



Article

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SPORT, LEISURE AND TOURISM IN SOUTH AMERICA

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Academic interest in sport, leisure and tourism in the nations that comprise South America has been given a significant boost by the scheduled hosting of the two largest sports mega-events – the FIFA men’s football world cup finals and the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games – in Brazil and Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 2014 and 2016 respectively. This is not to say that research has not been conducted until recently, but to acknowledge that the English-language literature has started to increase in the past three years, and looks certain to grow even more rapidly in the next three and beyond. One of the reasons is that the staging of these ‘megas’ focuses the attention of the global media on the host nation and cities involved.

In the past 30 years most of the developed and developing world have joined in the competitive marketing of places as social and economic opportunities seeking capital investment. Many ‘Cariocas’ (Rio de Janeiro locals) glued themselves to their TV screens at 11am local time on October 2nd, 2009, awaiting the results of a decision about whether or not Rio de Janeiro would host the 2016 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. On Copacabana beach, proposed site of the 2016 beach volleyball competition, a huge party was scheduled whether or not Rio was selected. The decision to award the Olympics to Rio was very much the icing on a decade of steady development. Brazil’s had been one of the few economies that had remained stable and growing, leading to it being hailed as one of the BRICs, the so called major emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China.

Whilst there were no groups organized in Rio specifically against the Olympic bid, there were several groups on the ground concerned with the legacy these Olympics would bring to Rio, and especially to the marginalised communities living in favelas (sometimes referred to as ‘slums’). While eviction in low-income, informal areas has become a not-uncommon consequence of mega-event planning worldwide, housing rights violations have reached significant proportions during recent Olympics. It is in this way that sport, and sports mega-events such as the Olympics especially, may appear superficially as

credible tools of development. Yet they do so in ways that does not challenge inequalities or neo-liberal development. In fact the hosting of sports mega-events may be a most convenient shell for the promotion of neo-liberal agendas, since they do not deviate from top down notions of economic and social development.

Contemporary sport is not simply a set of commercial media spectacles, even if it often seems that way. Sport as an active practice continues to be undertaken and played by millions more participants than the relatively small number of elite athletes whose performances are routinely broadcast on national, and increasingly, international media networks. In addition many more people than actually participate in it *follow* any particular sport. Popular involvement in sport is one of the major accomplishments of the 100 years or so since modern sport was established. But sport is not naturally followed anymore than people naturally go shopping. Sport consumers and audiences are *made* not born.

Sport consumerization appears initially to have relied upon local and national affiliations. Globalization has offered the opportunity to expand this process of consumerization and the mass media of communications have played a major role in the creative process whereby sport is transformed. In turn as mediated sport has become an accepted part of everyday life worlds it has also come to play an influence in consumption choices and aspirations for particular consumer goods and lifestyles. Hence sport today – especially through a focus on large scale (‘mega’) mediated events and celebrity accomplishments - plays a major role in the maintenance of consumer culture, especially through marketing, advertising and other promotional strategies. Hence the three main features of contemporary consumer capitalism - globalization, commodification and inequality - shape and contour contemporary sport and sports mega-events, such as the Olympics.

Perusal of the Taylor & Francis journals focussing on sport, leisure and tourism – including *Sport in Society*, the *International Journal of the History of Sport, Soccer & Society*, the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *Current Issues in Tourism* and *Leisure Studies* – reveals a number of recurring topics of interest that enable us to

begin to understand these and other developments in South America. These include (association) football, mega-events, sport and indigenous physical culture, leisure and tourism. Football, by far and away the most popular sport throughout South America, features in articles about fans, elite migrant labour, professional organizations and globalization. Mega-events attract accounts about the history of South American involvement, involvement in the Football World Cup and the Olympics and also the impacts of hosting on marginalised communities. In addition to football, sports and other forms of physical culture discussed include hurling in Argentina via the Irish emigrants, surfing in Brazil and capoeira – the Brazilian martial art that combines elements of dance, acrobatics and music. Specific accounts of the development of policies for sport in Brazil and Venezuela and the philosophy of sport in South America feature in some articles. Discussion of the development of leisure in Brazil and gender divisions and sport also appear. Finally tourism is discussed in terms of the development of ecotourism and tourism policy.

In addition the journals contain overviews that summarise the history and development of sport and leisure in South America more generally, as well as those that discuss the complex composition of South American societies in the wake of centuries of immigration and colonial exploitation. Hence the diaspora of Europeans – the British, the Dutch, the French, the Germans and the Italians – as well as Portuguese and Spanish are rivalled by that of Japanese people, creating in Brazil the largest Japanese-speaking population outside of the Far East.

In future, as research grows, at least in the English-language literature, it will undoubtedly fill some of the gaps in our understanding and thus overcome the exoticisation of South American culture often presented in popular travel programmes and documentaries. South America contains both economic giants, such as Brazil (that puts the ‘B’ in BRICs) and relatively smaller developing economies. Anthropologists, historians, human geographers, political scientists and sociologists, amongst other scholars, will all find opportunities to investigate and write about sport, leisure and tourism in South America in forthcoming years.