SPORTS, BODIES, IDENTITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS: CONCEPTIONS AND PROBLEMS

WOJCIECH J. CYNARSKI, KAZIMIERZ OBODYŃSKI, NICOLA PORRO [EDS.]

eass
SPORTS AND IDENTITIES

Part 1

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- Museums
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- Cultural aspects
- Historical timeline

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- Social impact
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Part 2

8. The physical activity of certain sports:
- Physical demands
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- Psychological benefits
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Sports and Identities

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PREFACE

Georg Anders, President of eass

The 6th eass conference in Rome, 27-31 May 2009, brought into focus „Sports, Bodies and Identities“. Questions such as „Who am I?“ or „Where do I belong to?“ or „What will I be?“ or „What should I be?“ are probably eternal questions of mankind.

Our bodies are sources of concern. The body is an object of appearance management and self-improvement. We are judged on the basis of bodily appearances and performances. Body exercising offers a solution to health problems.

Sport means one of the most important, expressive and socially relevant representations of body. Sport as a cultural field is a complex web of sites, products and practices, producers and consumers, focused on the exercising body.

It is used as an instrument and as a strategy for producing both individual and collective identities, sense and belonging. Processes of building personality at the top sport level are connected with success, public attention, appreciation, prestige, flow experience.

But there exists the risk of loss of identity and psychic breakdown as well if the sport loses its function as a producer of identity, for example, when top athletes resign. We know about the problems of transition and biographical disruptions at the end of a career.

Not only individuals are concerned in the question „Who am I?“ and „Who will I be?“ but nations as well. Nations make use of Football World Champion-
ships to demonstrate and to communicate the image of what they would be, that is: self-confident nations but combined with openness, tolerance, brightness, and hospitality.

Collective identities give the individual a sense of belonging, of orientation, of integration. On the other side, the individual embodies the orientations of the community in its feeling, thinking and acting, thus stabilizing and perpetuating the collective identity. Exactly this kind of collective identity and identity building was reflected in the behaviour and the symbols of the fans of the clubs which took part in the final of the Champions League in Rome that coincided with the start of the conference. The respective codes of collective identity define the persons' inclusion or exclusion. The participants of the conference had insofar the chance to realize the relevance and significance of the conference theme. And perhaps some of those present at the conference were themselves adherents of the code of one of the clubs involved.

Since the eighties of the last century we have discussed the „revival of the body“ and the „revaluation of the body“ in society. This „body-turn“ evoked multi-faceted theoretical and empirical research in the field of the sociology of the body. And the sociology of sport discovered the body as a central category, too.

The conference brought together approaches from historical, cultural, social, socio-psychological and political studies as well as from economic and media studies. It offered an excellent opportunity to be informed about latest scientific results and developments on an international level. The 6th conference in the „Eternal City“ continued the series of successful eass conferences and attracted participants from 28 countries.

On behalf of the eass I thank Prof. Dr. Wojciech J. Cynarski, Prof. Dr. Kazimierz Obodyński and Prof. Dr. Nicola Porro for publishing a selection of papers presented in Rome. The papers mirror a great variety of topics. Composing the book was a huge work. I am sure it was worth while. The publication will contribute to exchange research results and to promote fruitful discussions.

Prof. Dr. Georg Anders
President of the European Association for Sociology of Sport
Chapter 2.3.

IS OLYMPIC COMMUNICATION-ACTIVITY A MEANS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITIES?

Cultural Identity and Olympic Sports

In the last decades, accelerated and unrestricted structural changes on an institutional level, national and international identification processes are changing, our social transformation and the construction of cultural identities are increasing in importance. Socially, the Olympic Games are a means to stabilize and reinforce national and cultural identities. The Olympic Games provide a framework for the creation and promotion of national and cultural identities. The Olympic Games provide a context for the construction of cultural identities that are not only located nationally but also globally.

In particular, the Olympic Games are significant in constructing the identity of the Olympic athlete who represents a nation internationally. The Olympic Games provide a platform for the construction of national and cultural identities. The Olympic Games provide a framework for the construction of cultural identities that are not only located nationally but also globally. Therefore, the Olympic Games are significant in constructing the identity of the Olympic athlete who represents a nation internationally. The Olympic Games provide a platform for the construction of national and cultural identities. The Olympic Games provide a context for the construction of cultural identities that are not only located nationally but also globally.

The Olympic Games provide a platform for the construction of cultural identities that are not only located nationally but also globally. This is achieved through the promotion of national and cultural identities. The Olympic Games provide a context for the construction of cultural identities that are not only located nationally but also globally. Therefore, the Olympic Games are significant in constructing the identity of the Olympic athlete who represents a nation internationally. The Olympic Games provide a platform for the construction of national and cultural identities. The Olympic Games provide a context for the construction of cultural identities that are not only located nationally but also globally.
Cosmopolitanization and the Olympics

Globalization is not only an economic phenomenon, namely a product of economic changes and market processes [Kamberidou 2007]. The Olympic phenomenon has always been subject to or influenced by the trends of development on an international level, and today on a global level, in other words that of the globalization processes. As a result, the Olympic sports phenomenon is consigned a negative dimension. Specifically, the globalization processes encompass – as a constituent element, as a condition for integration and inclusion – the elimination or rather the undermining of diverse cultural and ethnic identities. Beck [2002] argues that we cannot even begin to think about globalization-cosmopolitanism without referring to specific locations, places or nations. Globalization changes not only the relation between and beyond national states and societies but this process changes “the inner quality of the social and political itself” [Beck 2002, p. 23]. Beck calls this mode of change the “cosmopolitanization of nation-state societies” and argues that there is an interrelation or inter-dependence between globalization and cosmopolitanism [Beck 2002]. Explicitly, globalization seems to be a prerequisite for the appearance of those elements that reflect cosmopolitanism.

International dialogue indicates that globalization, as a process, is primarily a result of power-dominance: dominant economic or political power on a world level and usually beyond/outside international principles (ethics or laws) which disregard cultural diversity. [Grosby 2005; Beck 2002; Bryan 2002], whereas cosmopolitanization/cosmopolitanism as a process could exist only as a result of the respect and acceptance for the cultural diversity (law and ethics). The Olympics, however, as a global event, do not seem to be the result of a dialectic process in which the global and the local can coexist, in other words, exist as combined and mutually implicating principles [Beck 2002, p. 17]. For example, Courbetin’s goal and that of the Olympic movement was cultural uniformity, sameness or homogeneity. Courbetin never attempted to incorporate other kinetic cultures into Olympic sports, but instead he imposed the western example, the western model, western sports. Colonialism had played a catalytic role in the internationalization of this goal, a target that was not based on justice or ethics but on force, power and domination. This is what Courbetin called cosmopolitanism. Consequently, cosmopolitanism has been associated with the western European elite of the colonial empires. The English model that Courbetin adopted in order to internationalize his ideas includes abstract elements of structural rationalism such as Individualism, Tolerance, Universality, Contract, and Equality – the products of bourgeois capitalism that had come to maturity in the Age of Enlightenment [Goldmann 1973]. If we agree that the cosmopolitanization process means “internal globalization, globalization from within the national societies that transforms everyday consciousness and identities significantly” [Beck 2002, p. 17], then it seems that the globalization process is a prerequisite-precondition for cosmopolitanism. In other words, modern cosmopolitanism is a result of specific social changes that are associated with globalization and the vision that globalization could lead to a cosmopolitan democracy.

Coubertin’s Cosmopolitan Vision

The central mission of the Olympic movement was the construction of a new ethos, according to which the social subject must consider not only his/her own social progress, but that of the cosmos (entire world). The term and concept of cosmopolitanism was repeatedly used by Courbetin, who aspired through Olympic activity-communication to achieve interconnections across boundaries as well as transformations in the quality of social life inside the nation-state societies in order to elevate the moral life of the peoples of the world. The English perception of sport/athleticism – formulated by fair play as a central moral rule in the public schools of the 19th century and adopted by Courbetin – stressed that students should be taught through sports to govern others and to control themselves [Holt 1989, p. 76]. In this context the exercise of power was perceived as a game. This is evident today in Olympic ceremonies, etiquette and activities that provoke theoretical dialogue of a political, and economic character. Olympic activities, in accordance to prevailing socio-cultural conditions, are used as a means for the revival of political and economic power, thereby exercising great influence in the construction of individual identities and collective identities. One needs need out that in the framework of sport semasiology, any form of exercise of power must be connected to ethical/moral sport rules (eg. fair-play), including the obligation of taking into consideration and respecting all participants – active or passive – of Olympic activity and not only the athletes.

Courbetin’s cosmopolitanism was not perceived as a result of a dialectic process between western societies and non-western societies. According to Courbetin, a cosmopolitan was a citizen of the world, however, he meant only the western world! In the 19th century England was witnessing the rise of an Evangelical Muscular Christianity in its public school system and in its universities, including the development of Christian missions, such as the YMCA. Undeniably this was a form of cultural imperialism, cultural homogenization or as Beck [2002] argues an “internal globalization”. In the 20th century the production of an institutional framework for international sport events created an international sport culture and identities that replaced regional and sub-national sport-cultures. Was this a process of cultural imperialism or an effort for the formulation of a cosmopolitan culture? During the colonial period, sports in general were a means for the westernization of cultures around the world. When we say that sport was a means for the westernization of societies, we mean that
there was no dialectic method in which the ‘global’ (western kinetic culture) and the local kinetic cultures (non-western) existed as combined and mutually implicating principles. It was a monologic process and concept which provided the opportunity for the manifestation of national identities in a global reality. This manifestation of the local or the national through international processes such as the Olympics usually leads to a cosmopolitan fallacy (imagination). Thus cosmopolitanism, as it was constructed in the framework of the Olympic movement, seems to be a vague and abstract concept. Coexistence during the Olympics does not necessarily stimulate a feeling of cosmopolitan responsibility. If we argue that cosmopolitanism means a reflexive globalization, a daily global experience then coexistence during the Olympics is something beyond daily life. It is a world sport celebration. This is not a real dialectic between local and international/global but an experience that surpasses daily life, even though it can help all Olympic participants (active and passive) and not only the athletes, to imagine a cosmopolitan society.

Olympic communication/activity is a social experience that assists the social subject to envision or dream of a cosmopolitan society. It is a social experience that is linked to the imaginary/fantasy. It seems that Coubertin strove to achieve a new order that would be applicable to the entire world by creating a symbiotic (a consensus) between the peoples of the world, a symbiotic that could be achieved through mutual acceptance of specific rules, regulations, rights and obligations. In this spirit, at least rhetorically, we can agree that Olympic activities can generate cosmopolitan perceptions as a basis for the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. We can argue that the Olympic topos is a special topos (social space/sphere) where athletes exercise their imagination since Olympic values are abstract elements. Namely, they exercise their imagination about in-cosmopolitanism, a cosmopolitanism within the boundaries of Olympic time and space in its confrontation with the outside world. The notion of “a citizen of the world” has long been part of the western utopian imaginary. It was implicit in Augustine’s idea of “the City of God” and in Kant’s vision of “perpetual peace” in 1796 during the Age of Enlightenment, namely, the vision of a world free from irrational social prejudice [Bryan 2002] that re-emerges in Coubertin’s dialogue.

How can individual and national identities be integrated into the cosmopolitan vision in the Olympic topos

Current discussions focus on the deconstruction of national identities due to the globalization processes, emphasizing the need for cultural empowerment. The Olympic topos (social space) is recognized as a space for the declaration of national identities and many times as a space for the empowerment of ethnic-state identities. One need point out that a primary source of cultural identity is ethnicity or the culture into which we are born [Hall, Held, McGrew 1992]. Although in the beginning Olympic sports had been perceived as a means to cultural imperialism, they are now perceived as a means for the empowerment of cultural identities through victory. In order to understand this, one need point out that initially the construction of a national-state framework of membership was required to establish Olympic institutions. Coubertin had structured his ideas on cosmopolitanism and on citizenship, which in order to exist required a nation-building. In this spirit Coubertin understood that local identities and national identities were prerequisites for cosmopolitanism and the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. Olympic sports were closely connected to political activities which focused on the creation of a state and its identification with ethnicity. Inevitably Olympic sports were connected to activities that pursued the construction of state- national identities. Access into Olympic sports requires a state identity that ignores the national origins of the participants. On the other hand, the Olympic topos, as a space of social communication-activity also leaves open room for the development and declaration of national identities, a factor that is compatible with democratic political cultures. It is also well- suited for the development of nationalism which distinguishes faith and dedication to the nation as a superior/moral/ethical source and as a means to political-social prosperity.

As a result, Olympic sports are distinguished as a topos for cultural empowerment and the expression of national identities, although they have frequently been associated with a nationalism that embraces negative images of outsiders or the other with regard to nation or national identity [Grosby 2005; Hastings 1997]. The social Olympic topos is susceptible and vulnerable to such forms of differentiation, capable of transgressing or violating the conventional boundaries of democratic civilizations (e.g. nationalism).

The Olympic movement and Coubertin had aspired to promote the concept of patriotism in order to build a framework that would eliminate nationalism and move towards cosmopolitanism. At this point we need to make the distinction between patriotic commitments and nationalist commitments – between identity which is related to homeland (patris) and identity which is related to nation (ethnos). Patriotism means emotional commitment to a place or patriotic love of country, and not commitment to a nation. A love of ones country does not rule out respect for other cultures and places. Love of one country is merely a preparation for respect of diversity. Cosmopolitanism does not mean that one does not have a country or a homeland, but one has to have a certain reflexive distance from that homeland [Bryan 2002, p. 57]. Consequently, the reflexive distance from the homeland constitutes a cosmopolitan virtue and in this framework patriotism seems to be a precondition for understanding and respecting other cultures. In this context patriotism is compatible with cosmopolitanism. The republican tradition regards patriotism as a training ground for cosmopolitanism
[Bryan 2002, p. 59] and Coubertin, as a republican, attempted to promote his ideas on cosmopolitanism on the basis of the meaning patris (homeland). He believed that there could be no cosmopolitanism without localism (patriotism). In this spirit patriotism seems to be a precondition for understanding and respecting cultural diversity.

Olympic sports, as seen in the historicity of the phenomenon, have been used by all political systems, all ideological currents for specific political goals. Olympic sports have frequently been identified as political tools/means – not only in today’s western neo-liberal societies – in the urban societies of the 19th century, in the ideologies of fascism and in those of communism and socialism [Espy 1981]. Even republicanism and Marxism evolved on the basis of an “enlightened ecumenism” [Hall, Held, McGrew 1992] which aspired to create a global society, a global community in which super-ethnic social ties and culturally accepted views of values and power between states, justice and freedom, were included in the foundations for a global civilization and culture and not those of imperialism. The Olympic Charter has been essentially based on this tradition since the 19th century [Ππανταρακη 2007].

Olympic sports – and competitive sports in general – fulfill political functions and operations since they promote national prestige and advocate or assist in the revival and construction of national identity. For example, even though Olympic victory is an individual or group accomplishment, that of the athlete or that of the team, the success/victory is bestowed on the nation. Moreover, universal principles of democracy and personal liberties are included in the Olympic Charter. We can theoretically argue that the Olympic symbols, such as the Olympic flame, are distinguished by societies as a means for the promotion of global rights – that we believe are the basis for the cultivation of cosmopolitan identities. The Olympics as a means of internationalization, globalization and also cosmopolitanization are also used for the internalization of conflicts between states. For instance, these conflicts can be political issues like those in Tibet. The reactions concerning the recent Olympic relay reveal that the Olympic symbols stimulated a feeling of cosmopolitan responsibility. Specifically, during the Olympic relay protesters around the world demanded that the Olympic organizers denounce China’s policies against human rights in Tibet as well as the communist government’s backing of the Sudanese military regime responsible for the killings in Darfur. However, we need to point out that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is not a global government with the authority or the political power to enforce human rights or punish the violators. The IOC is not a global government that can enforce the rights and obligations of citizens, but it is only a means to internationalize national and local social problems.

Undeniably, athletes as role models can promote examples of peaceful coexistence and world peace. The Olympic topos could also be perceived as a cultural identity that is not only a means to internationalize national and local social problems. The importance of the Olympic Charter as a means of promoting peace and understanding cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion: Olympic social reality

Olympic social reality, in order to promote social cohesion, incorporates diverse identities according to time and place. The Olympics are a means for the construction of national identities and global-cosmopolitan identities. However, the Olympics as a means for the construction of national identities and global-cosmopolitan identities. However, the identities that are constructed and empowered do no exclusively depend on Olympic communication-activity, but on political and social conditions as well.

Olympic identity is a means towards cosmopolitanism. It can function as a unifying force with other identities. The identity of the Olympic athlete, for example, seems to function as a link for the coexistence of diverse identities with the diversity being the self and the social subject. The Olympic athlete in this framework is defined only not nationally or locally but globally or cosmopolitically. Unquestionably Olympic sports, the Olympic environment can move toward cosmopolitanism and the construction of a cosmopolitan identity, without eliminating other identities. The Olympic environment can function catalytically in the unification of different identities. Under certain conditions, Olympic identity (the athlete or the audience/spectator) can unite and bring together other identities.

On the other hand, this unification of diverse identities includes elements from the sphere of the imaginary/fantasy/illusion. That is to say, identity remains incomplete and is constantly under reconstruction and transformation in the relations between the participating countries in Olympic communication.
accordance to cultural representations. Thus Olympic communication is a social experience that can touch on the imaginary of cosmopolitanism in a limited space and time. The Olympic system is a social entity that consistently produces meanings. It is a system of evolving cultural representations. Olympic culture is comprised not only of Olympic institutions but also of Olympic symbols, ceremonies and representations that have the power to create a sense of identity. In Olympic sports it seems that the national (or patriotism) can be combined with universalism. When national citizens participate in an ecumenically accepted event they become «citizens of the world» and this is made possible not because they follow specific national values, but because they have committed themselves to higher ecumenically accepted values.

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