

SPORT, SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

By

**Professor Grant Jarvie
University of Stirling**

**Professor Grant Jarvie
University of Stirling
Pro-Vice Chancellor
Stirling
FK9 4LA
Scotland
grant.jarvie@stir.ac.uk**

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Abstract This article argues that the role of the public intellectual in sport is desperately needed. The research for the article draws upon key interviews and newspaper reports. The paper examines three questions: (i) What is the role of the public intellectual in sport? (ii) Do we wish to encourage the role of the public intellectual in sport? (iii) How does one balance the objective of challenging unseen silences in sport with its potential transformative capacity to produce change (or at least be a resource for hope) in many communities. The challenge is for today's sociologists of sport and others not to accept the narrow job description of the academic but instead to ensure that the social study of sport is one of these very public, visible forms of activity and engagement.

Key words public intellectual; sport; social change; transformative capacity

SPORT SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

Introduction

‘I believe in this world that sport is one of the tools that can unite youth- sport is something different from fighting in war and it can make a difference- we can change this world by using sport as a tool’

‘I’ve run a lot for water charities and children’s charities. I believe we share in this world with members of our society who are less fortunate. This is important. We came to this world with nothing and we leave this world with nothing. We can make a it a better world for those who need assistance’.

The above remark was made in discussion with the former Olympic and Commonwealth athlete Kip Keino talking about the power of sport to act as a resource of hope for both individuals and communities. The former athlete and current International Olympic Committee (IOC) member was specifically talking the capacity of sport to help children from battle scared parts of Africa such as Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia. Recent editions of this journal have also reminded us about the importance of combining scholarship and commitment but also the promise and possibilities that sport may be part of a progressive resource of hope in keeping alive different visions of the world that we both live in and could live in (Kidd and Donnelly, 2000; Sugden, 2006). More than twenty years ago critical commentators on sport were asking on a regular basis just exactly what was the transformative value of sport and whether sport could truly make a difference to people’s lives? It is perhaps worthwhile reflecting upon such interventions and comparing them with the relative silences in the academic world over certain aspects of sport today, such as cricket in Zimbabwe. The politics of cricket in Zimbabwe was not just about sport specific

issues but about land seizures, land repatriation, chronic fuel shortages, poverty and the relations between coloniser and colonised (*The Sunday Herald*, 7 December 2003:17). It is tempting to suggest that the relative silence over the politics of cricket in Zimbabwe progressed in a way that would have been unthinkable during the sport/apartheid era (Tatchell, 2003:30). The reason for making such a comparison at the onset of this article is to question whether the much valued empirical thrust of social scientists researching and substantiating the different claims made by sport has at times replaced some of the committed political activism that was the hallmark of some of the work of the public intellectual in sport during previous decades.

Disparaging remarks are often made about academics and intellectuals as if they have no place in the public debate about sport. 'There is a character missing from the cast of social and political life: the Public Intellectual' so wrote Richard Reeves (2003:23) in an essay about role of the academic in public life. A role that he and other commentators have observed is much in decline at the beginning of the 21st century. Such is the current sociological interest in whether the public intellectual is extinct or alive that the 2007 British Sociological Association Annual Conference had it as its main theme. Buraway's (2005) Presidential address to the 2004 American Sociological Association called for more public forms of sociology engaging with the world in which we live in. The notion of the public intellectual has been addressed by a range of international scholars such as Said (2001), Klein (2001), Sontag (2002), Small (2002), Gourley (2003), Giroux (2006), Ritzer (2006), Turner (2006) and Misztal (2007). Furedi (2004: 67) asked where have all the intellectuals gone and suggested that 'there was clearly a sense that the role of the public intellectual is changing- or might have in fact ended?'. That such a topic is of contemporary concern is perhaps surprising given the policy influence of writers such as Anthony Giddens,

Amitai Etzioni and Robert Putnam not to mention the regular interventions in public life by academics such as Germaine Greer, Richard Dawkins and Robert Winston.

Consternation about the place of the public intellectual in public life has often been associated with a further set of arguments about the decline of the public realm, public space and public engagement. The alleged decline in public engagement has been associated most notably with the work of Marquand (2002; 2004; 2006) and most recently Mair (2006). Civic engagement appears to be less of a potent force, and public values are seemingly rendered invisible, in light of the growing power of multinational corporations not only to shape the content of the media but also increasingly privatise and commercialise public spaces (Walljasper, 2005). *In The Decline of the Public* Marquand (2004) charted the decline of citizenship, equity and service that had been deemed crucial to both individual fulfilment and social well-being. Contemporary trends such as trusting people less, a lack of faith in politics and the kinds of associations that groups of people are joining tend, according to Marquand (2004), to have more to do with private needs than concerns about civic engagement and public responsibility. Mair (2006) has raised the spectre of a void in democracy emerging as ruling elites retreat and voters abstain from mass electoral politics with the paradox being that the legacy of a third way triumph is in fact the emergence of a governing class bereft of legitimacy as parties become appendages of the state.

The above arguments are complex and are expanded upon elsewhere (Jarvie, 2003). However, such concerns and the need for active public intellectuals engaging in the political arguments of the day about and through sport are also vital facets of this concern. They are all needed if Mair's democratic void or Marquand's decline of the public realm are to be addressed not to mention the need for alternative or

progressive visions for sport in society. British sport has certainly not been immune from such concerns either historically or in the present. From the Women's Institute's and the Women's League of Health and Beauty to the working men's club and contemporary local sports clubs, Britain has had a well documented history of a strong record of voluntary association and social capital in sport and other areas of public life (Coalter, 2007; Field, 2003; Hill, 2002). Recent surveys of sports clubs in Scotland identified that 50% of sports clubs had identified a general shortage of volunteers; 33% identified a shortage of volunteer/staff with technical skills and 29% identified a shortage of volunteer staff with management skills (Jarvie, 2004). Add to this that in one part of Britain- Scotland, the Scottish Executive now determines sports policy, the national sports agency is no longer at arms length, then the spectre of Mair's (2006) hollowing out of democracy and the existence of a ruling void in sport has perhaps arrived. Furthermore, if the public domain of sport is annexed to, or invaded by, the market domain of buying and selling then the promise and possibilities of sport forging higher levels of trust and mutuality run the risk of also being sacrificed on the alter of individualism identified by Marquand.

These introductory points have some merit in their own right but it is the inter-connection of these points that suggests that the relationship between sport, social change and the public intellectual needs to be addressed. This article asserts that the role of the public intellectual in contemporary sport is desperately needed and it does so by addressing three key questions?

- What is the capacity of sport to produce social change?
- What is the role of the Public Intellectual? and
- Do we wish to encourage the role of the Public Intellectual in sport to-day?

What is the capacity of sport to produce social change?

In 1997, when Tiger Woods won the Masters and donned the green jacket that accompanied the winning of the coveted title, golf became thrilling to watch for an entirely new audience. On the hallowed putting greens of Augusta, where Woods would not have been allowed membership a few years earlier, history had been made (Spiers, 1995). It would be wrong to suggest that Tiger Woods was a political trailblazer or even an activist for change. At the same time his very emergence as a leading golfer helped with social change in places such as Augusta. It would be wrong to argue that there was no impact. Not since Lee Elder squared off against Jack Nicklaus in a sudden death playoff at the American Golf Classic in 1968 had a black golfer gained so much televised attention (Bass, 2002). The sports press cast the feat of Woods as breaking a modern colour line, yet no one including Woods himself could fully describe exactly what colour line had been broken. The press conveyed his parental heritage as variously African American, Asian and Native American, overwhelmingly others portrayed Woods as a black athlete, a golfer who had brought about change in the same way attributed to the likes of Jesse Owens, Tommie Smith, John Carlos Muhammad Ali, Tydie Pickett, Louise Stokes, Vonetta Flowers and Alice Cochrane. Woods himself did not consider himself in such terms but embraced a more nuanced racial heritage more representative of the melting pot imagery associated with American history and a determining demographic factor of so-called Generation X (Bass, 2002:xvi).

In October 2006 Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva was re- elected President of Brazil. The content of the first period of administrations were also influenced by football in that the first two laws that the President signed in May 2002 concerned football. Football in Brazil was one of the key battlegrounds upon which the battle to make the

country a fairer place was being fought. The sport had been run by a network of unaccountable largely corrupt figures known as *carrolas* or ‘top hats’ who had become wealthy while the domestic football scene remained broke and demoralised (Bellos, 2003:32). The public plundering of football was viewed by the President as a continual reminder of the previous administration’s failure to stamp out corruption in areas of public life. Lula in an attempt to force the football authorities to become transparent ratified a *Law of Moralisation* in sport that enforced transparency in club administration (Bellos, 2003:32). On the same day he sanctioned a more ambitious and wide ranging law the ‘Fans Statute’ which served as a modern day bill of rights for the football fan.

Unlike the actions taken by President Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva of Brazil in passing legislation in relation to the morality of Brazilian football, when faced with the option of intervening to prevent England cricketers touring Zimbabwe in 2003, both the chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board and Jack Straw the then British Foreign Secretary accepted by their actions that morality had no part to play in English cricket (Wilson, 2004:27). In contrast Stuart MacGill the Australian cricketer refused to make himself available for the Australian cricket tour of Zimbabwe on the grounds that he could not maintain a conscience in the light of the human rights violations being perpetrated in Zimbabwe. He was commended by both the Australian Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. One year earlier two members of the Zimbabwean cricket team, Henry Olonga and Andy Flower made a powerful political statement by wearing black armbands as they took the field in a World Cup match in Harare- a protest in their words against the death of democracy in Zimbabwe (*The Observer* 1 June, 2003:3) . A group of church leaders in Bulawayo hailed the gesture as hitting a six for freedom and democracy and it cost both players their position in

the side. While the International Cricket Council (ICC) did not allow tours to be cancelled on political or moral grounds they did allow for *force majeure* and it was this failure by Jack Straw to issue a clear statement by the government cancelling the tour on these grounds that was a missed opportunity (*The Sunday Herald* 2 February, 2003:15). Despite the preparation of a framework paper that could have led to the abandonment of the 2003 tour in the end the Foreign Secretary stated that he did not have the power to order sportsmen (and women) around even when they begged to be ordered and this was from a government that had no problem with finding powers to invade Iraq on the basis of little substantive evidence.

A further example might be given here as further evidence of the power of sport to both symbolically and actually serve as an agent of change. Against the odds, Catherine Astrid Salome Freeman became the first Aboriginal to represent her country at the Olympics, at Barcelona in 1992, its first world champion, and first Olympic champion. In doing so she became a symbol for reconciliation between a black and white Australia in which she had much to forgive (Gillon, 2003:15). Her grandmother, Alice Sibley, was one of the so-called stolen generation, taken from her parents at the age of eight by an Australian government policy that was designed to help integration. As a consequence of the 1950s programme which saw Aboriginal children removed from their parents and settled with white families Freeman remained unaware of her ancestry on her mother's side. (Gillon, 2003:15). Her father an outstanding footballer left home when she was five, died of an alcohol-induced stroke aged 53, she was sexually molested at 11 and later abused by whites (Gillon, 2003:15). Her Olympic success has perhaps helped to change the face of prejudice, almost a taboo subject in a modern Australia. Her Olympic reception following Victory in the final of the 400 metres may be viewed in stark contrast to the day she

travelled to an athletics meeting aged 13. Waiting outside Melbourne's Flinders Street Station, she was ordered to move on by a group of middle-aged white housewives, when the whole adjacent seating area lay vacant (Gillon, 2003:15). As Cathy Freeman held the Olympic torch aloft during the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games she did so in a different Australia from the one experienced by her parents. She herself had become perhaps one of Australia's greatest ever sporting icons but also a symbol of the struggle that aboriginal Australians had to endure in order to win many civil and political rights.

What I am suggesting here is far from utopian or indeed new and it also acknowledges that it is important not too overestimate what sport can do. Yet, the examples provided, in part, are evidence that sport can help to (i) change some people's lives and (ii) symbolize change and (iii) contribute to and facilitate social change. Sport has the capacity to work across societies and agencies to help or attempt make the world a better place. In a general sense the potential of sport to contribute to different visions of what the world is and should be should not be overstated nor underestimated Three are mentioned here in an illustrative sense and these might be referred to as (i) the global neo-liberal view of sport in society in which the convergence of the opportunity gap between sport in the richest and poorest parts of the world might be possible (dependent upon a strict adherence to liberal policies); (ii) the hard third way view of sport in society that requires a more limited adherence to democracy but an enthusiasm for sporting partnerships funded between private/public sources, decentralisation, arms length sports policy, an acceptance of global sporting values and less of a concern with sporting inequality while still embracing certain egalitarian goals through provision for targeted or vulnerable sports groups; and (iii) a softer but less likely third way in which sporting relief is used as

part of an overall policy of managing capitalism's social contradictions with the typical role for sport being that of being a means to an end or a bridge-builder of reconciliation in areas of conflict. Within this model, third world democracy and sport as a facet of social welfare come first, not last.

There are a number of fault lines running through the different worlds of sport that have sustained progressive agendas for change and the above are examples of any number of entry and exit points that may be chosen as a basis for substantiating the transformative capacity of sport. Forms of action may be classified along the continuum from reformism to radicalism or from ideological to non-ideological or from issue orientated to more collective forms of action. Forms of change may also have both intended and unintended outcomes but whatever the basis for thinking about sport and social change in the early 21st century it is imperative to acknowledge that the parameters of sport and social change are both geopolitical and socio-economic. The analytical distinction and separation of these two elements does not of course imply that they are literally distinct. In the different worlds of sport these two fault lines may become conjoined but as a method of thinking about sport and social change they help to highlight not just the particular social patterning of movements for change in sport but also that the impetus and pressure for change may often result from a more geo-political fault-line of north and south or east and west.

The migration of athletes from one country to another in search of resources and fame is not uncommon. One such example is Saif Saaeed Shaheen born as Stephen Cherono and raised in Kamelilo a village in Kenya in which there was no water tap and every day after school the 2005 World 3,000 m steeplechase champion walked three kilometres to collect 10 litres of water, which cost two dollars for three days. The change of allegiance from Kenya to Qatar was allegedly based upon an

offer of at least \$1,000 dollars a month for life (*The Herald*, 15 January 2005:10). About 50 people now depend upon the athlete's success for their livelihoods. He puts eight children through school with two at college in America and when asked to explain Kenyan running success said that the answer is simple 'an athlete in Kenya runs to escape poverty and I fight to survive' (*The Herald*, 10 August 2005:34). Listen to Nelson Mandela or Kofi Annan talking of the role of sport in International Development. The former United Nations Secretary General in 2005 noted the potential of sport to effectively convey humanitarian messages, help to improve the quality of people's lives while helping to promote peace and reconciliation (www.un.org/sport2005/index.html). Haile Gebrselassie (2003:12) talking of the political responsibility of the athlete left one in no doubt about his priorities- 'eradicating poverty is all that matters in my country'. He goes on 'when I am training I think about this a lot; when I am running it is going over in my mind -as a country we cannot move forward until we eradicate poverty and whereas sport can help - the real problems will not be overcome just by helping Ethiopians to run fast' Gebrselassie (2003:12).

The Public Intellectual, Sport and Social Change.

The comparative public silence over the cricket tour of Zimbabwe in 2003, compared with for example the media coverage and activism associated with the 1970s Springbok rugby tour of Great Britain, highlighted, for this writer and others (Tatchell, 2003b) the extent to which the academic world has become relatively disengaged from the politics of sport. When Reeves (2003:24) was asking whether 'There is a character missing from the cast of social and political life: the Public Intellectual' he was in fact asking serious questions about role of the academic in public life and the nature of academic life. A role that he and other commentators

have observed is much in decline at the beginning of the 21st century. Furedi (2004:67) asks the question where have all the intellectuals gone –people with genuine learning, breadth of vision and a concern for public issues. In the age of the knowledge economy we have somehow managed to combine the widest ever participation in higher education with a reduced participation of the intellectual in public life. The argument ends with a plea for the re-creation of public spheres in which intellectuals and the general public can genuinely debate the issues of the day.

Is there a space a person or character missing in between the slow ivory tower scholars who have little time for public politics and the furiously peddling politician with little time for theory. The Oxford political philosopher Adam Swift (quoted in Reeves 2003) remarks that the politicians think that the philosophers are only interested in talking to each other in arcane journals and the philosophers think that the politicians have no interest in real philosophical concepts, both observations maybe true. At the same time there also exists plenty of commentators in the media studios who have limited knowledge and expertise in the areas they pronounce upon. Debate is governed by the quick and the clever rather than the thoughtful or the learned, the former being characterised by what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1988:19) observed as *Le Fast Talker* who was often heard to be ruling the airwaves. Meanwhile we have the modern academic who has devoted his or her life to a particular subject lying undisturbed and invisible, perhaps preparing for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) writing in one of the peculiar languages of scholarship to an audience of peers, with no inclination, incentive or often ability to participate in the rough and tumble of public debate. So we have plenty of intellectuals and plenty public commentators- what Plato might have called rhetoricians- but a declining overlap between the two.

It is not as if there is a shortage of ideas, writing and commentary from academics about the decline of the public realm, public sociology or indeed the public realm. The cult of genuine expertise being replaced or challenged by the cult of punditry in which there is no place for, never mind value for genuine debate about things unless they are aligned to policy, government, the quest for power and or authority. Some remind us of the warnings in Huxley's *Brave New World* in where we willingly enslave ourselves by coming to adore the technologies that undo our capacity to think. Donald Wood (1996) in *Post-Intellectualism and the Decline of Democracy* in to-day's culture argues that we must manifest an even stronger commitment to reason and responsibility but that we fail to do so. He suggests that we are opting out of a serious responsibility if we continue along this path and that the very essence of democracy might be put at risk. Public intellectuals are defined In Posner's (2001:3) *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* as those who write for the general public or at least for a broader than merely academic or specialist audience on public affairs. More specifically 'a public intellectual is not merely someone who does intellectual work in public but she does intellectual work on public issues' (Posner, 2001:3).

Others such as Brasch (2001) suggest that the function of the public intellectual is to puncture the myth makers' to avoid utopian thinking and be sceptical about grand claims whether it be the victory of the free market, worldwide genetic enhancement, or the myth of global sport. Scepticism towards elected politicians is nothing new, of course. At least sixty years ago, Schumpeter (1947: 288) warned against relying too heavily on those who were emerging from the electoral process, and suggested that others had to be involved in the process of forging popular democracies otherwise the 'administrators' would distance themselves from the

matters that were most important to ordinary people. What was being implied was that unless we had healthy contributions from a variety of groups and people on matters of public concern then the elected parties and their civil servants or advisors shifted away from having expressive or representative functions which were in tune with the matters that concerned ordinary people and became much closer to becoming potential appendages of the state.

Despite the previously mentioned impact of social and political thinkers such as Anthony Giddens, Amitai Etzioni and Robert Putnam there was little mention of the public intellectual's role in sport despite the fact that both sport and academia were represented in a recent top ten list of people who were likely to change or influence the world in the 21st Century (New Statesman, 17 October, 2005). The usual suspects were well represented with the young US senator Barack Obama often described as the next JF Kennedy or first black President of the United States of America in number one position. Some may find it surprising that not far behind Obama was to be found a sportswoman. In tenth place was a young athlete- a then 18 year old female tennis player from India, Sandra Mirza, who was at the time ranked number 37 in the world. The rationale for this placing amongst the Top Ten influential people was in part recognising not so much that this was the first female Indian tennis player to be ranked in the top 40 but that she had the potential to be a role model for an entire generation of Muslim girls in a country where women have typically been discouraged from taking part in sport. At Wimbledon she wore a T shirt bearing the slogan 'well behaved women barely make history' at the US Open where she lost in the quarter finals to Mari Sharapova she wore another T shirt which read 'You can either agree with me or be wrong'. She has been attacked by Muslim clerics who all too well have recognised the impact of sport in changing attitudes and the power of a

young, attractive, media smart teenage Muslim tennis star to shake traditional hierarchies.

Yet in all of this it is almost, to paraphrase Reeves, that there is a missing character from the controversial and courageous academy of sporting thinkers and writers- the public intellectual. There are a few, but perhaps not enough, who have attempted to uncover the silences and recognise that decisions about sport and the part of the social contract that involves matters of sport can only work if we have honest argument, real information and not the spurious confessions of spin-doctors or political puppets.

The Role of the Public Intellectual in Contemporary Sport.

There is undoubtedly a considerable cynicism, perhaps premature cynicism about the demise of national mainstream politics, the prospects of a more just and less charitable social order in which important social and political problems are not reduced to matters of efficiency or profit. Yet for the public intellectual interested in sport there are a number of fault lines running through the different worlds of sport that have sustained agendas for change and have illustrated that any number of entry and exit points may be chosen as a basis for substantiating and encouraging the transformative capacity of sport. Writers such as Sontag (2002), Said (2001) and others remind us of the impressive array of opportunities offered by the lecture platform, the pamphlet, the radio, the interview, the internet, the research newsletter, the guest lecture, the letter to the newspaper open to us and others.

It is not as if there is lack of areas for concern. Almost universally phrases such as globalisation, global sport, free-market, privatisation, public/private funding for sport are in the public realm as given and yet all of these need to be properly explained and tend to be accepted tacitly as if they are the pre-ordained only way to

do things. What are the alternatives and how do you create genuine climates where the controversial aspects surrounding the world of sport are encouraged, openly valued as a contribution to public debate in the very best traditions of freedom of speech in a healthy functioning sporting world that is perhaps more just, accountable, transparent, open, democratic? To ignore the capacity of sport to assist with social change is not an option for the public intellectual interested and steeped in an understanding of what sport can do.

Sports participation in Scotland often gets headline news because sports participation tends to be viewed as being associated with areas such as health and yet the civil renewal argument is also compelling (Jarvie, 2006:335). It is an argument that has a particular resonance for volunteers and non-governmental organisations. A 2005 Department of Culture Media and Sport Report which included Scotland in the aggregate UK data demonstrated the part played by sports participation and organisation in being a catalyst to create civil renewal:-

- The UK is above the European average for both membership of sports groups and sports participation, and average for volunteering;
- 26% of the UK population were members of sports clubs; 21% actively played sport in the context of a sports organisation and 6% volunteered in clubs. Scandinavian countries in general displayed higher levels of associational involvement but the UK was ahead of many European Countries.
- Sport was found to be the most popular type of group activity in the UK.
- British people are more likely than the average European to belong to sports club and participate in sport and are as about as likely as the average European to volunteer in sports.

Membership of sports clubs appears to have a number of beneficial impacts, members are more likely than non-members to vote, contact an official and sign a petition. Countries with high levels of sports participation tend to have higher levels of social and institutional trust. The correlations are substantial for the level of sports participation in a country and levels of social trust. Life satisfaction is also strong although perhaps not as significant. Countries with high levels of membership of sports groups tend to have high levels of membership of cultural and social groups, suggesting that participation is cumulative. In short membership and participation of sports clubs is associated with being more satisfied with life, more trusting, more sociable, healthier and more positive towards state institutions. Sports members also tend to have slightly more liberal views about immigration. The point that is being made here is that sports membership, sports participation, sports volunteering is not unconnected and is indeed more connected than other forms of group activity in generating, sustaining and developing civil renewal and factors that are at the very heart of democracy.

Other areas are worth mentioning. When the career of a leading world athlete from Kenya, Ethiopia or Mozambique is brought to a premature end, the consequences often extend far beyond the track. Maria Mutola the Mozambican, former Olympic and five-time world indoor 800m champion and world record holder routinely sends track winnings back to her country of origin. Chamanchulo, the suburb of Maputo in which Mutola grew up, is ravaged by HIV, passed on in childbirth or breast milk to 40% of the children (Gillon, 2004). In 2003 when Mutola became the first athlete to collect \$1million for outright victory on the Golden League Athletic Grand Prix Circuit, part of the cash went to the foundation she endowed to help provide scholarships, kit, education and coaching for young athletes (Gillon,

2004). Farms and small businesses have often been sustained by her winnings on the circuit, which have provided for the purchasing of tractors, fertilisers and the facilities to drill small wells.

The possibilities that exist within sport are those that can help with radically different views of the world perhaps based upon opportunities to foster trust, obligations, redistribution and respect for sport in a more socially orientated humane world. The late novelist Susan Sontag (2002:15) once said about the novel that any novel worth reading is an education of the heart, it enlarges your sense of human possibilities and what human nature can be. She was a fervent believer in the capacity of art to delight, to inform and transform the world in which we live in. Does this make sense in relation to sport does it fulfil it's potential to enlarge your sense of human possibilities, to delight, to inform and transform the worlds in which we live?

Much attention has focused in recent years on the possibility of an emerging global civil society with the power to engage with and challenge institutions of governance. The protests of Seattle, Washington, Chiapas, Prague, Barcelona Genoa, Port Alegre and elsewhere have all highlighted the presence and work of civil society. Non Governmental Organisations (NGO'S) and various social movements have found themselves in the limelight, becoming front-page news and the subject of international debate and action. The development of, at a European level, civil society over the past ten years has been impressive. NGO'S from local to the international level have increasingly realised the importance of organising themselves into coherent alliances in order to gain influence with in the European Union. Both European and World Social Forum's have been set up in the early part of the 21st century as focal points for various activists, students, intellectuals, environmentalists, economists, and

researchers amongst others to meet and link to-gether in an expanding network of opposition to the neo-liberal cause.

The geography of the current climate of social and political protest and change in many ways signals a new political landscape. One which is arguing for diverse forms of social change and points towards an entirely new ideological, political and geographical design than that which characterised the cold war or other ideologically driven left versus right sporting battlegrounds of the 20th century. The social and geographical diversity of calls for social and political change can be found in places such as Chiapas, an impoverished region of Southern Mexico, Seattle, the symbol of the microchip and American post modernity and Port Alegre a European city in Brazil's deep south not to mention the many smaller specialist campaigns that have revolved around single issues such as the environment, poverty, hunger, child labour, religion, democracy and war to name but a few. What has happened is that new groupings, new emblems of protest and new possibilities have given rise to a host of hopes, fears, illusions, questions and actions for change. In a way that differs somewhat from liberalism, the ideas of civil society, social forums, NGO'S and social movements have been used to voice and proclaim opposition to irresponsible states, governments, parliaments and political parties while at the same time searching for effective partnerships with socially responsible and responsive multinational corporations.

Thus a new form of internationalism is emerging in a way that is entirely different from the old historical internationals in which solidarity was premised upon the universalized exploitation of labour. In 2005 Kofi Annan UN Secretary-General pointed out that sport was a universal language that could bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, and religious beliefs or economic status

www.un.org/sport2005/index.html). The use of child labour in sport is still very much part of the use of a debate about labour in sport it is vital that such areas of concern are not isolated as single areas of concern unconnected from other local, and/or international forms of resistance. The use of child labour in sport is related to labour rights and the rights of the child. The movements that emerged so effectively in Seattle in November of 1999 resulted from ecological, feminist, ethnic, human rights and other movements combining with anti- world trade groups that created new space. The notion of the social forum as a meeting place for anti-systemic forces to gather at a world level is attractive both in terms of its diversity but also because it creates a space in which anti-neo-liberal struggles can escape from the narrow limitations of the global sport v national or local sport binary. The common framework provides not so much an alternative to globalisation and global sport but a different kind of globalisation and global sport. The advent of social forums represent a milestone and mark the possibility of a shift from sterile debates about global sport or identity sport to that of asserting yet again the idea that sport can contribute to social change but also articulate international political, social and cultural concerns about neo-liberal sport and overcome them.

Concluding Remarks

While it is important to explain and understand economic, social, historical, physiological, psychological and many other explanations of what sport can do for society, the more important intellectual and practical questions often emanate from questions relating to social change. Historically the potential of sport lies not with the values promoted by global sport or particular forms of capitalism for these are invariably unjust and uneven. The possibilities that exist within sport are those that can help with radically different views of the world perhaps based upon opportunities

to foster trust, obligations, redistribution and respect for sport in a more socially orientated humane world. Sport's transformative capacity must not be overstated, it is limited, but possibilities do exist within sport to provide some resources of hope within a world that is left wanting on many fronts. To ignore the capacity of sport to assist with social change is not an option, particularly for students, teachers and researchers of sport all of whom have the capacity and the platform to act as public intellectuals.

The challenge is for sociologists of sport and others not too so much to accept the narrow job description of the academic but to ensure that the social study of sport is one of these very public form of sociology. Furthermore beyond creating a platform for individuals and the key sporting issues of our time public organisations, perhaps international organisations such as ISSA, can also constitute themselves as a public that acts in the public arena. Durkheim once insisted professional associations should always be an integral part of national political life – and not just function to defend their own narrow professional interests. A public intellectual involved in sport would not simply be an intellectual who does work in public but does intellectual work in public on public sporting issues and concerns. One of the most important roles of the public intellectual in sport is the capacity to see above and beyond existing debates, to get off the tramlines of discussion- perhaps to rock the boat but certainly provide a level of independence that think-tanks cannot often provide because of funding constraints.

Perhaps sport should be thought of as a resource of hope in that sport has some limited capacity to assist with social change, can have an impact on life chances, be part of a holistic approach to what a recent report by a international think tank referred to as 'Narrowing the Gap'. Intervention can come in many forms,

legislation, policy, writing, investigating, uncovering silences, pressure groups, social forums, campaigns and activism, re-allocation of resources and not accepting injustice in sport are but a few potential possibilities. This perhaps involves the readers of this journal and many others taking on the mantle of the public intellectual in sport. There is no single agent, group or movement that can carry the hopes of humanity, but there are many points of engagement through sport that offer good causes for optimism that things can get better.

Writers such as Said (2001:6) were openly explicit about the role of the intellectual which was to ‘uncover the contest, to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalised quiet of unseen power’ wherever and whenever possible. Said laid out a powerful case for regarding intellectuals as those who are never more themselves than when moved by metaphysical passions and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak and defy imperfect or oppressive authority. They are those who speak the truth to power and refuse the constraints of disciplinarity and specialisation that Said believed tended to weaken and depoliticise the intellectual strengths of academic writing. In our time and almost universally phrases such as globalisation, global sport, free-market, privatisation, public/private funding for sport are all within the public domain and yet all of these need to be properly explained and tend to be accepted tacitly as if they are the pre-ordained only way to do things. They are not and they need to be continually challenged and re-worked.

Notes

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2. I am also grateful for the comments made by the external reviewers. They helped to clarify at the margins my thinking on some of the core issues in this paper. They also strengthened my resolve over some of the content.

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Grant Jarvie is Professor of Sports Studies and Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of Stirling.

Address: University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA, Scotland (UK).

Email grant.jarvie@stir.ac.uk