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DEFINING THE GEOGRAPHY OF WORLD SPORT

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Abstract

This paper on the Geography of World Sport is simply to define a new and evolving sub-discipline of Geography because, although accepted by academic institutions, no determination justifies its existence as an intellectual or scholastic subject. The objective of this paper is to provide that explanation and rationale.

The paper explains three globally accepted (3) categories of sport to be considered and what characteristics differentiate sport in general to world sport, World Sport, and Mega-Sport. Lastly, it identifies the five (5) different, universally-accepted geographical components found in World Sport that qualifies it as a genuine sub-discipline of Geography and as an academic subject.

Keywords: Sports Geography, Sports Marketing, Cultural Geography, Human Geography, World Sport

I. Introduction

Sport Geography; much like Medical Geography, Tourism Geography, and other more recent applications, is a newer sub-discipline of Geography and Geo-Sciences. And, like the other newer sub-disciplines, the course of Sport Geography is being offered at more colleges and universities over the past decade.

However, the term sport geography is limited in its overall scope and, arguably, should adopt the name “The Geography of World Sport” which is more inclusive as to its global reach and penetration. It should also be noted that the subject also has importance as a study in sports administration, business and management typically found in business schools.

Today, the study of world sport is largely reliant on observation and quantitative statistical analysis. If observation is accepted as fact supported by demographics based on human activity in physical places, then the Geography of World Sport is recognized as a legitimate sub-discipline of the main academic subject.

By my own definition, sport is a competitive game or event played by either individuals or a team with the result determined by a winner. Some sports are more methodological than others with specific rules, degrees of organization, and levels of participation. In its overall context, sport can be more than a single game or a single event. It can be a series of games or events or a season of games or events. (Capparelli 2016).

There are about 450 known games (Top End Sports 2014), slightly more or less, construed as sport that are played throughout the world today. While most recognizable sports are played by professionals in front of large crowds of spectators in purpose-built stadiums and broadcasted on television to even greater audiences, some games, maybe most, are mundane and insignificant. In fact, sport can be found with children playing in a field in an African village, teens on an urban sandlot in a South American city, or elderly gentlemen at a café table somewhere in the Middle- East. Sport, appropriately all world sports, can be played virtually anywhere in many dimensions depending on conditions.

Bale's book, 'Sports Geography' (2003), first published in 1989, has long been considered the absolute 'bible' of the field. Bale, a professor of sports geography in Denmark, bases his book mostly on an European model. He applies on six distinct themes: 1) concepts of 'space' and 'place', 2) the geographical diffusion of modern sport, 3) the economic impact of sport, 4) sport and the community, 5) cultural geographies of sport, and 6) sport and the 'geographical imagination'. Other publications concentrate on individual world sports, i.e., Foer's 'How Soccer Explains the World' (2010) and Reid and Sylt's publication 'Formula Money: Formula One's Financial Performance Guide' (2018) respectively explains world soccer and the World Formula One Championship in great detail. Most courses on the subject today seemingly examine current targeted articles yet lacking a foundation.

II. Sport Categories

As sport rapidly grows causing aspects of both controlled and uncontrolled globalization, there is a refreshed need to define and redefine world sport. My experience and research indicate there is three categories of sport and five components that make-up sport globally (2016).

The three categories of sport are:

- **sport** or world sports
- **World Sport** (note the difference between world sport and World Sport as we continue)
- **Mega-Sport** (some World Sport may appear to be a Mega-Sport, for example the Super Bowl, but in reality, it is only a World Sport with regionalized Mega-Sport application)

What first differentiates the three categories are: 1) number of participants, both individuals and teams, in a particular sports, 2) number of professional participants, both individuals and teams, in a particular sport, 3) organization of that sport both amateur and professionally, 4) the live spectator attendance of a particular sport; including its respective income from ticket sales, 5) the amount media coverage of a particular sport, 6) derived commercial value of a particular sport from advertising and other marketing, 7) perhaps historical value, and 8) global penetration of these elements. Progression of these kinds of elements will allow the emergence of precise geographic classification found in this text: economic, commercial, cultural, political, and technological (Capparelli 2016).

Sport, essentially the three categories mentioned, can be further divided into another two categories: amateur and professional. Although there are exceptions, everyday sport is mostly for amateurs, and World Sport and Mega-Sport are largely professional. One example of exclusion would be the Olympics which is for amateur athletes but powered by the components more aligned with professional sport.

Sport or world sport: It is easy to dismiss the vast majority of sports played simply because most do not meet the objective minimal criterion mentioned. Kids playing kick-the- can in a street as a game has little or no significance other than a possible mention while kids playing soccer in a sandlot may initially be thought of in the same way except soccer has an eventual world wide appeal with professional levels. Chess and checkers are games played worldwide but there little formal organization to gain significance on the world stage. Little League baseball, high school football games, most college sports and other related sport activities can be included in this kind of category as well.

World Sport: There are probably just under 100 sports that can be considered a true World Sport. These are mostly the professional sports we attend or watch on television. There are instances were a general term of a World Sport may represent numerous sub-categories or divisions within a sport, i.e. motorsports can be used to describe Formula One, Indy-car, drag racing, etc. or soccer can represent the World Cup, Olympic soccer, all the many national professional leagues, and amateur teams. Sometimes the general term is used to describe the sport outside of its major sub-categories. Major college events may also fall under this term depending on reach such as the College Football National Championship (Capparelli 2016).

And, all World Sport are not equal. There is a huge variance in the criterion of the top ten of World Sport and the bottom ten or even between some of the top sports. The significant strength of different sports in the World Sport category emerge inappropriately but it's clear some World Sport are significantly stronger than others in its global reach and popularity.

There is some World Sport that clearly has a greater value than most World Sport but fall short of Mega-Sport status thus making room for a Super World Sport sub-category. Some, including some boxing, golf and tennis, can be found in this sphere. Most of these sports, decidedly, are American events.

Degree of global penetration is the major component to being a World Sport; however, it's possible some World Sport can have substantial regional importance with marginalized global penetration sometimes due to dependency of localized physical geography, i.e. mountains or water. World Championship skiing may be considered dependent on physical conditions for example.

Mega-Sport: The term Mega-Sport is reserved for only the most powerful of all sport and is siphoned from World Sport. The power derives from its advertising prowess and global penetration which mostly is calculated by its world television audience. In simplistic terms, Mega-Sport is determined by the amount of monies it earns. Only three World Sports, all events or series of events, arguably fall into this exclusive class: the World Cup (soccer), the Olympics (multiple seasonal sports), and the World Formula One Championship (auto racing). These three sports far exceed all other sports in terms of global penetration and revenue (Capparelli 2016).

III. Components of World Sport

To further define world sport, there is a further, somewhat unrelated needed to access the very characteristics shared by sport, World Sport and Mega-Sport; although decidedly the latter two. Components of sport, World Sport, and Mega-Sport include in all or part of the following and accepted universally:

- **Economic**
- **Commercial**
- **Cultural**
- **Political**
- **Technological**

Economic: The economics of sport is its engine. This is often an association but more likely to be ownership in professional sports. Ownership is the top of the food chain in sport. It can be packaged in an assortment of ways: typically a team in a major sport and sometimes in a far less complicated nature; ownership of a world-class boxer for example. And, ownership projects world sport as a capitalistic venture. A sport designed as a business.

Commercial: Commercial is the grease that oils the engine. This essentially includes all advertising income that is acquired from multiple sources including hospitality, merchandising, on-car messaging, publications, television, ticket sales, tourism, and other. Most economics and economic indicators of world sport are found in the commercial component.

Cultural: If the economic component is the engine and the commercial component is the grease of world sport then its cultural part is the fuel that engineers it. **Nationalism** and **patriotism** are the two main aspects of culture in world sport. These parlay into other defining areas like actual live attendance and events and television viewership. Historical events also greatly influence culture.

Political: World sport can't exist without the political implications that allow certain sports to exist in specific places; particularly in places where capitalistic opportunities do not exist.

Technological: Sport, especially those which incorporate invention, lends itself to high-tech, industrial, and mechanical advancements. These applications are evident in all aviation, motorsport, yacht racing, and others. Technology from sport is often transferred to consumer product. This is particularly true with safety innovation. Another specific transfer of technology is from Formula One auto racing to automobile manufacturer production; including tire and rubber (Capparelli 2016).

IV. Conclusion

The Geography of World Sport is fast evolving and this is the 21st Century definition. And, this definition is applicable globally. It is largely my own definition based on observation as a sports marketing professional and an academic geographer. It is likely, as this sub-discipline becomes more popular and grows, the definition will expand. It is possible new or more comprehensive components like the History or Historical aspects could emerge further intensifying its interpretation. However, the immediate need to describe what the relationship between world sport and geography is solved at this juncture.

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