

## Review paper

# SPORT AND TOURISM BETWEEN MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY

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### Abstract

The text presents and analyses manifestations of modernity and postmodernity in the field of competitive and recreational sport, physical education, leisure, and tourism. The paper builds upon an extensive literature survey and presents the concept and key features of postmodern societies and the modernity-postmodernity debate in sports with reference to postmodern tendencies in tourism. We have attempted to determine the proportions of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity in contemporary sport and tourism, keeping in mind that, similarly to contemporary societies as a whole, sport is undoubtedly a mixture of traditional, modern, and Fordist elements with postmodern and post-Fordist features. We present and discuss the prevailing belief that the key elements of leisure sport are mostly postmodern and focused on the notion of individualisation and freedom expressed especially in alternative sports, while commercialised mainstream sport follows the regular mass-media show-business development path, maintaining a significant amount of modern concepts, such as the importance of national identities. Special attention is also paid to the Olympic Games as a specific and very efficient mixture of modernity and postmodernity. More so than at any point in the past, and despite the actual proportions of modernity and postmodernity that it contains, contemporary sport has become an integral part of postmodern societies and their lifestyle, with technology-determined individualisation of sport consumption and leisure sport participation.

**Key words:** sport, sport events, tourism, postmodern society

### Introduction to the concept of postmodernity

Sport is deeply rooted in the tradition of European culture, and it is also a domain of life in which we can observe modern and postmodern social trends (both in competitive and leisure sport). Even the most ardent traditionalists note, very often with discontent, that what we are currently observing in contemporary, developed societies differs significantly from the way sport functioned in the past. It is more and more difficult for traditional theories to explain the increasing number of exceptions. In this paper, we aim to illustrate and analyse postmodern elements in the rapidly changing domains of sport, active leisure, tourism, and physical education. The idea of postmodernity has been present in the humanities for several decades. However, the debate on modernity and postmodernity intensified considerably in the 1980s and the 1990s, when postmodernist theories were used in an attempt to analyse the postindustrial, globalised consumer world [1]. Initially, the concept of postmodernism referred only to new movements in painting, architecture, film, and literature. The art of postmodernism was characterised by the bringing together of different styles and features that were typical of various cultures and eras, irony and artists' distance

from their works, relativism, and the departure from tradition and conventional standards. However, the idea of postmodernism was quickly utilised as a tool to analyse almost all aspects of life in contemporary societies. In each of these aspects, postmodernity is contrasted with a bygone industrial modernity. This opposition is the basis and common element of all postmodernist theories. In modern societies, there was a clear social structure, and there were obvious criteria determining social class (such as Marx's relationship to the means of production or Weberian stratification). However, according to theoreticians, in postmodern society, such structures are starting to blur. Traditional factors determining social class and status are no longer relevant, and the debate on the "death of class" is shifting from a theoretical phase to an empirical one. In the postmodern world, human identity is not as strongly defined by traditional social roles connected to a specific social class or position in the social structure, but rather by individual choices and preferred lifestyles, heavily influenced by ever-present marketing and continuous consumption. Postmodern relativism and the consequent collapse of old cultural institutions and socialising agents have left a creative space for leisure, determining its new social functions in the process of identity formation [2]. There-

fore, we are dealing with societies in which nothing is constant, obvious, permanent, or certain, and everything is seemingly achievable for each individual [3, 4]. These conditions result in consequences that are present in all areas of postmodern life. One such consequence is an excess of freedom. The necessity of constant decision-making and growing responsibility of the individual for his or her own life can lead to a need to “escape from freedom”. In open, meritocratic, postmodern societies, a belief constantly promoted by commercials is that every person can accomplish anything. Yet, this clashes with reality, as it is often impossible for many people to achieve their goals, which in turn leads to frustration, dissatisfaction, and, in some cases, violence [5].

Despite the fact that the concept of postmodernity has been discussed over many years, it is safe to say that there is still no one, explicit definition of the notion, which is often the case in the social sciences. While the general characteristics of postmodern theory (as roughly outlined above) – the absence of certainty, unambiguity, and permanence – remain a common thread, this lack of an unambiguous definition allows for diverse applications of postmodern theory in research. Furthermore, due to the lack of empirical study and evidence, the postmodern debate often does not go beyond theoretical analysis. Additionally, while attempting to perform a broader examination of world societies, we should bear in mind that modernity has not been completely superseded by postmodernity. As in economics, post-Fordism coexists with Fordism and pre-Fordism. The intensity of postmodern traits varies even in societies generally considered to be postmodern, such as European Union countries. Referring to Bauman [6], postmodern societies have ceased (or are ceasing) to be disciplined communities of “workers” and “soldiers”. They are instead becoming atomised and individualised consumer collectives: “during its current stage of development postmodern society does not require industrial and mass manpower nor a conscript army. Instead it requires its members to be consumers. The manner in which citizens are formed by contemporary society is mainly dominated by the consumer role that they need to play within that society” [4].

In this context, it is worth examining the utilitarian premise of the development of modern physical education and youth sport. Initially, care for the health and physical fitness of citizens was directly connected to the demand for efficient and disciplined soldiers and factory workers, as well as to maintaining production capabilities. The concern for health and physical fitness was therefore logical. In the 1880s, when education was made compulsory for all children in the United Kingdom, school authorities found physical education based on military fitness regimes to be the perfect means for disciplining and controlling children from the working class, while also maintaining social order [7]. This way of thinking meant that the body was treated instrumentally, which makes it different from the postmodern concept. It seems that the nature of leisure and competitive sport has changed in postmodernity. From being a pedagogical and communitarian instrument, it has become more of an individualistic means to achieve self-centred well-being.

#### **Postmodern sport and tourism: post-tourists, post-fans, and leisure**

As noted by Szacki, postmodern society is a postindustrial society [8], in which all of our basic needs are satisfied, industrial production has given way to services, knowledge and information are prized, and the size and type of consumption

have gained greater importance. In the recent developments of postindustrial society, leisure has acquired a new relevance in postmodern life, both in quantitative and qualitative terms [9]. In such societies, there has also been growth in both the amount and importance of leisure time. This has been confirmed by numerous studies [e.g. 10, 11]. The expanding significance of leisure time in Western societies has been well established for several years, and this is also true of former communist countries which have joined the EU and made progress in their economic development. According to the Polish Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) [12], the percentage of Poles who declared they lacked leisure time decreased by 9%, from 15% to 6%, between 2006 and 2010, while sport participation increased from 28.2% [13] to 45.9% [14].

If we combine this research with the contemporary thesis about the “death of class” and decline of traditional factors that determine social position and status, we can see that leisure time, the value systems that are associated with it, and the consumption related to it are a considerable area for study in the field of social structures. Thus leisure time should cease to simply be the antithesis in discussions about work and should become an important and independent subject of analysis. Postmodernity is linked with an increase in leisure time, but also with changes to it. Those modifications can be observed in the areas of leisure time, tourism, and both recreational and professional sport. In this paper we will concentrate on sport (both recreational and professional); however, because of the inseparable links between all of the aforementioned areas, they (especially tourism) will also be present in our analysis.

An attempt to determine the exact proportions of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity in contemporary sport appears very compelling, but sport, similarly to contemporary societies as a whole, is undoubtedly a mixture of traditional, modern, and Fordist elements with postmodern and post-Fordist features. However, there is a prevailing belief among researchers that the key elements of recreational sport are mostly postmodern. Heinemann [11, 15] mentions it in his analysis of sports club culture, highlighting the visible transformation in the forms of sports and Europeans’ interactions with sports. Heinemann [11] notes that despite the noticeable increase in the number of sports club members across Western Europe, more and more people are actually taking up a sport outside of organised structures. These are usually individual and recreational sports, lacking the element of competition. Besides having to do with postmodern social tendencies, this situation is also connected with the ageing of European societies. Older people are naturally attracted to recreational sports, while sport clubs offer activities more suitable for younger people, which are based on competition between clubs. Contemporary young people frequently do not stay attached to one sport for a sustained period and do not try to reach perfection in any one discipline, but instead change their interests as quickly as they change channels on TV. Hence, such individuals are labelled “sport-zappers” (a term which is derived from the word “TV-zapper”) or “grass hoppers”. A sport-zapper has become another type of consumer of goods and services in a consumer society. It is a person who rents a yacht to sail for a week in the Masuria Lake District, Croatia, or Italy; signs up for a climbing excursion to the Alps; books a windsurfing instructor for a few hours; tries snowboarding when they are bored with skiing; and visits a swimming pool every now and then. Postmodern sport activities are often unstructured and independent from institutions. They are also individualised and focused on the concept of solitary self-satisfaction. The postmodern recreational sportsman has become an active and never fully-satisfied

seeker of sensations and pleasures, similar to the postmodern tourist as described by Bauman [16] and MacCannell [17]. The postmodern tourist is an omnivorous consumer of culture in the very same way as the postmodern leisure sportsman is. Both tourism and leisure (including leisure sport) have undergone the same profound changes. Modern mass production, industrialisation, and standardisation were giving way to still mass but post-Fordist production, de-industrialisation, diversity, flexibility, and mobility of humans, technology, capital, and cultures. Mass tourism and standardised “packaging” tourist products were not what people were looking for. Therefore, tourism became more individual, flexible, and very often tailor-made. The products offered became much more diversified, reflecting the diversity of consumers’ preferences, “proliferation of alternative sights and attractions”, and shifts in tourist sites and experiences due to fashion changes [18, 19]. Uriely [20] claims that “post-modern tourism is characterised by the multiplicity of tourist motivations, experiences, and environments”, which means that “different people perform different tourist activities”, but also – and this is more likely – post-tourists (the same people) enjoy “moving across the different types of tourist experiences”.

Postmodern changes in tourism have been supported by communication technology development and globalisation as well as the processes of the “McDonaldization” and “Disneyization” of consumption, the latter meaning that tourism has become magic, playful, and theme-oriented [21]. As stated by Dujmović and Vitasović [22], “it is evident that the term ‘post-modern tourism’ was utilized with regard to a variety of developments, including the emergence of alternatives to the conventional mass tourism and the growing quest for simulated and theme-oriented tourism attractions”. With regard to the latter, we can easily see links between the concept of “hyperreal” experience and simulacra [23] and artificial, theme-oriented sport stadia as places of consumption and media consumption of sport. “Post-tourists” can be seen in neo-tribal sport “post-fans” who, in their individual ways (via television, the Internet, etc.), seek mostly entertainment and pleasurable consumption in supporting sports teams. They are often not attached to any local stadium or club (in a topophilic way, described by Bale [24]). An example would be Italian or Polish cosmopolitan, globalised, media literate children, whose favourite football team may be not their local team, but the Spanish Real Madrid or Barcelona football club. The “mediated experiences of sport on television” [25] or the Internet will be predominant for them (the above mentioned “hyperrality”), and this will probably not be their life-time sport-fan commitment. These characteristics are also visible in supranational, *flâneur* type fans, who will easily drop and change the team they support while keenly participating in various sporting brand cultures, by wearing Chicago Bulls caps, Brazil football team shirts, or Manchester United sweatshirts [1].

### Postmodern sport events, tourism, and “serious leisure”

Nowadays, sports events have been established around the world as a growing sector of the leisure industry, becoming gatherings for sharing experiences, value systems, and lifestyles and may be interpreted as the new socialising agents in a postindustrial society [26]. These events, through different forms of participation, are some of the most widespread practices of leisure. They have become important social phenomena and are believed to have considerable economic, socio-cultural, and political effects on the places and communities that host

them. Analyses of the “legacy” of the impact of sport, especially mega sport events, have received significant scientific attention [e.g. 27, 28, 29, 30] and have often dealt with both positive and (many) negative outcomes of sport mega-events, with “critics questioning their effectiveness as avenues for economic development and the gap between the rhetoric and reality of the mega-event effect” [31]. If we examine any particular sporting event widely publicised by the media, we can clearly see its post-modern eclecticism. Let us take the UEFA Cup events and their media image – including visual, musical, and commercial elements – as an example. Here we can observe a constant blending of styles: dead seriousness and embellished terror (“culture clash”, “fight for your life”, etc.) mixed with comic commercials of various UEFA sponsors and YouTube video imitations. Mobile phone recordings of average quality, presumably aimed at making the transmission more authentic, accompany HD images. In such cases (including the extended opening and closing ceremonies), sport intermingles with art or is simply treated as art. It is also a business and form of economic activity.

Sport mega-events are inherently linked to the sport tourism concept that has become widespread both as a popular tourist product and in academic research. The flow of sports tourists is growing and changing. More and more people, some for health reasons and some for pleasure or passion, choose their holiday in accordance with the sports supply, and sports are determining their tourist destination. In order to develop marketing strategies for particular regions based on the appeal of sports- and culture-related attractions they offer, organised cultural and sports events that attract a large number of fans, athletes, and their families have been established [32]. On the other hand, due to the global audience of mega sport events, the exact location of the event venue is becoming less relevant. In the global postmodern era, sport mega-events may be located in a desert (e.g. in Doha, Dubai, or Abu Dhabi), and Winter Olympic Games may be organised in a location where snow is a rare phenomenon (e.g. Sochi 2014).

In postindustrial society, new economic assets, new forms of work, new values, new social subjects, and, above all, new spaces and ways of using leisure to attract “serious tourists” have emerged [33]. These novelties have allowed “serious tourists” to develop a “tourist career” [34], studying issues related to an event, seeking a high quality of service, and, above all, seeking the added value given by the relational capital that an event can offer through its staff and the host community. The public of today, which is more educated (thanks to access to new media that allow for the easy exploration of topics of interest), richer, and has more leisure time, seeks more attractive cultural spaces. In these spaces, people are also looking to derive aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction from intensive recreational and relational activity and therefore have the need to be part of a community of common interests. The studies by Ryan [35] and Urry [36] have outlined a trend in international tourism demand towards the growth of the experiential tourist, who is multi-motivated and multi-sensorial and is also called the “post-mass tourist”. The “serious leisure” sought in the postindustrial society expresses a different attention towards tradition, cultural heritage, the local community, and the authenticity of relationships, all of which sports events can overlap with in terms of their socio-cultural contexts, especially in the few cases in which local stakeholders adhere to the bottom-up development theory used in sustainable tourism and develop a new hybridisation of knowledge among local administrators, event organisers, and experiential tourists with a postmodern lifestyle [37]. In the current knowledgeable society, consumption is the main instrument for exis-

tential investment as well as for the construction and affirmation of our own dimension of identity. Participation in a sport event can be an opportunity to share collective rituals and feel part of a group or “social tribe” [38]. These events become gatherings and experiences which make it possible to share and communicate value systems and lifestyles.

The most important sport events, such as continental championships, world cups in major sport disciplines, or mega sport events such as the Olympics, affect all aspects of social life in the host country (or countries, which seems to be the latest trend). They wield a huge influence on the country’s economy, marketing strategies, road infrastructure, urban planning and general development as well as on the life of citizens and their holiday plans. These events have become responsible for economic and social growth in the country, or its lack. The game is perceived as sacred: it is an elevated and unusual event, separate from everyday life. It is also an exceptional event in the contemporary, postmodern, individualised society with its premium on diversified tastes, as it gains the attention of the majority and is commonly understood. This is achieved because of the simplicity of the meaning of sport and its clear rules and unambiguous characteristics, all of which are often missing in the surrounding reality. Those in red and white t-shirts are “our team” and the ones we need to support. Their rivals are “the other team”, who should be treated with dislike at the very least. In this respect, sport is undoubtedly a stronghold of modernity. It is also a symbolic return to contemplating national identities (as a form of Billing’s banal nationalism [39]) and to localisation in a globalised world, in which – at least in the European Union – official borders between (at least Schengen area) countries have actually ceased to exist. These borders not only organised space but also constituted ways of interpreting reality. However – as noted in recent years based on the example of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, which saw a wave of discontent in the country due to the large amount of money spent on its organisation or the withdrawal of Kraków from the competition to host the Winter Olympics due to the disapproval of its citizens – sport can lose its widespread popularity and sacred character in democratic societies.

The political polarisation of the Cold War gave way to multipolarity some time ago. In this supranational, global, homogenised consumer reality sport involving national teams can be seen as a contemporary museum of modern concepts. In this understanding, the Olympic Games could also be perceived as such a museum, although the following argument suggests they actually fit perfectly into the postmodern transformation. This is due to the fact that beyond the classic Greek façade, the Olympics shelter eclecticism typical of postmodern architecture, art, literature, and cinema. They value participation and fair play, and, on the other hand, all that matters is winning, or, in the worst case scenario, landing any Olympic medal. This, at least in Poland, guarantees a proper pension in the amount of the average monthly salary from the previous year, financed by the taxpayers. In this respect, athletes are treated in a special way that differs from the treatment received by all other members of our democratic society – truly like the Olympian Gods in comparison to the common folk. Arguably, no other law guarantees such special retirement privileges for a professional achievement. In any other field, the most one can receive for outstanding achievements is a state medal or a one-time monetary award from the government or a collective organisation (such as the Polish Nike prize or “Polish Nobel” prize, etc.). It is unlikely that even Nobel Prize winners (including Poles) will get a fixed pension because of this particular accomplishment, although,

similarly to athletes, they do receive a substantial one-time monetary award. We do not honour outstanding scientists, soldiers, or artists with additional pension schemes; we therefore treat athletes as people who are socially disabled (i.e. not having enough working years to accrue social insurance contributions which would be sufficient for receiving a decent pension) and as such are in need of additional care from society. At the same time, helping athletes to develop as better human beings by enhancing their potentialities through learning and education is nowadays a human right whose importance has been recently stressed by the European Union [40]. For too many years, athletes did not have access to the education system. Actually, the new policies and commitment of the European Union to issues having to do with the so-called “dual career of student athletes” are aimed to frame the practice of sport in our society within a wider context of social justice and social equality.

### Modernity and postmodernity of the Olympic Games

A true abundance of contradicting and dichotomous divisions – though non-conflicting and even harmoniously coexisting – can be observed in the Olympic Games. The Games, constructed by Coubertin based on the fundamental principles of modernity and humanistic ideology, treat sport simultaneously as autotelic and instrumental. The contemporary Olympic Games are the meeting point of the amateur and utterly professional. Without the latter, there is no actual chance of succeeding in the Games; this allows for the coexistence of the ideology of Olympism and pure and fair play with the rational and pragmatic strategies of teams and individual athletes aimed at gaining money and everlasting fame. The Olympics simultaneously functions as something beyond politics while also having a significant political impact. The IOC promotes stability in sporting rules and values as well as constantly modifying the disciplines included in the Games, in an attempt to widen its audience and attract more sponsors. Segreve [41] states that the Olympic Games “were conceived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a classic expression of modernity”, while “the breakdown of the modernist project over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has transformed the Games into a postmodern phenomenon, a development that has nurtured the Games but denigrated Olympism”. This should not be interpreted as a criticism of the Olympic Games, but rather as a summary of their characteristics and presentation of their postmodern collage of ideas and values, all of which may also be found in many other areas of life besides sport.

### Conclusions

Referring to Veblen’s leisure class concept, sport has long ago lost its character as an activity that is (presumably) completely economically unproductive and used only as symbolic violence to demonstrate the dominance of the leisure class above the rest of the society. While organised sport is rooted in the age of modern production and modern society, with time and technology, it has – especially in terms of leisure sport and media sport consumption – strongly diversified into a commercial show-business spectacle and leisure activity infused with postmodern notions of pleasure-seeking consumption, flexibility, individuality, and personal freedom. With regard to these features, sport post-participants and post-consumers are very similar to post-tourists. Being an integral element of culture, contemporary sport, more so than at any point in the past and

despite the actual proportions of modernity and postmodernity that it contains, has become an integral part of postmodern societies, their lifestyle, and identity.

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