

# Global public good: a choice between two models for a new global sports governance?

## Definition

- **Generalities**

The notion of Global Public Goods (GPGs) appeared in international negotiations at the end of the 1990s, essentially around the issues of sustainable development as defined by Agenda 21 following the 1992 Rio World Conference. Given the extent of global imbalances such as global warming and the collapse of biodiversity, there is a growing call for worldwide governance of these common goods: air, water, climate, energy, health, education, financial stability, knowledge, information, culture and peace.

The conceptual origin of GPGs can be found in economic theory with the traditional distinction between private and public goods. It should be remembered that private goods are defined by the two principles of rivalry and exclusion, whereas in contrast, public goods are defined in relation to the two principles of non-rivalry and non-exclusion. Non-rivalry means that the consumption of a good by one individual does not prohibit its use by another individual; non-exclusion means that it is not possible to prevent an individual from enjoying goods.

The definition of these public goods is tantamount to recognising market failures that imply the need for state intervention to provide goods that the market is unable to produce, such as major infrastructure or national security, thus justifying the establishment of public services.

The new feature of the 1990s is that we are no longer in the context of nation states and Keynesian policies but in the context of globalisation and liberal policies. This implies that market failures no longer concern the domestic market but the global market, and that there is a lack of global institutions to address such failures.

- **Sport as a GPG?**

The question of whether sport could fit into the GPG category raises two questions:

- If a GPG is a commodity that the market cannot produce, then does the sporting spectacle escape this category? Should we consider that there is a sporting exception?
- If we adopt a completely non-market definition of sport, could we then consider that it can be included in the category of GPGs alongside culture, education and health?

This means that we would have to return to the fundamental question of the definition of sport, which the community of sports

economists has always refused to do. Indeed, it would be necessary to review such a definition of the word sport, which encompasses radically different realities that have nothing to do with each other. On one side, there is sport as a spectacle, as a market, as a business dominated by the quest for profit maximisation. On the flip side, there is a disinterested, authentic sport, which can effectively be placed alongside culture or education. We must therefore denounce the common attitude of 'dressing up' the business of sport with the values of authentic sport just to hide its abuses.

The misunderstandings surrounding the definition of sport stem from the difficulty of articulating two opposing systems of representations and values. For some, sport is an exaltation of nature, balance, health, respect for others and fair play. But for others, it is about competition, about surpassing oneself, which leads to the cult of performance by any means, with no regard for ethics or health. Is it possible to reconcile these two radically opposed views?

The sporting spectacle is above all a commercial product in a global market dominated by large groups and powerful international sports organisations. In no way can the sporting spectacle be equated with a GPG. What would remain is an authentic grassroots sport, which corresponds to the spirit of GPGs, such as culture, education or health. Of course, it would be possible to admit that the sporting spectacle contributes to the development of authentic sport by giving grassroots participants the means to achieve their personal goals. However, this presupposes that professional sport is free of all excesses and can therefore serve as a model. Sadly, this is not the case. In this context, two models are being discussed for a new global governance of sport.

## **New global governance of sport**

- ***A top-down model.***

The question is which global body should be set up to manage GPGs from on high and impose its laws on the State? Which institution will be able to implement such governance? The sports world is already characterised by the existence of an institutional pyramid going from the local to the global level. Nevertheless, there are many shortcomings in such governance. The IOC is an interesting example of the contradictions between sporting and commercial objectives that considerably weaken the effectiveness of its governance. In general, we can speak of a relative submission of sports institutions to the market and its commercial and financial logic with all the harmful consequences that this implies. Conversely, good governance can be defined as the ability to control deviant behav-

our (doping, corruption, cheating, etc.), which is increasingly difficult on a transnational scale. Which is why new institutions are needed.

One proposal is to make humanity a subject of law and thus create a new category, the common goods of humanity and based on the same model as that of the world heritage of humanity. Genuine sport could be part of such a category of new human rights. Apart from the technical difficulties, it is to be feared that the ruling elite who are part of the neo-liberal ideology are opposed to such a view of the world. They prefer competition and the struggle of all against all to cooperation and social justice. This is why global solutions from above remain very hypothetical and raise the question of whether a solution from below is conceivable with the constitution of a counterweight at the level of civil society.

- ***A bottom-up model***

The current period is characterised by the interweaving of three crises: an economic and financial crisis, an ecological crisis and a social crisis. As a result, there is a risk of the collapse of the thermo-industrial civilisation that will eventually allow us to rebuild our societies on a sustainable basis. It is becoming more and more vital to recognise that infinite growth in a finite world is not possible and that it would be better to try to set up a society of chosen and not subdued degrowth. The recomposition of our societies could be carried out from the determination of new operating logics: the priority is social and consists in ensuring well-being for all, which implies drastically reducing the inequalities which today reach an intolerable level; the constraint is ecological because we cannot indefinitely continue to destroy the living organism which conditions the human habitability of the planet; the economic aspect must come last when considering the best means to achieve the social objectives under ecological constraint. This is therefore a reversed logic compared to the current situation in which the primary objective is economic (performance, competitiveness, profitability, etc.), with ecological and social aspects relegated to the rank of secondary objectives or even completely ignored. Such a change of the paradigm would of course have major consequences on the sporting spectacle and the practice of sport.

Given the need to drastically reduce our ecological footprint, it is not impossible to think about the disappearance of mega-sporting events as we know them today. The carbon footprint of these events depends largely on international transport. In general, the society of widespread mobility of people and goods may no longer be sustainable or profitable, and we could see a relocation of the world economy.

In this perspective, we are back to the bottom-up development characteristic of the 1970s before the neo-liberal revolution of the 1980s made this model seem archaic. It is a question of determining the right territorial scale to best face the contemporary crisis and it is recognised that the small community can be effective in solving economic, social and environmental problems. The practice of sport would find its place in such a model contributing to a good quality of community life.

In the end, there could be a growing disconnection between sport as a spectacle, with all its excesses, and the disinterested practice of sport for pleasure and health, without any competitive spirit. There are no winners or losers but just the simple joy of being together in a playful exchange.

### **Further information:**

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