

## EDITORIAL

### International Sports Studies: What's in a name?

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*What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet.  
(William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet)*

*'When I use a word', Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone,  
'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'  
'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'  
'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master — that's all.'  
(Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There)*

Language is the lifeblood of academia, the medium through which ideas are expressed, arguments are built, and knowledge is shared. Yet, the words we choose in academic disciplines are far from neutral—they shape the boundaries of thought, influence perceptions, and ultimately determine how knowledge is received and applied. Reflecting on the language used in academic disciplines is not merely a linguistic exercise; it is a critical enquiry into how disciplines define themselves, interact with the world, and evolve.

Consider how a single term, like "globalisation", carries different connotations in economics, sociology, and cultural studies. In one context, it might signal economic opportunity; in another, it represents cultural homogenisation. This divergence highlights the importance of understanding what words mean and how they frame our understanding of complex phenomena. By reflecting on language, we uncover the assumptions, biases, and power structures embedded within academic discourse.

Moreover, the language of academia is not static; it evolves in response to societal shifts and inter-disciplinary collaborations. For example, inclusive language reflects changing norms and priorities, ensuring that how we discuss issues such as gender, disability, or cultural identity aligns with values of respect and equity. Similarly, as fields such as international sports studies draw on multiple disciplines, their terminology adapts to foster dialogue across diverse perspectives. Reflecting on academic language is an invitation to question the familiar, embrace innovation, and connect with broader audiences. It is a journey into the heart of how knowledge is constructed and shared—an essential undertaking for anyone committed to their discipline's growth, inclusivity, and relevance.

This journal, *International Sports Studies (ISS)*, offers what we hope is a clear and welcoming introduction to our interests and scope:

*International Sports Studies (ISS)  
is one of the world's oldest and most  
established scholarly sports journal.*

*With its origins dating back to the 1960s, the journal has been a significant force in promoting international and comparative studies of sport worldwide.*

We recognise that this brief allows for a wide range of interpretations. This is deliberate, as we, as editors, have always been eager to produce journals with a rich diversity of content and methodologies. Nevertheless, it is helpful to reflect on our assumptions and guiding principles. Therefore, we are using this editorial to explore some possible meanings of international sports studies and some of their extrapolations in this journal. At the same time, we hope to inspire new contributors, especially early career researchers, to join us by submitting their work to our journal.

As an academic field, 'international sports studies' has tended to be understood as a broad, multi-disciplinary academic field that seeks to understand sport as a complex global phenomenon. It recognises that sport is not merely a recreational activity or competitive pursuit but a cultural and social institution with far-reaching implications for individuals, communities, and nations. By adopting a global perspective, *ISS* examines how sport influence and are influenced by historical, cultural, economic, and political processes.

## The Scope of International Sports Studies

What does this mean for researchers? Some fields immediately present themselves as central to the interests of *ISS*:

*Cultural Perspectives in Sport.* *ISS* explores how sport is embedded in and reflects cultural identities and traditions. Topics may include:

- The role of traditional sport and indigenous games in cultural preservation.
- How sport might serve as a medium for expressing national or ethnic pride.

- Cross-cultural exchanges in sport such as football, basketball, and cricket across continents.

*Globalisation of Sport.* Sport has become a universal language that transcends borders, and *ISS* can investigate:

- Whether global events such as the Olympics and FIFA World Cup promote internationalism.
- The cultural impact of sport brands like Nike or Adidas and the global reach of leagues like the NBA or English Premier League.
- The effects of media and technology on the accessibility and commercialisation of sport worldwide.

*Sport and Politics.* Sport is a powerful political tool, and there is considerable scope for *ISS* to examine:

- Its use in diplomacy, such as the 'ping-pong' diplomacy between the US and China.
- The role of sport in resisting or reinforcing authoritarian regimes.
- How mega-events in sport project soft power or strengthen political narratives.

*Sport Development and Sustainability.* *ISS* can explore how sport can contribute to social and economic development:

- Promoting health, education, and gender equality in underserved regions through sport-for-development initiatives.
- Facilitating peacebuilding by utilising sport to foster dialogue, break down barriers, and promote understanding among diverse groups.
- Integrating sport into policies that align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Examining infrastructure development and community impact of hosting major sport events.

*Economic Impact of Sport.* Sport is a vastly wealthy industry, and *ISS* might examine the following:

- The business of sport, including sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and merchandising.

- The economic effects of sport tourism include hosting the Olympics and World Cups.
- Disparities in resources and financial investments in sports across countries.

*Ethics and Integrity in Sport.* *ISS* can scrutinise the ethical challenges facing sport, such as:

- The fight against doping and performance-enhancing drugs.
- Establishing and maintaining a safe sport environment where participants can collaborate and develop free from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse or misconduct.
- Corruption and governance issues within international sport organisations such as FIFA.
- Gender inequities in pay, representation, and opportunities in sport.

*Health and Well-being.* Sport is often presented as a tool for promoting physical and mental health, and *ISS* can focus on:

- The relationship between physical activity and well-being in various cultural contexts.
- Barriers to sport participation, particularly for underrepresented groups.
- The role of adaptive sport in fostering inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

*Inclusion and Accessibility.* *ISS* can emphasise the importance of making sport equitable and accessible by examining:

- The inclusion of marginalised groups, including women, LGBTQA+ individuals, and people with disabilities.
- Perspectives from underrepresented groups from the Global South and non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) societies
- Policies and practices that promote diversity in sport leadership and participation.
- Case studies of inclusive initiatives, such as Paralympic sport or grassroots programs.

*Education and Research in Sport.* *ISS* can promote this by highlighting the following:

- Integrating sport studies into higher education curricula.
- Conducting inter-disciplinary research that bridges theory and practice.
- Engaging with sport professionals, policymakers, and educators to translate research findings into actionable strategies.

We are just scratching the surface of this vibrant field. The reader could easily add to our list, and perhaps that will happen organically, anyway, as any comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate connections between sport and society on a global scale evolves with new insights and ideas. We understand the vital role of editors of our journal, *ISS*, in opening the door to alternative perspectives.

### Comparative Studies

Our journal has always held a special place for comparative studies. Indeed, such research was an important source of early inspiration for establishing *ISS* (and our associated membership organisation, the *International Society for Comparative Physical Education and Sport - ISCPES*). Comparative studies in sport serve as the foundation of *ISS*, offering a lens through which the complexities of the role of sport in different societies can be understood. Scholars have uncovered valuable insights beyond surface-level analysis by examining how countries and cultures approach sport. These studies open doors to understanding the nuances of sport governance, education, participation, and societal impacts, providing a roadmap for identifying best practices, innovative solutions, and adaptive strategies to address universal and local challenges.

Comparative studies in sport are invaluable for understanding how different countries and cultures approach sport, offering insights that transcend single-nation or single-discipline perspectives. By examining variations in policies, governance structures, education systems, and participation rates, these studies uncover best practices and innovative

strategies that can be adapted to address global and local challenges. For instance, exploring how Scandinavian nations integrate public health goals into sport policies or how New Zealand fosters gender equity in sport leadership provides actionable models for other countries. Additionally, comparative research reveals how cultural values shape the societal role of sport, such as Japan's emphasis on discipline and teamwork in youth sport versus the United States' focus on competition and individual achievement. Moreover, comparative studies of sport for development across disaster-prone nations, such as "Sport and Play for Traumatized Children and Youth" in the aftermath of the 2003 disastrous earthquake in Bam, Iran, the "Movement, Games and Sport" for children's psychosocial development in Sri Lanka after the tsunami disaster in 2004, or the 3R (*Re-Play, Re-Live, Re-Create*), a sport-based psychosocial program in the aftermath of the 2013 super typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, offer insights on how physical activity, physical education, and sport-based initiatives not only aid in immediate recovery but also contribute to long-term disaster preparedness and social resilience. Knowledge generated from such comparative studies can help researchers and policy-makers design culturally sensitive and effective interventions that align with local needs while drawing on global expertise.

Beyond informing policy and practice, comparative studies in sport are critical in addressing shared global challenges such as doping, environmental sustainability, and inclusivity. By analysing how different nations tackle similar issues, researchers identify strengths and weaknesses in various approaches, fostering the development of more comprehensive solutions. For example, comparative analyses of anti-doping policies highlight variations in enforcement and education that can be harmonised to create more robust systems worldwide. Moreover, these studies promote cross-cultural

understanding and collaboration, which is essential for international events, such as the Olympics, where diverse sport systems converge. Ultimately, the value of comparative studies lies in their ability to bridge cultural, political, and economic gaps, fostering a richer and more interconnected understanding of the global sport landscape.

Ultimately, comparative studies in sport are more than a methodological approach—they transform how we understand, govern, and experience sport on a global scale. International sport scholars have uncovered pathways for innovation, collaboration, and progress by analysing differences in policies, practices, and cultural attitudes. These studies challenge assumptions, broaden perspectives, and build bridges between cultures and disciplines, making them a cornerstone of International Sports Studies. Through comparative research, we can address the complexities of sport in a globalised world and provide the tools needed to leverage its potential to foster unity, inclusion, and excellence across societies. In this way, the work of International Sports Studies goes beyond academia, influencing real-world practices and enriching the global sporting landscape for future generations.

### From Disciplinary to Multi-disciplinary to Inter-disciplinary Research

The evolution of research and scholarship in International Sports Studies mirrors the increasing complexity of sport as a global phenomenon. Initially, research on international sports studies often adhered to *disciplinary approaches*, in which scholars narrowly focused on specific aspects of sport within their fields of expertise. For example, sociologists have studied sport as a social institution, economists have analysed the financial aspects of sport, and historians have examined the evolution of sport over time. While these approaches generate valuable insights, they often lack the ability to address the multi-faceted

nature of sport, which involves simultaneously interacting with cultural, economic, political, and physiological dimensions.

As the field matured, there was a shift toward *multi-disciplinary methodologies*, in which researchers from different disciplines collaborated to examine sport from multiple perspectives. For instance, a study on the globalisation of sport might involve economists analysing market expansion, anthropologists studying cultural adaptation, and media scholars examining digital broadcasting trends. Although multi-disciplinary approaches have provided broader insights, they often remain fragmented, with little integration of methods or findings. The current trend in International Sports Studies emphasises *inter-disciplinary approaches* beyond merely juxtaposing disciplines to actively integrate theories, methods, and frameworks. This enables researchers to construct a more cohesive understanding of complex issues such as the global economic impact of mega-events or the role of sport in fostering social inclusion across different cultural contexts. By blending expertise, interdisciplinary methodologies in international sports studies facilitate innovative solutions to global challenges, enrich academic discourse, and ensure the relevance of the field to an increasingly interconnected world.

### Our journal - International Sports Studies (ISS)

*ISS* provides a dynamic and inclusive platform for researchers from all backgrounds to share their work and contribute to the growing field of sports studies. The journal is committed to fostering a supportive and welcoming environment, particularly for *early-career researchers* looking to establish themselves in the academic community. Our editorial team actively encourages submissions from new scholars. We provide constructive feedback to help refine and enhance their work, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued in the global discourse on sports studies.

*ISS* embraces the diversity of research perspectives and welcomes *national and international studies* that explore the multi-faceted role of sport in societies worldwide. Whether examining local grassroots initiatives or global mega-events, *ISS* values contributions that deepen our understanding of sport as a cultural, social, and economic phenomenon. We are also particularly excited to support *new and innovative research approaches* that challenge traditional boundaries and push the field forward. By publishing with *ISS*, researchers join a vibrant and collaborative community dedicated to advancing knowledge and fostering meaningful dialogue in the field of International Sports Studies.

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