

# Why are the European and American sports worlds so different? Path-dependence in the European and American sports history

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## Introduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the European and American sports formations and cultures developed along quite different paths. First, other sports became popular in the United States than in Europe, with baseball, basketball, hockey, and 'American football' as the most prominent in the United States, versus 'global football' (or soccer), tennis, cycling and gymnastics as the most popular sports in Europe. Second, these sports were developed, organised and practiced in different contexts: that of voluntary clubs and associations in Europe and that of schools, colleges and universities in the United States. Third, American sports commercialised and professionalized earlier and much more thoroughly than European sports. Fourth, as a business, professional sports in the United States were organised in closed leagues of competing franchises, while both amateur and professional sports in Europe formed part of open competitions based on the principle of promotion and relegation. Fifth, Europe's open sport competitions got an international or even global appeal and were governed by international non-profit federations, whereas America's closed professional leagues remained national in scope and meaning for a long time, and were established under profit-oriented managerial control without any international regulatory body. In the United States, this often led to the formation of competing leagues in the same branch of sport. And sixth, compared to Europe, the American government hardly influenced the development of the sporting formations and cultures. Sports in the United States developed market-driven and independent of the state, while governments in Europe increasingly intervened in the world of sports, especially after the Second World War.

Because the American sporting formation and culture seems to be the anomaly in this respect, American authors have come to speak of "America's sports exceptionalism" (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001: 39-51; Sparvero, Chalip & Green, 2008: 269). This fits in with the American self-image and pride to be fundamentally unique, different from the rest of the world. It also elaborates on the scholarly literature on American exceptionalism, going back to classical studies like De Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835-1840) and Sombart's *Warom gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?* (1906). The American exceptionalism thesis, however, has also become subject of considerable debate; not only with respect to the causes of America's alleged

uniqueness, but also – more fundamentally – whether this concept is a reality or a myth, and what empirical evidence can be found for both positions (see for example Hodgson, 2009; Lipset, 1997; Lockhart, 2003; Shafer, 1991; Tyrrell, 1991). Recently, this discussion has been extended to the world of sports. Pope, for example, argued to overcome a strictly national focus on American sport history and to endorse a critical, trans-national mode of analysis so as to interpret the American story not as an exception to patterns of national power in a world of nations, but “as a particular, and constantly changing expression of complex forces” (Tyrrell quoted in Pope, 2007: 95). In line with this, Nafziger argued that the variations in sporting practices in the United States as well as the much neglected similarities between features of the European sports model and the actual characteristics of Northern American organisation of sports call into question both the reality of a North American sports model and the extent to which its features actually differ materially from those of its European sibling. Moreover, Nafziger noted that trends of globalisation and commercialisation continue on both sides of the Atlantic, accelerating a convergence of the European and North American sports model in many respects and on all levels of competition (Nafziger, 2008).

The problem, however, is that systematic comparisons of the European and American sporting configurations are hard to find, in spite of an increasing interest in this topic by politicians, journalists and scholars. There are too many monographs and articles on European and American sport to mention, but only a few authors (like Bottenburg, 2001; Halgreen, 2004; Hofmann, 2004; Markovits & Hellerman, 2001; Nafziger, 2008; Naul, 1991; Stokvis, 2009; Szymanski, 2008) have tried to describe and explain their differences and similarities on the basis of a systematic comparison from a historical, sociological, economic or law perspective. As a result, many questions concerning the social origins and implications of the differences between the American and European sporting formation and culture remain unanswered. One of the most intriguing questions in this respect is why voluntary clubs have become the organisational principle for practicing sport in big parts of Europe, whereas schools and colleges have become fundamental in the organisation of sport in the United States. Wasn't it just the emphasis on voluntary associations in America which so impressed De Tocqueville, Weber, Gramsci, and other foreign observers as one of the distinctive characteristics of the 'new' versus the 'old' world (Lipset, 1991: 20)? Following this puzzling question, other issues arise. Why did American high school and intercollegiate athletics, most of which is publicly funded, develop in the direction of a nationally oriented market model, in which a few, elite athletes perform for the benefit of paying customers, and become as such connected with personally owned, businesslike leagues; whereas the private clubs and associations in Europe in many sports and for a long time resisted against commercialisation, initiated and dominated a global network of amateur sport organisations and competitions, and became closely connected to the public sport policies in

their countries? And to what extent have these differences been challenged by broader processes that have taken place in all western societies since the Second World War, like the growth of affluence, the extension of secondary and higher education, the replacement of manual labour jobs by office-based functions, and more recently accelerated processes of globalisation, commercialisation and mediatisation? Have these trends led to convergence and reconfiguration, or are they counterbalanced by path-dependent dynamics in the sport formation and cultures on both sides of the Atlantic?

Building on monographs and articles on the European and American sports formation and culture, and a selection of systematic comparisons, this chapter aims to answer these questions and thus to explain the main differences between both sports configurations. Inspired by insights from historical sociology and historical institutionalism, the explanation will be based on three basic principles. The first is that the current differences between the European and American sporting configurations will be analyzed from a historical perspective. The sports formations and cultures in Europe and America are far from static systems. On the contrary, they have moved from and towards each other, although we do not yet understand exactly why, to what extent and with what result. Second, as each sporting configuration has developed within a specific society, the differences between the American and European sporting configurations will be analyzed by connecting the (changing) sports configuration with the (changing) societal system. And third, the differences between Europe and the United States will be explained by making use of a path-dependent analysis (Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2004).

According to Mahoney, “path dependence occurs when a contingent historical event triggers a subsequent sequence that follows a relatively deterministic pattern” (Mahoney, 2000: 535). He further suggests that a path-dependent analysis has three defining features. First, path-dependent analysis involves the study of causal processes that are highly sensitive to events that take place in the early stages of an overall historical sequence. Second, in a path-dependent sequence, early historical events are contingent occurrences – or critical junctures – that cannot be explained on the basis of prior events or ‘initial conditions’. Third, once contingent historical events take place, path-dependent sequences are marked by self-reinforcing mechanisms that reproduce a particular institutional pattern over time. Initial steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction (Mahoney, 2000). The critical junctures are characterized by the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement from among two or more alternatives. “These junctures are ‘critical’ because once a particular option is selected it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available” (Mahoney, 2000: 513). The choices

made during these critical junctures close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate enduring and self-reinforcing processes (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007).

It is important to be explicit and clear about the use and meaning of the terms 'path dependence' and 'critical junctures'. According to Mahoney, the term 'path dependence' is often used too loosely and without clear definition, only meaning that what has happened earlier will affect later sequences of events (Mahoney, 2000: 510). In the same style of argumentation, Capoccia and Kelemen argue that 'critical junctures' and their synonyms are too often treated as bookends, or a *dues ex machine*, on otherwise carefully constructed stories of institutional development. They emphasize that researchers should not stop with simply identifying a critical juncture but must instead deepen the investigation of the historical material to identify the key decisions (and the key events influencing those decisions) steering the system in one or another direction, favouring one institutional equilibrium over another (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007: 343).

The analysis of the critical junctures and path dependent sequences in the history of the organisation of sport in Europe and the United States needs to start with acknowledging that the European sport configuration is a highly differentiated one itself. In the second section, therefore, I will provisionally distinguish a few archetypical models in the organisation of sports in Europe and compare these with the model that is archetypical for the United States. In the subsequent sections, I will concentrate on the explanation of the two most fundamental differences between the European and American archetypes. The third section focuses on the critical juncture that led to diverging structuring principles of sport participation on both sides of the Atlantic: voluntary clubs in Europe (club structure) versus educational institutions in the United States (school structure). The fourth section places the critical juncture at the heart of the analysis that initiated differences in the professional sport competitions: with associations as part of globally operating federations in Europe (association structure) versus franchises affiliated to personally owned businesslike leagues in the United States (commercial structure). The third section will thus mainly focus on what is called 'grassroots sports' or 'sport for all'; the fourth section on 'professional (high performance) sports'. This will be followed by an analysis of the causal, self-reinforcing path-dependent processes initiated by these critical junctures in the fifth section, and a discussion of the impact of converging dynamics on these processes, resulting from broader social, economic and political changes in the second half of the twentieth century.

## **Archetypical models of sport**

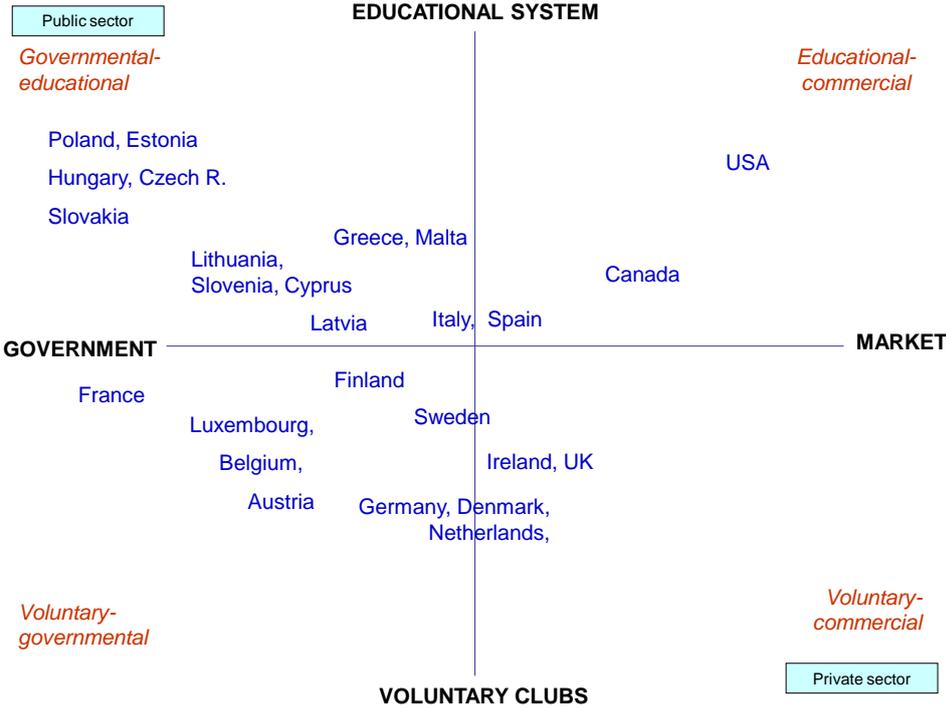
Much of the – grassroots – sport in the United States is provided by schools, colleges, universities, public parks-and-recreation recreation departments, and club-like businesses such as fitness and health centres. In addition to these sport providers, there are large multi-sport organisations that function as private not-for-profit enterprises, like the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and Jewish Community Centres. These organizations provide sport as part of their educational and social service mission. Moreover, there are also private, independent clubs in several branches of sport, spread throughout the country, especially in those sports – like handball – that have not been established in the school system, or sports like tennis and golf that are (also) played by elderly, often in quite expensive country clubs (Slack & Parent, 2008; Sparvero et al., 2008). In general terms, the list of main sport providers in Europe does not deviate from this. Here too, sport is provided by educational institutions, sport and recreation departments of local governments, commercial clubs for fitness-related activities and sports like squash, bowling, martial arts, and adventure sports (Bottenburg, Rijnen, & Sterkenburg, 2005).

The difference between the United States and Europe, however, lies in the relative importance of these providers. In the United States, an educational-commercial configuration has become predominant. This configuration is characterized by a system in which schools and colleges and commercial managed sports centres form the main organizing principle of sport participation. Voluntary clubs and public authorities have had negligible impact on this configuration compared with their European counterparts. In Europe, on the other hand, a voluntary-governmental configuration has become the principle system, with a strong position of voluntary sports clubs and associations. In many European countries, these voluntary organisations have been confronted with and supported by an increasingly active public sector, while the influence of the business community and educational system remained relatively weak; at least until the last decades of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the overall picture of the European sport model is heterogeneous, as each country and region has had its own specific national history and sport development. The tradition of voluntary sports clubs is the strongest in northern and western parts, and the weakest in eastern parts of Europe. In the last decades, also commercially managed sports centres have come up as main providers of sport participation, especially in north western European countries, like Sweden, Denmark, UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, and in southern European countries, like Spain and Italy. In countries like Luxembourg, France, Austria and Finland, the strong position of voluntary sports clubs goes hand in hand with a weaker position of commercially managed sports

centres but also a more active role of public authorities. Finland scores the highest in sports participation and physical activities in Europe, and seems to be characterised quite a-typically by a strong missionary state, a high level of informal sport participation and a lower level of sport participation in sports and health clubs. Even more a-typical are the eastern European countries. Here, a relatively weak (though strengthening) position of both sport clubs and commercially managed sports centres goes hand in hand with a relatively strong (though diminishing) presence and role of public authorities. With all kinds of differences between these countries, this governmental-educational configuration predominates in Poland, Estonia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Cyprus. In these countries, the sports participation structures still show the marks of their long term dependence on the state regulated and financed educational system (schools and universities), although new commercial and voluntary structures are rising.<sup>i</sup>

Figure 1. Archetypes of sport organisational models in Europe and North America



## **Club versus school structures**

The contrasts between the dominant configurations in Europe and the United States are all the more intriguing if one realizes that in its early stages, modern sports were organized in clubs in both Europe and the United States. In line with the quickly spreading voluntary associations in the English-speaking world in other fields of social activity, like politics, religion, art, music and trade, the club became the basic organisational unit of modern sport on both sides of the Atlantic. The creation of clubs was an expression of the right of individuals to associate freely without the interference or oversight of the state (Szymanski, 2008). Moreover, it was quite a simple process. Groups of boys, young men, or adults just followed democratic procedures that governed voluntary associations. They choose a name, wrote and ratified a constitution and bylaws, listed the financial and personal obligations of each member, and searched for a playing ground (for example, see for Europe: Holt, 1981, 1989; and for the US: Kirsch, 1989).

The associative model was more or less adopted from the English, who dictated the development of modern sports in its earliest decades both on the European Continent and in the United States. However, between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century the American sport formation and culture developed along an entirely different path than it did in Europe (Guttmann, 1988; Mandell, 1984; Markovits & Hellerman, 2001; Rader, 1983). This was made possible because the United States underwent a fairly autonomous modernization process, surpassing the European countries in several respects by the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the inhabitants were European immigrants or their descendants, but especially after the Civil War, they emphasized their independence and cultivated their national traits. As the United States became a key player on the world stage, its citizens' early admiration of English culture was replaced by self-confidence in the country's own achievements. In line with this, they took the liberty of reinterpreting the English sports culture. The products were new sports, like baseball, football and basketball, which they were proud to call American (Bottenburg, 2001; Kirsch, 1989).

The development of a deviating principle for the organisation and regulation of these sports, was yet another expression of this. The initial process of club formation in the field of sport by young men was stimulated unintentionally in Europe and the United States by the rise of secondary and higher education in the second half of the nineteenth century. Being brought together in schools or colleges, they started all kind of activities in self-organized debating societies, fraternities and sororities, and also athletic organizations. Initially, in both the United States and most European countries, this process of club formation by young students took place independent of the school programmes. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the club-based sport

competitions increasingly met opposition from school authorities. They criticized the sports rage of their students for absorbing student interest at the expense of their study, and causing problems like injuries and unruly behaviour. Nonetheless, the school authorities in Europe did not try to gain control of the club-based sport participation of their students, nor did they – or only slowly and partly – allow the students to organize sports in the contexts of their schools (Stokvis, 2009). Conversely, in the United States, educators across the country tried to increase their authority over the students' sport activities. This led to the development of the comprehensive high schools, which supplanted the academic-oriented high school between 1890 and 1920. In these comprehensive high schools, special attention was given to the participation of pupils in common extra-curricular activities such as sports, social activities and the government of the school (Rader, 1983).

These contingent events in Europe and the United States took place in a relevant short period but would trigger path-dependent processes that constrained future choices and thus produced distinct legacies. In the United States, the organisation of sport became included in the extra-curricular programmes of the educational institutions, whereas clubs and schools remained separated in most European countries. Before discussing the self-reinforcing path-dependent processes that resulted from this critical juncture (see section 4), I will go more deeply into the key factors that steered the system in one or the other direction. In a recent publication, the Dutch sociologist Stokvis has attempted to provide an explanation for the watershed in the history of the organisation of sport on both sides of the Atlantic (Stokvis, 2009). In this article, Stokvis refers to four intermingling factors. The first factor is that American high schools in the first decades of the twentieth century were increasingly comprised of more heterogeneous groups of students than secondary schools in many European countries. The United States developed a concept of education that emphasized the inclusion of large numbers on all levels. Secondary schools in European countries were, on the other hand, often split up and organized according to intellectual performances, social background and – in some countries – religion. Here, higher education remained the preserve of a privileged few until the education explosion of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). The increasingly heterogeneous composition of the student population at American high schools stimulated a reform of the classical curriculum, with special attention being paid to extracurricular activities. This change was strongly supported by middle-income parents, who did not see high schools as academic institutions designed to prepare students for entrance into colleges, but wanted their sons to develop social poise required of white-collar occupations (Stokvis, 2009).

This parental support for school reform with extracurricular sport activities under adult control is related to a second factor that distinguished the American from the European situation. As

Stokvis observed in an earlier publication (Stokvis, 1989: 91), parents of students in the United States have always had a greater say in school policy than in Europe, where the school curriculum has been brought under more control of central governments. This parental participation in school governance created stronger ties between the educational institutions and the local communities in the United States than in Europe, enhancing the development of community activities, like sport competitions, within high schools and colleges. Contrary to this situation, students in Europe turned – and still turn – their back on the schools after school time, to practice sport or play music in autonomous clubs. Wilson strengthens this argument by adding that American high schools, much more than their European counterparts, are governed locally, on a township, county, or school district basis. The supreme authority at the grassroots level is the school board. These boards are typically filled by elections and not won by those interested in the intellect but by ‘practical men’ with a business background. Most of them are males who favour both material symbols of education and sport competitions. Schools and universities in Europe, on the other hand, devote themselves mainly to education, including physical education, while private clubs provide opportunities to practise and watch sports at all levels (Wilson, 1994).

Moreover, the sport programmes had and still have an important additional function. That is a third factor: educational leaders recognized that interscholastic athletics could be used in solving the problem of giving a common identity to this heterogeneous mass of students, with all its potential class and ethnic conflicts. Markovits and Hellerman emphasize that:

“As in the case of major European soccer clubs with their clear identities, milieus, and networks, the football and basketball teams of American universities became essential representatives of the identity and culture of their respective regions, states, cities and towns. On the European continent, sports never entered the realm of the universities, since these were seen as research institutions, training grounds for state bureaucrats, or domains of the church. In all three cases, they remained strictly in the realm of the mind and had little, if any, tolerance for pursuits of the body” (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001: 43).

Apart from interscholastic athletics, the public high schools had no common goals that could inspire the allegiance of the student population as a whole. Varsity sport, including the various accompanying ceremonies, however, could create a positive attitude towards the school and enhance the identification of the community with the school (Stokvis, 2009; Wilson, 1994). As Rader observed, the results of this could and can be seen in the salaries and facilities, for school boards typically pay the coach more than any other teacher and invariably place a higher priority on the construction of a gymnasium or a football field than a laboratory or a library (Rader, 1983: 163). Everywhere in the United States, high schools and colleges appointed professional coaches who

developed coaching and managerial rather than pedagogical skills. This professionalisation of coaching reinforced the control of the college administration over the sports participation of the students (Wilson, 1994).

In addition to the more homogeneous student population, the educational ethos and the stronger governmental control of the school curriculum in many European countries, Stokvis points to another decisive difference between both sides of the Atlantic that hindered the introduction of extramural sport programmes in European schools. That is: the opposition of physical education teachers against modern English sports in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century, these physical education teachers had successfully propagated gymnastics. In many European countries, gymnastics was included in the school curriculum as a means to improve discipline and strengthen the nation. When modern sports were introduced a few decades later, these sports could meet with strong opposition from physical educationalists. The practice of sports outside schools or in extracurricular programmes could undermine the status of gymnastics. Moreover, the propagandists of gymnastics argued that sports without proper supervision would produce fanaticism, to the detriment of homework and students' futures. In their pleas for gymnastics and opposition against modern sports, the physical education teachers addressed – and were backed by – the central government; not the least in countries which were confronted with escalating political tensions or military confrontations. As mentioned before, European states controlled the school curriculum in their countries more than the federal or state government in the United States. As a result, the playing of sport remained separated from gymnastics and thus exceptional at schools in many European countries. Instead, sport was confined to private clubs; at least until far into the twentieth century (Naul, 1991; Pfister, 2006; Riordan & Krüger, 2003; Szymanski, 2008). Physical educators in the United States, on the other hand, did not intend to eliminate interscholastic sports. Their goal was to position physical education as their foundation. However, they did not succeed in this and were to discover that athletic competitions had moved irresistibly into the programs of physical education (Wilson, 1994).

### **Association versus commercial structures**

As Holt rightly argues in his seminal *Sport and the British*, it was not the provision of sport for profit that was remarkable in the nineteenth and twentieth century, but the degree to which commercial forces were excluded from sport (Holt, 1989: 281). Modern sports evolved out of traditional pastimes that had a long tradition of prizes in cash or in kind, but this tradition was interrupted by an era of amateurism, which lasted from the second half of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century (Stokvis, 2003).

The amateur rule originated in England as a means of class distinction and class exclusivity. It was rooted in a combination of increased social tension in mid-Victorian England and the growing popularity of sport among the working classes in this period (Holt, 1989: 108). With the spread of English sports to the European continent this amateur rule was more or less enforced in many sports and countries. Because athletes from outside England were only allowed to compete with the English if they could demonstrate that they did not play for pay, their national governing bodies had to guarantee their amateur status. The English could demand this from athletes abroad because England enjoyed such a lead over other countries in most sports that these foreign athletes were honoured and keen to compete with the English. In some spectator sports, like (association) football, cricket, boxing, horseracing, cycling, tennis and golf, professionalism was accepted, but only as part of the international sport system that was governed by middle-class amateurs in national and international amateur associations. As such, in many European nations – and indeed elsewhere in the world – professional leagues and competitions developed into a kind of non-profit-making cartels which remained under the auspices of their national amateur governing bodies (Holt, 1989: 285). However, not so in the United States. Although amateur sports emerged here too after the Civil War, the American sports world came to diverge from the European with the creation of competing personally owned commercial leagues. These leagues came to operate quite independently of the rest of the global sporting system.

At least four factors led to this critical juncture. First, it is generally held by scholars that the distinction between professional and amateur proved to be less tenable in the United States than in Europe because of differences in the class structure (Guttman, 1988; Mandell, 1984; Rader, 1983). According to Mandell, sports business, sports spectatorship and sports heroes were smoothly integrated in the new society, which was “equalitarian, literate, accomplishment oriented, optimistic, materialistic, relatively traditionless and geographically dispersed” (Mandell, 1984: 192). In nineteenth century England, with its more rigid class structure, boundaries between classes were crossed with the greatest difficulty. Sports were one of the many status markers in this class conflict. In the United States, class sensitivities were not as keen, thus creating more freedom to transcend class boundaries in sport (Wilson, 1994: 70).

Second, Americans were not or hardly involved in the foundation of international governing bodies in sports like (association) football, athletics, tennis, (field) hockey, swimming, and gymnastics. Contrary to the European sport history, they produced new sports of American origin, like baseball, football, and basketball, that came to dominate the national sports scene. In these sports, several local and regional leagues developed which were hardly influenced by English or international sporting governing bodies (Bottenburg, 2001). On the European continent, many

English sports were adopted at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period, there was greater interdependency between these nations than ever before. In the light of their diverging languages and cultures, this urged for international regulation and standardization in many fields. In the sports field this led to the foundation of authoritative international organizations with a variety of regulatory functions, preventing or discouraging initiatives by other organizations to start competing, commercial leagues (Stokvis, 1989). The American sports world, however, developed in relative geographic and cultural isolation from this process of organization, regulation and standardization in the 'Old World', giving far more room for all kinds of commercial initiatives to establish closed professional leagues under profit-oriented managerial control, especially in the American sports (Mandell, 1984; Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). The commercial and professional sport competitions in Europe thus became far more international in scope than those in the United States (Wilson, 1994).<sup>ii</sup>

A third factor is that, as I argued in the previous section, the educational institutions became the main organizers of play in the United States, whereas the voluntary associations came to dominate as such in Europe. Soon after the introduction of intercollegiate sports, groups of colleges formed committees to regulate this competition. This gave rise to several conferences, all over the country, rearranging the structure of college sports away from a hierarchical, single-sport arrangement, which was dominant in the international sporting system, to a horizontal many-sport arrangement. The constitution of the international sport federations provided that in each country, a single organization in each sport should exercise control over the national competition. In the United States, however, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), formed in 1910, refused to work within these international rules and isolated itself from the international – and Olympic – sports movement (Wilson, 1994).

Fourthly, in this college setting, the Americans imposed upon amateurism their own particular interpretation, quite unlike that found in the club tradition in the United States or amateur sports in England.

“As early as the 1870s, college teams were competing against each other for both cash and noncash (...) prizes, competing against professionals, charging money at the gate, (...) spending heavily on recruitment and support of athletes, and hiring professional coaches. (...) Yet because they tied sports to college attendance, they could use the expansion of higher education as a basis for the argument that their version of amateurism was more democratic and open than were the private, voluntary efforts of club sports” (Wilson, 1994: 71).

As such, high school and intercollegiate athletics, most of which were publicly funded, developed in the direction of a market model. Interestingly, the team and league owners were careful not to compete with the college teams for playing talent. They agreed not to raid colleges for talented players until their eligibility as defined by the NCAA had expired. At the same time, this agreement allowed and enabled professional leagues to connect themselves to the intercollegiate leagues as their farm system where talents are nurtured (Wilson, 1994). In Europe, the nurturing of talents is one of the functions of local sports clubs. These clubs are connected to national and international governing bodies that organize local, regional, national and international (open) competitions for different age groups and have developed selection procedures and systems of promotion and relegation. The American system of personally-owned commercial (closed) leagues lacked this system. As alternatives, they have allied themselves to intercollegiate competitions and started minor leagues.

### **Self-reinforcing sequences on both sides of the Atlantic**

The examined critical junctures had diverging consequences for the further development of the American and European sporting formation and cultures. In the United States, each school, college and university developed an athletic department, created sports facilities and venues, and became culturally interpreted as the setting for sports activities. In big parts of Europe, on the other hand, it was principally the voluntary club where the sports provision could be found, where the expertise to organize sports competitions was developed, and where parents got to think of if they wanted their children to play whatever sport they liked.

When the rising level of education and prosperity in the western world led to an explosive growth in sport participation, this was absorbed in the school system in the United States and in the club system in Europe. It were these institutional arrangements that offered the most and best sport facilities, coaches and competitions. It were the schools and colleges in the United States and the sport clubs in Europe that became thought of as the normal, logical and 'natural' settings for organizing and practicing sport. As more and more investments were made and more and more expertise was concentrated in one of these systems, it became progressively difficult to return to the initial point where both alternative institutional arrangements still could be put forward as an equivalent option, and to transform the dominant pattern. Once adopted, the school system in the United States and the club system in Europe delivered increasing benefits with its continuation and thus led to dramatically different paths in the history of sport. As these processes progressed, they induced mechanisms that reproduced their institutional pattern over time (Mahoney, 2000).

Another self-reinforcing sequence was that the American system got more elite sport oriented and the European system more directed towards sport for all. Sports practiced at the American high schools, colleges and universities became highly competitive and achievement-oriented. Interscholastic sports grew into an institution governed not by the participants themselves, but by faculties, administrations, and alumni, who primarily focused on the function that sport can have for the prestige of their schools and colleges and the identification with the school by students and the local communities (Guttmann, 1988; Stokvis, 2009). The coaches and athletic directors modelled their programmes on professional or high-level elite sport, with an emphasis on winning and the higher-profile sports. Their goal became to be ranked rather than to respond to the needs of all students in their schools (Slack & Parent, 2008). As Wilson points out: “coaches were rarely trained in physical education, athletic facilities were not designed for mass participation, and interscholastic contests were confined to a few sports with no recognized carryover value into adult years” (Wilson, 1994: 289). Varsity athletes – i.e. the most talented and competitive students – came to enjoy institutional support through provision of facilities, coaching, trainers, and the costs of attending competitions, while less talented students had the opportunity to participate in ‘club’ sports, but these were not or less well supported and regulated by the athletics departments of the educational institutions (Sparvero et al., 2008).

In western European countries, on the other hand, the dominant trend in the second half of the twentieth century was to facilitate ‘sport for all’ and to open the sporting clubs to everyone. This was partly the result of increased governmental interference in the field of sport. In response to the growing number of sports participants, governments more and more subsidized clubs in western European countries for the construction of sporting facilities and the training and coaching of youngsters. For the clubs, however, this governmental support also resulted in an increased pressure by government authorities to open their doors for everyone, put less emphasis on competition and achievement sport and create more possibilities for recreational sports participation. This was clearly linked to the welfare policy principles of the 1960s and 1970s in western European ‘welfare states’ (Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Nodland, & Rommetvedt, 2007; Houlihan & White, 2002). In Eastern Europe, the authorities also encouraged sport after the Second World War, but this policy change was driven primarily by their wish to gain international fame and bind people more firmly to companions, unions, and the party. State support in eastern European countries targeted first-class athletes whose achievements would boost the country’s international prestige, emphasizing the amateur sports that had been integrated in the Olympic programme. Like the sporting culture in the United States, sport in Eastern Europe became highly achievement oriented, focussing on a specific group of sports and creating particular sport academies to prepare young talented athletes for

international sporting competition (see for example Girginov & Sandanski, 2004; Hoberman, 1993). This was, however, the product of a state supported and proclaimed sport, whereas sport development in the United States is an example of a *laissez faire* system. Here, the responsibility for providing sport opportunities is taken over by, often publicly funded and managed, educational institutions; and to a lesser extent to local governments and quasi-public voluntary agencies (Wilson, 1994).

Related to the process just mentioned, sports in the United States became dominated – also at the school and university level – by a spectator- or audience-centred perspective, whereas – at least at the club level – a player or participant-centred approach prevailed in Europe (Stokvis, 2003). As a result of the audience-centred perspective in the United States, only a limited number of sports are included in the high school and college athletic programmes. Which sport varies from school to school, but in general one can say that those sports which attract the most public attention are widely included; that means: the most commercialized (and professionalized) sports (football, basketball, baseball, and tennis); and the most appealing Olympic sports (track and field, swimming, gymnastics); while sports like hockey, rowing, soccer, volleyball, wrestling are well covered in most but not all regions. Most other sports, however, are rarely, if ever found in the high school and college sport systems (canoeing, shooting, handball, skiing, etc.). As a result of this, athletes are typically channelled into sports for which there are opportunities to compete in school (Sparvero et al., 2008).

Both critical junctures in the organization of sport therefore not only reserved many sport opportunities to those attending schools and colleges, it also had a powerful effect on the kind of sport experience they have (Wilson, 1994). It is true that Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 has secured or improved the position of some women's sports, but this has been accompanied by the elimination of some 'minor' Olympic sports for men in order to obtain percentages of participation that appear equal for both sexes. Moreover, the American sport system also implies that sport participation has traditionally peaked during childhood and adolescence. The forty-year-old, unfit and unhealthy alum, watching sport on television, with beer and chips within hand reach, is a well known American stereotype. Public money for sport facilities is mainly channelled through schools and universities. Adults who are beyond their school and college years are therefore not served as well as the young. The school sport programs concentrate on the biggest team sports that students in their later life seldom play and offer athletic facilities that are only open to their students; with the private enterprise being expected to fill the gaps in sport provision (Sparvero et al., 2008: 243-250).

The western European club system is less based on spectators and viewers than on participants. In general, the club facilities are created by or with financial support of the government, generally based on the needs of the sport participants with the number of club members as main indicator. Children and adolescents are overrepresented in the European club system – just like white males and higher income groups – but in countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Ireland, England, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Austria, Spain and Italy, the clubs represent ten to thirty percent of the entire population, including many people in their thirties, forties, fifties and even hardy types in their sixties and seventies (Bottenburg et al., 2005). While Americans usually abandon serious participation in sports after graduation from high school or college, many sport participants in Europe continue their membership of a sporting club when they are over twenty.

A further diverging institutional outcome that derives from these critical junctures and the subsequent processes of self-reproduction and path dependency, is the contrast between the nationally oriented closed leagues of American professional sports versus the internationally oriented open competitions in European professional sports. Sport clubs in Europe founded regional, national and international federations, and organized a pyramid structure on the basis of a system of promotion and relegation, of which the professional top level became a part in most sports. In contrast to this, baseball, basketball, football, and other sports that got commercialized in the United States, were organized and professionalized quite independently of the rest of the global sporting system. Being developed relatively autonomous from the ‘processes of sportization’ that took place in the internationally interwoven European sports world (Bottenburg, 2001; Elias & Dunning, 1986), the Americans did not feel any pressure to formulate the rules of their sports and sport competitions in an international federation of national sport associations, nor were they compelled to bring their rules into line with what was regarded as the ‘international standard’. First in baseball, and later in other American sports as well, an alternative competition model evolved (Szymanski, 2008). Professional leagues became joint ventures of constituent teams. Operating as franchises these teams collaborate outside the sporting field in order to promote their mutual economic interests. As such they have formed a closed system – like the National Football League – in which entry of teams is not managed by a system of promotion, relegation and qualification – as is the case in the Champions League - but by cooptation (Nafziger, 2008). As the reputation and interests of the professional leagues on both sides of the Atlantic increased, it became more and more prestigious and profitable for the teams and clubs to function within their system and remain loyal to it. Although commercialization processes put pressure on the open European system and globalization processes challenge the closed American system, resignation from the European (international)

leagues or opening up the American (national) leagues is (still) seen as a too risky enterprise. Both systems have become caught in their competition structures and governance models, which only seems to be overcome by a new critical juncture.

Further processes of commercialization and globalization may lead to such a transformation. They create converging dynamics that intermingle with the diverging trends (Nafziger, 2008). A principle example of this in the sport participation sphere is the popularization of fitness, running, and so-called 'alternative' sports, like skating, climbing, surfing, and snowboarding. These sports have caught on in both Europe and the United States and have neither been organized in the school system nor in the club system. On both sides of the Atlantic, they have been practiced in different organizational frameworks or no organizational context at all; challenging the existing school sport and club sport structures. The 'alternative' sports were developed in the context of new commercial relationships and on the street. They mainly got popular among young people, for whom these sports expressed a more freely, individual, egalitarian, and pleasurable attitude, and gave the impression of being not or less controlled by adults. Fitness, aerobics and running got popular among people who are a generation older than the average sport participant at an American school or in a European club. These sports are mainly practiced to keep healthy and manage the body; motives that are radically different from the social and sporting reasons for competing in varsity or club sports (Stokvis & Hilvoorde, 2008). The popularization of these 'new' sports thus led to extensions of the existing school- and club-based sport cultures in the United States and Europe. This convergence in their sporting formation and culture, therefore, does not occur because one of both institutional patterns displaces the other and is getting dominant on both sides of the Atlantic, but because of the emergence of new sporting arrangements.

## Conclusions

Although we should not overlook significant variations within the European and American sporting configurations, nor their similarities, we can conclude that there are indeed fundamental differences between both models. The two most fundamental differences are their organizational arrangements with respect to sport participation (the club versus the school model) and to professional sport competition (open versus closed leagues). Rather than interpreting these differences from the perspective of American exceptionalism, they are analysed in this chapter as 'changing expressions of complex forces' .

These forces are explained here by looking back in history for contingent occurrences – critical junctures – that have produced one of both institutional arrangements, and that have induced self-reinforcing path-dependent mechanisms. As comes to the fore from this analysis, the critical junctures that led to the split in the organisation of sport participation and professional sport competitions can be understood by analyzing broader societal differences and specific differences in the school system (student population composition, educational ethos, government control) and the international orientation of the early governing sport bodies.

The processes that were responsible for the genesis and split of the European and American model were different from the processes responsible for their reproduction (Mahoney, 2000: 512). Once the school model had become dominant in the United States and the club model in Europe, they triggered other self-reinforcing path-dependent processes which enforced the cultural preferences and financial benefits of the produced model and marginalized the advantages of adopting an alternative institutional arrangement.

However, the analysis also indicates that the existence of these self-reinforcing mechanisms does not imply an ever-widening divergence of both sporting configurations. General processes of commercialization and globalization produce converging dynamics that intermingle with the diverging trends, creating dynamic tensions between local, national, and continental sporting configurations in the 21st century, and the possibility of new critical junctures that change the course of sport history.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Figure 1 is an adaptation of a typology of national sports systems in the European Union developed by Camy et al. (Vocasport 2004) in a study supported by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture, Contract no. 2003-4463/001-001). Their typology was based on four parameters: the role of public authorities in the regulation of the system (particularly the state); the degree and form of coordination of the various actors involved in the national sport system; the distribution between the three types of providers: public, voluntary or commercial; and the suitability of the supply to the changes in demands. On the basis of these parameters, four types of configurations in Europe were identified: a bureaucratic configuration, characterised by the very active role that public authorities take in regulating the sport system (Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain); a missionary configuration, characterised by the dominant presence of a voluntary sports movement with great autonomy to make decisions (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden); a entrepreneurial configuration, characterised by the regulation of the system arising from the social or economic demand for sport (Ireland, UK); and a social configuration, characterised by the presence of the social partners within a multi-faced system (the Netherlands). As the stress on the presence of social partners in the ‘social configuration’ indicates, this model was developed in the context of a study on the labour market, i.e. the vocational education and training, in the field of sport.

Figure 1 in this chapter elaborates on this typology, but refers to the types of providers of sports participation (voluntary sports clubs, commercially managed sports centres, PE in primary and secondary schools) and the presence and influence of public authorities in this respect. The figure is based on an analysis of comparable empirical data on five parameters: sport participation in general (for which Eurobarometer 62.0 has been used), sport participation in clubs (European Social Survey and Eurobarometer 62.0), sport participation in the health club industry (IHRSA 2006), PE in primary and secondary education (Hardman 2008) and the role of the state in the sport systems of the EU member states (Vocasport 2004). The main results of this analysis are summarised below (table 1). Unfortunately, comparable data for other European as well as North American countries are lacking. The typology of the United States and Canada in figure 1 is based on secondary literature ((Bottenburg, 2001; Markovits & Hellerman, 2001; Nafziger, 2008; Stokvis, 2009; Wilson, 1994).

Further research is needed to refine and extend this international comparison and validate this typology. Ideally, this should also include a parameter for the role of the state, market, educational institutions and voluntary organisations with respect to the organisation of elite sports. Here, the typology used in figure 1 serves mainly as an illustration of (1) the differences between the educational-commercial configuration in northern American countries and the voluntary-governmental configuration in northern and western European countries; and (2) the differences within Europe, contrasting a voluntary-governmental configuration in most northern and western European countries and an educational-governmental configuration in several eastern and southern European countries.

Table 1: Level of sport participation, club membership, fitness penetration and governmental interference in 25 member states of the European Union

	Active or very active in sport and exercise	% member of sport club	% sport clubs as preferred provider for exercising	Fitness penetration rate	Minimum time allocation for PE in primary and secondary schools	Governmental interference
Finland	++++	+++	++	++	++	+++
Sweden	++++	++++	+	++++	++	+
Denmark	++++	++++	++++	+++	++	+

Ireland	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+
UK	+++	++++	++	+++++	+	+
Netherlands	+++	++++	++++	+++++	++	++
Germany	++	++++	+++	++++	+++	+
Belgium	+++	++++	+++	+	+++	++
Luxembourg	++	+++	+++	n.a.	++++	++
France	+++	n.a.	+++	++	++++	++++
Austria	++	+++	+++	++	++	+
Portugal	+	++	++	+	++++	++++
Spain	++	+++	++	++++	+++	++
Italy	+	+++	++	+++	+++	++
Greece	+	+	++	++	+++	+++
Malta	++	n.a.	+	n.a.	+++	++++
Cyprus	++	n.a.	+	n.a.	+	++++
Slovenia	++	+++	+	+	++	++++
Czech Republic	+	n.a.	++	+	+++	++++
Slovakia	+	n.a.	++	+	++	++++
Estonia	+	n.a.	++	+	++++	++++
Latvia	+	n.a.	+++	+	++	++++
Lithuania	+	n.a.	+	+	+	++++
Hungary	+	++	+	+	+++	++++
Poland	+	+	+	+	++++	++++
<i>Criteria:</i>	++++ > 60%  +++ = 50-60%  ++ = 50-60%  + = >60 %	++++ > 20%  +++ = 10-20%  ++ = 5-10%  + < 5%	++++ = >24%  +++ = 16-23%  ++ = 8-15%  + < 8%	++++ = >10%  +++ = 7,5-10%  ++ = 5-7,5%  + <5%	++++ 224-271 minutes per week  +++ 176-223 minutes per week  ++128-175 minutes per week  + = 80-127 minutes per week	++++=dominant public agencies  +++=very significant role of public agencies  ++=fairly significant role of public agencies  +=relatively low contribution of public agencies

Sources:	<i>(Commission, 2004; Scheerder &amp; van Tuyckom, 2007, p. 133)</i>	<i>(Surveys, 2002)</i>	<i>(Commission, 2004; Groll, Koopmann, &amp; Hänsch, 2008, p. 78)</i>	<i>(IHRSA, 2006)</i>	<i>(Hardman, 2008)</i>	<i>(Vocasport, 2004)</i>
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<sup>ii</sup> Commercial sport enterprises (chiefly baseball in the late nineteenth century, but also boxing, basketball and football in the twentieth century) often remained small-scale and highly competitive. “Teams and leagues came and went almost overnight” (Wilson, 1994, p. 126).