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Editorial

Jonathan Grix, Daniel Bloyce, Kirstin Hallman and Popi Sotiriadou

There are certain times when Journals take stock of where they are, where they have come from and how they hope to develop. Such thought pieces may fall on an anniversary, the turn of the millennium or the introduction of a new Editorial Team. This Editorial Brief is slightly different, in so far as it marks a rejuvenation of our Editorial Board. However, it is also a response to the unprecedented times we are living through and offers some reflections on how we, as social science scholars, are reacting to, and making sense of, the seismic changes in society that are impacting all facets of sport.

First, we'd like to thank all those who have served on our Editorial Board in recent years. We have been lucky to be able to draw on the collective wisdom of our Board as *IJSPP* has grown and developed (the journal has around 170,000 downloads and views per annum). It is common practice to revamp the Editorial Board from time to time and we have attempted to re-shape our Board to be more representative in terms of both the geographical areas and expertise covered, but also to be more diverse. A stock-take of our journal is also necessary in tumultuous times and we offer some reflections on what this means for the study of sport policy and politics in a changing global environment.

The wider political backdrop to this critical juncture is the re-shaping of the so-called liberal world order, underpinned as it is by Western norms and values and upheld by global institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation, United Nations and the North Atlantic Trade Agreement. The restructuring of this institutional architecture manifests itself in the following in many ways: The growing strength of the 'Global South' and the dissemination, manipulation and distorting of ideas and ideology through digital data, social media and new technology. Alongside these developments, the world has witnessed the rapid rise of populist politics across a wide geo-political area. The most recent rise of populist politics can be linked to the 'right' or 'radical right' and can combine populism with nativism and authoritarianism.

This backdrop matters for international sport policy and politics more broadly, as all policy is made within changing political priorities and environments. The following highlights some of the recent trends in articles published in *IJSPP* and some of the areas articles of the future may focus on.

The Politics of Sports Mega-Events

The use of sport for political purposes is not new, but there are a number of recent and current examples where this is becoming more obvious. The relatively new buzzword ‘sportswashing’ simply signifies a very old practice of attempting to burnish tarnished reputations through hosting sports events, sponsoring or buying up sports teams and events and even polishing a nation’s image. Specific examples include the purchasing of top-flight football teams and the hosting of break-away tournaments. Yet, there remains a distinct lack of *criticality* in much of what is written about the obvious misuse of sport and sporting events by states that have a lot to ‘wash’. The reasons behind this are usually linked to notions of ‘neutrality’ among researchers or money: academics in many countries are reminded often not to ‘upset’ potential funders, given that Universities are increasingly cultivating close working relationships with overseas institutions, not all of which stem from states with impeccable human rights.

Sport and the Environment

One of the most pressing subject areas that is not receiving much attention is the environment and sport’s impact on it. The devastation of the climate is clearly one of *the* most important issues globally, as the recent destructive floods in Pakistan and devastating droughts in East Africa attest. Climate change is likely to greatly impact sport policy and politics in the future, given that much sport is played outside, under the elements. Take, for example, the Winter Olympics, which looks increasingly set to be held in areas that do not have enough natural snow and where hosts need to ‘produce’ artificial snow, ironically, at the expense of the environment. Yet, there is very little research on this broader area outside of sport management studies, although some work around the environmental dimension of sustainability – a key future policy topic – is developing. However, sustainability studies are not solely about the environment, as they also embrace an economic and a social dimension too.

Sport Spaces and Places

Sport participation requires the use of spaces and places. On the one hand, a place is a geographic locale with coordinates. On the other hand, a sport place is more than the geographic locale as it is socially constructed and emotions occur when playing sport. Thus, through practising sports, places and spaces, meaning is created among sport participants and the communities in which they practice, thereby allowing a sense of place to be developed. Sport participants can make use of built

venues such as a sports hall, a sports field, or a swimming pool. However, not all sports require the use of such a built 'sportscape'. Sport participants also use spaces within their urban and rural environment, including landscapes (e.g., streets and parks for running, the mountains for hiking, or parks for all sorts of fitness and health sports). Thus, the lived space of a city and municipality becomes a sport space. This clearly has policy implications for urban and rural development when new districts are planned or old districts are revitalised and restructured.

Sport and Technology

The acceleration of technologies in order to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic has precipitated the transformation of sport innovation, digitisation and technologies. International competition for the most advanced ideas is intensifying and creates a contested and diverging landscape of innovation. Countries strategise and position themselves in ways that would allow them to capture potential benefits from technologies, and innovate on ways they can deploy commercial, public and high-performance outcomes.

The role of big data or metadata in sports has the potential to capture and distribute the latest and most relevant information. In addition to sport data, a technologically advanced ecosystem can improve training and performance, as well as participation, sport fitness and the recreation industry, fan or volunteer engagement, education, event experiences and coaching. These shifts in the narrative of the sport world require sport leadership and vision. Importantly these shifts require a frame of reference and a policy context to ensure safety and the ethical design, delivery, implementation and uses of technological advancements in sport, athletes, and participants.

Sport and Security

There have been numerous accounts of major global security issues and their impact on sport, including the 2009 terrorist attack on the Sri Lanka cricket team in Pakistan and the Boston Marathon attack in 2013. The 'securitisation' of sports studies can be traced back to the tragic events of the Munich Olympics in 1972. Much has been written, especially post 9/11, about the impact of such terrorism on hosting global sporting events. Interest grew again following the London 2012 which took the securitisation of sport to new levels. One clear and unintentional legacy from London 2012 (dubbed 'lockdown London') is that of a 'security' Olympics. However, comparatively little has been written about the policy related to sport and security. The impact of the required security measures to host such events is

considerable –in terms of physical, financial and human resources – and this will add more to the debate about the resources needed to ensure sports events are secure and could lead to the situation whereby only more wealthy states can afford to host.

Sport for Development

Sport for development has, arguably, been one of the most rapidly growing areas of research in the wider sport politics and policy area. This is amply reflected in the increasing number of papers published, not just in the IJSPP, but in numerous other journals over the last decade or so. There is a wide range of academic disciplines active in this field, including sports management, sociology of sport and sport pedagogy. As with many fields, interaction and cross-fertilisation is needed between academics working in their own disciplines to get at the more complex and nuanced themes of sport for development. For example, more studies are needed that examine the *political* fault lines that lead to the conflict that sport is attempting to resolve. This is where students of country-specific policy and politics can make a contribution. While few would disagree with the positive aspect of sports per se, studies are still needed on the long-term efficacy of sport development programmes.

Sport and Athlete Welfare

Another area that has seen substantial growth in research and publications is that of athlete welfare. International headlines around the US Gymnastics sexual exploitation case prompted much debate in the wider media, and also within academia. Even before this, numerous publications were produced regarding the potential danger of sexual exploitation, particularly in elite sport academies. This is an especially important area for increased focus for sport policy researchers. In addition, the exploitation of athletes generally – in terms of expectations within high-performance squads, and related accusations of bullying, or even state-sponsored doping programmes, requires further research. Beyond this, much more needs to be done for elite athletes in terms of their post-athletic careers. The IOC has recently introduced some help for Olympians to navigate the time after competing; yet, the vast majority of elite-level athletes are not Olympians and therefore do not have a support mechanism to help them prepare for life after sport.

Sport, Equality and Diversity

There has been considerable focus, from the world's media and also governing bodies of sport, on issues around sexuality and sport – and policies related to 'trans'

athletes, and their integration, or not, into ‘mainstream’ sport over the last few years. The rise in research in this area has been noticeable at IJSPP. Several governing bodies who have made significant attempts to develop inclusion policies regarding lesbian, gay and bi-sexual athletes have, more recently, come under the spotlight for initially allowing trans athletes to compete, in particular, in women’s sporting events, but even more recently for seemingly introducing policies that backtrack on such inclusion. The policy of allowing trans athletes to compete in women’s sports has set alight social media and animated those who see this as a retrograde step for equality in sport. This, combined with the growing policy focus on the particular case of Caster Semanya, offers further opportunities for policy-based research.

The above are just some of the key themes likely to be prominent in sport in the coming years. IJSPP now offers a number of routes for researchers to contribute to such debates: the standard ‘Research’ article remains, but this is alongside the ‘Critical Commentary’, a shorter article putting forward a particular take on a topical theme; a ‘Critical Literature Review’, which sets out the key works on a particular topic and critiques it, and the growing number of ‘Country Profiles’ that offer a starting point for understanding the development of sport policy and politics in specific countries.