

## EDITORIAL

### What Makes International Sport “International”?

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The term *international* appears frequently in sports research—across titles, abstracts, and journal names—because it signals reach, scope, and significance. Yet many studies that use this label rely exclusively on data from a single country, league, or institution. This raises a fundamental question: What should *international* mean in sport scholarship, and what obligations follow when authors invoke it?

This is not an argument against single-context research. Studies rooted in a single country or community provide essential, detailed knowledge: they illuminate histories, policies, and lived experiences that might otherwise go unseen. The challenge lies in addressing the gap between description and claim. A study conducted in one setting can legitimately speak to broader issues, but those claims must be supported by explicit reasoning rather than assumed by virtue of a global label alone. Clearer standards would make the term *international* more meaningful and the field more rigorous.

#### The Problem of Unspecified Reach

Phrases such as global trends, world sport, or international perspectives can imply broad relevance without specifying the level of analysis. A survey of teachers within a single education system is sometimes presented as evidence of “global practice.” A case study of one federation may be framed as representative of governance in “world sport.” These moves often reflect publication pressures to claim broad significance and the dominance of a few sport systems in the literature. The result is a narrow empirical base paired with sweeping rhetorical claims. A journal that calls itself *International* should identify this tendency and encourage more transparent alternatives.

#### International as a Concept, not a Badge

*International* should articulate the research problem, not merely advertise the study’s hoped-for impact. Work that genuinely addresses international dynamics typically does one or more of the following:

- examines cross-border relations or transnational institutions;
- compares cases across multiple countries or regions;
- traces transnational careers of athletes, coaches, or officials;
- analyses media flows, labour migration, or sport diplomacy that link systems across borders.

In such studies, international dynamics are central to the research design and analysis, rather than decorative language. By contrast, rigorous single-context studies derive their value from depth and contextual clarity. They can inform broader debates, but that generalisation must follow from conceptual argument and evidence, not be presumed on the basis of a global label. A disciplined use of *international* will clarify what a study sets out to do and what it does not.

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Journals can improve precision by asking authors who use terms like international, global, or worldwide to specify what they mean. Does the term indicate a comparative design? A focus on transnational processes? Or a claim that findings are relevant across multiple settings? These are distinct assertions that require different evidence and reasoning. Explicit statements of intended scope will sharpen dialogue between studies and strengthen critical appraisal.

### Modes of International Sport Research

There is no single template for international sport research, but three recurring modes deserve attention.

1. Comparative research places two or more countries, regions, or organisations in a shared analytical frame. It compares policy responses to common problems—safeguarding, concussion, or physical inactivity—or shows how the same sport takes different forms under distinct political and cultural regimes. Rigorous comparative work attends to conceptual equivalence, measurement consistency, and careful case selection, revealing what is general and what is context-specific.
2. Transnational research treats flows and networks as the unit of analysis rather than the nation-state. It examines player and coach mobility, the diffusion of training methods, mega-event marketing, and the circulation of digital content. This approach frames international sport as a field of relations, exposing structures of power and dependency as well as patterns of resistance and creativity that national frames can obscure.
3. Multi-sited and networked research follows people, practices, or artefacts across locations. Studies might track athletes trained in one country and recruited to leagues elsewhere, trace how coaching philosophies adapt across cultures, or map sport-related social movements that span continents. These designs demand collaboration, time, and resources, but they yield rich accounts of international sport as lived experience.

*International Sports Studies* invites submissions across all three modes, encouraging submissions that bring comparative, transnational, and multi-sited designs into conversation. Each mode has

distinct strengths and limits and connects to broader debates in the humanities and social sciences, including globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and post-colonial critique. In every case, international should denote an explicit research approach, not a loosely applied marker of scale.

### Methodological Nationalism and Uneven Geographies of Knowledge

Advancing explicit international research requires confronting background habits that shape the field. Methodological nationalism treats the nation-state as the default container for social life: data are gathered within borders, and explanations begin and end with national cultures, policies, or institutions. This orientation is understandable given how many sport systems are organised, but it can obscure cross-border dynamics and multi-level processes.

Methodological nationalism also intersects with uneven global research capacity. International sport journals continue to draw disproportionately from a small set of higher-income countries with established academic infrastructures. Work from these contexts often sets the terms of debate, while research from regions with fewer resources or different traditions receives less visibility. The result is a skewed picture of international sport in which some settings appear normative and others marginal.

A single journal cannot resolve these structural inequalities alone, but it can respond constructively. It can welcome submissions from underrepresented regions and institutions, support rigorous qualitative, historical, and interpretive work that does not require costly infrastructure, and encourage equitable collaborations across contexts. Editorial and review processes should remain alert to the risk that some perspectives are treated as universal, while others are cast as local curiosities.

### Theory Translation and Travelling Concepts

Theory and translation are central to international sport research. Many influential concepts in the social sciences and humanities originate in specific historical and cultural settings; they do not travel unchanged. Applying such frameworks to new contexts produces both friction and insight.