

## **SETTING THE STAGE FOR MULTICULTURALISM, VALUES AND PLURALISM IN OLYMPIC STUDIES RESEARCH**

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In 1983, during a Session of the International Olympic Academy – IOA, held in Ancient Olympia, Greece, a group of non-European participants rejected the universal validity of Olympism as they presented the argument that Olympism was based on principles from Western societies. The fact was reported by Wojciech Liponsky (1987), Polish scholar, who additionally raised this question: “what kind of values, now so essential for Olympism, should be kept and should be limited or eliminated if any in order to respect non-Western societies?”

This paper aims at providing answers to Liponsky’s claim taking into account not only developments from Olympic Studies in the last two decades but also advances in academic knowledge in the interplay between values and culture. In this concern, we shall meet a main proposal of this *Olympic Studies Reader*: to provide a stage for future research on multicultural topics.

The first step is to examine Liponsky’s argument according to key initiatives in the area of Olympic Studies in terms of approaches to build knowledge. That is the case of the “First International Conference on the Olympics and East / West and South / North Cultural Exchange in the World System” (Seoul, 1987), organized by Kang Shin-pyo (Korea), John MacAloon (USA) and Roberto DaMatta (Brazil). This event was privileged with the participation of “some 50 distinguished anthropologists, sociologists, communication specialists, philosophers and historians representing the five continents to discuss...comparative historical, regional and national experiences...for understanding them in very different cultural contexts...at the same time, international sport will offer a common point of reference and contrast for discussions of conceptual and theoretical approaches to intercultural relations...” (Kang, 2007).

The challenge Kang and his associates faced gave Olympic Studies a new enthusiasm when they researched intercultural relations, a theme which needed knowledge from Olympic sport and which should clarify questions such as the ones asked by Liponsky and others. This initiative can be verified as one examines the papers given at the “International Symposium Sport...The Third Millennium”

(Quebec City, 1990), in which one of the main highlights was directed to culture and its different ways to relate to sport, in particular, Olympic sport (Landry, 1991).

Quebec City hosted a meeting which had the participation of anthropologists remaining from the group gathered in Seoul three years before (1987) and other specialists who did research on the intercultural meanings of the Olympic Games, including areas such as media, ceremonies and Olympic rituals, racial segregation, gender discrimination, values, etc. Unsurprisingly, John MacAloon (1991) opened the Symposium and renovated the proposal of cultural relativism as theoretical support to the contemporary intercultural relations of Olympic sport. As such, this conception indicated that values and traditions could not be totally transferred from one culture to the next. In the Olympic sphere, this means respect to the differences, keeping equality. MacAloon also defended the thesis that the exercise of politics was intrinsic to what he called Olympic Interculturalism.

In terms of new intercultural approaches, one of the most important contributions of Quebec 1990 was the lecture by Miquel de Moragas (1991), specialist in communications from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain). In his speech, he analyzed the interpretation of values and counter-values of the Olympic Games given by various national television networks when broadcasting the Games. Moragas demonstrated that there was reduced comprehension from the part of the television commentators about the values of Olympism, proclaimed at that time as having universal meanings.

The repercussions of the academic events of Seoul and Quebec City were still heard during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, according to a report by DaCosta (2002) in an overview about the leading approaches of Olympic Studies. Furthermore, in that period, another group of researchers devoted to Olympic Education and to the cross-cultural values also focused on intercultural exchanges. This tendency of studies and research proved to be particularly meaningful because it also included authors who had come from non-European countries and whose mother tongue was not English, conversely to what had been happening up to then, as most authors were from European countries and their choice of language was English.

In this context, Hai Ren (1997), from China, typifies the emphasis on cross-cultural values of Olympic Education when he makes recommendations about the future of the Olympic Movement:

Moreover, the Olympic Games, as an international phenomenon, may stir up a variety of conflicts due to the fact of their diversified participants with different social and cultural backgrounds. To avoid this, the Olympic Movement has to have the certain fundamentals shared by all participants, an accepted standard of behaviors for everyone, and a general guideline for its development. The fundamentals, standard and guidelines could not be anything else but the cultural and educational values for a harmonious development of human beings and world peace. These values are vital to all human beings as well as widely accepted by all nations; therefore, they are suitable to be the foundation of the Olympic Movement.

On her turn, Marta Gomes (2002), from Brazil, supports the idea of multiculturalism as she analyzes Olympic Education:

The debate on culture and identity is becoming so sophisticated that Olympic Education cannot fail to follow it. Although nowadays there are many globalizing institutions and movements, there is a counter-movement to save identities. When fighting for the respect to disparities, we may run the risk of helping the construction of identities that do not communicate among themselves. Therefore, the multicultural education, besides fighting for the preservation of and the respect to differences, should also reinforce the valuation of the differences as an opening of esthetic values, as well as other legitimate ways of being and of looking at life and at the world.

Another example of production which adds to the mainstream initiated in Seoul-1987 is the production of Neise Abreu (2002) from Brazil, who discusses the validity of the adoption of universal values starting from the controversies of Olympic Education:

At the center of this context of consensus and conflict, modern debates on Olympism grow and develop looking for unanimous world acceptance. The definition of Olympism is not as controversial as it is voiced. Actually, its challenge is the coexistence between the values and codes of Olympism towards each specific local culture. These cultures are inserted in their autonomy and particular concepts and, when these proclaimed universal values of Olympism are confronted to each singular code of culture, a voice can be felt in the emptiness. Of course, the generalization adopted by the official definition can not be avoided once it faces the need of broad inclusion in following Coubertin's traditions.

Taking these examples into consideration, it is essential to point out a synthesis made by Susan Brownell (1995), an American Olympic scholar who has deep professional relations with the Chinese culture and whose vision of the Olympic themes anticipates and serves as bases for the overlapping of the tradition of Olympic anthropology with Olympism focused on values:

Thus, the study of the spread of the Olympic Movement can contribute to the debates on the tension between cultural diversity and the world monoculture, tradition and modernity, local and global organizations.

Intercultural Exchanges or Multiculturalism?

When the focus is on the development of the social sciences in general, it is important to observe a renewed interest in values at the end of the 1990s. Either by coincidence or by convergence of social research mainstreams, new concepts about similarities and differences between cultures facing a technologically globalized world have come up. This interpretation had its origin in the research developed by Nestor Canclini (2004), Mexican sociologist who investigates the transfer of music, arts, films and other socio cultural manifestations between cultures by means of comparisons within today's globalization process.

To Canclini (Ibid.: 13-26), today's problem in an intercultural and globalized world is not related to the differences but to the inequalities. These can be reduced when either common sense or symbolic values (Ibid.: 33) of understanding or connection between culturally differentiated groups are adopted. In other words, the

intercultural option implies that one can clearly spot what stands out or what is different in relationships of conflict whereas the multicultural option accepts heterogeneity. Therefore, the epistemological problem of the interchange between cultures does not lie only in the definitions but, above all, in the environment and context where relationships take place.

Canclini's theory has consistency and content to explain the insufficiency of interculturalism in the Seoul version of 1987 if we consider sport not only as a common sense of connection between distinct cultures but also as a carrier of values that serve their own purposes and traditions of the Olympic Movement and of Olympism. In other words, the initial generalization of Kang and colleagues was based on Olympic sport, and, above all, it focused on behavioral reactions between different peoples and not on the values that inform such reactions. It is then possible to say that there was a dominating anthropological bias in initial Olympic interculturalism, which was later compensated by the sociological and educational vision of values which were to be further developed.

According to Canclini (2004: 97 – 101), the superposition or even competition between anthropological and sociological approaches is common in interculturalism studies. However, today this confrontation tends to emphasize multiculturalism because it accepts heterogeneity and the means of connection between differentiated groups. This last tendency, which has become dominant, implies in privileging the universalism (i.e. free of context) of the means of relationship in opposition to relativism (i.e. all points of view are equally valid), accepted by the intercultural option.

However, Canclini (Ibid.: 16) warns us that the adoption of universalism does not happen only because it is a concept that can solve the difficulties which are typical of relativism in intercultural approaches. Indeed, the adoption of universalism is either a strategic justification or an ethical option when one has to face problems of confrontation between cultures. This conclusion takes us naturally to the historical origins of Olympism and to the problems that come out of the adoption of universal values which are proclaimed for all.

#### Olympic universality

Historically speaking, the intention of universality has been one of the primordial characteristics of both the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games as far as

they have been grounded on the presupposed philosophical principles of Olympism. The restorer of the Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, developed, after 1894, a renewed doctrine based on the Ancient Olympic Games. He had also suggested orientations towards a social pedagogy, which supposedly could be adapted to any ethnic group or culture (DaCosta, 2006). In this sense, one of the main historians of Coubertin's life, Yves Pierre Boulongne (1994, p. 22), divulges in one of his writings that the Olympic Congresses from 1897 to 1914 "defined the doctrine and promoted Olympism as a universal value".

Nevertheless, the cultural relations established within the Olympic Movement have come to some international understanding that has implicit meanings. This international understanding has not promoted any explicit discussion about the universal acceptance of the values of Olympism as they are related to the particular values of each culture. In other words, sports activities are taught and experienced in different ways in each society, according to the interpretations of each specific local culture.

The Coubertinian expression "All games, all nations" is representative of the Olympic ideology as it is displayed in several texts, including one from 1911, in which Coubertin precisely depicted a multicultural trait for the first time:

The fundamental rule of Modern Olympic Games is linked with two expressions: all games, all nations. It is not from the International Olympic Committee the power to change it. I would add to this explanation that a nation is necessarily an independent State and that there is a sport geography that can sometimes differentiate from the political geography.

The universal claim of the Olympic idea has been significantly kept up to the present day under several rationales of the IOC, including the option that it should be incorporated into the Olympic Charter. For instance, the Principles of the Olympic Charter clearly proclaim several values such as the one of the second principle, which refers to the definition of Olympism as a movement which "seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles" (p.8, 1997 edition). The seventh principle also demonstrates an assumption of universal values: "The activity of the Olympic Movement symbolized by five interlaced rings is universal and permanent. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with

the bringing together of athletes of the world at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games” (p. 9. Ibid.).

Moving out from Coubertin’s lifetime to contemporary Olympic Movement, it is symptomatic that in many sessions promoted by the International Olympic Academy – IOA (Greece), there have been declared and explicit preoccupations with multiculturalism related to Olympism. Besides the 1983 controversy here previously reported, again in the 33<sup>rd</sup> IOA Main Session - 1993, some representatives from the African continent questioned the fact that modern Olympism only values the practice of sports that are characteristic of the European continent. In the same session, a discussion emerged about the viability to commend universal human values of sport practice upon societies still full of racial, social and political conflicts (Abreu, 2002).

Moreover, the increasingly growth of heterogeneous societies (from the intensification of migrations, ethnic interactions, globalized intercultural relations, and movements in favor of Human Rights) guides approaches that can not stem from traditional cultural concepts and traditional cultural relativism concepts. Facing these realities, the problematic of culture concepts becomes indispensable and it might be considered a collective elaboration, in continuous transformation.

#### Towards the plurality of Values

Within this scenario, how are Olympic values going to be brought into discussion? How are proclaimed universal values going to be attached to cultural diversity? These questions belong to the longtime and multidisciplinary debate between universalism and relativism, which in terms of Olympic Movement and Olympism, has historical fundamentals connected to Coubertin himself. This particular explanation is found in a review made by Ana Miragaya (2007), from Brazil, another researcher of values-led approaches to Olympic Movement, in the theme of Sport for All in its pioneer formulations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

When Sport for All was proposed by Coubertin, it could have had the sense of universalism, as there seemed to be very little reference to diversity. One may infer then that the expression ‘sport for all’ aimed in the beginning to universalism without universals, another expression denoting qualitative identity and resemblance among individuals (...) An additional answer usually found among researchers of human

rights lies in the necessary agreement involving a diversity of cultural interplays. In this case, "universal" understanding is cognitive and an agreed outcome and not necessarily based in Olympic and Coubertin's traditions. This option for mutual understanding is more a philosophical problem and sometimes a political proposal than an anthropological contention related to cultural relativism.

Apart from Olympic sport interests, the conclusive remark from Miragaya has many correspondences with recent philosophical assumptions on the theme of cultural pluralism. For instance, John Kekes (1994), a philosopher from the State University of New York, is assertive when declaring that "there is no single, authoritative standard for resolving values conflicts". Thus far, values issues must be submitted to an agreement involving a diversity of cultural understanding. Alternatively, in Olympic grounds, "universal" value according to Kekes's view should be an agreed value and not necessarily an outcome of Olympic and Coubertin's traditions.

Moreover, the focus on philosophy is presumably the basis for dealing with current uncertainties due to diversity of values. The argument for the search of a philosophical justification of pluralism is also depicted by Kekes (1993), to whom any value can be ultimately justified; as yet pluralism avoids a chaotic relativism according to which all values are in the end arbitrary. His central claim is that pluralism is a preferable alternative to relativism as far as the conflicts resolution involving values diversity demands plural approaches not selection.

Kekes's thesis has supportive meaning to the Olympic Movement and Olympism facing the so-called Olympic values, which have a positive and complementary sense among other social and cultural values. Here lies an answer to the initial claim of respecting non-Western societies' values in Olympic affairs: the realization that one cannot exclude the realization of another. Unfortunately, as pointed out by DaCosta (1998), the actions towards a new pluricultural Olympism are still incipient among Olympic scholars.

Therefore, it is recommendable that Olympic pluralism should encompass Olympic values and other values brought from diverse sources in order to give rise to a common and synergetic development. The *Olympic Studies Reader* was planned to provide a stage for mutual commitments and agreements about plural and shared values.



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