Governing bodies or managing freedom? Subcultural struggles, national sport systems and the glocalised institutionalisation of parkour

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Abstract

Whilst being the world's fastest growing informal sport, parkour is also undergoing a gradual institutionalisation which is shaped differently by each national context's specific sport system. We investigate this glocalised process by examining the subcultural tensions and power struggles it generates within the Italian parkour community. Whilst in other countries parkour practitioners (the so-called *traceurs/traceuses*) have managed to gain public recognition by forming a specific and independent national governing body, in Italy they are gradually affiliating with different Sport Promotion Bodies (*Enti di Promozione Sportiva*), the distinctive umbrella organisations which compete for the provision of sport-for-all within the country. Through a qualitative mixed-method approach based on focus groups, individual interviews and the analysis of ethnographic and documentary material, we explore the institutionalisation of Italian parkour by focusing on the controversies surrounding the introduction of teaching standards and qualifications, which is becoming a battlefield between competing authenticity claims based on different visions and interpretations of parkour.

Our analysis shows how sport policymakers become influential agents in this authentication process by (often unwittingly) favouring certain forms and meanings of the practice and thereby contributing to legitimising certain practitioners over others, distributing subcultural reputations and shaping hierarchies in the field. Moreover, by highlighting how the specific characteristics of the Italian sport system contribute to increasing tensions amongst traceurs but also stimulate discussion and pluralism, this study calls for future comparative analysis of the role of policymakers in the local re-contextualisation of highly globalised practices.

Keywords: lifestyle sports; institutionalisation; authenticity; teaching/coaching qualifications; glocalisation; Italian sport system

Introduction

Contemporary neo-liberal states are increasingly including sport within (and using it to serve) broader social investment policies in key areas such as health, education, social inclusion and crime reduction (Green 2007; Bergsgard et al. 2007, Andrews and Silk 2012). At the same time, sport participation is gradually moving away from rigidly structured and organised mainstream practices to explore new forms of personal, social and environmental engagement through physical activity (Borgers et al. 2015). Therefore, the incorporation of lifestyle sports and informal outdoor activities into sport development policies and broader public policies could provide new opportunities to reach out to wider and more diverse audiences (Tomlinson et al. 2005, Casey et al. 2009, Rowe 2012), including those at risk of inactivity such as low-income groups, people with weight concerns or elderly (Borgers et al. 2015).

However, this also presents policymakers and sport institutions with new challenges in terms of developing suitable systems of governance, regulation and funding (Turner 2013, Borgers et al. 2016b). Moreover, the gradual incorporation of lifestyle sports into mainstream organisational structures tends to alter the nature of these activities and the experiences of their practitioners (Thorpe and Wheaton 2011, Ojala 2014, King and Church 2015), fostering competing visions of the practice and exacerbating battles for control and power amongst different groups (Coates et al. 2010).

These issues are discussed here by exploring the complex pathways of the sportisation and institutionalisation of parkour, one of the most popular and rapidly growing lifestyle sports. Characterised by an ethos of ownership and responsibility towards one's own self, others and the environment (Atkinson 2009), parkour is

particularly suitable for fostering pro-social behaviour and active citizenship as required by current social investment policies (Green 2007). As highlighted by Gilchrist and Wheaton (2011), parkour is proving to be a successful tool to increase sport participation amongst otherwise inactive, hard-to-reach youth, given its flexible, anticompetitive and inclusive nature and its ability to provide managed risk-taking. Nonetheless, the incorporation of parkour within sport policies entails the negotiation of different discourses around risk and requires the formalisation of safety standards and regulations, including the introduction of teaching qualifications (Wheaton 2013).

While addressing the need to reassure the stakeholders (notably parents, school teachers, educationalists and public administrators) and the wider public about the safety of the practice, regulations and teaching qualifications – similarly to other sports such as mountaineering (Beedie 2007) or snowboarding (Ojala and Thorpe 2015) – are also becoming a contested field for normative definitions of the practice itself, nourishing an ideological battle among competing forms and interpretations of parkour (Ferrero Camoletto et al. 2015).

Moreover, although the globalised and mediatised diffusion of parkour (Kidder 2012, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2013) has shaped the practice in similar ways worldwide, its regulation and formal recognition are moulded slightly differently at the local level by different national systems of sport governance, which contribute to the glocalisation of the discipline (Roberston 1995, Thorpe and Ahmad 2015). We analyse this glocalised process by focusing on the role of sport-for-all organisations in the institutionalisation of Italian parkour, particularly with regard to the introduction of teaching qualifications and its impact on the internal hierarchies within the community of practitioners.

Parkour evolution(s), authenticity struggles and subcultural hierarchies

Parkour can be defined as the art of moving in the most fluid and efficient way from one place to another through running, jumping, rolling and leaping over and across any natural or architectural obstacle such as walls, trees, fences, roofs or staircases (Ortuzar 2009, Kidder 2013). Created in a deprived suburb of Paris in the late 1980s, parkour (like other lifestyle sports) is often represented by its participants as a no-competition, no-rules and no-ref practice, thereby marking its difference from institutionalised, achievement-oriented Western sport cultures (Wheaton 2013). Since the end of the 1990s, parkour has been rapidly spreading among urban (mainly male) young people across many countries, thanks to the extensive use of 2.0 social media (Kidder 2012, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2013, Thorpe 2016a).

For many of its practitioners – the so-called traceurs/traceuses – parkour is more than simply a form of physical activity. On the personal level, it can be considered as "a form of urban adventurism allowing for tests of individual character" (Kidder 2013, 231), in which "playing with fear" (Saville 2008, 908) and reinterpreting obstacles as opportunities (Bavinton 2007) become ways to explore/overcome one's own mental, emotional and physical limits, thus increasing self-awareness and self-confidence. On the social level, parkour can be interpreted as a form of resistance and challenge to the alienating corporate architecture that characterises most urban environments, particularly in suburbs, thus turning physical activity into a form of playful escapism or even an act of critique, subversion and anarcho-environmentalism (Daskalaki et al. 2008, Atkinson 2009, Mould 2009, Lamb 2014).

Whilst being characterised by a strong sense of subcultural distinctiveness, commitment and belonging, parkour can be considered as a fragmented social field in which particular practices, embodied knowledge and dispositions are recognised as subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) and mobilised to build identities, reputations and hierarchies (Wheaton 2013).[i] Such status hierarchies are generally underpinned by authenticity claims, since "participation is explained by reference to the idea of a 'true' inner self — an essential self that emerges and is maintained through subcultural involvement, and is constituted in relation to the 'in-authenticity' and shallowness of others" (Wheaton and Beal 2003, 159). This rhetorical opposition between 'real' and 'artificial/fake', or between 'alternative' and 'mainstream', often implies the diachronic dimension of remaining faithful to the original form and ethos of a subcultural practice. However, authenticity is a social construction of symbolic boundaries rather than an objective category (Williams and Copes 2005) and it can be defined as "a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (Peterson 2005, 1086). Hence, the authentication process results from the interaction between those who make the 'authenticity work' – e.g. the "effort to appear authentic" (ibid.) – and those who "are able to grant or reject the authenticity claim" (Peterson 2005, 1090). Whilst such legitimation power is mainly exercised by the community of practitioners (especially the most experienced among them), the authentication process can also be considerably influenced by external actors – such as sport organisations and policy makers – once a lifestyle sport becomes somehow institutionalised, as this paper will highlight.

One of the main authenticity disputes among traceurs revolves around the distinction between parkour and free-running. Whilst most traceurs value both the

disciplining dimension (e.g. the importance of building the body as armour) and the creative/aesthetic aspects of the practice, those who emphasise the latter (seeking self-expression through acrobatic tricks) are often called *free-runners* as opposed to those who accentuate the former (pursuing efficiency and essentiality). Despite being contested and blurred, the parkour/free-running distinction has definitely become an important site for competing discourses of authenticity confronting tradition vs innovation, purity vs hybridisation, and utility/discipline vs display/expression (Wheaton 2013).

As for other alternative and lifestyle sports, contested authenticity claims have increased with the rapid popularisation and evolution(s) of parkour, developing around different but partly intertwined transformative processes – on the one hand, the mediatisation (Kidder 2012; Gilchrist and Wheaton 2013) and related commercialisation/commodification of the practice (Coates et al. 2010, Edwards and Corte 2010, Stapleton and Terrio 2012); on the other, its sportisation (Lebreton et al. 2010, Thorpe and Wheaton 2011), professionalisation (Ojala 2014) and institutionalisation (Wheaton 2013).

Unsurprisingly, mainstream sport brands such as Nike and Adidas have started to commercialise parkour-specific garments and equipment – although less successfully than in other lifestyle sports, at least so far (Wheaton 2013) – while other companies like Red Bull have incorporated parkour in their marketisation and spectacularisation of action sports. Many traceurs have started to perform in commercial events and advertisements, as well as in corporate sponsored competitions. The purists of parkour, on the other hand, accuse them of 'selling out' the practice (Wheaton and Beal 2003) and betraying its authentic values, which they consider to be oriented towards personal development rather than narcissistic exhibition. Similarly to

other "'resistant' subcultures that actively embrace commodification" (Giulianotti 2005, 56), parkour is characterised by competing and often ambivalent views on this issues.

The professionalisation of parkour is accompanied by its gradual institutionalisation, i.e. the "process through which behaviours and organisation become patterned or standardised over time from one situation to another" (Coakley 2001, 20). This involves the sportisation of an informal and play-like activity through the standardisation of rules, the establishment of governing bodies, the rationalisation of the practice and the formalisation of its learning. However, whilst for many lifestyle sports these processes are usually driven by the incorporation of the practice into networks of contests and competitions (Thorpe and Wheaton 2011, Ojala 2014, Ojala and Thorpe 2015, Gagnon et al. 2016), in the case of parkour they mainly depend on the need to regulate the increasing number of parkour courses taught by young instructors whose expertise is not formally certified (North 2010, Wheaton 2013).

Teaching/coaching qualifications and the contested institutionalisation of parkour

Lifestyle sports are gradually gaining recognition among policymakers as a tool for education and social intervention (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, Thorpe 2016b) providing alternatives to more traditional activities, which often need to be adapted and de-sportised in order to become more inclusive and flexible (Sterchele 2015).

Parkour has clearly the potential to stimulate the civic engagement of hard-to-reach youth by increasing their sport participation through the provision of managed risk-taking opportunities (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011). Notably, parkour is characterised by an ethos of care – towards one's own self, others and the environment

(Atkinson 2009) – which makes it extremely suitable to raise active and responsible citizens within neoliberal policies and forms of government(ality) (Green 2007; Wheaton 2013). The DIY attitude of traceurs and the nature of parkour make it particularly convenient for policymakers and local administrators, limiting the requests for investment in infrastructure and facilitating cost-effective interventions in peripheries and deprived areas. Moreover, the inclusive ethos (and rhetoric) or parkour, despite its contradictions and ambiguities (Rannikko et al. 2016), makes it less intimidating than other environments and potentially more open to diversity (Wheaton 2013, De Martini Ugolotti 2015).

Nonetheless, the incorporation of parkour into sport (and broader social) policies entails important challenges with regard to defining safety regulations and providing suitable forms of governance for an activity that was born as an alternative to mainstream sports (Tomlinson et al. 2005, King and Church 2015). While the normalisation of the practice is partly achieved through its spatial containment within parkour-parks (Gilchrist and Osborne 2017) and other forms of indoorisation (Van Bottenburg and Salome 2010), a further measure to ensure its safety is the introduction of teaching/coaching qualifications (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, O'Loughlin 2012). In the UK, for instance, the crucial importance of "delivering legacy and policy objectives through the systemic development of active, skilled and qualified coaches" (Duffy et al. 2013, 165) has been recently recognised by the UK Coaching Framework (sports coach UK 2008). Hence, the need to educate coaches and instructors, evaluating and certifying their expertise, applies not only to lifestyle sports, but represents a common issue for sports coaching in general (Duffy et al. 2013).[ii]

However, this entails further meanings and additional challenges for activities like parkour and most lifestyle sports that were originally based on individual

experiential learning (through trial and error) supported by peer learning (O'Grady 2012, Ojala and Thorpe 2015). Given the moral panic associated with parkour despite evidence suggesting that its injury rates are no higher than in many traditional sports (Wanke et al. 2013), the regulation and monitoring of its coaching are accepted or even welcomed by many traceurs who hope this process will contribute to reassuring public opinion, legitimising parkour as a safe activity and gaining insurance coverage (Wheaton 2013). Yet, disputes and controversies arise not only between those who accept or reject the introduction of coaching certification but also between different views about the most appropriate form of qualification. Indeed, formalising one specific way of teaching parkour can legitimise one form– i.e. one specific definition, version and ideological interpretation – of the practice over others, and therefore those traceurs who favour (and identify themselves with) that specific form. While impacting on subcultural reputations and hierarchies, this process could also contribute to the standardisation of the practice and the reduction of pluralism in terms of performance styles and interpretations (O'Loughlin 2012, Wheaton 2013, Gravestock 2016). Geo-cultural diversity is also at stake, since the internationally dominant status of some coaching qualification for parkour – such as the UK-based ADAPT (Art du Déplacement And Parkour Teaching) programme[iii] discussed in this paper – can generate forms of cultural imperialism and local resistance (or acquiescence) which clearly show the glocalised development of parkour highlighting "the simultaneity or co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in globalization" (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007, 134). Finally, another important issue is the allocation of the power to grant the formal accreditation of coaching qualifications in parkour and enforce the related rules, which entails debates about, the establishment of official governing bodies or rather the creation of innovative and more suitable forms

of governance (Tomlinson et al. 2005, Turner 2013, Ferrero Camoletto et al. 2015, Borgers et al. 2016b).

This article extends Wheaton's (2013) analysis of the institutionalisation of parkour in the UK by exploring how the process has developed in a partly different way in the Italian context, where the ADAPT certification has been imported by one of the sport-for-all organisations that are competing for a leading position in the incorporation of parkour (Ferrero Camoletto et al. 2015). We adopt a post-subcultural perspective (Wheaton 2007) which, instead of reading subcultural groups as homogeneous communities that gradually evolve from a completely resistant to a fully co-opted status, "seeks to understand and explain the complex, shifting, and nuanced politics and power relations involved in the commercialization [and institutionalisation] of youth cultures before, during, and after the group becomes incorporated into the mainstream" (Thorpe and Wheaton 2011, 834). Rather than interpreting such incorporation as a top-down dynamic, the post-subcultural approach acknowledges the agency of subcultural groups in both resisting this process and actively embracing the opportunities that it provides (Giulianotti 2005).

Different ideological and pragmatic forms of active engagement in this process have been analysed in previous studies considering both the intra-cultural politics of "the dynamics between individuals and groups within each action sport culture" and the inter-cultural politics related to "the power relations *between* social groups and agencies such as the [...] sporting organizations […], and the action sport cultures [...]" (Thorpe and Wheaton (2011, 834-35). Here we focus on the introduction of teaching qualifications as another emerging battleground for the definition of authenticity (Wheaton 2013), in which subcultural capital is distributed to assess credibility (Thornton 1995) and dominant positions in transmitting parkour philosophy and

practice. We look at how certifications are used by individual traceurs, groups and sport-for-all organisations in raising authenticity claims, i.e. in competing for the definition of the 'authentic' discipline and the 'good practitioner'. Through the analysis of this process, we also investigate Italian Sport Promotion Bodies' cultural politics of incorporation of lifestyle sports and their impact in the governance of these fluid and grassroots practices (Tomlinson et al. 2005, Turner 2013). Finally, the glocalised institutionalisation of Italian parkour highlights the interplay between global dynamics and local diversity (Roberston 1995) by showing how the highly cross-cultural character of lifestyle sports can be partly re-shaped by the specific features of local sports systems, on the one hand, and challenge them, on the other.

Context and method

In the absence of a Ministry of Sport, the Italian sports governance structure is headed by the National Olympic Committee (NOC) which has the power to recognise, regulate and subsidise each sport's National Governing Bodies (NGB), thus ruling on both elite and grassroots sport. However, a parallel system was developed after the end of World War II to manage the provision of sport-for-all activities as a means for social inclusion, participation and recreation (Porro 1995). This system is composed of several umbrella-organisations called Sport Promotion Bodies (SPBs) managing their own yearly leagues for a broad range of different sports. Initially born as the sporting vanguards of mass parties, SPBs were formally acknowledged by the NOC as institutional subjects of the sport system in 1974. While many of them barely exceed 100,000 members, the biggest SPBs such as CSI (Centro Sportivo Italiano) and the

UISP (Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti) have 1 million and 1.4 million members respectively.

Although most SPBs tend to replicate the hierarchical and rigid structure of the NOC-affiliated NGB, their different mission means they can afford a greater organisational diversity and flexibility, which makes them potentially more suitable to accommodate occasional and less structured forms of physical and cultural activities (Ferrero Camoletto et al. 2015). Three SPBs – AICS (Associazione Italiana Cultura e Sport), CSEN (Centro Sportivo Educativo Nazionale) and UISP – have recently been particularly active in trying to intercept and co-opt the new trends in bodily and sport cultures, with specific attention given to street sports and notably parkour as an emerging practice. In order to analyse the consequences of SPBs' engagement with parkour, our paper focuses on the controversies surrounding the introduction of teaching standards and qualifications, which is becoming a battlefield between competing visions and interpretations of the discipline.

Our study was conducted between November 2012 and October 2015 adopting a qualitative mixed-method approach based on focus groups, individual interviews, ethnographic observation and the analysis of on-line sources and other documentary material. Although informal conversations were held with officers from the SPBs to gain a broader understanding of the context, our fieldwork specifically focused on the accounts of the traceurs and their representations as insiders (Kay 2009).

Non-participatory, overt ethnographic observation was carried out during the first ADAPT courses held in Italy (Level 1 in December 2012[iv] and October 2013, Level 2 in October 2013) and at some of the biggest parkour events in the country (i.e. TheJamBO, Ecce Parkour and Krap Invaders). While focusing on the participants' reception of the performance styles and normative discourses conveyed by the course,

ethnographic fieldwork also enabled us to identify key actors (representative of different attitudes/approaches to the practice and the course itself) and establish trust with potential interviewees and participants in the focus groups. These were therefore recruited through a combination of purposive, emergent, snowballing and convenience sampling (Patton 1990) that was "not fixed in advance but" was instead "an ongoing process guided by emerging ideas" (Holloway 1997).

Six focus groups were carried out overall with four to six traceurs each. Three focus groups were conducted during and after the first ADAPT Level 1 course, held in late 2012, with what we labelled 'non-sceptical participants' (i.e. traceurs who attended the course and were to various degrees supportive of that certification system), 'sceptical participants' (who attended the course but were critical about ADAPT) and 'sceptical non-participants' (who were critical and therefore did not attend the course). The other three focus groups were conducted during the second ADAPT Level 1 course in October 2013 with traceurs recruited through emergent and opportunistic sampling depending on participants' availability and fieldwork circumstances.

Semi-structured individual interviews were also conducted throughout the research with 21 traceurs (all male except one), mainly targeting experienced practitioners who were able to provide information-rich interpretations and offer a longitudinal account of the processes under scrutiny. Both in focus groups and individual interviews, participants' views on the introduction of coaching qualifications in Italian parkour were explored by prompting a broader discussion of (interconnected) key issues including: the impact of digital media, particularly YouTube, on both the diffusion and misrepresentation of parkour; their role in stimulating imitation/mimicry phenomena, irresponsible practice, health and safety

concerns, and moral panic; the consequences on the reputation of the discipline; the role of parkour parks and spatial containment.

Individual interviews and focus groups were fully transcribed and then thematically coded and analysed (Sparkes and Smith 2014) with specific attention given to the relationship between teaching qualifications and authenticity claims, as well as the interplay between intra- and inter-cultural politics (i.e. the dynamics of tension and cooperation among traceurs and between them and the SPBs).

The fieldwork was complemented by the analysis of on-line sources and other documentary material produced within the community of traceurs and by the SPBs. Notably, in this article we also draw on video-interviews recently carried out by the founder of the Rome-based association Monkey-Move with several groups of Italian traceurs and made publicly available on YouTube since the end of 2014 (here cited as 'VT interviews').

In order to better contextualise the presentation of our findings, we will mention some key parkour groups' real names when analysing information already in the public domain, whilst the sources will be anonymised when using data from our own interviews and focus groups.

Teaching qualifications as authenticity claims

Joining a moralisation movement led by internationally renowned groups such as Parkour Generations and ADD Academy and boosting their endorsement, four of the most important Italian parkour associations – namely Momu (Rome), Rhizai (Trani), Milan Monkeys (Milan) and ParkourWave (Bergamo), all UISP members – signed the Italian Manifesto of Parkour in 2010.[v] This document was conceived as a call for the

Italian traceurs to preserve the authentic values of the discipline through the development of shared "rigorous and professional" attitudes and teaching standards, thereby limiting "the phenomenon of incompetent instructors", protecting the public image of parkour in Italy and preventing its commodification. While defining an orthodoxy (listing as the core principles of parkour, "the history of the discipline, founders and representatives, definition and sharing of values") the Manifesto also indicated a legitimate way of transmitting such an orthodoxy, identified in the ADAPT certification.

The ADAPT crusade

The ADAPT certification was developed by the UK-based Parkour Generations, with the endorsement of some of the French founders of parkour (Wheaton 2013). Parkour Generations' approach to parkour is strongly underpinned by (and contributes to shaping) normative discourses around the nature of the discipline and the moral status of its practitioners. From this perspective, the importance of healthy lifestyle and physical conditioning assumes a moral significance, since building the 'body armour' is considered a necessary prerequisite to enable responsible risk-managing (in line with the authentic ethos of parkour) and promote both the safety and the reputation of the practice (Kidder 2013). Hence the rigour of the ADAPT teaching/coaching programme, which is structured in different levels (1 for Assistant Coach, 2 for Coach and 3 for Master Coach) entailing both residential courses and certified traineeships. Whilst gaining strong status internationally – particularly (although not exclusively) amongst those traceurs who share such rigorous and disciplinary approach to the

practice – ADAPT has also generated controversies based on differing and conflicting positions and interpretations.

The promoters of the Italian Manifesto of Parkour managed to convince UISP's officers to hold the first Italian ADAPT courses level 1 in 2012 and level 2 in 2013 under the supervision of instructors from Parkour Generations. The incorporation of the ADAPT teaching programme by UISP further accelerated the gradual co-optation of the majority of Italian parkour associations and practitioners into this SPB: by the end of 2013 about 70 parkour groups and 1,400 traceurs were formally affiliated, including some of the most active parkour groups in the national landscape.

However, despite UISP's quantitative dominance, the engagement of other SPBs such as AICS and CSEN has proved to be important in ensuring pluralism and complexifying the debate amongst traceurs. Notably, an alternative course for parkour teachers proposed within CSEN in 2011 immediately generated scornful protest on the part of some of the most influential UISP-based ADAPT advocates who issued the following statement:

> We were the first Italian portal to promote Parkour in Italy. Nowadays we have around 160 subscribers to our Roman courses run by instructors who are ADAPT certified by Parkour UK […]
>
> Today CSEN has decided to open a course to train Parkour instructors without contacting the French founders and above all to do this in unacceptable ways. A two-day course that enables anyone to become an instructor and teach Parkour simply by paying 250 euros.
>
> Parkour is a potentially devastating discipline if badly taught. Let's safeguard traceurs' health, especially that of the youngest ones.

BOYCOTT CSEN COURSES AND THOSE WHO PROMOTE THEM, BOYCOTT THOSE WHO DON'T CARE ABOUT THE PROMOTION OF PARKOUR AND ISSUE QUALIFICATIONS WITHOUT ANY EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE, SO PUTTING EVERYBODY AT RISK OF INJURY [vi]

This bitter reply illustrates the "increasingly litigation-obsessed culture" characterising the "accreditation bandwagon" in parkour (Wheaton 2013, 85), and the attempt to ensure safety standards to legitimise parkour as a "civilised" activity (Turner 2013). According to the ADAPT advocates, the superiority of the method was guaranteed by its being endorsed by the founders of the discipline and being much longer and complex than the CSEN course, thus enticing only highly motivated traceurs. On the other hand, the first Italian ADAPT Level 1 course (December 2012) was perceived by some traceurs as excessively emphasising physical conditioning, potentially penalising weaker participants and ultimately sanctioning someone's ability as a traceur rather than assessing their teaching competence.

More broadly, different perceptions about the ADAPT courses were often underpinned by (and were an expression of) different understandings and views around the nature of parkour and particularly the balance between discipline and freedom (Lebreton et al. 2010; Wheaton 2013), with Parkour Generations – and its Italian followers – being seen as the champions of a rigorous approach to the practice which discourages more playful, acrobatic and self-expressive (though at times exhibitionist) styles and interpretations.

Professional teaching: protecting parkour or selling it out?

The ADAPT debate highlights a significant paradox: while the moralising mission of the ADAPT advocates aims at fighting the commodification and spectacularisation of the practice (Stapleton and Terrio 2012), their contribution to the formalisation of teaching standards promotes the professionalisation of parkour instructors and therefore facilitates yet another form of commercial exploitation of the discipline (Wheaton 2013; Ojala and Thorpe 2015). Indeed, some of the pioneers of Italian parkour felt that, by fully embracing the ADAPT cause, their once fellow traceurs were selling out parkour by promoting and exploiting the business of teaching qualifications and courses, thus betraying the authentic ethos of the discipline:

> Regardless of whether the ADAPT method is correct or not, if we're talking about certification in general, it is well known that the UISP people who are managing it… they use it as a way to obtain funding, and this annoys me 'cause it conflicts with the idea of parkour in its purity, especially when I see people whom we grew up with, who are now claiming economic recognition for their… for their experience, overnight [whilst] we grew up with the spirit of sharing… (focus group 3)

Personal remarks were once again intertwined with (and magnified by) criticisms of the SPBs as the intermediaries of a sport funding hegemony (Turner 2013) that leads traceurs to accept sportisation and professionalization in order to access resources. By contrast, other traceurs felt that UISP was providing good value for money by importing the ADAPT courses and delivering them rigorously, also acknowledging that "if there wasn't an Italian institution [involved] Parkour Generations couldn't do

anything in Italy, 'cause they can't issue a [legally recognised] certification" (focus group 3).

These conflicting judgements clearly show how the strategies and policies of a SPB in relation to parkour can generate very different perceptions among the practitioners. In this respect, the partnership between UISP and Parkour Generation could work as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it could enhance the reputation of both organizations as being genuinely interested in the preservation and diffusion of the discipline; on the other, it could damage their reputation if they are also perceived as instrumentally interested in monopolising the teaching market.

Qualifications, legitimacy and subcultural hierarchies

When it became clear that ADAPT qualifications were likely to become mandatory within UISP (hence for the majority of Italian traceurs) if their advocates continued to gain a dominant position within the organisation, an important opportunity for discussion was offered by the founder of the Rome-based association Monkey-Move, who travelled the country interviewing many important groups about this topic and publicly sharing those video-conversations with the whole Italian parkour community online. The leader of ADD-Roma, one of the architects of the arrival of ADAPT in Italy, made clear the non-monopolistic position and non-mandatory status of ADAPT for the Italian traceurs, acknowledging that "if any other Sport Promotion Body [e.g. CSEN, AICS, etc.] comes up with a course of Whatever Parkour... if you are certified by a Sport Promotion Body, you can teach, there's nobody forbidding you to teach" (VT interview 12). However, he still portrayed ADAPT as the dam that would protect

the teaching standards of Italian parkour by ensuring they stay true to the founders of the discipline:

> ADAPT is not the solution... of the world. It is simply, really banally, a certification […] to teach. A quality one because... [t]he founders of parkour, they've been puzzling for 10 years over this thing. And, I repeat, it's a work-in-progress, they are improving it step by step, also based on our feedback. (VT interview 12)

The legitimacy of the ADAPT method is therefore positioned at the intersection of a genealogical descent from the founders of the discipline (which guarantees its authenticity) and an ongoing bottom-up co-construction at the grass-roots level (Wheaton 2013). However, although Italian traceurs are contributing to the development of the ADAPT method by feeding back to its creators, it is the latter who are regarded as the legitimate leaders of this process and are therefore acknowledged to have the power to sanction other traceurs' authenticity claims (Peterson 2005). Indeed, those few Italian traceurs who have worked hard to bring ADAPT courses to Italy have de facto been entitled by Parkour Generations to act as their delegates for the Italian ADAPT courses, which indirectly represents a recognition of their commitment to the (alleged) authentic values of parkour. Being blessed by Parkour Generation has provided this restricted number of traceurs with formal legitimacy and power within the Italian parkour community. On the other hand, such visibility has also exposed them to criticisms, at times driven by personal resentment. This was particularly evident when traceurs who came from a previous sporting career in strictly related areas, such as gymnastics, felt that their long-term teaching competence and expertise

was belittled and were even offended by what they saw as a dominant attitude of ADAPT's advocates:

> I don't get it at all: I have six years' experience of teaching gymnastics, 11 years of personal practice, two gymnastics certificates, and you are telling me that [someone with] an ADAPT Level 1 has a better right to teach than I have? But then we're going nuts here! (interview 4)

Whilst this type of expertise was devalued by UISP's adoption of ADAPT as the formal requirement for their coaches, it was instead implicitly recognised by CSEN whose courses for parkour instructors were developed and run by one traceur on the basis of his strong gymnastic background. These different approaches and outcomes clearly highlight the role of sport institutions in distributing symbolic capital and influencing subcultural hierarchies as a result of different incorporation strategies.

Global orthodoxy vs. local evolutions

The opportunity provided by the Video Tour interviews was used by the Vicenza-based group Next Area to suggest that, despite ADAPT being "the best certification [currently] available worldwide", it should not be adopted uncritically:

> I mean, does ADAPT have the capacity to be the only certification in Italy, recognised by everybody? [...] We'd like all the parkour associations to get together to address the legal problems, as well as the ethical issues that need to be addressed. And the fundamental values as well. You see that ADAPT is

supported very resolutely, and very coherently, but it conveys specific values. Hence, they draw on certain values that are those of the founders but it doesn't mean that they can't be modified, adapted or integrated with other values. And we need a discussion on this regard as well. (VT interview 2)

Disclosing how different views about the most desirable qualification system convey different conceptions of the discipline's ethos as a whole (Wheaton 2013), this need for a broader reflection on the (plural) values of parkour was also seen as an important chance to bring together the Italian parkour community and strengthen it through a truly participatory process:

[…] what is missing especially in Italy – which in other countries happens more – is that parkour associations create a strong network and manage to impose themselves politically [...] in a broader sense, in the institutions as well, to have a voice, perhaps having a League, having something within UISP that can represent us. The associations should get together, rather than make ghettos. (VT interview 2)

Interestingly, this 'call to unity' is aimed at obtaining recognition within UISP rather than constituting an independent organisation directly affiliated to the NOC, or even considering other (non-sport) forms of formal aggregation (O'Loughlin 2012). This suggests that while the pluralistic coexistence of different SPBs provides more opportunities to accommodate institutional changes in the forms of sport participation (Borgers et al 2016a, 2016b), on the one hand, it also prevents the creation of a single NGB for parkour on the other, making its governance and regulation more complex.

Moreover, this call for local agency and self-determination is underpinned by glocal awareness, since external influences can be both a source of inspiration (e.g. subcultural mobilisations that happened in other countries) as well as a potential source of cultural colonisation that needs to be critically managed (e.g. the diffusion of the ADAPT method). This glocal perspective is taken further by those traceurs who, despite acknowledging the importance of ADAPT as an initial and ready-made reference point, suggest that the time is ripe to develop a specific Italian certification for parkour instructors. From this perspective, the incorporation of ADAPT by UISP is perceived as a pragmatic shortcut that undermines the possibility of building a more grass-roots alternative. The wish to create an Italian certification is shared by other traceurs aiming to avoid excessive standardisation and to respect the cultural diversity represented by the slightly different styles of parkour that characterise different countries as "increasingly local manifestations of a hybrid, globalized culture" (Kidder 2012, 231).[vii]

In these plural voices we can glimpse traces of different forms of glocalisation, a process which "both highlights how local cultures may critically adapt or resist 'global' phenomena, and reveals the way in which the very creation of localities is a standard component of globalization" (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007, 134). Some traceurs seem to consider the ADAPT incorporation by UISP as an example of "transformation", that is "the abandonment of the local culture in favour of alternative and/or hegemonic cultural forms" (id., 135), triggering a standardisation and homogenisation of parkour. Others, by contrast, see it as a form of "accommodation", by which UISP pragmatically absorbs practices and meanings defined elsewhere in order to maintain key elements of a locally shared ethos of both parkour and sport promotion. Nonetheless, the Italian version of the ADAPT scheme can also be

interpreted as a form of "hybridization", engendering a distinctive mixture of global and local practices and meanings (for instance, some modules of the ADAPT 1 programme have been replaced, in the Italian version, by UISP's training sessions Aree Comuni – Common Areas – whose attendance is mandatory for all coaches and instructors across the different sports and disciplines within UISP).

National sports systems and the glocalised institutionalisation of parkour

In many respects, the relationship between the Italian traceurs and the SPBs seems to be rather exploitative for both parties. This mirrors the ambivalent attitude of most subcultural groups towards their incorporation into the mainstream system, confirming that they are not simply victims of this process but rather contribute to it in various ways (Wheaton and Beal 2003, Thorpe and Wheaton 2011). While on the one hand Italian parkour groups need the formal support of a SPB to carry on their activities, on the other they are needed by the different SPBs which compete to occupy the field of parkour in order to increase membership and gain a reputation as cutting-edge, youth-oriented sports providers. As the founder of one of the leading parkour groups in Italy commented:

> We joined UISP completely by accident in 2008; we looked around, we didn't even know what a Sport Promotion Body was, we picked UISP, and we joined it. […] I've also been approached by other Sport Promotion Bodies [...] and I've found them all to be little sensitive to the discipline, and very interested instead in... those objectives that are actually typical of a sporting body, and therefore: increasing memberships, looking good for having youth activities,

attracting funding... but then basically they don't care about the discipline. (interview 22)

As Thorpe and Wheaton (2011, 830) remind us, "the incorporation process, and forms of (sub)cultural contestation, is in each case unique, based on a complex and shifting set of intra- and inter-politics between key agents" with their different cultures, values and interests. The debate about teaching qualifications becomes therefore a battleground not only for the definition of (authenticity-based) subcultural hierarchies among traceurs, but also for the competition among SPBs. The particular structure of the Italian sports system, characterised by the formal recognition of different Sports Promotion Bodies alongside the National Olympic Committee and affiliated NGBs, entitles each of these institutions to issue sports teaching qualifications bearing legal value, although only within their own leagues and activities. Whilst creating ambiguities and tensions, with different SPBs claiming to have been "the first Body in Italy to issue a qualification for Parkour instructors",viii such lack of a national monopoly also limits the homogenisation of the parkour scene by enabling the coexistence of different conceptions of the practice:

[...] if the way UISP interprets parkour was the only way possible, we probably wouldn't exist, I mean, our association [...]. 'Cause basically our approach to parkour is 'a free sporting activity', it is not all that range of stuff [that is implied/conveyed by the ADAPT method]. Therefore… for me, a Sport Science graduate could well teach parkour, I mean… also because they certainly have more didactic competencies than someone who does three days of ADAPT. (interview 22)

Hence, the plurality of Sports Promotion Bodies provides traceurs with a number of formal organisational containers whose availability ultimately hinders the formation of an independent NGB for parkour. Such a relationship between 'container' (national systems of sport governance) and 'content' (the form and organisation of the practices) could be observed in other countries from a comparative perspective, as implicitly suggested by one traceur:

[...] I don't think that in America everything is directed by a single institution, indeed as far as I know there are already two or three different types of certification in America, there is ADAPT, there's one that was made by Apex Movement who are other guys, and... there are several ones. In England it's probably not the same, there... there you do have the unification. (interview 22)

Indeed, since Sport England is the only institution entitled to formally recognise a new sporting discipline in the UK, some groups of traceurs (and particularly Parkour Generations) took the lead in the constitution of Parkour UK as the only official NGB, with the formal accreditation of ADAPT as the official teaching qualification at the national level. Once this form of sportisation was completed, alternative approaches to parkour could mainly be developed outside the sport system, for instance within the performance arts (O'Loughlin 2012; Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011; Wheaton 2013) – although Parkour UK is currently working to accommodate diversity and ensure inclusivity.

Instead, the more liberal and market-oriented US system is characterised by a plurality of parkour networks. Each of these umbrella-organisations can develop its

own teaching qualification, whose legitimacy largely depends on its market credibility and its ability to provide rich service packages (especially insurance coverage) rather than being based on its moral status or endorsement by the founding fathers of the discipline. For example, USAParkour is described as "the leading organization in the United States in the effort to help people build their own Parkour gym business"[ix], and its WFPF Certification Program is advertised as "the only Parkour certification developed in partnership with a major insurance underwriter" [x] and "the gold standard for the safe and practical instruction of Parkour"[xi].

The Italian context seems to sit in-between the UK and the US ones, with the formal recognition of parkour depending more on public sporting institutions than on the market, but also with a plurality of organisational actors equally entitled to issue formally recognised coaching qualifications, which makes the institutionalisation process more complex and pluralistic.

The development of these exploratory interpretations into a more thorough comparative analysis (Bergsgard et al. 2007) could add to the study of glocalisation – as well as to the knowledge of policymakers – by further exploring how different institutional and organisational settings contribute to shaping the agency of local social actors who are engaged in the re-contextualisation of global phenomena (Robertson, 1995).

Concluding remarks and future directions

By focusing on the Italian parkour scene, we have explored some important issues in the institutional recognition of this rapidly growing lifestyle practice (Wheaton 2013). As warned by O'Grady (2012, 159), "co-opting youth (sub)cultures for the purposes of

instrumentalism and social cohesion runs the risk of sanitising and diffusing the very practice it wishes to harness". The regulation and policy incorporation of lifestyle sports, if not managed properly, can deprive them of "the mimetic properties which make them so attractive to participants in the first instance" (Turner 2013, 1259), particularly to those who are alienated by more traditional and formalised sport provision (Tomlinson et al. 2005, King and Church 2015).[xii] It is therefore vital to enable participants' ownership and control over the institutionalisation of their practice (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011). However, the fact that this can be interpreted in different and contested ways presents policymakers with challenging dilemmas. In the case of Italian parkour, whilst many traceurs praise UISP for incorporating an emic certification like ADAPT instead of imposing an external one, others criticise the same SPB for not endorsing the creation of an Italian homemade qualification.

This tension between transformation, accommodation and hybridisation of the ADAPT scheme (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007) is rooted in the authenticity claims and subcultural struggles analysed in our study. On the one hand, many traceurs consider ADAPT as a qualification developed 'from below' that preserves the authentic values of parkour, since it was created by highly regarded insiders under the supervision of the founders of the discipline. On the other hand, the strong position gained by its promoters within the subcultural hierarchies of parkour leads a number of traceurs to perceive ADAPT as a qualification imposed 'from above' by an internal elite, which denies their right of self-determination and therefore clashes with the authentic ethos of parkour.

Our findings thus support previous studies based on post-subcultural perspectives by confirming that "contemporary action sport cultures are highly fragmented and in a constant state of flux, such that myriad types of cultural

contestation are occurring, often simultaneously" (Thorpe and Wheaton 2011, 842). This article shows how the introduction of teaching qualifications impacts both on the practice, by favouring certain forms and meanings over others, as well as on the relationships between the practitioners, by legitimising certain positions over others, distributing subcultural power and shaping hierarchies in the field (Thornton 1995, Wheaton 2013). An increased understanding of such dynamics would help policymakers to better manage the impact of their strategic choices on the subcultural struggles in which they inevitably become involved when, trying to co-opt lifestyle sports, they become influential agents in the authentication process that sanctions some participants' 'authenticity work' over others' (Peterson 2005).

Our research highlights both similarities and differences between parkour and other lifestyle practices. In a similar way to what happened to skateboarders with the introduction of skateparks (Chiu 2009, Turner 2013), traceurs are cooperating with sports institutions and policymakers in developing the regulation and containment of their practice. However, whilst this process contributed to 'civilise' a skateboarder imagery originally characterised by "aggressive language and mannerisms, territorialism and a lack of interest, or indeed hostility, towards personal health and safety" (Turner 2013, 1257), the regulation of parkour is welcomed by many traceurs as a way to certify that being 'civilised' (i.e. respectful, conscientious, reliable, responsible) is inherent in the authentic ethos of their discipline. Indeed, as noted by Kidder (2013, 242) "parkour is steeped in a rhetoric of responsible training, and those who act out of control – or even speak brashly about danger – are quickly chastised". Moreover, the debate around the evolution of parkour – underpinned by the sense (and rhetoric) of mutual respect and civic responsibility that makes parkour particularly attractive for neoliberal policymakers (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011; Wheaton 2013) –

remains open and pluralistic, maintaining some sort of dialogue between different positions ranging from those more conservative, oppositional and resistant, to those more open to evolution, cooperation and crossover. At the same time, as for other lifestyle sports, the strong predisposition to engage in philosophical reflections about the nature of the discipline leads many traceurs to attach a strong symbolic and often moral meaning to their own interpretation of the practice.

Our study also provide further evidence to support previous claims about the importance of understanding the governance structure of lifestyle practices (Tomlinson et al. 2005, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011) and the inadequacy of the current sports systems – with their rigid organisational forms (Ferrero Camoletto et al. 2015), funding criteria (Turner 2013), uses of space and facilities (King and Church 2015, Borgers et al. 2016b) – in accommodating the fluid and bottom-up nature of such activities.

At the same time, we cast light on the glocalisation of parkour and its "interconnected processes of homogenization and heterogenization" (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007, 134) by showing how the strong global similarities conveyed by the mediatised diffusion of the practice (Kidder 2012) are also locally shaped by the different organisational and legal structures of national sports systems (Bergsgard et al. 2007). Despite the predominance recently gained by the disciplinary approach to parkour following the promotion of ADAPT courses by UISP (and therefore its diffusion among the majority of Italian traceurs), the pluralistic structure of the Italian sports system prevents anyone from gaining a monopolistic position. The possibility of leaving UISP and joining one of the other SPBs such as CSEN or AICS, on the one hand, and the call by some traceurs for UISP to create its own independent parkour training programme, on the other, gives a breathing space to alternative voices and

keeps open the battleground for the accreditation of teaching qualifications. Conversely, however, these options might also limit the desire to pursue other, more creative developments outside the sports system itself, as has happened in other countries (O'Loughlin 2012). Extending Thorpe and Wheaton's remark (2011, 832), our research therefore confirms that in order "to understand the complexities of the cultural politics involved in the incorporation of action sports, attention must be paid to the particularities within each specific historical conjuncture" as well as each specific geo-cultural context.

From a policy perspective, these observations should increase policymakers' awareness about their power and responsibilities in managing the cultural and social impact of the incorporation and institutionalisation of lifestyle practices. From a research perspective, this study could provide the basis for future comparative research to analyse the impact of different sport governance systems in shaping globalised practices and, conversely, to explore what different local institutionalisations of a global practice can teach us about each specific local system.

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[i] Previous studies of different lifestyle sports have shown that subcultural reputations can be based on different factors of distinction (Thornton 1995) such as: the risk-taking propensity (e.g. Langseth 2012, on B.A.S.E. jumping), the styles of participation (Wheaton 2000, on windsurfing), the use of specific spaces (Borden 2001, on skateboarding), the level of commitment (Davidson 2015, on mountaineering), the use of commodities and forms of consumption such as specific clothing, equipment, music (Thorpe 2011, on snowboarding), the reliance on personal abilities instead of technical devices and support (Beedie 2007, on mountaineering).

[ii] As recently highlighted by North (2010, 239), a significant majority of the 1.11 million individuals undertaking coaching in the UK "are volunteers, have no license to practice, and just over half have a coaching qualification", which generates "uncertainty about the quality of the sporting provision being undertaken".

[iii] For details of this qualification scheme, see the websites http://adaptqualifications.com/ or http://parkourgenerations.com/certifications/adapt/.

[iv] The first ADAPT Level 1 course ever held in Italy was attended by 57 participants (54 male and three female) representing 15 of the 20 Italian regions. Aged between 18 and 42 (with the vast majority being in their twenties), they had from one to nine years' experience of practicing parkour, and some of them already had (non-certified) experience as an instructor.

[v] Accessed on 15/03/2014 from: https://www.facebook.com/manifestoitalianodelparkour

[vi] Posted on 21 October 2011 via Facebook by Parkour.it. Accessed 28/10/2015 from: https://www.facebook.com/parkour.it/posts/10150870302915314

[vii] The debate is further complexified by those traceurs, such as one of the leaders of PK Torino (VT interview 1), who reject any kind of teaching qualification fearing excessive standardisation and suggest that the self-policing capacity of the parkour community should be trusted instead, relying on the informal distribution of teachers' reputations via 'name-and-shame' dynamics.

[viii] Accessed on 21/11/2015 from: http://mobile.facebook.com/events/1430107677282495?acontext={%22ref%22%3A22%2C%22action_history%22%3A%22null%22}&aref=22

[ix] Accessed on 21/11/2015 from: http://www.wfpf.com/news/usa-parkour-build-parkour-dream-america/

[x] Accessed on 21/11/2015 from: https://www.usaparkour.org/

[xi] Accessed on 21/11/2015 from: https://www.usaparkour.org/certification-overview/

[xii] It can be argued, for instance, that by turning qualified traceurs into a sort of PE teachers or gym instructors, the introduction of teaching certifications runs the risk of unbalancing the peer-to-peer learning dynamics and partly undermining the equality ethos that makes parkour particularly appealing to many newbies. As noted by O'Grady (2012, 153) with regard to the NGB Parkour UK, "[w]hilst acknowledging the significant, positive impact this organisation has had on the development of parkour in the UK, being 'taught' parkour by a qualified instructor or coach is very different to 'learning' parkour with peers on the street."