

## INFLUENCING SOCIETY THROUGH SPORT

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### ABSTRACT

*Sport can be broadly defined as competitive, recreational, leisure, and physical activity. The complexity of sport is with regard to managing diverse forms of sport participation engaged by diverse members of a society. Society is a web of social relations which is always changing. A society is a group of people who are involved with each other (relationships, interaction, common interests) or share a common social territory (society's boundaries may not be geopolitical borders), typically subject to a common political environment and similar cultural expectations (language, beliefs, values, way of life). Culture is a defining element of a society. Increase in participation in sport; of the players, organisers and spectators; has added benefits for society in general. These may range from individual fitness to addressing societal problems. Sport is a universal language and a tool to achieve broader objectives of education, social inclusion, or societal development. This paper makes an attempt to give a broad view of sport and society; and examines the impact of sport on society including pandemic conditions; based on empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions of existing research; to collate the outcomes for easier understanding and for future exploration.*

**Key Words:** Sport, Society, Influence and Events

**INTRODUCTION:** Sport comprising of players, event organisers, sport industry, media and spectators; involves a large strata of society. With such large numbers coming together voluntarily, it provides a great opportunity to sensitise the society about a chosen aspect. Besides the benefits of participation, entertainment, and individual fitness, there is scope to address societal issues through spreading awareness during sports events. However, with restrictions imposed on gatherings and protocol of maintaining distance during pandemic conditions, there were huge disruptions in the organized sports activities. An attempt has been made in this paper to give a broad overview of sport, society and sport sociology; and examine impact of sport on society.

## SPORT

Sport is a “physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, is aimed at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competitions ...” “Sport aims to use, maintain or improve physical capability and provide enjoyment, and, in some cases, entertainment to spectators ...” (Council of Europe, 2012). “Sport is a universal language, a cost-effective tool to achieve broader objectives such as education” (Ascione, et al., 2018), “social inclusion” (Kelly, 2011), or “community development” (Schulenkorf, 2012). The precise definition of sport and other leisure activities varies between sources. Sport can be amateur, professional or semi- professional.

**Sport and Mass media** – From business point of view, mass media is an important factor for generating interest amongst spectators and sponsors. Mass media and elite sports form a marriage of convenience. With cable, satellite and microwave delivery systems availability, broadcasters demand payment for access to sports channels or, for access to pay per view live broadcasts. “Cyberspace provides intimate relationship between the mass media and professional sports to be consummated ...” (Thomson & Ameche, 2020). Sport was correctly perceived as ideal for capturing audiences for advertisement. State media also recognises sports events as opportunities to reaffirm national culture and to boost patriotism.

**Sport and Religion** – “Sport developed from religious ceremonies, which served to promote social and moral solidarity of the community ...” (Giddens, 1971). In the pre-modern societies sports and religious festivals were interconnected. Modern sports have become independent of the religion. However, religion does hold some importance in sports, which can be seen in the pre-match rituals like prayers.

## Society

“No concept is more pervasive in modern social science than society and no concept is used more automatically and unreflectively than society (used interchangeably for community) ...” (Wallerstein, 1974). “Society exists among those who have some degree of likeness in mind and in body ...” (Giddens & Sutton, 2017). “Society is a web of social relations which is always changing ...” (MacIver, 1937). Adam Smith taught that a society may subsist among different men from a sense of its utility without any mutual love or affection. Society was created by humans, but it turns back and shapes humans every day ... (Berger, 1967). “Our societies determine our choices and teach us what to believe, how to behave and the customs to follow”

(Webster dictionary). A society is a group of people who are involved with each other (relationships, interaction, common interests) or share a common social territory (society's boundaries may not be geopolitical borders), typically subject to a common political environment and similar cultural expectations (language, beliefs, values, way of life). Culture is a defining element of a society. "Societies build patterns of behaviour (societal norms) by considering some actions or concepts as acceptable or unacceptable. However, societies and their norms undergo gradual and perpetual changes ..." (Giddens & Sutton, 2007). It is difficult to come up with a unified definition of society. Broadly speaking a society can be considered as "a group of people who live together in a particular social system having common beliefs, and cultural ideas ..." (Cambridge dictionary). "Society (a human society) can mean a voluntary association of individuals, or an organised group, working together or meeting periodically having common interests, beliefs or profession." .... "Society may, also, mean a community, a nation or a group of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interests" (Webster dictionary).

### Sports Sociology

**Understanding Sport Sociology** - "Sports sociology is the study of relationship between sport and society; influence of culture and values on sport and vice-versa, and the relationship between sport and media, politics, economics, religion, race, gender, youth, etc. It also looks at the relationship between sports and social inequality and social mobility ..." (Crossman, 2020). Sport is regulated by rules of behaviour, spatial and time constraints, and has governing bodies ..." (McPherson et al., 1989). "Sport is part of the social and cultural framework that contributes to a number of areas that include targeting of social problems and generating economic benefits ..." (Jarvie, 2006).

**Sport and Socialisation** - Socialisation is the way humans adjust to their culture (values, beliefs, and heritage), the process by which they become active members of society. Sport and physical education in schools can be used to transmit values of wider society (Respect, Competitiveness, Team work, Tolerance, Cooperation, Personal effectiveness, Problem solving, Critical thinking, Decision making, Fair play and sportsmanship). Play, games, contests, and sports have crucial and specific roles in the general socialization process. The sense of self develops through childhood socialization as a result of role-playing. As they grow older, children shift from non-competitive games to contests where they encounter stricter rules and regulations. They learn to see themselves as others see them; they develop their sense of identity and self. Early

socialization into sports is the best predictor of lifelong involvement in sports. The effects of sports socialization, however, are not always as per expectations.

**Social Inclusion** - Sport is a form of activity in which varying categories, depending on type of sport and its position within the society, can participate. Sport can be used to directly target a very large number of people with a focus on social inclusion as a vehicle for introducing change. Sport benefits social issues such as addressing crime, education and health.

**Social Discrimination** - Culturally diverse groups and ethnic minority groups have difficulties with regards to integration within communities. In such cases sport can be used as an incentive to encourage youths to participate. Race often interacts with class, gender, and ethnicity to determine the accessibility of certain sport, and perception about the athlete. "Athletic ability of black sportspeople was proven time and again. With their success the theory shifted toward physical ability at the expense of intellect ..." (Miller, 1998).

**Sport and Gender Issues** – The inequality in society's handling of gender and race is found in sports as well. Social inequalities of gender pose barriers to society. Modern sports (with few exceptions) were devised by and for men, with the content, meaning, and significance of the contests reflecting male values, strengths, and interests. Some sports cultures create environments in which behaviours are openly antagonistic toward people of different sexual orientation. Barriers have developed through sports for female participation as a result of male dominance over a prolonged period of time that has resulted in female participation still being behind that of males. Viewership of certain sports also varies by gender. Moreover, "men's sports are covered most often, both in print and on television ..." (Crossman, 2020 & Buzz, 2015). Women have fewer opportunities to access and succeed in sports. "After achieving success a woman's race is downplayed and her sexuality is accentuated ..." (Gwendolyn, 1998). "In certain cultures, especially Muslim, women are denied access to sports all-together ..." (Hasima, 1997). "Women's sports are less covered by news than male sports ..." (Marcula, 2001). Focus of television networks and corporations is on showcasing successful female athletes which are considered as attractive.

## SPORT AND SOCIETY

Sport has significant impact on leisure, entertainment, business, and culture. “Sport is a major source of entertainment for non-participants, drawing large crowds to sports venues, and reaching wider audiences through broadcasting ...” (Brummett, 2009). “To ignore sport is to ignore a significant aspect of any society and its culture ...” (Delaney, 2009). Sport enhances quality of life, improves fitness levels thereby reducing medical costs and in business it improves productivity. Through sport and physical education the society can foster values of respect, competitiveness, team work, tolerance, cooperation, fair play, critical thinking, problem solving, discipline, leadership, and much more. Sport has been increasingly recognized in social policy as a means of steering social change and as a method for responding to diverse social problems. Sport augments communal principles by enhancing physical and mental well-being of individuals and the integration of social classes. Modern day sports have an important part in contemporary culture, in boosting tourism, developing core values and creating a feeling of national pride. Sport can thus be seen as a sign of the quality of our society and our identity within that society.

**Sport and Societal Health** - When influential athletes participate they are watched by the younger generation and a mass audience. The children aspire towards role model athletes in the sports they love. These role models can then aim to help motivate or create schemes which aim to use their sports as a means of improving health and well being of others and addressing prevailing social causes.

**Sport and Emotions** - Emotion has always been a huge part of sports as it can affect both athletes and the spectators. Level of emotion differs based on level of sport and can be extremely intense (in professional sports). There is much more public and self-pressure. Emotion is highly contagious, especially if there are many emotional people in one space. Sports are very good at bringing out the worst qualities in people.

**Sport Bureaucracy** – Sports are controlled by organizations, committees and supervisory boards on local, national and global levels. However, “the regulatory control of sports is largely in the hands of persons and organizations who are not direct participants ...” (Frey & Eitzen, 1991).



**Sport and Spectator Behaviour** – With passage of time, sport has developed and evolved, and so has the audience it now captures. Spectators of sports strongly identify with athletes (representatives of their race, religion, nation state, ethnic group, city, or school). Behaviour of fans varies in response to state of winning and losing.

**Sport during Pandemic** - Pandemic, by its very nature, resulted in restrictions on public gatherings and put a stop to direct and in-person public interaction. This was a world-wide phenomenon. A key consideration during lockdown was to maintain a balance between health and economic risks; especially in the face of uncertainty of the period of lockdown. “The pandemic limited the extent to which athletes and the general population can move around, exercise and socialise with one another” (Mann, 2020). “While the government responses have varied widely, the global response prompted the almost total shutdown of competitive sport at all levels” (Parnell et al, 2020). It is well known that sports impact society through bringing people from varying strata, together (Social-health). However, pandemic resulted in curtailing this very characteristic of sport. No organized sport activities or competitions were held during the period of restrictions. Social and physical distancing measures, lockdowns of businesses, schools and overall social life, which became commonplace to check spread of the virus, also disrupted many regular aspects of life, including sport and physical activity. The inherent benefits of sport were largely not available during pandemic due to restrictions. The sport ecosystem, comprising of producers, broadcasters, fans, businesses, owners and players among others, need to find new and innovative solutions to mitigate the negative effects of pandemic on the world of sport. This includes finding ways to engage with fans in order to ensure safe sports events in the future while maintaining the workforce, creating new operating models and venue strategies.

## CONCLUSION

There is something about the dynamics of the sport that transcends all social, political, and ethnic barriers. Sport brings together individuals and communities that help abolish social differences. Spectators sit together while watching the game. Sport can help encourage dialogue, and help to break down cultural differences, intolerance, and discrimination. A love of the game and passion builds bonds between players and amongst spectators. Heroes are created who can become positive role models for the team and the wider community.

A large number of values can be developed through sport at educational institutions from a young age. Sport contributes to factors which build social cohesion, better physical and mental health; reduces crime and antisocial behaviour; creates better employment opportunities, and ensures a fit and healthy workforce. However, pandemic and the associated restrictions of social

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distancing; resulted in organized sports activities vanishing from the scene. Alternatives to organized sports activities and competitions were explored at individual level. Social media helped spread the message of boosting immunity and use of exercise was amply highlighted. Physical interaction during sports tournaments that went missing due to restrictions was compensated by increased exchanges on social media. As both sport and society are deeply associated in processes of social change, future research should continue to map ways that perceived positive outcomes related to society are realized through sport under different conditions/ situations, pandemic being one of them.

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