities, Boli (2016) contended that refugee men are less likely to access settlement services compared to women, partly due to cultural perceptions and the lack

of tailored programs for men. Funding restrictions further exacerbate this issue. Conversely, refugee women have found sources of strength and resilience, and it has helped them during their settlement process in Winnipeg. For example, McCluskey (2022) reported that spirituality and faith were crucial for women's coping and provided them with a sense of community; while family, particularly children's well-being, was a primary source of strength and motivation; and community support was also vital for them in accessing information and resources, fostering a sense of belonging; and they appreciated Canada's diversity that allowed cross community relationships and learning to build the fabric of local communities.

Soccer and Peace in Winnipeg

Within this social landscape, the concepts of soccer and peace emerge as two significant themes, reflecting how participation in sports can foster cross-community connections. Therefore, this section highlights the evolution of soccer in Winnipeg and the different peacebuilding efforts in the city.

The Evolution of Soccer in Winnipeg

Sport in general has the potential to impact and change people's lives. Mott (1983) noted that historically the development of sport was influenced by Winnipeg's growing population as well as urban concerns within the city. In the early 20th century, Winnipeggers sought solutions to urban problems through people's increased participation in organized sports. Many citizens were concerned about urban issues, including the city's physical and moral decline. 'Manly' sports, sport revolving around boys and men, were promoted as a remedy for the negative effects of urban living. This movement left a lasting impact on the city's sporting culture, emphasizing organized participation. Further, the early 1900s witnessed a dramatic rise in the popularity of various sports in Winnipeg and as Winnipeg's population grew from approximately 40,000 in 1900 to over 150,000 by 1914, new sports were introduced included field hockey, skiing, squash, volleyball, badminton, indoor baseball, and basketball (Mott,

1983). This suggests that a need was met in Winnipeg through the establishment and evolution of sports to meet groups different. It shows the significance of sport as a growing and popular activity among many of the city's citizens.

Soccer was one of the most popular sports in Winnipeg during the early 20th century and by 1914, there were approximately 4,500 soccer players in the city (Mott, 1983). It had a well-organized structure, with the Winnipeg and District Football League arranging games for players at different levels, including 'senior,' 'intermediate,' 'junior,' and 'juvenile' categories. It was played in various leagues like the intercollegiate leagues, church and Sunday School leagues, lodge leagues, occupational leagues (e.g., bankers', printers', and tradesmen's leagues), and company leagues. Notably, Eaton's employees formed a soccer league in 1908 with 16 teams (p. 59). Further, soccer was actively promoted in public playgrounds and schools. The Schools Football League, established in 1900, grew significantly and provided competition for over 500 boys aged 12 to 16 by 1914 (Mott, 1983). Soccer was seen to instill discipline, fair play, and moral values, especially among immigrant children and those from working-class families.

In addition, Mott (1983) narrated that multiple factors contributed to the surge in sports participation during this period. For instance, (1) population growth was a key factor, but the increase in participation exceeded population growth alone; (2) a decrease in working hours allowed people more leisure time for sports; (3) the enjoyment of playing games and social interaction motivated individuals to participate; and (4) participants received rewards such as trophies, medals, and praise from respected community members. Over time, there was a concerted effort to promote organized sports among young males to instill values and discipline in them. Mott argued that efforts were made to replace unstructured play with organized games that had educational value. There were Protestant churches which facilitated numerous teams

and events to attract young boys. Those leagues were sponsored and designed in such a way that the churches would preserve and protect those teenagers.

Mott (1983) noted that publicly financed facilities were designed to provide safe environments for youth sports. Facilities such as playgrounds, skating rinks, and swimming pools were built to reach those teenagers. There were also organizations like the Winnipeg Boys' Club and the YMCA who emphasized the importance of sports in developing character and health. These came as an attempt to create a safe space for those young individuals. As time went by, there was increased participation among diverse groups. Various groups, including women and non-British Protestants, began participating more actively in sports during this period. They were encouraged to engage in sports, moving beyond their traditional role as spectators. Women were traditionally seen as spectators, but by the early 1900s, they were praised for participating in sports like hockey, baseball, and basketball (Mott, 1983). The belief that healthy mothers lead to healthy children spurred the push for women's involvement in invigorating sports. Women sought to redefine themselves as "modern" by participating in sports, moving away from the stereotype of the "swooning" female (Mott, 1983, pp. 63-64). Also, non-British Protestant minorities like Icelanders and Catholics, increased their participation in team sports like baseball and hockey. The influx of Central and Eastern European immigrants also contributed to the diversity of sports participation.

Moreover, there was a democratization of sports in early 20th century. As Mott (1983) highlighted, sports became more accessible to the working class, leading to a democratization of previously exclusive games. The rise of new sports like indoor baseball and basketball contributed to this trend. While some sports remained exclusive, the overall participation of working-class individuals in many sports significantly increased. This created a lasting impact of an early 20th century sports culture on the city. In fact, the developments in organized sports during this period had a lasting influence on Winnipeg's sporting culture. The practices and

institutions established in the early 1900s continued to shape sports in Winnipeg post-World War I and organized sports remained popular as a means to address urban problems and promote physical and moral benefits while the early twentieth century is recognized as a seminal period in the evolution of Canadian sports attitudes and practices (p. 67). Taken together, this indicates that sport in general and soccer in particular have always played a crucial role in shaping Winnipeg's culture as well as creating a space that fosters belonging and a sense of community. In the same vein, several sports organizations around Winnipeg came together and established a framework that guides the city's role in sport and physical activity, based on the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) model.

Prokopchuk (2012) revealed that Winnipeg has a long-standing tradition of providing diverse sport and recreation opportunities for its residents. Early childhood programs foster active play and motor skills development while physical education in schools teaches fundamental movement skills. Community-based teams and clubs prepare youth for organized sport and competition because the sport system aims to create a healthy, active, and physically literate population. Further, the framework was developed through extensive community consultation and collaboration among key stakeholders, and its aim was to establish a shared strategy for promoting physical activities for all (Prokopchuk, 2012). A partnership was formed in 2009 among sport organizations and stakeholders to create a policy and the development process that included four stages: partnership formalization, community consultation, policy articulation, and implementation planning that is guided by collaborative principles aimed at enhancing sport and recreation (Prokopchuk, 2012). An implication of this framework is that sport is an important outlet for local and newcomer Winnipeggers demonstrating the value sports holds and the impact it can have on people's lives.

Cherney (2006) exploration of the growing popularity of soccer in Manitoba conceded that it was introduced to Canada by British troops and settlers in the 18th century, gaining early

popularity before being overshadowed by Canadian football. Immigrants from various countries such as the Italians, Scots, Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Greeks, Germans, English, and Irish maintained their soccer traditions, leading to the formation of clubs in Winnipeg. In 1896, the Manitoba Football Association, later called the Manitoba Soccer Association, was established, which helped in positioning Manitoba as a leading Canadian soccer organization. The first national championships were held in 1913 and 1914, with teams like the Norwood Wanderers and Winnipeg Scottish achieving early success (Cherney, 2006). This implies that newcomers have played a key part in the establishment of soccer activities and its evolution over time, making soccer an important sport among Manitobans.

Equally important is the 'Golden Age' of soccer in Manitoba. According to Cherney (2006) it was a period termed by Franck Jankac, a local historian, which was between the World Wars and was characterized by large crowds (8,000 to 12,000) attending games at Carruthers Park. Soccer was particularly popular among immigrant communities, often surpassing hockey in importance during this time. Special trams were introduced to transport fans from industrial areas to matches, highlighting soccer's role in community cohesion amidst social tensions. There were some key individuals who contributed to the recognition and expansion of soccer in Manitoba. For example, Sam Davidson was a pivotal figure in promoting soccer (Cherney, 2006). He was an immigrant born in Northern Ireland, who came to Winnipeg in the early years of the 20th century. He supported local soccer and served as secretary of the Manitoba Soccer Association and organized cross-country tours. He is now in the Canadian Soccer Hall of Fame and Museum from this period. John Easton and George Anderson were also instrumental in soccer administration, with Anderson playing a key role in the reorganization of the Dominion of Canadian Soccer Association post-World War II. Notable players included 'Buzz' Horn and Doug McMahon, who achieved success both locally and internationally. McMahon was one of

the inductees into the Soccer Hall of Fame and Museum as well as a star with the United Weston Team.

The Winnipeg Women's Soccer League (WWSL) has developed since its inception in 1983 (Winnipeg Women's Soccer League, n.d). Established in 1983 with four teams, the WWSL has significantly expanded over 33 years, now featuring multiple divisions including a Premiere and a nascent Masters Division. The league is self-governing and volunteer-driven, promoting soccer for women aged 18 and older, and plays a vital role in the local soccer community. WWSL collaborates with organizations like the Manitoba Soccer Association and the Winnipeg Soccer Federation to enhance soccer in Manitoba, and a partnership with Red River College has provided excellent facilities for teams, fostering community support and collaboration. The league aims to support the growing number of young female players and anticipates continued growth, particularly in the youth and Masters categories (Winnipeg Women's Soccer League, n.d).

Peacebuilding Efforts in Winnipeg

The concept of peacebuilding is important and relevant to this study. It is a multifaceted process that requires a nuanced understanding of local contexts, the interplay of various factors, and the importance of both tangible and intangible elements (Brabant, 2010). As such there are several examples of peacebuilding practices that exist in Canada and Winnipeg in particular and fall under the context of this study. Thus, it is critical to comprehend some of these practices that are important for the betterment of the population, including newcomers and Indigenous peoples.

The toolkit for inclusive municipalities in Canada and Beyond by Yvonne Vizina and Peigi Wilson (2009) is a good illustration of why peacebuilding is important. The toolkit aims at promoting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada through a holistic approach, providing resources and strategies for municipalities to engage with Indigenous communities.

It is a toolkit for Canadian municipalities to use and beyond to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through inclusive practices and policies. In an environment where there are people whose voices have been silenced for a very long time and who have been neglected, this peacebuilding tool helps in understanding how individuals can harmoniously work together in a spirit of reconciliation. Winnipeg's municipalities are encouraged to engage with Indigenous communities on various local issues, including land-use planning and economic development. This collaboration can lead to cost savings, job creation, and improved service delivery. Successful initiatives could include joint projects and sharing services between municipalities and Indigenous communities.

Within the Winnipeg context, there are several initiatives that Vizina and Wilson (2009) also report on such as the Indigenous Accord that Winnipeg created and over 80 business and organization signed, whereby the signatories committed to reconvene annually to report on their reconciliation progress and future goals. Another peacebuilding method is the Indigenous Youth strategy called *Oshki Annishinabe Nigaaniwak*. This program offers Indigenous youth opportunities in employment, literacy, and recreation through culturally appropriate programs and supports. It includes internships, scholarships, camps, and recreation programs. Also, there is the Citizen Equity Sub-Committee (CEC) whose main purpose is to advise the Mayor and Council on equity and diversity issues. It developed resources like Winnipeg's Know Your Neighbours Guide and an Indigenous Leadership Invitation protocol to guide respectful engagement with Indigenous leaders. Winnipeg also developed a Smudging Standard, allowing traditional ceremonies like smudging in City facilities for events, meetings, sports gatherings, and personal self-care.

Finally, Vizina and Wilson (2009) noted that there is the Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory. The City's Citizen Equity Committee published a card acknowledging Treaty 1 Territory and the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota peoples, as

well as the Métis Nation. Further, there are independent Indigenous organizations that work towards peacebuilding efforts. Reesor (2019) observed that independent Indigenous organizations such as *Ka Ni Kanichihk* (KNK), located in the inner city of Winnipeg, provides a culturally safe environment to support Indigenous people through various programs like the Butterfly Club and Root Connections. These programs focus on community involvement, self-development, environmental stewardship, and Indigenous cultural reclamation. Additionally, KNK has collaborated with community settlement services in Winnipeg since 2010 to foster connections between newcomers and Indigenous people. KNK offers programs like Aboriginal Awareness workshops, Youth Peacebuilding gathering programs, and anti-racism training to promote cross-cultural relations and decolonization in the city. These initiatives aim to create space for relationships between Indigenous people and newcomers, educate newcomers about Indigenous history and culture, and address negative perceptions of Indigenous peoples. This initiative shows that peacebuilding efforts have been undertaken to foster relationships among a myriad of different individuals, especially Indigenous people.

Furthermore, there is a call for and an emphasis on relationship building between newcomers and Indigenous peoples. For example, Alidina et al (2020) recognized that relationships between newcomers and Indigenous peoples are dynamic and evolving, with both communities sharing histories of colonization and socio-economic challenges. There is a growing awareness of Indigenous rights and struggles, yet tensions remain due to xenophobia, racism, and misinformation. This led to newcomers often adopting negative stereotypes about Indigenous communities, while some Indigenous individuals harbored xenophobic sentiments towards newcomers. Therefore, in an effort to nurture relationship-building, the authors suggested the following wise practices: (1) land-based learning which aims at educating newcomers about Indigenous territories and cultures through experiential learning; (2) storytelling which utilizes oral traditions to share experiences and values; (3) sport and

recreation, using accessible activities to build relationships; and (4) life skills exchange in order to share valuable skills between communities. These suggestions are fundamental because it helps in eradicating discrimination, stereotypes, and defamation between Indigenous and non Indigenous communities that can lead to facilitating more harmonious, strong and connected communities which strive for good relationships.

Along similar lines, the implementation of the Winnipeg Community Sport Policy has had a positive impact on soccer delivery and players alike, especially in terms of personal development. According to Papageorgopoulos (2018), the Winnipeg Community Sport Policy has redefined Winnipeg's role in sport delivery, with an emphasis on a community development and collective impact framework. It also aims to enhance health and wellness for Winnipeg's citizens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the context chapter provided a broad understanding of Winnipeg as a city newcomers desire to live in highlighting how the city has grown over the years to accommodate young emerging adult newcomers that have found a new home away from home. It underscored the different challenges that young emerging adult newcomers face in the city. These challenges range from educational transition, and cultural navigation to gang violence. The chapter also explored the history of soccer in Manitoba and Winnipeg, revealing how impactful soccer has been on newcomers over a very long time. This set the stage for a deeper exploration of the complex dynamics shaping the experiences of newcomers in this diverse urban environment. The next chapter discusses pertinent literature around to showcase the importance of the study and its relevance.

Chapter Three - Literature Review

Introduction

Four theoretical frameworks comprise the basis of Chapter three and the theoretical framework of the thesis, namely (1) Critical and emancipatory peacebuilding, (2) Soccer and peacebuilding, (3) Youth, and (4) Social integration, cohesion, and community building. These four theoretical frameworks help unpack and aid in our understanding of the research question and the study's findings. It also assists in our understanding of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences of soccer and peace in Winnipeg. Moreover, it also provides an understanding of how soccer can be leveraged as a vehicle for social change, as well as empowering and promoting social cohesion, and integration among young emerging adult newcomers so that they can become active agents of peace in their communities.

Critical and Emancipatory Peacebuilding

Emancipatory peacebuilding advocates a bottom-up, localized approach that prioritizes local participation, cultural context, and the everyday experiences of those affected by conflict. It rejects universal blueprints and neoliberal goals, focusing instead on social justice and empowering local actors (Thiessen, 2011). It also draws on critical theory, challenging global political and economic structures that support neoliberalism seeking to address systemic inequalities and promote justice for local populations as part of a holistic peacebuilding approach (Thiessen, 2011). In other words, it provides an alternative option to neoliberal peacebuilding that has been faulty and ineffective over the years.

Neoliberal peacebuilding is a strategy found within international peacebuilding that uses a universal IKEA model of intervention; "a flat-pack peace made from standardized components" including a market economy, democracy, elections, human rights, economic aid, and security reform (Mac Ginty, 2008, p. 145). In fact, international peacebuilding faces

difficulties in the current turbulent global environment with escalating conflicts, terrorism, and militarism; consequently, the lessons learned from the last 25 years emphasize the political nature of peacebuilding, the need for inclusive processes, and the importance of long-term engagement (Tschirgi, 2019). The changing global milieu demonstrates the need for a much more accessible approach to empower local communities in a way that creates economic stability and peaceful living. This is somewhat in contrast to “Peace Inc’s peacelanders” efforts to implement neoliberal peacebuilding locally which excludes local inhabitants from working for social change (Autesserre, 2021).

According to Thiessen (2011), neoliberal peacebuilding combines neoliberal economic policies and liberal political structures in conflict-affected areas. This model emphasizes rapid marketization and democratic elections in a post-war context, often prioritizing economic freedom and minimal government intervention (p. 113). Ultimately, this critique of neoliberal peacebuilding highlights the need for a critical examination of the power dynamics and potential drawbacks of imposing Western-style economic and political systems on post-peace accord societies, emphasizing the importance of context-specific and locally driven approaches to nurturing sustainable peace. Therefore, critical and emancipatory peacebuilding is essential for navigating and understanding the complexity of this study.

Soccer and Peacebuilding

The relationship between soccer and peacebuilding is one that is fascinating that is why there is a plethora of academic work around the subject. Therefore, this section reflects on those studies which highlight their relevance to the study.

Soccer As a Tool for Integration and Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding plays a critical role in fostering robust communities. It establishes stability and restoration, addresses the socioeconomic dimensions of conflict, and is conceptualized as activities that aim to prevent, manage, and terminate direct violence and/or

cultural and structural violence, and to alter the systems of ideas and values that legitimize and promote physical violence and injustice (Barnett et al., 2007; McEvoy-Levy, 2024). In fact, people are brought together through peacebuilding despite their intersectional backgrounds, cultural differences, race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion leading to an appreciation of diversity and providing a strong foundation for society to thrive.

Peacebuilding is a powerful tool to forge social cohesion and integration because of its aims to prevent, reduce, transform, and aid in local individuals recovery from violence as well as empower individuals to foster positive relationships and create structural justice for people through deliberate intervention (Mac Ginty, 2024; Schirch, 2006). The scope of peacebuilding has expanded since the early 1990s, recognizing that it can occur even amidst conflict and not just after it so that its evolution has seen the emergence of various innovative approaches (Barnett et al., 2007; Mac Ginty, 2024), among which sports, and soccer in particular, have developed as a potent peacebuilding intervention tool.

Information from many studies suggest that sport has grown significantly in its role and influence across various societal spheres. In fact, sport has a global influence through fostering social relationships and promoting peace as well as attracting investment and support with nations and corporations worldwide recognizing the value of sports in young people's development (Ajibola, 2023). In the same vein, Cardenas (2016) contends that sport-based interventions have made modest but tangible contributions to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and Colombia. In Northern Ireland, soccer fostered contact and cultural awareness across both Catholic and Protestant divided communities yet is also burdened by political and sectarian affiliations, whereas in Colombia, it has addressed conflict-related social issues and is seen as a tool for facilitating development and peace, with potential for expanded policy integration in the post-peace accord era. However, there is room for improvement to strengthen peacebuilding efforts in both Colombia and Northern Ireland.

In particular, soccer¹, often called ‘the beautiful game,’ or ‘football’ as it is also known in certain parts of the world (Weineck & Szymanski, 2018) transcends cultural and national boundaries. Soccer’s universal appeal and ability to bring people together makes it an ideal method for fostering social integration and peace among young people. Further, in some instances, soccer has become a source of national identity in certain countries like South Africa and Brazil.

Looking at the World Cup in South Africa in 2010 for example, Sewpaul (2009) noted that despite the diverse views on national identity, reflecting a spectrum of political ideologies in South Africa, hosting the 2010 World Cup was seen at that time as a potential catalyst for national pride and identity. There was a need for a nuanced understanding of South African identity that incorporated race, class, gender, and other factors. The tournament was viewed as a potential unifying event that could reshape perceptions of South Africa and Africa as it had the potential to serve as a platform for social inclusion and development. However, Sewpaul (2009) reported that the socio-economic challenges facing South Africa at that time were intertwined with the hosting of Soccer 2010 and South African national identity. In fact, the socio-economic implications of the event were critical, as disparities in wealth and opportunity persisted. Also, there were high rates of unemployment, poverty, and crime which posed significant challenges to social cohesion. These differences can be explained in part by the economic and political context of the country post-apartheid at a time where unity was needed and belonging created.

That said, the success of international soccer tournaments like the World Cup has further enhanced soccer’s ability to bring people together and foster a sense of global unity. This is why soccer is undoubtedly the most popular sport in the world with approximately 200 million

¹ The term ‘soccer’ and ‘football’ are used interchangeably in this thesis research.

players, including 40 million women (Dvorak et al., 2004). It is clear that soccer has a special place in the hearts of many people worldwide. In the context of Winnipeg, soccer is a sport as well as a community-building activity that brings young people together across many boundaries. Numerous local leagues and clubs and local organizations such as IRCOM, Sport Without Boundaries (SWB), Bonivital Soccer Club, and Winnipeg Newcomers Sport Academy (WNSA), to name but a few, actively engage youth from diverse backgrounds, providing them with a platform to connect with each other. Through activities and sport programs like Mini's Free-to-Play Soccer, Beyond Sport, and Girls in Sports, they promote growth and development, physical activity, and teamwork (Sport Without Boundaries, 2023). Bonivital Soccer Club, for example, engages with newcomers to Canada by supporting newcomer families, including those facing financial barriers and helping them with program fees and applications for funding. The club also creates a welcoming environment for families and athletes which has led to an increased participation from newcomer families in recent years (Sport for Life, 2023). This inclusion demonstrates how soccer promotes essential values such as teamwork, respect, and mutual understanding, making it an ideal vehicle for peacebuilding.

One of the most common problems individuals face while being involved in sport is racism. That is why, the Anti-Racism toolkit provided by BGC Canada (2022) was designed to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion through anti-racist programming and self-awareness activities in all sectors, and particularly in sport. This toolkit serves to build self-awareness about anti-racism, recognize oppressive systems in Canada, and provide strategies for managing emotions in anti-racism conversations. BGC Canada (2022) provides strategies for: (1) those suffering pain and anger, checking in with members, modelling expected behaviour, allowing people to share their feelings, and acknowledging emotions respectfully; (2) using the analogy of racism as smog, and emphasizing collective responsibility for change; (3) encouraging members to identify realistic responsibilities and refocusing guilt into actionable anti-racism

steps; (4) creating safe spaces for anonymous sharing of humiliating experiences and guiding members towards solutions; and (5) introducing accurate facts to counter misinformation and ignorance about specific groups. An implication of these strategies is that challenges are real, and no one is exempted from it, so that there is a need to establish ways for smoother integration especially for newcomers involve in soccer activities.

In addition, Cardenas's work (2019) provides several components of soccer's role in peacebuilding efforts. He noted that soccer has a role of rehabilitation and healing, and it has been used in communities affected by armed conflict in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Rwanda as part of social programs and refugee camps to treat the physical and psychological wounds of war victims. Additionally, it plays the role of rebuilding and reculturation. Soccer tournaments in African countries like Sierra Leone have featured teams composed of players from different ethnic groups to reduce intertribal conflict and foster a sense of national identity. It is also crucial in conflict resolution as well as reconciliation, and it has been used as a controlled environment to teach youth conflict resolution skills. For example, the Football for Peace International program in Northern Ireland incorporates values-based coaching to teach equity, inclusion, respect, trust, and responsibility during soccer training sessions (Cardenas, 2019). And soccer tournaments and festivals have been used to integrate groups in protracted conflict, promoting healing, intercultural understanding, and fostering relationships between antagonistic groups. In South Africa, soccer contributed to reconciliation at the national, community, and individual levels.

Cardenas's findings (2019) further indicate that soccer is a tool for integration across ethnocultural barriers is further demonstrated by the case study of Colombia. The research shows that soccer has been a key tool in Colombia's sport-for-peace movement, helping to limit illegal recruitment of children and youth by armed groups, fostering peaceful coexistence, and promoting social inclusion. The Football for Peace methodology, developed in Medellín,

introduced innovative practices such as mixed teams, no referees, and rule-setting by participants to tackle urban violence and promote social inclusion.

However, some critiques, challenges and limitations exist that argue against the fact that sport in general can be used a tool for integration and peacebuilding. At the same time however, Corry-Roake (2015) argued that football has been used for social development since the 19th century, initially in British private schools to promote individual development and citizenship. Over time, its use has expanded to include peacebuilding in politically and socially tense environments. There are several participatory football projects that were aimed at creating safe spaces for individuals from conflicting groups to interact, build trust, and form positive relationships. Some of the examples include grassroots initiatives like Kickz and Kick Racism Out of Soccer in the UK, Mifalot in Israel, and Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, there is a lack of robust evidence to support the claim that football can lead to long-term peacebuilding (Corry-Roake, 2015). While there is anecdotal evidence of positive relationship transformation at the individual level, there is little evidence to suggest that these changes lead to broader societal or political conflict resolution (Corry-Roake, 2015).

Also, it is worth noting that in the past there have been instances where soccer was also a source of violence. For example, global soccer hooliganism is a form of violence in society that is recognized as a significant issue that leads to hate crime and can be classified in the same category as skinhead and neo-fascist violence (Byrne & Senehi, 2012). In the same vein, Miguel et al. (2008) examines the relationship between national culture, specifically the history of civil conflict, and violent behavior in soccer players within European leagues. Using data from European soccer leagues to analyze the impact of national culture on violence, the paper indicates that there is a significant relationship between civil war history and violent behavior in soccer. Also, a one standard deviation increases in civil conflict prevalence led to a 3.6 percent increase in yellow cards for African players. The findings remain consistent even when

controlling for various factors, including rule of law and team characteristics. So, to validate the findings, the study conducted several robust checks. In fact, the analysis remained robust when considering players' exposure to violence based on their age and the timing of conflicts. The relationship holds true even when controlling for players from developed countries and accounting for team quality. The study also found no significant correlation between civil war history and regular fouls, which are less violent in nature. Miguel et al. (2008) also suggested that exposure to violence during childhood may have influenced players' behavior on the field. The proportion of years a player experienced civil war before age 18 predicted their likelihood of receiving yellow or red cards. Civil war history from the 1960s and 1970s, prior to most players' births, did not show a similar predictive power. However, further research is needed to confirm the causal relationship between childhood exposure to violence and subsequent behavior. An important variable to investigate is the persistence of violent cultures. Miguel et al.'s (2005) study indicates that violent cultural traits may be resistant to change even when players that have experienced wars move to different societies. Discussions regarding whether the influence of civil war history diminishes with a player's age or experience in European leagues did not yield statistically significant results. This suggests that violent national cultures are persistent throughout a player's playing career.

On the other hand, Brand (2019) argued that there has been an over-optimistic hype of sport as a powerful peacebuilding tool. He noted that the expectations placed on sport to achieve grand solutions to complex social issues are unrealistic and may be counterproductive (p. 17). Further, Brand (2019) contended that sport has been used as an instrument for political and social engineering as it is often used to promote politically preferable neoliberal norms and values, which may not align with the cultural idiosyncrasies of sporting activities. Finally, sport has the potential to be easily used to trigger violence. In fact, Cwik (2008) argued that football can mobilize people along identity lines and trigger conflict.

Conversely, Lechner (2007) examined how the Dutch national team's global competition influences perceptions of Dutch identity and the complexities of soccer nationalism. Lechner explored soccer's role in centering Dutch national identity arguing that soccer serves as a significant cultural touchstone in the Netherlands, particularly during major soccer tournaments, yet its impact on a continuous national identity is debated. The paper revealed that in the 1970s, soccer became a substitute for nationalism, fostering a sense of unity among the Dutch during international competitions like with the great Dutch 1974 world cup team's total football that included Johan Cruyff, Johnny Rep, Ruud Krol, Arie Hann, and Johan Neeskens. Also, the national team 'Oranje' symbolized a binding element for a nation facing identity challenges. So collective attention to soccer is periodic, with national identity crystallizing mainly during soccer tournaments. Fans engage in communal passion, often with a sense of irony, as seen in their playful expressions of patriotism. The paper conceded that globalization presented both challenges and opportunities for Dutch soccer which influenced player's careers and fan experiences. Historically, the international stage has provided opportunities for Dutch players to showcase their talents globally. However, the losses in major tournaments and player migrations to foreign leagues raised concerns about the standardization of soccer strategies. Also, the expansion of media allowed the fans to follow both local and international teams, enriching their soccer experience. Dutch fans exhibited little anxiety about juggling multiple identities and interests in the global soccer landscape (pp. 225-226). Therefore, it is crucial to organize football responsibly to ensure it serves as a peacebuilding tool rather than as a source of division. Consequently, this shows that the idea of using sport as a peacebuilding tool lacks consensus and there is a need to address some of its challenges.

Soccer As a Tool for Facilitating Togetherness

The term "soccer" is commonly used in North America, and it originated in Britain in the late 19th century (Szymanski, 2018) while in other parts of the world, it is called football.

Szymanski (2018) asserted that the word ‘football’ has been used in English since 1486, and the game of football has a long history in England. Also, it is the most popular game in the world, and it was regarded as one of the safest sports to play compared to other sports and the word ‘football’ is referred to as ‘Association Football’ in most countries around the world (Dvorak et al., 2004; FIFA, 2023; Nitrini, 2017; Weineck & Szymanski, 2018). This definition helps to distinguish between how English and American people view this sport.

Football has emerged as a powerful peacebuilding tool particularly in ethnically divided regions (Cwik, 2008). Global soccer has had a significant impact on players development, and it has evolved into the most extensively studied sport globally, with a significant increase in research publications since the 1980s (Kirkendall, 2020). Further, whether it is the players themselves or fans supporting soccer clubs, soccer has always been regarded as a peacebuilding method because football can facilitate social inclusion and cross cultural integration, and the evidence of this can be clearly seen in for example, the case of the implementation of the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) programs in Kosovo (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2019) among the ethnic communities there who have experienced firsthand social inclusion and integration through using football. The OFFS program has brought together and integrated different ethnicities in Kosovo, promoting peacebuilding and fostering dialogue among the Muslim Kosovar and Serb ethnic communities (Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2019).

In addition, soccer has several advantages and benefits. Soccer fosters a sense of community and belonging by providing opportunities for social interaction and creating meaningful relationships among young people. The sport is also promoting these young players’ physical and mental health through physical activity that is good for the human body and teaches them life skills like teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution (Gennaro, 2023; Participation, 2023). Moreover, soccer has provided the space for coaches to be role models for young individuals. As Blom et al. (2015) noted, coaches serve as

role models, demonstrating positive behaviours and peaceful living skills for their athletes. They also engage youth through soccer in constructive activities, reducing the likelihood of their involvement in conflict as they also promote their social growth. Therefore, being engaged and involved in soccer activities assist young individuals to be successful on and off the football pitch. That said, African football also plays an important role among young people because it is more than a sport as it is a powerful tool for unity, peacebuilding, and youth empowerment which “transcends boundaries, fostering social change and bringing communities together” (Eastleigh Voice Reporter, 2024, p. 1). Through active participation in soccer activities, African youth, especially those living in conflict zones or underdeveloped areas, can connect and relate with each other’s stories and experiences as it also serves a “beacon of hope, resilience, and progress” (p. 2) across the continent.

Further, when discussing the impact of soccer on fans, Chiweshe (2016) found that supporting football clubs goes beyond entertainment because it creates a social identity, emotional attachment, personalization of victory, and social interaction that provides young people with an escapism from their everyday problems. All these benefits are included in the beautification of the sport. In South America, especially in Brazil, football is associated with Brazilian national identity and plays a crucial role in the complex intersection of social class, race, and regional rivalry (Tobar & Gusso, 2017).

Similarly, Omamo’s research findings (2022) demonstrate that soccer serves as a vital tool for fostering peace and unity in the ethnically diverse Mathare slums of Kenya. Omamo argued that soccer initiatives for peace have been active in Kenya for decades, especially after the 2007-2008 electoral violence. Further, the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) engaged 3,000 to 4,000 youth from various ethnic backgrounds as well as providing a platform for youth to learn about peace, inclusivity, and community engagement. The research also showed that youth engagement in soccer activities is crucial for peacebuilding in Mathare slums

(Omamo, 2022). Young people were empowered by MYSA that provided them with opportunities beyond soccer, including training in music, photography, and health education so that they were encouraged to spread messages of peace and unity within their communities. Non-football training emphasized health, security, and conflict management, molding young leaders for peace so that through soccer, soccer clubs in Mathare were involved in social activities and community reconciliation (Omamo, 2022). In fact, they were engaged in social activities that promoted community reconciliation and environmental conservation. Teams participated in community service projects, earning points in league standings for their contributions.

Also, the Mathare Environmental Conservation Youth Group (MECYG) collaborates with soccer teams to work on community initiatives. Building on this study, recent research analyzed grassroots soccer development and its impact on national team performance, comparing successful models from Europe, South America, and Africa to provide recommendations for improving the U.S. soccer system. In fact, Ndubuokwu and Oluwalose (2023) reported that grassroots soccer fosters passion and skill development through community initiatives, youth academies, and local clubs. Successful nations like Germany and Spain have structured youth development systems that produce elite players. However, the U.S. has struggled to convert grassroots participation into international success due to the pay-to-play model, limiting access for lower-income players. Another issue is that the U.S. lacks a cohesive academy structure, leading to fragmented player pathways and inconsistent development standards; and coaching education and licensing are less stringent compared to leading soccer nations, affecting training quality (Ndubuokwu & Oluwalose, 2023) . There were also some infrastructure disparities that existed, with poorer communities having limited access to quality training facilities (Ndubuokwu & Oluwalose, 2023) . To resolve the issue there were recommendations for the U.S. to include adopting inclusive talent identification and

development strategies to improve national team performance (Ndubuokwu & Oluwalose, 2023). Extending this argument, Ndubuokwu and Oluwalose (2023) pointed out the benefits and importance of youth soccer development. Youth soccer development offered numerous benefits that extended beyond athletic performance, which contributed to holistic growth. When youth participate in soccer, it enhances their physical fitness, including cardiovascular health, strength, coordination, and flexibility.

Additionally, soccer promotes vital social skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership, which are beneficial in various life activities. Engaging in team sports fosters discipline, resilience, and confidence, preparing young players for future challenges both on and off the field. Along the same line, Ndubuokwu and Oluwalose (2023) contended that there were emerging issues in youth soccer development. Early specialization caused burnout and injuries, suggesting a need for multi-sport participation (Feeley et al., 2016 cited in Ndubuokwu & Oluwalose, 2023, p. 2152). Two other issues emerged from the research findings namely technology and mental health issues. They noted that that technology's use in training may have overshadowed traditional coaching methods, risking young players losing their creativity (Heilig & Scheer, 2023, cited in Ndubuokwu & Oluwalose, 2023, p. 2153) while mental issues, were prevalent due to competitive pressures and high expectations (Reverberi et al., 2020, cited in Ndubuokwu & Oluwalose, 2023, p. 2153). Finally, inclusivity remained a challenge, particularly for marginalized groups and girls indicating that the potential of soccer is vast in terms of having a greater impact on youth. However, when conditions are not met and the environment is not favorable, there are lots of issues that emerge to prevent that from happening.

Moreover, Canadian children are also interested in football. In Canada, soccer has recently received a major boost of participation from especially among its youth. Even though Canadian youth sports experienced significant disruptions due to the pandemic, they are now rebounding. Thus, recent empirical data from 2023 pointed out that soccer has become the most

popular organized sport among Canadian youth, with 16 percent of all youth between the ages of three and 17 participating in the sport (Solution Research Group Consultants, 2023). This is important to know because it indicates that an increasing number of young individuals are becoming interested in “the beautiful game” of football. Gennaro (2023) also mentioned that soccer is Canadian youth’s number one choice of sport to play, ahead of hockey and basketball. Soccer assists young people in improving their motor skills, coordination and balance as well as contributing to their overall fitness, developing their social skills, and in promoting cultural expression and diversity (Gennaro, 2023; Hong et al., 2016). Once again, soccer demonstrates its capacity to include youth from all walks of life highlighting the greater good that it provides these young people.

In terms of diversity, soccer brings people together from different cultural, class, and gender backgrounds despite their origins. For example, McSweeney et al. (2024) revealed that in Uganda, where there were many refugees, football activities were used to create social inclusion and teach the youth conflict resolution and peacemaking skills. Playing soccer also allowed refugees participating in football activities to divert their attention away from challenges they faced to experience positive emotions. For example, Xu (2021) articulated that the Halifax Dunbrack Soccer Club played a crucial role in helping teenage newcomers in Halifax to integrate into Canadian society by providing them with opportunities to engage in soccer, make friends, learn the language, and feel a sense of belonging. The club supported these newcomers not only socially but also financially, making organized sports more accessible to immigrant families. Ultimately, the diverse nature of soccer demonstrates that it is more than a sport; it is a powerful inclusive peacebuilding tool with many advantages that are beneficial for individual participants.

A further consideration is the study completed by Wheatley et al. (2023) that examined the relationships between mental toughness, playing experience, club support mechanisms, and

self-esteem among elite female football players in the English Football Association Women's Super League. The study found significant relationships between mental toughness and various factors, supporting the hypotheses that mental toughness positively correlated with years of playing experience and the highest level of football achieved by players. Soccer players with higher mental toughness also reported greater appreciation of club infrastructure and support mechanisms. Meanwhile, self-esteem was positively associated with mental toughness, playing experience, and external support. Along similar lines, Leslie-Walker and Mulvenna (2022) outlined the growth and professionalization of women's soccer in England, focusing on the Women's Super League (WSL) and the experiences and motivations of female fans with a focus on the Manchester City Women Football Club supporters' club. The professionalization of women's soccer in England has led to increased visibility, attendance, and fan engagement. The WSL was established in 2010, with the first season starting in 2011 featuring eight teams. By 2021, the WSL had expanded to 12 professional teams, with an additional 11 teams in the championship. The average attendance for WSL matches was over 2,000 during the 2019-2020 season, with some matches attracting over 20,000 fans. The record attendance was 31,213 during a Manchester City vs. Manchester United derby match during the 2019-2020 season.

Leslie-Walker and Mulvenna (2022) also identified significant themes regarding what motivated female fans to attend WSL matches. They found that individual players played a crucial role in attracting fans, with many attending games to see star players rather than solely supporting the club. Fans expressed a sense of responsibility to support women's soccer, feeling that their attendance contributed to the sport's development. The desire to inspire younger girls to engage with soccer was a common motivation among fans, highlighting the importance of role models. The study also found that supporter clubs play a vital role in engaging fans and fostering a sense of community within women's soccer. For example, the Manchester City Women Football Club Supporters' Club (MCWFSC) has grown to over 200 paid members since

its formation in 2015. Membership includes benefits such as providing members with a welcome card, a metal badge, and priority access to events. This may help us to understand that women soccer players are also faced with difficulties that have the potential to affect their performance both on and off the pitch as well as the importance of fans in the growth of women's soccer.

Another dimension to consider is McCree's research (2016) which examined the influence of family, particularly parents, on the participation of daughters in soccer in Trinidad and Tobago, highlighting the gender dynamics and socialization processes involved. It revealed how parental involvement in sports influences their daughters' participation in soccer. Most players had parents or siblings who participated in sports, serving as their role models. The active involvement of fathers and brothers was noted, with many players citing them as significant influences. Further, the study revealed that parents generally provided equal support for their daughters in sports, contradicting commonly held stereotypes. Both mothers and fathers showed their encouragement for their daughters' participation in sports. Parents were involved in various ways, including attending games, providing soccer gear, and offering transportation to and from games. Nine out of eleven players received scholarships to attend college in the U.S., showcasing the impact of parental involvement. At the same time, parents helped with college applications and maintained communication with their children while they studied abroad. Finally, the study found little evidence of gender stereotypes among the families of female soccer players. Parents did not display gender-biased beliefs regarding their daughters' capabilities in sports. The supportive environment contributed to the players' motivation and participation in soccer. This study findings indicate that when parents support their daughters, it goes a long way, and it is a successful effort in decreasing gender stereotypes in family contexts.

Research findings also shows that several challenges exist when soccer is used as a tool for facilitating togetherness. For example, looking at the case of Mathare, Nairobi, Kenya, Omamo (2022) argued that soccer activities were plagued with challenges that hindered its development as well as peacebuilding efforts. There was a lack of funding for soccer programs that limited young people's participation and engagement in peace initiatives. Also, poor remuneration for players led to their disillusionment and potential involvement in violence while an inadequate infrastructure and the mismanagement of funds further impeded the development of soccer as a peacebuilding tool. In addition, Omamo (2022) found that there were poor governance and management issues that impacted the development of Kenyan soccer. Omamo (2022) revealed that the governance of soccer teams in Mathare's slums were inadequate, hindering peacebuilding initiatives as: (1) soccer clubs focused primarily on winning tournaments rather than on community development; (2) FIFA's lack of intervention in local clubs contributed to poor management; (3) political interference in soccer activities complicated effective peacebuilding efforts; and (4) corruption among soccer administrators led to mismanagement of funds meant for community initiatives. Other challenges and limitations were the limited popularity of soccer and the gender imbalance in young people's participation. Omamo (2022) also disclosed that not everyone in Mathare slums enjoyed the benefits of playing soccer, complicating its use for reconciliation purposes. While some community members preferred playing other sports like basketball, cricket, and rugby, disappointment in local soccer development led fans to support international teams instead. Also, Mathare soccer players were also predominantly male, which affects peacebuilding initiatives. Women's participation in soccer was limited, impacting their role in peace efforts. The programs aimed at inclusivity faced challenges in psychological acceptance among female participants while initiatives like MYSA worked to include more girls in soccer activities.

Cardenas's study (2019) recognized that there has been an overestimation of sport's impact on youth. Some supporters of Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) have an exaggerated belief in the 'power of sport' to solve social problems, leading to unrealistic expectations among beneficiaries, supporters, and the public. Also, he averred that a limited awareness existed among people because there was often a lack of understanding among key stakeholders, such as the private sector, educational institutions, and sports agencies, about the potential of sports in peacebuilding and development. Another critical challenge was the fact that sport in general can also exacerbate conflicts and sometimes overlook local voices in its development (Reynard, 2020). Decision-making often lacks input from those most affected, leading to solutions that may not address local people's needs effectively while there was also a lack of recognition and utilization of local knowledge with efforts relying solely on international experts. Reynard (2020) also argued that there was a need for a more compelling case to be made for funding sport for peace initiatives that was necessary, emphasizing measurable impacts and success stories to attract donor support.

Youth

The youth have the potential to be actor of change, especially young newcomers. As Pruitt (2019) noted, they provide innovative ways that could enhance local peacebuilding efforts. In that sense, this section discusses some of the literature around youth in peacebuilding as well as newcomer youth.

Youth in Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is an important intervention process in PACS, and it is instrumental in bringing people together including youth. It has evolved over time shifting from focusing solely on state institutions to also targeting populations and individuals (Zanotti et al., 2015). Further, the evolution of peacebuilding makes it holistic in nature because as Visoka (2024) noted, it has progressed to incorporate various practices and fields, including conflict prevention,

peacekeeping, conflict resolution, transitional justice, statebuilding, economic development, gender, and environmental concerns, providing an avenue for everyone to be positively impacted by its activities. For example, Zanotti et al. (2015) contended that peacebuilding encompasses disciplinary and biopolitical techniques targeted at changing individuals and the ways in which they live together. This is essential because individuals are at the core of any activities that can be developed, and without including people in the community, it is very difficult to establish a robust peacebuilding plan. Peacebuilding is a multifaceted approach that helps in transforming conflict. For example, Schirch (2022) reported that peacebuilding aims to address structural, cultural, and direct violence and distinguishes between two paradigms, namely social justice peacebuilding and stability peacebuilding. The former “aims to shift power, build social, economic, and political equity, and address structural injustices” (p. 3) as well as emphasizing local ownership, intersectional analysis, and the importance of grassroots initiatives. Meanwhile, the latter is more state-centric, focusing on extending state authority, rule of law, and achieving national interests and it can be critiqued for echoing colonial practices by imposing Western-style governance and economic models (p. 4).

Berents (2025) also explored the concept of ‘everyday peace,’ which is an important aspect under the umbrella of peacebuilding. It emphasizes local actions and interactions in conflict-affected societies that contribute to safety and social cohesion. Everyday peace is significant because it gives way for local voices and experiences often overlooked in traditional peacebuilding literature as well as behaving as an active process shaped by individuals' responses to violence and social exclusion (Berents, 2018; Berents, 2025). Some of the examples of everyday peace include community initiatives like fixing streetlights or fostering civility among diverse ethnic groups, which can disrupt conflict and promote social cohesion. This seems like a component of peacebuilding that touches everyone in a conflict affected society and demonstrates how crucial yet fragile it is.

Berents (2025) also argued that everyday peace challenges the liberal peace paradigm, which often fails to address local realities and cultural contexts. It is seen as a potential source of radical change, emphasizing the importance of local practices and narratives in peacebuilding. This notion recognizes the complexities of living in conflict-affected areas like Colombia. Along similar lines, Berents (2018) reported about young people's perspectives on peace. Young people in Cazucá in Colombia expressed a desire for recognition and engagement in community issues. Berents findings revealed that young people felt marginalized and often ignored by adults. They articulated a strong belief in their ability to influence the future positively. Young individuals like Paola, Juliana, and Alejandro emphasized the importance of dreaming and taking action to realize those dreams. They expressed frustration with adults who dismissed their capabilities and contributions. A further consideration to highlight is the role of adults in the lives of those young people. As Berents's study (2018) revealed, the relationship between adults and young people is crucial for fostering peace and inclusion. Also, young people desire more engagement and recognition from adults regarding their opinions and capabilities. While teachers acknowledge the stigma surrounding young people, often viewing them as delinquents or incapable of learning, there is a sense that positive adult role models can validate young people's self-worth and potential for change. This is because the pervasive violence affects their outlook on the future, leading to feelings of hopelessness and anxiety.

Further, Schirch (2006) and Visoka (2024) argued that peacebuilding has a dual purpose which is addressing and resolving conflict legacies and conflict root causes, and establishing mechanisms to prevent future violence to foster lasting peace while it also encompasses a variety of activities intended to prevent, reduce, and transform violence with the ultimate objective of cultivating positive relationships and creating a just society. In this sense, peacebuilding has helped young individuals actively participate in the betterment of societies and in fostering positive relationships among their peers. Most importantly, young people are

important in the peacebuilding context with their energy, resilience, bright minds, and adventurous nature because they can shift their narratives. They are recognized as key stakeholders in local and global peace and security efforts and are actively engaged in advocating for their inclusion in global peacebuilding initiatives (Pruitt, 2019). By empowering and amplifying the voices of young people, we can tap into their unique potential to drive innovative solutions, challenge existing power structures, and create a more just and peaceful world for future generations. In the context of everyday peace, children and youth are increasingly recognized in the everyday peace literature, highlighting their roles in peacebuilding and governance (Berents, 2025).

In addition, the impact of education and peace education in particular on youth socialization is significant. Cromwell (2019) reported that young Pakistanis involved in the Benjamin Franklin Summer Institute with South and Central Asia (BFSI), the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program, the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD), and the Study of the United States Institutes (SUSI) programs cultivated their leadership skills, increased their mutual understanding between different countries, and engaged in community service and follow-on projects. Youth participation in these programs actually paid off because it pushed some of the individual alumni graduates from these projects to have an impact as they integrated their program experiences into community action at the meso-level. The young Pakistanis in these programs have replicated their own transformations by implementing projects in their communities modeled after their program experiences (Cromwell, 2019).

Another significant point that fits into the narrative of peace education as an important peacebuilding tool for youth is the integration of peacebuilding principles and conflict management education within Canadian public-school curricula as discussed by Bickmore (2005). The study examined how these curricula address social diversity, injustice, and the

development of critical citizenship skills. It also found that Canadian public-school curricula in three provinces (Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario) included elements that align with international peace and conflict education goals, such as promoting social harmony, interpersonal communication, cooperation, appreciation of diversity, conflict resolution, critical reasoning, and citizen engagement. However, the curricula largely focused on abstract ideals and harmony-building, often avoiding direct attention to the roots, characteristics, and contrasting viewpoints of specific social conflicts, particularly gendered social relations, social-structural issues, and transnational problems. These curricula contributed more to discursive peacekeeping, implicit social control through denial and inculcation of unproblematic values, rather than democratic peacebuilding, which would require addressing real-world social and political conflicts and their underlying causes. While the curricula provided some rationale and opportunities for teachers to engage students in critical discussions about conflict and peacebuilding, these opportunities were limited and often disconnected from substantive content (Bickmore, 2005).

Berents (2018) contended that young people in Colombia have actively participated in peace movements, demonstrating resilience and agency amidst violence. Colombia has faced protracted conflict and war, with peace efforts by local community organizations supported by international groups. By 2015, more than six million people were internally displaced due to the conflict with the country having the second highest number of landmine victims globally in 2009, disproportionately affecting young people. The finding acknowledged that youth have formed peace communities, negotiating nonviolence and advocating for peaceful conflict transformation (Sanford, 2006, as cited in, Berents, 2018). Also, the Children's Movement for Peace included 2.7 million young people in a symbolic vote for children's rights, raising awareness of the conflict's impact on youth (Carter & Shipler, 2005, as cited in Berents, 2018).

In the same vein, student groups organized protests and campaigns, such as #PazALaCalle, advocating for peace during the 2016 plebiscite debates.

That said, there are peacebuilding efforts targeting structural and systemic conflict issues that involve engaging youth. For instance, as Clark (2016) noted, Generation For Peace (GFP), a pilot initiative of the Jordan Olympic Committee using sport for peacebuilding has had a significant impact on Jordanian youth as well as Syrian youth refugees living there. These activities expanded and now include programs related to arts, advocacy, dialogue, and empowerment. These programs engage youth in transformative activities recognizing their pivotal societal role.

Sports, in particular, not only fosters community resilience and connectivity but it also addresses local conflict and violence issues. Involving youth in peacebuilding through inclusive activities like sports, peace education, and leadership training leverages their perspectives, energy, and creativity to promote positive change and a culture of peace contributing to a more sustainable and equitable society (Clark, 2016). Sports activities can restore self-esteem and rehabilitate those vulnerable to trauma and violence, including both victims and perpetrators (Clark, 2016). Sports activities foster trust and acceptance, dismantle stereotypes, bridge conflicts, and promote inclusivity for marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, displaced individuals, refugees, and people with disabilities (p. 2). Sports' holistic nature and the character-building it fosters underscore its potential as a constructive agent of peacebuilding. Additionally, sports develop critical life skills in youth like teamwork, leadership, goal setting, communication, emotional regulation, time management, and sportsmanship (Camiré et al., 2021). Thus, sports equip young individuals with essential skills to work to build a successful future for themselves.

Newcomer Youth

Turning now to young newcomers, it is important to note that newcomer is a term that varies depending on the country. According to Heisler (2022), the term “newcomer” is used as a more inclusive term to refer to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sometimes even foreign students. This can vary, ranging from someone who arrived in the last three years to someone who arrived a decade ago and in the Canadian context, the term “newcomer” is defined as an individual who has immigrated to Canada for work, school, or to live there within the past five years (Koshy et al., 2023). One significant issue that warrants consideration is the newcomers and how they settle in their new environment, and how they understand concepts such as multiculturalism. In fact, Fries and Gingrich’s work (2011) based on data from the Regina Refugee Research Project discussed how multiculturalism is perceived and enacted in the lives of newcomers to Canada, particularly through the lens of social justice. The literature concluded that multiculturalism is a contested policy with varying interpretations and implications for newcomers.

Moreover, prior to the 1960s, integration in Canada meant assimilation into a British model and post-1970s, multiculturalism became the accepted norm of integration (Fries & Gingrich, 2011). The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was enacted in 1988, promoting cultural diversity and equality. Multicultural policy aims to address cultural differences while acknowledging ongoing economic inequalities. The policy has both supporters and critics, with ongoing debates about its effectiveness and commitment. Looking at newcomers’ understanding of multiculturalism, Fries and Gingrich (2011) also revealed that while many newcomers emphasized the importance of diversity and harmony in multiculturalism, some expressed ambivalence or criticism, viewing multiculturalism as ineffective or superficial. As for the newcomers’ perspectives, the study reported that (1) approximately 40 percent of newcomers identified diversity as a key theme, with many associating it with positive

coexistence; (2) about 25 percent expressed notions of equality and resource utilization in relation to multiculturalism; and (3) some newcomers articulated a desire for transformative change, emphasizing the need for integration and shared responsibilities within society (Fries & Gingrich, 2011, pp. 45-46). These were some remarkable findings although they are difficult to explain. This might be related to the fact that newcomers are exposed to a new environment and new culture that is way different from what they have known before.

However, newcomers to Canada face several challenges that sometimes hinder their ability to enjoy their new life, new environment, and to be successful in their endeavors. For example, a study by Li and Que (2015) indicated that newcomer youth to Newfoundland faced difficulties in terms of transportation, family support, social interaction, language barriers, and financial difficulty/job pressure. Some of these challenges drove young people away, and some withdrew from society, which is not good. Also, Chuang's (2010) study of youth in Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec found that newcomers faced challenges such as homesickness, balancing dual cultures, preferring their native culture, and adapting to Canadian weather and environment. These issues hindered their appreciation of their new surroundings.

Similarly, newcomer disabled youth also face challenges in Canada. In fact, these young individuals face income insecurity, language barriers, unemployment/underemployment, and deteriorating health (Tam et al., 2021). Allard (2021) highlighted that newcomers, particularly Filipinos, encountered significant challenges in Winnipeg due to misinformation and high expectations. He identified their information needs in employment, housing, and daily living, addressed through online resources, social networks, and local institutions. Allard also argued that migrants often face surprise and disorientation due to the gap between expectations and the actual reality upon arrival. Notably, other scholars like Hulchanski (1997) reported that young Black males in the Toronto area faced gender barriers to housing access. The report highlighted

the stereotyping of young Black males and how they often were targeted in housing due to prejudiced assumptions about drugs, violence, or parties. These stereotypes can make it more difficult for young Black males to find housing compared to other groups.

At the same time, however, Waez (2024) explored how sports can facilitate the social integration of newcomer girls into Canadian society, highlighting their unique challenges and experiences. The study argued that newcomer girls face barriers to sport participation due to cultural and religious gender norms. Sports were often perceived as more appropriate for boys, and girls were expected to fulfill other roles. Religious dress codes and discomfort in gender-mixed environments further limited their participation. Also, many newcomer girls lacked foundational knowledge and experience in sports due to limited opportunities in their home countries, often caused by political turmoil, economic hardship, or cultural restrictions. This lack of physical literacy led to fear of injuries, embarrassment, and reluctance to participate. Looking at the resettlement experiences, Waez (2024) revealed that newcomer girls often experienced shyness, hesitation, and fear of taking the first step in social settings, including sports. This was due to unfamiliarity with the environment and cultural differences. Newcomer families and girls harbored mistrust toward Canadian systems and individuals, influenced by past adverse experiences and cultural differences. This mistrust may have led to separation between newcomers and non-newcomers, hindering social integration. Finally, Waez (2024) avowed that despite these challenges, sport participation helped newcomers learn about Canadian society, build social capital, and foster a sense of belonging. It also improved their language skills and facilitated social connections. Even though the school has implemented programs tailored to the high newcomer demographic, including collaborations with local organizations, these efforts are limited by insufficient coordination and infrastructure.

While Allard's (2021) work shows the peculiarity of newcomers' life in Winnipeg, Aziraj's (2018) research indicated that newcomers' integration into Winnipeg was complex and

influenced by social, economic, and cultural factors. Social networks within their cultural or faith groups and the broader Canadian community were crucial for newcomers' successful integration into the city. Nevertheless, newcomers faced numerous challenges affecting their safety, well-being, and peace, highlighting the need for improved inclusivity.

Conversely, newcomers may have found ways to compensate for these challenges so that the use of sports could play a critical role in helping them in their new lives and environments. For example, Fader (2018) argued that soccer clubs can contribute to forging a sense of belonging and support for refugee youth, serving as a means of integration, stress relief, and cultural connection. Sports provided a platform for personal development, socialization, and friendship, while also fostering resilience and positive youth development. This is significant because youth involved in soccer activities are preparing to face the challenges of life and improve their health. Further, newcomers entering a new club have the potential to be the future of the club. In fact, Kristenson et al. (2013) found that newcomers playing for professional soccer clubs had a lower general injury rate compared to established players. Thus, newcomers were less likely to experience injuries while playing professional soccer illustrating their resilience and strength and how important they are for the future of this sport in Canada.

Social Integration and Social Cohesion, and Community Building

Social integration remains significant in peacebuilding as it can help unleash the potential of people from different backgrounds and ensure that they live in harmony within the community. Arger and Strang's (2008) research showed that social integration is the process through which individuals from diverse backgrounds become part of the social fabric of a community by fostering connections, relationships, and participation in various levels of society. In addition, Gidron and Hall (2018) conceptualized social integration through three dimensions that enabled individual connections: shared normative order, social interaction, and social recognition and respect. This foundation was crucial for newcomers settling into a new environment. For

instance, refugees need to feel that their new community can become a permanent home. Social integration offers newcomers benefits like safety, stability, community relationships, a sense of control, predictability, and social-capital resources for information and support (Kowsikka & James, 2019) fostering feelings of welcome, safety, and engagement in the new environment.

However, there are a myriad of challenges that emerge when analyzing newcomers' experiences regarding social integration. Kupriianova and Kupriianova (2024) noted that newcomers often face significant cultural, traditional, social, and societal differences, which can lead to feelings of detachment and cultural duality. Moreover, newcomers also face prejudices and biases. Both the accepting host society and the newcomers may hold prejudices and biases against each other, complicating the integration process. Another point made by Kupriianova and Kupriianova (2024) was that many newcomers faced difficulties in confirming their educational qualifications and professional certifications, forcing them to take lower-quality jobs to provide for their families. Finally, newcomers also experienced psychological and emotional struggle as well as nostalgia and homesickness. While some refugees and forcibly displaced persons for example experienced PTSD, anxiety, depression, and homesickness, which can further hinder integration, others experienced acute homesickness and nostalgia for their homeland which prevented them from fully engaging with the accepting society (Kupriianova & Kupriianova, 2024). This demonstrates how difficult social integration can be for newcomers and how important it is to facilitate newcomers' journey in their new environment.

Further, Kay (2012) argued that to better understand social inclusion, another facet of social integration, and especially youth inclusion, there was a need to look at it through the lens of social exclusion in majority world countries also known as the Global South. In fact, social exclusion in majority world countries is multidimensional, involving economic, political, and social deprivation. In contrast to the minority world, exclusion in these countries often stems

from absolute poverty, lack of resources, and deeply ingrained social inequalities. In that sense, sport was seen as a tool to address this social exclusion by engaging young people, fostering relationships, delivering educational content, and promoting positive experiences that transfer to non-sport contexts as it was used to tackle issues such as education, health, gender inequality, and empowerment (pp. 220-223).

The research provided a few examples of how social inclusion for young people was made and how they benefitted from it through sport. For instance, in Brazil, sport was used to engage youth at risk of violence and insecurity through the Segundo Tempo project in the Recife Metropolitan Region (RMR) in northeast Brazil which has the highest income gap in the country (Kay, 2012). It encouraged young people's educational aspirations and reduced exposure to social risks among "youth from neighbourhoods characterised by extreme poverty and high levels of crime, drug-taking and violence" (Kay, 2012, p. 225). Another example is India, where sport was used to empower young women through netball sessions combined with educational modules on personal, social, and economic issues as it was part of a project run by The NAZ Foundation, a charitable organisation working to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS in India (Kay, 2012, p. 225). These examples demonstrate how multidimensional sport can be important for young people in facilitating their inclusion in a new setting. It is also a reflection of the power that sport carries, as it is a tool that is beneficial for young people's inclusion and in facilitating young people's use of conflict transformation.

The term cohesion itself is used significantly especially in the context of sport. Berengui et al (2022) noted that cohesion was considered a determinant construct in sports teams, influencing interpersonal variables like collective efficacy and personal variables like effort and motivation. It was also associated with prosocial teammate behavior, which in turn positively influenced both task and social cohesion. However, the concept of social cohesion especially has numerous variations and interpretations. For example, Schiefer and Noll (2016) argued that

social cohesion is a significant topic with various interpretations and frameworks that encompass social relations, identification, and orientation towards the common good, shared values, equality/inequality, and quality of life. Eys et al. (2022) noted that social cohesion refers to how well team members get along outside of practices and games, leading to the development of friendships and relationships (p. 1). These constituents are equally important within a community of newcomers. In addition, Friedkin (2004) noted that social cohesion involves individual membership attitudes and behaviors, positive interactions among individuals, and the influence of social networks within groups. Friedkin (2004) emphasized the interconnectedness between individual attitudes and behaviors, and broader group conditions in understanding and fostering social cohesion (pp. 410-412).

Likewise, Jayakody et al. (2022) pointed out that social cohesion involves trust, peaceful coexistence, and the ability of different social, ethnic, and demographic groups to live together amicably. For example, Mousa's (2020) study revealed something interesting. The study investigated whether meaningful contact could foster social cohesion after conflict, specifically among Iraqi Christians displaced by ISIS. There were two categories of findings for the study: the first was the outcomes on the field and the other, the outcome off the field.

Looking at the on-the-field outcomes, Mousa (2020) argued that the intervention led to significant improvements in tolerant behaviors among Christians toward their Muslim teammates: (1) participants were more likely to vote for a Muslim player to receive a sportsmanship award, (2) a higher percentage expressed willingness to register for mixed teams in the future and (3) six months post-intervention, treated players reported training regularly with Muslims. Regarding off-the-field outcomes, the intervention did not significantly affect behaviors in broader social contexts: (1) participants showed no increased likelihood of attending mixed social events or patronizing Muslim-owned businesses, and (2) there was no notable change in attitudes toward Muslim strangers, suggesting that while contact improved

interactions with teammates, it did not extend to the wider community. Both outcomes indicated that while positive intergroup contact can enhance tolerance within the context of the intervention, the challenge of translating on-the-field tolerance into off-the-field social cohesion was persistent.

One key element of social cohesion is the ability of those involved to make friends. Friendship is important as it helps individuals create bonds and strong relationships as well. In one part of their study, Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019) discussed the role of friendships in settlement as it relates to social cohesion. They argued that friendships formed during migration play a crucial role in providing both practical support and emotional belonging. Also, enduring friendships contributed to a deeper sense of embeddedness and feeling at home. The study provides examples of how friendships helped migrants in their transition within the context of social cohesion. For example, one participant, Gabriela from Brazil found social cohesion through her Italian flatmate, leading to a larger social network; Aika from Kyrgyzstan received emotional and practical support from her friend's mother, which helped her start her own business; and Aamina from Saudi Arabia overcame isolation through a friendship with a Moroccan woman, improving her sense of belonging (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). These examples reflect how crucial social cohesion is.

This conceptualization and these examples of social cohesion highlight the importance of addressing both individual and collective factors in building a cohesive society built on a sense of belonging, positive relationships, and the well-being of the individual within the community. A component of social cohesion that is important in the context of sports, especially soccer, is team cohesion. According to Asamoah and Grobbelaar (2017), team cohesion was crucial for success in team sports like soccer, with high levels of cohesion being associated with player's enhanced performance. In other words, when team cohesion existed among players of the same team, the team tended to perform better, and their relationship became stronger.

In addition, Mach et al. (2009) and Eys et al., (2022) pointed out that team cohesion or group cohesion was defined as the unity and harmony within a team; it was the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united, whereby trust in teammates, the coach, and top management was crucial so that it played a mediating role between trust and team performance. Team cohesion created trust among the players, which undoubtedly led to an atmosphere in which the individuals and the team were thriving. As Bruner et al. (2014) pointed out, group or team cohesion was important because it empowered individuals to enhance their personal and social skills, which may include better communication, cooperation and the ability to work with others. Also, it provided a supportive environment where members felt a sense of belonging and acceptance. Finally, group cohesion was important because it favored positive developmental outcomes, motivation, and commitment (Bruner et al., 2014).

In addition, Berengüí et al. (2022) argued that task orientation played a major role in team settings which led to team cohesion. In fact, task orientation created positive moral functioning and sportsmanship. This paved the way for individuals involved in soccer activity to be respectful towards their fellow players and also towards their opponents. It also assisted them in achieving specific goals as a group rather than individually. At the same time, however, coaches were important in how team cohesion was articulated among youth soccer players. They played a crucial role in promoting positive values and in creating a supportive environment for youth development (Berengüí et al., 2022). In addition, the study found that younger players (Under-10 and Under-12 categories) demonstrated higher levels of both task and social cohesion compared to older players.

Despite the distinction Berengüí et al.'s (2022) study made between task and social cohesion; it translated that both brought value to team settings. It argued that task cohesion referred to the degree to which team members worked together and remained united in achieving common goals while social cohesion referred to the level of interpersonal affiliation

or attraction among team members, including enjoying each other's company (Berengüi et al., 2022). These two elements were essential among group settings, especially among young people. Therefore, as trusting and strong relationships emerge, they became key factors in fostering cooperation, interaction, and synergy among team members, ultimately positively influencing team performance (Mach et al., 2009, p. 3).

Further, Mach et al. (2009) found in their study that team cohesion was a mediator between trust and team performance. The findings illustrated that this trust was to be found in their teammates, coach, and top management which positively influenced team cohesion. Moreover, the study demonstrated that team cohesion was positively related to team performance. They argued that cohesive teams were more united, committed to success, and better able to utilize their capabilities efficiently. Also, cohesion mediated the relationship between teammates in terms of building mutual trust influencing team performance indirectly.

Looking at the mechanism factor, they recounted that team cohesion fostered cooperation, interaction, and synergy among team members, which enhanced player performance. It was strengthened when team members perceived each other's actions as reliable, honest, and genuinely concerned. In this sense, for individuals and the team to function as a team, team cohesion had to be valued and recognized as inseparable.

In contrast, Asamoah and Grobbelaar (2017) argued otherwise. Exploring the dynamics between team cohesion and team performance in the context of social cohesion, their research findings indicated that high individual attraction to the group (both task and social dimensions) was positively related to team performance while high group integration (both task and social dimensions) was negatively related to team performance. Likewise, they found that strong individual attraction to the group-task was advantageous for performance as well as noting that excessive social cohesion or group integration could lead to issues like decreased focus, complacency, or goal-related problems, which negatively impacted performance. This finding

indicated that the social aspect of social cohesion performed well depending on the context. The study showed that there were situations where individualism will prevail especially in team performance and emphasizing group integration may hinder it.

Social integration and cohesion also play a vital role in helping individuals establish a sense of community. The concept of community is made up of different variations, definitions and perspectives. For example, Minkler et al. (2022) argued that communities can be geographic or based on shared interests, norms, or identities. Communities could also be defined as functional units for young people's sustenance, social interaction units, and symbolic units of identity. With regards to the ecological systems perspective in the context of community, Minkler et al.'s (2022) research focused on population characteristics and environmental factors, while the social systems perspective examined community interactions. And this was grounded in community actions that could be shaped by historical oppressions and the need to encourage collective identity and agency. In other words, the term community in the larger sense was complex and encompassed different factors which varied depending on the context.

However, community is often formed around shared interests tied to players identity. Brown (2019) described it as support from people who share common interests, goals, or values. Building a community is essential for both individuals and groups, as it aims to empower them by enhancing their problem-solving abilities and community capacity (Minkler et al., 2022). In so doing, community building allows individuals to foster a sense of belonging and purpose.

Additionally, Brown (2019) suggested that there were three stages of community building in the context of asynchronous distance learning classes. The first was making friends as students found others with whom they shared similarities and began interacting regularly. The second was community conferment. At this stage, acceptance into the community occurred through participation in long, thoughtful, threaded discussions, leading to feelings of

satisfaction and kinship. The final stage was camaraderie. Brown noted that this was achieved after long-term or intense association, often involving personal communication outside the class. These three stages might have the potential to be replicated in different settings, especially in soccer. In terms of benefits, individuals involved in such a community setting can bolster their confidence, learning and engagement. However, this might not always be the case as: (1) some students might not feel a sense of community due to lack of interest, time constraints, or differing definitions of community; and (2) new students often struggle with technology, pedagogy, and content, which can hinder their participation.

Additionally, strong community bonds facilitated the exchange of ideas, resources, and support, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being of community members enhancing a health-promoting environment that fostered physical and mental well-being (Minkler et al., 2022). All of these are essential for understanding how individuals interact with each other within society. Looking at sport in this context, community building plays a crucial role in the lives of people. For example, Warner and Leierer (2015) looked at the importance of sport in community building and how it impacted adolescents' sense of community. They highlighted that adolescents who participated in the three-week sport program experienced a significant increase in their overall sense of community. Also, significant improvements were observed in four different areas: (1) reinforcement of needs as participants felt their needs were better met through the program, (2) membership as participants felt a stronger sense of belonging to the community, (3) influence as participants felt they had more influence within the group, and (4) shared emotional connections as participants experienced stronger emotional bonds with others in the program (Warner & Leierer, 2015). These findings translated how sport programs can contribute to community building and adolescent development.

Another example is Valle's study (2019) that discussed how CENTRO University and its Social Design Hub used soccer as a tool to bridge cultural, racial, and economic divides in

the America neighborhood of Mexico City in Mexico. She argued that “part of the project’s aim was to learn from other communities, share our experiences, encourage exchange and help build capacities by supporting each other” (p. 10). Some of the key aspects of community building mentioned in the project were that it was an opportunity to engage neighbors, students, and staff in the design and implementation of activities to ensure inclusivity and relevance; it reclaimed streets and public spaces for soccer matches and cultural events to foster a sense of belonging and connection; and it used soccer as a medium to challenge assumptions, open conversations, and build trust among participants. These results demonstrated that community building can be accomplished using soccer.

In addition, Black (2019) illustrated how community building in the Women’s League in the United States of America was enacted through communication practices that emphasized shared values, inclusivity, and mutual support. The Women’s League prioritized values such as friendship, compassion, safety, fun, and collaborative skill development. These values were articulated in the group’s mission statement and were evident in how the group structured its activities like creating balanced teams, not keeping score, and self-officiating games. Community was built through positive relationships both on and off the field. Members supported each other during difficult times like when people had an illness or personal challenges, and they engaged in informal conversations that fostered connection and belonging. The group defined itself as “recreational” and contrasted its values with the competitive, hyper-masculine norms of other sports leagues. This distinction reinforced the group’s identity as a supportive and inclusive community.

Also, Black (2019) argued that while the group was welcoming to women of all ages and skill levels, inclusivity was bounded by the need to maintain the group’s values and style of play. The league was exclusively for women, creating a space for “me time” where members could prioritize themselves without external pressures. Finally, the study emphasized that

community was not a pre-existing entity, but it was actively created and maintained through communication practices. This included managing group boundaries, negotiating skill gaps, and fostering a sense of belonging. This example demonstrated the significance of community building among women, and it helped them to connect with one another and foster emotional connections.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theoretical framework connects the research to existing knowledge that shapes the process in which the research is developed. By exploring literature around critical and emancipatory peacebuilding; sports and peacebuilding; youth and social integration; and social cohesion and community engagement, the literature review demonstrated the intersectionality that exist with sport, youth and peacebuilding and how important they are in shaping this research. With overarching themes like soccer as a tool for togetherness, newcomer youth and social integration, social cohesion and community engagement, Chapter three presented an opportunity to understand the direction of this research. This has laid a solid foundation by providing a clear direction for the research into how soccer can be leveraged as a tool for social integration, community engagement, and fostering peace among newcomer youth in Winnipeg. The next chapter provides an understanding of the research methodology and methods used in the study.

Chapter Four - Methodology

Introduction

Soccer has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering social integration and community cohesion, particularly among young newcomers (Gennaro, 2023; Participation, 2023) in urban settings. This qualitative research explores the role of soccer in facilitating social integration, social cohesion, and community building among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg, Canada. Additionally, it seeks to understand their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of soccer as a peacebuilding tool. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative methodology employing semi-structured open-ended interviews were utilized for data generation.

The study included research participants from two soccer organizations in the city, namely IPAC-Ukraine Soccer Club, and Sport Without Boundaries (SWB). To ensure a diverse range of perspectives, snowball sampling methods were employed for participant recruitment. The generated data was analyzed using generic qualitative research, allowing for an understanding of the phenomena in play.

Generic Qualitative Research

Qualitative research helps in our understanding of the social experience of people, with its focus on generating empirical data compared to using a quantitative methodology designed to test hypotheses with inferential statistics (Mills & Birks, 2014). It defines the trajectory of the research and helps in learning about people and phenomena and emphasizes the meaning people find in their natural social lives (Cooper & Finley, 2014), making it appropriate for use in the context of this research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that qualitative research provides an opportunity for researchers to uncover some areas of our current world, interpreting findings within a specific context that impacts our knowledge of the world. A qualitative study of youth (18+ years) participating in soccer programs can reveal unique insights into the challenges

newcomers face and the ways in which they adapt to new environments, providing valuable knowledge for policymakers and service providers. In this way, qualitative research offers a unique opportunity for researchers to delve into the complexities of human experience and expand their understanding of the world in which they live (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This study was conducted using generic qualitative research. Generic qualitative research was described as seeking to understand phenomena, processes, or perspectives without adhering to a specific qualitative methodology (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). The use of generic qualitative research is essential to this research as it helped in understanding the participants' experiences and perspectives and how they relate to soccer and peacebuilding. As Kahlke (2014) and Ellis and Hart (2023) noted, generic qualitative research refers to studies that do not strictly adhere to a single established qualitative methodology and it also does not emphasise cultural context for interpretation. This methodological freedom creates flexibility and allows the methodology to draw elements from other qualitative methodologies as well as allowing researchers to create new methodologies or adapt existing ones to suit their specific needs, while still aiming to maintain rigour and coherence in their research design (p. 38). In fact, generic qualitative research may blend elements from multiple qualitative methodologies or deviate from traditional methodological guidelines to better fit the research questions, epistemological stance, and disciplinary context (p. 38).

As Kennedy (2016) and Caelli et al (2003) noted, generic qualitative research focuses on subjective opinion and external experiences and the focus is typically on understanding the research participant's experiences or events rather than building theories or cultural analysis. This is essential as it assists the researcher in finetuning their study in a way that is relevant and robust. The use of generic qualitative research is pertinent to this study as it helped in understanding the participants' experiences and perspectives and how they relate to soccer and peacebuilding.

Further, Kostere and Kostere (2022) observed that generic qualitative research falls under different criteria that are necessary for the research. First, the research question should seek to understand human experience meaning that it should look at how people make sense out of their experiences, and “how those experiences relate to how people construct meaning interrelated to themselves, others, social situations, and world occurrences” (p. 4). Second, the researcher should ensure that qualitative methods are employed in the research design. In fact, qualitative methods serve to generate descriptive data which is an integral part of the study. Methods like semi-structured interviews and field notes play a crucial role because in generic qualitative research, what matters the most is words and language, not numbers and measurements (p. 5).

Another point that is important for the researcher to consider for choosing an appropriate qualitative method is the commitment of the researcher to using that method in the field research and in the data analysis. This is important because the data analysis in this thesis, for example, is based on an inductive reasoning process, which leads to quality data analysis that is dependent on how familiar the researcher is with their data, how they use their reasoning skills, and their openness to creative and intuitive processes (p. 6).

Finally, the design must align with a qualitative process. A qualitative stance, as Kostere and Kostere (2022) noted is the process that emphasises understanding and in interpreting lived human experiences within their natural context. In other words, it prioritizes discovery, understanding, and meaning making over measurement and causation, aiming to capture the richness and complexity of human experiences (Kostere & Kostere, 2022)

Consequently, the generic qualitative methodology aligned with the thesis research question as it relates to the research methods (semi-structured interview, taking copious field notes, and participant observation), explores the participants’ experiences of soccer, how they make sense of it, and their understanding of peace and how it relates to soccer that places young

emerging adult newcomers experiences and understanding of soccer and peacebuilding at the center of the research. For example, Kostere and Kostere (2022) noted that a generic qualitative methodology focuses on exploring how people make sense of their experiences, “constructing meaning in relation to themselves, others, social situations, and world occurrences” (p. 4). It was also suited for the thesis because the research utilised semi-structured interviews and field notes that were undeniably important in carrying out the field research

Research Objectives and Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: How does soccer facilitate social cohesion, integration, and the formation of cross-community relationships among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg?

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- Understand the role of soccer in facilitating social integration, social cohesion, and community building among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg.
- Appreciate the accessibility of soccer programs to young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg.
- Deduce the impact of soccer on young emerging adult newcomers’ social life and their interactions with each other.
- Explore young emerging adult newcomers’ experiences and perceptions regarding soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young newcomers in Winnipeg.

Positionality and Standpoint

Positionality is an important component of the research because it refers to the researcher’s social and political context, including their identity, role, and power relations with the research participants (Corlett & Mavin, 2018) as well as other stages of the research ranging from the research process, and the formulation of the research questions to the data interpretation.

Therefore, reflecting on my own positionality was essential particularly given the sensitive nature of peacebuilding and the experiences of young emerging adult newcomers. I was transparent throughout the research process regarding my positionality with regards to the ways my background and perspectives influenced the research process and the interactions with my research participants. The research process involved acknowledging my personal investments, biases, and the socio-historical context of my identity (Bourke, 2014; Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

I approached this study as a PACS graduate student with an academic and personal interest in the intersection of sport and peacebuilding. I recognized that my own position as a young emerging adult newcomer affected how I engaged with soccer and its role in peacebuilding with young newcomers. I grew up in an environment in Cote d'Ivoire where youth's involvement in sport activities was essential for constructing young people's social lives. I participated in football activities by seeing people around me playing the game as well as by actively playing soccer with them.

I recognized that by playing soccer, I had the opportunity to form and strengthen friendships with the people involved, and to integrate into communities different from the one I belonged to as well as feeling welcomed in these communities and developing a sense of belonging and connection. Therefore, my experiences growing up in Cote d'Ivoire and my professional focus on conflict resolution shaped my interpretations of social integration and community-building practices. My familiarity with soccer as a player as well as recognizing that it is a global sport informed the way I approached the thesis research, potentially influencing the types of questions I asked and the assumptions I brought to the study.

Since I was dealing with young emerging adult newcomers, I was aware that a sense of power dynamics might infringe the way I, the researcher, related to them and the way they related to me. Therefore, to avoid any power dynamics, I pledged to be reflexive and committed to fostering an open, respectful and welcoming environment where the participants could feel

empowered to share their experiences and stories in their own ways. As Bourke (2014) recognized, I remained transparent about my positionality and motivations to foster greater openness and trust with my research participants since as Finley (2014) recognized, “the researcher must be upfront about their own thinking and their perceptions and must make this clear to those who read their work” (p. 52).

In terms of my reflexivity, I actively reflected on my own biases and assumptions throughout the study. This included keeping a reflexive journal where I documented my thoughts, interactions, and any possible emerging biases during data generation. I also engaged in regular discussions with my academic advisor to challenge my interpretations and ensure that I remained open to diverse perspectives. By adopting a generic qualitative approach, I focused on the experiences and understanding of the participants related to soccer and peacebuilding and let myself be guided by the research question and research objectives. I also remained open to any new patterns and themes related to the research question that emerged from the data analysis.

Research Participants

I interviewed four young emerging male adult newcomers (aged 18-25) participating in two different organizations in Winnipeg, Sport Without Boundaries and IPAC Ukraine, whose work encompasses programs related to soccer programming for young emerging adult newcomers that are predominantly attended by male soccer players. The reason for choosing young emerging adult newcomers is that they have experienced the phenomenon under inquiry and were able to verbalize their experiences (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Second, the research proposal anticipated a sample size of eight participants, however, due to recruitment challenges and constraints such as gender imbalance in recruitment and narrow eligibility criteria, the actual research resulted in a small participant pool. Even though, there are no strict rules for sample size in qualitative research and for a generic qualitative thesis, a sample size of 8–15

participants typically are recommended, especially if individual interviews are used (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). In contrast, Braun and Clarke (2022) noted that two-to-four research participants can be used by a researcher to fully comprehend and narrate the research topic in an in depth and unique case study. Consequently, data saturation was reached during the four participant's interviews as similar themes began to emerge across their narratives. The lived experiences of this group of four conversant and experienced research participants did not provide any new pertinent information. Thus, the final sample provided sufficient rich data for analysis. In addition, sampling size differs from one qualitative approach to another and prioritizes depth of insight rather than numerical representation as in quantitative research. In fact, Ellis and Hart (2023) mentioned that "when topics are exploratory in nature, small sample sizes with depth are what generic research provides, allowing for increased descriptions of subtleties in the research design and analysis" (p. 1761), which underscores the appropriateness of the generic qualitative methodology for this thesis research and why having four research participants still allowed the research to move forward.

The first organization that was to participate in this study was the Winnipeg Newcomer Sport Academy (WNSA), which provides economically accessible quality multisport programming for newcomer children and youth, promoting their growth and development to help them integrate positively into new communities in the city. Unfortunately, at the start of the data generation, WNSA had to withdraw from the study as they realised that they did not have the participants in the 18+ age range that were required. This left me with two organizations that shared my thesis research with their members. The first organization was the IPAC-Ukraine soccer club whose goal is to present and promote Ukrainian soccer in Winnipeg, and the second organization was Sport Without Boundaries (SWB) that includes the Women's SWB soccer team whose aim is to provide a dynamic and inclusive group of female athletes, including young emerging adult newcomers, aged between 18 and 30, who share a

common passion for the beautiful game. One research participant came from the IPAC-Ukraine soccer club, and three hailed from Sport Without Boundaries (SWB).

Research Location

The field research took place in Winnipeg at various locations and times convenient for the participants. One challenge arose when I had to interview a participant immediately after their soccer game. It was a cold and windy day, so I ensured I was well-prepared with my jacket. I also had the privilege of watching them play that same day, which was a truly enjoyable experience. Due to the wind and the lack of an indoor space for recording, I had to ask the participant to speak louder so my device could capture their voices. It was challenging, and we managed to make it work. Another challenge that emerged during the fieldwork was coordinating different schedules with the participants that required me to adjust my own schedule. Fortunately, I had plenty of free time, which made the process smoother.

Finally, one participant's first language was not English, and this required me to use an interpreter during the interview process. The participant's coach, a Ukrainian-born individual fluent in both Ukrainian and English, acted as an interpreter to facilitate our conversation. The coach signed an Oath of Confidentiality. The use of the translator was important as it allowed the interview to be conducted as intended while ensuring that the participant could express their experiences accurately and comfortably.

Data Generation

The data was generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews with four participants who were recruited using a snowball sampling framework. Snowball sampling is "when initial informants recommend additional participants" (Cooper & Endacott, 2007, p. 867), which was essential for the development of the study. This sampling process assisted me in exploring young emerging adult newcomers' experiences and perceptions of the role of soccer in social

cohesion and cross-community building. Indeed, given that these young emerging adult newcomers encounter distinct challenges in adapting to their new environments, their participation and experiences in these soccer programs might bring to light soccer's impact on them through its peacebuilding initiatives targeting this demographic (Francis Cain & Trussell, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022).

In this instance, semi-structured interviews were the preferred data generation method as the objective was to comprehend the participant's unique perspective. Semi-structured interview allows for focused, yet exploratory discussions, enhancing the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon beyond what quantitative data can provide (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021, p. 3). Snowball sampling is complementary in that it provides insights that are specific to the context, and it is recommended for studying "behaviors, perceptions, customs, and describing 'typical' cases that cannot be generalized to entire populations and to estimate the characteristics of rare and difficult-to-identify populations" (Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2013, p. 163).

The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions from a semi-structured interview guide. Field notes and participant observation were also utilized that included observations and reflections from the semi-structured interviews. As Kostere and Kostere (2022) noted, field notes are the researcher's thoughts that permeate throughout the data generation process that includes observations of gestures, non-verbal expressions, and the researcher's interpretations and hunches. Field notes serve as a check for decreasing researcher bias as the researcher ensures that interpretations within the field notes accurately represent the participant's descriptions and not the researcher's preconceived ideas (pp. 51-53).

My role as a researcher was not to coach responses, but rather to ask open-ended questions. All interviews were audio-recorded and scheduled for at least one hour but were completed in 45 minutes, based on the participants availability. The raw interview data was

stored on a password protected laptop and then transferred to the University of Manitoba's network drive.

Recruitment Strategy, Confidentiality, and Privacy

Following approval from the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 2, data generation for this study commenced during the summer of 2025, conducted in person and continued for four months. I accessed three football organizations with which prior contact had been established through personal research and volunteer work. One of the organizations was not part of the research as the members did not fit the research criteria. Consequently, contact was made with two organizations because they aligned with the research objectives. Depending on the level of comfort and scheduling constraints, in-person interviews were conducted at the organizations' training facilities, at the University of Winnipeg, and at one of the participants home where he felt more at ease to speak with me. Only four participants responded to the emails from both participating organizations circulated on their members listservs. The reason why the sample size is four research participants is because the four respondents were the only people to respond after the recruitment materials was shared on their listserves by both soccer organizations. I continued to seek new participants without having any new possible respondents contact me.

Before participating in the study, participants were requested to provide informed consent, and the consent form explicitly conveyed their right to discontinue their involvement and remove themselves from the study at any time without penalty. No individuals chose to withdraw from the study. All other information was stored on UM's network drives to which only I and my thesis advisor have access. Participants provided explicit consent for their names to be disclosed in the research. No participants received compensation during or after the interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted concurrently with data generation in the field. This approach facilitated continuous data generation and comparison. It also allowed the emergence of new themes as the flexibility of the generic qualitative methodology allowed me to determine data saturation if no new themes emerge (Finley, 2014; Kahlke, 2014; Mills et al., 2014). However, as an inexperienced researcher, I was aware that ceasing data generation too soon might have prevented me from finding new discoveries because of a false sense of saturation; therefore, I ensured that I generated enough data to address the research question comprehensively (Kostere & Kostere, 2022).

The semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions empowered the research participants to employ their own words and experiences rather than constrain their responses to binary or comparative choices. Most questions empowered the respondents to articulate their personal experiences within the context of the study. The methodological approach was used because of the predetermined categories that inform the research. As Kostere and Kostere (2022) noted, the data generated was individually analyzed for each participant. The patterns that emerged from the data were organized under the predetermined themes. During the process, some of the new patterns and themes that emerged from the data were added to the predetermined themes while others formed new themes that fell under the research question.

Human Research Ethics

Ethical conduct is a crucial point in conducting one's research. Following ethics approval, since I was dealing with potentially vulnerable groups (i.e., young emerging adult newcomers), it was important to ensure that my research was respectful, transparent, and minimized any risks to participants. Consequently, I ensured that the participants were provided with informed consent and written consent forms. This allowed them to fully understand the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research before agreeing to participate (White, 2020). The

consent forms were written in clear English, as this was the primary language of most participants. To ensure full comprehension and inclusivity, interpreter support was available for participants who faced language barriers. Interpreters were selected based on their cultural awareness and sensitivity to the research context and signed an Oath of Confidentiality to protect participants' identities and information. I used a Ukrainian soccer coach to translate the questions and the Ukrainian speaker's responses in one interview.

In terms of confidentiality and privacy, I ensured the participants' confidentiality was safeguarded and the four participants gave their consent for their names to be used in the thesis. The ethics protocol used ensured that my research involving human subjects was conducted in a manner that protects their rights, safety, and well-being (Cantin, 2020). No pseudonyms or codes are used based on the participants consent to use their names, instead I use their real names when referring to the participants. All information was stored on UM network drives to which only I and my thesis advisor have access.

When it comes to minimizing harm and risk, I was aware that some of my participants might have experienced trauma (for e.g., refugees from war zones), therefore, I carefully considered the potential psychological, emotional, or social risks involved during the interview process. I was also sensitive and ready to pause or stop conversations if participants seemed uncomfortable during the interview process. I ensured that the participants had access to Klinik's free counselling services if needed. I conducted interviews in places where participants felt safe such as within the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, and in one case, in the respondent's home, the soccer organizations' offices or at their training facilities.

I approached the research process with respect and sensitivity toward participants' cultural and linguistic differences. Culturally appropriate language was used in both written and verbal communication, and efforts were made to familiarize myself with relevant cultural contexts where necessary. In one instance, an interpreter familiar with the participant's cultural

Ukrainian background assisted me during the interview process. This Ukrainian soccer coach signed an oath of confidentiality to ensure the protection of the participant's identity and information. I ensured that the four participants did not feel pressured to provide responses they thought I would like to hear by emphasizing the fact that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers and by performing active listening, validating their experiences and viewpoints.

I ensured that honesty and transparency guided the research process. I avoided manipulating the data to fit preconceptions and theories. I explained clearly the results to the participants, and I used my UM email to share an overview of the research findings with them via their emails.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations in this study. First, I interviewed four participants who shared their experiences relevant to the study. Notably, three of these participants did not speak English as their first language. Two were born in Congo, where French is their first language, and they moved to Kenya at a young age, where they had to learn English. The other participant was born in Ukraine and was fluent only in Ukrainian, so an interpreter was used to facilitate communication. Language barriers and the way questions were formatted may have also limited participant responses because language nuances do not always translate directly. The questions were designed to avoid leading the responses.

Second, most participants initially arrived in Winnipeg as refugees before becoming permanent residents. Including young female participants in the thesis research would have been beneficial, as their experiences might differ from those of males. The original study design intended to include both males and females, but finding female participants proved challenging. This difficulty could be due to various reasons: there may be no young female newcomers participating in soccer activities in Winnipeg, or cultural or religious barriers might prevent

their participation, or there was simply a lack of interest to participate. Additionally, the recruitment efforts may have inadvertently favored male participants, as recruitment occurred through two soccer organizations whose programs were predominantly attended by males. This recruitment approach may have limited access for female newcomers who participate less frequently in these organizational spaces or who face additional barriers to participation. Future research could adopt more gender-responsive recruitment strategies by expanding recruitment beyond male-dominated soccer organizations and engaging programs, spaces, or community networks where female newcomers are more likely to participate.

Third, the thesis includes the perspectives and experiences of four young emerging adult newcomers, and finding more participants was challenging due to the recruitment criteria set. One criterion was that participants must have immigrated to Canada within the last five years, which was difficult because other potential participants had immigrated more than five years ago. Expanding this timeframe from five to ten years could have enriched the research by allowing more participants to join.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explores how soccer might promote social cohesion, integration, and community building among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg. The study also explores the participants' experiences and perceptions in the same context. It was conducted using a generic qualitative research and followed four interrelated objectives: (1) to understand the role of soccer in peacebuilding efforts among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg, (2) to appreciate the accessibility of soccer programs to young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg, (3) to understand the impact of soccer on young emerging adult newcomers' social lives and their interactions with each other, and (4) to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young emerging

adults newcomers in Winnipeg. The following chapter analyses and discusses the empirical data that emerged from the interviews.

Chapter Five – Soccer as a Pathway to Social Integration and Cohesion

Introduction

The interview process was pleasant, and my participants felt at ease. They shared their experiences and understanding with regards to how integration and cohesion can be achieved through soccer. Chapter five discusses two themes, namely relationships and community building and some sub-themes. These themes reflect the many ways soccer can be effectively applied in the context of social integration and cohesion as it relates to young emerging adult newcomers.

Relationships

All participants described some form of friendship and relationship that developed while they were playing soccer. This pattern was consistent across all participants, indicating that it is a shared understanding and experience. While some emphasized relationships, others described more profound experiences that went beyond relationships and friendships, such as finding brothers and families. For example, Fabian mentioned that he met people from different countries and learned from them when he played soccer.

When you go play soccer, you meet people from different countries and above that you are connected with those people, and you learn different things from them.

Moses was born in Congo, and moved to Kenya before coming to Canada. He averred that soccer helped him form strong friendships and to find others that he considered to be his true friends and brothers. He equates the two and sees no difference in the following excerpt from his interview.

I have made a lot of friends through soccer. I've known a lot of people through soccer since I came to Winnipeg, like the people that you don't really meet, they become your brothers. They become your friends.

In addition, it was not difficult for him to meet new people as soccer facilitated the process of meeting new people. When Moses was asked to describe a particular instance in which soccer helped him to form new friendships or connections, this is what he had to say:

When I was playing with this guy and we only met at school just meeting in our school. But since we started playing on the school soccer team, we became friends till now. It's like the moment that I'll never forget. And then like the time we spend together. It was actually a good time for me. I really felt good spending time with them.

Similarly, Francis who is originally from Nigeria and played soccer there articulated that soccer is beyond making friendships because it creates community, helps the individuals to socialize as well as strengthening community. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I feel like soccer is an extension of culture, an extension of friendship, and an extension of socialization. Not many people appreciate the fact that soccer is becoming a very fast way for young teens like myself to be able to socialize, because growing up, I've always been someone that had, I was always a bit shy. I didn't have that socializing factor that other kids had, but through soccer I have been able to make some incredible friends, meet some good people that have helped me go to professional professionally and academically, and I feel like soccer is a way in which we bring communities together. It brings communities together and it makes people more connected in such a way that, you can't get it from other sports.

Francis's story indicates that relationships are formed when young people are involved in soccer activities. Relationships are important, valued, and necessary to fulfil the respondent's needs.

Additionally, the study's participants emphasized how people from different backgrounds and cultures connect with each other while playing soccer. They described the positive connections and sense of belonging that was produced when they all came together to play soccer. While some described the diversity of Canada as an important factor that favors connection and belonging, others highlighted that while it is important to come together, the reality is that it is still difficult to do so. When asked how soccer helps bridge cultural and social divides among young newcomers, Moses had the following to say on the issue:

It connects people, people from different places, no matter where you're from, no matter what colour you are, no matter who you are. It brings you all together. A team have a little bit from different places. Just people from different countries, different areas, different background, you know?

Further, when Francis was asked the same question as Moses, he recounted a more personal story where he was surrounded by diversity that created understanding and improved the team's connection. He reported on the issue in the following manner:

This is a question that is much more personal for me because coming here, Canada is such a diverse country, and when I first came to Canada, I couldn't really settle down because I wasn't meeting other Nigerians because I couldn't really find other people. And through soccer I got to meet people from various parts of the world. I met Congolese, I've met Vietnamese, I've met Japanese, I've met Indians playing soccer, and I feel like it helps because when you are playing soccer together, there's just this understanding.

It's not a language, but it's more of like an understanding, you know, feeling [and] emotion. I feel like that's how it helps to connect people from certain parts of the world because they're always this understanding between soccer players. And, you know, when playing soccer language is not necessarily a barrier because everyone you know is happy. And they're all speaking one thing because I want to communicate the same ideas to you. So, yeah, I feel like it helped because it breaks down that barrier, it helps everyone improve each other and yeah.

On the other hand, while Francis and Moses revealed more positive outcomes of how soccer creates and reinforces connection and relationships in their narratives, Serhii argued it was essential for young people to get together even though it is difficult sometimes. He noted that, "Once we get together, this is already big part of the social interaction, because sometimes it's hard to get people together."

While most participants demonstrated a similar understanding of connection and belonging through playing soccer and they recounted personal stories about how soccer helps them forge relationships and connections, Serhii pointed out that it was still difficult to come together. However, their responses portray the positive side of being able to play soccer.

Community Building

Every respondent felt that a diverse community with people from different backgrounds and cultures was created when they engaged together playing soccer. They felt the support and help from people with a shared interest in soccer and this has helped them in their individual journeys. For instance, Fabien was able to find help in improving his language skills with the people he met when he was involved in soccer activities. He felt the warmth of the community when he received that assistance. He made it known that it was a huge boost for him mentally and socially:

Socially playing soccer has helped me because I'm still a student learning English, so when I'm playing with some guys here, some have stayed for four years for 10 years, so they speak English very well, way better than me. So, I'm learning from them. I talk to them more often, so I'm learning from them. You know, that's how it's helped me socially and mentally.

While Fabien found help within the community, Francis, on the other hand, had some poor impressions and ideas about African communities before coming to Canada. However, since he joined Sport Without Boundaries in Winnipeg, his ideas had changed. He sought out support and assistance from the African community which made him feel the togetherness and affection of the community.

Long before I joined Sport Without Boundaries (SWB) I always had this belief that Africans didn't like helping each other. Everyone was out for themselves. Everyone wanted their own person to grow but while playing for this organization, I've learned a few things that soccer helped people go further in life. Like the African community have come behind us in such a way that I feel proud to call myself an African now because I know that yes, we might not be perfect.

But you know, we have this backing of the entire community. Everyone is speaking to us like, yes, this is the club, so I feel like it has helped bring everyone together and also, you know, change my understanding of how other African countries are because I have gotten to meet a lot of them, engage socially and yeah, it's actually my perception on that.

That said, Moses experiences and knowledge of soccer programs like Sport Without Boundaries (SWB), helped him see the value of community building. He pointed out that these programs have brought people together with a shared interest in soccer:

And then there are these programs that people make that I might know that I've heard of and that I've seen some. Like Sport without boundaries, SWB, it's like they bring people who are all kind. Normally people who came here like some of them are older and some of them they can't play at the academy anymore, they want to bring them together.

These responses depict multiple facets of the community that contributes to how it is being built. Some participants had a change of heart regarding their preconceived ideas of African communities due to their exposure to different cultures. Other participants found help and comfort as well as saw the value in community, and that it was important for them as it plays an important role in their lives.

This section has two key findings, relationship building and community building. As expected, the participants were able to form meaningful relationships and find a sense of belonging, which led to community building. This was important for them as they navigated life and found themselves in a new environment. First, the relationships that were created were transformed into friendships and brotherhood. This is an indication of how soccer facilitates these types of connections. It was fascinating to have seen some of the participants recalling those stories of meeting new people and finding new family members other than those they already have. These stories stay and never leave because they serve as reminders of how everything started for them. Thus, the participants revealed that getting involved in soccer programs and playing with people they met for the first time and arriving at the point where they can call each other friends and brothers indicates how exceptional soccer is in building ties and lasting and meaningful relationship between the youth.

Some participants mentioned that finding people they could call brothers was remarkable and it felt deeply personal for them. For those participants who might feel alone or who might not have siblings, the feeling of finding a brother on the soccer field, despite the cultural differences, is unparalleled and speaks to the way soccer appears to be a bridge between people from different cultural, class, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. Also, this finding responds to the research question about how soccer promotes the formation of social bonds among young emerging adult newcomers from diverse backgrounds in Winnipeg. It shows that soccer is not an obstacle nor a setback from forming and enjoying relationships because it fosters and facilitates a plethora of interactions. This finding is consistent with social integration theory advanced by Ager and Strang (2008) and Kowsikka and James (2019) because connections and community relationships are fostered among participants. These relational outcomes suggest that simple interactions during soccer programs contribute to broader community building in Winnipeg, demonstrating how everyday activities support local peacebuilding efforts.

Second, the participants found value in the community-building aspect of soccer as that is where social interaction and social cohesion come to life because within that sphere, the participants felt a sense of belonging, safety, and stability. This finding indicates that soccer builds a community where each individual finds support, meaning, and develops their shared interests. Soccer promotes and offers young emerging adult newcomers an opportunity to find a common purpose and shared identity and thus feel empowered. This finding is central to understanding how soccer creates community building because within the community individuals can rely on one another and share the same values and interests. It is a place where meaningful interactions and strong identities are upheld and supported. These young emerging adult newcomer soccer players who may not have the support needed or who may find it

difficult to integrate into a new community, find that it is helpful to be with like-minded people that makes a difference and creates a strong bond among friends.

This aligns with community building and social cohesion theory elaborated on by Eys et al. (2022) as well as Jayakody et al. (2022) which emphasizes shared activities, interests, identity, and values as the foundation of building a strong community. This finding also falls under social integration theory which stipulates that social integration provides a safety net for newcomers within the community where their basic needs such as security and protection is being met and fulfilled (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kowsikka & James, 2019). While previous research suggests that sports create community building, this finding extends that literature by showing how soccer promotes a strong community among young emerging adult newcomers.

This section presented two themes based on the data generated during the interview process with the research participants. These themes summarize how young emerging adult newcomers can create and strengthen relationships with one another that builds and strengthens communities. These are elements that matter, and it reflects the participants desire to see and experience other people like them.

Soccer as a Peaceful Way

This section focuses on key themes that emerged during the interview process, which highlight the participants understanding of peace and soccer. Two key themes emerged from the data, namely fostering peace and understanding, and the relationship between peace and soccer. The participants provided details on how they perceive peace and the sense in which it relates to soccer.

Fostering Peace and Understanding

The concept of peace was not a foreign language to the participants as they expressed their understanding of peace based on their unique experiences. This was a consistent pattern that was well described and linked to the framework of peacebuilding in the study. For example,

Fabien, who came from a refugee camp, mentioned that “Peace is when there's no conflict between people.” In the same vein, Moses noted that, “Peace is when everything is going great, like your life is going perfect.”

Francis believed his understanding of peace leans towards happiness, whereby people come together to do something they enjoy and love and it leads to peace:

In my view, that is what peace should look like; everyone coming together to be happy, to be happy to watch people play football. This is what peace is when everyone is kind of silent and there's nothing going on.

While Fabien, Moses and Francis have similar responses, Serhii offered a slightly different understanding of peace. He saw peace as more about actions that disrupting or destroying people’s lives and any actions that brought people together:

Peace is when people don't hate each other, don't insult each other and don't shoot at each other, don't scream, don't do bad things to the other one, but rather cooperate.

All participants shared a similar understanding of peace. Their understanding is rooted in their unique experiences. This shows that peace can be understood and lived by anyone. The participants pointed out that peace is not merely words as it is a set of action that aims to alleviate violence, crisis and pain.

The Relationship Between Soccer and Peace

The participants described that there is a relationship between soccer and peace. This relationship is strengthened and fostered through engagement in soccer that empowered the participants to have a unique experience. When asked how soccer relates to peace, their responses mostly reflected the way they experienced peace through soccer and how it affected their community. For example, Fabien indicated that when soccer is introduced into a community where there is violence, the conflict stops leading to relationship among the youth:

Soccer creates peace in a way that you might find in a community there's some conflict. But when people come together and play together, they become friends. Soccer creates peace in that way.

While Fabien saw the relationship of soccer and peace as something that is relationship orientated, Francis provided a nuanced perception. He noted that peace equates tranquility and stability, and soccer paves the way for that. He said that “I understand peace basically in the sense that [it] is an absence of disruption and soccer provides that avenue.”

Moses’s views of the relationship between soccer and peace were clear and simple. He narrated that playing soccer was like a protection, a shield that prevents individuals from hurting one another so that they can live in harmony:

You're playing soccer here with a lot of people when you play soccer, you don't harm each other. You're not going to call anybody out, let's go kill this person, or just do something bad to this person.

The respondents' perceptions of how soccer and peace were linked together reflected their aspiration to have a peaceful life while participating in their favorite sport. These responses underscored the peaceful influence of soccer on young emerging adult newcomers.

Key Findings

Two significant findings were identified and mirrored how the respondent’s understood peace and how it was related to soccer which is rooted in the following research question: how do young emerging adult newcomers’ experiences and perceptions regarding soccer contributes to social cohesion, integration, and community building in Winnipeg by pointing out their understanding of peace. First, the participants described peace as the absence of war, a state where there is no conflict and where violence does not occur. This is not surprising as most participants had refugee backgrounds. The fact that they had to move from their country of origin where violence and crisis engulfed their societies to come to Winnipeg that is different and probably less chaotic than where they come from indicates that their understanding of peace

is pure and genuine. This finding suggests that the participants view peace as not merely the absence of war but as something that creates an atmosphere where people have value, respect, and love for each other and where relationships and togetherness are fostered.

Since this research explored young emerging adult newcomers' experiences and perceptions regarding soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young newcomers in Winnipeg, this finding touches on that by amplifying their unique understanding of peace and its relationship with soccer. This is then connected to how they see soccer as a peacebuilding tool. This aligns with peacebuilding theory, advanced by Barnett et al. (2007), McEvoy-Levy (2024), Mac Ginty (2024) and Schirch (2006) which upholds and values social justice and building positive relationships. Previous studies by Cardena (2019) in Colombia and Sierra Leone, and by Corry-Roake (2015) have shown how young newcomers relate to peace activities by pointing out, for example, how they are doing small projects in their community for its betterment and how they are exposed to peace education through their school curriculum. This finding supports this literature by adding how these young newcomers understand peace. From a general perspective, this finding indicates that the concept of peace is understood by everyone. One does not need to be an expert to understand its meaning and enjoy its benefits.

Second, the participants shared their understanding of how soccer was related to peace. The participants' understandings were all interconnected as they discussed the way soccer created a platform for a community to be formed, where soccer activities helped individuals to be removed from conflict or violence, and where there is no harm committed to any team members. This is not surprising because most of the participants moved to Winnipeg from violent contexts where they had witnessed violence and atrocities. Therefore, their view of soccer, as it relates to peace, was grounded in their lived experiences; playing soccer became an escape and a safe place for them. This suggests that while young emerging adult newcomers are involved in soccer activities, they can feel and experience peace at their own level. Soccer

offers them the opportunity to rely on each other, enjoy themselves, and not think about harming each other.

However, a note of caution must be raised here since soccer games can get a bit physical, and fights can occur at any time. Despite this reality, young people are still prone to play soccer and experience peace with one another. This finding directly addresses the central question of the thesis research which explores how soccer facilitates social cohesion, integration, and the formation of cross-community relationships among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg by showing how these youth's experience social cohesion, social integration, and community building while being engaged in soccer activities. The literature on soccer and peacebuilding argues that soccer brings people together and creates integration and togetherness, as well as facilitating peacebuilding (Blom et al., 2015; Chiweshe, 2016; Krasniqi & Krasniqi, 2019). This finding extends that argument with a particular focus on young emerging adult newcomers. This finding demonstrates how soccer paves the way for young people, especially newcomers, to establish relationships, form communities, and feel safe. This is valuable because it is an opportunity to showcase their unique experiences, ideas, and values both as newcomers and soccer players. In general, it illustrates that soccer provides an escape route for young emerging adult newcomers who might not have had the opportunity to experience peace because of where they originally come from.

This section illustrated that peace is a concept understood by these young emerging adult newcomers. It also demonstrated that through their experiences a relationship between soccer and peace exists in such a way that soccer provides them with an opportunity to feel alive, be in community and rely on each other. This makes soccer a vital peacebuilding tool in achieving peace at the community level.

Soccer as a Tool for Motivation, Personal Development and Well-being

This section focuses on the way soccer motivates young emerging adult newcomers, how they use it for personal development, and how it contributes to their overall well-being. During the interview process, the themes of motivation and personal development, and well-being outline the importance and impact of soccer on the physical and emotional life of the research participants.

Motivation and Personal Development

Motivation and personal development are themes that I expected to find in the data because as a player and a newcomer myself, it is a common thing to see among players, and I also had this experience. During the part of the interview process where I asked the participants the question what motivated you to start playing soccer?, they became lively and joyful. I could see the determination in their eyes and feel their sense a pride. Their responses revealed how motivation and personal development can stem from playing soccer. All the participants demonstrated their resilience and determination in making their dreams come true. Fabien, for example, shared with me that his dream was to be a soccer player and it was a dream that helps him go forward and despite some setbacks, he continued to be motivated by one of his teammates to succeed:

The thing that motivated me is since I had that dream of becoming a professional soccer player, I kept playing. In [the] last match we played on Sunday, a friendly match. So, after the match, because the coach says he's seen the match and the performances, then he said he has selected the list of players who will go to the tournament. So, then the coach came to me and said you are not qualified for this, your skills are still young. You know, I felt so bad a little bit, I felt like I didn't deserve it. I felt like maybe I chose the wrong career or something.

But then another player came and said "bro, it's OK." So that's how I overcame that one. So, my teammates came to me and said, "No, it's OK. You don't have to be qualified for each one. You know, come every day, train and play and go home. That's all about soccer. You don't have to be professional. And even though he has not seen it right now, but keep practicing, maybe next year you will be qualified."

That said, Moses described that motivation is more about having a winning mentality and not giving up despite the ups and downs encountered in one's life:

Absolutely if you win, the feeling will keep continuing in your body like even if you lose, I mean, I don't think just if you win, but if you lose. You're going to have to win. You're going to start practicing. We must put so much effort [in], let's just keep on bringing, you just keep on pulling.

While Fabien and Moses believed that a soccer player's motivation and personal development stem from having a dream, being determined and having the right mentality, Francis saw it as more about seeing the end goal and having something to play for. Francis pointed out that, "It (soccer) gives [...] something to do as I said earlier, it gives [...] a purpose, a goal to achieve."

Thus, soccer blazes new trails where young newcomers can develop the right motivation and determination to develop in a way that is beneficial for them. It is important to note that they perceived a bright future when engaging in soccer activities, which helps fuel their desire to keep moving to ensure that their dreams come true.

Enjoyment and Stress Release

Enjoyment and stress release are also themes that emerged from the data and are not surprising. All the participants agreed that they released stress by enjoying themselves by playing soccer. They described the experience as something that helped them escape the world's harsh reality. The respondents also said that playing soccer made them feel good. For example, Moses equated playing soccer with having the best time of his life as it was a pleasurable and fulfilling moment:

When you're playing soccer with people, and you're having the best time of your life, you are actually enjoying the game. You're having peace. You know, you don't remember anything that you had, like you just completely forget everything that is in your mind. You just focus on what you're doing and the people you're playing with. You're just giving your life to the game.

On the other hand, Serhii contended that interactions that occurred during soccer programs was important because it allowed them to relax their minds relax. It was an escape from the difficulties that the world presented to them each day. This is what Serhii had to say on the issue:

It also helps them (the players) interact with each other and when they play, they try to forget about the calamity and what's going on now in Ukraine like the war and all this disaster. So, it's kind of relaxation [and it is] also motivation and relaxation for players.

While Serhii's views were more centered on relaxation, Fabien in contrast indicated that playing soccer was something that made him feel good. He narrated that, "Playing soccer makes me feel good because when I'm playing soccer, I cannot be sad. I'm happy playing soccer, so I feel good."

In contrast, Francis recounted a personal moment of how soccer led him to have a dreamlike feeling while playing his first soccer game:

The first game I had [played in] was such a very surreal moment for me because I had never played soccer at the competitive level before. It has always been my kindergarten class or my primary class playing with friends and stuff like that. So, when I stepped onto the pitch the first time, I was super, super excited. That was just the feeling that I had at that moment. It was pure joy to be doing something that I love at that level.

In addition, Moses expressed that participating in soccer activities helped him relinquish stress. This is a common experience among players, especially those who feel lonely. Moses reported on this issue as follows:

When you play soccer, you release all your stress, all your stress goes away. Everything goes away. When you are playing soccer everything that you have in your mind, like an actual soccer player, everything you have in your mind is just gone away like it's actually gone. With all the stress you have, you are just focusing on soccer. And it's helped a lot of people, especially in Winnipeg, when you don't know anybody.

When you like, you have a lot of siblings or like you can go to this field called Gordon Bell and then meet people [and] then practice with them. You know what I'm saying so, yeah. When you practice with people and then just release your stress and then [you] forget about everything because here it's a lonely, lonely place when you are a newcomer. You don't know people you don't know anybody. But once you get yourself into something that a lot of people are involved in, you find yourself. You're making friends, meeting new people, you know what I'm saying? Yeah. OK.

While Moses provided a more detailed story about how he was able to release stress and how he also observed this with another player, Fabien was more interested in discussing his feelings. He observed that soccer prevented him from feeling sad and actually made him feel good. Fabien articulated that, "Playing soccer makes me feel good because when I'm playing soccer, I cannot be sad. I'm happy playing soccer, so I feel good."

Francis saw soccer as a cure for depression and from his darkest days academically. He described that he was also conscious that this may not be the same feeling for everyone:

Around early last year, which was 2024, I fell into depression because I had fees to pay at school, and they were threatening to deregister me from some of my courses. So, I was trying to kind of get money to do everything. And I had school too. My grades were sleeping. I was seriously down on my luck that period. And there I fell into depression for like a couple of months. And I have recovered, but I still feel that because during that period the only thing that kept me going, kept bringing me out of the house was just to come play soccer on the field.

And I channeled all that energy there. And it didn't leave space for me to think about any other thing. So, I felt like it greatly helped me to battle depression, which is not I can say the same for a lot of people. But I feel like soccer quickly helped me to battle that particular phase of my life. Also, the social, my friends were all there. So, I get that. I continue to meet my friends every time. And you know, we'd go out after practice. We'd do a couple of fun stuff come back home, so it really helped me during that period to, you know, lift my depression.

It is worth mentioning that the respondents eventually experienced joy and pleasure while playing soccer. Soccer made it easier for them to enjoy and feel good about themselves. Also, helped them be stress-free as they all went through soccer activities. These feelings were commonly shared by all the participants.

Key Findings

There are two findings that emerged from the data here. These findings respond to the following research question: What was the impact soccer programs had on their social life and their interactions with each other? First, the participants described how they were motivated and developed themselves through participating in soccer as they found pleasure and enjoyment which led them to developing a strong sense of well-being and identity. This finding suggests that soccer created an avenue for young emerging adult newcomers to become better versions of themselves and reach their goals of one day playing professional soccer. It also showed that they can be consistent, have the desire to improve game-after-game, and keep on growing. Consequently, soccer allowed these young individuals to come out of their shells and experience the world. Even though it was not easy for some, the desire to be exposed and improve kept them growing. Soccer also created a winning mentality in them which is crucial both on and off the playing field. These are the types of attitudes that could assist them in overcoming difficult situations that might come their way. It also helped them become more resilient and ready to face hardships that they encountered.

Since one of the study objectives is to deduce the impact of soccer on young emerging adult newcomers' social lives and their interactions with each other, the findings showed that soccer not only provided an atmosphere where these youth were motivated to do better and improve, but they were also developing themselves internally. This aligns with social cohesion, where personal efforts and motivation are influenced and developed, as well as being joined together for the team to function well (Eys et al., 2022; Friedkin, 2004; Schiefer & Noll, 2016). It also supports the literature that highlights the social impact of soccer on individuals (Asamoah & Grobbelaar, 2017; Berengüi et al., 2022) by focusing on the participant's and their lived experiences with soccer. Overall, the findings show that small interactions and involvement in soccer activities have the potential to have a key impact on young emerging adult newcomers,

especially in a space and city where soccer is not the top choice for people to invest in. Soccer can ultimately provide an integrative platform for young newcomers to develop, improve, and reach their goals.

A second significant finding to emerge from the data was that the participants expressed a feeling of satisfaction and having fun when they were engaged in soccer activities. They recognized that they were having the best time of their lives and/or enjoying the game, as well as releasing stress while playing that were contributes to their well-being. As someone who also plays soccer, this does not come as a surprise because playing soccer has personally helped me clear my mind and enjoy myself. Soccer players in that state of mind can individually create some sort of common feeling that helps them navigate difficulties they may face off the field as soccer provides that opportunity for them. For example, the participants mentioned that the stress release part was something that they all experienced. Some may have had many school assignments and did not know where to start, or maybe there were family issues that affected them, yet they were able to leave the particular trouble behind while playing soccer. The participants noted that those who had experienced depression were able to feel the warmth of others, find joy again, and revive the desire to move on once they got onto the football pitch. This indicates that soccer contributes to the well-being of young emerging adult newcomers, both physically and emotionally. It enhances their ability to feel good about themselves, experience pure joy, and simply have fun, which is an important to each person's quality of life.

Participating in soccer also allowed the participants to be able to see that they were not alone in their struggles and journeys, which developed a renewed sense of hope in them. This finding suggests that the participants viewed soccer not merely as a recreational sport but as an essential tool that helped them decompress from all sorts of pressure that encroached on their mental well-being. Soccer operated as a psychological buffer that supported their physical and emotional regulation supporting the findings of (Cardena, 2019). This finding also represents

how their involvement in soccer activities played a significant role in maintaining the participants well-being, illustrating how sport, as a whole, can contribute to positive mental health outcomes.

In conclusion, this section demonstrated that soccer had an influential impact on the participants lives. Soccer activities provided a context where they were able to be physically and emotionally stable, to prepare themselves for the future. They had the opportunity to be a better version of themselves and to see their dream come true by playing soccer.

Barriers, Challenges, and Resources

This section highlights the barriers and challenges that the participants faced in their journeys. It also explores some of the resources that were beneficial for the participants in navigating life in Winnipeg. It is clear that from the findings here that young emerging adult newcomers face a plethora of challenges like transportation and paying registration fees while taking part in soccer activities, and these remain obstacles to their fulfillment of their basic human needs.

Challenges

I did not imagine or foresee that the questions on barriers and challenges would provide so much insightful reflections from the participants. I was inspired by hearing the participants describe what they went through, and their current struggles related to soccer. The participant's response relating their personal challenges to external barriers was unique. In addition, the insights they provided regarding the changes they would like to see were remarkable. For example, Francis while feeling introspective described how his lack of cardio health was a challenge he desperately wanted to overcome:

The first challenge I faced was my cardio. Whenever I played soccer, I couldn't run to save my life because I hated running. But the more I play, the more I realized that running is very important for one's health and I was able to overcome that with the help of the coaches actually.

In contrast, Moses shared a different experience noting that patience was something he had to have as sometimes the game could be tough and tension often arose between players:

Number one is that patience because there are some people that may come playing football and for no reason, they start yelling at you. They become aggressive, so you have to be patient and understand each other [...] so I just play mostly for fun.

Fabien, on the other hand, highlighted that language and communication are challenges that he and others must face because English is not their first language that made it difficult sometimes to have a conversation with others and the coach. This is what he had to say on the issue:

The language it's like a lot of people, when they came here and a lot of them don't speak English and a lot of them don't speak another person's language. It's like communication is going to be so hard for them to communicate. When you have a talent and the coach likes you. But the coach can't talk to you. You know what I'm saying? It's being harder for him to tell you what to do, what position to play, where to play. It's hard. It's a challenge, you know. That's a challenge for communication. That's the hardest thing in soccer that I've experienced.

Another challenge Fabien emphasized was seeing some people form groups with only people they know, and they were not willing to mingle with other players:

They don't want people from another country. They just want to be with themselves. They just want to be because there's certain people that bring themselves together and then, everywhere they go with their people. They just don't want to be with you. They just don't want to be. They want to be themselves.

It is different in the case of Serhii as he viewed Canada as a 'global village' where no fights and disruptions among the diversity of players should occur. Instead, he articulated that only friendship should exist among the plethora of diverse players:

Soccer shouldn't be like battle. That of course we have emotion, but it should be reasonable and also have respect [for] your opponent. Canada is like a global village. We have [a] different nation, different races. We should be kind. We are

in soccer, coming together. We are playing against each other, tomorrow we can play in one team. And this is how we create and forge friendship between people of different nations [and] different races.

These challenges were unique to the participants, as they spoke from their experiences. Some reflected directly from a personal perspective, while others described things that they had observed. One thing for sure was that it was very personal and held true value for them.

Another challenge the participant's raised were the external barriers that affected and continue to impact them. I was not surprised to see the emergence of the theme of external barriers from the data. I too have experienced these obstacles as a newcomer and soccer player. In telling his story regarding the barriers he observed, Francis mentioned that despite recent improvements, the unpopularity of soccer still exists in Winnipeg. He reflected on the issue as follows:

I don't feel like it [soccer] is something that it's that much public yet, and I feel that has to do with [the fact] that soccer is not a general sport here. Everyone mostly talked about hockey or football. So, I feel like that has played a factor into why I feel like it's a work in progress and since 2022 that has greatly improved. So, I feel like it is becoming more and more accessible to kids and to younger adults. But I feel like a lot of work still needs to be done on that in this particular program.

Moses noted that transportation is the first significant obstacle for young newcomers like him to access soccer facilities and participate in soccer activities in Winnipeg. He also pointed out the issue of the distances between the soccer fields and his place and how late buses can make it challenging for newcomer players to reach those soccer fields:

Other challenges that I can think about is transportation. People live in different areas. Winnipeg is a big place, you know? Yeah, it's a big place. With the soccer places where people play is farther and when you take the bus, sometimes the bus delays. And you know people in Canada goes by time, you know they say time is running so when you waste the time then it's going to be hard for you.

Another challenge faced by almost all the participants was the financial cost of being part of a local soccer team or participating in soccer tournaments. The higher fees meant that it was sometimes out of reach for some participants. Moses speaking about his own experiences did not shy away from mentioning the hard truth he was living with that playing soccer costs money and sometimes it is not affordable for young emerging adult newcomers like himself:

I haven't played because clubs cost a lot of money and then I'm getting old, you know? Take the last time to play cup was like 18 and I'm turning 19. You know, it's like, it's a challenge. I'll call it a challenge. I wanted to blend. They ask for a lot of money. When you're trying to play soccer in this place you need to be rich to have, like 1,000 bucks. I mean \$4,000 or \$3,000, or \$5,000 a year. And that's that. You just have to pay the \$4,000 a year, you know?

Serhii echoed Moses' sentiments. Serhii revealed that paying fees is a problem. He said that "You have to pay, and sometimes it's a burden."

Participants discussed the transportation and financial costs associated with soccer programs. These costs prevent them from enjoying their sport to the fullest. These new and young newcomers to the city made it clear that attending training sessions regularly was difficult for them. These external barriers were a continuous cycle that prevented them from enjoying soccer activities and this was a reality that they all faced, and it showed how deeply it affected them.

Community Resources and Accessibility

When responding to questions regarding the barriers and challenges to playing soccer as well as the resources that have helped them so far in their journey, the participants were not hesitant to share their experiences with me. For example, Serhii suggested that soccer programs should be affordable for young emerging adult newcomers. He reflected on this issue in the following manner:

So, it would be great to have some kind of program that would be affordable for newcomers to get [into]. In winter time it's quite costly. Even when you play in the league, it's quite costly.

While Serhii highlighted the cost of joining soccer programs in the city, Francis recommended that community groups should provide access by making it more affordable for young emerging adult newcomers to join teams. Serhii believed community groups could help spread the word about how to access soccer programs to enable the young emerging adult newcomers reach their goal of playing soccer:

Another resource is maybe some community group who can reach out to young adults because there are some young adults out here, but they don't know if there are places you can go and play soccer. They're not aware of that. So if there's some community program, [a] program who can reach out to those young adults and talk to them about soccer.

Leaning on this same understanding, Moses indicated that he found a community that helped him on his football journey. He found big brothers in this community that taught him about football and about life. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I found the FIMBU, the DRC team. I found it so helpful because they gave me [a] ride. Yeah, I find it helpful because they give [a]ride. They take me home. They take me to new places. Apart from soccer, they [are] also like the person who gave me ride. He also tells me about how life works. He's like my big brother, teaching me new things as motivations.

Francis hinted that government intervention could be crucial in helping those young emerging adult newcomers access soccer so that they would be safe and secure in after-school programs:

I feel like if this is the program that [is] adopted by the government [it] could help some of these kids who are constantly getting into trouble. It would be something that would help them stay out of trouble because it's a fun activity to do after school and also, you know, maybe while they are probably working, it could help them, you know, channel their energy and whatever anger they might have. It helped me. So, I feel like it would help them a lot so.

Francis also provided an example of a soccer program that was helpful and instrumental in keeping the young emerging adult newcomers busy. He reflected on the issue as follows:

There is an event that takes place every year. They call it the Canadian African Cup of nations. [In] every stage of the competition, there's always a program that the kids are taking [part in]. And I feel like this program have helped at least keep the kids busy at present during the two months of vacation that they get, it keeps them busy. They are always doing something, always practicing and also the young kids program and the foundation also helps them kick football around. You know, just do something rather than staying home and, you know, not really doing anything.

Finally, Francis advocated for more inclusive programs be provided for young emerging adult newcomers and that discrimination must be kicked out of football:

I feel like it's something that happens already, but it should be more inclusive of everyone because the soccer program here is only for certain groups of kids basically get to play because they are more athletic. But I feel like soccer should be for everyone.

The participants provided unique and strategic suggestions that must not be taken for granted. These suggestions related to important areas like financial resources, government intervention, and facilities access, which are vital to the inclusion of young emerging adult newcomers.

Key Findings

Several important findings emerged from the data. These findings fall under the following research question: How accessible are soccer programs to young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg? As I said before, the participants' responses provided much insight into their struggles as well as ways that could be helpful for them and other young emerging adult newcomers that are in the same situation. First, the interviews made it clear that the research participants all had a difficult time adapting to how things work in Winnipeg, especially in relation to soccer programs. The reasons for their difficulty could stem from a lack of cross-cultural understanding, which prevented them from successfully establishing themselves in the

city and feeling completely welcome to participate in soccer programs. For example, one participant mentioned that he observed that people were aggressive on the pitch while he only came to have fun. This suggests that in his mind the other players were not having fun because the way they were playing was different as it was more competitive that were most likely connected to their cultural and worldviews about how soccer should be played.

On the other hand, the issue of adaptability could stem from the social environment that might create social exclusion, where individuals who are new are being separated from the mainstream player's group. One of the participants pointed out that there were communication struggles due to language barriers, and some individuals were not willing to mingle with others creating feelings of isolation, vulnerability, and hopelessness. The reason for these feelings was because the participants were willing to interact and have conversations, but if the other individuals were not willing to interact, it becomes difficult to engage. One participant expressed a desire for people not to fight during matches. This is common in soccer games as tension rises, and it becomes difficult for people to control themselves, especially if they are on the losing side. Soccer is a peaceful game where its purpose is for people to come out and have fun. However, this is difficult in reality as some argue that fighting, not to the point of death, with little tackles here and there, is part of the beautiful game that helps individuals to rise to the occasion and motivate themselves to perform better.

Another important finding tied to these challenges is the role of external barriers that prevent young emerging adult newcomers from participating in soccer programs in Winnipeg. Participants discussed the role of transportation and the financial costs associated with soccer programs that were obstacles that prevented them from enjoying their sport to the fullest. This could be because the participants did not have access to a car or were not able to afford the driving license or simply have the time to pay for driving lessons and then take the driving test. This meant that they had to rely either on public transport or one of the senior players living

in the city for a long time to drive them to and from practice. Depending on public transport especially during Winnipeg's severe winters becomes more difficult when the buses are always running late or when the young emerging adult newcomers are dependent on finding someone who has a car to give them a ride. It is also difficult when they do not have the financial means to take a taxi to and from training sessions. All these little hurdles induce stress and fear and amount to them not achieving their goals. In addition, the participants revealed that participating in soccer programs is costly. The prices that different clubs promote to attract people are out of the range of young emerging adult newcomers who have just arrived in the city, or who have fled a war from their country of origin, or who were displaced but they still want to play soccer. This finding suggests that the participants love and are involved in Winnipeg's soccer programs. However, the environment that goes along with soccer does not favor them especially when they want to be fully immersed, feel accepted, and welcomed so that they can enjoy their favorite sport without disruptions. One of the research questions allowed the participants to reflect on appreciating the accessibility of soccer programs for young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg. A key finding revealed that accessibility remains one of the key challenges for these youth who love the 'beautiful game.' Therefore, even though soccer created opportunities for young emerging adult newcomers to express themselves, enjoy their time, and create connections, there were still barriers that prevented them from having a full and complete experience of the sport they love.

Further, the respondents provided insights into what has helped them cope with all these struggles as well as what they would like to see happening in terms of changes and improvements regarding soccer as a key community resource. They spoke about affordable and inclusive programs, community groups advocating for their inclusion, and government intervention to reduce costs and to ensure ease of access. The respondents were not thinking about themselves only they were also caring about others who might find themselves in the

same situation. They hold soccer dear to their hearts and would like to continue being active participants in the sport as long as programs remain affordable and inclusive. They would also like every young person to have an opportunity to enjoy soccer, not only by watching it but also by playing the sport. They were considerate and thoughtful in their stories. Some participants mentioned that being part of a community group helped them as these groups were made up of people who shared the same interests, beliefs, and values, as well as struggles as these community groups were vital in their lives. This can go a long way, especially when they know they have the support needed to attain their goals.

As one participant pointed out, government intervention was important in making soccer accessibility easy and affordable for all people. This finding translates into the young participants desire to see things improve, not only for themselves but also for other youth in the city. They noted that these programmatic, community-based and institutional resources are important if the goal is for young emerging adult newcomers to experience peace through soccer. This response directly addresses one of the research objectives regarding soccer program accessibility by pointing out that there were some resources that could assist young emerging adult newcomers and that there was a need to tap into these resources.

This section highlighted the numerous challenges and barriers that the participants faced and still face while playing soccer. It showed that they were unable to enjoy their favorite sport, and they could not be completely immersed into their new soccer community. Consequently, their sense of belonging was jeopardized and their desire to play was at risk. Therefore, actions needed to be taken to assist them in enjoying their new home in the city and to have a great experience playing soccer.

Conclusion

Chapter five presented the empirical data and the research findings. The findings indicate that the participants forged and strengthened relationships with one another and formed community by being actively engaged in their soccer programs. The findings also show that participants understand peace and through their experiences, they can see and experience the relationship between soccer and peace. Further, participants were able to care for their emotional and physical wellbeing by being actively involved in soccer activities. Finally, the findings highlight the challenges and barriers faced by the participants and the ways that helped them navigate through these situations. Chapter six presents the conclusion to the study and shares recommendations for future research possibilities.

Chapter Six- Conclusion

Introduction

The study's aim was to explore the role of soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young emerging adult newcomers in Winnipeg, and the significance of the sport in their lives. The preceding empirical chapter detailed the key themes that emerged inductively from the data. The central findings then explored the relationship between soccer and peace through the experiences and perspectives of these young individuals, and the accessibility level of soccer programs for young emerging adult newcomers. It also revealed some of the barriers and challenges they faced, as well as the resources that helped them to access soccer programs in the city.

The research sought to contribute to the growing discourse on the connection between soccer and peace, particularly in relation to peacebuilding from the viewpoint of some of Winnipeg's young emerging adult newcomers. Additionally, the study aimed to delve into the unique experiences of these young emerging adult newcomers, highlighting their value and the crucial role they can play in peacebuilding efforts in the city.

Overall Key Findings

This study demonstrated the fluidity of soccer in terms of gathering individuals from different backgrounds together. It also showed how important this sport is for young emerging adult newcomers in the city, especially how it influences their well-being and welfare. Further, it highlighted the barriers and challenges these young emerging adult newcomers face when accessing soccer programs, as well as some of the helpful ways to navigate these circumstances and approaches the research participants would like to see for soccer programs to be easily accessible for all youth in the city. These include government and the Manitoban soccer federation address the challenges and barriers like transportation and program affordability that

impact young emerging adult newcomers so that they can have a smooth transition into their new community.

First, the depth of relationships formed from participating in soccer programs suggests that community organizations must view soccer programs not only as recreational services but also as critical platforms for young emerging adult newcomers' sense of belonging. This is important because these youth are now part of Manitoban society and the local Winnipeg community. It is essential that every individual in the community must develop a strong sense of belonging and Manitoba and Canada are a hub for newcomers. The Manitoban government must establish a social skills program for young emerging adult newcomers that could benefit them on and off the football pitch. These skills that could be taught to youth in the program include the importance of teamwork, cross cultural communication, finding friendships, peacebuilding, and understanding Canadian culture. These skills could also be taught to young emerging adult newcomers through English classes in Manitoba's schools that would help them improve their language skills that would encourage them to form new friendships and better communicate with others. Similar programs exist in Halifax and other parts of Canada (Gennaro, 2023; Xu, 2021) so the potential is there to replicate these programs in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Second, a consistent finding across the research participants was the fact that sometimes they felt isolated while language barriers prevented them from communicating accurately with their soccer coaches. These challenges affect their mental state that can infringe on their performances. Therefore, soccer clubs must have programs that regularly focus on their player's mental health and health education. This is also critical because young emerging adult newcomers might have difficulty adjusting to their new environment, and family issues can pile up, causing many problems for their mental well-being. Thus, it is critical to have programs in place that assist young emerging adult newcomers to deal with their mental health and provide

strategies and tips about how to overcome mental challenges would be beneficial. In addition, these programs must not be a one-time opportunity; they should be recurrent, and follow-ups should be followed through by the program directors. The counselling support system will allow these young emerging adult newcomers to be at peace with themselves and also be in the right state of mind to perform well during soccer games. Counselling programs are helpful as observed in studies by Omamo (2023) on health education interventions regarding about 4,000 young individuals involved in soccer activities in Kenya that were positively impacted by these programs.

Third, the soccer community was something that helped the participants navigate life in the new city. The soccer community members are people they play soccer with, and they can rely on. It is crucial to have mentorship programs at different soccer clubs that would go a long way in supporting young emerging adult newcomers when they arrive in the city with no directions. Due to their naivety, it is easy for them to get distracted and be carried away by things that are not essential to their welfare or by bad influences that would push them into horrible vices on the streets. Therefore, a mentorship program at soccer clubs would pair young emerging adult newcomers with current older soccer players who could act as mentors to guide them, provide them with advice, show them around the club and the city, and support them in making good choices. The mentorship programs would allow their transition to be smooth and motivate them to give their best in everything they do. The mentors can undergo rigorous training that will help them carry out their tasks and instill the values of peace, understanding, support, and love within their new mentees. The programs could be designed in such a way that those who go through them can also be mentors for young emerging adult newcomers following them to the clubs. The cycle will continue to create new mentors with an annual or quarterly review of the programs.

Finally, one participant pointed out that there must be some sort of government intervention that would help young newcomers participate in soccer programs stress free by making it accessible to them. The idea could be to subsidize the registration cost so that it would reduce it and allow them to register for the clubs. In this instance, these young emerging adult newcomers will not have to worry too much with financial costs. The subsidy could also help soccer clubs develop soccer facilities and empower them to get buses that would help transport young newcomers to soccer practices and games on time. The government could also run soccer scholarship programs for newcomers that could be a set amount that they could use to buy soccer materials and jerseys, boots, shin pads, and balls. This would facilitate their integration into the clubs and city and encourage them to perform their best. In addition, the government's investment in youth participation in soccer would also have long term health benefits for this aging population in the long-term reducing healthcare costs for the government.

Policy Recommendations

Some policy recommendations emerge from the thesis research findings that can be essential in fostering social cohesion, integration, community building and peacebuilding among young emerging newcomer adults through the medium of soccer. These findings can also inform conflict resolution and peacebuilding practices with young emerging newcomer adults. These recommendations operate at both the micro level, focusing on individual and community-based interventions, and at the macro level, addressing broader institutional and government frameworks.

Micro Level Policy Recommendations

First, community sports organizations working directly with soccer players should develop targeted support programs that address their specific needs. Some of the key findings showed that participants were able to feel good, be stress free, and find community through their

involvement in local soccer programs. Therefore, peer mentoring, skill-development workshops, and mental health workshop programs could provide an opportunity for these participants to strengthen these sentiments especially as they address issues that pertain to their wellbeing as well as fostering the more inclusive participation of young girls and boys and strategically disadvantaged groups.

Second, settlement or newcomer agency service providers and coaches could receive training and professional development to better understand the experiences and challenges faced by young emerging adult newcomers. Most of my participants have a refugee background with lived experiences of violent atrocities and wars so that having mentors who understand them and know how to deal with any stressful situation that might arise would be significant. Increasing staff's cultural competence and awareness can help ensure that soccer programs are delivered in ways that are respectful, accessible and responsive.

Third, local soccer organizations should also strengthen community partnerships. Collaborations between community groups, schools, and service providers can expand access to resources and create more supportive networks for young individuals. Such partnerships illustrate the value of working toward mutual goals among community stakeholders creating a robust system that is of service to young emerging adult newcomers.

These micro level initiatives can enhance soccer programs effectiveness and improve the day-to-day experiences of individuals interacting with local institutions.

Macro Level Policy Recommendations

First, local and state-level policymakers must expand funding opportunities for more inclusive soccer programs and services that support the needs of young emerging adult newcomers. Local grassroots civil society organizations and soccer clubs that have access to new funds can develop sustainable programs and reach a wider population. For example, soccer organizations

are often on very tight budgets and do not have enough resources to support the youth so expanding organizational funding would allow them to provide an easy transportation system for young newcomer soccer players to attend and return home from the soccer programs.

Second, government and local civil society institutions should work toward integrating inclusive practice into broader policy frameworks. This may involve co-developing guidelines, regulations, or strategic plans that ensure equity and accessibility across all sectors.

Third, there is a need for greater cooperation between governmental agencies and community organizations. Coordinated policy efforts can help these partnerships to address systemic barriers and create more cohesive support systems for young emerging adult newcomers.

Finally, future government led policy development should prioritize ongoing research and data generation so that there is continued evaluation that would assist policymakers to better understand emerging challenges and ensure that policies remain responsive to the evolving needs of local soccer clubs working to empower young emerging adult newcomers.

Future Research

Future studies should include a larger sample size to obtain richer and broader data. During the field research, I endeavored to interview a total of eight young emerging adult newcomers. However, I ended up with four participants, which is too narrow and restrictive in terms of numbers, as it does not reflect the lived experiences and understanding of all of Winnipeg's young emerging adult newcomers. In addition, the sample size should include both female and male participants. Unfortunately, this study did not reach that goal. I was only able to recruit and generate data from interviews with male participants. Therefore, including data that represents both groups would be critical as men, women, disabled, and LGBTQ+ young

emerging adult newcomers may or may not have the same lived experiences and understanding of soccer.

Further research is also needed to explore how soccer facilitates social integration and peacebuilding across different age groups, including youth and older young emerging adult newcomers. This could uncover hidden themes and novel ways that would assist in building policy friendly outcomes for young emerging adult newcomers' integration into the community. This intergenerational participation would provide deeper insights into how soccer contributes to long-term community cohesion in newcomer families and communities.

What might also need to be researched in the future is a cross-nation, cross-city, and cross-community study that would include young emerging adult newcomers from different places who are involved in soccer programs. The research could be comparative, longitudinal and include mixed methods like inferential statistics and surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups, whereby policies and community infrastructures in different cities or provinces across Canada include soccer in social integration, cohesion, and peacebuilding efforts. Longitudinal studies following young emerging adult newcomers over time could further illuminate how early participation in soccer impacts their long-term social networks, well-being and sense of belonging. Together, these research projects would deepen our understanding of sport-based peacebuilding and its potential contributions to building inclusive communities.

Final Remarks

By employing a generic qualitative approach, the research sheds light on how young emerging adult newcomers perceive peace and its connection to soccer. The findings emphasize the significance of relationships and community formed through soccer, its link to young emerging

adult newcomers' well-being, as well as the challenges encounter and the solutions that have aided them in overcoming these obstacles.

Beyond its empirical contributions, this study highlights the importance of the lived experiences of young emerging adult newcomers and how sports, particularly soccer, have assisted them in coping with the challenges they face. This insight enriches ongoing scholarly discussions and offers a nuanced understanding of soccer as a tool for social cohesion, integration, cross-community relationships, and peacebuilding. While no single study can encompass the entirety of this complex social issue, this research lays a foundation for future studies to build upon. It is hoped that this work will inspire further research and thoughtful engagement around the theme of soccer and its role in peacebuilding efforts.

Conclusion

This thesis explored how soccer helped young newcomers in Winnipeg in connection with peacebuilding. It also examined the level of accessibility of the soccer programs for these young emerging adult newcomers and how these programs affected their social lives. The study showed that playing soccer helped these young people feel more at peace and connected to each other. However, they also faced many challenges that hindered the way they enjoyed this sport. These findings align with recent national reports that position sport as both a powerful tool for integration and a system in need of structural reform (Future of Sport in Canada Commission, 2024; Sport for Life, 2025). This study contributes to these ongoing conversations by offering local participant-based insights into these concerns. The goal then is to use the study's findings to reinforce the need to create more inclusive and accessible sport environments, assist researchers and policymakers to create better programs for young emerging adult newcomers. Since Winnipeg is a popular destination for young emerging adult newcomers, it is important to have a strong system in place to support and help them succeed in the city and in the province of Manitoba.

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Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and your journey to Winnipeg.
2. How did you become involved in playing, or coaching and supporting soccer in the city?
 - a. What motivated you to start playing or coaching and supporting soccer?
 - b. Can you share a specific moment in time of your early days with soccer in Winnipeg? What was that like?
3. In your option, what role does soccer play in the lives of young newcomers in Winnipeg?
 - a. Can you provide an example of how soccer has impacted young newcomers?
 - b. How does this soccer example compare to your own experience?
4. How do you understand peace, and how do you think it is related to soccer?
 - a. Can you recall a specific experience in which soccer contributed to building a peaceful environment?
 - b. Do you think that others in the community share your understanding that young people are peaceful when they are involved in soccer?
5. How does soccer help bridge the cultural and social divide among young newcomers in Winnipeg?
 - a. Can you share an example when soccer brought people from different backgrounds together?
 - b. What challenges exist in using soccer to bridge these divides in the city?
6. How did/has playing soccer impact/impacted your social and emotional well-being when/since arriving in Winnipeg (former player/coach and current player)?
 - a. Can you describe a particular instance in which soccer helped you form new friendships or connections?

- b. How has soccer influenced your sense of belonging in your community?
- 7. How accessible are soccer programs for young newcomers in Winnipeg?
 - a. What has been your experience with these programs?
 - b. Can you provide an example of a soccer program that you found particularly helpful or challenging?
- 8. In what ways have you seen soccer facilitating positive or negative interactions and relationships among players from diverse cultural backgrounds?
 - a. Can you share a story in which soccer helped build trust and understanding among individuals from different communities?
 - b. What makes these interactions possible through soccer?
- 9. What challenges have you faced while participating in soccer activities in Winnipeg and how have you overcome them?
 - a. Can you describe a specific challenge and how you dealt with it?
 - b. What support systems, if any, have helped you overcome these challenges?
- 10. How do you think soccer contributes to peacebuilding efforts in the Winnipeg community?
 - a. Can you provide an example of how soccer has promoted social cohesion and integration among Winnipeg's young newcomers?
 - b. What additional support or resources do you think are needed to enhance soccer's role in youth peacebuilding in the city?
- 11. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix A: Consent Form

Study Title

From Fields to Friendships: How Soccer Facilitates Social Cohesion, Integration, Cross Community Relationships and Peacebuilding Among Young (Emerging Adult) Newcomers in Winnipeg

Student Principal Investigator

Diwan Oulai, MA, Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba

Student Advisor

Sean Byrne, Ph.D., Peace and Conflict Studies

Conflicts of Interest and Undue Influence

Diwan Oulai does not have any conflicts of interest in this study. You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form, a copy of which will be provided to you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, feel free to ask me. Please take the time to read this carefully and to make sure that you understand any accompanying information. It is very important that you understand:

- what is being asked of you,
- what the risks and benefits of participation are, and

how the information you provide will be used and stored.

Purpose of the Study

This research is a qualitative study that explores the potential of soccer to be used as a peacebuilding tool among young (emerging adult) newcomers (18-25 years) who are participating in soccer programs in Winnipeg with the following organizations: Winnipeg Newcomer Sport Academy (WNSA), the IPAC-Ukraine Soccer Club, and Sport Without Boundaries (SWB). The goal is to address the research gap by exploring how soccer might facilitate social cohesion, integration, and community building among young (emerging adult) newcomers in Winnipeg. This study will be guided by the following objectives: (1) understanding the role of soccer in facilitating social inclusion, social cohesion, and community building among young (emerging adult) newcomers in Winnipeg, (2) appreciating the accessibility of soccer programs to young (emerging adult) newcomers in Winnipeg, (3) deducing the impact of soccer on young (emerging adult) newcomers' social lives and their interactions with each other, and, (4) exploring young (emerging adult) newcomers' experiences and perceptions regarding soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young newcomers in Winnipeg.

Study Procedures

I am completing this research for a Master's thesis under the supervision of Sean Byrne, PhD. I am inviting you to participate in an in-depth Zoom call or in person interview about your experience as a young (emerging adult) newcomer and soccer and peacebuilding in Winnipeg. The term young (emerging adult) immigrant newcomer refers to someone between the age of 18 and 25 years, who recently immigrated to Canada within the last 5 years and holds permanent residency or citizenship. **You are free to decline the invitation to this study.** The interview will take 45-60 minutes of your time. The interview will consist of semi-structured questions to provide you with the opportunity to share what you feel comfortable sharing about the topic. You will be asked questions about your background as a young (emerging adult) newcomer as well as a soccer player. You will also be asked questions about your understanding of peace and how it relates to you, others like you, as well as soccer. All raw data files and documents regarding this interview will be securely stored on UM's OneDrive and will be accessible only to me and my M.A. research supervisor. The interview will then be transcribed at which point you will have the opportunity via email to review and confirm or change any of the information contained therein. Once approved, identifiable data will be destroyed or rendered anonymous as soon as it is no longer necessary to link data with individual participants. Transcripts and audio will be stored in the secure UM One Drive cloud storage and recordings will be deleted from my audio device. No one will be permitted access to the transcript without your expressed and written consent. Your real name and any identifiable information will be masked in the final research report. If desired, the findings from the final report can be emailed to you at the completion of the study by 03/2026.

Study Risks

This interview is minimal risk, meaning that the risks are no greater than what you might encounter in your daily life. Although no questions are intended to make you feel uncomfortable in any way, should you find yourself uncomfortable with a question that is asked, you do not need to answer the question, and you can also withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. **You will be encouraged to use Klinik's Free Counselling Services to help you, if you need further support after the interview.**

Study Benefits

You will have a chance to tell your stories and share your experiences playing soccer and in what ways these soccer activities have had an impact on you, your social life and your community. Also, the findings of this study may contribute to improving accessibility to soccer programs for you and others.

Compensation

There is no compensation for this study

Use and Storage of Information

All the information you provide as a participant in this study is confidential which means I must keep it safe as the researcher. I will do my best, however, it is not possible to guarantee absolute confidentiality. I will only share your personal information if required through court order or law (e.g., suspected child or elder abuse).

Your information will be stored on a secure platform (OneDrive) approved by the University of Manitoba. I will have a file that links your name to your information using a code. I will keep the file with your name, contact information, and code separate from the research information you share with me. When I share the results of this study, I will combine everybody's responses. This means no one will see your answers, name, or contact information. At the end of this document, you will have a chance to tell me whether you would like your real name to be used when I share the study's results. I will only use your name when I share the study results if you say it is okay. If you do not agree, I will destroy any information that identifies you (name, contact information) by 03/2026. The rest of the information will be destroyed five years after the research study has been completed (03/2026).

Dissemination

The study results will be shared through 1) the publication of a master's thesis; 2) journal publications and presentations in relevant academic fields; and/or 3) a summarized report of the study results to be sent to interested participants. Your research information may be shared outside of the University of Manitoba with researchers, other organizations, and/or made publicly available. The information is being shared for further analysis or testing, as part of the research study, and/or because it is required by a funder or journal. It will not include your name or any information that could identify you. At the end of this document, you will have a chance to tell us if we can share your name with people outside of the University of Manitoba.

Withdrawing

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can choose to do only the activities and/or answer only the questions that you are comfortable with. You may withdraw from the study for any reason. You do not have to explain why. You will not be penalized in any way. Should you withdraw partway through the study, all of your information will be destroyed. If you decide you would like to have your data removed from this study, you can email the primary researcher and state that you are withdrawing from the study and to remove your data from the study. Transcripts will be sent to participants electronically for their approval. Withdrawing from the study is no longer possible by 08/2025 as the data will be anonymized. All the transcripts that will be used in the research will be anonymized.

Questions or Concerns

Designated University of Manitoba personnel may check that this study is being done safely and properly. To do this, they may visit the study site or review the research records. I will tell you if someone outside the research team will be there while you are participating. If this makes you uncomfortable, please let me know and I will ask the personnel to return at another time. This study has been reviewed and approved by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. However, this does not mean that participation is risk-free. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics at humanethics@umanitoba.ca or (204) 474-7122. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact any members of the research team listed on the first page or the Office of Human Research Ethics.

Consent

By signing this document, I agree that:

- I have read the above information or had it read to me.
- I have had the opportunity to ask and have answered all of my questions.
- I understand what is being asked of me.
- I will be taking part in a research study.
- I may freely stop or leave the research study activities at any time.
- My information may be shared outside the University of Manitoba.
- I do not waive my legal rights by participating in the study.

Notice Regarding Collection, Use, and Disclosure of Personal Information

Your personal information is being collected under the authority of The University of Manitoba Act. The University of Manitoba is committed to preserving your right to privacy. The information you provide will be used by the University to support our research. Your personal information will not be used or disclosed for other purposes, unless permitted by The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act or The Personal Health Information Act. If you have any questions about the collection of personal information: Ph: 204-474-9462 or Email: fippa@umanitoba.ca.

I agree to participate in this study.	☐ YES ☐ NO
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Summary of Results

Would you like a copy of the final research report?

a) Yes

b) No

If yes, how would you like to receive the report? Please provide your email address so that we can send you the report.

Email address: _____

A summary of the research report will be sent to all participants by 03/2026

Appendix B: Email Script to Organizations

Subject: Participant Recruitment for Research Study on the role of soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young (emerging adult) newcomers in Winnipeg

Dear [Organization's focal point name],

I hope this message finds you well.

I am reaching out to kindly request your support in sharing the recruitment poster for my research study. The study focuses on the role of soccer as a peacebuilding tool among young (emerging adult) newcomers in Winnipeg. As you may recall, we spoke earlier this year about this project and discussed the possibility of sharing information with your members.

I've attached the recruitment poster to this email. I would be grateful if you could share it with your members through email, social media (e.g., WhatsApp or Instagram), or by phone call. I've also included a suggested message for social media and a phone script if staff members are making calls.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or need more information.

Thank you very much for your support.

Best regards,

Diwan Oulai

University of Manitoba

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

Diwan Oulai
Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Manitoba
04/16/2025

Dear [Participant's Name],

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study titled “From Fields to Friendships: How Soccer Facilitates Social Cohesion, Integration, Cross Community Relationships and Peacebuilding Among Young (Emerging Adult) Newcomers in Winnipeg” being conducted as part of my research at the University of Manitoba. This research is a qualitative research study that explores the potential of soccer to be used as a peacebuilding tool among young (emerging adult) newcomers (18-25 years old) who are participating in soccer programs in Winnipeg.

Your participation in this study would involve sharing your experiences in a one-on-one interview, which will take approximately 40 to 60 min of your time. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. If you decide to withdraw, any data collected from you up until that point will be destroyed.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines your rights as a participant. You will also receive a summary of the research findings once the study is complete, and you can choose to receive this summary by email or by mail, whichever you prefer.

Please be assured that all information gathered will be kept confidential and securely stored, and your identity will be protected throughout the process. If you agree to participate, I will be available to answer any questions you have before, during, or after the study.

If you are interested in participating, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my advisor, Dr. Sean Byrne. We would be happy to discuss any aspects of the study with you.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I look forward to the possibility of your participation.

Sincerely,
Diwan Oulai
Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Manitoba

Appendix D: Phone Call Verbal Script for Organization Staff

Hello, I'm calling on behalf of [Organization Name]. We're helping a researcher from the University of Manitoba to find participants for a study about newcomer experiences in soccer and how it relates to peace.

If you're interested, you would take part in a short one-on-one interview. It can be done in person or online, and it's confidential and voluntary.

Would you like us to send you the information and poster about the study?

Appendix F: Social media text to be used for social media posts

Are you a soccer player? Are you between 18 and 25 years of age?

Have you immigrated to Canada within the past 5 years?

Do you have permanent residency status or Canadian citizenship?

If you answered "yes" to the above, we want to hear from you!

We're conducting a study on the potential of soccer as peacebuilding tool among young (emerging adult) newcomers in Winnipeg. If you're interested in participating in a one-on-one interview, please check the poster for details or contact Diwan Oulai or Dr. Sean Byrne.

All participation is voluntary and confidential. Interviews can be done in person or online.