

# THE FUTURE OF SPORT

## PART TWO - WHAT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLICIES?

### Executive Summary

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April 2024

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## INTRODUCTION

### WHY THIS STUDY?

As explained in Part One of our report, published in July 2023<sup>1</sup>, young people around the world have high expectations of sport. As a social object, sport has an impact on a variety of spheres, such as education, health and community spirit; as an object of consumption and entertainment, its economic footprint is constantly growing; as a geopolitical object, it is a means for states to exercise their soft power. As is the case in all other sectors of our globalised society, the major international associations and private-sector players develop power strategies within the sporting arena, which raises the question of control over the rules of the game. All the more so, given that the "values of sport" are regularly bandied about.

Drawing on the findings of our study, based on numerous national and international analyses and with contributions from experts, Part Two of our report is divided into six chapters and approaches the topic from three angles:

1. **Are the national and supranational sport systems in place meeting expectations? How can we do better for the future?**
2. **Between autonomy of the sports movement and public and private strategies, a global governance of sport is taking shape. What role can states play?**
3. **Should the values of sport be decided at the international level? Avenues to explore.**

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<sup>1</sup> See Part One of this study, <https://publika.skema.edu/the-future-of-sport-needs-and-ideas-of-international-youth-for-use-by-policymakers/>, subtitled "Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers" and presented at UNESCO's 7th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VII) in June 2023. In it, we analysed the results of a study of 7.6 million tweets posted by 670,000 young people aged 18 to 24 between October 2021 and January 2023, as well as those of direct qualitative interviews and surveys conducted with 95 students of 18 different nationalities and different fitness levels and sporting abilities.

## KEY POINTS

### 1. ARE THE NATIONAL AND SUPRANATIONAL SPORT SYSTEMS IN PLACE MEETING EXPECTATIONS?

The first part of this report presents four major sport systems and what characterises each of them: the American system, based on a liberal and private management of sport; the Chinese system, run by a strong, interventionist state; the so-called “European” system, which has a number of values and characteristics common to the various national systems that compose it – sport as a public good, volunteerism, fairness and openness of sports competitions, social and educational functions, etc.; and, within the European Union, the French system. Finally, when discussing sport we could not leave out Africa, which will be hosting the 2026 Summer Youth Olympics in Senegal. The African systems are thus also covered in this report.

These are broad categories; the reality on the ground is sometimes more complex. Indeed, **the sport sector is not immune to globalisation and commercialisation. Sporting models influence each other and compete with one another:** the North American ‘sport as entertainment’ model is being exported to China, where private investment is soaring, but also to Europe, where – for example – the proposed creation of a closed football competition called the European Super League sparked heated debates (the ruling of the European Court of Justice on 21 December 2023 was not unfavourable but took a highly nuanced position on this matter).

**In France and elsewhere, sports are attracting growing interest from big corporations and international funds,** which do not invest without at the same time exporting their own vision of sport as an object of entertainment, a source of profits, and a tool of influence. **These competitive processes** are primarily underpinned by the acquisition of strategic assets. As is the case in all other business sectors, one of these assets is data, a new “intangible raw material” and a source of wealth. In addition to this, just like the infrastructures, know-how and image of the companies trading in elite sport, the athletes themselves are now becoming strategic assets, thanks to their ability to influence behaviour and opinions via the media, marketing and social media. Finally, because sport is first and foremost a *social* phenomenon, it is an ideal instrument for developing strategies of influence or even interference that are more political.

While states are still recognised as being responsible for public policies in sport, there are theories developing, including within public international organisations, regarding the need to bring in private investments. While these must of course be driven by the advantages to be gained, in sport they can find both a source of profitability and a channel for philanthropy.

Major international sporting events (MISE) are catalysts for major geoeconomic opportunities. They promise their host cities or nations colossal economic spin-offs, as well as unparalleled international visibility and prominence. As the number of MISE increases, so does the commercialisation of sport as entertainment. At the same time, these major events provide an opportunity to showcase and export the know-how of the whole range of companies involved in the sports industry, as well as that of connected industries, such as tourism. In the face of growing criticism concerning their impact on the environment, their organisers are developing responsible approaches which are also helping to improve their image.

States are well aware of all these developments and are deploying sport diplomacy strategies combining power and new market penetration. **Sport is thus recognised by all, in Western nations and those of the “Global South”, as a political, diplomatic and geoeconomic tool that is all the more important at a time when the global distribution of power is shifting to a multipolar system (multipolarisation).** It is clear that we are currently witnessing a battle of the sporting models with global stakes. **The Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG) are an opportunity for the host countries and cities to showcase their qualities. In this respect, the Paris 2024 Games are a fantastic opportunity for France to highlight its vision of sport as a common and sustainable resource.**

That said, **how do we compare the effectiveness of these different sport systems and policies?** There are a number of elements to consider: not just sporting victories during international competitions, but also how much the populations are engaging in sport, the extent to which sport is taken into account in public health and education policies, the presence and quality of infrastructures, citizen satisfaction, image and media success, and so on. The report describes the main attempts at measurement, which need to be analysed in detail, as the criteria used for the evaluations and other rankings are themselves the result of a set of conscious or unconscious presuppositions.

For example, the synergistic relationships between high-performance sport and recreational sport or 'sport for all' vary from one country to the next, and public participation in sport does not appear to be a key condition for the success of high-performance sport in the short term. **What seems to set apart the nations is the overall level of resources allocated to sport in relation to population size.**

**Finally, what should we ask of sporting models to better meet the expectations and needs of young people?**

Part One of our study showed that young people spontaneously associate **sport with health and education, and therefore implicitly expect public sport policies to be linked to these realms.** Furthermore, young people see sport as a tool for integration, cohesion and social mixing, and an activity that fosters team spirit and **promotes universal values.** They see high-level athletes as role models with the vital role of inspiring young people, thus conferring on them a great deal of responsibility. Lastly, while their main motivation for engaging in sport remains the expected benefits for their physical and mental health, to them **the fun aspect and the enjoyment they derive from it are nevertheless important.** However, this subject seems to be a blind spot in public sport policy, or at least it gets very little mention. If resources are not allocated to making sport accessible, there is a risk that it will be reduced to a type of show business, up for grabs by the highest bidder. These issues are crucial for public policies related to sport.

## **2. WHAT ROLE CAN STATES PLAY IN THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF SPORT WHEN THE WATCHWORD IS PRESERVATION OF THE AUTONOMY OF THE SPORTS MOVEMENT?**

The second part of the report presents the players who, more or less formally, govern sport globally, and it examines the dynamics of their interactions.

Global sport governance is dominated by private players. It is the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Paralympic Committee and the international federations that organise participation in various sports. Some of these players, such as the IOC with its 7.6 billion budget (for the 2017-2020/21 cycle), or the biggest international federations, with FIFA in the lead, wield great economic power. These non-governmental, independent non-profit organisations deemed to contribute to the greater good of society sometimes have legal structures that are almost identical to those of intergovernmental organisations.

As for the states, they are represented in global sport governance via the handful of public international organisations that deal with this subject: one of these is UNESCO, of course, as sport is one of its mandates along with physical education, but there is also the Council of Europe and the OECD. These bodies tend more to issue soft law, i.e. a set of ethical principles and recommendations, although several binding texts do exist, such as UNESCO's International Convention against Doping in Sport and the Council of Europe's Macolin Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions. To date, the World Anti-Doping Agency is the only one with both private and public players in its governance. **Our report provides a comprehensive overview of existing binding and non-binding international regulations.**

The virtual stranglehold of private players on the governance of sport is a legacy of the **autonomy of sport principle**, which stipulates that, because of its specific nature, the sector must be safeguarded against political and state interference. In fact, this principle was enshrined in a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 31 October 2014. And yet, **the numerous corruption and fraud scandals that have rocked private sports organisations in recent decades call for a reform of the way they operate.** Many experts recognise that their governance structures need to evolve to meet the current challenges in high-performance sport, which is becoming more professionalised, commercialised and regulated. The fact that they simultaneously perform a commercial role and a regulatory role yet have no clear supervisory body also raises questions.

There have been calls, in France and elsewhere, for **the creation of an independent world agency responsible for awarding major international sporting events**. In the United States, it is the independence of the World Doping Agency that has been called into question, leading to the creation of an extraterritorial law on doping cases in all international competitions, which applies as soon as these are attended by at least one American athlete. This is the Rodchenkov Act of 2021.

### 3. SHOULD THE VALUES OF SPORT BE DECIDED AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL? AVENUES TO EXPLORE

A socio-historical approach reveals that sport has played a variety of roles through the ages and across cultures, in religion, the military, emancipation, recreation, but it has also been used as a means of population control by authoritarian regimes, or as entertainment for the masses. It is clear that throughout history the values promoted by sport have often been influenced or manipulated by the regimes under which the sporting activities were taking place. The attempts to control the ideologies and beliefs of young people through sport should not be overlooked either. On the other hand, the values of sport can be called upon by states that see sport as a means of empowering young people, particularly girls and women, and a way of protecting these young people from the temptation of radicalism and violence. In any case, they are used to promote social cohesion.

Our study showed that young people are keen to imbue sport with universal values.

As for the previously mentioned international organisations in charge of sport, they consider that sport permeates a great many aspects of human life. They see its educational, public health, social, cultural and recreational value, but also what it can contribute to security<sup>2</sup>. In the IOC's Olympic Charter it is considered a "philosophy of life". According to the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, sport must promote the values of Olympism: excellence, equality, peace, appreciation of beauty, and the upholding of moral principles.

To work toward this ideal, two big questions need answers.

- **How do we reconcile sport as a promoter of values with the principle of political neutrality of sport?**

Like the major international federations and UNESCO, the IOC recognises the principle of political neutrality of sport. To many researchers and experts, however, this neutrality is a myth, as sport has always been used as a political tool. While the history of major sporting events has seen many states take a stand or boycott, sporting institutions such as the IOC had never taken a political stance, until recently when Russia was excluded from major international competitions following its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. **This stance marks a real turning point, as the principle of neutrality is no longer seen as a principle of indifference to human rights violations by states.** A new balance is being struck in international sport, with states from the "Global South" becoming more involved where, historically, Western states were more inclined to do so. As a result, **the debate on values is becoming a global one, and sport is inviting all present-day conflicts to it.** For example, in response to its exclusion from international competitions, Russia is now organising its own events, such as the BRICS Games. Saudi Arabia has made sport a major component of its Saudi Vision 2030 roadmap and is organising events on the global sports calendar. The norms, values and conventions of these new stakeholder-states thus receive more attention on the world stage and can also give rise to protests. As an example, numerous western NGOs objected to Qatar's hosting of the 2022 men's football World Cup because of the way the country treats its LGBTQ+ community. Environmental issues are not excluded from the debates either, particularly when it comes to the topic of MISE, wherever these are taking place.

Thus, today, political neutrality in sport ends at the question of human rights.

At the same time, sport allows the expression of a form of nationalism that is perfectly tolerated.

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<sup>2</sup> One example is the idea of "peace through sport" promoted by the United Nations and the IOC.

So, if young people are so keen to see universal values permeate sport, **our second big question is how to agree on which values.**

- **Are there values that are inherent to sport? With sport becoming ever more global, how can the international community agree on common values?**

Today, sport reflects global political debates whose scope extends far beyond the sport sector alone, bringing into conflict universalist and multicultural visions of society, economic models, and political and geopolitical objectives.

**Since sport is becoming more global with each passing day, the international community now cannot ignore the need to find agreement on the values it embodies.** It might certainly be tempting to avoid this debate, but that would leave the floor open to the game of influence.

UNESCO is actively working on “a universal framework for learning values [...] needed for responsible citizenship”, notably through its “Values Education through Sport” initiative, where it identifies “fairness, teambuilding, equality, discipline, inclusion, perseverance and respect” as essential values.

When it comes to the individual values of discipline, surpassing oneself, fair play, and even love of play, a consensus should be easy to reach. Not to be forgotten in this panoply is the fervour that accompanies all sports competitions and which was mentioned in our study on the thoughts of international youths as collective spirit<sup>3</sup>.

In national public policies and international regulations, however, the words “equality”, “inclusion” and “fairness” are used in different ways depending on the regime and model. The same is true for the notion of individual empowerment.

We suggest that stakeholders do their utmost to find a “**lowest common denominator**” of values at the international level which is acceptable to all and respects freedom of choice. The idea of **sport as a public good** may seem to have political overtones, but on closer inspection it nonetheless features in most national policies, though they may use different terms for it. It implies the notion of equal access regardless of age, gender, financial means... and fits in well with the concept of responsibility, which is being demanded universally. We feel it holds promise for meeting the expectations of young people and all citizens. Furthermore, it is a concept that can be used and adapted by all the key players in sport, whether they are national or international, in the public sphere or the private sphere.

**This work should involve public international organisations – which, let us not forget, are composed of states that must play their full part – and private ones.**

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<sup>3</sup> See our [Emergy Youth Early Signs \(EYES\)](#) report on the thoughts of international youths.

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We would also like to thank **Mariagrazia Squicciarini**, Chief of the Executive Office, Director for Social Policies, **Philipp Müller-Wirth**, Chief of the Sport Section, Social and Human Sciences Sector, and **Giulia Scacchi**, Project Officer, Sport Section, UNESCO, for their participation and contribution to this report.

This report does not commit the persons mentioned and reflects only the views of the authors.

Publication date: April 2024

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