

IRENE KAMBERIDOU<sup>1</sup> and NIKOLAOS PATSADARAS<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1, 2</sup> *University of Athens, Department of Sport Sciences*

### ABSTRACT

Social capital is a key component in understanding the relationship between European sport governing bodies and civil society. A core concept in sociology, political science, organizational behaviour and business, social capital is relatively new in the context of European sport governance. In exploring the boundaries of both sport and social capital in theory and practice, one can see sport as a form of positive social capital that promotes social cohesion, trust, social ties, etc. However, it could also be perceived as «dark» social capital since the politics of sport do not always deliver the social benefits they proclaim due to the «exclusionary» vs. inclusive factors: commercialization, doping, institutionalized gender personification, the leaky pipeline and the glass ceiling in SGBs and in competitive sports. Sport has not yet evolved into a form of social capital which can be nurtured and reproduced to raise social cohesion and eliminate social exclusions.

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**KEY WORDS:** *sport as social capital, «dark» social capital in sports, social capital production/reproduction, gender personification in sports, leaky pipeline and glass ceiling.*

## INTRODUCTION

«Where are the boundaries of both sport and social capital in our theory and practice? How can sport participation and sport management practices contribute to social capital production? Using examples from sport, can we appropriately address the phenomenon of “dark” social capital?» (Groeneveld 2006).

The European Commission (EC) is currently funding a three-year project (2006-2008) on Sport and Social Capital in Europe. The first conference on «Sport and Social Capital in the European Union: Trust and the Use of Social Ties» was held in Milan, Italy on Dec. 4-5, 2006 in order to stimulate and promote research on sport as social capital and encourage cooperation between sport governing bodies (SGBs) and the European Commission (EC). Research Team Leader Dr. Margaret Groeneveld, speaking at the conference, pointed out that the project also considers the involvement of women in these networks particularly in decision-making capacities. In view of our participation in the conference –and in order to formulate and propose inclusive multi-dimensional and proactive strategies on how sport participation and sport management practices can contribute to social capital production and reproduction– our analysis addresses the ethical framework of networks and the difficulties in theorizing sport as social capital, following an examination of theoretical approaches and current debates on the concept of social capital. (19, 2, 5, 6, 28, 4, 30).

Specifically, international research indicates that where social capital flourishes, the result is that individuals, communities, organizations and nations prosper economically (32, 4). Social capital refers to associational life, civic virtue, civic engagement, community service, social action, social cohesion, social ties, trust, the collective value of social networks, the construction of broader identities, respect for ethnic, racial and gender diversity and the elimination of socioeconomic exclusions. It entails active and direct interactions among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness, namely mutual understanding, shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks, making cooperative action possible. On the other hand, arguments suggest that social capital can reinforce exclusive identities, homogeneous groups, social divides, social discrimination, gender exclusions, capitalization, and egocentric bonding (28). For instance, organizations, clubs and social groups with high social capital have the power, the means or even the motives to exercise non-inclusive practices and policies.

In view of the ambiguity of definitions and the variety of interrelated meanings, one can see sport as a form of positive social capital that promotes social cohesion, solidarity, trust, social ties, etc. However, it could also be perceived as negative or «dark» social capital since the politics of sport do not

always deliver the social benefits they proclaim due to the «inclusive» vs. «exclusionary» factors, such as commercialization, doping, the exploitation or misuse of social capital in the mass media, genetic personification, and the under-representation of women –the leaky pipeline and the glass ceiling– in SGBs and in competitive sports.

## **THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: THEORIES AND CURRENT DEBATES**

In the beginning of the 20th century the concept of social capital appeared in Lyda Judson Hanifan's (18, 19) examination of rural school community centres. Focusing on «the daily lives of people», on those that «make up a social unit». Hanifan (18), examines the cultivation of social intercourse, social ties, good will, fellowship and sympathy among social groups. Although the concept has been approached by the social sciences, the modern usage of the term has been traced to Jane Jacobs (21), who uses it in an article in relation to urban life, neighbourliness and the value of networks. Pierre Bourdieu (2) in 1972 presents the first cohesive exposition of the term, building upon theories of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Norbert Elias, among others. Later on Bourdieu (2) pioneered methodological frameworks and terminologies such as social, cultural and symbolic capital, emphasizing the role of practice and embodiment in social dynamics. He distinguishes between three forms of capital –economic capital, cultural capital and social capital– placing the source of social capital, not only on social structure but also in social connections that entail the resources linked to possessions and benefits from group memberships. Subsequently, James Coleman (5) developed and popularized the concept of social capital, but it became highly acknowledged, or rather fashionable, in the late 1990s, due to the fact that the World Bank (32) devoted a research program to it. By the year 2000 the concept achieved public awareness through Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (28).

Considerable evidence indicates that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable (32). Communities with a good «supply» of social capital can help alleviate the ominous effects of socioeconomic disadvantage and are more likely to achieve not only economic growth, but also higher educational accomplishment, better health, and lower crime figures (28). Cohen and Prusak (4): 4. Additionally scholars have been commenting on the misunderstandings and distortions concerning the term «capital», such as Cohen and Prusak (4), who observe that not everything of value should be called «capital» as it could be distorted towards the economic, namely, linked to the current context of capitalism, consumerism or capitalization, thereby producing and reproducing social exclusions.

## **INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL DIMENSIONS**

In his pioneering study, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Harvard political scientist Robert D. Putnam speaks of two main components of the concept: «bonding or exclusive» social capital and «bridging or inclusive» social capital (28). They are not necessarily categories to which social networks can neatly be assigned or classified, but more or less dimensions along which we can compare different forms or interrelations of social capital. Undeniably, there is always a place in societies for both bonding and bridging social capital, however the distinctions and interrelations between bonding and bridging social capital are necessary since they highlight that social capital may not always be beneficial for society as a whole, even though it may be an asset for certain social groups and individuals.

Specifically, Putnam argues that bonding (exclusive) social capital entails specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. However, it can also reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups while bolstering our narrower selves, reproducing self-serving behaviours, egocentric attitudes and exclusionary practices. Bridging (inclusive) social capital, on the other hand, can be more outward-looking and encompass people across different social divides, regardless of gender, race, age or socioeconomic class. Bridging networks are good for external assets and information diffusion, generating broader identities and reciprocity –a positive asset since it enhances community productivity and social cohesion.

For example, criminal gangs formulate bonding social capital whereas art clubs, choir clubs, community volunteer groups and church groups create bridging social capital. Then again, internet networks, sports clubs, sport associations and SGB's such as the IOC –and not only extreme groups like the KKK and terrorist groups like Al-Kaida (Al-Qaeda)– can also have negative impacts since they create exclusionary social capital as well as «dark» social capital that burdens society. In other words, all these groups can either help build or break societies because of their bridging/bonding social capital dimensions. Consequently, in order to examine how sport participation and sport management practices can contribute to social capital production and reproduction, our analysis must initially address the ethical framework of networks, including critical exclusionary issues and practices.

## **ADDRESSING THE PHENOMENON OF «DARK» SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SPORTS**

The Olympic Charter clearly advocates respect for ethnic-cultural-gender diversity, allowing to a great degree, the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. According to Pierre de Coubertin's conception of «Olympism», cosmopolitanism was the only effective measure for the peaceful coexistence of the

peoples of the world (7, 8). Nevertheless, the Olympics clearly fall short of meeting these ideals. Olympic values have been neglected and the goal of global understanding, togetherness and social cohesion has been receiving only token attention. As a social phenomenon, the Olympic Games have a self-dynamic evolution that often has uncontrolled impact that cannot be restrained by the Olympic Charter. They are connected to power relations in society as a whole, and cannot be separated from the complex economic and socio-cultural globalization processes, even though they were originally designed to promote a sense of national and global unity and coexistence.

Olympic sports do not exist in a social void but in interrelation with a plethora of other social spaces, such as politics and the economy. As a result they change with new developments in government, the media and technology, and with new ideas and theories on culture, race, ethnicity and gender (26), that inevitably influence the structure and the organization of the Olympic movement. Have Olympic sports become a means, a tool or an instrument for the globalization processes? Globalization is not exclusively an economic phenomenon, a product of economic changes and market processes. It is also a complex socio-cultural phenomenon that entails, as a condition for integration, the elimination of cultural-ethnic identities. For instance the sport migration phenomenon or the «global migrant athlete», a result of the commercialization of Olympic activity in the last two decades, is a contradiction to Olympic values. As in the case of the global migrant labour force, athletes from less privileged countries have been changing their nationalities and adopting new sport identities in return for economic benefits. This global sport mobility, which usually applies to high performance or elite athletes, has raised new socio-political issues, such as: 1) the effects of global sport migration on the less privileged or less developed nations who have been deprived of their high performance athletes, 2) the impact of global sport mobility on patterns of personal, cultural, national, cosmopolitan or global identity formation, along with 3) social prejudices, various forms of racial bigotry, intolerance and social exclusions, and 4) the economic and organizational dynamics of labour mobility.

Research interest in the migration of athletic talent or sports labour –namely in the movement of transnational sports migrants or elite athletes within and between nations, including the implications of athletic talent migration for various sports– has grown in the past 20 years. However, there is a lack of sustained academic analysis on the migration patterns or the mobility of non-western sports stars, including those from Asia and Africa (31). Specifically, studies have been focusing on the implications of athletic talent migration on conceptions of identity, on the impact of athletic talent migration on both host countries and donor countries, on the role of intermediaries such as sports agents, the effects on sports fans and athletes, and the changes in regulatory sport frameworks. According to Takahashi & Horne (31):

«Athletic labour migration is a dynamic subject involving country, club/team, and athletes in a complex chain of negotiations over rights and responsibilities. In 1995 the Belgian football player Jean-Marc Bosman won a court case confirming that players were free to work anywhere in Europe when their contract with a club expired. Currently the European Union is attempting to bring to an end the transfer fees for football players as part of its effort to remove all obstacles to the freedom of movement of labour in European member state countries. Many European football clubs have come to depend on such transfer fees as compensation for the scouting, training and development of junior players. Some are also concerned that now «star» players will have even more bargaining power, and local loyalties will diminish even further in importance for players. Nationally developed players may no longer represent the route to success for teams, and there are also implications for coaching, training and national teams» (31).

Additionally, developments in new technologies of mass communication have created unprecedented global audiences for «mega» sports events. For instance, «the 2004 Athens Olympics were watched by an estimated cumulative total of 3.9 billion people in 220 countries and territories: making them the most accessed in history, and the most watched sporting event in the world at that time» (17). The positive social impact of such events –such as the influx of corporate sponsorships as an important source of income for host cities and international organizations– has been overestimated and overrated. An «imaginary-plasmatic» national economic development is depicted, as was the case during the Athens 2004 Games (27).

The interrelations between sports and television have resulted in the adaptation-modification of Olympic activity to commercial principles. Olympic sports have frequently made changes in their regulatory framework in order to accommodate the mass media's commercial principles. The IOC sells the rights for the Olympics to the media, who instead of using the games to visualize and promote a global community constructed around respect for cultural diversity, focus the viewers' attention on consumerism and egocentric sport achievements, consequently contributing to the socioeconomic globalization value system, and not to that of universalization or cosmopolitanism. In other words, in regard to today's Olympic phenomenon, consumerism, capitalization or the exploitation of our social capital in sports have become a priority (e.g. in the mass media, in the commercial market, in high performance sports through doping and intensive training for «victory» at all costs). The IOC is clearly dependent on commercialization. Cities spend enormous amounts of money to assemble and submit bids to host the Olympics. Prospective host cities, companies and nations frequently use financial incentives or exercise various forms of pressure to gain the votes of IOC members in the bid selection process. The agreement for hosting the games usually includes contracts

with specific international construction companies, and consequently the games often become a means of legalizing or conveying illegal capital.

Needless to say, elite competitive sports have always been used to promote specific social values, to foster particular or occasional global interpretations, to endorse the superiority of a political and economic system, to establish a nation's legitimacy in the international arena and to promote a country's national identity to the world. Nations have used the Olympics to pursue their own interests and political agendas, rather than the collective goals of global communication, understanding, solidarity, friendship and peace. Consequently, the modern Olympics are an international phenomenon, and not an ecumenical one, as they are incorrectly defined by many researchers, since they were and are still used to internationalize and globalize western cultural values and the western world model at the expense of the sport traditions of less-privileged nations.

Olympic sports have always been associated with public diplomacy and nationalism, particularly during the periods of colonialization and the cold war. Powerful western powers used their national games to introduce their own cultural values and traditions to the colonized peoples around the world, and as a result the games of wealthy and powerful nations became the sports of the world (12) –one of the reasons that the native or traditional games of other cultures are not part of the Olympics today. The internationalization of a specific kinetic-sport culture, as was the case during the periods of colonialization, exercised greater influence over the kinetic cultures of the occupied or «less-privileged» countries. As a result, the games have been characterized as a means to «cultural imperialism»(29). As Coubertin points out, a culturally «superior» race has the right to restrict or limit the privileges of a culturally «inferior» race (7). Evidently, his views on colonialism conflicted with the theory on the social equity of the races that the Olympic movement and he himself strove for (8). Could one argue today that Coubertin was a supporter of the concept of «dark», exclusionary or bonding social capital? For instance, in the beginning Olympic sports excluded from their institutional positions, not only women, but also men from third world countries (27).

The systematic misinterpretation, or rather misuse of Olympic values indicates that sport has not yet evolved into a form of social capital which can be nurtured and reproduced to raise social cohesion and eliminate social exclusions. It is time for the IOC to put into practice the ideals of the Olympic Charter, especially in view of the fact that the Olympic Games capture the attention of over one-third of the world's population, and could be used for something other than global marketing and the political agendas of wealthy nations that can afford to produce medal-winning athletes.

Firstly and primarily, the IOC, and not only athletes, is in dire need of Olympic education/peace pedagogy (Olympism). The IOC could use its funds

from sponsors to develop an appropriate education program for its members. Additionally, in the countries hosting the Olympics the IOC could, in collaboration with the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), prepare specific educational programs –directed to sport federations, clubs, organizations– designed to «reactivate» Olympic values. Furthermore, the games should also be held in the less privileged countries of the world and not only in the wealthy or developed ones.

### **GENETIC PERSONIFICATION IN OLYMPIC SPORTS**

Olympic sports emphasize genetic characteristics. The social capital of sports, regardless of gender, whether a male athlete or a female athlete, is measured only and exclusively in its «biological dimension», as a «physio-organic entity» as a «material entity», as a means to an end, namely as a tool-instrument for attaining high or maximal performance records, or «victory» at all costs, including the changes and transformations of the body due to the intensive sports training processes and doping. Corporeality for both genders is examined and perceived, as static biological-anatomical unit instead of a totality of evolving cultural representations and documentations.

Furthermore, the structural emphasis given to the biological difference between men and women leads to bipolarity in the competitive-sport expression. Undeniably, anachronistic biologicistic theories or biological «facts» have been accordingly integrated into cultural influences, social structures and structural thinking, thereby formulating social views, attitudes and stereotypes concerning capabilities and performance in relation to biological gender. Sport identity has been associated with various socio-cultural meanings since the appearance of Olympic sports in the 19th century when women were excluded from most sectors of public life (16).

Today, even though women do participate in Olympic activity, Olympic sports are still not perceived nor institutionally structured as gender-neutral or gender-inclusive. Gender classification is clearly institutionalized as a structural category, in contrast to other social spaces. For instance, there is no gender classification, imposed by structured rules and regulations, in information society (IS), in science and technology, in the economy, in the political arena, etc., namely gender is «deactivated» or «neutralized» as an analytical category in these social spaces, as opposed to the gender impact factor in sports.

In today's postmodern Olympic social reality we can't discuss the relationship of sport and social capital without reference to gender –particularly in view of the incorporation in the European Commission's 7th framework of gender inclusive policies, projects and interdisciplinary-international research



on the gender subject in science and technology, in the social sciences and in the humanities (13, 14, 15, 22).

Current discussions on the gender subject, gender identity and corporeality (23, 16, 25, 3), are no longer based exclusively on the biological gender, but on the social gender which formulates, defines and redefines identity according to bio-socio-cultural interpretations. In the new theoretical framework, the «body and gender» are being rediscovered, in other words viewed as linguistic conceptions, socio-historical manifestations, transformable meanings and evolving elements of change. Consequently, the gender subject, whether male or female, in this analytical framework, is defined as a conveyor of identities, namely a conveyor of social functions, positions, professions or disciplines. This does not however mean that the biological gender has been eliminated or will no longer exist as a social category. This does not mean that the gender subject has become genderless or has been «castrated». It signifies, however, that the biological factor as an analytical category that leads to social discrimination is less and less interrelated to traditional views and stereotypes concerning identity. It offers a form of «gender-neutrality» or gender-inclusive perspectives and attitudes in all social spheres. Gender is not disappearing in modern social reality, but it is being transformed from a static biological perception into a dynamic social category. In this theoretical framework the biological gender is losing its primacy as an analytical category in most social spaces, with the exception of sports.

### **INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL EXCLUSION: THE «DE-ATHLETICIZATION OF WOMEN»**

Cooperation between the EC and SGBs cannot be fruitful if SGBs continue their non-inclusive practices in their organizational structures, namely the under-representation of women in competitive sports and in decision-making capacities. This under-representation is no longer an issue or a problem of the «supply» of female athletes in competitive sports and in SGBs. It is the problem of the leaky pipeline and the glass ceiling, specifically how we can change attitudes and social stereotypes to keep women in this social space once they are in, thereby eliminating the leaky pipeline, and secondly how to break the glass ceiling and promote and reproduce women's inclusion, socialization, advancement and agency in competitive sports and in SGBs.

In this transitional stage of the postmodernist period, institutionalized social discrimination or gender exclusion –supported and enforced by structured rules and regulations– is anachronistic, socially problematic, contradictory, deficient and theoretically inconsistent. Nevertheless, gender dichotomy in competitive sports, as opposed to other social spaces is enforced in the name of gender equity and gender equality and continues to be considered an «un-

avoidable», conventional and standard practice. As a result, the biological gender, as an analytical category, is dynamically present in SGBs as well –a result of the anachronistic biologicistic theories originally interpreted as the «inferiority» of women to men.

In Greece, for example, although our study is still ongoing, women in the SGB hierarchies are clearly absent. No sport federation in Greece has a woman president, with the exception of one, the Water ski federation (which is not an Olympic sport). The glass ceiling effect remains actively visible not only in Greece, but around the world. Today, women in the IOC comprise a «restricted minority». From a total of 116 members only 12 are women (10.3%), a violation of the Olympic Charter (rule 2, paragraph 5, 18/97/1996), according to which:

«The IOC strongly encourages, by appropriate means, the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, particularly in the executive bodies of national and international sports organizations with a view to the strict application of the principle of equality of men and women».

Furthermore, female athletes are still under-represented, not only in the executive bodies of national and international sports organizations, but also in competitive sports. In the Athens 2004 Games, from a total of 11.099 athletes from 202 countries, only 40.7% were women ([www.athens2004.com](http://www.athens2004.com)).

Extensive discussions in the sport sciences and in the mass media highlighting gender «difference» has played an important role in the gender codification and personification of Olympic sports, thereby preserving and reproducing gender classification, and consequently promoting and reproducing the under-representation of women in the executive bodies of national and international sports organizations.

The «difference» assigned to men's and women's Olympic sports has resulted in gender stereotyping and discriminatory evaluations in the mass media and consequently in «the de-athleticization of women» (10, 12). Such examples are the extensive promotion and coverage of men's competitions and male athletes in contrast to the non-promotion and comparative «invisibility» in the media of female athletes and women's competitions (11, 9), with the exception of the minority of commercialized female athletes who are portrayed as sex-symbols or «super-feminine», and not for their sport achievements. On the other hand, when female athletes do not meet these «feminine ideals» they have been labeled and depicted in the media as «mannish», «macho» or «monsters» (20). Alarming are the results of a study depicting the under-representation of female athletes and women's competitions in the mass media. According to a press release from the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (AAF), dated July 20, 2005:

«In the last five years the television coverage of women's sports has declined. In fact, the percentage of stories and airtime devoted to women's sports on local news programs is now as low as it was 15 years ago».

A study commissioned by the AAF, «Gender in Televised Sports: New and Highlights Shows, 1989-2004», indicates that women's sports received only 6.3% of the air time in 2004 compared to 1999, when 8.7% of the airtime was devoted to women's sports. In 1989 and 1993, women's sports received 5%, and 5.1% of the coverage, respectively. The study included an examination of three two-week segments (a total of six weeks) of televised sports news coverage on each of three local Los Angeles network affiliates (KNBC, KCBS, and KABC). AAF President Anita L. DeFrantz, commenting on the findings, said:

«The continued paucity of women's stories occurs against the backdrop of significant growth of girls' and women's sports nationally and internationally, a development that is simply ignored by television sports news. The wilful neglect of women's sports is an abdication of journalistic responsibility and has the effect of diminishing the significance of women's sport and hindering its further growth. This inequity is unfair. It is wrong. It can be changed and it must be changed» (1).

Breaking patterns and practices of exclusion requires the strict implementation of equity policies, inclusive pro-active strategies and new models, such as: fostering research in the social scientific study of sport, increased media exposure of women athletes, more women sport journalists, extending agendas, «talking gender», and promoting physical culture research for the twenty-first century (25, 16). International-interdisciplinary collaborations could examine: 1) how sport reporting should be taught to future sport journalists and writers, in contrast to the patterns and practices of mainstream male journalists and writers covering sports, 2) the construction of sport identity, and 3) the context and effects of media messages, media values, journalistic norms, and news conventions in the world of sport.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS-RECOMMENDATIONS**

The systematic misinterpretation, or rather misuse of Olympic values indicates that sport has not yet evolved into a form of social capital which can be nurtured and reproduced to raise social cohesion and eliminate social exclusions. New agendas, diversity policies, opposition politics or resistance strategies are required in this age of cyborgs, plastic bodies, genetic doping, virtual reality technologies, global commercialization and increasing state interventions (22).

As a starting point sport should be defined as a cultural institution and a broader socio-cultural approach used. Specifically, a qualitative approach and a self-reflective perspective rather than only an empirical one –an analytical framework which touches on race, class and gender relations in sport, as opposed to concentrating only on the sport components of games and activities.

Since sport is a global phenomenon, it is vital to promote multicultural and cross-cultural interdisciplinary communication among scholars— including collaborations or partnerships with universities, public school systems, organizations, and institutions, such the Olympic movement, the IOC, sport federations, etc. —in order to formulate and implement multi-dimensional and proactive strategies for the use and not misuse of social capital in sports. Using examples from sports in regard to the phenomenon of «dark» social capital, we must avoid focusing our research on the concept of «difference», namely on «the other» as an analytical category— as it promotes inequalities and social exclusions —but on the concept of diversity which advocates, not tolerance, but respect, acknowledgment, appreciation, namely «celebration» of diversity based on gender, race, colour, physical disability, etc.

In conclusion, social capital production and reproduction requires allies and networks. The establishment of a multi-cultural interdisciplinary research network, including sustained academic analyses, is necessary to examine (1) the ethical framework of sport networks, (2) the complex and multidimensional sport-politics relationship, (3) the nature of social ties between SGBs and their members, (4) the under-representation of women in the executive bodies of national and international sports organizations, (5) the effective use of media, (6) the social value of public recreational sports and physical exercise versus commercial sport, (7) cross-national comparisons concerning sport-politics relations that can be extended to other countries, etc.

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*Address for correspondence:*

Irene Kamperidou  
Navarinou 9, N. Iraklio  
1421, Athens  
Greece  
E-mail: ikamper@phed.uoa.gr