



Sports, Global Politics, and Social Value Change: A Research Agenda

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Sports as a form of modern organized leisurely activity emerged in the process of the reshaping of social life in 19th century industrializing societies. Since then they are one of the cultural hallmarks of modernity. Yet the evolution of organized sports as an important sociocultural arena has long been at the margins of academic interest. This neglect also applies to many fields for which sports and sports cultures would have been perfectly suited, such as cultural sociology, cultural history, and the study of culture and politics.¹ Nevertheless sports have mattered all along. And they not only continue to literally move and deeply affect millions of people but have expanded their social relevance in recent decades. Sports also make a large segment of the most sophisticated scholars and intellectuals (often unadmittedly) first turn to the sports pages every morning when they read the news. But scholarly interest in, for instance, the relationship between football and working class origins and identities has partly been suffocated by the association of football fan culture with hooliganism, right-wing groups, and politico-economic power players – as if any of this would disqualify sports from being a significant social force, and consequently from being a worthy subject of

¹ Until this day, even sports sociology has only been half-heartedly institutionalized in few universities and had to struggle to be taken seriously as sociological subfield.



research.² Despite their important role in forging, constructing and self-ascribing social identities and shaping popular and political cultures around the globe, sports have thus long been a widely ignored if not disdained. From a cross-disciplinary view, sports are often still viewed as a somewhat peculiarly “illegitimate” subject of social science inquiry, social history, cultural studies, and research on international politics.

There are several key reasons for this hitherto persistent marginalization. Paraphrasing Marx’s frequently quoted dictum about religion, the mantra of sports as a collective “opium of the peoples” engendering aggression and serving the powers that be has dominated the scholarly and intellectual focus for decades. Sports has long been a subject at best deserving occasional dismissive social criticism and polemical commentary, even if some of sports’ potentially progressive qualities have been acknowledged. As part of popular culture, sporting events and fan cultures have indeed been embedded in political and social domination since antiquity. Sports continue to be utilized by political regimes and autocratic ones in particular.

The traditional scholarly denigration of sports has also to do with their commercialization and professionalization since the first half of the 20th century. This process transformed organized leisurely activity—often with working class origins – into organized commodities. In our commercialized age, this process has reached unprecedented levels during the current “second,” post-industrial globalization (Markovits and Rensmann 2010: 43-106). Moreover, it is not even necessary to mention global organizations such as FIFA and the IOC, and the many scandals they were and are involved in, making negative front page news, to understand that the world of organized sports is indeed known for being corrupted. These powerful regulative global sports bodies indeed often lack minimal standards of democratic principles, transparency, and accountability, epitomizing failing global institutions (Sugden and Tomlinson 2005).

Only over the last decade has the hegemonic academic marginalization of one of

² In Italian popular culture, where sports traditionally play a particularly significant role, there are more daily sports papers than in any other country. Not by coincidence, the national football chant “Forza Italia” was successfully turned into a right-wing populist party led by Silvio Berlusconi that dominated Italian politics for two decades since the Tangentopoli corruption scandals and breakdown of the party system in the early 1990s. Still, even though there is plenty of popular literature on *berlusconismo* and the effective use of football (and the global club AC Milan in particular) for political and economic purposes, serious scholarly work is strikingly rare even here (one of the notable exceptions is Foot 2007). Even in the world’s hubs for scholarly work on sports, society and culture, namely the UK and the USA, the study of sports largely remained caught in a pariah status with a handful of research centers, only recently making partial inroads as parvenu. In the field of sports sociology, the Leicester School examining English football hooliganism did of course groundbreaking work since the late 1980s (for an overview and evaluation Best 2010), followed by initial work on the globalization of football by Giulianotti (1999) and comparative sports sociology by Markovits and Hellerman (2001). The evolution of the field has its roots some 30 years ago, with the development of journals such as *Soccer and Society*, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, or *International Review of the Sociology of Sport*.



the most relevant societal spheres begun to be challenged, and in many ways profoundly so. Driven by new cross-disciplinarily oriented studies of professional and amateur sports cultures, for a few years now we have been witnessing a considerable change in direction. In particular the area of sports and international politics, for a long time entirely dormant, has in the latest years partly been resuscitated. This ignited an innovative reconstruction of the academic landscape. Research has evolved and explores a wide range of topics and intersections of sports and politics, such as soft power politics and the political impact of sports mega events (Grix and Lee 2013; Lenskyi 2002; 2008), international sports policy and governance (Palmer 2013), sports, political culture, and globalization (Allison 2005; Giulianotti and Robertson 2004; 2007; 2009; Markovits and Rensmann 2010), women's rights, sports cultures, and female fandom (Markovits and Albertson 2012), global sports migration (Bale and Maguire 1994; Maguire and Falcois 2010), or the interaction of football and transnational public spheres (King 2003). Notwithstanding these nascent trends, overall IR (and political science) have "barely had an impact on the study of sport in general and on the political use of sport by states in particular" (Grix and Lee 2013: 5).

This article seeks to advance the still nascent but now emerging field of research on sports and global politics in two ways: First, by addressing largely unexplored issues of sports, politics, and social conflicts. In so doing, the article discusses the evolving research landscape and puts the spotlight on sociopolitical arenas that include global institutions and commercialized sports mega events, which have attracted most scholarly attention in contemporary research--but also turns to decentered perspectives on everyday soccer cultures. Second, by generating hypotheses on the direct and indirect political effects of sports cultures, the subsequent section focuses on the role of sports in forming sociopolitical identities, and in particular on the relationship between local social identities – reinforced through sports – and cosmopolitan value change.

These interlinked spatial and substantive claims advance a conceptual framework through which I analyze team sports as an independent force – or independent variable – of "glocalization." This framework grounds a critical research agenda that understands and examines sports as profoundly embedded in socioeconomic, cultural and political forms of rule and domination. Such agenda also seeks to disclose sports' emancipatory and subversive potential in advancing cosmopolitan norms and globalization from below. The argument is developed by reviewing some important new research in sports, and global as well as "glocal" politics. Moving beyond the conventional political focus on sports mega events, soft power in international relations, and global institutions, the article then develops critical perspectives on the often underrated broader, indirect political impact of sports – and football in particular. Special attention is paid to the relationship between sporting phenomena and social values, and the meaning of sports for global as well as local allegiances and identities.



RETHINKING GLOBAL SPORTS AND POLITICS: LOOKING AT AND BEYOND GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS, SOFT POWER, AND SPORTS MEGA EVENTS

There are three noteworthy, interlinked areas in which research on sports and international politics has made recently significant inroads into political science and political sociology: (i) the politics of global institutions and the agents of global sports policy; (ii) the role of sports as a soft power and public diplomacy instrument recognized by scholars and policy makers alike; and (iii) global sports mega events as a political focal point. In these areas, there is reinvigorated, innovative scholarship liberating the subject from a formerly entirely ephemeral existence.

First, cross-disciplinary research has increasingly focused on sports institutions as socio-political organizations that exert significant power and influence in contemporary global society. Especially FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and the IOC (International Olympic Committee) as significant international organizations (IOs) have increasingly become the subject of scholarly interest in recent years. They are arguably the world's most global institutions, with more member nations than nation states on this planet and thus more members than the UN and an almost complete representation of the world. Yet they also signify like few other global institutions the failings of elite-driven institutional "globalization from above" (Rensmann 2014). Pretending to advance (and regulate) global football and the "Olympic spirit" respectively, these global organizations are made up by entirely self-selected elites originating from national federations. These global institutions claim non-governmental organization (NGO) status. However, criminal investigations and critical institutional analyses suggest they are arguably thoroughly profit-oriented and corrupted, business-friendly elite INGOs or business international non-governmental organizations (BINGOs). In fact, they may also be classified as monopoly capitalist organizations: they exercise historically institutionalized monopoly rule over global events and competitions, such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, for the main purpose of extracting maximum profit (Sugden and Tomlinson 2005; 2011). The critical analysis has been bolstered by recent global public attention on corruption scandals at these world sports governing bodies, and – in the case of FIFA – subsequent international criminal investigations led by the US. The spotlight is now first and foremost on FIFA (Tomlinson 2014). There have evidently been bribes involved in the FIFA leadership and in the prelude to the selection process of World Cup host countries. And in Qatar, the dubious winner in the behind-closed-doors selection process to host the 2022 World Cup, human rights INGOs and the International Labor Organization already count a record-breaking number of casualties among workers building the stadiums and architecture for the World Cup (Gibson 2014). Consequently, especially FIFA today epitomizes in the court of global



public opinion a profoundly dysfunctional, corrupt, failing global institution representing powerful particular interests and cartels. FIFA and the IOC represent the worst aspects of both global institutions and organized global sports. They tend to directly serve economic and social domination.

This is why there has been an ongoing struggle and public pressure for global institutional reform and supporting research. Reform of these institutions may no longer be enough. Particularly in the case of FIFA and the IOC, the call to build accountable, trustworthy, transparent, democratized and efficient global sports institutions has long been challenged by work demonstrating the need for these organizations to be replaced by alternative institutions—a complete overhaul that refocuses on supporting sports' evolution and identity from below (Foster 2005).³

Institutional analyses of sports organizations on the regional, national and subnational level also display at best mixed results. This applies to institutional performance and the goal to advance sports, and sports culture as a potentially progressive, humanitarian social force. Italy is an exemplary case but far from being the only country marked by a series of scandals affecting organized soccer. The Italian crisis culminated in the disclosure of years of match-fixing in the *calciopoli* scandal in 2006, involving clubs and institutional failure of the national football federation (Foot 2007). Even UEFA, the Union of European Football Associations, which regulates European soccer and which many argue is one of the most transparent regional sports organizations in comparative terms, suffers from a primarily profit-driven commercialization while simultaneously lacking supervision and institutional democracy (King 2007).

Institutions matter, and so does their critical analysis. It fulfils an important societal function. However, while critical studies of institutional processes, governance problems, and institutionalized social domination are important, they may also be in danger of reproducing a restricted view on global politics and sports. The sole focus on these organizations and their failures risks reducing the relationship between sports and politics to domination. Such narrow focus may exclude the multi-faceted relations between sports and politics below the level of centralized institutional power, and beyond economic interests. What has hardly been examined is the relationship between sports governance institutions (and their legitimacy and efficiency) and their broader socio-cultural and political impact on global society. In how far does FIFA, for instance, engender or harm the potential of sports in conflict

³ These institutional failures also have an impact on global sports governance and global sports policy, which involve governments and a multiplicity of subnational and transnational agencies. Within the vast and growing framework of global governance and global public policy research sports governance and policy has once again only lately been discovered as subject worthy of systematic analysis. For a first excellent, critical and comprehensive account on multi-level global sports policy, network policy, and globalization see Palmer 2013.



resolution, and the legitimacy of soccer in promoting a just society through its unifying language?

A second research strand on sports and politics indirectly touches on the important issue of sports-related identity – and the political relevance of identity dimensions of sports competitions – by applying the concept of “soft power.” It refers to the use of sports as a non-coercive means of power and attraction in foreign policy, engendering and pursuing a state’s cultural diplomacy and “public diplomacy” (Nye 2008). Joseph Nye understands soft power as intangible forms of “co-optive power” that can be contrasted to hard or “ordering power.” Without necessarily replacing coercive power, the increasing relevance of such soft power is enabled by the growing interdependence of societies in globalized information society. In this context, Nye considers soft power equally important to hard power, as the use of force tends to be less acceptable. A state may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics, argues Nye, based on soft power resources such as cultural attraction fostering “the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own.” (Nye 1990: 168)

States have recognized the significance of sports for a very long time. This does not just apply to the use of sports as an instrument to consolidate domestic power. To be sure, governments of all system types have long tried to employ sports and organized sports events as a resource to bolster national identity or domestic regime support. In fact, the role of sports in increasing prestige and leverage or “soft power” on the stage of international politics vis-à-vis other states has also a long history throughout the 20th century.

In contrast with what we often associate with “soft” and “smart power” today, traditionally sports investment in the service of foreign policy, international prestige and status – ultimately with the goal to increase influence in international relations – was especially significant on the part of *autocratic regimes*. This arguably started with Nazi Germany and the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. It continued during the Cold War in the Soviet Union and among the Warsaw Pact countries, which spent a significant part of the GDP on achieving national prestige enhanced through medal counts and sporting success, fostering the international image and identity of being powerful and successful nations (Allison and Monnington 2005; Grix 2012; Grix and Lee 2013).

Jonathan Grix and Donna Lee persuasively argue that especially “emerging states” recently invest in sports and sports events. They thus follow the “lure of the politics of attraction.” While the term “emerging states” may be misleading (it is commonly used for transitional or new states, or states no longer classified as “failed”), Grix and Lee show that aspiring state powers and international power players seek to expand (or consolidate) their international status. This includes countries like South Africa (host of the World Cup 2010), which is still only on the road to fully reestablishing itself in the international arena as strong, significant, powerful nation. Sports, and especially sports mega events showcasing one’s nation, are hereby



consciously employed as a means of public diplomacy (Grix and Lee 2013: 4). Public diplomacy differs from the direct, often secretive bargaining between government representatives in international relations. Public diplomacy takes the indirect path, or detour, by appealing to global public opinion and recognition: a nation's standing or "brand" based on its globally *perceived* power, identity, character, and capacities. In the current age of post-industrial globalization and partially globalized age, global publics have become an increasingly important factor in international affairs. Consequently, states and international institutions actively pursue, invoke, and play in this arena (Keohane 2001). Sports as well as sports events draw public attention to countries. They are thus important elements shaping the global perception of a state or nation – arguably more so than ever before, as broadcasts and sports in general reach audiences in the billions (Markovits and Rensmann 2010).

In fact, the aspiring power Brazil has made public sports diplomacy, which includes hosting the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, openly part of a soft power strategy seeking to increase the countries' national standing and leverage (Soares e Castro 2013). Following the history of autocratic regimes with their special eagerness to invest in sports for political purposes, the resurgent global powers Russia and China have been outspending other nations, including western ones, with billions spent in the government-subsidized sports industry and increasing international competitiveness. They have also massively invested in mega events like the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics respectively. But even small nations like Singapore have profoundly increased government spending on sports in recent years (with some sporting successes) to enhance its standing and soft power by facilitating a positive and successful brand image, identity, and projected power.

However, even though sports investments by states in the pursuit of soft power have increased over time, and particularly in the age of global interdependence, the underlying political issues and dynamics are complex. These investments are themselves controversial. Moreover, by no means do they guarantee positive results – neither in terms of a nation's prestige and power, nor *vis-à-vis* domestic conditions of sports, politics, and society. It was overdue for scholarship to recognize the role of sports (and especially sports mega events) in pursuing international prestige and soft power strategies in international relations (IR). By now, the soft power concept is rightly applied to sports politics by policy makers and researchers alike (Grix 2012). The actual empirical and political output of such strategies is considerably less clear. This is even more so the case for measuring and evaluating the effect of such policies and politics of collective self-representation on shared national identity constructs, at home and abroad.

The question of the indirect impact of such politics of sports on identity has hardly ever been explored to date, while the issue of soft power strategy outcomes in IR is addressed in a third group or new wave of research: the proliferating study of sports mega events, such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, and their



expected and actual effects (Cornelissen and Swart 2006; Grix and Lee 2013; Lenskyj 2002; 2008; Markovits and Rensmann 2010: 43-106; Palmer 2013: 144-182).

Of particular interest are the recent aspirations by (re)emerging international powers to host global sports mega events and use them as tool to “communicate their (new) identity” (Grix and Lee 2013: 6), e.g. South Africa, Brazil, Russia, Qatar, and China, and look for political dividend in foreign policy by means of “cultural diplomacy” (Ndlovu 2010). The emergence of scholarly work paying systematic attention to the complex global political impact and contested nature of sports mega events had long been overdue. Until recently the intriguing political force field of sports mega events had been left to historians alone, even though these events have often been overshadowed by – or even been at the heart of – international conflicts and symbolic politics. The most obvious cases are political calls for event boycotts, from the 1936 Nazi Olympics to the 1980 Moscow summer Olympics and Los Angeles 1984 (Abrams 2013).

Initial studies show that the soft power payoffs desired by political elites, the gains in international social and power capital, that big investments in sports mega events are supposed to bring are by no means a sure bet. Especially autocratic regimes, which are the most eager spenders, also run the risk that high exposure might backfire because global attention can also be directed to domestic human rights violations, corruption, and environmental harm. Mega events also offer a space for “glocal” contestation of government policies and national self-representation; they often serve as sites of public contestation – most recently in Brazil 2014. This is especially the case if campaigns on social media, INGOs and local activists coordinate and form transnational protest movements in the prelude to and during global sports mega events (Golebiewski 2013; Lenskyj 2008). For instance, in the case of Qatar – governed by a small but geopolitically ambitious autocratic regime – the question is wide open if the country’s “soft power gamble” by hosting the 2022 World Cup will yield positive output in terms of its image, prestige, identity, as Qatar’s repressive and undemocratic system, poor women’s and human rights record, and disastrous labor standards have come under massive global public scrutiny (Brannagan and Grix 2014). And Russia, which spent 51 billion US\$ on the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, hardly improved its soft power due to the escalating hard power crisis in the Ukraine taking shape in the immediate aftermath of Sochi. The often-envisaged economic and infrastructure benefits of such events are at least as dubious, as the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the 2014 World Cup in Brazil have amply demonstrated (Grix and Lee 2013).

Comparative impact studies of mega events need to move beyond the rationale and expected politico-economic utility of such events towards a more systematic analysis of the outcomes or legacies of these events and their relationship to regime types. For example, it is necessary to systematically explore the actual political outcomes in relation to effects on domestic stability and national identity or pride, as



well as positive influences on global public opinion about a state's identity and capacities, or on the increase of international soft power. Initial general hypotheses have hereby been replaced by more nuanced, qualified hypotheses and tests. The former either claimed that the benefits of hosting mega events tend to always outweigh costs due to a positive effects on prestige, status and soft power; or, quite the reverse, that mega events are economically so costly and always tend to fall short of expectations in improving states' prestige, status and soft power in IR. Winning the bidding may always tend to imply initial gains. Yet the positive effects of hosting games can be negatively influenced by various variables (e.g. organizational failure, domestic/transnational protests, attention to HR violations, economic costs, external factors and political crises).

Moreover, research needs to better understand the potentially transformative impact of transnationalized identities on politics at mega events. In turn, few have studied the effects of mega events for social, cultural, and political identities, values, and political behavior.⁴ Golebiewski argues that with increased intercultural communication, transnational protests at Olympics and other mega events are sprouting, shifting from "merely" local issues. That official Olympic goals transcend national boundaries cultures makes the Olympics particularly attractive for universal, global issues addressed by like-minded transnational non-state actors, who themselves are shaped by globalized identities (Golebiewski 2013). Completely unexplored, however, is the impact of such transnational political activity at mega events on engendering or reinforcing transnational or glocalised identities and cosmopolitan values.

It is important, however, for a broadened critical research agenda on global sports and politics to look not just beyond centralized global institutions and state's use of sports for soft power pursuits, but also expand research beyond those highly commercialized mega events. The impact of these events may generally be overrated, especially in relation to issues of sociopolitical identities and values. These events may effectively reinforce and mobilize national identities at a specific moment (such as the stunning support for their national team displayed by Americans during the 2014 World Cup). Yet affective ties mobilized and recreated during a major sports event that happens every four years can be expected to have a much smaller long-term impact than ties generated and sustained through the support for teams and clubs playing all year long. It is especially through deep-seated local, I argue, and through increasingly "glocal" ties to a beloved sports team or club that social identity is fostered and reinforced. It is the power of these deep allegiances that can also substantively transform social values and attitudes towards the world, ultimately facilitating more

⁴ One of the few, and most intriguing, research projects on political identity constructs and effects is the work by Sala, Scott, and Spriggs (2007), who examined the role of political identities and allegiances in the politics of Olympic figure skating judging during and after the Cold War within a moderately constructivist theoretical framework.



cosmopolitan values through the love of the sport and one's team, and the desire to see it succeed (Markovits and Rensmann 2010).

FROM SOFT POWER POLITICS TO GLOCAL IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL VALUE CHANGE: LOCATING POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN TRANS- NATIONAL SPORTS CULTURES

As important as global sports events that create short-time global attention every four years may be, their ultimate political impact may be more limited than other dimensions of sports culture. An alternative view on the global political significance of sports decenters the analytical perspective and the subject of study. In addition to systematically and critically examining the political conflicts playing out at the level of global institutions, global sports policy, and mega events, such research is grounded in an analysis of the everyday culture of local sports. The (contested) identities sports generate are primarily shaped by such everyday (political) culture in a broad sense. Critical research thus aims at understanding the political impact – partly subtle and indirect, partly openly conflictual – of sociological processes of “glocalization” in sports cultures (Roberston 1992; Giulianotti and Robertson 2004; 2009; Markovits and Rensmann 2010). Instead of solely addressing the more conventional framework of “high politics” and soft power in IR, the focus is on the transformative potential of sports cultures “from below.” The spotlight should also be on sociopolitical arenas beyond commercialized sports mega events, which have attracted most scholarly attention in contemporary research. Such new focus may disclose many still unexplored problems of sports cultures, politics, and sports-related conflicts shaping society. Such research requires a closer look at issues of local identity constructs and conflicts; affective ties generated through sports and their meaning for exclusive and cosmopolitan norms; as well as understanding contestatory politics in old and new, local and global, (trans)national sports cultures that are exposed to new forms of intersecting spatiality. In so doing, research needs to employ a broader conception of politics and political culture beyond institutionalist limitations. Professional and amateur sports cultures should be seen as a social context and forms of social practice that can have a profound impact on citizenship conceptions, collective or cultural self-understandings, and identity constructs. These can ultimately also translate into political attitudes and may be involved in the transformation of (trans)national political cultures in which politics operate.

Inspired by sociological theorizing, I therefore argue that a renewed critical research agenda needs to further broaden the perspective. It can do so by expanding the aforementioned scholarly directions in the study of global politics and sports in three interlinked areas: (i) turning to the long neglected issue of the sociocultural transformation of local identities anchored in or related to sports, and the seemingly



indirect, yet potentially long-term and significant effects of these highly affective ties on social and political value change; (ii) re-investigating the political impact of reconfigured spatiality and “glocalized” social identifications with clubs and franchises in this process, from small teams to major players; (iii) better understanding how contestatory politics and profound public struggles take shape over key questions of identities and values in these decentralized sports arenas. They constitute both local and glocal spaces – and (re)generate both local and glocal collective ties.

Especially soccer, the most global of games with multi-faceted local roots, can serve as an enormously rich focal point for research in these areas. In particular, this is the case for research on the relationship between *glocalization*, on the one hand, and identity transformations and social or political value change, on the other hand. Soccer, as a participant sport as well as a professionally organized sport catering to local and global spectators, is also arguably one of the most globalized and “glocalized” social phenomena in general (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009; Markovits and Rensmann 2010). “Glocalization” hereby refers to the complex, mutual penetration of global and local dimensions, spheres, and spaces. With Roland Robertson (1992) it can be argued that through glocal hybridization processes of differences neither the global nor the local stay the same, even though local responses to global trends may vary and different local identities may be distinctly affected by globalization. The local can hereby not only make it to the global stage but also transform global developments (Markovits and Rensmann 2010: 27).

First, research needs to better understand how strong attachments and allegiances to local clubs as a source of collective identity may lead to and robustly anchor cosmopolitan value that is difficult to achieve by mere persuasion. I am especially concerned with the role sports play in changing political and cultural norms, identities, and allegiances in a socioculturally changing world – in how far sports and sport cultures as vanguards of globalization and glocalization may actually be a relevant factor in social value change and, more specifically, advancing cosmopolitan norms (Markovits and Rensmann 2010).

Indeed, today citizens are generally likely to accept diversity and entirely merit-based egalitarian norms in professional sports. In this sense, sports are a medium, maybe the most popular medium, of cultural inclusion, i.e. the acceptance of diversity and cultural cosmopolitanism, however limited and merit-based this recognition may initially be. Local fans have a strong emotional attachment to their team which is a source of personal and collective identification – mostly local – that usually lasts a life time. And they want to see their teams win but in the age of glocalization and sports migration they are not able to do so if they only count on ethnic co-national or your local boys. This is why we have hypothesized earlier that especially professional team sports open a window to a culturally pluralized world in which ethnic, religious or cultural background does not matter. We predict this effect even in formerly ethnically exclusive, closed societies (Markovits and Rensmann 2010).



Following previous work with Andrei S. Markovits, I therefore suggest that particularly deep emotional ties and constitutive local identity constructs are generated through sports allegiances (Lechner 2007). And I suggest that because of these deep ties meaningful and lasting social value change can take shape (Markovits and Rensmann 2010). It can do so in the wake of changing sports cultures and professional sports environments that are marked by professional competitiveness and global sports migration. Football fandom is entrenched in historical and cultural identity narratives and entails rooting for a team for which one has declared lifelong allegiance. It is through this deep affection and social identity that one cares deeply about one's club's sporting success, and one implicitly learns to support any player that can help achieve that. Inclusiveness and cosmopolitan value change are thus potential by-products of sports-generated identities and allegiances facing a changing sociocultural and sporting environment. Yet such cosmopolitan inclusion through sports may in turn be an important variable in potentially changing social attitudes vis-à-vis diversity and egalitarian human rights in society at large. To substantiate and test this set of hypotheses, new longitudinal data and experimental research designs would be needed.

Second, in order to understand these processes of presumed cosmopolitan value change *through* deep collective identity ties, it is important to also turn to questions of reconfigured spatiality in the context of glocalization. If we investigate the process of cosmopolitanization of sports cultures, it is relevant to assess the role that such reconfigured spatiality or spatial dimensions of glocalizing processes (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004) may have in "opening up" identities and in changing social values. The transnational multiplication of followership may play a more than marginal role in making identities more inclusive without reducing the emotional energy invested in them. Today followers, and even die-hard supporters of a particular (mostly still local) club or franchise, today tend to support and follow "second" or "third" teams and/or are much more informed and interested in developments and players active abroad. Citizens still tend to care most about their local team but also increasingly love and admire and root for global teams in the sport they care for, such as Manchester United or the LA Lakers, and they follow global events such as the World Cup. At times these global teams and events just add an extra level to local ties. But they are not limited to an extra level. At any rate, the competitions in which these clubs participate create transnational publics and allegiances. This is nowhere more apparent than in the European Champions League, the only truly European public sphere that draws attention across the continent.

New social media have further expanded, accelerated and deepened "glocalized" social identifications with clubs and franchises, which can now be followed in the most distant localities. The impact of the reconfiguration of spatial relations and transnational sports cultures is not limited to so-called global teams like Manchester United or FC Barcelona, with their global icons on the pitch. It arguably



also significantly affects modest clubs and lesser known leagues, even second and third divisions. The process of glocalization has an impact, I argue, on small teams as well as major players, though this impact may vary significantly with the different scope and global outreach of clubs. However, new global layers and the relevance of digital spaces, media and links in the age of the second globalization does not render the centrality of locality – of local spaces, teams and allegiances – secondary or irrelevant. Quite the reverse. The game and even the transformative potential of social identity linked to this glocalized sport, still derive much of their vitality from passions rooted in a sense of place and of community. If anything, the significance of the local resurges, and with it the emphasis on attachments to an allegedly “authentic” local space in cultural perceptions of sports and identities.

Third, while local norms, identities and spaces are inevitably permeated by translocal, post-local, virtual, and transnational dimensions, the normative and sociocultural cosmopolitanization of local identities is no automatic process but is often contested. Indeed, I suggest that sports cultures and sports stadiums are key arenas of public contestation, or contestatory politics, over sociocultural norms and glocalization. Yet these particular struggles, while temporarily attracting public attention, are so far hardly examined in scholarly research. The varying nature, origins, and specific dynamics of opposition and contestation, which can take different (socially restrictive or progressive) directions, have yet to be adequately studied. These can range from protests against over-commercialization as a threat to local fan culture and opposition to social domination and exclusion (such as calls for more socially inclusive access to stadiums and ticket prices) to regressive forms of localism. These may be limited to favoring the “home boys” but also include extreme forms of ethnic exclusivist fantasies and racism articulated by right-wing extremists in the stands. The suggested cosmopolitanization of sports cultures and local identities arguably often faces fierce, often public and political opposition in stadiums and beyond. The presumed cosmopolitan value change – the increase of inclusiveness, universalistic norms, and recognition of diversity – encounters resilient culture residues and resurgent constructions of traditional, anti-modern, exclusive identities. Sports arenas do not just express society at large. They are also actively used by political agents as highly publicized spaces of contestation. This is why local case studies and agency-centered research are needed that explore the supply-side of sports-related political contestation and the actual interactions and dynamics involved (Rensmann 2014b).

The new cleavage between inclusive cosmopolitan values, according to which everybody matters or *can* matter equally independently of their cultural background, and exclusive nationalism or regressive localism (Kaldor 1997) mobilized by anti-cosmopolitan groups and people as well as those whom Kwame Anthony Appiah calls “counter-cosmopolitans,” certainly does not stop at the entrance gates to sports arenas (Appiah 2007: 137ff). The public arena that sports generates, with its vanguard role in facilitating cosmopolitan diversity and transnational ties, also constitutes a



space for counter-cosmopolitan discontent and contestation precisely because of its cosmopolitan power and its locus of cultural and political value change.

It is in fact hardly surprising that such highly relevant spaces of popular culture and identity, such as sports arenas, are also among the critical cultural battlefields in which this cleavage is salient and fought over. There are several variations of this culturally protectionist backlash against the globalization of sports. Its ugliest expression is resilient – and in certain places resurgent – racism and random violence against “others”. Some hooligan and extreme right groups deliberately target the sports arena to act out their racist prejudices, to commit violent acts, and to agitate for the politics of exclusion (thus against cultural cosmopolitanism). Even superstars like the Cameroon forward Samuel Eto’o have been regularly exposed to racist slander in Spanish stadiums, and fascist ultras in Italy hardly refrain from openly racist and antisemitic chants (Markovits and Rensmann 2010: 207-270).

Sports arenas and sports cultures are indeed key locations of contestatory politics in increasingly glocalised spaces. In sports venues the world over, the struggle over social norms, citizenship, cultural identity and social “belonging”, as well as spatial boundaries or the glocalised diffusion thereof, is in full force and on public display. Yet we still know too little about these contestations, their conditions, agents, and dynamics. At any rate, analyses of sports arena and sports cultures, which serve as relevant spaces of sociocultural and political contestation or contestatory politics over social norms and identities, are also likely to show the limitations of sports as a glocalised, “transnational” cosmopolitan force. The claim about the power of sports as a vehicle for cosmopolitan value change may require significant qualification in specific cases. Sociocultural cosmopolitanism continues to meet exclusivist identities and reactions – also and often drastically in the world of sports, which carries so much weight in the construction of and emotional ties to social identity constructs. Ethnic or racial discrimination continue to matter and are still mobilized by populist and radical right groups that use sports as a platform. Moreover, while bearing enormous potential to ‘anchor’ more inclusive norms, the massive mobilization of collective identities, and the idealization of a constructed past identity or legacy, remains always in danger of turning against the “other.” Such exclusive mobilization of identities often resonates among groups in football arenas today. The rapid changes of the sports world over the last decades have been met with opposition against sports’ commercialization, in Europe often identified with “Americanization,” and against sports’ cosmopolitanization, personified in immigrant players who for some are allegedly not “rooted” in the local or national environment and therefore not “identified” with one’s team (Markovits and Rensmann 2010).

One should abstain from suggesting all too easily straightforward causal mechanisms and generalizations, however. How these sociocultural and political conflicts play out is likely depend on a variety of conditions and, as indicated, on particular agency. Context matters. The level of inclusiveness and cosmopolitan



identity within the space of hegemonic sports cultures appears still considerably context-dependent. In terms of incidents and the level of acceptance of diversity, there seem to be still significant differences around the world, and within national contexts in Europe (Markovits and Rensmann 2010). The conflict over social identities and values plays out distinctly in interaction with institutionalized responses, different hegemonic political cultures, and different levels of the cosmopolitanization of national politics and society with which sports cultures interact (Rensmann 2014b). Boundaries vis-à-vis hate speech are drawn differently in different countries, leagues, regions, and stadiums. But these boundaries are also in flux and often face contestations from various groups, spectators, and institutional agents. Yet still too little is known about these dynamics. Quantitative as well as qualitative research is still sparse, including interviews with club officials, fan groups and ultras, and questionnaires about attitudes to diversity, for instance, distributed among average spectators. There is also a need for more case studies to understand the origins of continuities and changes in spontaneous or organized fan behavior, and how social or club identities are asserted or transformed. At any rate, the fight over sports' identity, team identity, and society's identity is ongoing and at play in the stadiums of the world.

For instance, the Timber Army, Portland's ultras, were a vanguard of gay rights supporters by featuring the entire stand in LGBT, gay pride rainbow colors, supplemented by a banner stating "pride, not prejudice" – something still unthinkable in many European soccer stadiums. The Timber Army hereby constructs and reinforces a decidedly progressive political identity "from below". The Spanish club Rayo Vallecano features rainbow colors on its new jersey for the 2015/2016 season. How this decision "from above" will play out with the fans remains to be seen. The Italian club Hellas Verona learned the hard way to depart from an extremely racially exclusivist policy. In the 1990s, the club leadership refused to hire international, non-EU nationals and black players due to "respect" for its right-wing extremist hard core ultra fan groups. Utterly unsuccessful when only relying on local home boys on the pitch, the club declined and ultimately got relegated to the fourth division. Only then did the club abandon its exclusivist policy and is now back in Serie A (Markovits and Rensmann 2010). Conflicts over a club's social identity, or identity struggles between clubs, can still also follow more traditional left-right divides. Powerful club supporters from different political camps can reinforce such political alignments. Before the recent Greek referendum on accepting the conditions imposed by the EU, the oligarchs behind the Greek football clubs articulated the club position: Panathinaikos (pharmaceuticals) supported a "no" to EU proposals, Olympiakos (shipping industry) a cautious "yes."

Finally, identity conflicts in the stadium may also take important symbolic social functions. Think of Glasgow and the "Old firm." The inner-city rivalry between Catholic Celtic and Protestant Rangers may be fierce. And it certainly still has political



relevance: most Rangers' supporters rejected Scotland's independence, whereas Celtic supporters tended to embrace the referendum on independence from the UK (Ruthven 2014). Yet, despite many verbal assaults in the stadiums and occasional violence between fan groups, the symbolic rivalry on the pitch may well have had an overall pacifying effects on a deep-seated religious and cultural conflict. In other places, without the ritualizing power of a well established sports competition, such conflicts may have spun out of control (in Northern Ireland they did, for a start). Increasingly, the bridging function of both participant sports and sports fandom has been recognized by policy makers and researchers examining strategies of conflict resolution in militarized conflict areas and among groups with hardened, exclusive collective identities (Montague 2008; Robertson 2012).

POLITICS AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES AT PLAY: THE POWER OF SPORTS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL DOMINATION AND GLOBALIZATION FROM BELOW

The systematic and cross-disciplinary study of global sports and politics is still in its early, experimental stage. In this sense, Theodor W. Adorno's lament about the lack of systematic studies on sports and its multi-faceted ambiguities is still relevant today:

[O]ne must surely also study the role of sport, which has been insufficiently investigated by critical social psychology. Sport is ambiguous. On the one hand, it can have an anti-barbaric and anti-sadistic effect by means of *fair play*, a spirit of chivalry, and consideration for the weak. On the other hand, in many of its varieties and practices it can promote aggression, brutality, and sadism, above all in people who do not expose themselves to the exertion and discipline required by sports but instead merely watch: that is, those who regularly shout from the sidelines. Such an ambiguity should be analyzed systematically (Adorno 1967: 196-7).

However, it is time to fully recognize the meaning of sports and sports cultures in shaping politics and international relations, and many of the world's citizens and their socio-political identities. The overdue nascent research on global politics and sports should thereby not limit itself to the critical analysis of institutions of sports governance, global sports policies, the role of sports as part of states' soft power strategies, or the politics of sports mega events. The critique of institutional failures, economic interests, power strategies, and institutionalized social domination involving professional sports is an important task and still developing. Yet an equally relevant, alternative area of research seeks to understand the complex, "glocal" cultural significance of sports for politics, identities, and social values. Such research employs a more decentered perspective on "globalization from below". It turns to indirectly politically relevant, yet socioculturally strong local and glocal social ties that are



reproduced through hegemonic sports cultures, teams, and clubs (and their agents on the sports fields and in the stands).

A corresponding multi-level research agenda, as outlined here in its first general contours, also seeks to grasp the new political spatiality of sports' glocalization. Focusing on cultural dimensions of politics and their long-term transformations, such research looks at sports cultures and their transnational and local spaces. They can be viewed as arenas of public struggles over identity, diversity, and social values on multiple levels. By critically employing case studies, survey data, and qualitative analysis, such research seeks to find out how values, conflicts, and identities specifically play out in interaction with sports cultures. In so doing, the envisioned research agenda understands sports as profoundly embedded in socioeconomic, cultural, and political forms of rule and domination – but does not conceive sports as limited to such functions. A critical framework looks for the “other side” of sports as well – the emancipatory sociopolitical effects of sports cultures. It seeks to disclose sports' contested 'subversive' potential: the often hidden power of sports to challenge social domination, resolving or reducing conflicts, enabling public diplomacy and “glocal” conflict resolution, advancing more inclusive cosmopolitan value change and human rights norms, and promoting alternative forms of globalization from below that empower those who are politically or socially marginalized.

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