

## A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON SPORT-RELATED TRENDS AND CAREERS

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### ABSTRACT

*Practices in the sports industry, sports management and the sociological study of sport are seldom integrated to provide an integrated theoretical framework for analysis and contextualization. The aim of this explorative academic enquiry was to develop a social conceptual framework for the analysis, explanation and contextualization of sport-related careers within the sports industry. For this purpose several main theoretical paradigms within the sociology of sport were analyzed. The functional, conflict (Marxist and Marxian), critical (feminism, cultural studies and post modernism) and figurational sociological approaches provided a synthesis of analytical concepts through which societal trends were discussed. Exploring the manifestation and career-oriented trends of the sports industry in terms of the manipulation of sport, institutionalization, professionalization (including scientification and globalization), segmentation and demystification, different career fields were identified. The social phenomenological and figurational analysis focused on the sectors and segments of the sports industry that poses unique challenges for proactive human agency. This analysis presents a multi-level, multi-faceted and inter-disciplinary approach to be utilized for development and application in education and training programmes within the field of sports management and other careers within the sports industry.*

**Key words:** Theoretical approaches; Sport management; Sport-related careers; Sport industry.

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of sub-disciplines within the scientific inquiry of movement phenomena has open new avenues for cross-disciplinary scholarly activity and research. Especially the development and institutionalization of the study of sport as a social phenomenon with sport sociology provided the context for other disciplinary developments (Coakley & Dunning, 2000). The social significance and theoretical developments within the sociology of sport provided the conceptual framework for contextual analysis and projections for scholars and practitioners. Sport and the sports industry are largely products of human agency within society in which changes are reflected, acted out or initiated (Coakley, 1998). It would therefore be meaningful to draw on theoretical frameworks, societal dynamics and trends for contextual analysis and scientific conceptualization to explain the multi-faceted dynamics of different sectors within the sports industry. In this sense it is of scientific relevance for the field of sports management and sports-related education to create inter-disciplinary understanding of sport-related careers.

In order to present an integrated knowledge structure and theoretical concepts as analytical tools, the following aspects will receive attention: i) the problem and methodology will be stated, ii) social perspectives will be discussed in terms of the analytical concepts and relevance to sport-related trends in western society, and iii) the trends will be explored to develop categories and an understanding of career fields within the different sectors of the sports industry.

## **PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY**

This paper attempts to develop a scientific base for the contextual analysis, structuring and explanation of sport-related trends and careers that has evolved in society in relation to the sports industry. The result of such a venture is to generate meaning and relevant knowledge structures for the understanding, socio-historical contextualization and possible projection of career fields in the industry of sport.

A comprehensive literature study and several discussions between the two authors, who are respectively qualified in the academic fields of sports management and the sociology of sport, produced an interdisciplinary understanding and sensitivity for developing a scientific base and analytical tools for this paper.

## **SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **Functionalism**

Functionalism or structural-functionalism as a holistic approach and perspective for the macro-analysis and understanding of sport in society has maintained theoretical hegemony for more than a century. The analogy of the functioning of a biological organism and society underpinned the notions of functionalism as an integrated societal system in which each part is integrated and contribute to the functioning and maintenance (functionality, order and survival) of the systemic whole (Barnes, 1995). Different systems such as the economy (adaptation), polity (goal-attainment) socializing institutions (integration) and the community (pattern-maintenance) are to provide the collective values, roles, strategies and resources to influence and produce collective behaviour (Craib, 1984).

Within the macro-functionalist or societal level, sport can contribute to the maintenance of society by providing a socio-emotional outlet (serving as an 'opiate') or as a vehicle for socializing groups and individuals in order to perpetuate collective and cultural values, norms and behaviour. Disparate individuals and groups are integrated into society through institutionalized and diverse socialization and educational processes and practices. The educational processes involved are inherent in the socialization process of the individual that he/she undergoes with the parents, and/or care givers being the main socialization agents in the home environment. This process is continued and complemented at other social institutions such as the school and college or work environments with other significant others such as coaches, teachers, members of the peer group or colleagues as important social influences. Sports phenomena are also utilized for ideological purposes (political function) and for providing opportunities for upward social mobility (Stevenson & Nixon, 1972).

In reaction to main wide spread criticism (of being ahistorical, overemphasizing consensus and ignoring conflict) a new conceptual paradigm known as neo-functionalism was developed to address multi-level and multi-faceted analysis and understanding of the potential role of sport in society (Lüchen, 1990). It is mainly the latter strand of functionalism that will be utilized to illuminate trends of manipulation and institutionalization in contemporary sport and western capitalist society (see Figure 1).

| SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES   | SPORT-RELATED TRENDS  |
|---|---|
| Functionalism   | Manipulation<br>Institutionalization                                      |
| Conflict paradigm<br><br>Critical paradigm<br>Marxism<br>Feminism<br>Cultural Studies<br>Post Modernism | Segmentation<br>Professionalization<br>Scientification<br>Demystification |
| Figurational sociology  | Globalization   |

**FIGURE 1. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES AND SPORT-RELATED TRENDS IN SOCIETY**

### **Conflict and critical paradigms**

The comprehensive ideologically inspired work of Karl Marx and the theoretical insights contributed by Marxist scholars since the nineteenth century provided a comprehensive body of knowledge and analytical tools for the conflict paradigm. Focusing on the economic activities and relations ('base') and the subsequent effect on different social institutions ('superstructure') makes out the core of the Marxian paradigm. Rigauer (2000: 32) explain this economic-deterministic approach and process as follows:

“The economic conditions of capitalism automatically generate a socio-economic conflict between the ‘masters of production’ (capitalists; owners of the means of production) and the ‘direct producers’ (workers; owners of labour power). Both societal groups are best understood in terms of classes competing for power (‘class struggle’)...this power imbalance is also characterized by the increasing impoverishment and alienation of the workers...”

Hierarchical economic and political relations, cultural conflicts, class structures and struggles, a knowledge framework, ideologies and consciousness as well as social behaviour and institutional reform became the core themes in Marxist's theoretical assumptions, analysis and sociological agency. High performance sport as microcosm and reproduction of western capitalist-industrial societies offers unique opportunities for Marxist study and analysis in terms of the capitalist mode of production, unequal economic and political power distribution,

social stratification and exploitation of workers and minority groups by the 'powerful elite' (politicians, sport bodies and owners) in society and within high performance westernized sport forms (Elias & Dunning, 1993). Separatism and socio-economic layering (amateurism and professionalism) as trends underpin this paradigm.

The reproduction of power imbalanced through socialization practices and ideology are also manifested in Marxist-influenced critical theory that critiques the social processes and sport-related behaviour evidenced in the commodified or commercial sport, consumer behaviour and exploitative role of capitalist owners (such as multi-national companies) (Coakley, 1998). An exponent of such critical analysis is explored by the hegemony theory based on the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (Gruneau, 1988) who developed a group- and class related analysis of domination translated into material, cultural and political processes and structures.

Gender inequality has over the years culminated and emancipated in a unique body of knowledge comprising different feminist paradigms of which Marxist feminism is but one (Birell, 2000). Main traditions that emerged from different world-wide 'waves of feminism' also include liberal feminism, radical feminism and post-modern feminist traditions. Based on the differential experiences and differential gender-related values, sport as a 'male preserve' in which masculine values and unequal power relations are played out, are scrutinized by liberal feminist (Hall, 1996).

Building on the theoretical ideas of Antonio Gramsci, scholars in the cultural studies paradigm explored the role of culture in constitution political domination. Gramsci's utilization of the concept of hegemony is interdependently contextualized as being an integral part of cultural, political and economic processes. The fragmentation of culture in postmodernist societies replaced class-dominated research to allow for differential experiences in which subjectivity and identity are differentially analyzed and contextually explained.

The proliferation of post-modern sociological paradigms is most evident in emerging sociological theories such as post-structuralism and post-modernism (Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000). Experiences of individuals and collectives in different socio-cultural and political contexts (being differently raced, classed and gendered) find expression in the 'plurality of voices' that echoes their unique perceptions and lived realities of being 'marginalized', 'trivialized' and 'ghettoized' in unique ways (Birrell, 2000).

Post-modern and post-structuralist orientated literature emanating from the social world of sport explore individualistic, symbolic and challenging discourses in consumerism (the body politics), sexuality, identity, medical-scientific discourses and society, remaining attentive to history and power relations (Andrews, 2000). This micro-level analysis is also evident in other interpretive approaches such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology in which the social worlds of individuals are investigated as it is being constituted and reinvented and not merely only confronted something that is to be confronted, internalized (socialization) and reacted to (Donnelly, 2000). Phenomenological and ethnomethodological approaches focus on the capacity of the individual to construct and reconstruct their worlds, give meaning to their lived experiences and illustrate the freedom and agency of individuals to act (Jary & Jary, 1995). Individualized and the symbolic understanding of sports related phenomena within the industry illuminate trends such as market fragmentation, scientification and demystification (see Figure 1).

### **Figurational sociology**

Dichotomies and dualisms between individual and society present in most of the sociological theories, posed unique problems for research and interpretation of social phenomena and sport. Avoiding the biases towards either 'objectivity' or 'subjectivity', Elias (1994) advocated 'value freedom' and the approach of social phenomena through a 'detour via detachment'. The interdependency of social structures ('figurations') and the plurality of human acts are interweaved in social processes that reflect "social relations as emerging and contingent" (Murphy *et al.*, 2000: 92). Based on the work of Norbert Elias, process or figurational sociologists view the central dimensions of figurations as power, and power relations that are in essence dynamic and continuously changing. Central to the figurational sociology is the notion of the civilizing process based on the analysis of empirical data that indicate that the societies of Western Europe over centuries have evolved and become relatively refined in terms of self-control, refinement of manners and social values that for instance perceive physical violence and violent sports as 'undesired' and 'uncivilized' (Dunning, 1999).

The emergence of European nation-states with homogeneous forms of governance, interdependence and democratization, increased public control and the sportization of global society are part of the processes characterizing the civilizing process across the globe. The 'sportization' process or figuration was invariably linked with other macro-processes such as the 'parliamentarization of political conflict'. In this sense, the rules and practices of sport became more controlled, formalized and equal in terms of the facilitation of fair competitions. Evolving sport forms from early Greek and Roman sports to medieval folk-games and modern sports reflect the characteristics of identifiable configurations over time (Dunning & Sheard, 1979). Recent studies focused on the diffusion of modern sporting forms and globalization to trace the development of sports forms, trends and the role of the 'media-sport production complex' (Maguire, 1994). Inherent in the globalization process is the transcendence of boundaries of nation-states, time-space compression, diminishing contrasts, bi-directional global flows and global interdependency. Globalization is viewed as a global interactive process induced by dominant Western nation-states that are underscored by their notions of civilization and emphasis on international exchange and competitions (such as the Olympic Games) to meet the interests of dominant groups (political power) and satisfy powerful transnational corporations (economic power) (see Figure 1).

Macro-level theories of post-Imperialism and broad 'Marxist' traditions (cultural Imperialism, world-systems theory and dependency theory) conceptualize capitalist domination and exploitation in terms of global class relations that transcend national class structures. Robert Cox's critical theory injects Gramsci's notion of hegemony into the study of world order, analysing the expansive phases of capitalism in terms of the dialectical development of the capitalist world system (Hoogvelt, 1997).

A synthesis of theoretical paradigms is to be utilized to explain the complexity and antecedents of different process as they find expression and uniquely manifests in different cultures, social, political and economic contexts (Murphy *et al.*, 2000). The value base and assumptions of each theoretical paradigm will inevitably produce different explanations in the study of sport in society. For the purposes of this study, different theoretical paradigms will provide the conceptual framework for the projection and analysis of societal trends and sport related occupational fields. In this sense the phenomenon of sport will include what Coakley

(1998: 502) refers to as the 'power and performance' and the 'pleasure and participation' models of sport. These models respectively refer to high performance sports in which elite athletes might compete at such events as inter-club competitions or at an international event such as the Olympic Games, whereas the latter model refers to more informal types of physical activity in which people may participate for social or recreation purposes.

## **SOCIETAL TRENDS AND SPORT-RELATED CAREER FIELDS**

The sports industry on the one hand, reflect changes in society and on the other hand, individuals, institutions or events from the world of sport might initiate change. Trends in society will thus be reflected and in some cases spearheaded by sport-related phenomena and human agency. The most influential trends to be translated in terms of possible career opportunities within the sport industry include manipulation, institutionalization, professionalism, segmentation, demystification and globalization.

### **Manipulation**

Sport has since antiquity been manipulated to serve the ideology, political, social and religious purposes of influential leaders of institutions in society. In classical Greek and Roman societies sport was an important vehicle to train young men for war. This practice of being socialized (and manipulated) according to group norms (functional theory) became a modern institution in British public schools during the eighteenth century with the intention of preparing young boys for manhood (Coakley, 1998). Providing an outlet for 'male energy', spectator and athlete control, and perpetuating dominant social values to maintain the economic (class structures) and political control (powerful elite) found expression in societies across the globe and in different historical periods (Goodale & Godbey, 1988).

The military, educational institutions and sport institutions became the main exponents in the manipulation of sport and sport practices to gain social control of the masses, enforce the 'work ethic', facilitate societal control and structures to maintain the *status quo* in different cultural contexts. Physical education and sport practices, fitness and health projects to enhance workers' productivity and the 'national health', international competitions and interests of powerful political leaders, governments (National Sport Federations, Commissions), companies, television and economic enterprises play a pivotal role in the multi-level manipulation of sport-related phenomena and people (Curtis & Russell, 1997; Rowe & McGuirk, 1999). Nation-building, national identity formation, integration and utilizing sport and sports people for political agendas are persuasive propaganda vehicles as was the case when the national rugby and soccer teams respectively won the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and the Africa Cup of Nations in 1996 (Bradley, 1998). Equally persuasive is the creation of 'ideological outposts' in the minds of sport consumers by influential transnational companies such as Nike, Coca Cola and Reebok and world-wide television networks to induce collective norms, values and enhance consumerism (Coakley, 1998).

### **Institutionalization**

The industrial revolution brought about mass production, organized recreation and the institutionalization of competitive sport forms as evidenced in the birth and spread from modern sport forms from a British core and the establishment of the Modern Olympic Games by De Coubertin in 1896 (Cashmore, 1990). Global and national organizational structures of sport were established giving impetus to social stratified participation as only the more

affluent members of society could afford free time and financial support to participate as amateurs in sport competitions or recreate as part of their lifestyles of leisure and luxury (Donnelly, 2000). Members of the lower socio-economic strata saw opportunities to experience upward social mobility through competitive sport participation, the exclusivity of clubs, the lack of resources and free time hindered mass participation in high performance sport and international participation.

In different historical periods and contexts, the structuring and institutionalization of sport in terms of controlling agencies, channeling of resources and controlling the participation of the masses, perpetuated a western ideology of Eurocentric supremacy. Sport served as a controlling mechanism in orderly segmented societies and layered societies (functionalism). What contributed to the significance of this 'figuration', was the mass production of sporting goods, the development of a sporting market through imperialistic drives to export modern sports forms and the creation career opportunities to manage, market and control the institutions of sport. International sporting success was highly acclaimed and translated in terms of national self-worth, status and identity (Jackson & Andrews, 1999). The drive for international success, internal conflict and the democratization of western society presented the drive of wide spread contestation and inclusivity. Amateurism gave way to a process of professionalism under powerful economic forces.

### **Professionalization**

Marxist and Marxian thought often guided critique on oppressive structures, hegemonic sporting practices and the quest for equality among classes and nations. During the early twentieth century the commodification and commercialization of sport became a reality, creating new opportunities for economic exploitation of sports people (as a workers class) by the owners of teams, facilities and sponsors (conflict paradigm) (Coakley, 1998). External rewards, the monetary value of athletes, events and profitability of sport, proliferation through the intensification of controlling structures and professions in the sport industry. Tertiary institutions reacted to this trend by establishing curricula and professional educational programmes for the sports market (Branch, 1990).

Governments such as that of the USSR and the USA utilized sport in the imperialistic ventures to spread a socialist and capitalist ideology, and form alliances with other nation-states (Riordan, 1980). Educational institutions, sport federations and the media became important role players in the marketing, popularization and professionalization of sport. Sport managers, coaches, administrators, communicators, scientists, medical experts, recreation leaders and tourist agencies responded as national and international competitions were globally awarded a high profile (De Knop & Standeven, 1998). The sixties witness the increased scientific investigation and support of specialists to support professional athletes, institutions and work in the diversified field of performance sport, the expanding sports market and in health-related physical activity. Exploitative power relations were economically (trans-national companies as sponsors) and politically constructed and perpetuated in the 'sportization' of society (Murphy *et al.*, 2000). Law practices (including sports and contractual law), and international movements took up the case of unequal power relations (gender, race and class) to lobby for change.

## **Segmentation**

Society has increasingly become more differentiated since the Second World War. Enhanced and specialized marketing techniques enabled companies and institutions to produce tailor-made and sophisticated products for different segments of consumers within the sport industry (Curtis & Russell, 1997). Decentralization and demystification of knowledge systems typified technology-driven production and consumerism in the wider society. Through the global expansion of sport consumerism and national-states' interdependency to compete internationally, recruit athletes, control athletic (labour) migration and gain access to international sources (media and sponsorship) created sport-specific frames of reference, ideology and structures.

By global expansion niche markets were established in terms of the type of sport or interest-orientation, gender, class, age as well as physical ability (such as paralympic sport and sport for the mentally challenged). International and local sports federations reacted to this trend by adapting rules of traditional sports, promoting events such as for veteran athletes or play forms for juniors such as mini-golf. The segmentation is most evident in international recognized forms of sport such as in the case of recognized forms or rugby that include Rugby Union, rugby league, Australian Rules and the American Grid Iron (Cashman, 1995). Each form not only cater for a wider, yet unique audience but carries with it local symbolism, sentiment and unique market and (political) persuasive content (symbolic interactionism, cultural studies paradigm and post-structuralism).

Market franchising and specialization of academia, medical experts, sport scientists, scholars and highly specialized practitioners were products of this trend. This also led to scientific inquiry, publication and mediation of sport-related knowledge, resources and services. Especially sports marketers, event and facility managers, sports retailers, sponsors, entrepreneurs and the sports media offered specialized services to make profit, earn a living and act on this 'societal wave'.

## **Demystification**

The needs created by the expansion of specialized knowledge and services spiraled to all spheres of society and resulted in the availability of personalized knowledge and dissemination of specialized sport-related knowledge. Specialization and personalization of knowledge and resources instigated the demystification (Ellis, 1988). Not only was information more accessible for the individual and unique group, but also the media, technological advances and globalization contributed to the availability of expert opinions on the click of a button. Globalizations, the reduction of space and time, traveling and public debates about ethical practices in sport inform and empower sport groups, individual athletes and practitioners alike (Silk, 1999).

This trend directly impacted on tertiary institutions and sport-related professions as the need for 'self-help' manuals and programmes developed. The generalist approach was replaced by specialized and eventually by differentially disseminated knowledge (symbolic interactionism, cultural studies paradigm, post-structuralism). For instance in the fitness industry, the general prescribed exercise programme was replaced by the personal trainer which in turn is at least partially replaced by the health consultant that assist the individual to 'tailor make' a programme for him/herself.



### Sports-related career fields

In conjunction with the sport-related trends within the broader figurations of society, a social phenomenological analysis of the different career fields does not follow distinctive, neatly created boundaries, but rather an integrated and interdependent whole. The sociological framework, underlying assumptions, focus and analytical value of each paradigm and trend set the context for the identification of sports-related career fields. Depending on the trend and societal focus, the field is multi-faceted and differently structured although only the broad sector is indicated as comprehensive categories (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1. SPORT-RELATED TRENDS AND RELATIONAL CAREER FIELDS**

| <b>TRENDS IN SOCIETY AND THE SPORTS INDUSTRY</b> | <b>CAREER FIELDS</b>   |
|--|--|
| Manipulation                                     | Education and training<br>Politics<br>Participation (sport and recreation)<br>Recreation and leisure participation<br>Sports consumerism                       |
| Institutionalization                             | Sports and recreation management<br>Facility and event management<br>Sports marketing<br>Participation (sport and recreation)                                  |
| Professionalization                              | Sports marketing<br>Facility and event management<br>Sport participation<br>Consumerism<br>Sports science and medicine<br>Specialized fields (e.g. sports law) |
| Scientification                                  | Research<br>Education and training<br>Sports science and medicine<br>Specialized fields (e.g. sports technology)   |
| Globalization                                    | Sport tourism<br>Sport media   |
| Segmentation                                     | Sports consumerism<br>Sports marketing   |
| Demystification                                  | Sport media<br>Education and training<br>Sports-related research<br>Sports marketing   |

The sport-related career fields are also identified as different sectors within the sport industry. It provides an analytical framework for the categorization of different occupations within different segments of the sports industry.

## THE SPORTS INDUSTRY

### Segments of sport in society

In the late eighties and early nineties different sectors or components of the sports industry was analyzed in order to create a conceptual framework for the categorization of unique occupational fields and typologies in analogy of the nature of physical culture or movement phenomena. Cuskelly and Auld (1991) identified sectors according to the structural allocation thereof such as forming an integral part of the state, local and regional authorities, or being commercial and part of the public sector. De Sensi *et al.* (1990) added a life span dimension and institutional dimension in including school, tertiary and public agencies. Focusing on sport management Kjeldsen (1990) identified tertiary institutions, professional sport, facility management, sports marketing, school sport and sport agencies as sectors that provide career opportunities for students qualified in the field of sport management.

Parks *et al.* (1998) identified three main segments of the sport industry in terms of the product and consumer. The sport participation and performance segment provides opportunity for direct or indirect consumerism at professional or amateur level and include occupational fields such as participants, volunteers, sports coaches and referees. The second segment, namely the sports production segment relates to sports products that are essential to create opportunities for participation. The five main sectors of this segment comprises of the sports goods, education and training, recreation and tourism, event and facility and fitness and health. Sport promotion forms the third segment of the typology and is viewed as the medium for marketing the sports product.

### Sport sectors in society

Within the sport participation and performance segment, the sport consumer is placed at the center. The participant's may be primarily or directly involved at professional, amateur or social level or in a secondary capacity as manager or administrator (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997). The provision of sport medical services and providing expert services for the team, including being part of the technical support group or coaching athletes also falls within this sector (Darby & Browder, 1998). Tertiary consumers predominantly include the sports media and occupational fields of reporting, commenting and marketing. Sponsors, the media and commercial sport form a symbiotic and interdependent relationship to promote consumerism.

The sport production segment relates to the production and promotion of sport goods (such as clothing and apparatus). Entrepreneurship, franchising, branding and marketing are essential in generating profits and creating consumer markets. Facility and event management focus on maximizing consumerism in terms of attending sport events and facilitating the optimal and/or profitable use of facilities. Traveling became part of sport consumerism in terms of attending sports events or participating in sport-related activities (Brown, 1998).

Education and training include different levels and agencies within the formal and informal structures of a society. National bodies, tertiary institutions and qualification agencies provide differential programmes, monitoring and guidance within a wide variety of sport-related career fields. The fitness and health sector is related to the medical and performance field of physical activity and sport, as well as generating consumerism and marketing opportunities in and through sport (Horowitz, 1998).

Sports marketing assume that the consumers need to be recruited and that sport products need to be introduced effectively and persuasively to a wider market. This entails the marketing of sport and sporting products as well as utilizing sport, athletes and events to market other products such as cars, beer and soft drinks in which associative media images form part sponsors' initiatives and market strategies. Planning, management, promotion and branding are thus some of the responsibilities of the sports marketer (Mahony & Pitts, 1998).

## CONCLUSION

Different sociological theoretical paradigms provide the theoretical conceptual framework for the analysis and identification of different sport-related trends and career fields. This sociological and developmental approach whereby different societal figurations are globally identified present the social and historical context against which cultural and political dimensions of sport-related trends and careers finds substantiation and are manifested as part of reactive human agency.

The interrelated of societal trends and career fields within the different sectors of the sports industry provide meaning and hold educational possibilities for the development and adaptation of tertiary programmes in the field of sports management, human movement studies or other related disciplines. By utilizing a sociological framework provides meaningful insight into the dynamics of global society and possible predictions that may trigger pro-active educational programmes in answer to developing trends and societal needs.

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