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Small states: sport and politics at the margin

Barrie Houlihan and Jinming Zheng

Micro-states, small states and major sports powers

In modern international sport events small states are consistent in their presence and also in their marginality. The median population size of the 204 countries that participated in the London 2012 Olympic Games was just over 6.6m and almost one quarter (47) had a population of less than 1m. Those countries with a population below one million accounted for just three Olympic medals in 2012 and the 102 countries with the smallest population accounted for just 11% (106) of the 962 medals won. The total number of athletes competing in London was approximately 10,800 with over half that number coming from just 17 countries. The median size of a national squad was 11 and of those countries below the median 70% were, not surprisingly, also below the population median of 6.6m. The pattern of marginal presence and negligible success is also found in the analysis of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Of the 71 countries and territories that took part 52 had populations below 10m of which 39 had populations below 1.5m. Thirty-five countries did not win a single medal of which 23 had populations below 500,000. The aims of this paper is to address this apparent paradox of presence yet marginality. In particular the paper aims: first, to identify the objectives of small states for participation in international sport and investing in elite sport; and second, to analyse the strategies that small states adopt to maximise their ability to achieve their sport and non-sport objectives.

In discussions of the objectives of government involvement in sport, especially in elite sport, reference is often made, *inter alia*, to sport's perceived utility in developing and projecting national identity, providing economic benefits through regeneration or a strengthened balance of payments, delivering social benefits for individuals or communities and in adding to the repertoire of diplomatic resources

(Arnaud and Riordan 1998, Houlihan 2006, Preuss 2004). However, the identification and analysis of governmental objectives is substantially based on the examination of the use of sport within a limited number of states whose main characteristics are wealth, large population and a long history of independence (notable exceptions include Beckles and Stoddart 1995, Cronin 1999, Sam 2003, and Andersen and Ronglan 2012). Yet the vast majority of states that take part in major multi-sport events, such as the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games, and single sport world or regional championships, are 'small states'.

As a preliminary to the discussion of the two aims of the paper it is necessary to examine briefly the concept of a 'small state'. There is much debate, but little agreement on the definition of a small state (Sutton 2011, Maas 2009, Duursma 1996). Many attempts at developing a precise definition used a combination of population, usable land and GDP (for example Taylor 1969, who found a high correlation between these characteristics) with the occasional addition of the dimensions of remoteness, because so many small states are islands, military assets and narrowness of the economic base (Thorhallsson 2000). While agreement on objective measures of smallness is not to be found some indication of the objective characteristics of the type of states under discussion in this paper is required. For the purposes of the following discussion a small state will usually have a population below 10 million and a micro-state a population below 1.5m (Vital 1967, Bailes 2009). Even if a consensus did exist regarding the objective criteria by which a small state and a micro-state could be defined it would still be important to acknowledge that 'smallness' has significant relative and subjective aspects. For example, while North Korea has a population of 25m it is arguably 'small' in comparison to its regional neighbours China (1352m), Japan (128m) and South Korea (50m). Canada (population 35m; per capita GDP US\$42,000) is small in relation to its southern neighbour (population 314m; per capita GDP US\$52,000) with the latter having had a substantial impact on the development of elite sport in Canada, especially ice hockey and baseball. Furthermore, there is a subjective aspect to smallness insofar as a state may adopt the behaviour associated with small states because of a self-perception of weakness, for example as is evident among some populous sub-Saharan states. While the ambiguity in the conceptualisation of smallness need to be acknowledged the problems of definition

should not be allowed to justify the exclusion of small states from an analysis of the international politics of sport policy.

In addition to the ambiguity surrounding the concept of smallness there is a similar degree of uncertainty regarding the concept of the state which requires brief comment. The 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States listed four criteria for statehood namely: defined territory; permanent population; effective government; and a capacity to enter into relations with other states. Dissatisfaction with these criteria was soon apparent but despite considerable debate in the intervening years a consensus on a definition has proved elusive. The definition of statehood is relevant to this discussion insofar as there are some small and micro-states that would not be able to operationalize their sport resources if it were not for external support (for example of the Commonwealth Games Federation or Olympic Solidarity). Second, there are some territories whose claim to statehood is contested and who have been relatively effective in utilising sport to support their claims to or aspirations for sovereignty/independence such as Palestine, Kosovo, Scotland and Catalonia. Finally, there is the example of Hong Kong which, while indisputably part of the People's Republic of China, aspires to distance itself symbolically from the central authority and position itself as a global rather than a Chinese region (Lau, 2000, quoted in Ho & Bairner, 2012, p. 353). Although this paper will not explore these variations on statehood in detail it is important to bear in mind that many of these territories will use sport in a broadly similar way to that under discussion for the generality of small states.

Domestic and international relations interests of small states

While other organising principles such as culture (Francophone Games), religion (Maccabi Games) and sexuality (Gay Games) have been used independent of or in conjunction with statehood, in the study of international relations the state is the dominant organising concept and unit of analysis and thus reinforces the state as the primary unit around which international sport is organised. It is argued in this paper that not only do small states face similar political and sporting problems associated with recognition, voice and stakeholding and that elite level sport is often used as a

resource in the pursuit of broader diplomatic goals, but also that the international relations and sport policy interests of small states are generally under-researched by the academic community. Such interest as has been stimulated in the international relations (IR) of small states was prompted in part by the rapid increase in the number of states between the 1960s and 1980s due to decolonisation. During those three **decades** 36 states were admitted to the United Nations which had populations of around 1 million or less. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia provided a further incentive to address the IR of small states. However, much early research was often founded on a crude assumption that size equated to power and that small states were necessarily weak states (Neumann and Gstöhl 2004).

Much of the academic neglect of small states is due to the dominance of the realist paradigm in IR which, though centrally concerned with security (a primary concern of small states) emphasises (military and economic) capabilities thus tending to privilege the study of the more powerful states. Small states are often seen, due to their perceived lack of capability, as mere irritants in great power politics (Lewis 2009) or as part of the supporting chorus of major sports-power politics. When the IR of small states has been considered it has often been in terms of the threat they pose to the interests of major powers such as Cuba as a threat to the interests of the United States or Georgia and the Baltic states as threats to Russia. A parallel example in relation to sport would be the evidence of widespread doping and government neglect of anti-doping activity in Jamaica and Kenya which can be seen as a threat to the traditional prominence of the United States in track athletics.

A secondary aspect of the realist perspective on small states is a tendency to focus on what they lack and the ways in which they cope with economic vulnerability and political insecurity with some authors seeing vulnerability as the defining political characteristic of smallness (Commonwealth Secretariat 1997). As Bishop (2012, p. 948) notes 'the idea of vulnerability suggests that development is more fragile, ephemeral and potentially threatened than in larger societies'. Reflecting this concern the United Nations published a 'vulnerability index' (Briguglio 1995) and the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned a report on the impact of economic volatility (Atkins *et al.* 2000). In his review of the evidence on the association

between population size and vulnerability Payne (quoted in Sutton 2011: 151) concluded that 'it is vulnerabilities rather than opportunities ... that come through as the most striking manifestation of the consequences of smallness in global politics'. Much the same can be argued in relation to the consequences of smallness in global sport. For example, the narrow resource base of many small states, the limited domestic market and the concentration of elite sport resources in a narrow range of sports contributes to vulnerability and reflect the status of small states in international sport policy as predominantly policy-takers rather than policy-makers. It might also be argued that a further parallel could be drawn with the tendency of small states to specialise in one or two sports (Houlihan and Zheng 2013) and their consequent vulnerability to decisions by international sport organisations (such as the IOC, Commonwealth Games Federation or major international federations) to remove sports from multi-sport events or to change the format of single discipline competitions. For example, the decision (later reversed) by the IOC in 2013 to remove wrestling from the 2020 Olympic schedule would have been a major problem for Azerbaijan who won seven of their ten medals in the sport and Georgia who won all but one of their seven medals in the sport.

Bishop (2010) cautions against a deterministic view of vulnerability as vulnerability should not be equated with poverty or economic weakness as the examples of Singapore, Monaco, Qatar and, though to a lesser extent, Cyprus and Malta illustrate. If the definition of state capabilities is broadened to include money then realist theory can be used to analyse the capacity of small states such as Qatar (as hosts of the 2022 football World Cup), Singapore (host of the 2010 Youth Olympic Games) and Abu Dhabi (host of major tennis and golf championships) to challenge the traditional dominance of large states (sport powers) as hosts of major sports events.

To explore the sport politics of small states purely within the realist paradigm would be unwise as there are plenty of examples from mainstream IR of small states confounding the assumptions made about them and demonstrating their capacity to pursue successfully their interests, often collectively, in the face of major power opposition. The 1997 international agreement to outlaw the use of anti-personnel mines and the 1998 agreement to establish an International Criminal Court to

address the issue of war crimes were both achieved in the face of determined opposition from major powers, especially the United States, and were not explicable in terms of conventional realist IR theorising (Davenport 2002; see also Braveboy-Wagner 2010). A similar argument could be made regarding the role of African states in isolating South Africa from international sport during the apartheid period (Keech and Houlihan 1999).

The neo-liberal paradigm gives less emphasis to capabilities and more to institutions and the institutionalisation of interests. The paradigm also takes account of a broader range of political actors including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the IOC, SportAccord, and international federations (IFs), and encourages the exploration of the ways in which state interests are pursued beyond the concentration on state to state relations. While small states were seen as sharing many of the concerns of large states (such as recognition, self-determination and the maintenance of the integrity of borders) many had more intense concerns with environmental and trade issues as a direct consequence of their narrow economic base and their small geographic as well as population size. The neo-liberal paradigm supports the examination of the use made by small states of international organisations and international policy regimes as arenas within which to pursue their national (sport) interests. Of particular relevance to sport policy is the extent to which small states can use (either individually or collectively) NGOs and sport policy regimes (such as those for anti-doping and development through sport) to pursue their sport and non-sport objectives. For example, some states (Norway, Denmark and New Zealand for example) have, arguably at least, developed a stronger global profile on non-sport issues through their involvement in NGOs and sport policy regimes (in relation to anti-doping, integrity and child protection for example). However, while neo-liberal institutionalism gives greater scope for the exercise of influence by small states it must be acknowledged that most policy regimes, such as those for anti-doping and elite sport competition, represent the institutionalisation of major power interests.

Social constructivism draws attention to the processes by which perceptions of states, for example as vulnerable, sovereign, honest, trustworthy, efficient or corrupt, are established and maintained. The awareness of the importance of image is easily

illustrated. In the early part of the present century Norway used consultants to inform its public diplomacy strategy. The outcome was the formulation of four 'image and value platforms ... around which coherence in presenting Norway to the world should be built: a humanitarian superpower/a peacemaker; a society living with nature; a society with a high level of equality; [and] an internationalist society/a society with a spirit of adventure' (Batora 2005, see also Leonard and Small 2003). The prominence of Norway in sport for development and peace initiatives, the promotion of community sport, hosting environmentally sensitive sports events and in anti-doping action all indicate the scope for sport to play an important part in the construction of the four value platforms and the fulfilment of the country's public diplomacy objectives.

According to Lee and Smith (2010, p. 1092) 'rather than treating smallness as an analytical category ... it can be understood as a discursive construction'. For many small states a key challenge is to achieve recognition of their right to self-determination and claims to sovereignty. International sports events and organisations provide important opportunities for small states to assert and receive acknowledgement of their sovereignty. In addition to using sport as an opportunity to acquire quasi-legal recognition by other states international sport helps small states project a degree of cultural distinctiveness which reinforces their sovereign status. As Grant (1997, p. 638) comments 'nationals of micro-states are often indistinguishable from nationals of their larger neighbours at least in terms of race, language, religion and tradition'. A number of small states saw the 2012 London Olympics as an opportunity to raise their profile (for example Lesotho¹, a landlocked country in Southern Africa) and/or to promote their claims to statehood (Palestine² and Kosovo³). International sport presents many highly visible opportunities for small states whose claims to statehood are vulnerable and contested to do things that are 'characteristically state-like' (Grant 1997, p. 656). The Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games give many small and micro states the rare opportunity to share a formal symbolic equality of status with the major (sports) powers most evident in the opening and closing ceremonies. Additional opportunities for symbolic demonstrations of statehood are offered by the international federations that operate on a one nation - one vote principle. As Grant (1997: 675) noted, in the struggle that many small and especially micro states face to assert and protect their status the

most convincing evidence of statehood 'is their admission into international organisations'. Sport provides an important arena in which often limited tangible resources can be utilised to generate disproportionately effective symbolic strategies to manage the perception of statehood so as to protect or further claims to de facto and de jure recognition (Chong 2010).

The role of some small states as 'norm entrepreneurs' (Ingebritsen 2006) is an important concept that can be operationalized within both the neo-liberal and social constructivist paradigms where much greater account is taken of the diplomatic skills of states. Norway's skill as a norm entrepreneur is evidenced and facilitated by the state's prominence in WADA and in the number of bi-lateral anti-doping agreements in which it has been involved (Hanstad forthcoming).

Sport as a resource for small states: soft power and sport

Discussions of the motives for governments to invest in sport – mainly based on analyses of major states – often distinguish between domestic and diplomatic motives (Houlihan 2007, Horne et al. 2013). Among the domestic motives are urban regeneration, nation building, social integration and social control while diplomatic motives include expressing support or displeasure for the actions of other states, image building and the building of tentative diplomatic links. Whether these pre-occupations are shared with small states is rarely explored although it is likely that small states do indeed share many of the concerns of larger states especially those related to improving health and maintaining social stability. However, as many small states are ex-colonies it is likely that differentiation from their former colonial power is a significant motive for government interest in and funding of elite sport. Furthermore for many small states differentiation from the former colonial power is paralleled by the need to differentiate themselves from the neighbours who are often culturally similar. Many of the small states in the Caribbean are ethnically/culturally homogeneous, but less ethnically/culturally distinct from their close neighbours. Singapore is an example from **south Asia**. For these countries differentiation is more important than integration. As regards diplomatic or external relations the motives may be the same as those of major states, but they are likely to be more intense. Diplomatic recognition, security of borders and access to trade are motives not

peculiar to small states, but they are often much more urgent concerns for the reasons previously discussed. With this range of domestic and diplomatic motives in mind it is pertinent to ask what strategies are available to small states to protect and advance their interests.

It is possible to identify five potential sport strategies that are available to small states in pursuit of their objectives: independent (autonomous); isomorphist/imitative; isolationist; collective; and camp follower. While the choice of strategy can be affected (and mainly constrained) by many factors the most significant will be the degree of internal stability/unity, uncertainty/hostility of the external environment and domestic resources. Few small states have the option of adopting an *independent strategy* and those that do tend to be wealthy such as Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Singapore and Bahrain, all of whom have **the** used state resources not only to attract major global sports events in football, golf, tennis, rugby, Youth Olympic Games and Formula 1, but also to establish a presence in the sporting infrastructure of other major (sports) states through the ownership of commercial football clubs (such as Paris St Germain which is owned by Qatar Sports Investment and Manchester City which is owned by a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family) and by sponsorship of global sports brands such as Barcelona FC (shirts sponsored by Qatar) and the Tour de France (Qatar Air as the official airline). These small states are able to accrue a degree of status, international visibility and influence which eludes many medium range states. However, an independent strategy does not have to be based solely on wealth as a deeply-rooted and distinctive sporting culture might be an alternative resource. A small state such as Ireland, which has a deeply rooted national sporting culture (focused on the games of hurling and Gaelic football), continues to pursue, even if only partially, an independent strategy (partial because of the state's increasing engagement with Olympic sport and football). Norway similarly has relied on its moral resources to pursue an independent strategy on issues such as youth elite sport and anti-doping.

A much more common strategy is one of policy *isomorphism/imitation* according to which states seek to protect their interests by adopting the sporting interests of a sports power or a cluster of sports powers. For a large number of ex-colonies, such as many Caribbean islands, isomorphism takes the form of retaining selected benign

colonial links in the form of the sporting culture of the former imperial power – for example cricket in the case of many British ex-colonies. Isomorphism can also take the form of adopting the sporting culture of a powerful neighbour, such as the United States, illustrated by the popularity of the sports of baseball and basketball in the Caribbean. Similar patterns of isomorphism can be found among the many small states that associate themselves with the Olympic movement and the Commonwealth Games. The extent to which isomorphism is a strategic choice rather than an unavoidable default position is debatable, but it does give small states access to an international stage and often to development funding from the resources of Olympic Solidarity, the Commonwealth and the major IFs. A variation on the strategy of isomorphism is the *camp follower* strategy in which small states seek to gain advantage by ingratiating themselves with major states or with major international sport organisations. The most effective way of pursuing this strategy is by making their votes available to states or, more commonly to leaders of IFs, in return for which they receive development funding.

The adoption of an *isolationist* strategy is increasingly rare as states, whether large or small, find it difficult to ignore the diplomatic opportunities that involvement in international sport offers. It would be hard to imagine a state emulating the isolationism of China in the 1960s and 1970s, a period during which it had very little international sporting contact and did not participate in the Olympic Games. One of the few countries occasionally to consider isolationism as a viable strategy is North Korea, but even that state's leadership seems to have doubts about its utility in furthering the state's interests. The isolationist strategy contrasts with the much more common *collective* strategy where small states cooperate to protect and promote their collective interests. The organisation of the Games of Small States of Europe⁴ is one example of small states protecting their interests in relation to participation in elite level sport. A second example of a collective strategy is the boycott by 32 states, many of which were small, of the 1986 Edinburgh Commonwealth Games over the issue of apartheid in South Africa. A third example would be the attempt by a group of mainly socialist states, including many small states, to organise a multi-sport event (Games of the New Emerging Forces – GANEFO) to rival the Olympic Games in the mid 1960s. However, political issues of the potency of apartheid capable of uniting a significant group of countries are less common today.

Accepting that the capacity of most small states to select their strategy is highly circumscribed it is important to consider what resources they could utilise and how they might deploy them most effectively. Given the general lack of economic, military and population resources valued by the realist IR analysts most small states need to rely on softer resources and on the careful husbanding of sporting talent thereby acknowledging their willingness to test the assumptions of neo-liberal and constructivist analysts. In recent years there has been a growing interest among IR analysts in the nature and efficacy of soft power which is a valuable concept in understanding the motivations for small states to invest in elite sport not just in the hope of developing an Olympic medal contender, but more pragmatically to give them access to significant global arenas such as sport NGOs and mega-sports events. Small states potentially benefit from the greater awareness of the risks of deploying traditional military forms of power which, according to Nye (1990, p. 167), has led to 'intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions' becoming more important in inter-state relations. Nye (2004, p. 2) defines power in terms of the ability to 'influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants' and sees soft power, the ability to 'attract and co-opt them to want what you want', as a complement to, and occasionally a substitute for, the exercise of hard power. According to Nye three key sources of soft power are a state's culture, its political values and its foreign policy (Nye 2004, p. 11, 2008, p. 96).⁵ Although an activist foreign policy, utilising the conventional resources of wealth, trade and military power, is generally unavailable to small states the other two elements of soft power – culture and political values – are more accessible and can be co-produced between the state and domestic sport organisations such as the NOC. As Bially Mattern (2007, p. 102) comments in contrast to hard power 'soft power is available to any actor that can render itself attractive to another'.

As Batoria (2005, p. 1) astutely observes much of contemporary international relations takes place in 'a post-modern world of images and influences' in which there is a greater possibility for small states to shape the international agenda and further their domestic interests to a degree that exceeds their limited tangible resources. However, in order to take advantage of the opportunities for influence that soft power resources provide small states have overcome the problem of their

invisibility and which requires the availability of some at least of the following resources:

- access to and voice within appropriate global arenas such as IFs, the IOC, WADA, UNESCO and Council of Europe (organisations which operate on the basis of one country-one vote offer greater scope for influence) or within the sporting cultural fabric of one or more major sports powers
- access to and prominence within highly valued (culturally and politically) sports events such as the summer Olympic Games, which is usually achieved by the concentration of development resources on a small number of sports in which the state hopes to become prominent if not dominant. Examples would include New Zealand and rugby union and Jamaica and athletics.
- ideas, values and behaviour that is attractive to other states
- a concentrated focus on one or two issues
- prominent/charismatic advocates/ambassadors, which would normally be globally known athletes for example, Alberto Juantorena of Cuba (member of IAAF Council), Frankie Fredericks of Namibia (IOC member; member of Champions for Peace⁶) and George Weah of Liberia (UNICEF Goodwill ambassador), but which might also be internationally known sporting institutions such as the Gaelic Athletic Association

The brief review of Singapore and Ireland illustrates not only the operationalization of these requirements, but also how they relate to the sport strategies adopted by two small states.

The examples of Singapore and Ireland

Singapore (population 5.3m) is a small island city-state located within a complex geo-political context. It is also a highly successful economy with the ninth highest per capita GDP in 2012. However, the current achievement of the 'Lion city' (Williams, 2009) is hard-won. Colonial rule under the British Empire (Lim & Horton 2012), cruel occupation by Japanese Fascist (Lim & Horton 2011), traumatic separation from Malaysia (Chen 1988, Horton 2013b), direct and indirect influence from, and connection with, China (Aplin & Jong 2002), its geographical location of being

sandwiched between two non-Chinese dominated neighbours - Malaysia and Indonesia and its internal lack of resources and intricate racial composition resulted in an 'ideology of survivalism' within the Singapore government (Ortmann 2009, p. 29, Long 2012). In terms of foreign affairs, Singapore has adopted a pragmatic diplomatic strategy since Lee Kuan Yew's tenure and the security and development of Singapore are the overriding objectives. The independence from, and balance between, major powers (in spite of a certain degree of dependence on the US' military power for national defence) have been key features of the People's Action Party's diplomatic policies (Qie 2005, Wang & Jiang 2008). As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (MFA 2013b), Singapore has played an active role in international and regional affairs including economic development and cooperation, counter terrorism, disarmament and non-proliferation, environment and peace keeping operations (MYF 2012c) and made a great contribution to the establishment of ASEAN. The political priorities for the Singapore government may be summarised as the maintenance of internal cohesion and the maintenance of its external security and sovereignty.

Although Singapore's, hard power, economic strength is a valuable diplomatic resource the country has relied to a greater extent on a soft power strategy within which sport has become an increasingly important element (Horton 2013b). During Lee Kuan Yew's prime ministership (1959-1990) sport mainly served the political objectives of social cohesion, racial harmony, national identity and the promotion of health and fitness with sporting excellence labelled as 'foolish and wasteful' (Horton, 2002, p. 251). Indeed Lee Kuan Yew, speaking in 1973, (quoted in Horton 2002, p. 251) said that 'There are no national benefits from gold medallists for smaller countries ... it is foolish and wasteful for the smaller countries to do it'. However, his successor, Goh Chok Tong, took a different view and argued, 1998, that 'The contribution of sports to nation building and national pride is far-reaching. When Singapore athletes win medals at international sports competitions, they bring immense pride and joy to our people. Sporting victories foster national joy and pride'. (quoted in Horton 2002, p.258). The subsequent publication of ambitious sports strategies for example, Sporting Excellence 2000 (Ministry of Community Development 1993), the establishment of a sports ministry in 2000 and the government's considerable investment in the construction of the Sports Hub all took

place against a background of a distinct lack of enthusiasm for participation in elite sport within the country.

The lack of domestic enthusiasm notwithstanding the Singapore state invested heavily in a range of elite and international sport initiatives reflecting the government's concern to pursue an independent strategy. The government's strategy to strengthen its profile at major international sports events was supported by a concentration on seven priority sports including table tennis, badminton and sailing and the offer of substantial financial rewards to medallists. Although its post-1990 strategy has had only limited success at the summer Olympics the state has maintained its ranking in recent Asian Games and seen a substantial improvement in its medal total at the Commonwealth Games. A second element in the state sport strategy was to attract major sports and sports-related events which would give the country an international profile: these included hosting the 117th IOC session in 2005, hosting the Formula 1 Grand Prix since 2008, hosting the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in 2010, and the planned hosting of the Women's Tennis Association annual end of season competition from 2014 to 2018. The third element in the strategy is investment in the 'High Performance Training Hub' (SSC 2009) which has attracted many international teams and star athletes such as Michael Phelps and Ronaldo. The fourth element of the strategy focused on attracting international and continental sports federations and organisations to locate in the country. One of the first fruits of this strategy was the decision by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) to move its Asia Pacific Office and Marketing Headquarters to Singapore in 2011 (SSC 2011, p.50). The final element of the strategy was to seek the appointment of Singaporeans to influential posts in major international sport organisations. In addition to Ng Ser Miang, the current Vice President of the IOC, there are several Singaporean members on the executive boards or senior committees of the IFs of a number of Olympic sports including badminton, canoeing, equestrian, hockey, sailing and table tennis and within the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Although Singapore is far from typical of small states the evidence clearly indicates the extent to which the country has been able to incorporate sport into its wider diplomatic strategy. With its substantial economic resources Singapore has been

able to pursue an independent strategy for the maintenance of its sovereignty. With reference to the five resources which facilitate the utilisation of sport as a soft power resource Singapore was relatively successful in gaining access to positions of influence within some major global sport organisations, most obviously the IOC. Ng Ser Miang's senior position within the Olympic Movement also gave the state a prominent advocate on its behalf. The hosting of a number of globally significant sports events was also a notable resource. Singapore made less use of the opportunity to associate itself with a distinctive set of values or issues although it did have such an opportunity to raise its profile through the promotion of youth sport by virtue of being the inaugural host of the Youth Olympic Games.

Ireland provides a significant contrast to Singapore. Ireland has a population of about 4.6m and is culturally homogeneous with over 80% of the population describing themselves as Catholic. Until 1922 Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom. Upon independence the island of Ireland was divided between the independent Republic in the south and six counties in the North East which remained part of the UK. For well over 100 years sport has played a central role in Irish politics initially as a focus for cultural resistance to the UK and, since independence, as a focus for nation building and as a cultural representation of the irredentist claims to Northern Ireland. Unlike many other small states for much of its recent history Irish sport, as with much of Irish politics in general, has been shaped by the country's relationship with the UK and the division of the island.

Central to the sport politics of Ireland has been, and continues to be, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). The GAA was founded in 1884 and was central to the campaign of cultural resistance to British rule. The aim of the Association was to revive and promote traditional Irish sports such as hurling and Gaelic football and to resist the spread of alien English sports such as rugby, football and cricket which were referred to as a 'demoralising and prostrating tide' (quoted in Mandle 1977: 420). The network of local clubs established by the GAA fostered a close relationship between Gaelic sport and nationalism. Following independence and a brief but bitter civil war the government of Ireland was content to let the GAA take the lead in organizing the sporting life of the country partly because of the chronic shortage of public finance and partly because the GAA club network was reasonably

comprehensive in its geographical coverage.

In more recent years there has been a marked change in the attitude of the government towards sport in general and towards non-Gaelic sports in particular. Non-Gaelic sports such as football (soccer), rugby and a range of Olympic sports have steadily grown in popularity partly due to decline in the significance of the confrontation with the UK and partly due to membership of the European Union which has encouraged a regional outlook within the Irish government. Periodic international sporting success has also contributed to a lessening in the dominance of the GAA. The success of the Irish football team at the 1988 European Championships and at the 1990 and 1994 World Cup finals, Barry McGuigan's success in boxing, Michael Roche's victory in the 1987 Tour de France and medal success at the 1992 Olympic Games all contributed to changes in Irish sport politics.

The international relations that have shaped Irish sport politics are: first, the relationship with the UK; second, the relationship with Northern Ireland; third, the relationship with the Irish diaspora; and fourth the relationship with other countries, especially in the European Union. Lacking the economic resources of a small state such as Singapore, Qatar or Monaco Ireland has had to rely more heavily on the distinctiveness of their sporting culture and wider range of strategies. The period from the establishment of the GAA in 1884 at least to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 was characterized by a strategy of confrontational autonomy and sporting isolationism directed at Britain as the colonial power. The organization of sport in Ireland prior to independence was clearly divided along political lines, with the GAA enforcing rules which prevented its members playing 'British' sports and attempts to undermine the efforts of Unionist associations such as the Irish Amateur Athletics Association to promote track and field disciplines. The forceful nationalism of the GAA brought it regularly into violent confrontation with the British government. There were also many examples of harassment of the GAA by the British government such as the attempt to impose a tax on Gaelic sports, interference with the organization of transport for major sports events, occasional bans on Gaelic sports and police disruption of sports events (de Búrca 1980).

Since independence and the establishment of the Irish Republic in the 26 counties of

the island of Ireland the focus of Irish sport politics has focused more specifically on the relationship with Northern Ireland. However, the strategy of the Irish state remained autonomous and defined by irredentism. From 1937 to 1998 the constitution of Ireland stated that 'The territory consists of the whole island of Ireland' (Article 2). Although the constitution was amended in 1998 as part of the process to end the civil war in Northern Ireland to remove the claim of the Irish government to the six counties in the North the new constitution still noted the right of 'every person born in the island of Ireland ... to be part of the Irish nation'. Paralleling the claim of the Irish government to Northern Ireland the GAA operates across all 32 counties of the two countries and is a significant cultural and political force within Northern Irish politics.

Complementing and reinforcing the pursuit of an autonomous and isolationist sport strategy in relation to Britain and more recently Northern Ireland the Irish state through the GAA has also pursued a collective strategy aimed at other states with large Irish migrant populations particularly the United States and Australia. Up until the 1980s Irish sports diplomacy was limited to and defined by the Irish Diaspora and was concerned to maintain Irish cultural identity in overseas communities and also to support a lobby on behalf of Irish political interests (especially in terms of the country's relationship with Britain and Northern Ireland) in influential host countries.

It is only more recently, since membership of the European Union in 1973 and the Good Friday agreement in 1998 which changed the character and intensity of nationalist politics with regard to Northern Ireland, that the nature of the Irish sport strategy has altered significantly. While an autonomous strategy continues to define Irish sports diplomacy it has become less exclusive and isolationist. Irish involvement in football and particularly in the Olympic Games has increased steadily in prominence both in terms of popular appeal and also **in terms of government support.**

As a small and, for many years, an impoverished state, Ireland demonstrated the capacity to define and pursue an independent sport strategy at the domestic and international levels. This capacity was the product of the politicisation of culture in the anti-colonial struggle with the UK and the integration of cultural and political

nationalism. The strategy was also shaped by the singularity of Irish political objectives namely independence from the UK and a united Ireland. Once those objectives had been partially achieved an isolationist sport strategy became far less effective in supporting the diplomatic ambitions of the Irish state. However, while the Irish strategy has become more conventional it still reflects a considerable capacity on the part of the Irish state to determine the nature of strategic change.

In contrast to Singapore, Ireland has utilised a different set of resources in its efforts to utilise sport as a soft power diplomatic instrument. Ireland does not have **the** a strong current voice within major international sport organisations, although Lord Killanin was President of the IOC in the 1970s it was a time when Olympic sport was a low priority for the GAA-dominated Irish government. Although Ireland has increased its involvement in global sports it has not achieved a dominant or even prominent profile in any sport with the possible exception of rugby union. The independent and isolationist strategy of support for Gaelic sport has proved attractive to other states with a large Irish migrant population such as the USA and Australia, although the extent to which the prominence that support for Gaelic sport in migrant communities affects their host government policy in a way that is favourable to Irish interests is unclear.

The brief review of the cases of Singapore and Ireland illustrates **s** the capacity of small states to utilise sport for both domestic and international political purposes, but they also highlight the constraints on strategy choice even for states that possess substantial resources – economic in the case of Singapore and cultural in the case of Ireland. However, these two cases, while far from being the only studies of sport as a policy resource in small states, draw attention to the lack of research into the sport policy objectives of small states, the strategies they develop to pursue their objectives and the extent to which they achieve their objectives.

The relative neglect of the study of small states is not just a feature of sport policy analysis, but is a characteristic of the study of both domestic politics and international relations. In the field of international relations Christmas-Møller (1983: 39) referred to the 'benign neglect' of small states within the IR literature. Although Neumann and Gstöhl (2004: 12 and 13) noted a revival in small state studies in the

1990s they concluded that 'there has been no continuous flow of research on small states' and that 'the continued ... proliferation of small states ... must constitute a challenge to social scientists'. Part of the explanation for the relative neglect of small state studies in the field of sport policy is due, in part at least, to the sociology of knowledge within the field which is dominated and defined by the interests of academics in the 'sports powers' of western Europe and North America. Within this academic community the study of small states, such as it is, is often confined to the sub-discipline of 'sport for development' which tends to treat small states as passive objects rather than active, or potentially active, subjects in the policy process.

A second explanation of the neglect of small states is the difficulty of studying them. Given that the location of much sport studies research is in higher education institutions in large states there are few small states that have the research capacity (for example, universities with sports studies departments) to undertake research or to partner researchers from abroad. Furthermore, it is arguable that selecting the study of small states as university career direction is probably not a wise move as expertise in the policy of major states is likely to be more attractive to university appointments committees and to academic publishers: the study of small states has a small audience and one that is likely to remain small. A third explanation for the inertia in this area of study is the problem that the IR field has experienced in defining (and theorising) small states and the consequent attraction of moving on to other more amenable topics rather than address the definitional impasse and theoretical underdevelopment.

Small states and the future of international sport

Although it has been argued that there is a risk in over-emphasising the vulnerability of small states and underplaying their capacity there are trends in international sport that add a degree of urgency to the study of small states. The first is the globalising ambitions of the major international federations. The steady increase in the number of states participating in world championships puts at risk the success that some small states have managed to achieve in developing a niche sport such as Samoa, Tonga and even New Zealand in men's rugby union, Slovenia and Croatia in men's handball and Bulgaria and Cuba in men's volleyball. If these and other ambitious

sports are successful in attracting the major sports powers to embrace their sport then it may be more difficult for small states to preserve their niche position. A second trend which generally reinforces the ambitions of the international federations is the global objectives of the IOC. The steady growth in the number of states attending the summer Olympic Games has brought many small states into the Olympic Movement. The attraction of participation (even if only in the opening and closing ceremonies) and of access to Olympic Solidarity funding has a significant effect on domestic sport policy. Most states, even the wealthy, adopt an elite sport policy that is heavily influenced, if not determined, by the decisions of the IOC on the sports to be included in the summer and winter Games. The homogenising effect of the dominance of the Olympic diet of sports is unlikely to benefit small states, but rather make it even harder for them to identify a niche where they can develop and sustain a competitive advantage (and the associated international profile in sport). A final pressure on the strategies of small states is the increase in expenditure of the medium and major sport powers on elite athlete development (Houlihan and Zheng 2013) and particularly the increasing investment in sport science which may price many poorer countries out of an increasing range of sports.

Despite these potential additional pressures that small states face in developing and operationalizing an effective sport strategy in pursuit of domestic and especially international political objectives there is sufficient evidence to suggest that small states can be adept at operating in the political and diplomatic interstices between the major powers. More systematic studies of the strategies and experiences of small states would not only enrich our understanding of sport policy processes in a distinctive and extensive group of states, but would also enrich our understanding of the interface between international sport and international relations beyond that of a narrow group of sports powers.

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