

Sport Sociology

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Sport Sociology

3rd Edition



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INTRODUCTION TO SPORT SOCIOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

From its fairly humble beginnings as a number of fairly localised village games, sport has grown in less than two centuries into a worldwide phenomenon. As well as being one of the world's biggest industries, with an estimated global value that has grown over the last decade alone from an estimated \$100 billion in 2006 to \$145 billion in 2015, sport is now an expected social and cultural element of all societies. Indeed, it could be argued that, today, for a country to be acknowledged as a nation, there are really only two criteria: (1) being formally recognised by the United Nations (UN) and (2) being accepted as a nation by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and able to parade around a stadium with the national flag flying at the opening ceremony to an Olympics.

In common with many international organisations, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) recognises sport to be an essential part of growing up in a 'modern world', stating: 'For many people around the world, sport and play are immediately and inextricably tied to the notion of childhood ... and fundamental to the health and growth of children everywhere'. Moreover, this recognition of sport's social importance has been extended by organisations covering the political spectrum, nationally and internationally (the UN, the European Union), due to their understanding that:

- Sport is a powerful social tool, bringing together people from different ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Sport plays an important role in improving physical and mental health, and in fostering active citizenship and social inclusion.
- Sport is a good entry-point for the promotion of life skills-based education and healthy lifestyles, including building awareness of the values of physical fitness, proper nutrition and how to make choices that positively impact health.
- There is evidence that sport and play enhance child development and learning and encourage better academic performance.
- Sport encourages and improves physical fitness, reducing child obesity, which is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century.
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. Evidence shows that regular participation in appropriate physical activity and sport provides all people, regardless of ability, with a wide range of physical, social and mental health benefits.
- Sport offers opportunities for the development of peer leaders.
- Sport increases self-esteem among adolescent girls and provides opportunities for the advancement of girls in the face of gender-related barriers.
- Sport can build community, aid conflict resolution and foster mutual understanding and peer support among groups in past or present conflict.
- Sport can be used to promote a safe and protective environment for children and to teach young people how to solve conflict in a non-violent manner.
- Sport activities can be low-cost and utilise locally available resources.

(Source: www.unicef.org/sports/23619_23624.html)

Even if only a few of these impressive claims were deemed to be true, what should be clear to all is that sport matters and that while we might not always agree about it or like it, as a routine part of their everyday lives, sport has a personal significance to literally billions of people. Sport reaches out far beyond the boundaries of any nation and far beyond the time frame of any specific sporting event. Sport today is one of the most important points of global interconnection – between nations and their governments, national and international sports organisations,

and between the billions of people from around the world who love to play and watch sport. In fairly simple but concrete terms, there is an important need to understand sport as much ‘more than a game’.

The hosting of sporting events that have a global importance, such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup, is now widely expected to bring significant benefits. The named city, and by implication the host country, enjoy an enhanced international profile. Global media coverage of the Olympics provides an unparalleled opportunity for the host city (and country) to showcase its culture to the rest of the world. The economy is boosted by tourism and other business possibilities, and there are real opportunities to address home-grown economic and social necessities, such as urban regeneration. Across the world, the process of preparing athletes and developing facilities for elite sport provides a fertile arena for the development of disabled sport and sports programmes designed to promote social cohesion and integration. In schools around the world, sport and physical education are used to address key lifestyle issues such as diet and regular exercise, and thereby contribute to national agendas of health and wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2014).

Today, sport is being envisaged as a driving force for change in the world. Consider the following statements:

‘Sport has the power to change the world’. These were the words of Nelson Mandela, the great humanist and leader. We should take this message as an inspiration to contribute to progress through change. First and foremost this refers to ourselves. You can inspire others to change, only if you are ready to change yourself. We have all gathered here to lead this change in sport ... In our world – changing faster than ever – the success of yesterday means nothing for today. The success of today gives you only the opportunity to drive the change for tomorrow. (IOC, 2014, Olympic Agenda 2020, p. 4)

We see it as our mission to contribute towards building a better future for the world by using the power and popularity of football. This mission gives meaning and direction to each and every activity that FIFA is involved in – football being an integrated part of our society. (www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/federation/mission.html)

If the claims and commitments made in these statements are serious and acted on, then sport really does matter, socially, economically and culturally. Once we realise this, it is also clear that there is a need to develop an informed and critical understanding of sport and its connections to these complex processes and claims. This is the task of sport sociology and it requires us to enter into a series of debates about the interconnections between sport, modern society and how that society is itself changing in quite radical ways. Sport may be a commonplace part of our lives and our social world, but its everyday familiarity begs a number of questions with regard to the part played by sport in the production and reproduction of our modern world, and how that world is itself being transformed.

In order to develop these sorts of insights, we need to examine the importance of the institutional structures that characterise all modern societies and explore how sport is linked to them. How we socially experience and understand sport is not a simple process and can be based on a complex interplay between the objective, biographical and subjective dimensions of everyday life (Sugden, 2015). Our understanding of sport, sports organisations and sporting behaviour therefore needs to move beyond a reliance on our everyday experiences of doing it, reading about it or watching it.

One requirement needed for this to happen is the development of an understanding of how sport has been influenced and patterned by social structures and processes that may, at first glance, seem to have relatively little to do with sport. While we might not always be aware of them, our experience of sport – whether it be as an active participant, spectator, administrator, fan or just a casual armchair viewer – is nonetheless fundamentally interconnected to the social structures of our modern society. These structures act in ways that both enable and constrain, disadvantage and advantage, people in sport.

1.2 SPORTS WORLDS: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

As the sub-discipline of sociology, sport sociology has grown over the past four decades; numerous texts have been published to provide students with an introduction to this important field of enquiry. This book is an extension of this tradition and draws extensively on the insights of this body of literature, while extending the analytical interest to the most recent and contemporary contributions and the transformational social changes that characterise life in the 21st century. Although the roots of sport sociology can be traced back to the 1960s, it was the 1980s onwards that saw the publication of a number of texts that were to firmly establish the field. One of the many influential texts from this time was *Sport, Power and Culture* by John Hargreaves (1986). This book's influence was that it extended the field of enquiry from the examination of sport as an institution with various social 'functions' to a number of vital debates about power and culture and how these have shaped access to, and the experience of, sport. Since then, the field has become an established part of life for thousands of undergraduate and postgraduate students around the world who have decided to undertake their degree study in sport.

As the world of the late 20th century changed, so the field of enquiry within sport sociology expanded into detailed commentaries on the complex theoretical and conceptual debates that had emerged and were continuing to do so. Two texts that attempted to reflect these emergent intellectual issues and concerns were Gruneau (1999) and Jarvie and Maguire (1994). As they correctly recognised, sport sociology had become deeply fragmented along theoretical

and conceptual lines. Among others, the impact of a feminist analysis of sport (Hargreaves, 1994) had opened up a number of pivotal debates that are still vital to sport sociology. The strengths of these contributions and of their many successors were their desire to transcend these divisions while also giving an objective account of them. As the multiple contributions to the recent ‘assessment of the current state and issues impacting sport sociology’ (Pike et al., 2015) evidence since that time, the ‘field’ has moved on significantly, though it is also facing a number of important challenges.

The world we live in is subject to powerful and sometimes disturbing processes of change. As McKay (2015) argues, the task that lies before us is therefore two-fold: (1) there is a need to develop how we think about and ‘imagine’ sport; and (2) there is a need to create an understanding of how sport has been structured by modernity, while also looking critically at contemporary social issues and the changes they are creating and what they might mean for the future of sport.

In addressing these requirements as well as the work of sport sociologists, where appropriate, the chapters will also intentionally acknowledge some of the theoretical and conceptual insights located in the academic disciplines, including history, economics, politics and mainstream sociology, so that they can provide you with the necessary contemporary insights into the chapter’s focal theme and the social issues inherent within it.

1.3 THE THIRD EDITION

In drawing on many elements of the previous edition, this new edition has a similar intention – to help you encounter how sport sociology has produced a wide-ranging, diverse and, at times, challenging body of sociological research and analysis that have illuminated our understanding of sport. Since the publication of the second edition of the book, much has changed in the world and indeed much has stayed the same. The Olympics of London 2012 have been and gone but Rio 2016, at the time of writing, is about to happen. Sport continues to inspire young and old around the world but is still deeply fractured by persistent levels of inequality. The world’s economy still seems to be deeply troubled (Harvey, 2015; Stiglitz, 2015), but sport as a business continues to grow, especially in regard to how emerging technologies are opening up new and, in some cases, radically different imaginings regarding what people consider sport to be. We are all wedded to our comfortable forms of consumption and our use of carbon-based energy to create necessary mobility within our daily lives, yet the planet seems to be providing strong indicators that neither of these is sustainable. This new edition has acknowledged these familiar and unfamiliar spaces by undertaking a significant re-working of many of the previous chapters and by including two new chapters: ‘Sport in a digital age’ and ‘Sport, climate change and sustainability’.

As you progress through the chapters, you will note that they have a similar structure. Each chapter will set out a number of learning objectives that you will

be able to review when you complete the chapter. Embedded in each chapter will be a number of 'reflections' that can act as a 'time-out' from working through the text and give you the opportunity to undertake some tasks that have been designed to help you practically ground and apply the issues being discussed. At the end of the chapter, there will be a detailed case study for you to go through. In addition, each chapter will end with a number of recommended further readings and a section reviewing one or more key thinkers who have made a significant contribution to the theme of the chapter. You should find all of these features very useful as they not only help broaden your understanding of the chapter topic but also show how the topic can be developed to inform your assignment preparation in your sport sociology modules.

The aims of this new edition of the book are:

1. Through a detailed analysis of international sporting examples, to develop your awareness and critical understanding of the complex and dynamic interrelationship between sport and society.
2. To engage you with a critical introduction to a series of sociological themes and issues that are fundamental to how sport sociology has sought to analyse and understand sport as a social and cultural construction. These themes are:
 - (i) an exploration of the institutional and organisational structure of modern society as fundamental components of the sociological analysis of sport;
 - (ii) the deep interconnections between sport and the social and cultural structure of society in regard to how this maps the everyday actions and intentions of people;
 - (iii) the crucial importance of power relations connected to these structures and how they act in ways that both enable and constrain, and provide opportunities for some and disadvantages for others;
 - (iv) the expanding importance of technological innovations, the media and consumerism;
 - (v) the importance of sport within a globalised world and the processes of social and cultural change that it brings;
 - (vi) the implications that the now well-established recognition of climate change have for the future of sport.
3. To develop your critical understanding of the various sociological theories and concepts that have been applied to sport.

While each chapter has been devised to develop and extend your understanding of these sociological concepts and theories, your personal journey within sport sociology and how you will develop your own critical understanding of sport will also be reliant on you actively spending time reading some of the recommended additional texts and, through discussion with your tutors and peers, thinking about and applying these concepts and theories for yourself.

1.3.1 Structure

To help organise your introduction to the sociology of sport, the chapters within the text have been organised into four sections:

Part 1: An Introduction to Sport Sociology

This consists of your introductory section, containing this chapter, Chapter 1, ‘An introduction to sport sociology’ and also Chapter 2, ‘Sport and modernity’ to examine the structure of modern society and its impact on the formation of modern sport. The chapter also introduces you to the ways in which sociology seeks to analyse and understand sport in the context of a world that is undergoing rapid change.

Part 2: Foundational Themes in Sport Sociology

Chapter 3, ‘Sport’s organisation and governance’, provides an examination of the organisational structure of modern sport and the influence of the processes of rationalisation and bureaucratic control on the experience and structure of modern sport.

Chapter 4, ‘Sport, physical education and socialisation’, introduces you to important insights from the structuralist and functionalist theories of sport, and explores how sport and physical education are connected to and challenged by the processes of socialisation.

Chapter 5, ‘Class and gender differentiation in sport’, further extends the exploration of how social and economic structures impact sport. Through its examination of Marxist and neo-Marxist sociological theory and its application within sport sociology, it will outline how capitalism underpins some of the most influential structures of power and control within sport. The specific issue that this will lead us into examining is social class. From here, the chapter then turns to explore how gender and sport interact to produce complex patterns of social differentiation.

Part 3: Postmodern Themes in Sport Sociology

Chapter 6, ‘Sport diversity and community’, extends some of the sociological themes of power and control established in the previous chapter by exploring how culture and cultural practices are connected to the experience of race, ethnicity and disability in sport. There are two aims to this chapter. First, it introduces a number of concepts and theories to help explain the relationship between sport and diversity and some of the contemporary challenges that the reality of a global multicultural world brings. Second, it provides a framework for exploring further the interconnections that are made (especially in governmental policy) between

sport and community. Here, the issues of development and social cohesion will be significant themes.

Our society today evidences a whole range of concerns around the body. Whether it is in terms of health and wellbeing or as a way of representing our sense of identity, the body has never had a more prominent place in our society. In Chapter 7, 'Sport and the body', we examine how the body is socially and culturally constructed and the role that sport plays in establishing dominant images of the body.

Sport today has moved far beyond its modest recreational and amateur beginnings: it has become big business. Chapter 8, 'Sport and consumer society', recognises that, for many, contemporary sport is also a matter of consumption and that sport provides people, as consumers, with a vast array of commodities. The chapter's examination of these processes explores the major elements of 'consumer society' and how sport is now intimately connected to the complex benefits and problems of consumer culture.

In our contemporary world, sport and the media have become completely intertwined. In Chapter 9, 'Sport and the media', we examine this relationship and identify how sport, the media and popular culture influence each other, and what this means for the social and cultural production and reproduction of sport and its future.

In Chapter 10, 'Sport in a global world', attention turns to how processes of globalisation are transforming the modern world. Today, the world is 'shrinking' and societies are ever more deeply interconnected through the global flows of money, people, media, technology and ideas/culture. Sport is at the very heart of many of these processes. The chapter will also examine how sport and, more specifically, global sports events such as the Olympics and the World Cup are linked to these processes.

Part 4: Emergent Themes in Sport Sociology

The character of social life and the structure of society in the 21st century are rapidly evolving into a digitally mediated social landscape. This transformation has had, and is having, profound impacts on the world of sport and has therefore become an area of increasing importance to sport sociologists. This is the theme of Chapter 11, 'Sport in a digital age'.

With the impacts of climate change becoming ever more apparent, there is now a clear consensus amongst academics and many of the world's politicians that the interconnected issues of climate change and sustainability need to be addressed. As Chapter 12, 'Sport, climate change and sustainability', will detail, sport is not immune from these dramatic and far-reaching changes and therefore it is inevitable that it will also have a need to examine how these emergent transformations will impact on many of the well established processes within sport (consumption, participation, etc.), on the organisation of sport, and on the experiences of athletes and fans.

1.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The world is changing, often in disturbing but also in exciting and stimulating ways. Sport is and will be an important arena of social life that is involved in how we choose to respond to these emergent realities and their challenges. To be well informed about how the social world is produced and reproduced through our routine and habitual lives and expectations is about understanding not only the contemporary world of sport but also what lies ahead and the choices we can make that will impact that 'future'. The relevance of sport sociology has never been more important and it is hoped that the journey (through these chapters, theories, concepts and issues) that lies ahead may provide you with some of the necessary insights that will inform what these decisions might be.

1.5 FURTHER READING

There is a wide range of excellent introductions and overviews of sport sociology and its current areas of concern, so the following recommended texts are merely here to direct you to some of the most recent and influential works that have informed, and continue to inform, the field:

- Coakley, J. and Pike, E., 2014. *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*. 11th edn. London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
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