

Jürgen Mittag

Protest and Social Movements in Football as an Emerging Field of Research: A Review on Sport Politics Studies between the Local and the Global

Alan Bairner/John Kelly/Jong Wu Lee (eds.): *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Politics*, Milton Park: Routledge, 2017, 546 pp., ISBN 9781138792548 (hardback).

Michael Barry/James Skinner/Terry Engelberg (eds.): *Research Handbook of Employment Relations in Sport*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016, 424 pp., ISBN 9781783470457 (hardback).

Emmanuel Bayle/Patrick Clastres (eds.): *Global Sport Leaders. A Biographical Analysis of International Sport Management*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, XVI + 441 pp., ISBN 9783319767529 (hardcover).

Jon Dart/Stephen Wagg (eds.): *Sport, Protest and Globalisation. Stopping Play*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016 (Global Culture and Sport Series), XII + 373 pp., ISBN 9781137464910 (hardcover).

Jean-Michel De Waele/Suzan Gibril/Ekaterina Gloriovova/Ramón Spaaij (eds.): *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, XV + 710 pp., ISBN 9783319787763 (hardcover).

Borja García/Jinming Zheng (eds.): *Football and Supporter Activism in Europe. Whose Game Is It?*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017 (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe), XIX + 296 pp., ISBN 9783319487335 (hardcover).

Jonathan Grix: *Sport Politics. An Introduction*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 248 pp., ISBN 9780230295469 (hardcover).

Jean Harvey et al. (eds.): *Sport and Social Movements. From the Local to the Global*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013 (Globalising Sport Studies), 208 pp., ISBN 9781780934143 (hardcover).

Michael Lavalette (ed.): *Capitalism and Sport. Politics, Protest, People and Play*, London: Bookmarks Publications, 2013, 288 pp., ISBN 9781909026308 (paperback).

Dino Numerato: *Football Fans, Activism and Social Change*, London: Routledge, 2018, 164 pp., ISBN 9781138911871 (hardback).

New Research Fields: Sport and Protest Politics

Football is a global mass phenomenon that has become a permanent feature in the everyday life of many people. Sport in general and football in particular do not only serve the individual's physical fitness or the team's competition, it also stimulates communication in view of its considerable mobilisation potential. As a field of projection, it even fosters the various political and social processes. While some use sports as a tool for integration, international reconciliation or development cooperation, it is also an economic factor worth billions, which provides opportunities for undesirable developments such as corruption or match fixing.

It is not least against this background that football has increasingly become a stage for political protest in recent years. This protest can originally be related to sport. However, there are also forms of sport-related protest that have little to do with sporting events themselves, but for which sport merely provides the framework. In principle, it can be stated: The interaction of football with other social areas has contributed to processes revealing that sport has become more and more exploited for interests and goals beyond those inherent in sport; on the other hand, there has also been an ever more strong influence on sport itself.

The reasons for the dynamic increase in the importance of football, especially since the 1980s, are as broad as they are diverse: They include the liberalisation and differentiation of the media system with more and more private broadcasters and progressively more comprehensive sports reporting, the use of sport for advertising purposes, the staging and commodification of football, especially at major sporting events, but also the arrival of football and its stars in tabloids and lifestyle magazines. Within the framework of this development, football has developed into a social event that offers identification for an ever more finely functionally differentiated society with increasingly diversified communication spaces. Thus, football represents an ideal occasion, topic and point of reference for communication.

In view of these aspects, football has left the realm of exclusive match reporting and has advanced to become an important topic not only in the feuilletons but also in the academic world. The growing number of academic publications underlines this tendency. Almost on a monthly basis, comprehensive new studies are published, dealing with individual facets of the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of football in the past and present. This review essay takes the fundamental increase in

the importance of football as an opportunity to examine the linkages between football and protest or social movements, which have so far received less attention. While research on sport has traditionally focussed on institutions and associations, social movements as emancipatory agents of the marginalised or as ‘early warning units’ of erroneous developments have attracted much less attention. The iconic protest of John Carlos and Tommie Smith during the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico can clearly be characterised as a telling exception in view of academic awareness.

Ten publications are presented that can roughly be divided into three problem areas or genres: First of all, there are text books and handbooks on the relationship between sport and politics that refer to the significance of protest and social movements in a larger context. Secondly, specialised studies on football and sports-related protest can be found, dealing with individual forms of protest as well as with specific stakeholders. Football supporters are given special attention in this context. Thirdly, illustrative problem areas will be examined, including employment relations in sport and the role of elites or sport officials. In view of these three dimensions, the questions raised by the links between the local and global levels of sports form a central point of reference for all studies explored here.

Handbooks and Textbooks

The issuing of journals and textbooks indicates that an academic field has achieved an advanced level of establishment as an independent discipline. Until the beginning of the century, the still young research field of sport politics was hardly able to produce corresponding publications in this respect: Only a limited number of books existed that included the term ‘sport politics’ in their title and dealt with the various facets of the political dimension of sport in an academic and systematic way at the same time. Frequently, existing studies drew more attention to other academic disciplines or simply did not live up to their promises. However, this obvious shortcoming seems to have been overcome, at least with regard to the English-speaking world. In the wake of the *International Journal for Sport Policy and Politics*, initiated in 2009 by Barrie Houlihan (Loughborough University), three important books were published at short intervals, documenting that the academic treatment of sport politics can now be based on a firmer foundation.

Jonathan Grix, who teaches ‘Sport Policy and Politics’ at Birmingham University, has written a 186-page textbook, which—with a supplementary glossary and comprehensive bibliography—provides in-depth access to the topic. Grix begins by defining his understanding of sports policy as “politics of sport” and “politics in sport” (p. 23) and then sets out various conceptual approaches to sports policy. In his key thesis, he argues that, during the last 30 years, there has been an increased politicisation and internationalisation of sports, which gave the state an increasingly important role

as an actor. He then illustrates various processes that are shaped by the interaction between sport and specific structures or actors, such as sport and identity, sport and media, sport and social capital, or sport and diplomacy. In addition, he deals with fields of action such as elite sport, the doping problem or the political economy of sport. Protest as a form of action and social movements as actors do not receive attention. The strength of this book is mirrored in its political-science approach that is pursued consistently, while problem awareness for the political dimension of sport is basically illustrated. However, the volume lacks a systematic approach: the examples are sometimes eclectic, the municipal level is underrepresented, and associations and clubs are disregarded to a certain extent. Above all, Grix writes a story from above in which he devotes much more attention to the instrumental use of sport ('politics of sport') than to the actual conflicts of interest in sport and the decisions taken. Against this backdrop, the value of the volume above all lies in sensitising readers to individual topics; as a systematic text book and regarding the linkage between sport and protest, however, it offers only limited impulses.

The *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Politics*, for which Alain Bairner from Loughborough University and John Kelly and Jung Woo Lee from the University of Edinburgh are responsible, is much more systematic in its approach. A total of 42 articles and six sections, each with a brief introduction, cover a broad spectrum of sports policy topics. On the whole, the selection of topics emphasises the political dimension. It is noteworthy that political ideas and ideology, as well as country studies and major sporting events, are given a great deal of attention, while specific policy fields are hardly taken into consideration. Researchers who are looking for information on doping, engagement or health policy in sport, will hardly find any traces of these matters in this handbook. If, however, researchers want to learn more about the categories of protest, countercultures or sustainability in sports, they will find both basic and in-depth academic analyses written in an instructive manner throughout. Mick Totten's contribution to "Sport activism and protest" is particularly convincing because it presents a wide range of various forms of protest. Totten sees sport protest primarily as a reaction to neoliberal tendencies and a sensitised awareness. The protest mainly takes place on a local and subcultural level, but can also take on more comprehensive forms. Totten, however, does not go so far as to identify a form of social movement in the various forms of sport activism. Not least the extensive bibliographies presented in his contribution and in other texts make the handbook a valuable reference work.

At least its title, the *Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics*, published in 2018, marks the counterpart to the *Routledge Handbook of Sports and Politics*. A team of editors around the political scientist Jean-Michel De Waele, mainly based at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, is responsible for the volume. With the exception of the introduction, the structure of the volume is exclusively based on the country principle. A total of 30 states from five continents are dealt with in relatively concise contributions along a systematic structure of four problem areas. These problem areas

include, first, the origins of football in the respective country with a strong recourse to local cultures, but also references to processes of transnational interaction. Second, in view of professional sports, special attention is paid to conflicts and rivalry between clubs. The third problem area focuses on the event dimension of football and sheds light on the activities of fan associations, including violent conflicts. Finally, a fourth set of problems deals with specific topics such as religious and ethnic, as well as economic or social conflicts. The individual contributions, as well as the volume as a whole, are characterised by an idiosyncratic interplay of theory-based approaches and exemplary empiricism. In its empirical density, the volume does not match other recently published books such as the *Oxford Handbook of Sport History*, which also follows a nation-state approach.¹ The specific focus on the socio-cultural anchoring of football and on supporters' activities, however, make this volume a highly innovative presentation, since it is the first time that both politicisation and processes of instrumentalisation have been comprehensively elaborated upon on a comparative basis. By referring to processes of awareness and supporters' symbollic representations of sports and clubs, the volume deepens our knowledge of the intersections between political and social developments. The differences and dynamics on which the activities are based, but also the transnational processes of exchange, not least in the context of the new social media, are elaborated clearly. The rivalry between supporters of individual clubs in football can have a traditional component (Germany), but it can also be consciously constructed by owners of other clubs or leagues (USA) or it is reflected in conflicts with other sports (Australia).

Studies on Sport Protest and Social Movements

The next three volumes deal more closely with the linkage between protest, social movements and sport. The volume edited by Liverpool's political scientist Michael Lavalette largely reflects the publisher's socialist commitment as a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), to which some of the authors are also close. The political dimension of the volume can be seen, among other aspects, in the fact that numerous texts in the anthology have a rather essayistic character covering only a few pages, and that the annotation section is banished to the end of the book in small print. Despite this, the volume consists of 42 stimulating studies and provides important incentives: the first sections explain the relationship of 'capitalism and sport' in light of the main title of the volume. Primarily from a British point of view, it is shown convincingly which impulses modern sport received from capitalism, how economic

1 Cf. Robert Edelman/Wayne Wilson (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of Sports History*, Oxford 2017.

ways of thinking spread globally and why they subsequently had a negative impact on sport. The spectrum of topics ranges from the insolvency of Glasgow Rangers to the stadium catastrophe of Hillsborough and the doping scandals of the Tour de France. Finally, the third section of the volume shows to what extent sport can contribute to social division along the categories of class, race, gender and disability. The further sections of the volume are more dedicated to its subtitle 'Politics, protest, people and play': The fifth section of the book portrays individual athletes such as the boxers Muhammad Ali and Damien Hooper, the tennis players Arthur Ashe and Billie Jean King or the footballers Mahmoud Sarsak and Arthur Wharton. What these athletes and players have in common is that over the course of their sporting activities they became politically involved and entered into opposition or resistance against perceived injustices. The sixth chapter then deals with collective resistance in sport, whether it was directed against apartheid or against tendencies towards commercialisation. The volume concludes with various examples and discussions about what needs to be done to ensure that sport is not just used as a weapon of capitalism. Though the political diction of the volume cannot be ignored, it receives its significance from the numerous case studies and the broad historical perspective that reaches back to the early days of industrialisation.

A monograph published in 2013 by a Canadian-British team of authors around the sports sociologists Jean Harvey and John Horne, who teach in Ottawa and Preston, claims to be the first systematic academic study on the interplay between sport and social movements. Based on classical definitions of social movements, the authors first distinguish actors such as the Olympic Movement from their own research object. Old and new social movements such as the labour movement, the women's movement, the human rights movement, the peace movement and the environmental movement are examined as relevant actors. Five studies, all well informed and based on broad sources and literature, present the sport-related activities of these social movements from a mostly diachronic perspective. Special attention is paid to mobilisation processes and the interaction between the local and the global levels. In contrast to Michael Lavalette's volume, the empirical observations are also explained and classified in a more comprehensive theoretical way. These strengths of the book, however, are also confronted with some constraints: With regard to the movements studied, the main focus lies on the use of sport by established (new) social movements. However, the movements generated by sport itself, such as 'wild leagues', fan-based community projects as for instance the 'FC United of Manchester' in England, but also alternatives to FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*), such as the 'Confederation of Independent Football Associations' (CONIFA) or social organisations such as 'Streetfootballworld' or 'PLAY!YA' are not taken into account. Additionally, sports-related movements beyond football, as for instance 'No Olympia' that emerged in various candidate cities, are not considered either. However, they are relevant in light of the classical definition by Doug McAdam and David A. Snow that

characterises social movements as “collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part”². Accordingly, it appears that these sport-specific movements should also be addressed.

A conceptually broader view underlies the volume published in 2016 by Jon Dart and Stephen Wagg of Leeds Beckett University. Over a period of more than 100 years—from the sport-related protests of the British suffragettes to activities against recent mega sport events in Russia and Brazil—the contributions shed light on protests in which sport is not only a point of reference, but the main subject. Among them are some well-known and repeatedly discussed incidents such as the Olympic Games in Mexico, the rugby protest against South Africa in New Zealand or the sport protests related to the State of Israel. But the volume also includes many unfamiliar examples, for instance, from a historical perspective, the studies on the ‘Women’s World Games’ in 1922 and the ‘Games of the New Emerging Forces’ (GANEFo) in 1963 and 1966, which were designed as an antipode to the Olympic Movement. Among the more recent examples, the protests against the sponsor Atos in the context of the 2012 Paralympic Games in London open up new insights. The Paralympics sponsor Atos has been targeted by disability and anti-cuts demonstrators in angry protests against its role in ‘fitness to work’ tests for disabled people that were meant to reassess their eligibility for benefit payments. Also of particular interest is the case study on the 158th boat race between Cambridge and Oxford, which had to be interrupted in the year 2012 as the Australian Trenton Oldfield swam in front of the boats to protest against social injustice in the United Kingdom. Jon Dart combines his portrayal with illuminating fundamental reflections on the potentials and limits of sport protest. In this context, he refers to the ‘Situationist International’, which was founded in 1957 as a left-wing group of European artists and intellectuals. It attracted attention with forms of action such as spectacles that were located at the interface between politics and art. Unfortunately, however, the volume does not go any further with its theoretical explanations and remains largely oriented towards protest. The explicit study on trajectories and obstacles for the emergence of sports-related social movements would be of particular interest with regard to the examples dealt with.

2 David A. Snow et al. (eds.): *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Oxford 2004, p. 11.

Protests by Supporters

The focus of the volumes dealt with so far was either on situational protest or on traditional social movements and their intersections with sport. Seeing football fans and supporters as a group of actors whose activities happen with some degree of organisation and continuity, they come close to the character of a social movement according to this definition. The monograph by Dino Numerato, a sociologist from Prague, is based on a project at Loughborough University and aims at examining football supporters' activities and their impact on contemporary football culture in England, Italy and the Czech Republic. From an empirical point of view, the work examines both the national space of action and transnational interactions. Dynamic processes of change between fans, clubs, authorities and mass media are shown. They are illustrated by topics such as the reactions of fans to police and security measures in football stadiums, the use of symbols and rituals during football matches or conflicts between fans and football clubs. The corresponding explanations offer original insights. Dino Numerato's theoretical frame of reference, which is based on concepts of reflexivity and relational realism, deserves special attention. Numerato sees social change as a potential consequence of various reflexive processes. He thus builds a bridge to other publications that also highlight changed processes of perception, but also to social movement research without explicitly naming it as such.

The second volume on fan research bundles the results of the Europe-wide FREE research project on football.³ It is based on an academic conference at the University of Loughborough organised by the academics Borja Garcia and Jinming Zheng, who teach sports management and sports policy at Loughborough. Their study offers access to a cross-country perspective on the political activities of football supporters and their involvement in preparing, taking and controlling decisions in professional football. In contrast to other literature focusing primarily on supporters' social and cultural backgrounds and on their behaviour in the stadiums or on match day, this book refers to a political perspective analysing supporters' representation of and participation in football activities, particularly in the management of clubs. In view of the countries chosen, the book has as strong South and Eastern European bias while no countries from northern Europe have been taken into consideration. The book is structured simply but clearly. The individual contributions are well-written and up-to-date in terms of literature and material. The book does not develop a specific theoretical framework but it implicitly follows conceptual approaches such as the concept of representation. It is highly stimulating that the book also provides references

3 Cf. *Football Research in an Enlarged Europe*, available online at www.free-project.eu/ (last accessed 1 March, 2019).

to approaches of comparative politics that so far have not (or just to a minor extent) been attributed to sport studies. The only explicitly theoretical contribution to the book (David Webber: ‘The Great Transformation of the English Game: Karl Polanyi and the Double Movement ‘Against Modern Football’’) is not referred to by the other authors. However, seeing the strong empirical basis of the book, the relevance of supporters’ struggle for democracy, participation and transparency becomes clear.

Employment Relations and Elites in Sport

The shaping of employment relationships and working conditions marks a key field in social policy, which is shaped by collective agreements, often based on difficult negotiations and processes of distribution reflecting diverging social interests. While industrial relations have been extensively researched by academics regarding general relations between employers and employees, there is hardly any data and even less secondary analyses available for the specific field of employment relationships in sport. Against the backdrop of this gap in research, the anthology on employment relations, edited by the Australian-British editorial team Michael Barry, James Skinner and Terry Engelberg, is a pioneering achievement in every respect. In four main chapters 1) the current state of regulation in sport is examined, 2) exemplary industrial relations in sport are presented, 3) career developments and undesirable developments are illustrated and 4) the economic dimensions of these processes are clarified. Of particular interest for the context of protest and movements are actors and activities. While traditional actors such as industrial trade unions play only a minor role in sport—mainly in outsourced services—and while the degree of organisation is generally low, numerous new actors have formed claiming to represent interests in sport. A strong tendency towards pluralisation can be observed; traditional representation is replaced by a system of individual actors and professional associations, which face each other within the framework of the various sport disciplines. The USA is playing a pioneering role while social movements have only emerged rudimentary in employment relations.

The contributions by Jack Anderson and Craig A. Depken II, in particular, show that the conditions for collective action and solidarity in sport are different than in traditional industrial relations, even in the case of strikes. As a result, the much-quoted specificity of sport is repeatedly expressed in this important volume of Barry, Skinner and Engelberg. The only critical point to be noted is that in almost all contributions professional sports in the Anglo-American world serves as point of reference, while the intersections with (European) leisure and amateur sport are hardly dealt with. That is also why the local level is only of limited importance here. As a result, it is above all legal experts and sociologists, who contribute to this volume.

Finally, there is another important volume to mention which deals with the elite of sport officials and functionaries in sport. The volume on *Global Sport Leaders*, edited

by the sports historians Emmanuel Bayle and Patrick Clastres, who teach in Lausanne, brings together 14 individual biographies and one collective biographical study on sports functionaries. Almost all of the authors have a background in the French-speaking world. They deal with agents such as Pierre de Coubertin and Jules Rimet, João Havelange and Juan Antonio Szamarch or Jaques Rogge and Sepp Blatter to highlight the top level of FIFA and International Olympic Committee. But the book is also looking at illustrious or sinister personalities such as Lamine Diack and Bernie Ecclestone. This volume represents a pioneering achievement in the history and politics of sport, as there has been a lack of serious portraits of even the most important players. The result of the individual contributions clearly shows that it is almost exclusively men who have a say in sport politics; that European origin is dominant; that for many sports officials the career ladder begins at the local level of sports; that working as a lawyer or businessman and, more recently, an earlier career as an athlete, is an important prerequisite; that seniority plays an important role and that a certain executive dominance with long terms of office can be discerned. However, it also becomes evident—and this is not explicitly addressed—that hardly any of the high-ranking sports functionaries have made their career through protest, resilience, opposition or support by certain movements. Organised sport continues to be an elitist enterprise at its head, whose internal structures have so far been characterised by professionalisation and networking, but not by political or social conflicts.

Benefits and Delimitations of Sports Politics Research

An overview of the ten volumes reviewed makes clear that sports politics is becoming increasingly important in the sense of a struggle of an ever increasing number of actors both for the assertion of interests in sport and for objectives conveyed through sport. Even though the books focus on very different actors, it becomes clear that the focus is no longer just on public institutions and associations, but also on the social dimension of sports politics. This follows a concept that has already received important impulses from Peter Millward's 2011 study⁴ and has been deepened in a few recent research articles.⁵ All publications are significant contributions to an emerging research field which develops with impressive dynamics. With the volumes reviewed in this essay, the state of knowledge has been considerably expanded and a substantial foundation has been laid for further studies. At the same time, however, (still) quite different ideas

4 Cf. Peter Millward: *The Global football league. Transnational Networks, Social Movements and Sport in the New Media Age*, London 2011.

5 Cf. Tim Hill/Robin Canniford/Peter Millward: *Against Modern Football: Mobilising Protest Movements in Social Media*, in: *Sociology* (2016) and Peter Millward/Shaminder Takhar: *Social Movements, Collective Action and Activism*, in: *Sociology* (2019), pp. 1–12.

prevail as to which approaches and concepts should be used to deal with specific topics such as the question of protest and social movements. This challenges us to look much more carefully at both the links between sport and emancipatory social movements as well as the issue of sport in movements.

What the ten publications all have in common is that they are predominantly anthologies, that they primarily refer to the Anglo-American area, that the authors predominantly also originate from this area, that they shed light on football and major sporting events staged by the media, that they are empirically descriptive rather than theoretical-analytical, and that they often combine different academic disciplines with one another. When references are made to theories, it is remarkable that governance approaches are primarily used, while the 'theory of action' approach to social movements, exemplified by Alain Touraine, the 'resource mobilization' approach by Charles Tilly or more recent 'framing' approaches do not serve as theoretical reference.

These observations clearly point at the next steps to be taken in research on sport politics: We need to be much more attentive to movements and protests as well as to the margins of society and to the non-Anglo-American world. In addition, a wider conceptual discussion of the links between sport politics and protest and movements is needed. At present, the analysis of sport and protest or social movements is still some way from the paradigmatic structures illustrated in Thomas Kuhn's classical theory of science as an unspoken common academic view of the world. However, it is already apparent today that sports policy is approaching this paradigmatic state with great strides. The books shown here, which should ideally be read complementarily, very differently but simultaneously impressively document the considerable progress of academic research into sports politics in the past five years.

Jürgen Mittag has been Chairholder and Head of the Institute of European Sport Development and Leisure Studies (German Sport University Cologne) since 2011. From 2003 to 2010 he was Managing Director (*Geschäftsführer*) at the Institute for Social Movements of the Ruhr University Bochum. Between 1997 and 2003 he served as a research assistant at the Jean Monnet-Chair for political science, University of Cologne.