Sport and the political economy:
Considerations for enhancing the human condition.

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Purpose

- Highlight how sport, particularly at the elite level, has been commodified by global market forces,
- Suggest ways in which the proposed pathologies of commodification can be addressed through education programmes,
- Critically suggest that Olympism education, located in school physical education programmes, has an important role in affecting the political economy of sport via the educational values inherent in sport and in so doing enhance the human condition.
Transformation of sport

Sport is under-going dramatic transformation from “diversion to consumption, to spectacle to beyond, where sports events and teams have become vehicles to promote strategies of growth, investment, capital accumulation, … national political success and sites for the solidification and regeneration of national or regional identity.”

(Nauright, 2005)
Transformation of sport

- Centred at elite level
- Substantial benefits, particularly for athletes and spectators (quality of events, stadia, media coverage)
- Gives rise to “moral grounds of concern”

Pathologies of Sport

Globalisation

Neo-liberal market

Commodification of sport
Motivational Pathology:
The commodification of sport is pathological when it erodes the attitudes of those who participate so that they no longer pursue sport as a goal in itself.

Instrumentalist Pathology:
The commodification of sport is pathological when it leads others to regard athletes and sport itself as mere means and not an ends-in-themselves.

Distributive Pathology:
The commodification of sport is pathological when it gives rise to forms of distributive injustice.

Pragmatic Pathology:
The commodification of sport is pathological when it undermines the long-term profitability of any sporting activity.

Pathologies of sport
“... involve the violation of what we might take to be fundamental moral values that emerge from or through sporting activity be it at the elite or grassroots level.”

Pathologies of Sport (Walsh & Giulianotti, 2007)
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Sport as valued practice

“Sport in the context of the school […] is or should be a form of moral education.” (Arnold, 1997)

Characterised by

- rules & regulations,
- specific traditions & goals,
- physical skill,
- competition & rivalry,
- social interaction,
- physical exertion.

Moral and ethical sense →

- duty, obligation, fairness, courage, honesty and justice

Arnold (1997)

Focus on functional aspects of sport

“The elevation of sport ‘as a transcendent form of life […] is ridiculous.’” (Miller, 2009)

- Capitalism recognised the importance of physical education and body control while it neglected its moral and ethical value
- Education of docile bodies for control, discipline and regulation


Instrumentalist Pathology

Sport influenced by Western Capitalism

9th May, 2016 Athens

Sport and the political economy, Culpan & Meier
Suggested Solutions (Walsh & Giulianotti, 2007)

Mixed market economy

- **Regulation** of free enterprises by the **State** and global sport organisations
- ‘Blocking’ detrimental practices, preventing and restricting excessive and corrupting behaviours
- **Reinvestment into ‘grassroots sport’** via the State and global sporting bodies
- **Moral exhortation through education** about the underlying virtues, ideals and behaviour inherent in sport
- Expectation of the **individual**/ collective to **resist immoral behaviours** and take individual subsequent social action

Diminishing the “influence of money in sport, and reawakening in its practitioners a **love for goals other than money.**”
Education, physical and sport education in the school context

Value of sport for education

- “Physical education and sport can help constitute a meaningful pattern of life in which individuals can both find and extend themselves and provide the means by which individuals become persons.” (Fraleigh, cited in Arnold, 1997)

- Individuals transform themselves for the better
  - Self-regulation, self-actualisation, individual responsibility, inducing economic growth and prosperity
  (Foucault’s technology of the self, 1988)

Physical education and sport in schools → key role in moderating the rampant commodification of the sportive process
Olympism and Olympism Education

- Different understandings/ definitions of Olympism
- Working conceptualisation of Olympism, Olympic Charter:

  “Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.” (IOC, 2014)

Gap between ideal and reality → Criticism
Olympism and Olympism Education

- Separation of the philosophy of Olympism from the IOC and the Olympic Games
- Placing of the learner and Olympism at the core of learning
- Acknowledgement of the importance of the respective cultural context

Olympism Education, New Zealand Centre for Olympic Studies (NZCOS):

“a culturally relevant experiential process of learning an integrated set of life principles through the practice of sport” (Culpan & Moon, 2009)
Olympism and Olympism Education

- Olympism Education can:
  - be aligned with national physical education curricula,
  - have active engagement in sport and physical activity,
  - have less focus on the IOC and Olympic Games, create more focus on a contextual understanding of Olympism,
  - help to develop a criticality around Olympism,
  - help to regulate the rampant commodification of sport,
  - address underlying virtues, ideals and behavior inherent in sport,
  - highlight the expectation of the individual/collective to behave morally.

Need for a significant contemporary re-orientation for Olympic education to morph to Olympism education

➢ become a necessary critically educative tool in addressing particular disagreeable consequences associated with the political economy of sport.
Final Comment

Olympism Education

• Based on – and incorporates – criticism of IOC’s Olympic Education
• Bifocal:
  • Personal level: confronting of social injustices and inequalities
  • Structural level: assisting in the regulation of the political economy of sport

➢ preservation of educative, social and moral ethos of sport

• No “one size fits all” → Acknowledgment of the importance of diverse contextualisation
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Thank you for your attention!
References


