

SPORT AND GLOBALISATION

**ENTRY FOR:
SPORT AND DEVELOPMENT WEB-BASED PLATFORM,
SWISS ACADEMY FOR DEVELOPMENT,
SWITZERLAND**

Professor Joseph Maguire, Ph.D
Co-Director, Centre for Olympic Studies and Research
Past-President, RC27/ISA, International Sociology of Sport Association
School of Sport & Exercise Sciences
Loughborough University
Leicestershire LE11 3TU, UK
P: +44 (0) 1509 223328
F: +44 (0) 1509 226301
E: J.A.Maguire@lboro.ac.uk
W: www.lboro.ac.uk.uk/departments/sses/

SPORT AND GLOBALISATION

Modern sport is bound up in a global network of interdependency chains that are marked by global flows and uneven power relations. Consider the consumption of sports events. People across the globe regularly view satellite broadcasts of English Premier League and European Champions League matches. In these games the best players drawn from Europe, South America and Africa perform. The players use equipment – boots, balls, uniforms etc - that are designed in the West, financed by multinational corporations such as Adidas and Nike and hand-stitched, in the case of soccer balls, in Asia using child labour. This equipment is then sold, at significant profit, to a mass market in the towns and cities of North America and Europe. Several transnational corporations are involved in the production and consumption phases of global soccer – some of whom both own the media companies and have, as in the case of Sky TV, shareholdings in the soccer clubs they screen as part of what sociologists term the ‘global media sport complex’.

The global flows that pattern world sport have several dimensions. These include: the international movement of people such as tourists, migrants, exiles and guest workers; the technology dimension is created by the flow between countries of the machinery and equipment produced by corporations and government agencies; the economic dimension centres on the rapid flow of money and its equivalents around the world; the media dimension entails the flow of images and information between countries that is produced and distributed by newspapers, magazines, radio, film, television, video, satellite, cable and the world wide web; and finally, the ideological dimension is linked to the flow of values centrally associated with state or counter-state ideologies and movements. All five dimensions can be detected in late twentieth century sports development. Thus the global migration of sports personnel has been a

pronounced feature of recent decades. This appears likely to continue in the future. The flow across the globe of goods, equipment and 'landscapes' such as sports complexes and golf courses has developed into a multi-billion dollar business in recent years and represents a transnational development in the sports sphere. Regarding economic issues, clearly the flow of finance in the global sports arena has come to centre not only on the international trade in personnel, prize money and endorsements, but on the marketing of sport along specific lines. The transformation of sports such as American football, basketball, golf and soccer into global sports is part of this process.

Closely connected to these flows have been media-led developments. The media-sport production complex projects images of individual sports labour migrants, leisure forms and specific cultural messages to large global audiences – consider the world-wide audience for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. The power of this media sport complex has forced a range of sports to align themselves to this global model that emphasises spectacle, personality and excitement. At the level of ideology, global sports festivals such as the Olympics have come to serve as vehicles for the expression of ideologies that are transnational in character. Note, for example, how the opening and closing ceremonies of the Athens Games were designed to project images and messages about Greece to both its own people and to a global audience. How can we make sense of these global sport processes?

Three points need to be grasped. First, studies of sport that are not studies of the societies in which sports are located are studies out of context. Here, emphasis is being placed on the need to examine the interconnected political, economic, cultural and social patterns that contour and shape modern sport. Attention has also to be given to how these patterns contain both enabling and constraining dimensions on

people's actions – there are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in this global game. Societies are no longer - and except in very rare cases - were never sealed off from other societies. Ties of trade, warfare, migration and culture are of long standing in human history. Witness, for instance the connections made throughout Renaissance Europe. More recent globalisation processes have unleashed new sets of ‘interdependency chains’, the networks that have (inter) connected people from distant parts of the globe. It is in this context of global power networks, that the practice and consumption of elite modern sport can be best understood. Secondly, in order to trace, describe and analyse the global sports process it is wise to adopt a long-term perspective. An historical and comparative approach can help us explain how the present pattern of global sport has emerged out of the past and is connected with a range of ‘civilisational struggles’.

The third point of significance concerns the concept of *globalisation* itself. The concept refers to the growing network of interdependencies, political, economic, cultural and social, which bind human beings together - for better and for worse. We can also note that globalisation processes are not of recent origin and nor do they occur evenly across all areas of the globe. These processes involving an increasing intensification of global interconnectedness are very long-term in nature but during the twentieth century the rate of change gathered momentum. Despite the 'unevenness' of these processes, it is more difficult to understand local or national experiences without reference to these global flows. In fact, our living conditions, beliefs, knowledge and actions are intertwined with unfolding globalisation processes. These processes include the emergence of a global economy, a transnational cosmopolitan culture and a range of international social movements. A multitude of transnational or global economic and technological exchanges, communication networks and migratory patterns characterise this interconnected world pattern. As a result people

experience spatial and temporal dimensions differently. There is a 'speeding up' of time and a 'shrinking' of space. Modern technologies enable people, images, ideas and money to cross the globe with great rapidity. These processes lead to a greater degree of interdependence, but also to an increased awareness of a sense of the world as a whole. People become more attuned to the notion that their lives and place of living are part of a single social space - the globe.

Globalisation processes, then, involve multi-directional movements of people, practices, customs and ideas that involve a series of power balances, yet have *neither* the hidden hand of progress *nor* some all-pervasive, over-arching conspiracy guiding them. Although the globe can be understood as an interdependent whole, in different areas of social life established and outsider groups and nation states are constantly vying with each other for dominant positions. Given this growth in the multiplicity of linkages and networks that transcend nation-states, it is not surprising that we may be at the earliest stages of the development of a 'transnational culture' or 'global culture', of which sport is a part. This process entails a shift from ethnic or national cultures to 'supranational' forms based upon either the culture of a 'superpower' or of 'cosmopolitan' communication and migrant networks. In this connection there is considerable debate as to whether global sport is leading to a form of homogenised body culture – specifically along Western, or American lines. There is some evidence to support this.

Yet global flows are simultaneously increasing the varieties of body cultures and identities available to people in local cultures. Global sport, then, seems to be leading to the reduction in contrasts between societies but also to the emergence of new varieties of body cultures and identities. Several of the more recent features of globalisation can also be identified. These include: an increase in the number of

international agencies; the growth of increasing global forms of communication; the development of global competitions and prizes; and the development of standard notions of 'rights' and citizenship that are increasingly standardised internationally. The emergence and diffusion of sport in the 19th century is clearly interwoven with this overall process. The development of national and international sports organisations, the growth of competition between national teams, the world-wide acceptance of rules governing specific, that is 'Western', 'sport' forms, and the establishment of global competitions such as the Olympic Games and the men's and women's soccer World Cup's, are all indicative of the occurrence of globalisation in the sports world.

If consideration is given to the issue of international sport success in the late twentieth century and in the early part of this new century it is clear that this involves a contest between systems located within a global context. Sport success depends on several elements: the availability and identification of human resources; methods of coaching and training; the efficiency of the sport organisation and the depth of knowledge of sports medicine and sport sciences. These national sport system mechanisms are a necessary but not sufficient explanation of international sport success. In addition to these elements sport development within a particular society also depends on the status of that nation in the sports international rank order. Less developed nations tend to under-utilise their talent and performers and/or lose them to more powerful nations in the global sports process. Global sport processes can thus lead to the under- or dependent development of a nation's talent.

The migration of performers, coaches, administrators and sport scientists within and between nations and within and between continents and hemispheres is also a pronounced feature of late twentieth century sport. Migration of this elite talent

has become a decisive feature that structures the experience of sport in different societies. The movement of technology and the manufacture of clothing, footwear and equipment is a world-wide industry that wealthier nations are able to access to a far greater degree than their poorer counterparts. The global sports industry needs to be examined in terms of the implications for sustainable sport systems. In addition to these global flows, the images of sport stars and tournaments flow round the globe via the media sport complex. The interconnected web of media and corporate interests structures, though it does not completely determine, the sports experience for performers and consumers alike.

Global sporting success not only reflects national sport systems but also reinforces national esteem. Global sport involves a form of patriot games in which images and stories are told to us, about ourselves and about others. Elite level achievement sport also tells us something about what it is to be 'human'. With its emphasis on rational and efficient performance, specialisation, scientisation, competition and professionalisation, achievement sport reinforces the myth of the 'superman'. This myth is sustained by the ideology and findings of the sports sciences that tends to be concerned with identifying the conditions necessary to produce the ultimate performance.

The global sports system accordingly involves the mechanisms of production, experience and consumption. Achievement sport involves the identification and development of talent; its production on a global stage, in a single or multi-sport event and its consumption by direct spectators or, through the media complex, a global mass audience. Traced over time there is a tendency towards the emergence of a global achievement sport monoculture - a culture where administrators, coaches and teachers promote and foster achievement sport values and ideologies and where competitions

and tournaments are structured along highly commodified and rationalised lines. Within the global sports system there is not only an international rank order of nations, but these nations can be grouped, more or less, along political, economic and cultural lines, into core, semi-peripheral and peripheral blocs. At the core of most team and individual based sports lie the countries of Western Europe, North America - excluding Mexico - and former 'White' Commonwealth countries such as Australia. Semi-peripheral countries tend to involve former socialist countries and some emerging nations such as South Korea. Peripheral countries include most Islamic nations, the majority of African countries and those from South - Asia. Whereas the West may be challenged on the field of play by non-core countries, the control over the content, ideology and economic resources associated with sport still tends to lie within the West. Yet, through state policy, non-core countries can use major sport festivals to solidify internal national identification and enhance international recognition and prestige.

Either in terms of hosting events or when the relevant decisions are taken, however, it is the West that dominates in international recognition, respectability, status and prestige. The more high tech and commodified the sport, the more dependent success is on the elements of the global sport process identified earlier. As a result, the West tends to win out. Indeed the last decade has seen the recruitment by Western nations not only of sport scientists and coaches from the former Soviet bloc, but also the drain of athletic talent from Africa and South America in sports such as soccer to the economically more powerful clubs of Europe. Non-core leagues remain in a dependent relationship with the dominant European core. In other sports such as track and field and baseball this drain of talent flows to the USA. The West also remains dominant in terms of the design, production and marketing of sports

equipment; new innovations emerge within the West. Sport federations tend to be controlled by Western officials and global sport tournaments are usually located within the West.

In the past decade or so there have, however, been challenges to the achievement sport ideology and to Western domination. Though no longer in existence, the Soviet bloc mounted a sustained challenge to the West for some forty years, though it too became incorporated into the ideology of achievement sport. Despite the ideological differences between Castro's Cuba and the capitalist West, Cubans participate in, and by some measures, outperform the core capitalist countries at the Olympics. The rise of Chinese success in the Olympics will only accelerate with the holding of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Non-Western success on the field of play, in specific sports such as badminton and middle and long distance athletics, is beginning to be matched by the involvement of non-Western personnel as coaches, officials, administrators and producers of sports goods, media outlets and the hosting of major tournaments. Though England was the 'cradle of modern sport', the relative decline of Great Britain on the sports field – despite the improved, if over-hyped success in the Sydney Olympic Games - is also matched by its fading influence in the corridors of power of global sport politics. This may be indicative of how things might develop in this century for Europeans and perhaps Westerners more generally. One main source of potential dispute may well be the Olympic Games. As yet, however, the West are the winners in the global sport contest – hegemonic control remains with Westerners.

Global sport has not, however, led to complete homogenisation: the consumption of non-indigenous cultural wares by different national groups has both active and heterogeneous. Resistance to global sportisation processes has also been

evident. Yet, there is a political economy at work in the production and consumption of global sport/ leisure products that can lead to the relative ascendancy of a narrow selection of capitalist and Western sport cultures. Global sport processes can therefore be understood in terms of the attempts by more established white, male groups to control and regulate access to global flows and also in terms of how indigenous peoples both resist these processes and recycle their own cultural products. We are currently witnessing the homogenisation of specific body cultures – through achievement sports, the Olympic movement and sports science programmes - and simultaneously the increase in the diversity of ‘sports’/body cultures.

It is possible, however, to overstate the extent to which the West has triumphed in terms of global sports structures, organisations, ideologies and performances. Non- Western cultures, as noted, resist and reinterpret Western sports and maintain, foster and promote, on a global scale, their own indigenous recreational pursuits (eg., Kabbadi). Clearly, the speed, scale and volume of sports development is interwoven with the broader global flows of people, technology, finance, images and ideologies that are controlled by the West, and by Western men. In the longer term, however, it is possible to detect signs that the disjunctures, and non–isomorphic patterns, that characterise global processes are also leading to the diminution of Western power in a variety of contexts. Sport may be no exception.

Professor Joseph Maguire, Ph.D
Co-Director, Centre for Olympic Studies and Research
Past-President, RC27/ISA, International Sociology of Sport Association
School of Sport & Exercise Sciences
Loughborough University

References

- Maguire, J. (1999). *Global sport. Identities, societies, civilizations* Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Maguire, J. (2005). *Power and Global Sport: Zones of Prestige, Emulation and Resistance*. Routledge: London
- Maguire, J., Jarvie, G., Mansfield, L., & Bradley, J. (2002). *Sport Worlds: A Sociological Perspective*. Champaign: Human Kinetics.