

THE FUTURE OF SPORT WHAT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLICIES?

Part Two

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of its extensive EYES study, focused on the thoughts of international youths¹, for several months now SKEMA Publika has been working on the exciting and ambitious goal of endeavouring to answer four questions: **What is sport? What do young people in different countries expect from it? How are the stakeholders, states, sports movement, associations and international organisations meeting their expectations? What can be done better in the future?**

This is a two-part study: the first instalment, published in July 2023² and summarised below, gave voice to the expectations of international youths through quantitative and qualitative analyses; the second is this report. It presents, analyses and assesses the various institutional solutions in terms of sport models and national and international sport governance. It also presents possible courses of action.

With the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG) just around the corner, **in France and elsewhere sport is a key topic of public debate**. In France, the 2024 Games promise major economic, social, political and geopolitical spin-offs. And social and environmental responsibility is taking a front seat³. The London, Rio and Tokyo Games already had great ambitions in terms of legacy. The London Games remain the most successful to date, particularly in terms of economic spin-offs⁴. Besides the traditional Olympic Games, other major international sporting events (MISE) exist. These include global competitions such as the FIFA World Cup, but also regional and continental events such as the Asian Winter Games, the Africa Cup of Nations, and the Mediterranean Games. Along with others, youth competitions such as the UEFA European Under-20 Football Championship or the Universiades, offering sporting events organised by age category, complete this landscape. Soccer events attract the most media coverage, although other sports such as cricket and basketball follow close behind.

Outside of these major events, in France and around the world, **decision-makers and public opinion are becoming increasingly aware of the intrinsically multidimensional nature of sport**: it has health, social, educational, economic, political and geopolitical impacts. Of course, there are as many systems or models of sport governance as there are countries. The differences are linked to their history, their social and economic culture and their political objectives, but sport has not escaped the globalisation processes of the last century. Sport policies and models are hybridising and gradually taking on practices from other countries.

The global importance of sport and the influence of its international representations, notably via major sports competitions, are increasing its dimension both as an instrument of power and a social, educational, health-promoting and cohesion-building tool for the state, and as a means of economic development for private players. The national and international sport movements claim to participate in both at the same time. The international organisations want regulations that synthesise the positions of all stakeholders; currently, these regulations are known as soft law (non-binding). Depending on the sources, the sports industry is reported to represent between 2% and 3% of global GDP, with a growth rate considered stable at 4% per annum. Public and private dynamics are also simultaneously at work. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the major international federations such as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) are perfect examples of this.

¹ Vallée, S. Revel, C. (2022, January 6th). EYES Report: Thoughts of International Youths. SKEMA Publika.

² Vallée, S. Revel, C. (2023, July 10th). The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers. SKEMA Publika.

³ The legacy promises are always excessive and could actually represent 0.1% of GDP according to the firm Asterès and its report published in January 2024.

⁴ IOC, London 2012: a spectacular show of equality, growth and innovation, July 2022: <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/london-2012-a-spectacular-show-of-equality-growth-and-innovation>

KEY POINTS OF PART ONE OF THE REPORT PUBLISHED IN JULY 2023

Part One of our study was entitled “*The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers*”⁵. In addition to analysing and explaining, it aimed to identify the major developments in sport that were likely to occur over the next ten years and considered necessary by young people. To this end, quantitative and qualitative surveys were conducted, involving young people of various nationalities (7.6 million tweets posted between October 2021 and January 2023, by 670,000 young people aged 18 to 24). In addition to this, direct qualitative interviews and surveys were conducted with 95 students of 18 different nationalities and different fitness levels and sporting abilities.

These analyses were presented at UNESCO's International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VII)⁶, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from June 26 to 29, 2023. Three key points emerged regarding young people's expectations:

1. Most frequently, it is personal benefit that motivates young people to engage in sport: they mention health and personal development, but also the fun and enjoyable aspect of sport, the social aspect and the group element.
2. Sport is seen as a tool for social integration, cohesion and mixing.
3. Sport is felt to promote universal values, and top-level athletes play a vital role in inspiring young people.

PART TWO, THE SUBJECT OF THIS REPORT

This new report is more policy-focused than the one published in July last year. It builds on Part One by looking at the national and international models of sport governance and their qualities on the one hand, and on the other hand it seeks to understand and anticipate the various facets of sport and its role in our societies. Finally, it presents possible courses of action. This report is divided into six sections:

1. Different national sport systems: a quick analysis of some of the world's major models reveals essential differences, obviously linked to their political, cultural and historical underpinnings.
2. A drive to standardise models? As with other human activities, the influences of globalisation in the previous century tended to erase the differences between sport models.
3. One commonality remains clearly visible, nonetheless: sport is a (geo)political, diplomatic and geoeconomic object that is increasingly valuable to states.
4. Do the current sport models meet the expectations of young people? Now that we have an overall picture, we need to ask ourselves if these models, whether original or not, are satisfactory for young people and for others.
5. Is there a need for a global governance of sport? If so, what should this look like? The existing international rules are as much private as public. Do we need to go further? In what direction?
6. So, what is sport today? What is expected of it? How might national and international policies need to evolve?

⁵ Vallée, S. Revel, C. (2023, July 10th). [The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers](#). SKEMA Publika.

⁶ UNESCO is the United Nations' lead agency for physical education and sport. It is guided by the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, established in November 1978. This charter has been revised several times and was last updated in November 2015.

I. NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEMS WITH VERY DIFFERENT PRINCIPLES

Public sport policies vary hugely from one country to another. However, it is possible to distinguish a few major models of sport organisation: North American, Chinese, European and, within the European Union, French. To these, we will add an overview of African policies.

1. THE AMERICAN MODEL: A LIBERAL MANAGEMENT OF SPORT

The United States does not have an official federal sport policy. There is no federal government department entirely dedicated to sport, just as there is no single central coordinating agency. There is no ministry of sport. However, this lack of national coordination does not mean that the authorities have no interest in sporting activities. Whether at the federal, state or municipal level, funding is available for college sports and professional sport. Federal involvement includes congressional oversight of legislative frameworks, investigations into the governance of Olympic and Paralympic sport, and the use of sport as a tool for political power and market development.

Unlike in Europe, where clubs underpin the sport model, in the USA it is in schools and colleges/universities that young people generally first become involved in sport. Sport is considered an educational discipline in its own right, and a means for athletes to access higher education through sports scholarships. Sport is a key factor in academic success and access to higher education. It has a prominent place in primary and secondary education, but generally is not free for families. At these levels of education, sport is organised in a variety of ways, often thanks to private sponsors, but also through being granted access to public sports fields. The situation varies from one location to another and very much follows the map of social differences noted in other areas also. The teaching is designed to enable children to develop the different components of skill-related fitness (speed, coordination, etc.) — or what the Canadians call “sport/physical literacy” — needed to specialise in one or more sports in high school. One of the objectives is to increase the chances of obtaining an athletic scholarship and joining a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)⁷ team. According to many observers, this system, which nurtures sporting talent from an early age, is the reason why the United States leads the world in Olympic performance and successful elite athletes. The existence of infrastructures and the funding of sports research are further strengths, along with the existence of a professional sport system introduced at the end of the 19th century which trains athletes from a young age. The presence of a sporting culture linked to the country's relatively short history and to a need for national identification reinforces this favourable dynamic.

After secondary school, young people continue to develop their sporting abilities in colleges and universities. Sport is also a means of entry to these, but excellence remains confined to major private universities. The often-underfunded public colleges and universities do not have the same first-rate facilities.

The situation is more varied than it first appears. According to a *France Info* programme aired on January 24th, 2022⁸, in the United States, less than a quarter of children aged 6 to 17 actually engage in sport for an average of one hour per day. Physical education is not compulsory in the United States. There are several reasons for this low level of participation in sport. In most states, for example, it is possible to obtain exemptions, and even to swap sport for another subject in high school. Moreover, extracurricular sporting activities are not accessible to everyone. This results in major disparities.

When asked about the American sport system, a former Brazilian tennis player who had attended an American university on an athletic scholarship explained that the country's main goal is to produce champions for the Olympic Games (OG) and major international competitions (World Cups, for example). According to him, in the

⁷ National Collegiate Athletic Association, an American sports association that organises the athletic programmes of many of America's leading colleges and universities.

⁸ *France Info*. (2022, January 24). *Quels sont les dispositifs censés favoriser la pratique sportive des élèves aux États-Unis, en Espagne et en Allemagne.*

USA sport is either a competition (for the athletes) or entertainment (for the spectators). He sums it up as: “You play or you watch”. Only the very best get to join the teams, after a tough selection process (try-outs). Many are forced to give up on “the American dream”. In the 2016-2017 season, 91,775 athletes played gridiron football and basketball in the NCAA⁹ and only 303 managed to turn professional by being recruited during the National Football League (NFL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) drafts.¹⁰

College sports competitions are followed by the general public in the same way as professional competitions, and they are extremely lucrative. The annual revenue of Division I colleges can run into the hundreds of millions of dollars, thanks in particular to the media rights for NCAA championship tournaments¹¹. The annual college basketball tournament March Madness alone generates over 3.2 billion dollars per year in bets and over a billion in advertising revenue. Since 2010, its television rights have also exceeded one billion annually.¹²

A look at how American sport is organised

In North America, professional sport is structured around closed leagues. There are major leagues for men's baseball, basketball, gridiron football, ice hockey and football (soccer), as well as for women's basketball and football (soccer). The professional teams making up these major leagues operate like private companies and are managed in such a way as to maximise their profits. In 2019-2020, 21 teams (across all sports) were worth over three billion dollars. The whole point of these closed competitions is to create a competitive balance between the teams that participate every season, to maintain a minimum amount of uncertainty in the outcome of the tournaments and thus keep the public interested. To achieve this, the leagues have athlete recruitment and retention policies in place, such as salary caps for athletes, or “the draft”, which ensures that the distribution of new talent each year helps to bring the teams back on a more level playing field.

The leagues are also instigators of new sports in the country. For example, over the past few years, there has been a movement underway in the United States to develop rugby, a sport that is still little-known on the other side of the Atlantic. Major League Rugby, created in 2016 in Dallas, officially launched its first tournament in 2018. Clubs are forming as a result, such as NOLA Gold Rugby, founded in 2018 in New Orleans. Apparently, no order came from the state or the national federation, USA Rugby, to develop the sport among the population. The move was simply driven by a desire on the part of private players with a passion for rugby, who saw the economic opportunity to develop this sport.

The Olympic and Paralympic system is governed by a national legislative framework, with the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) as its central authority. The USOPC works with 45 national Olympic sport federations (37 summer and 8 winter), and 5 federations for the Pan American Games. Legislation sets out its responsibilities and those of the national federations, and explicitly establishes that the federal government has a duty not to interfere in sporting affairs. However, each year the USOPC is required to submit a report on its operations to Congress. The two pieces of legislation are the Amateur Sports Act (1978 & 1996) and the Safe Sport Authorization Act (2017).

American professional sport contributes little to the development of mass sport. It operates within a market logic. In this respect, the CDES (Centre for the Law and Economics of Sport) in France points out that, on the other side of the Atlantic, “apart from the proposed offer of sport within the school system, there are few offers that do not discriminate by the entry fee and very few competitions organised for amateurs”¹³. At the same time, the CDES underscores “the existence of actions organised by the North American professional leagues, through foundations, which allow the promotion of the practice of the discipline, to anchor the leagues in their territory and to defend charitable causes”¹⁴.

⁹ The National Collegiate Athletic Association, or NCAA, is an American sports association that organises the athletic programmes of many of America's leading colleges and universities. It is composed of around 1,200 individual and group volunteers.

¹⁰ Sport universitaire, les oubliés du rêve américain - ARTE.

¹¹ Spencer J. Harris, Scott R. Jedlicka, “The Governance of Sport in the USA”, in *Sport Business in the U.S.: Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge, 2020.

¹² Sport universitaire, les oubliés du rêve américain - ARTE.

¹³ CDES, The European Model of Sport: Evaluation and perspectives, p. 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 31.

2. THE CHINESE MODEL: THE STATE AT THE HEAD OF THE SPORT SYSTEM

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the North American model, we find the Chinese model, where the governance of sport is the prerogative of the state and of the Chinese Communist Party. In their essay on sport policy in mainland China, Zheng et al. date the development of a sporting culture back to the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The chief characteristic of Chinese sport is its politicisation¹⁵. According to Lukas Aubin and Jean-Baptiste Guégan, sport was first a tool for national construction and power projection; the aim was then to link physical education to national strength¹⁶. A vehicle for diplomacy, the slogan associated with it is still quoted today (we found it in a tweet by a young Chinese man — see Part One): “Friendship first, competition second”. Today, the Chinese sport system is political and economic and it is at the service of the Communist Party and of the state, which the Party controls. Making China the world's leading sports power by 2049 is one of the Chinese government’s goals.

Zheng et al. describe a sport system with a centralised, pyramid-shaped organisational structure, where the State Council delegates its power to the General Administration of Sport (GAS). This government agency includes 20 sport management centres, each responsible for the development of their discipline. Fourteen of these centres manage Summer Olympic sports, and one is dedicated to Winter Olympic sports. Since 2015, however, the federations are becoming more autonomous to some extent and gradually detaching themselves from the GAS. Alongside this national hierarchical system, a provincial hierarchical system coexists, dedicated to the development of regional sport. There is a mentoring relationship between the provincial centres and the national centres. Ultimately, the former abide by the latter's decisions in all national and Olympic matters.

Convinced that performance at major international sporting events is a symbolic token of its modernisation and reaffirmed power, China has developed what is considered one of the best systems for recognising and training talented athletes¹⁷. It is the embodiment of the *Juguo Tizhi* policy, which literally means “whole-country support for the elite sport system”. Since 1992, China has consistently been among the top four sporting nations in terms of medals won at the Summer Olympics, and since 2000 in the top three. This action relies on coordination between national and provincial structures, and in particular on the essential role played by schools, which organise training sessions and refer the most talented individuals to specialised sports schools responsible for training Olympic hopefuls (“Extracurricular sports school” in the diagram). There is a network of thousands of these schools spanning the country¹⁸. They are entirely state-funded and athletes attend them for free.

Nowadays, these schools are no longer the only pathway to elite sport. More and more private (and thus paid) clubs are training young hopefuls, particularly in sports that are emerging or as yet underdeveloped in China¹⁹.

Zheng et al point out that reestablishing a balance between elite sport and mass sport or sport for all in the government’s priorities is one of the issues facing contemporary sport in China. Mass sport has received greater attention from the government in recent years, particularly for its health benefits. Implementing a national fitness policy is another step toward making China a global superpower in sport. Several documents attest to this: the No. 46 Document or Policy No. 46 (2014), the No. 37 Document or Policy No. 37 (2016), the 13th Five-Year Plan for Sport Development in China (2016)²⁰, and the 2019 Outline for Building a Leading Sports Nation.

¹⁵ Jinming Zheng, Shushu Chen, Tien-Chin Tan & Patrick Wing Chung Lau, “Sport Policy in China (Mainland)”, in *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 10:3, 469-491, 2018.

¹⁶ Lukas Aubin & Jean-Baptiste Guégan, *Atlas géopolitique du sport*, p. 62.

¹⁷ Yang Ma & Markus Kurscheidt, “Modifying Tradition: Understanding Organization Change in Chinese Elite Sport Training at the Grassroots Level”, in *Sustainability*, 2021, 13, 4049; pp. 13 and 2.

¹⁸ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Nepal, [article on physical education in China](#), accessed on January 10, 2023.

¹⁹ Yang Ma & Markus Kurscheidt, pp. 10 & 12.

²⁰ Zheng & al., p. 483.

3. IS THERE A EUROPEAN MODEL?

At the EU level, sport is not a Community competence, but rather a supporting competence governed by Community law. However, the increased involvement of the European Union, and of the Commission specifically, is tending to develop common tools and ensure compliance with a minimally-defined European model. For the European Commission, a European model of sport does exist, with its own key features, identified in 2022 to build on the White Paper on Sport²¹ it published in 2007. The following are the key features of this European Sport Model²²:

- freedom of association,
- a pyramidal structure,
- an open system of promotion and relegation,
- a grassroots approach and solidarity; and
- community building.

The sport models of European states are many and varied, and there is no homogeneity in the organisation of sport at the national level. A review of sport governance carried out in 2017 by the French Ministry of Sport distinguished three distinct systems of organisation: the first is characterised by heavy state involvement (the United Kingdom), the second by state delegation to the National Olympic Committee (Italy), and the third by close collaboration between the state and the sports movement (Germany, the Netherlands, Spain)²³. Similarly, in a 2021 report, the CDES (Centre for the Law and Economics of Sport), in France, underlined that “the southern and eastern states appear to be more interventionist than the northern and western states, considering the promotion and development of sport as a public service that should be placed under the supervision of the state”.²⁴ From this diversity of models, can features common to all states emerge that could prefigure the existence of a European model? And actually, what is meant by “European model”?

CDES, which champions its protection, associates several “essential indicators” with it: the monopoly of federations and their regulatory power; club affiliation for athletes; the participation of athletes in a single competition; the organisation of open competitions, based on the promotion/relegation principle; the volunteer status of the leaders of sporting bodies, structured as non-profit associations; the idea of the absence of profit-making in the practice and management of the sporting activity; the principle of solidarity between professional and mass sport; the concepts of social functions of sport, territorial networking of sport, integrity and training; the pyramid-shaped organisation, with high-performance sport at the top and mass sport at the base.²⁵

The European Sports Charter, established by the Council of Europe in 1992 and revised in 2021, “highlights the common features of a framework for European sport and its organisation, understood by the sports movement as the European sport model”.²⁶ In an article published in January 2021, the think tank *Sport et Citoyenneté* questions the relevance of the notion, stating that it has lost much of its consistency since its introduction in the late 1990s and that it is as much myth as it is reality²⁷.

What does the European Union have to say on the subject? In 1997, the Joint Declaration on Sport annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam emphasised “the social significance of sport, in particular its role in forging identity and bringing people together”. In 2007, however, the European Commission recognised that “any attempt at precisely defining the 'European Sport Model' quickly reaches its limits”, pointing out, among other things, the existence in Europe of closed competitions or the fact that open competitions based on promotion/relegation

²¹ European Commission: [White Paper on Sport](#)

²² European Union: [Key features of a European sport model](#)

²³ Fabien Canu, Olivier Keraudren, “Mission relative au modèle sportif français : État des lieux des relations entre l’État et le mouvement sportif”, *Inspection générale de la jeunesse et des sports, ministère des Sports*, December 2017, p. 59-60.

²⁴ CDES, [The European Model of Sport: Evaluation and perspectives](#), p. 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 4-5 and 28-43.

²⁶ Revised European Sports Charter, 2021.

²⁷ *Sport et Citoyenneté*, *Qu’en est-il du « modèle sportif européen », 25 ans après l’arrêt Bosman ?* Colin Miege, President of the Scientific Committee, *Sport et Citoyenneté*, January 2021.

are limited to team sports²⁸. Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that the EU “shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function” and that Union action shall be aimed at “developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen”.

Sport in the European Union

The EU's first significant intervention in the sporting arena dates back to 1995, with the Bosman ruling, by the Court of Justice of the European Communities (now the European Court of Justice), authorising the free movement of professional football players within the European Union. The White Paper on Sport published in 2007 was the first initiative taken by the Commission to address sport-related issues in a comprehensive manner.

Sport became a supporting competence of the EU in 2009, with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. It may only carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States.

It began launching multi-year work programmes for sport in 2014, along with a number of initiatives designed to encourage citizens to engage more in sport and to be more physically active. The European Week of Sport, for example, has been organised each year since 2015; there are Be Inclusive EU Sport Awards and Be Active Awards; the Erasmus programme also has a sports chapter.

In 2021, a Council of European sport ministers²⁹ approved a resolution that attempted to unify the values linked to sport participation in Europe, indicating their commitment to defending and promoting the key features of this model, namely:

- the governance of sport organisations in compliance with the principles of democracy, transparency, integrity, solidarity, accessibility, social responsibility and respect for fundamental rights;
- a pyramidal structure on a national basis, and organised by one federation per sport;
- solidarity between professional and grassroots sport;
- the promotion of open competitions with a promotion/relegation system;
- a role in national identity;
- its social, educational, cultural and health functions.

The European model is more than a common system of organisation; today, it reflects a political will to protect humanist values, at a time when the sporting world is becoming increasingly driven by commercial aims. In this context, and we will go into further detail about this later on, the European model should be understood as an ideal to be implemented within the framework of European Community law.

4. THE FRENCH MODEL: THE STATE PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE

In his November 2016 book *Sports et Loisirs*, Laurent Turcot reminds readers that it was under the impetus of General de Gaulle, following the country's dismal performance at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome (“a pitiful twenty-fifth place finish”), that the French state launched a major movement to democratise sport and encourage the emergence of a competitive, high-performance elite. State-organised physical education dates back much further, however. It was initially associated with the Ministry of War, then attached to the Ministry of National Education in 1921, and in 1936 the first full-fledged Minister of Sport was appointed. His name was

²⁸ Accompanying document to the White Paper on Sport, 2007.

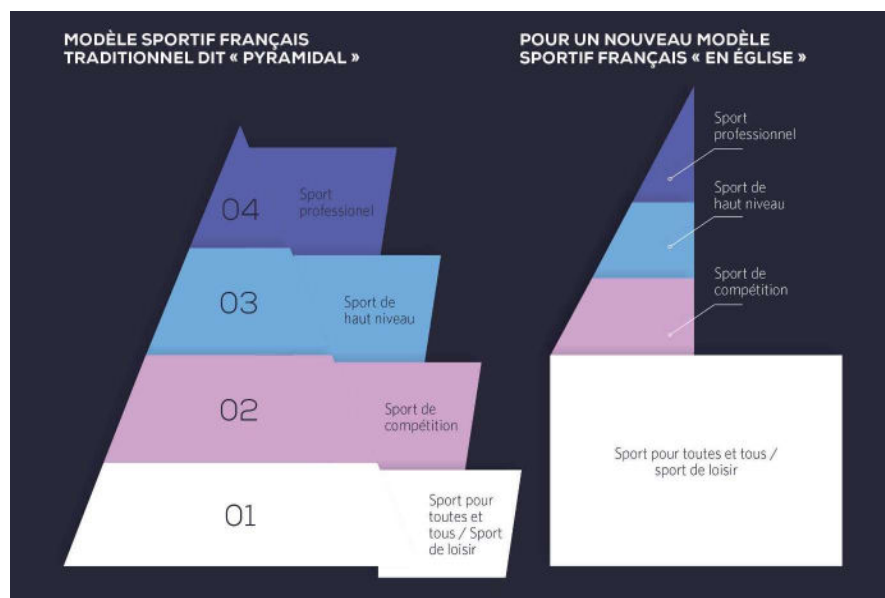
²⁹ Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the key features of a European Sport Model (2021/C 501/01).

Léo Lagrange and he defended the idea that sport and physical activity are part of education. As for state intervention in the sports movement, it dates back to the Vichy government in 1940, with the drafting of a Sports Charter as part of a “hygienist” policy. Through an ordinance dated August 28, 1945, the state delegated some of its powers to sport federations and associations.

Article L.100-1 of the French Sport Code states that the promotion and development of physical and sporting activities are for the common good and that they are an important element of education, culture, integration and social life. They also contribute to health. Article 100-2 sets out how sport is organised between national, regional and local public authorities and private organisations. It states that the state, local authorities and their groupings, associations, sport federations, companies and their associated bodies, contribute to the promotion and development of sporting activities. It goes on to say that the state and sports associations and federations ensure the development of elite or high-performance sport, with the support of local authorities, their groupings, and companies concerned.

In 2023, the Ministry of Sport was allocated a budget of 1.1 billion euros, i.e. 0.3% of the national budget. With an estimated budget of 451 million euros³⁰, the National Agency for Sport (*Agence Nationale du Sport* or ANS in French) supports and finances 15,000 high-performance athletes listed with the Ministry of Sport. Local authorities are the main source of funding. According to a March 2022 report by *BPCE L’Observatoire*³¹, “with the construction and maintenance of local sports facilities, their support for sports clubs and associations, sports events, school sports, etc., local authorities play a major role in the sports economy as testified by the €12.5 billion devoted to sports funding every year.” These figures should be viewed in the context of the economic dimension of sport, which is estimated to account for 2.6% of GDP in France.

The traditional French sport system is a pyramidal model, with mass sport or ‘sport for all’/recreational sport at the base, leading naturally to competitive sport, then on to high-performance sport, and finally to professional sport at the top. According to Patrick Roul, Co-founder of *L’Observatoire des imaginaires du sport*, an observatory which examines current conceptions of sport to understand and measure changes in practices and needs, this model no longer reflects modern-day expectations, as sport for all should be an activity and a public policy in its own right, whereas competitive sport, high-performance sport and professional sport are a specific objective, according to what he calls a “church” model (see diagram below). Indeed, when someone engages in a sport they are not predestined to work toward high-level competitions, since the average person engages in sport as a recreational activity for their own enjoyment, not with the aim of competing.



Source: Patrick Roul, Co-founder of *L’Observatoire des imaginaires du sport*.

³⁰ *L’Équipe*. (2021, December 2). *Le budget de l’Agence nationale du sport grimpe à 451 millions d’euros*.

³¹ BPCE, *Local & regional authorities, the principal source of public funding for sport*, March 2022.

The French sporting culture is still a culture of training for competition, and not a culture of recreational sport or of sport for personal development. In this expert's opinion, while the long-standing dialectic between state and federations governs public policies relating to sport in France, the latter should instead be developed jointly by different actors in the fields of health and education, by the municipality, so as to be more virtuous and efficient. That is why in recent years sport policies have been attempting to put in place new foundations linked to health, education and recreation, and these measures have gathered speed as France prepares for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG) (see below). That said, the traditional culture of competition has produced rather good results in terms of rewards, if we consider the number of medals won³² compared to other countries and relative to the population (see below)³³.

Another advantage of the French model that is often overlooked is that of its history and heritage. France boasts a rich tangible and intangible sporting heritage. A historical heritage, first of all: no one needs reminding that Pierre de Coubertin, the father of Olympism, is French, nor that France introduced laws on sport very early on, in connection with the military first of all, and then later with education. In addition, France is the fifth greatest Olympic power in history. It also has a national museum dedicated to sport, in Nice, bursting with visual archives. France's architectural heritage when it comes to sport is also significant: the Roland Garros Stadium is one facility that immediately comes to mind, but there are also other art deco gems. This cultural sporting heritage would benefit from greater promotion, in tourism campaigns in France, but also among the spectators attending sporting events in the country.

5. THE FRENCH MODEL IN THE LIMELIGHT WITH THE PARIS 2024 OPG

With the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG), sport policy is in the limelight more than ever before and, in addition to the organisation itself, the Games are giving rise to the development of new measures designed to take advantage of this moment to embed the new practices that will have emerged, as was done following the 2023 Rugby World Cup (more members, more volunteers, more individual sport).

45,000 volunteers will be mobilised for the upcoming OPG in Paris and the organisers report having already received 300,000 applications. RATP, the Paris regional transit authority, is also planning to mobilise 3,000 volunteers to assist its 19,000 agents. By the end of 2023, 1,700 people had expressed interest. The French sporting culture of clubs and sporting events does rely on volunteerism, a fundamental value of the sports movement. And yet, for the clubs, this is both a strength and a weakness, as pointed out by several of the young French people we interviewed for Part One of the study.³⁴ The volunteers are getting older and are no longer being replaced. Furthermore, the issues of undeclared work and of the institutionalisation of unpaid work under the guise of volunteerism have recently been the subject of media coverage and politicisation as a result of the upcoming 2024 OPG³⁵. Since late 2023, avenues are being explored to implement a framework and simplify administrative procedures for volunteers in the field of sport.

There has been a step-up in announcements and measures in the run-up to the 2024 OPG, and also, let it be said, with a view to creating an Olympic "legacy", i.e. what must remain and be passed on after the OPG, whether tangible or intangible. Hence the measures taken to generalise 30 minutes of daily physical activity from elementary school onwards, and the trialling of two extra hours of sport per week for secondary school pupils in 700 establishments starting in September 2023. For the population as a whole, the "maisons sport santé" and 5,000 local sports fields to be deployed are another dimension of the legacy, as are the major facilities built for the OPG, such as the Olympic Centre in Saint-Denis, which must be able to be reused for the benefit of all once the Games are over. The continued application of the skills and know-how companies have acquired or updated must also be part of the Paris 2024 legacy, following the example of what was done by Great Britain after the 2012 Olympics.

³² Rondeau, P. (2022, December 25). *La France est l'une des reines des sports collectifs, et c'est grâce à sa politique*. Slate.fr.

³³ Arnaud Saurois' data comparisons show that the French model performs well but there is room for improvement. He underscores the possibility of developing the system, by comparing it to more effective European systems.

<https://infogram.com/autre-classement-olympique-jop-ete-hiver-2012-2022-1h0n25y517yez6p?live>

³⁴ See Part One: Vallée, S. Revel, C.(2023, July 10th). *The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers*. SKEMA Publika.

³⁵ *France Info*. (2023, December 18). *Paris 2024 : derrière le recours aux bénévoles, les craintes de travail dissimulé*.

I. NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEMS WITH VERY DIFFERENT PRINCIPLES

In line with the idea of sport as a public good, the French government is also launching the *Grande Cause Nationale 2024* (the great national cause, in English), focused on the promotion of physical activity and sport, and increasing the budget by 7.3%. Five priorities have been established:

- the construction and renovation of sporting facilities;
- the promotion of sport and exercise, particularly among young people, women, and people living with disabilities;
- social integration through sport;
- the fight for ethics and integrity in sport;
- the success of French athletes.

A look at how the Paris 2024 OPG are organised

The Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (OCOPG) was established by the state in 2018, in conjunction with the IOC. Its budget is set at 4.4 billion euros (including — according to the information provided by the MPs Stéphane Mazars and Stéphane Peu in their report dated July 5, 2023 — 1.2 billion euros from the IOC, 1.4 from ticketing, hospitality and licensing resources, 1.1 from partnership resources, 0.2 from miscellaneous resources, and 4% from public funding for the Paralympic Games). Purchases are expected to reach 2.372 billion euros.

Indeed, the French government created Solideo, the public body responsible for delivering the Olympic and Paralympic infrastructures – whether new builds or renovations – which will remain in place after the Games. The amount of public funding required for the projects underway totals more than 1.7 billion euros. Around two-thirds of funding comes from the state, and one-third from local authorities. Private contributions are estimated at 2 billion euros. In addition, the government is funding all the transport infrastructure needed during the games. Due to the sheer number of actions, it is difficult to calculate the precise amount of state investment involved.

The OCOPG's purchases are projected to reach around 2.4 billion euros. Nearly half of this amount is already earmarked for the Games' corporate partners: 31.6% for the OCOPG's domestic partners and 15.9% for the IOC's 14 major corporate partners (Allianz, Alibaba, Bridgestone, Intel, Omega, Panasonic, Toyota, Visa, Coca-Cola, Atos, Procter & Gamble, Deloitte, Samsung, and Airbnb), who receive exclusive marketing rights and benefits. The remaining contracts (52.5%) will be awarded through the standard public procurement process. As Stéphane Mazars and Stéphane Peu point out in their report entitled *Rapport d'information n° 1505 sur les retombées des Jeux olympiques et paralympiques de 2024 sur le tissu économique et associatif local*, about the benefits of the 2024 OPG for the local economy and associations, French companies will ultimately miss out on part of these economic benefits.

At the symposium "*L'organisation des Jeux olympiques et paralympiques de Paris 2024 : Questions de droit public*" (Hosting of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Questions of Public Law), held on November 17, 2023, Laurence Folliot Lalliot, Professor of Public Law at the University of Paris Nanterre, warned the host-states of Olympic events that they must reconcile their desire to maximise the return on investment which the very costly hosting of the OPG represents, with the obligation both to take into account the rules of (non-)competition imposed by the IOC on certain major contracts and to comply with national rules on the obligation to open up domestic contracts to foreign companies in the public bidding process for sport-related contracts, and actually these rules can differ from one country to another.

The IOC thus has a strong hold on the organisation of the Games, through the extent of its financing, first of all, but also through the procurement rules it enforces. According to Laurence Folliot Lalliot's analysis, the IOC contributes almost the equivalent of 3.55 billion euros to the OCOPG and accounts for over 93% of the Olympic Games Organising Committee's revenues. Article L. 2512-2 of the French Public Procurement Code of 2019 allows the Code to be set aside and either the procedure specific to an international organisation to be applied when the latter is entirely financing the operation, or a procedure "agreed" "between the international organisation and the purchaser when the majority of the public contract is co-financed by this international organisation. In its 2019 opinion, the French Council of State (*Conseil d'État*) considered that this exception could apply to the IOC, **since it qualifies as an international non-governmental organisation** by virtue of Article 81 of the Law of December 28, 2017.

6. A LOOK AT THE AFRICAN SYSTEMS

It is impossible not to discuss Africa in a study devoted to international sport. Then again, "Africa" is not a single reality. Here, we are going to focus on the question of its systems and of its place in the globalisation of sport.

On this continent with 1.2 billion inhabitants, 60% of the population is under the age of 24. Common sense thus dictates that sport is very important there in every respect, as it is in other countries, but here even more so. While sport can help with wealth creation, it is also explicitly mentioned by the private and governmental experts we met as an absolute must in terms of fostering social cohesion, professional opportunities, but also for the empowerment of young people and specifically girls, and finally as a way to fight against idleness and all forms of control.

As mentioned previously, the sports industry represents between 2% and 3% of global GDP, with a growth rate considered stable at 4% per year. According to a book by the African Sports & Creative Institute and Michel Desbordes³⁶, 90% of this wealth is generated in North America, Europe and Asia. Although the continent provides the rest of the world with an abundance of sporting talent, sport only represents around 0.5% of Africa's GDP. The challenge lies in creating local sports infrastructures, both tangible and intangible (education, training, etc.).

African public policies are struggling to achieve this. At the country level, especially in the French-speaking African countries, the legacy of the past has led to a highly centralised and often bureaucratic form of public management. As for entering the "global system", according to Patrick Bouchet and Mohammed Kaach, after gaining their independence, and with the intention of being part of the global sport system, African countries created continental sports institutions, such as the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa (SCSA), which was established in 1966 and became a specialised institution within the African Union, or the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA) created in 1981, and the African Sports Confederations. These various institutions ensure the continent is represented. However, the challenge remains equipping the continent, particularly with local infrastructures.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to remain stuck on this picture influenced by the past, as the situation is changing rapidly; in fact, this was the theme of the "*L'Afrique au centre du jeu*" (Africa at the centre of the game) conference held in Abidjan on October 26, 2023³⁷. Since South Africa hosted the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Morocco has equipped itself with first-rate infrastructures, enabling it to host numerous football competitions and the next World Cup in 2030; Senegal is set to host the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in 2026, the first Olympic Games to be held on African soil; with no particular event planned, Benin has launched the construction of 22 multi-purpose stadiums; the Africa Cup of Nations is a world-class event, and so on.

On a deeper level, successful experiments have been set up by associations. One of these, run by Diambars, draws on the appeal of sport to train young people in other professions also. In fact, this know-how is now being taken up in challenging neighbourhoods in France.

In the sports sphere, as in others, reciprocal exchanges of experience between African and Western countries are certainly a source of innovative solutions, which should be encouraged by international public funding and genuinely responsible private investment.

³⁶ *ECONOMIE DU SPORT EN AFRIQUE Réalités, Défis, Opportunités*, 2022

³⁷ Kessous, M. (2023, December 11). *L'Afrique, prochain terrain de jeu du sport mondial ?* Le Monde.fr.

II. A DRIVE TO STANDARDISE MODELS?

Globalisation influences all models, whether of law, of thought or of education. Sport is no exception, whether in terms of types of sport, regulations or even public policy. They all hybridise and slowly absorb practices from other parts of the world.

According to Patrick Bouchet and Mohammed Kaach, a new era in Western sport began in the 1980s, when, at the IOC meeting in Baden-Baden in 1982, the economic importance of the Olympic Games and the professional status of athletes were recognised. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, held in the wake of this, were highly profitable. This movement in sport reflects the general economic and financial globalisation that gathered speed during those years.

1. TOWARD LESS VARIETY IN THE SPORTS PLAYED?

Globalisation processes influence the content and regulation of sports first and foremost. Some countries have adopted the idea of a legally defined national sport. This is the case in Canada with lacrosse and ice hockey, in Sri Lanka with volleyball, in the Bahamas with cricket, and in Uruguay with Creole [i.e. gaucho] skills (*destrezas criollas*). In other countries, certain sports have “always” dominated. In the USA, for example, the four major league sports are traditionally king. They attract the lion’s share of players and spectators: gridiron football (NFL), ice hockey (NHL), baseball (MLB), and basketball (NBA). MLS, the soccer league, has been added to this list since its creation in 1993 and the fresh impetus provided by both Lionel Messi’s arrival in Miami and Apple’s broadcast deal. The ten-year agreement guarantees the league 238 million euros per year in rights. These national professional leagues, like the NBA in the USA, are keen to maintain their independence from international federations and their own rules. In the NBA, for example, the refereeing rules, game length, and the distance between the lines and the basket are different to those of FIBA, the International Basketball Federation.

In reality, internationally, one sport stands out above the rest: football (soccer). It is growing at a phenomenal rate and becoming almost a national sport in most of the world’s countries. And in football, it is FIFA³⁸ that sets the rules worldwide. As is the case in many other sectors, international regulation, and the international governance model that goes with it, are having a direct impact on organisation at the national level. All of this is part of the same drive to standardise the tastes of consumers. Both the legacy media outlets and the digital multinationals have understood this, and events involving professional football clubs or national teams generate extraordinary economic spin-offs³⁹. Along with this standardisation comes financial concentration and the question of how to distribute the earnings. Aware of these phenomena, FIFA has decentralised the organisation of competitions within countries, while providing a set of frameworks and rules.

Esports was rarely mentioned by young people in our international survey. However, when talking about globalisation, it appears to be the ultimate globalised sport. Therefore, like the other disciplines, it is and will be influenced by models, political visions and even values. And the impact of this can be even greater.

2. TOWARD AN INCREASING COMMERCIALISATION OF SPORT: THE EXAMPLE OF CHINA

Today, international sport is becoming increasingly professionalised and commercialised. And China, where sport has always been a political affair, is not immune to this phenomenon. Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese central government’s focus, when it comes to sport, has “gradually evolved from its competitive, diplomatic function to having more commercial and recreational aspects”⁴⁰. The many policy documents produced since the 2010s recognise the great economic potential of sport and endeavour to develop its industry and consumption.

³⁸ *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*: the international governing body of association football

³⁹ FIFA’s operating budget for 2024-2026 is around \$11 billion, with the Qatar World Cup alone bringing it \$7.5 billion in revenue.

⁴⁰ Guo Cai & Jeffrey Benz, “Annual Review on Sports Dispute Resolution in China”, in *Commercial Dispute Resolution in China: An Annual Review And Preview (2020)*, Law in Sports, an initiative of the Beijing Arbitration Commission/Beijing International Arbitration Center.

China has been reforming this industry for several years now. While traditionally, in this country, the organisational structure of sport has been very hierarchical and centralised — with the General Administration of Sport (GAS) at the top —, China is now committed to “de-governmentalising” the management of sport. In 2015, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) became the first federation to leave the fold of the GAS to manage its finances and human resources independently. The Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) followed in 2017. By 2019, 21 of the 89 associations affiliated with the GAS had become independent⁴¹.

In parallel to this, the Chinese government and the GAS also introduced a series of measures to “remove administrative hurdles and energise the market”⁴². Examples include the lifting of restrictions on the right of national team athletes to profit from their name, image and reputation, and the recognition of the names and logos of sports organisations, sports venues and events as intangible assets that can be commercialised. With these measures, the government is massively encouraging private investment in a sector traditionally funded by the state.

The sports industry has strong potential: its share in China's GDP has doubled in less than ten years⁴³, and the size of the market grew by 75% between 2015 and 2019. The Chinese government's ambition, as set out in Policy No. 46, is for the sports market to reach 5 trillion renminbi by 2025, equivalent to 650 billion euros⁴⁴. By way of comparison, the U.S. sports industry was worth 430 billion euros in 2021⁴⁵.

However, the spectator sport sector was hit hard by the pandemic and the government's “zero-COVID” policy. In 2018, the Chinese Super League (CSL) was the sixth most-watched football competition in the world⁴⁶, well behind the English Premier League. It distinguished itself by paying the largest sums in the transfer market in 2016-2017⁴⁷, in line with Xi Jinping's policy aimed at demonstrating his power and encouraging the emergence of a Chinese dream. However, the situation has changed. Football in China is currently facing major financial problems, as a result of the economic slowdown affecting the companies that finance the Chinese clubs. The Chinese government taking back control of the CSL added to this negative dynamic. The clubs were renamed/de-branded, player salary caps were unilaterally reduced, and investment in football was discouraged.

Although the private sector now plays a considerable role in Chinese sport through its financial contribution (sponsorships, broadcasting rights, professional league), it is still strictly excluded from GAS decision-making processes⁴⁸ and currently has a very limited impact on the political direction of sport development in China. Once again, China has managed to retain its status as a “socialist market economy” and a strong state, while embracing the commercialisation of the sector.

3. TOWARD A NEW ROLE IN SPORTS AFFAIRS FOR THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

Like China, the United States has recently embarked on a process of organisational reform in the sport sector, albeit with a push in the opposite direction to that taken by the Chinese government, i.e. by introducing a degree of “governmentalisation” in this traditionally private sector.

The most striking example is the reform of the Olympic and Paralympic system. The legislative framework makes the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) the central coordinating body of this system, while keeping the federal government out of sports affairs. However, in 2020, the United States Congress passed a new law, the Empowering Olympic, Paralympic, and Amateur Athletes Act, and notably obtained the power to

⁴¹ Jinming Zheng, Shushu Chen, Tien-Chin Tan & Patrick Wing Chung Lau, “Sport Policy in China (Mainland)”, in *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 10:3, 469-491, 2018.

⁴² Guo Cai & Jeffrey Benz, *Ibid.*

⁴³ Statista, [GDP share of sports industry in China from 2012 to 2019 with an estimate for 2020.](#)

⁴⁴ Conversion in 2021

⁴⁵ *Agence wallonne à l'exportation et aux investissements étrangers, L'industrie du sport en Chine*, 2021, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Peter Upton, “Opportunity for Big Growth in Vjina's Sports Industry”, in *China Briefing*, September 25, 2019.

⁴⁷ John Duerden, “Another Chinese Super League Setback as Chongqing Withdraws”, in *AP News*, May 24, 2022.

⁴⁸ Zheng et al., p. 480.

dissolve the USOPC Board of Directors and decertify the national federations of individual sports, a responsibility that originally lay exclusively with the USPOC. This new law also imposes greater legal responsibility on the USOPC to protect its athletes (duty of care).⁴⁹ In this context, a Commission on the State of U.S. Olympics and Paralympics (CSUSOP) was created. It held its first public hearing in September 2023.

A second, more symbolic example, according to the experts⁵⁰, is the publication of a National Youth Sports Strategy (NYSS) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2019. This document reflects the U.S. government's growing interest in sports affairs.

This logic of "governmentalisation" does not escape the logic of global commercialisation. For example, collegiate sport, an essential link in the American sport model, is in the early stages of a major organisational reform in which the public authorities are playing a key role, and which will make it the theatre of increased commercialisation. Indeed, traditionally, any athlete receiving compensation or remuneration other than their scholarship had to give up their amateur status and forego participation in intercollegiate competitions, despite the fact that the collegiate sport market is now estimated at 14.4 billion dollars.⁵¹ The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the governing body of college sports, defends the amateur status of players in order to preserve the link between sport and education. In June 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a gradual increase in the compensation of athletes. In addition, several bills aimed at protecting the right of athletes to make money from their name, image and likeness are currently before Congress. In 2021, 28 U.S. states had already passed such laws, and many more are currently drafting new legislation⁵². In response, since 2021 the NCAA has (temporarily) allowed its athletes to sign sponsorship deals or contracts with athletic brands, etc.⁵³ Federal legislation on the issue is pending.

4. WHAT WAY FORWARD FOR THE EUROPEAN MODEL?

Discussions regarding a European model of sport and its defence were reopened in 2021, following the announcement by twelve major European clubs — before nine of them almost immediately did an about-face — that they would take part in the European Super League, a proposed closed tournament competing with the Champions League. This super league is modelled on North American leagues, whose objective is to maximise the market value of their member teams⁵⁴. Facing fierce opposition from UEFA and FIFA as well as the threat of sanctions, the three clubs still involved in the plan for a breakaway league (Real Madrid, FC Barcelona and Juventus) went to court, accusing UEFA of infringing competition law. On December 21, 2023, against all expectations⁵⁵, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled in their favour while specifying that "that does not mean that a competition such as the Super League project must necessarily be approved. The Court, having been asked generally about the FIFA and UEFA rules, does not rule on that specific project in its judgment".⁵⁶

More than ever, the Super League project is thus reopening discussions about the European model of sport, its values and its governance. Indeed, as early as November 2021, the European Parliament issued a report⁵⁷ in which it enshrined "open competition" as a feature of the European Sport Model and rejected "models based exclusively on profit". In the explanatory statement, it referred to the Super League as a prime example of projects that "threaten the European dimension in sport and seek to undermine its features". The Council of the European Union subsequently adopted the resolution on the key features of a European sport model⁵⁸ (mentioned earlier), listing "increasing commercialisation" as a threat to organised sport in Europe and to its

⁴⁹ Dan Murphy, "New law gives Congress more oversight over the leaders of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee", ESPN, October 31, 2020.

⁵⁰ Spencer J. Harris, Scott R. Jedlicka, p. 34.

⁵¹ Justin Byers, "College Athletes Could Earn \$1.5B This Year", Front Office Sports, October 6, 2021.

⁵² Dan Murphy, "Everything you need to know about the NCAA's NIL debate", ESPN, September 1, 2021.

⁵³ NCAA, announcement dated June 30, 2021, "NCAA adopts interim name, image and likeness policy".

⁵⁴ Spencer J. Harris, Scott R. Jedlicka, p. 27.

⁵⁵ Le Monde, "Super Ligue : l'avocat général de la Cour de justice européenne donne raison à l'UEFA", December 15, 2022.

⁵⁶ Court of Justice of the European Union, Press Release No 203/23, December 21, 2023.

⁵⁷ The report gave rise to a motion for a European Parliament resolution on EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward (2021/2058(INI)).

⁵⁸ Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the key features of a European Sport Model (2021/C 501/01).

values. The Slovenian (July 1 — December 31, 2021) and French (January 1 — June 30, 2022) presidencies of the Council of the EU particularly supported the need to defend and implement the European model.

In a 1998 document, the European Commission called on “European sport to start to consider the shape of its organisation for the years to come”, as by failing to do so “European sport risks being crushed under the pressure of economic interests”. In particular, the Commission mentioned that this “could endanger grass-roots structures”.⁵⁹ To illustrate this point, we can cite a 2022 CDES study on the expectations and needs of French stakeholders in sport, which highlighted the concerns of the French sports movement with regard to the development of sports competitions by commercial organisations. For the French economic players interviewed, it was the federal sport model and the difficulty in sustaining the clubs' business model through public funding that were a cause for concern⁶⁰.

The global market for major sporting events is currently estimated at \$512.14 billion (2023) and could reach \$623.63 billion by 2027 as well as 5% annual growth⁶¹. Given the increasing commodification of sport and the emergence of new players, it seems vital to reconcile the values of volunteerism, social inclusion, solidarity and education with the search for funding and the economic development of the industry. **Faced with the imperatives of a changing economic model, one question arises: can Europe remain competitive, both economically and in terms of performance, while also retaining the specific features of its model?**

5. CLASH OF MODELS, COMPETITIONS, AND ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES

In its report on the European sport model, the CDES describes sport as a “public good”: “not only is it useful to the greatest number of people, but the cost of financing it is such that no private interest would agree to finance it, having no certainty as to the profitability of its investment”.⁶² This is also the French position: that sport is a public good, i.e. one that can provide a benefit to society, given its ability to promote health, well-being and social cohesion. Like all public goods, sport is managed by the state and the local authorities, in close collaboration with private partners to remain in touch with reality.

However, while France has opted for a sport model focused on the public interest, this is not explicitly the case for competing models such as that of the United States, in which sport is seen more as a form of entertainment than as a public health object that can help with community building. Comparing the profiles of the presidents of each country's OPG organising committee provides a striking example. Tony Estanguet, the president of the Paris 2024 OCOPG, is a former elite athlete, a canoe slalom champion, appointed by the French President, whereas Casey Wasserman, the president of the Los Angeles 2028 OCOPG, is a businessman and the CEO of Wasserman Group, which specialises in talent management and production in the music, television and sports industries. This example speaks volumes about the different visions of sport, in one case seen as a public good managed by the public sphere, and in the other as a component of global "entertainment", guided by purely private interests. The development of "sportainment" at the heart of the sports and entertainment industry is a major trend, and one that appears more difficult to reconcile with the European model's imperatives of solidarity, development and inclusion.

The question of defending the European model, and more particularly the French model, is all the more pressing given the current context: in recent years, various American public and private institutions seem to be showing a new and growing interest in French sport, both in terms of how France's sport system works and in terms of its “consumers” (numerous visits from academics have been noted, requests from members of the federal government, etc.). Major American companies and funds are showing increasing interest in French clubs such as Olympique Lyonnais, taken over by John Textor and Eagle Football, Toulouse Football Club, bought by Redbird Capital Partners, or Olympique de Marseille, and in companies of all sizes within the sports industry, particularly those with a wealth of data or specialising in data processing.

⁵⁹ Commission Staff Working Paper, “[The Development and Prospects for Community Action in the Field of Sport](#)”, September 20, 1998, p. 7.

⁶⁰ CDES, *Étude nationale sur les attentes et besoins des acteurs du sport : Une ambition commune pour le sport de demain*, May 2022, pp. 68 and 74.

⁶¹ [The Business Research Company, Sports Global Market Report, January 2023](#); accessed on February 8, 2023.

⁶² CDES, [The European Model of Sport: Evaluation and perspectives](#), p. 27.

There are various elements driving these competitive processes. They are primarily underpinned by a drive to acquire strategic assets. As is the case in all other business sectors, one of these assets is data, a new "intangible raw material" and a moneymaker. Whoever owns the data gains the upper hand. This has been demonstrated time and again, and the world of sport is no exception. In France, these data abound and are rather well processed in the sporting arena, whether they concern competitive athletes, "consumers", sporting equipment and human performance, or the health of citizens (most of the time delivered by the citizens themselves) based on their sporting activity, etc. Because of their capacity to influence via the media, marketing and social media, athletes themselves are also becoming strategic assets, to be bought at the lowest possible price and sold on at the highest. Another lure is that sports companies often own or manage infrastructures and have an image and know-how, all of which can be negotiated. Finally, because sport is first and foremost a phenomenon rooted in society, it is an ideal instrument for more political influence and even interference.

These different interests underpin the approaches taken by investors, who may be national or international, private or public. As pointed out by Seventure Partners CEO Isabelle de Crémoux in an opinion piece published in *Les Echos*⁶³, the sports industry is a solid sector that holds promise for investors. According to her, an investor with a time horizon of five to seven years and a portfolio made up of these companies in the sports sector can aspire to triple or even quintuple their investment. As regards foreign investors, which make up the majority of investors in France right now, looking beyond the economic transaction and foreign direct investment, which can be useful and legitimate, one concern emerges: that these buyouts will bring with them an imported vision of sport that is different from, or even opposite to, our initial model. At the same time, and even within public international organisations, theories are developing on the need to encourage private investment, driven by the benefits and advantages to be gained, certainly, but which, in sport, can find both a source of profitability and a responsible purpose.

Amid these different approaches, the development of major events, as described earlier, is largely supported by the major international federations. FIFA, for example, plans to turn the U-17 World Cup into an annual event from 2025, and holds an U-20 World Cup every two years. FIFA explains that this is not just about commercial sport, but also about supporting countries to develop team sports thanks to these events. Nevertheless, these new initiatives could accelerate the spread of the spectator sport logic and influence models.

While it is undeniable that the growing number of MISE encourages people to participate in sport, it is important to ensure that the objective of public good, when governments have chosen this, prevails over the logic of unbridled commercialisation on the part of stakeholders as powerful as, or even more powerful than, the states themselves. **We are at a turning point in the clash of models.**

In France, as in other European countries where sport is considered a public good, it is therefore worth reflecting, in this area as in others, on the question of the sovereignty and preservation of our sport model, but also on its full development in the light of such predictions. In France, these questions must also be part of the previously mentioned "legacy", particularly in the lead-up to the 2030 Winter OPG set to be hosted in this country.

Also in France, the question of promoting and exporting the national model is just as important, as expressed by the French Minister for Sport and the Olympic and Paralympic Games at the second "*Demain le Sport*" meeting organised by *France Info*, *l'Équipe* and *France Télévisions* on September 19, 2023. Paris 2024 is the showcase for the French and European vision of sport as a public good. **The French Sport Minister insisted on the need to work on the French sports narrative and take part in the clash of messages underway on the international sports scene.** This narrative could largely contribute to **France's soft power** in sport, but also in general.

Finally, this French soft power in and through sport could better incorporate **the French-speaking world (Francophonie)**, the fundamentals of which have evolved considerably, with a shift from the Francophonie, singular, to the Francophonies, plural, with a diversity of geographies, sectors and means. In France, francophone sport is the focus of sustained government action, notably via a Ministerial Delegate for the Francophonie at the Ministry of Sport and the Olympic and Paralympic Games. This applied influence is to be underlined. The *IXèmes Jeux de la Francophonie* (9th Francophone Games) were held in the summer of 2023 in Kinshasa, despite pessimistic predictions. There is clearly a synergy to be exploited between sport and the Francophonie, and it is

⁶³ De Crémoux, I. (2023, December 15). Opinion | [Le sport, terrain de jeu pour diversifier son portefeuille](#). *Les Echos*.

a shame that it is so weakly leveraged in the context of the 2024 OPG in Paris, particularly since that same year the French president will be opening the *Centre de la Francophonie* in Villers-Cotterêts, a centre dedicated to the promotion of the Francophonie internationally. The Commonwealth is united first and foremost by a common language, a resource also available to the hundreds of millions of French speakers around the world. Highlighting a common culture through language in no way prevents integration into the global community. What is lacking today is the consideration of economic aspects and, in sport especially, an alliance of public policies and private investors to promote Pierre de Coubertin's mother tongue.

III. ONE COMMONALITY: SPORT AS A POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC AND GEOPOLITICAL OBJECT

1. MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS, CATALYSTS FOR THE GEOECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY SPORT

In 2011, Jean-Pierre Augustin explained that if sport has a hold on society, it is because the economy has a hold on sport⁶⁴. Since the 1980s, and even more so with the collapse of the communist model, sport has moved to a new dimension. It is now an essential facet of globalisation processes and their evolution. Countries use sport to promote their interests; and the economic dimension is by no means the least important. According to the French geographer, the economic shift created by the globalisation of sport and its role as an amplifier of global ceremonies in the media are invaluable. The geoeconomy of sport makes it possible to exist in international competition.

Sport, the economy and globalisation thus form an inseparable trio. Globally, the sports sector represents 2% of global GDP and is estimated to be worth over 1,200 billion euros, with growth driven by emerging markets⁶⁵. According to the latest BPCE study⁶⁶, sport in France accounts for 2.6% of the country's GDP, with annual net sales estimated at 71 billion euros in 2023. With 128,000 companies of all sizes operating across France, the industry, in the broadest sense of the term, represents nearly 450,000 jobs⁶⁷. From both an economic and a political point of view, sport is far from insignificant. It has become strategic.

The Rugby World Cup 2023 also demonstrated sport's capacity to make an economic impact. According to the figures released by the Organising Committee in November 2023, the competition generated 2.4 billion euros in economic spin-offs, including 1.2 billion for the tourism sector. It created or maintained 41,000 jobs in France. It also boosted France's attractiveness and prominence, with over 2 million foreign visitors welcomed during the competition.

Major international sporting events are a perfect example of the importance of the geoeconomy of sport. They outperform all other global events. The World's Fairs and the World Forum are no match when it comes to impact, visibility and virality. The Olympic Games are unrivalled... with the exception of the FIFA World Cup. MISE gather humanity in one place that immediately becomes something of a global capital. In economic terms, this kind of focus is priceless. The Olympic Games are a unique phenomenon; they are a geoeconomic catalyst⁶⁸. Most notably, they enable the development of infrastructure, enhance the host country's attractiveness and international influence, promote and raise the profile of local economic players, and showcase the know-how of local champions.

The Paris 2024 OPG are no exception. Of course, there are considerable organisational costs and negative externalities to consider, but estimates put the overall economic impact of the event at close to 10 billion euros, which is roughly the amount announced by the British government a year after the London Games. Over 15 million visitors are expected, most of them from abroad⁶⁹. While the direct impact on GDP may not exceed 0.1% per annum⁷⁰, the indirect economic spin-offs will be substantial and extend far beyond the sports industry alone.

⁶⁴ Augustin Jean-Pierre, "Introduction : le sport attracteur d'organisation sociale et intermédiaire de la mondialisation. Sport as an attractor of social organization and intermediary of globalization", *Annales de géographie*, 2011/4 (n° 680), pp. 353-360.

⁶⁵ Bernard Amsalem and Mohamed Mechmache, "L'économie du sport", CESE, July 2019.

⁶⁶ BPCE, *La filière sport : les challenges d'une championne*, January 2023.

⁶⁷ This figure is obtained by adding together the jobs generated by sports businesses (330,000) and sports associations (115,000) according to the [BPCE study](#) carried out in 2020 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶⁸ Simon Chadwick.

⁶⁹ [Impact study by the CDES](#), as quoted by BRED.

⁷⁰ *Paris 2024 : un impact économique encore incertain*. (2024, January 15). *Banque des Territoires*.

This windfall spans multiple sectors ranging from tourism to hospitality, the construction industry, security, events, transport, media and all other related services.

The geoeconomy of sport bolsters the power of the host state.⁷¹ It takes full advantage of the “power of the imagination”, which sport sparks and fuels.⁷² In terms of place marketing and place branding, sport propels the host nation into a moment that only occurs every four years for the Summer Games or World Cups. Germany is showing its interest in these geoeconomic opportunities by hosting Euro 2024 and, like India, by contemplating an Olympic bid in 2036. Other countries are not passing up these opportunities for development and influence: Saudi Arabia, with the Asian Games and the hosting of the 2034 World Cup; the United States, with the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic Games; and Senegal, with the 2026 Youth Olympic Games. We are even seeing the arrival of “grouped brands”, with the 2030 FIFA World Cup awarded collectively to Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay.

2. SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGIES COMBINING POWER AND NEW MARKET PENETRATION

By virtue of its symbolic capacity, sport is an important resource for foreign policy⁷³; all the more so because it helps to build, project and impose the soft power of states through the images of itself that a country presents to the world. This is so-called “soft power”, or the ability to expand and use one's power of attraction, influence and imposition without employing any means of coercion, as theorised by Joseph Nye in 1990⁷⁴. As a component and marker of contemporary soft power, sport is positioned alongside culture and language as one of the major geopolitical instruments of our time. As an element of public diplomacy, sport is one of the primary vectors of the “power of the imagination”, which today permeates our screens, our networks and affects our vision of the world. It contributes to the attractiveness of countries, to their standing, and to the positive, performative and controlled construction of their international image.⁷⁵

The United States took full advantage of it in the 1990s, with the epic success at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics of the basketball Dream Team led by Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. Reinforcing the image of a country that had won the Cold War and was at the height of its power, NBA basketball bolstered the narrative of a nation that wins and stands alone, while fuelling the immoderate fascination of the world's youth with the United States. The performance of the other American teams, the “sportainment” model of its professional leagues, and a culture that had become hegemonic and found itself without a counter-model since the collapse of the Soviet world also contributed to sport playing a large part in the modern and attractive image that the United States projected to the world at the end of the 20th century.

In the United Kingdom, sport plays the same role. The Premier League, England's top-level professional football competition, includes the best teams in the country. It is followed by millions of fans around the world, who support their favourite clubs and buy their merchandise. The Premier League thus generates significant revenue for the United Kingdom's external balance. In fact, it is even one of its leading exports. It also contributes to promoting a positive image of dynamism, diversity and excellence. In this, it helps to further the influence and power of attraction of England and the entire Kingdom, which is all the more important in the wake of Brexit and in today's fragmented world. In the Global Britain development programme, football is a key asset — and not the only one — to enable the United Kingdom to make its mark in international competition. The country has long relied on sport to strengthen its “brand”, and successfully capitalised on the London 2012 Olympic Games to reinforce it, notably via the “GREAT” campaign launched as soon as the Games were over.

Sport thus **reveals the capacity of states to exist, to shine and to attract**. For better or worse. The sporting failure and media disaster suffered by the French national football team at Knysna during the 2010 World Cup in South Africa had a significant impact on the country's national and international image. Brazil's heavy defeat to Germany at the 2014 World Cup contributed to putting a stop to the narrative of Brazil as an emerging country

⁷¹ Guégan, J. (2023, December 5th). [Paris 2024: A Unique Geoeconomic Opportunity for France](#). SKEMA Publika.

⁷² Lukas Aubin and Guégan Jean-Baptiste, *La Guerre du sport*, Tallandier, 2024 and Lukas Aubin and Guégan Jean-Baptiste, *Atlas géopolitique du sport*, Autrement, 2022

⁷³ Augustin Jean-Pierre, *Sport, géographie, aménagement*, Paris, 1995, p. 19.

⁷⁴ Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York, Basic Books, 1990.

⁷⁵ Guégan, Jean-Baptiste, *Géopolitique du sport, une autre explication du monde*, Studyrama, 2023

with the potential to be a global force, and it affected the morale of the nation. Without notable success, the Rio Olympics in 2016 had the same ambition: that of raising both the image and morale of Brazilians, while benefiting local businesses⁷⁶. The soft power of sport is thus not insignificant. It brings international attention and places the spotlight on you, at the risk of showing everything. In this age of globalised attention, digital media and social networks, it should be seen as a lever of power to be handled with care and articulated with classic power politics. Overlooking it means missing out on the benefits of an extraordinarily effective tool. Overusing it means risking what is known as soft disempowerment, i.e. negative, critical and counter-productive exposure, as Qatar experienced before the 2022 World Cup.

South Korea⁷⁷ understands this. It is the third sports power in Asia and its overall performance earned it the 12th place in the World Sport Ranking 2022. It has already co-hosted a FIFA World Cup in 2002 with Japan, and hosted two Olympic Games, one in 1988 and the other in 2018. However, the country's strategic priority is not traditional sport, it is esports. The South Korean market was worth €257.8 million in 2023, so almost twice as much as the French market. The results achieved vindicate this national policy actively supported by the state and the *chaebols*⁷⁸. In 2023, for example, South Korean teams won 7 of the 12 world championships of League of Legends, one of the world's leading competitive esports games.

Another important dimension of soft power is **the capacity of states to influence the rules**, regulations and standards to suit their own interests. We could even call it smart power, since economic influence is both soft and hard power. Here again, the United Kingdom successfully turned the hosting of the London 2012 Olympic Games into a competitive weapon. Indeed, the London Olympics Committee, alongside the British Standards Institution, was a key stakeholder in the formulation of an ISO standard on the sustainability of major events, published on the eve of the OPG⁷⁹. Thanks to this involvement in the drafting of the standard, the latter could reflect the practices of English companies that had participated in the organisation of the OPG. These companies could now boast that they were certified in the standard and had already implemented it. This afforded them a huge competitive edge when bidding on other large-scale events. For the Paris 2024 OPG, the French Standards Association (AFNOR) decided to revisit this standard and give it more of a French touch. However, it is struggling to get French companies involved in this work that began three years before the OPG, which is relatively late.

As pointed out by one of the experts with whom we met, it is essential for European states, including France, to **defend a strategic vision of the sporting sector, in order to promote and export their know-how at major international sporting events**. One of the examples cited was the cooperation between the French gendarmes and Qatari police to ensure security during the last FIFA Men's World Cup. On this subject, we can also mention the work of the "Towards an EU Sport Diplomacy" (TES-D)⁸⁰ initiative, headed by IRIS (the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs) and aimed at developing a European Union sport diplomacy. The Paris 2024 OPG could also be an opportunity to implement a Francophone sports strategy. What better way to stimulate the spectator's imagination than through sport, a universal language if ever there was one?⁸¹

⁷⁶ Pinot de Villechenon Florence and Lopez Rizzo Humberto, *PME et grands événements : Les JO de Rio 2016, source de confiance et de légitimité*, CERALE / ESCP, September 2023.

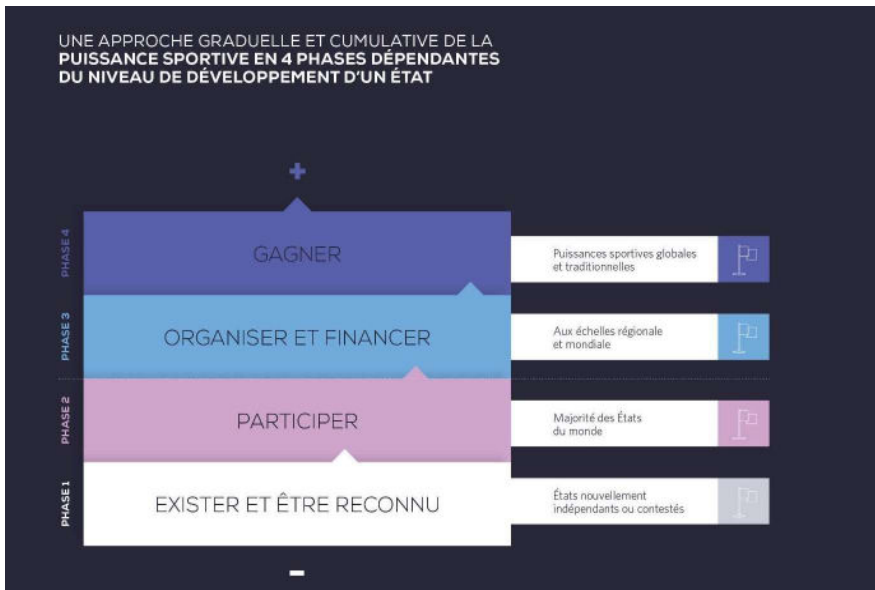
⁷⁷ Lukas Aubin and Guégan Jean-Baptiste, *La Guerre du sport*, Tallandier, 2024

⁷⁸ Large conglomerates such as Samsung, SK Telecom and LG.

⁷⁹ ISO 20121:2012 standard, Event Sustainability Management Systems.

⁸⁰ Headed by IRIS and five other European institutions

⁸¹ SKEMA Publika Conference, *"Francophonie et influence, d'aujourd'hui à demain"*, October 2023.



Source: *La puissance sportive, une approche graduelle*, Jean-Baptiste Guégan

3. SPORT AS A POLITICAL TOOL FOR BUILDING A NATION AND ITS REPUTATION

Sport is a way to affirm and project national cohesion, both inside and outside our borders. In doing so, it is an element that contributes to developing, asserting or reviving a national identity, whether real (Russia, Brazil, China), recently constructed (South Sudan, Kosovo, Croatia), or fantasised (post-racial United States, *multikulti* Germany, *Black-blanc-beur* France). Sport has established itself as a strong marker of identity through its ability to represent a territory and embody the national phenomenon. Sport thus becomes a means of nation building and nation branding⁸². Created by Simon Anholt, the concept of nation branding invites countries and local authorities to build their marketing identity according to simple criteria that enable them to position its various facets and promote them abroad. This idea of a “nation brand” gives rise to storytelling or a narrative referred to as “country telling” or “country story”. This is used in two ways. **Nation building**, first of all, is a state's ability to build a shared sense of pride and of belonging to the national community. Winning can unify a nation, as was the case in Qatar, or it can promote the illusion of unity. Next comes **nation branding**, which is more outward-focused. Nation building focuses on the national community of the state concerned and, on its diasporas, whereas nation branding is more focused on abroad and the world.

These two policies of nation branding and nation building feed off each other, and it is from this perspective that the sports policy pursued by **Qatar**⁸³ since 1995 should be understood. Along with China, Qatar, a symbol of the de-Westernization of the world, is the first non-Western post-Cold War country to make sport a long-term priority of its political strategy. In 2008, its government formulated a national vision extending to 2030, with the aim of launching a process of national transformation, of which sport is an integral part. For this young⁸⁴ but financially powerful “micro-state”, sport has a clear role to play in cementing society and building the nation-state, even though 90% of the country's inhabitants are foreign nationals and social stratification is high there⁸⁵. For Qatar, sport is also a guarantee of existing and of being recognised rapidly on the international stage, by using its need and capacity for financial investment to build geopolitical capital in the medium term. The sports strategy is orchestrated and implemented by a network of different types of players. These involve sovereign wealth funds such as the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), but also Qatari companies and institutional bodies (Qatar Foundation, Qatar Airways, etc.), and also include private individuals from both within and outside the

⁸² Concept created by Simon Anholt.

⁸³ Mourad El Bouanani, Alexandre Buzenet, Jean-Baptiste Guégan, Qatar, *Dominer par le sport, géopolitique d'une ambition*, Bréal Studyrama, 2023

⁸⁴ Independent since 1971. Previously a British protectorate.

⁸⁵ Simon Chadwick: [Video] *Coupe du Monde au Qatar : survie géopolitique, menaces sécuritaires et construction nationale*. SKEMA Publika.

circles of power, such as Nasser Al Khelaifi, President of the Paris Saint-Germain Football Club (PSG), or members of the branches of the House of Thani, the ruling family of Qatar.

The FIFA 2022 World Cup helped anchor Qatar's ambitions and was one of the main driving forces behind its nation-building programme. According to estimates, the country spent around \$240 billion to prepare for the tournament. Spending was channelled into the construction of state-of-the-art stadiums, but also into the creation of civic infrastructure, including a metro system, new roads, public parks, and commercial and residential buildings. The World Cup also served as a showcase for the folklore, identity and history of Qatar and the region, to remind Western countries in particular that the country has its own history and civilisation, predating the arrival of British settlers. The country rapidly became the embodiment of Arab values, with the help of the Moroccan national team, which performed very well, making it all the way to the semi-finals. In 2010⁸⁶, Mohamed Jaham Al Kuwari, Qatar's ambassador to France at the time, had declared that the Qatari bid was not that of a country, but that of a region, the Middle East, and of a civilisation, the Arab-Muslim world.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is also set in this context. Following Mohammed bin Salman's appointment as Crown Prince in 2017, the country embarked on a vast programme of investment in sport, with unprecedented financial means. Just a few days after the end of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the Saudi football club Al Nassr successfully secured the services of Cristiano Ronaldo, one of the best players in history and a five-time winner of the *Ballon d'Or*. In the months that followed, dozens of world-famous players followed suit, including Karim Benzema, N'Golo Kanté, Riyad Mahrez and Neymar. Being associated with some of the world's most famous football players is bringing image and reputation benefits to a country seeking to reposition its national brand. Saudi Arabia will also be hosting the 2034 FIFA World Cup⁸⁷. But its sports strategy is not limited to football. At the time of writing this part of the report, the country's Public Investment Fund was in negotiations to merge its breakaway golf league (LIV Golf, created in 2021) with the USA's PGA Tour. The country will be holding the 2029 Asian Winter Games in Trojena, a ski resort currently under construction⁸⁸, and it will host the 2034 FIFA World Cup. As part of its Vision 2030, the Saudi government has also identified esports as a key driver of growth, and plans to invest up to \$38 billion in this sector by 2030.

In Saudi Arabia, sport has thus become a state-run industry and a political strategy. Many observers describe this policy of massive investment as a marketing exercise or "sportwashing" designed to soften the country's authoritarian image and support its drive to modernise. This does not prevent it from also being an important exercise in national transformation, drawing on the experience of its closest neighbours. For Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, sport must contribute to GDP growth, increase productivity, promote private enterprise, stimulate innovation, and encourage the growth of a sports ecosystem. At the same time, the aim is to support social policies, by extending the gender equality reform programme that began in 2018.

Qatar may have been somewhat of a first mover, but Saudi Arabia is proving to be a very fast follower. The many references to these two states are not intended to suggest that oil and gas money is a prerequisite for effective investment in sport. The aim is to highlight the importance of sport in today's geopolitical and economic landscape. Promoting health, well-being and social cohesion is one role sport has played for centuries and is likely to continue to play. But sport is becoming increasingly important as a means of accumulating power.

⁸⁶ *Le Monde*. (2010, December 20). *Pourquoi le Qatar a emporté l'organisation de la Coupe du monde 2022*.

⁸⁷ As the only Asian nation to apply, it was awarded the event without a vote.

⁸⁸ Here again, Saudi Arabia was the only candidate for hosting the event, which has not been held since 2017 due to no one stepping forward to organise it.

IV. DO THE CURRENT SPORT MODELS MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE (AND OTHERS)?

In this section, we will attempt to determine whether current policies meet the expectations of young people, as expressed in Part One of our study, “The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers”, published in the summer of 2023⁸⁹, and how they might do so. However, it will be impossible not to mention other groups, such as the “old young” and the “future not-so-young”. And above all, we will be looking for best practices.

1. HOW SHOULD THE DIFFERENT SPORT MODELS BE COMPARED?

These models can be compared according to a number of criteria: the results of international sports competitions, with or without distinguishing between Olympic medals and the performance of top-level athletes; sport participation; public satisfaction; media success, etc. Various studies have explored the subject. While we will not cover all of them, we will describe several of them and, as much as possible, the basis of their methodologies. Whereas, logically, the first criteria lead to similar results, the others reveal more distinct results.

◆ Results of international sports competitions

The sporting performance of countries is commonly judged at major international events and notably the Olympic Games. Medal count is the indicator most often used to gauge the sporting quality of nations.

According to an article in *Le Monde* on July 23, 2021⁹⁰, since the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, 34,088 medals (gold, silver or bronze) have been awarded. The United States tops the list of most decorated delegations, with over 5,000 medals won (almost half of them gold, all disciplines combined), ahead of the USSR (2,063 medals), the United Kingdom (1,985), Germany (1,779), and France (1,627). If we add Russia's 905 medals to the now-defunct USSR (leaving aside the other countries that once composed the Soviet Union), the gap between top scores is reduced. China has won 909 medals since 1992. The figures compiled by Wikipedia based on IOC rankings by discipline give roughly the same overall ranking, albeit with different raw figures.

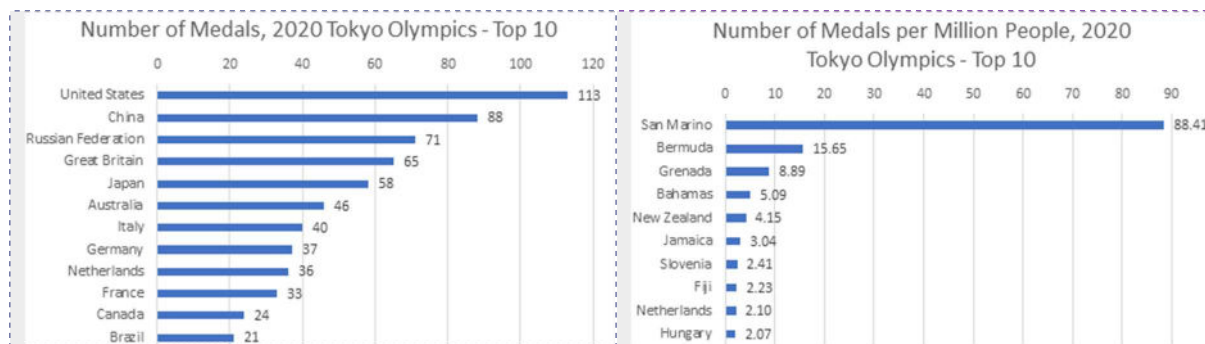
These rankings of performance in sport are confirmed by the annual Greatest Sporting Nation⁹¹ ranking: the USA, France and China won the most competitions in 2022, but Norway, Croatia and Slovenia respectively came first, second and third in the per capita ranking. Similarly, the USA and China were the leaders of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, in terms of the number of medals won. However, **if we look at medal count relative to the size of each population, a very different picture emerges**: the United States drops to 59th position and China to 78th. Countries with smaller populations appear at the top of the ranking: San Marino, Bermuda, Grenada, The Bahamas, New Zealand, Jamaica, Slovenia, Fiji, the Netherlands, and Hungary.

⁸⁹ See Part One: Vallée, S. Revel, C. (2023, July 10th). [The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers](#). SKEMA Publika.

⁹⁰ Imbach, R. (2021, July 23). [JO de Tokyo 2021 : qui a remporté les 34 088 médailles décernées depuis la création des Jeux ?](#) Le Monde.fr.

⁹¹ Greatest Sporting Nation, [ranking](#) based on the analysis and compilation of results from international competitions in 77 sports (20 more than Olympic sports) each month.

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Source: <https://medalspercapita.com>

Arnaud Saurois, a researcher, has also put together four rankings, based on the order of the IOC, medal quality (gold, silver or bronze), results relative to population size, and results relative to GDP. In the latter two categories, Norway and the Netherlands come first and second respectively⁹².

The very first SPLISS study, published in 2009,⁹³ compares the sports results achieved in international competitions and the sport models of six countries: Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom. The authors point out that **many studies attribute more than half of sporting successes to macro-level factors such as population size and wealth of the country. The other half would be the result of policies targeting elite sport.** While the results of the study are inconclusive, they do point the way to possible drivers of an effective elite sport system. The authors identify **four priority factors: financial resources, athletic and post-career support, training facilities, and coach development.**

The latest SPLISS study, from 2015⁹⁴, covers 15 nations: Canada, Brazil, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland, South Korea, Japan, and Australia. It does not identify a magic formula that could be reproduced in any context, but makes the following observations, among others:

- Funding is essential to sporting success, but funding alone is insufficient; it must be coupled with effective policies.
- The nations that use their financial resources the most efficiently have a strong national coordination of activities, a clear decision-making structure, and strong involvement of athletes and coaches in the policymaking process, etc.
- **Sport participation and talent development are not priorities for short-term success, but may deliver long-term competitive advantages.**

In addition to reflecting a nation's sporting excellence, a country's medal count is not just a source of national pride. It is also a powerful lever for increasing the popularity of the sports in question among the general population.

◆ The level of citizen participation in sport around the world

The level of citizen participation in sport is another indicator of the success of a country's sport model.

A 2021 Ipsos survey of 29 countries revealed that **the Dutch are the most physically active.** They devote 12.8 hours per week (almost two hours per day) to sport. The Germans and Romanians come next, with 11.1 and 11 hours of exercise per week respectively. Among the least sporty populations are the Brazilians, who spend an

⁹² *Autre classement olympique JOP été + hiver 2012-2022.* Infogram.

⁹³ Bosscher, Veerle & Knop, Paul & Van Bottenburg, Maarten & Shibli, Simon & Bingham, Jerry. (2009). Explaining international sporting success: An international comparison of elite sport systems and policies in six countries. *Sport Management Review*. 12. 113-136. 10.1016/j.smr.2009.01.001.

⁹⁴ *SPLISS Report Digest* © De Bosscher, V., Shibli, S., Westerbeek, H. & Van Bottenburg, M. (2015). *Successful elite sport policies. An international comparison of the Sports Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS 2.0) in 15 nations.* Aachen: Meyer & Meyer.

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average of three hours per week on physical exercise (26 minutes a day), followed by the Japanese (3.3 hours), the Italians (3.6 hours), the French and the Chileans (3.7 hours each)⁹⁵.

According to Eurostat⁹⁶, in 2019, **around 44% of the European population engaged in physical activities at least once a week**, and one third spent at least 150 minutes per week doing so. The figure was 44% in France, and the Nordic countries peaked at 70% or more. It should be noted that these figures were collected as part of the European Health Interview Survey, a health-related survey conducted in European countries in 2019. According to a study by Myprotein, a company specialising in nutrition, Europeans prefer outdoor sports such as cycling and swimming⁹⁷. Unsurprisingly, in 2019, across the EU as a whole, almost 55% of people in the high-income group engaged in sport and physical activity, versus 37% of those in the lowest income bracket. Similarly, individuals with a high level of education spend more time on sport and exercise, although these differences are less pronounced among young people.

In 2018, a study by The Outdoor Foundation established that **for the past ten years, the rate of participation in recreational sports in the United States had been stable**⁹⁸. The Outdoor Foundation, a trade organisation bringing together leading brands in the U.S. outdoor industry, has been monitoring the U.S. outdoor sports and recreation market for over ten years. According to its 2018 study, 146.1 million Americans aged 6 and over (i.e. 49% of the U.S. population) had participated in an outdoor activity at least once in 2017. The participation rate had remained stable over the past decade. Walking for fitness was the most popular outdoor activity (45.8% of participants). And running (including jogging and trail running) was even more popular when measured by both number of participants and number of total annual outings.

In 2020, despite the health crisis linked to COVID-19, **53% of Americans in the 6 and over age group participated in outdoor activities, so significantly more than in 2017, albeit with a lower intensity (only 20% participated more than twice a week) and with women still representing just 46% of participants even though they make up 51% of the U.S. the population.**

However, according to *France Info*⁹⁹, 20% of Americans aged 2 to 19 are considered obese. This figure has been rising for decades, and is highest among African-Americans and Hispanics. To counter this trend, in 2010 the U.S. government launched the much-publicised "Let's Move" campaign, spearheaded by Michelle Obama, and aimed at drastically reducing childhood obesity by 2030, through increased physical activity in particular. Since then, however, the situation has remained unchanged. This is paradoxical in a country that celebrates sports so much and where basketball and baseball fields are everywhere!

In China, in 2017, around 41% of the population engaged in sport on a regular basis¹⁰⁰. In 2018, nearly 91.6% of the over-18 population reported devoting at least one hour per week to physical activity. 24.4% reported engaging in sport for more than 9 hours per week. Only 3% of the population claimed to be physically inactive. The most popular activities by far were jogging and walking¹⁰¹.

⁹⁵ Ipsos, [Global views on sports: 58% globally would like to practice more](#), August 03, 2021.

⁹⁶ Eurostat, [Statistics on Sport Participation](#), 2019.

⁹⁷ Ramos, A. (2024, January 17). [Les pays les plus sportifs du monde](#) - Study | Myprotein™. Myprotein™.

⁹⁸ [Ministère des Sports français](#) and [Outdoor Industry Association](#)

⁹⁹ *France Info*. (2022, January 24). [Quels sont les dispositifs censés favoriser la pratique sportive des élèves aux États-Unis, en Espagne et en Allemagne.](#)

¹⁰⁰ Statista, Share of population engaged in regular physical exercising in China from 2014 to 2025.

¹⁰¹ Statista, Participation rate of popular sports in China as of 2019, by type and Preference of daily exercises among people who do sports in China as of September 2018.

◆ **A ranking blending results at international competitions and level of citizen participation**

Another type of **ranking** makes sense, blending the following three criteria: **Olympic ranking, sport participation and success in elite sport**¹⁰². According to this, the United States and France shared a similar characteristic of excellence in Olympic ranking and success in elite sport: 1st and 1st for the United States and 5th and 2nd for France, but 24th and 25th respectively in sport participation. These scores were similar, but lower in sport participation for the United Kingdom and Germany, and even lower for Spain (35th), China (38th) and Canada (44th). Norway, Australia and New Zealand had the best citizen participation, with Australia, which ranked toward the middle (13th) in Olympic competition, taking the prize for balanced average.

		Pays	Classement Olympique	Classement de participation sportive	Classement des succès en sport d'élite
1er		Australie	13ème	4ème	6ème
2ème		Etats-Unis	1er	24ème	1er
3ème		Royaume-Uni	3ème	21er	3ème
4ème		Japon	14ème	12ème	5ème
5ème		France	5ème	25ème	2ème
6ème		Russie	9ème	19ème	4ème
7ème		Suède	8ème	8ème	17ème
8ème		Norvège	10ème	2ème	21er
9ème		Allemagne	4ème	23ème	9ème
10ème		Corée du Sud	18ème	9ème	13ème
11ème		Pays-Bas	17ème	15ème	15ème
12ème		Finlande	16ème	7ème	24ème
13ème		Nouvelle-Zélande	32ème	3ème	16ème
14ème		Chine	7ème	38ème	7ème
15ème		Suisse	19ème	10ème	30ème
16ème		Belgique	29ème	20ème	11ème
17ème		Danemark	26ème	11ème	25ème
18ème		Espagne	28ème	35ème	8ème
19ème		Canada	15ème	44ème	14ème
20ème		Italie	6ème	71er	12ème

Source: *Myprotein*

¹⁰² Ramos, A. (2024, January 17). *Les pays les plus sportifs du monde* - Myprotein™ study. More than 150 countries were ranked according to their Olympic success, rate of sport participation, and success in elite sport. The Olympic success rankings were determined using a system of points, awarded for the number of bronze, silver and gold medals; the sport participation rates were sourced from the Global Wellness Institute's Global Economy of Physical Activity report for 2019, taking into account a variety of sports to consider cultural relevance; and success in elite sport was determined based on the Successful Elite Sport Policies ranking.

◆ **What does this mean? Is sport participation higher in countries with public policies in place?**

Do countries with strong public policies achieve better results, and if so, in what areas? An examination of results in international sports competitions and of the level of citizen participation in sport around the world does not reveal any striking correlation with the greater or lesser involvement of states in public sport policies. **What sets the nations apart is perhaps the overall level of resources allocated to sport in relation to population size.** Another factor that probably needs to be taken into account is the level of proactiveness of both public and private sport sector actors in each country. By this we mean the awareness of governments, associations, clubs, etc. of the value and benefits of sport and the extent to which they actively support its practice.

One differentiating factor to consider, for example, is scientific research and investment in R&D. According to the academic Nadim Nassif, the variable that explains performance is the level of importance attached to scientific development. It could be worth considering analysing this in relation to sport participation¹⁰³.

On the other hand, reaching a quick conclusion would lead to seeing an inverse relationship between results in elite sport and citizen participation in sport. That would not be completely wrong either, as it was also one of the conclusions of the 2015 SPLISS report, quoted above: in any case, citizen participation in sport does not appear to be a priority condition for short-term success in elite sport. The authors do, however, add that it “may deliver long-term competitive advantages”.

◆ **Are there other criteria to consider when gauging the quality of models?**

The presence of sports facilities, their cost and their accessibility are all criteria that can be used to gauge the quality of models. In addition to comparisons based on the number of facilities (large or local), **citizen satisfaction** with these is also an important factor. Eurostat¹⁰⁴ reports that a survey of European capitals in 2018 reveals widely disparate levels of satisfaction with sports facilities. Luxembourg and Helsinki top the ranking, with 84% of inhabitants very or fairly satisfied with their city's facilities. Next come Amsterdam (76%), Prague and Dublin (each with 75%), and Paris (71%). At the other end of the spectrum are Sofia, where only 38% of inhabitants are satisfied with sports facilities, Bratislava (43%), Bucharest, Valletta and Athens (44% each), and Vilnius (46%).

Image and media success are two other criteria, as is soft power for states. There are numerous rankings of sporting event viewership available. While viewer numbers and ranking positions vary from one source to another, it is always the same handful of mega-events that appear in the top 10, attracting several billion viewers: the Summer and Winter Olympics, the Men's and Women's FIFA World Cups, the Cricket World Cup, and the Tour de France. Two other events also stand out: the Champions League final, with 450 million viewers, and the Super Bowl, with 150 million. According to the Sport 365 website¹⁰⁵, this difference in viewership figures illustrates something: with astronomical marketing budgets, Europeans and Americans are constantly pushing the promotion of their respective sports further. In this race, European sports culture has the advantage. Despite major promotional efforts in various parts of the world, American sport is struggling to attract interest beyond the country's borders. While these successes are primarily economic, they also have an impact on states, although soft power, and especially its evolutions, are complex elements to measure.

Another evaluation criterion which is becoming increasingly important given the climate emergency is **the environmental impact of sport models**. The Shift Project and Carbone 4, two NGOs, are currently examining this. This was also one of the weak signals to emerge from Part One of this study, devoted to young people's opinions and feelings about sport (the key points of which are developed below): a small number of the students interviewed felt that the organisation of world sport around regular major events is no longer a viable model in light of current climate and environmental issues.

¹⁰³ Nassif Nadim & Raspaud Michel, *National Success in Elite Sport - Exploring the Factors that Lead to Success*, 2023. 10.1007/978-3-031-38997-9.

¹⁰⁴ Eurostat. (2018, June 14).

¹⁰⁵ Sport 365 (2020, October 6). *Europe et États-Unis : deux approches différentes du sport*.

2. HOW COULD THE MODELS BETTER MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE?

As mentioned in the introduction, in the summer of 2023 we published Part One of this study, "The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers"¹⁰⁶. It examined the results of a major survey of 18- to 24-year-olds, involving the analysis of 7.6 million sport-related tweets posted by 670,000 young people from Africa, Brazil, the USA, China and France, as well as direct qualitative interviews and surveys conducted with some 100 students of 18 different nationalities and varying fitness levels and sporting abilities.

Irrespective of culture and country of origin, one of the key findings of this survey is that **it is mainly personal benefit that motivates young people to engage in sport**. Young people engage in sport for its benefits to **mental health first, and to general health** second. On the fun side, it is seen as **a recreational activity, a passion, and a source of enjoyment, emotions** and entertainment. Young people see sport as a **social and collective pursuit above all**, enabling them to forge **strong bonds of friendship**. Last but not least, **the competitive aspect** is also appealing: measuring themselves against others allows individuals to assess their own value and efforts, to learn from failure and to challenge themselves. In this sense, sport is a **powerful tool for education** and personal development.

That said, young people also see sport as a social and political object, which they describe as an important element in our societies, whether or not we engage in it. Whether as a player or a spectator, sport is a topic of conversation; it receives extensive media coverage during major international competitions, and it allows people to take part in the collective culture if they so wish. Young people recognise sport as a tool for social integration, cohesion and mixing. Sport makes it possible to become involved in a common pursuit. It can be a factor in identity construction and in instilling national pride. To young people, sport is also conducive to social emancipation. The development of women's sport and, more generally, the growing inclusiveness in sport were topics particularly dear to them. Young people see sport as a political tool. In their view, states exert their influence through sporting activities and develop strategies to use it and, in some cases, to exploit it.

Finally, many young people feel that **sport promotes universal values** and that one of the roles of sports personalities is to be a model and an inspiration to all and particularly to the younger generation. These expectations place a heavy responsibility on actors in the sport system.

3. IS STATE INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT WANTED?

Do young people expect the government to have a hand in managing sport? According to our survey, yes. As we have seen, young people spontaneously talk about sport in relation to health and education on the one hand, and to foreign policy and national pride and belonging on the other. These two themes more or less overlap with policies relating to sport for all, which focus on social and individual issues, and policies relating to elite sport, which focus more on a country's influence and reputation. In terms of health, it was striking to see that young people not only talked about it as a priority, but also put mental health first. This survey was conducted a year after the end of the COVID-19 health crisis, but the answers clearly highlighted this serious problem and the possibility of using sport as one of the most natural means to help solve it. Doctors speaking at the *Parlement du Sport* (Parliament of Sport) conference, held on December 5, 2023 and co-chaired by the French senator Jean-Jacques Lozach and the French parliamentarian Belkhir Belhaddad, even went so far as to present sport as an interesting and relatively inexpensive means of prevention made indispensable by the current and future "scissor effect": on the one hand, the increase in medical conditions among the elderly but also the young, and on the other, the chronic shortage of medical personnel.

According to the young people interviewed, public policy has a supporting role to play and must help to remove the obstacles to sport participation, by focusing on improving accessibility, particularly in terms of cost and local infrastructure. Without imposing participation in sport, it must also help to awaken an interest in it. Despite the differences in models, the role of schools seemed essential to young people. According to the opinions we gathered, clubs and federations should drastically re-evaluate their policies toward the general public or better publicise themselves, at the very least. For France, one of the challenges of the 2024 OPG legacy is to attract or

¹⁰⁶ Vallée, C. R. J. G. & S. (2023, December 12). [The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers](#). SKEMA Publika.

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get aspiring players back to the clubs. The country must take advantage of this momentum to renovate or innovate in their governance. *Fédération Française de Rugby* (FFR), the French Rugby Federation, opened the way for this with the 2023 World Cup.

Although this topic was not explicitly mentioned in our survey, which did not specifically discuss competition-related practices, public policies in sport must cover both the question of violence in sport, including elite sport, and the practices to be put in place by sports organisations and private players. This theme was identified in France and other countries, and solutions must be found. It is part of the broader theme of ethics in sport, which is itself the subject of international recommendations (see next section).

However, there is still **one blind spot that public policy fails to address**: the need to take into account the aspects of enjoyment, fun and desire in their formulations. How can this factor of enjoyment and desire — the only way to ensure sustainable and effective practices, particularly in terms of health — be incorporated into public policy? Today, this fun, convivial aspect of sport is increasingly being “monopolised” by private gyms and sporting venues to encourage participation, or is being seized upon by sportainment, developed by the media and most likely, in the future, by the major private players that are in the process of establishing themselves in France and Europe. **However, one obvious link emerges between public policy and finding enjoyment in sport participation: education.** When trained from an early age to exercise without any do-or-die competition involved, at school for example, the young and then the not-so-young will, for the most part, keep actively engaging in sport. This long-term vision is also one of the reasons for the 30 minutes of daily physical education introduced in French primary schools in 2022. In short, **for the majority of the population who are not professional athletes, the role most expected of the state may be that of providing support for sport in education.**

Finally, for young people, values and sport seem inextricably linked. In their view, sport should be infused with universal values. But what are these universal values? How should they be decided? Who should decide on them? We seem to be moving to a different level here. Is the answer to this question a matter for national or international sports associations, for states? Is it a matter of global governance?

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1. A GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF SPORT IN THE HANDS OF PRIVATE PLAYERS

◆ The IOC and the National Olympic and Paralympic Committees

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded in Paris in 1894, following Pierre de Coubertin's call to revive the ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Games. The IOC defines itself as a not-for-profit independent international organisation. Despite its global reach, it remains “an association under private law, governed by the Swiss Civil Code, and composed not of national governments but of private individuals”¹⁰⁷.

The IOC presents itself as the “guardian of the Olympic Games and leader of the Olympic Movement”¹⁰⁸, currently made up of around 80 international federations¹⁰⁹ and 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs). By extension, any organisation (organising committee of the OPG [OCOPG], national associations, clubs) as well as any person affiliated with these organisations (athletes, referees, judges, coaches and other sports officials and technicians) participate in the Olympic Movement. **The Olympic Charter is the constitutional basis of this system.** Created in 1908, it is updated regularly; its most recent version dates from August 2021. The IOC, the international sport federations, the NOCs and the OCOGs must all comply with it. The IOC promotes the values of integrity in sport. In 2022, it published its **Code of Ethics**, and it regularly organises the **International Forum for Sports Integrity (IFSI)**.

The NOCs are an operational interface between the IOC and the public authorities in their respective countries. They have a dual role: they represent the IOC when dealing with their respective countries’ national bodies and, conversely, they represent the country's sports movement in dealings with national and international bodies (IOC, etc.). Putting together the Olympic teams and assisting the candidate cities with their bid to host the OPG are two of their responsibilities. Once the Games have been secured, an OCOPG — a specific committee for the Games — is generally set up and handles all the organisational aspects of the event.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC), is more recent, having been created in 1989, almost one hundred years after the IOC. It leads the Paralympic Movement and its 200+ members (National Paralympic Committees (NPCs), international federations, international organisations of sports for the disabled, etc.)¹¹⁰, and it oversees the organisation of the Paralympic Games. At the same time, the IPC serves as the international federation for six Paralympic sports (athletics, dance, ice hockey, powerlifting, shooting, and swimming), although by 2026 their governance should be transferred to the international federations in charge of the corresponding Olympic sports¹¹¹. **The IPC Handbook is the constitutional basis of the Paralympic Movement.**

In France in particular, parasports, or adaptive sports, began to develop at the end of the First World War in response to the large number of injured, disabled, blind, gassed combatants and amputees, many of them very young. Dr Ludwig Guttmann, a British neurologist, is regarded as the founder of the Paralympic Movement, as in 1948, at the same time as the London Olympics, he organised the first international sports competitions between paraplegic British Air Force veterans undergoing rehabilitation¹¹². Paralympic sport thus developed considerably

¹⁰⁷ Franck Latty, “The legal status of the International Olympic Committee – a brief journey into the laws of legal physics”, in *Droit et Olympisme*, Presses universitaires d’Aix-Marseille, 2015, pp. 15-25.

¹⁰⁸ IOC – International Olympic Committee. [Olympics.com](https://olympics.com).

¹⁰⁹ IOC – International Olympic Committee. [Olympics.com](https://olympics.com). Accessed on February 13, 2023.

¹¹⁰ International sport federations. [International Paralympic Committee](https://www.internationalparalympiccommittee.com). Accessed on February 13, 2023.

¹¹¹ IPC. (2022, June 1). [IPC transfers to FIS the governance of three Para snow sports](https://www.internationalparalympiccommittee.com). [International Paralympic Committee](https://www.internationalparalympiccommittee.com).

¹¹² The International Paralympic Committee - IPC. [FranceOlympique.com](https://www.franceolympique.com).

after the Second World War¹¹³. The first Paralympic Games were held in Rome in 1960, following the Summer Olympics.

To settle sport-related disputes, the IOC created the **Court of Arbitration for Sport** (CAS) in 1984. Any natural or legal person may submit disputes to the Court, whether of a commercial nature (contracts, sponsorship, etc.) or of a disciplinary nature (the majority being doping-related). Although originally financed and administered by the IOC, the CAS has been completely independent since 1994, under the aegis of the **International Council of Arbitration for Sport** (ICAS). Its members are appointed by the international federations, the NOCs and the IOC, which also fund this institution.

◆ The international federations

The Olympic Charter defines international federations as “international non-governmental organisations governing one or several sports at the world level, which extends by reference to those organisations recognised by the international federation as governing such sports at the national level.” They group together the national federations of the sport they govern, often into regional confederations. The Olympic Charter specifies that, subject to conformity with the Charter, the **World Anti-Doping Code** and the **Olympic Movement Code on the Prevention of the Manipulation of Competitions**, “each international federation retains its independence and autonomy in the governance of its sport”.¹¹⁴

The researchers Krieger et al. distinguish between small federations with little popularity outside the Olympic Games, heavily dependent on the television income of the Olympic Movement and therefore on the IOC, and large federations with a significant economic impact and therefore a high degree of independence from the IOC¹¹⁵. Although the latter are not-for-profit associations, they generate substantial profits by organising their own competitions. The most emblematic example is, of course, the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA), a private not-for-profit association which generated \$7.57 billion in revenue between 2019 and 2022¹¹⁶. This amount is very similar to the \$7.6 billion in revenue reported for the 2017-2020/21 period by the IOC¹¹⁷, which manages some 40 sports. For the 2023-2026 cycle, FIFA's budget is estimated at 11 billion dollars. It should be noted that part of this budget (at least 25% almost automatically) is redistributed to the national and regional football federations. As an illustration to demonstrate FIFA's power, its membership is regularly compared to that of the United Nations: FIFA has 211 affiliated national football federations, whereas the UN “only” has 197 member countries. Its global influence is massive, given that the international regulations it imposes apply to all its member federations. It also heavily subsidises small football clubs worldwide. For example, it works with UNESCO on the development of sport through the Football for Schools programme, to finance football playing in schools. FIFA thus considers that it is being of service to the wider community by promoting sport as a tool for development and social cohesion. On these grounds, it asked that its Paris office benefit from certain tax advantages, identical to the tax incentives that apply to foreign investors. In October 2023, the French news outlet *Libération* ran the headline “*Open bar : Le gouvernement veut créer un paradis fiscal pour attirer la Fifa en France*”¹¹⁸ (Open Bar: The Government Wants to Create a Tax Haven to Lure FIFA to France). However, a FIFA office in France helps to boost the country's influence and attractiveness. The French government introduced an amendment into the 2024 budget bill that would have exempted FIFA and other international sport federations from corporate income tax and their employees with “non-commercial activities” from income tax, but this was rejected by the French Constitutional Council in a decision dated December 28, 2023.

Most of the major international federations emerged between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, at a time when elite sport was largely amateur. Today, they are increasingly professionalised, commercialised and self-

¹¹³ Radical. (2023, March 28). [History - World Ability Sport](#). World Ability Sport.

¹¹⁴ [Olympic Charter](#), 2023 revision, p. 56.

¹¹⁵ K. Krieger, L. Parks Pieper & I. Ritchie, “International Federations and National Governing Bodies: The Historical Development of Institutional Policies in Response to Challenging Issues in Sport”, in *Sport History Review*, 2020, 51, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ 2019-2022 revenue. [FIFA Publications](#).

¹¹⁷ [IOC Annual Report 2022, Financial Statements](#), p.147.

¹¹⁸ *Libération*. (2023, October 18). [Le gouvernement veut créer un paradis fiscal pour attirer la Fifa en France](#).

regulated, but their governance structures have not evolved much at all and, according to certain specialists in the field, they are no longer able to meet current needs¹¹⁹.

2. INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC BODIES

There is no international body exclusively dedicated to the global governance of sport. UNESCO is the United Nations' lead agency for physical education and sport, and it is through this organisation that states participate in the international regulation of sport.

The UN agency is also behind a binding international legal agreement: the *International Convention Against Doping in Sport*, also known as the *Anti-Doping Convention*, adopted in 2005 and, to date, ratified by 191 states. The Convention establishes a legal framework and helps to ensure the effectiveness of the World Anti-Doping Agency's World Anti-Doping Code, a non-governmental document that applies only to sports organisations. Supplemented by a set of eight international standards, it is recognised by some 700 public and private sports organisations.

It is in this particular area of anti-doping that international sports law and governance are most developed. Indeed, established in 1999 under the initiative of the IOC, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is the only international sports institution to be governed and financed in equal parts by the IOC and the member states. As we have seen, the other bodies (IOC, international federations, etc.) are private, not-for-profit non-governmental organisations that states sometimes deem to be in the public interest. These organisations establish their own rules and codes.

UNESCO set up the *Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport* (CIGEPS) in 1978 to promote the role and value of sport and its relevance to public policy. It has also been organising the *International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport* (MINEPS) since 1976. During the latest edition (MINEPS VII), held in Baku in 2023, the *Fit for Life Alliance* was launched, with the aim of promoting sustainable development in and through sport, by developing sport for all.

In addition to this, in December 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Sport for Development and Peace". Other examples of initiatives within the UN system include (but are not limited to):

- The World Health Organization's Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030;
- the implementation since 2020 of the *Sports for Generation Equality* framework by UN Women, for example, which recognises sport's enormous capacity to propel women and girls' empowerment;
- the *Sports for Climate Action* framework, linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Other international organisations have also taken up the subject of sport. The OECD Council, for example, adopted a (non-binding) recommendation on international sporting events and local development in 2018. States thus agree to "develop and implement a tailored framework for global events that leverages local economic, social and environmental benefits" generated by global events at the local level. Concrete best practices were also developed for host countries. A year later, the organisation signed a memorandum of understanding with the IOC with the aim of strengthening ethics, integrity, good governance, peace and sustainable development in sport.

Since 2017, an *International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport* (IPACS) has been in place, bringing together governments, international sports organisations and intergovernmental organisations. It is made up of four task forces, focusing on procurement, major sporting events, governance, and cooperation respectively.

At the European level, the Council of Europe, an international organisation for the promotion of democracy and human rights that brings together 46 European member states, is particularly active on these issues and has

¹¹⁹ J-L Chappelet, J. Clausen, E. Bayle, "Governance of International Sports Federations", in *Routledge Handbook of Sport Governance*, ed. D. Shilbury and L. Ferkins, 2020, p. 197.

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developed several binding legal instruments concerning sport. The first is the *Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions*, also known as the *Macolin Convention*, which came into force in 2019. To date, it has been signed by 32 states (including three non-members of the organisation) and ratified by nine¹²⁰. The second is the *Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Approach to Safety, Security and Service at Football Matches and Other Sports Events*, also known as the *Saint-Denis Convention*, which came into force in 2017. To date, it has been ratified by 28 states and signed by 11¹²¹. And finally, an *Anti-Doping Convention* has also been in force since 1989 and, to date, has been ratified by 52 states (including six non-member states)¹²².

States can therefore participate in the global governance of sport through their involvement in the work and initiatives of the international organisations of which they are members (UNESCO, Council of Europe, OECD, etc.). They do not necessarily exercise all their prerogatives. However, in terms of influence, there is enormous benefit in having representatives within international sporting bodies, whether these are public or private. Conversely, public organisations such as UNESCO, for example, also serve as a point of reference for their member states, through their charters and resolutions.

Today, however, with the exception of the binding legal texts against doping or the manipulation of sports competitions (match fixing), public global sport governance is more a matter of public and private *soft law* than of positive law (see our summary table below).

3. SHOULD STATES BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONAL RULES?

These days, everyone wants a piece of the sport pie. Numerous international organisations are now trying to attract sport into their fold, or to strengthen their hold on it, because they have understood its unifying power. As for the major private sports organisations, such as the IOC and the international federations, they are looking to consolidate their regulatory power. As mentioned earlier, large multinational companies are also beginning to invest in this sector. In this respect too, sport thus appears to be an object of influence and competition.

In this debate, good governance of these private entities (IOC and international federations) is a central issue. Indeed, several corruption scandals have erupted over the past 25 years: suspicion of vote-buying to win hosting rights for major sporting events (from the Salt Lake City 2002 Olympics to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022), tax evasion and money laundering (FIFAgate in 2016), doping and fraud cases (biathlon federation in 2018).

To measure the good governance of the biggest international federations, the Danish Institute for Sports Studies developed the SGO (Sport Governance Observer) benchmarking tool. Its latest version contains 309 indicators and 57 principles of good governance, divided into four categories: transparency, democratic process, internal accountability and control, and societal responsibility. The first report, in 2015, covered 35 Olympic international sport federations and concluded that the majority of federations lacked oversight and control processes for their decision-making body members. Three quarters of the federations scored below 50%¹²³. Subsequent editions and other research (University of Granada, Spain, 2021) revealed similar results¹²⁴.

In the United States, the researchers Spencer Harris and Scott Jedlicka mention a number of issues with the governance of the USOPC (the U.S. NOC), and in particular question "[...] the inherent conflicts between sport organizations who must promote and build the commercial value of their sport and at the same time regulate it, and, in such a problematic environment, the wisdom of creating a system that has very little clear oversight [...]"¹²⁵. The debate is not new, and not specifically American, since the European Commission identified a similar

¹²⁰ [Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 215](#), as at January 5, 2024.

¹²¹ [Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 218](#), as at January 5, 2024.

¹²² [Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 135](#), as at January 5, 2024.

¹²³ A score of 100% indicates exemplary governance. Geeraert, A., Sports Governance Observer 2015. The legitimacy crisis in international sports governance, Play the Game/Danish Institute for Sports Studies, p. 9.

¹²⁴ Cabello-Manrique, D., & Puga-González, E. (2021). A review of the level of good governance in international sport federations. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, in press. <https://doi.org/10.14198/jhse.2023.181.15>, p. 10.

¹²⁵ Spencer J. Harris, Scott R. Jedlicka, "The Governance of Sport in the USA", in *Sport Business in the U.S.: Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge, 2020, p. 25.

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issue in 1998 with regard to international federations, and questioned “whether the federations can be regulatory bodies and private business entities at the same time”¹²⁶.

Is the ability of these institutions to self-regulate sufficient? Shouldn't governments step in to regulate international sports organisations? Given the political, economic and environmental impact of major international sporting events, shouldn't states intervene jointly to regulate the awarding of hosting rights? Their role today is ambiguous: the procedure for awarding the OPG is left entirely to the IOC, but states and local authorities also play an active role individually to host these events supposed to bring riches and power. One of the French experts we interviewed for this report explained that the controversy surrounding the awarding of the FIFA World Cup to Qatar was merely a symptom of the freedom given to international federations, whose decisions have a considerable impact on national federations, clubs, and even local and regional authorities (in France, local authorities are the primary source of funding for sport). This unchecked power calls for states to take up the issue.

In France, a motion for a resolution in favour of the creation of an independent global agency responsible for awarding major international sporting events was presented on January 16, 2023, by several MPs, including Soumya Bourouaha, MP for Seine-Saint-Denis. This was not a new idea: Marie-George Buffet, Sport Minister in France from 1997 to 2002 (and currently substitute MP for Ms. Bourouaha), had already put it forward. It was also suggested by the MPs Mazars and Peu in their aforementioned report of July 2023.

In the field of anti-doping, the United States has gone much further to protect its interests: judging the application of the World Anti-Doping Code and the independence of WADA to be insufficient, it introduced the Rodchenkov Act in 2021. This law gives the American justice system extraterritorial jurisdiction over doping cases in which one or more US athletes (and three or more other athletes) compete and which is either sponsored by a US company or broadcast commercially in the US. The new law was strongly criticised by WADA, which believes it will disrupt the global legal anti-doping framework¹²⁷. The IOC joined WADA in denouncing the fact that the law does not apply to American professional or college leagues, although the organisation does recognise the usefulness of the law in focusing on the entourage of athletes (doctors, coaches, agents, etc.), which the World Anti-Doping Code does not do¹²⁸. While any person (other than an athlete) of any nationality can be prosecuted under this law, the first person charged with violating the Rodchenkov Act was an American, found guilty of supplying doping products to several athletes at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

4. SUMMARY OF THE VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL SPORT POLICY DOCUMENTS

Binding documents	Author	Date	Reach	Public/Private
Convention on the Rights of the Child ¹²⁹	UN	1989	Ratified by 117 states	Public
International Convention against Doping in Sport	UNESCO	2005	Ratified by 111 states	Public
Macolin Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions		2019	Ratified by 9 states Signed by 32	
Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Approach to Safety, Security and Service at Football Matches and Other Sports Events, a.k.a. the Saint-Denis Convention	Council of Europe	2017	Ratified by 28 states Signed by 11	Public

¹²⁶ European Commission, "The European Model of Sport", Consultation Document of DG X, 1998, p. 12.

¹²⁷ WADA. (2020, November 17). [WADA statement on U.S. Senate's passing of the Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act](#). World Anti-Doping Agency.

¹²⁸ [IOC Statement on the Rodchenkov Act](#). (2020, March 12). Olympics.com.

¹²⁹ Recognises the right to engage in recreational activities.

V. IS THERE A NEED FOR A GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF SPORT THAT DEFINES ITS VALUES?

Anti-Doping Convention		1989	Ratified by 52 states	
World Anti-Doping Code	World Anti-Doping Agency	2004, revised in 2021	700 sports organisations	Public-Private
Olympic Charter	IOC	1908, revised in 2021	Olympic Movement	Private
IOC Code of Ethics and Implementing Provisions		Latest version 2023		
IPC Handbook	IPC	Revised in 2023	Paralympic system	Private
For each sport: statutes, procedures, governance rules of international federations	International federations		National members of each federation	Private

Non-binding documents	Author	Date	Reach	Public/Private
Resolution A/RES/77/27 on sport for development and peace	General Assembly of the United Nations	2020	Member States	Public
Documents produced during MINEPS conferences	UNESCO	1976, 1988, 1999, 2004, 2013, 2017, 2023	Member States	Public
International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport		1978, last revised 2015		Public
Recommendation on Global Events and Local Development	OECD	2018	Member States	Public
Sport for Generation Equality	UN Women	2020	Sports organisations	Public
Sport for Climate Action	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change		Sports organisations	Public
Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030	World Health Organization	2018	Member States	Public

Source: The authors drew inspiration from and supplemented Table 3. "International sport policy framework" by Spencer J. Harris, Scott R. Jedlicka, "The Governance of Sport in the USA", in *Sport Business in the U.S.: Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge, 2020.

VI. SO, WHAT IS SPORT?

1. SHOULD SPORT BE DEFINED?

The word “sport” appeared relatively recently in the French language, around the year 1830. In 1873, the *Littre* dictionary defined it as an English word, used to designate any outdoor exercise, such as horse racing, canoeing, hunting, fishing, archery, gymnastics, fencing.

In the late 19th century, Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) emphasised the motor dimension, and made the quest for performance the primary aim of engaging in sport. In 1968, the French philosopher Michel Bouet wrote that sport is an institutionalised recreational activity, with primordial bodily participation and rigorously specialised motor structures, engaged in for its own sake, in competitive mode, with the essential aim of achieving performance. But some forms of sport are neither about competition nor performance.

UNESCO favours a broad definition: “‘Sport’ is used as a generic term, comprising sport for all, physical play, recreation, dance, organized, casual, competitive, traditional and indigenous sports and games in their diverse forms”.¹³⁰ As for the *Revised European Sports Charter*, it chooses to define sport by its aims: “‘Sport’ means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, are aimed at maintaining or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”.¹³¹ The researchers Spencer Harris and Scott Jedlicka¹³² define “mass sport” as “sport for sport’s sake”.

With these examples, we understand the complexity of finding a simple, unifying definition that encompasses all sport participants and disciplines. If sport is such a multiform practice that it takes on different faces according to the times, to cultures and human beings, is it essential to attempt to define it? In fact, French legislation does not attempt to do so; it provides a framework for sport without offering a definition for it. However, if we did venture to define it, we could use the words of Patrick Roult, the co-founder of *L’Observatoire des imaginaires du sport*, an observatory which examines current conceptions of sport to understand and measure changes in practices and needs: “Sport is what we are doing when we say we are doing sport”, a twist on psychologist Jean Piaget’s definition of play (“play is what a child is doing when he says he is playing”).

And shouldn’t sport be play, first and foremost? And does play necessarily imply the triumph of one side over the other? This is the question posed by French anthropologist Philippe Descola in the very title of his September 2022 book¹³³, which mentions, for example, the ball games of Aztec societies in Mexico, where “the ritual function predominates over the idea of competition leading to the pre-eminence of one group over another”, or to this day still, of the island societies of Papua New Guinea, where cricket is played in such a way that at the end of the game there are neither winners nor losers, in order to maintain social equilibrium¹³⁴.

But while the diversity of definitions of the word “sport”, in terms of its essence, aims and functions, renders the phenomenon as complex as it is fascinating, the diversity of values it has promoted and functions it has served over time and across societies is no less so.

¹³⁰ [Kazan Action Plan](#) 2017.

¹³¹ Revised European Sports Charter, 2021.

¹³² Spencer J. Harris, Scott R. Jedlicka, “The Governance of Sport in the USA”, in *Sport Business in the U.S.: Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge, 2020.

¹³³ *Le sport est-il un jeu ?* Robert Laffont.

¹³⁴ Philippe Descola, *Le sport est-il un jeu ?* pp. 19-20 and 29-31.

2. HIGHLY TOPICAL DEBATES ACROSS THE AGES

We will take the case of sports in France and Europe.

Sport in ancient times: religious, military and recreational dimensions

Sports emerged in several phases during ancient times, as societies became more complex; first, as religious elements (dance springs to mind here) and for military training (chariot racing, horseback riding, or archery for the aristocracy), then as recreational activities, intended either for the whole of society or for a specific fringe of it. Sport could (already!) also be a state affair, as a demonstration of power, as in simulated sea battles, a prohibitively expensive form of entertainment specific to Rome which symbolically demonstrated Rome's domination of the seas.

The first Olympic Games, held in 776 BC, marked the beginning of ancient Greece¹³⁵. It would be an anachronism to see them as a mere sports competition, an opportunity for a military truce to guarantee the presence of many participants. Yet there was a significant religious dimension to the Games and, strangely, victories were attributed less to athletic training (which had its importance) and more to divine favour.

It is also interesting to note that, in both Republican and Imperial Rome¹³⁶, **debate raged over the legitimacy of sports as entertainment**. Cicero told Pompey that he had wasted his effort and his oil by organising games, while Martial wrote: "Why do strong arms fatigue themselves with silly dumbbells? Digging a vineyard is a much worthier exercise for men!" Physical exercise seemed entirely legitimate, but if motivated by a practical purpose rather than for show. *Mens sana in corpore sano*¹³⁷.

From the Middle Ages to the Revolution: from military tool to emancipation tool

The medieval period was largely marked by a growing mistrust of body care, and therefore of any sporting activity that did not have the immediate purpose of preparing for war. Far from the ancient ideal of a healthy mind in a healthy body, the Church urged its flock to focus preferentially, if not exclusively, on the spiritual. The body, its discipline and its firmness were no longer seen as proof of moral dispositions, since only the mind counted.

In France's tripartite society, the nobles were responsible for the defence and protection of all and thus, very logically, trained in the fighting arts from childhood, practising sword fighting, archery, horseback riding, and hunting. Between the 9th and 16th centuries, tournaments were held to demonstrate the contestants' power and worth as warriors. In England, on the other hand, almost the entire male population was trained in the fighting arts. As early as 1363, Edward III ordered that all men in England, with the exception of clergymen and magistrates, be obliged to practise archery every Sunday after mass from the age of ten, in preparation for the defence of the kingdom.

During both the Renaissance and the early modern period, *jeu de paume* (real tennis in the UK or court tennis in the USA) was the first breach in the social separation of sporting activities in France. Finally, it is interesting to note that during the French Revolution, the *sans-culottes* revived games modelled on those from the Ancient Era. "Every four years, the revolution will be celebrated with Olympic Games," wrote a pro-revolutionary newspaper on September 22, 1793¹³⁸. Danton took up the idea with fervour, and his speech even foreshadowed the modern Olympic Games, particularly their soft power dimension vis-à-vis foreign countries: "That during this great gathering of free men, the foreigner [be] struck with admiration for our work...". The first Olympiad of the Republic was held in September 1796.

¹³⁵ The Ancient Greek period extends from 776 BC (year of the first Olympic Games) to 323 BC (death of Alexander the Great). *Histoire de la Grèce antique. Philo-lettres*.

¹³⁶ The Roman Republic lasted from 509 BC to 27 BC, and the Roman Empire from 27 BC to 476 AD.

¹³⁷ A healthy mind in a healthy body

¹³⁸ *Les Annales patriotiques et littéraires de la France*.

Sport and totalitarianism: a tool for population control

Physical education and sport were widely encouraged by totalitarian regimes, as a means of controlling individuals, but also as a means of physically preparing future soldiers. Before the advent of Mussolini, sport was hardly an integral part of Italian daily life, whether in the city or the countryside. In 1925, a commission was tasked with reorganising national sport and physical education. At the time, the Italian NOC was working to increase sport participation among the population, especially the young, by linking sport to the fascist notions of vitality and the development of a disciplined military mind. As Ignacio Ramonet reminds us in his book *La tyrannie de la communication* (2001), Italian fascists believed that football made it possible to gather large crowds in a space conducive to staging, to exert strong pressure on them and thus sustain the nationalist sentiment of the masses. In the 1920s and 1930s, stadiums sprouted all over Italy, as they were ideal venues for the regime's propaganda. In fact, Italy hosted the 1934 FIFA World Cup, the poster for which featured a footballer with a raised arm... and the country's football team then went on to win at the 1936 Olympic Games, in Berlin, and the 1938 FIFA World Cup, held in France. A historic hat-trick that did wonders for Benito Mussolini's propaganda and cult of personality.

Major international sporting events became a showcase for the values promoted by these governments. In Germany, Adolf Hitler saw the 1936 Olympic Games as an opportunity to dazzlingly demonstrate to the world the validity of his doctrine on the superiority of the Aryan race. At these Games, which took place in an atmosphere of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, Germany was indeed the most decorated country (89 medals), but that is not what history has remembered. Instead, it is the four gold medals won by the African-American athlete Jesse Owens in track and field (sprint and long jump) that remain etched in people's minds. Those medals remain a political symbol and the victory of democratic values over Nazism.

Sport has also proved to be a valuable political tool for the international communist movement. In 1921, the Red Sport International (RSI) association was created and, from 1928 onward, it organised the Spartakiads, a kind of "counter-Olympic Games" designed to cement ties between proletarians before the USSR's first participation in the Olympic competition, at the Helsinki Games in 1952.

The birth of contemporary sport and the beginnings of spectator sport

Over time, sport has become one way of shaping societies and national communities. This is most evident in the existence of policies relating to sport. Whatever the level of state investment in their development or implementation, we can see that sport, throughout the last two centuries, has been progressively placed at the service of the power of states and their leaders, of national prestige, of social cohesion, and of public health imperatives.

In France, from 1870, gymnastic societies and velocipede associations set themselves the goal of "rearming" the nation physically and morally. The people had to be made to forget the defeat at the Battle of Sedan during the Franco-Prussian War and the final hours of the Second Empire. Where society was divided, including over what form the state should take, sport offered a counter-model. Put forward by Pierre de Coubertin, it was inspired by the virtues inherent in gymnastics, the project of English educators, and the long history of the Olympic Games. This counter-model combined fair play, physical commitment, selflessness, respect for opponents, pushing one's limits, justice and even the chivalrous and aristocratic spirit.

It was during this period that sport really began to take non-participants into account, by playing on the shared taste for spectacle and organising great rituals to give sporting events a solemn character. While these were readily taken up by totalitarian regimes, their symbolic dimension also served to highlight the universality of sport and its educational aspect, even when access to it was limited to the few, or even to the very few in certain disciplines.

3. SPORT TODAY: FROM FUNCTION-BASED REGULATORY APPROACHES TO COMMERCIAL LOGICS

Today, the multilateral approach sees sport in terms of the functions it performs. A European Commission document dating from 1998¹³⁹ lists five main functions: educational, public health, social, cultural and recreational.

As for UNESCO, it sees sport as a tool for social development and for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. There again, its functions are health-related (SDG 3 health), educational (SDG 4 education), social (SDG 5 gender equality, and SDG 10 social inclusion/inequalities), and also security-related (SDG 16 peace and security). Private players in sport are also embracing this SDG approach, as demonstrated by the creation of the new OXY index¹⁴⁰, a tool for measuring the environmental and societal commitment of stakeholders in the sports industry, whether clubs or major event organisers.

Following the health crisis linked to the COVID-19 epidemic, UNESCO launched the "Fit for Life" programme. Through sport, the latter aims to tackle three contemporary challenges: physical inactivity, deteriorating mental health, and accelerating inequalities. One component of this programme is the promotion of quality physical education policies and the provision of resources¹⁴¹, such as guidelines and methodologies, to support governments in this area. UNESCO is also working to safeguard and promote traditional games and sports, which it considers to be part of the intangible cultural heritage.

A young Brazilian's tweet about football particularly caught our attention when we were drafting Part One of this study¹⁴², as it highlighted this multidimensionality: "Football is one of the greatest social phenomena on the planet; there is room for everything within it. It is entertainment, it is work, it is learning, it is professionalism, it is recreation. It is what each person makes of it. Ignorance is thinking that the essence of the most powerful sport in the world is limited to your reality."

The Olympic Charter makes the promotion of Olympism one of the IOC's missions¹⁴³, defining it as "a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for internationally recognised human rights and universal fundamental ethical principles."¹⁴⁴ As for the International Paralympic Committee, it promotes the values of courage, determination, inspiration and equality.

Behind this ideal towards which sport must strive, we know full well that the latter is far from being "outside the system". The IOC, FIFA, the major international federations, the professional leagues, the big clubs (particularly in football), the organisers of sporting events, and even some national federations, have become economic players in their own right, moving considerable sums of money and managing the significant symbolic, political and economic interests of a range of disciplines.

Objectively speaking, sport today is subject to two logics moving forward in parallel: the first consists in putting on a great show to attract ever more spectators and television viewers and generate ever-growing revenue on the one hand. The second aims to defend rules and values in the name of a balanced philosophy of competition, and in doing so contributes to the education of all those who engage in sport but are not elite athletes. Balance is all the more difficult to achieve given that sporting institutions are both judge and defendant when it comes to addressing these issues.

¹³⁹ European Commission Staff Working Paper, The Development and Prospects for Community Action in the Field of Sport, (1998, September 29).

¹⁴⁰ *Ecolosport*

¹⁴¹ Promoting Quality Physical Education Policy. (2022, August 31). UNESCO.

¹⁴² See Part One: Vallée, C. R. J. G. & S. (2023, December 12). The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers. SKEMA Publika.

¹⁴³ Olympic Charter p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8.

4. CAN SPORT BE A NEUTRAL POLITICAL OBJECT?

In its Olympic Charter, the IOC recognises the principle of political neutrality as one of the five fundamental principles of Olympism. Moreover, it defines its role and mission as being “to take action to strengthen the unity of the Olympic Movement, to protect its independence, to maintain and promote its political neutrality and to preserve the autonomy of sport”. Political neutrality is also mentioned in Article 1 of the IOC’s Code of Ethics, as well as in the founding texts of several international sport federations (including FIFA) and of UNESCO¹⁴⁵. And yet, according to Lukas Aubin and Jean-Baptiste Guégan, apolitical sport is a myth, a utopia, an ideological construct at the service of the states and transnational institutions that use it¹⁴⁶. It has always been used as a political object, by all countries, whether democratic or not, in the pursuit of more or less noble aims.

Should sport therefore be depoliticised in order to make it a neutral political object, as the IOC and international federations are trying to do¹⁴⁷? The task seems daunting and the goal utopian.

Major sporting events are often an opportunity to highlight social issues specific to the host country or to promote political visions of the world. Calls to boycott them are frequent. For the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, it was a diplomatic boycott. Led by the United States, its objective was to protest against the repression of the Uyghur minority and prevent China from achieving its soft-power aims. Boycotts are not limited to diplomatic absence. Some sports boycotts, such as the Montreal Olympics of 1976, boycotted by 22 mostly African nations, stand out in the history of sport and international relations. The absence of the African delegations was in protest at the IOC’s refusal to exclude New Zealand from the competition for allowing its rugby team to travel to South Africa to play against the Springboks in the midst of apartheid. The American and Soviet sports boycotts of the 1980s also marked the Cold War.

While states are not bound to observe this neutrality, the governing bodies of international sport are, as stipulated in their statutes. This is what is called the “Coubertin trap”, this original contradiction between the desire for political neutrality and the fact of basing sport on the national fact and thus on the interests of nation-states.¹⁴⁸

And governments take advantage of this original contradiction, which is based on the myth that sport is apolitical¹⁴⁹. It is no coincidence that the Russian Federation recalled the obligation of political neutrality at the MINEPS VII conference held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from June 26 to 29, 2023. Not without some degree of irony, it invoked the values of Olympism to call for an end to passport discrimination at international competitions, so that Russian and Belarusian athletes could compete. Some forty states¹⁵⁰ reacted, pointing out both the fatal threat that the war begun in February 2023 poses to Ukrainian sport and the politicisation of sport by the Russians themselves since the Sochi Games. Since the invasion of Crimea less than a week after the closing ceremony, countless athletes and coaches have been killed, training facilities destroyed by bombs, and the population has faced difficulties in accessing sport in wartime. Instead of the apoliticism demanded by the Putin powerhouse, it was demanded that Russia “not be allowed to use sport to legitimise its barbaric and unprovoked war of aggression”.

In response to the exclusion of its athletes and the cancellation of international sporting events on its territory, Russia began organising its own international competitions. The University International Sports Festival in August 2023, the Games of the Future, dedicated to esports, in February 2024, and the BRICS¹⁵¹ Games in June 2024 are

¹⁴⁵ UNESCO, *Sport and Anti-Doping*. Accessed on January 05, 2024.

¹⁴⁶ Lukas Aubin & Jean-Baptiste Guégan, “*Organisations sportives : une étrange neutralité*”, *Atlas géopolitique du sport*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Lukas Aubin & Jean-Baptiste Guégan, *La Guerre du sport: Une nouvelle géopolitique*, Tallandier, 2024

¹⁴⁹ Defrance Jacques, “*La politique de l’apolitisme. Sur l’autonomisation du champ sportif*”, *Politix*, 2000/2 (n° 50), p. 13-27. DOI: 10.3406/polix.2000.1084. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politix-2000-2-page-13.htm>

¹⁵⁰ Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cook Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

¹⁵¹ Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

all attempts to propose another alternative and a different architecture for international sport, far removed from democratic considerations and the context of the war in Ukraine. While Russia insists it has no intention of competing with long-standing sporting events, it does seem determined to propose new models for international sports competitions so as to extend its sphere of influence with the BRICS nations, the CIS¹⁵², and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. In September 2024, it will be reviving its Friendship Games in Moscow, and this is no coincidence. The Games will be taking place 40 years after the first edition, which was held in 1984 in the Soviet Union and followed the boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics by several Eastern Bloc states¹⁵³.

These various stances are proof that sport is a political and geopolitical arena.

The decisions by the IOC and the International Paralympic Committee to exclude Russian and Belarusian athletes from the 2022 Beijing Olympics reflect this. They marked a clear abandonment of the principle of political neutrality, a principle originally enacted to “preserve the autonomy of the sports movement, by striving to protect it from all political and state interference”. According to the think tank *Sport et Citoyenneté*, these decisions are the result of excessive pressure from public opinion¹⁵⁴. According to Mathieu Maisonneuve, Professor of Public Law at Aix-Marseille University, these changes are designed to ensure that the Olympic principle of political neutrality is no longer a principle of indifference, on the part of sporting institutions, to human rights violations by states. In his opinion, the Olympic Movement is currently seeking a desirable balance between maintaining order in sport and respecting human rights, between reserve and indifference¹⁵⁵.

So perhaps it is at the edge of the human rights issue that the principle of political neutrality in sport is now being considered and where it should stop.

Julie Tribolo, Deputy Director of the International & European Law Centre at Côte d'Azur University, offers a more pragmatic view of this pivot, which she believes marks the transition from sport as a tool of soft power to one of hard power. According to her, given the undeniable economic weight of the sports sector today, and the new positioning of its players with regard to the neutrality of sport, it is quite possible that in the future it will increasingly distinguish itself as a credible instrument of economic pressure, thus entering — as the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict already partly demonstrates — the more traditional and tangible field of hard power.¹⁵⁶ In section 3 of this report, we talked about a combination of these two forms of power: smart power.

It is important to remember that sport is never neutral, even outside of conflicts and power struggles. Ultimately, it always serves (geo)political theories and visions: it is a public-good tool in France and, reportedly, in the European model; a space left to commercial entertainment and private offers in the North American model; and, for less democratic actors, a tool for increasing influence, soft power and legitimisation.

¹⁵² Commonwealth of Independent States.

¹⁵³ Reuters. (2023, May 4), [Russia to launch Friendship Games after 40-year gap, sports minister says](#).

¹⁵⁴ *Olympisme et neutralité politique*. (2022, March 7). *Sport et Citoyenneté*.

¹⁵⁵ Mathieu Maisonneuve, “Le principe olympique de neutralité politique. Réflexions juridiques à la lumière de l’invasion de l’Ukraine par la Russie”, *L’Observateur des Nations Unies, Le droit international face aux problématiques contemporaines du sport*, 2022, 52(1), pp. 13. hal-04014692.

¹⁵⁶ Julie Tribolo “*Sport et paix, un mariage de raison ? Retour sur 30 ans d’utilisations du sport au service de la paix par les Nations Unies*” : p. 22.

5. TOWARD INTERNATIONAL RULES BASED ON THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

In the run-up to the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022, a number of controversies inundated the media, surrounding the rights of the migrant workers who had built the sports facilities, the rights of LGBTQ+ minorities in the country, and environmental concerns (the decision to hold the competition in a country where temperatures exceed 40 °C in the summer, thus requiring the sporting event to be postponed by five months and the stadiums to be air-conditioned). Here, sport appears to be a vehicle for political values. In a September 2022 article, Simon Chadwick, Professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy at SKEMA Business School, wrote that “the likes of football tournaments are increasingly held in countries that hitherto haven’t played hosts, which brings unfamiliar values, norms, and conventions to their staging. At the same time, host countries find themselves talked about in ways they perhaps didn’t anticipate or confronted with ways of living that may seem threatening”.¹⁵⁷

The discussions at the MINEPS 7 conference also revealed this phenomenon. During the closing session, the Iranian delegation specifically asked to be dissociated from two references, in the "Fit for Life Alliance" Outcome Document, to the need to collaborate with “empowerment partners [...] with respect for diversity **regardless of gender or sexual orientation**”. This was followed by similar interventions from no fewer than 21 states, which considered the references “contrary to the social, legal and cultural order” of their country¹⁵⁸. In the final text, 24 states dissociated themselves from these references¹⁵⁹.

International sport therefore reflects major political debates. Their reach extends far beyond the sports sector alone. It pits universalist vs. multicultural visions, more or less conservative views of the world, and authoritarian aims against each other. **Sport is thus a vehicle for symbolic political representations and for values, but these are not self-evident.** It is primarily the kind of commitment one wishes to make to it and what keeps one engaged in it that counts. **However, international youths talk about the values of sport.**

◆ Young people want sport to be imbued with universal values

This is the conclusion we reached based on the interviews carried out during the first phase of this study¹⁶⁰. A strong consensus emerged among the 95 people of 18 different nationalities questioned. The young people we interviewed felt that sport promotes universal values. Respect, a culture of effort, pushing one’s limits, sharing, friendship and excellence were some of the values they listed. A tweet posted by a young man from English-speaking Africa described sport as “a powerful tool for promoting peace and tolerance”. According to several French students, sport should be an integral part of everyone’s education, because it transcends cultural and religious differences.

The young people interviewed went even further, expecting elite athletes to act as ambassadors of these values. Actually, they are admired as much for their sporting achievements as for the values they promote and uphold — humility, sacrifice, determination, willpower, etc. — or the great causes they serve — fighting racism, world hunger, etc. We found these aspects in a great number of tweets from young people in China, America and Africa.

However, our social listening on Twitter revealed very few posts mentioning the word “Olympism” among the 30,800 tweets mentioning sport and values in 2022 across the 7 geographical areas studied¹⁶¹. It does not seem to be part of the lexicon of 18- to 24-year-olds; perhaps it is too specific. The expression “sports values” was more commonly used, across all the geographical areas studied.

¹⁵⁷ Chadwick, S. (2022, September 21). *Saints, Symbols and Soccer – What’s Acceptable and Who Decides?* SKEMA Publika.

¹⁵⁸ Statement by the Algerian delegation.

¹⁵⁹ “The following countries dissociated themselves from Annex 1, footnote 4, and Annex 2, point III.i), while joining the consensus on the Outcome Document: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Guatemala, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Russian Federation, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Syria Arab Republic, Tunisia, Türkiye.”
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385925>

¹⁶⁰ See Part One: Vallée, C. R. J. G. & S. (2023, December 12). *The Future of Sport: Needs and Ideas of International Youth for Use by Policymakers*. SKEMA Publika.

¹⁶¹ Keywords and expressions used in searches: Olympism, values, IOC, and International Olympic Committee. Search area: South Africa, Brazil, China, the United States, France, French-speaking Africa and English-speaking Africa.

❖ **What sports values can the international community agree on? What are some possible courses of action for the future? Toward a lowest common denominator**

How can we meet this expectation on the part of young people as well as the objective need for a common denominator in the international values of sport? **With sport becoming more global by the day, the international community now cannot ignore the need to find common ground when it comes the values it embodies.** While some might recommend avoiding this debate, that would leave the floor open to the strongest, richest, most heavily armed influences.

As we have seen in this report, sport is protean. It has an impact on a vast array of spheres: political, geopolitical, economic, health, educational, recreational, etc. Should sport be regulated specifically? Or should it be governed by the principles that already exist in the major international instruments, particularly in the area of health? **It seems to us that sport, an object that is special due to its protean nature, should be the focus of special attention.**

UNESCO is at the forefront of this reflection on the values of sport and is working on this matter, notably through the “Values Education through Sport” (VETS) initiative, based on the idea that sport offers “a universal framework for learning values [...] needed for responsible citizenship”¹⁶². The values UNESCO associates with sport are: “fairness, teambuilding, equality, discipline, inclusion, perseverance and respect”. Moreover, the UN agency’s *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport* dedicates its Article 10 to the “protection and promotion of the integrity and ethical values of physical education, physical activity and sport”, and Action 3 of the Kazan Action Plan, adopted following the MINEPS VI Conference held in 2017, is to “unify and further develop international standards supporting sport ministers’ interventions in the field of sport integrity”. It is within this framework and that of the *International Convention against Doping in Sport* that UNESCO established *Guidelines on Sport Integrity*, which were revised in April 2023. They make preserving the rights of athletes, spectators and workers one of the priority policy areas.

When it comes to the **individual values** of discipline, pushing one’s limits, fair play, and even love of play, a consensus should be easy to reach. Not to be forgotten in this panoply is the sporting fervour that accompanies all sports competitions and which was mentioned in our study on the thoughts of international youths as collective spirit. **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 emancipation.

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 appear to have political overtones, but on closer inspection it nonetheless features in most national policies, though different terms may be used. 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 when it comes to meeting the expectations of young people and all citizens. Furthermore, it is a concept that can be used and adapted by all the key actors 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.

¹⁶² UNESCO, *Values Education through Sport* (2024, January 05th).

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