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# The place for social analysis in the press coverage of sports : a comparison of sports newspapers and general press in Italy's media ecosystem

Rosarita Cuccoli

## To cite this version:

Rosarita Cuccoli. The place for social analysis in the press coverage of sports : a comparison of sports newspapers and general press in Italy's media ecosystem. Sociology. Université de Rennes, 2020. English. NNT : 2020REN1G001 . tel-03144034

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UNIVERSITÉ DE RENNES 1

# THESE DE DOCTORAT DE

L'UNIVERSITE DE RENNES 1

ECOLE DOCTORALE N° 599
*Droit et Science Politique*
Spécialité : Science Politique

Par

**Rosarita CUCCOLI**

## The place for social analysis in the press coverage of sports

A comparison of sports newspapers and general press in Italy's media ecosystem

**Thèse présentée et soutenue à Rennes, le 23 novembre 2020**
**Unité de recherche : Arènes - UMR 6051**

**Rapporteurs avant soutenance :**

| | |
|---|---|
| Dominique MARCHETTI | Directeur de recherche CNRS, Centre Européen de Sociologie et de Science Politique de l'Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, et du CNRS |
| Thierry ZINTZ | Titulaire de la Chaire Olympique Henri de Baillet Latour & Jacques Rogge en Management des Organisations Sportives, Université Catholique de Louvain |

**Composition du Jury :**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Président : | Dominique MARCHETTI | Directeur de recherche CNRS, Centre Européen de Sociologie et de Science Politique de l'Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, et du CNRS |
| Examinateurs : | Jean-François POLO | Maître de conférences en Science politique, Institut d'Études Politiques de Rennes |
| | Franca RONCAROLO | Directrice du Département Cultures, Politique et Société, Université de Turin |
| | Eugénie SAITTA | Maîtresse de conférences, IUT Rennes – Université de Rennes 1 |
| | Thierry ZINTZ | Titulaire de la Chaire Olympique Henri de Baillet Latour & Jacques Rogge en Management des Organisations Sportives, Université Catholique de Louvain |
| Dir. de thèse : | Erik NEVEU | Professeur émérite de Science politique, Institut d'Études Politiques de Rennes |

# Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Erik Neveu for granting me the honour and privilege of being my academic supervisor for this thesis. While advising my work and making me benefit from his knowledge and experience, he has always shown trust in me, respected my choices and ultimately allowed me to write my own thesis, as opposed to an extension of his ideas. Our exchanges all along the thesis process have reminded me, if ever proof was needed, that greatness comes with kindness.

The very first job I could think of after completing secondary school, even before starting university, was being a sports journalist. Life took me elsewhere but sports and journalism were always part of my personal and professional trajectory, one way or another. Sometimes it "just" meant being a passionate fan and enjoying memorable days at the Roland-Garros in Paris, or at the Stadio Dall'Ara in Bologna to follow my favourite football team (Bologna F.C., of course). Other times, it was about learning to play tennis in Bologna, as an adolescent, from Évelyne Terras Papale, the French tennis champion, then a naturalised Italian citizen, who won trophies under both flags – which made me feel proud and joyful. Sports and journalism only merged into my profession in recent times, a little more than ten years ago, and finally through this thesis, which I enjoyed writing from the early days, when it was a shy one-pager, to the final days of the process – largely thanks to Professor Neveu.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Dominique Marchetti, Jean-François Polo, Franca Roncarolo, Eugénie Saitta and Thierry Zintz, who accepted to participate in the thesis examination committee. They accepted right away, in the middle of the summer and during the coronavirus pandemic, and this will not be forgotten.

In practical terms, this doctoral project would have hardly materialised without the help of Marylène Bercegeay, the coordinator of Arènes – the joint research unit affiliated with the French National Research Council (CNRS), the University of Rennes 1, Sciences Po Rennes and the French School of Public Health (EHESP) – of which I am a member.

Marylène was a constant, reliable and reassuring presence all through the administrative process leading to the degree.

I would also like to acknowledge all the scholars and experts whom I have cited in this thesis as well as those whom I have not mentioned. The journey of knowledge is only made possible by those who preceded us.

To conclude, I would like to thank my family, in Italy and the United States, for their ongoing and unconditional support. Knowing that I am and always shall be a student, they keep treating me as if I were forever young.

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# French abstract / Résumé en français


## *Le contexte*

Le sport bénéficie aujourd'hui d'une couverture médiatique massive et la relation sport-média peut être qualifiée, plus que jamais, de symbiotique. Bien que l'étendue du sport médiatique permette de présenter, en principe, une multiplicité de sujets et d'angles d'analyse, la couverture médiatique des sports a tendance, en réalité, à se concentrer sur un éventail relativement limité de sujets (les athlètes les mieux payés, les sports les plus lucratifs, les évènements d'envergure internationale, etc.) lorsqu'on le compare à la portée réelle du sport et à la variété des questions liées au sport qui méritent d'être abordées. L'analyse s'intéresse en particulier à la couverture des sports dans les journaux.

## *Problématique / question principale*

La thèse vise à identifier si la couverture médiatique des sports reflète ou non l'ampleur du phénomène sportif, et notamment à examiner la place de l'analyse sociale, ou "dimension sociale", dans la couverture des sports par la presse. La notion de "dimension sociale" aux fins de l'analyse a été développée et conceptualisée au cours de la thèse.

## *Sous-questions de recherche (QR)*

**QR1**: Dans quelle mesure l'analyse sociale du sport est-elle pertinente pour les journaux, ou même pour le journalisme sportif au sens large? La presse quotidienne est présumée devoir plutôt se consacrer aux questions de stricte actualité. De plus, l'idée selon laquelle le journalisme sportif devrait rendre compte non seulement des compétitions et de la performance des athlètes, mais aussi de ce qui est lié au sport dans un cadre plus ample (questions de sport et santé, sport et éducation, sport et handicap, bénévolat dans le sport,

etc.), moins controversée aujourd'hui qu'elle ne l'était il y a quelques décennies, ne fais toujours pas consensus.

**QR2**: Existe-t-il des différences significatives, dans la couverture de la dimension sociale du sport, entre la presse généraliste et la presse sportive? La presse italienne a été utilisée comme étude de cas pour cette analyse comparative.

**QR3**: Est-il réaliste d'envisager que les journaux du 21e siècle s'occupent de façon systématique de la dimension sociale du sport? La thèse porte sur les médias traditionnels, qui répondent aussi à des impératifs commerciaux, et qui sont confrontés à la crise dans un écosystème médiatique de plus en plus compétitif.

## *Objectifs de la thèse*

Le présent travail de recherche vise trois séries d'objectifs:

I) Au niveau théorique — Définir la composante sociologisante de la couverture médiatique du sport dans son ensemble tout en conceptualisant cet aspect.
La tâche s'avère particulièrement complexe. Examiner un seul sujet socialement pertinent du sport médiatique aurait été plus simple, et certainement plus facile à justifier. Malgré les difficultés que cela pouvait bien engendrer, la prise en compte de la composante sociologisante dans son ensemble a permis de mettre en évidence le large éventail des questions liées au sport et socialement pertinentes dont la presse pourrait s'occuper.

II) Au niveau empirique — Sensibiliser les journalistes quant à leur pouvoir et à leur "responsabilité positive" dans la promotion des valeurs du sport.
Le nombre d'articles dans les quotidiens traitant du sport dans un cadre d'analyse plus large a certainement augmenté au cours des dernières décennies, en lien avec une industrie du sport en plein essor qui est également devenue de plus en plus envahissante dans nos sociétés. Néanmoins, le nombre d'articles de ce type demeure très limité, et les

thématiques abordées, lorsque ces articles traitent d'un cadre élargi, concernent principalement les aspects économiques et financiers du sport (transferts de joueurs, sponsoring, etc.), tandis que la couverture des aspects sociaux demeure tout à fait marginale. Il n'est pas question dans cette thèse de pointer du doigt les journalistes parce qu'"ils ne font pas bien leur travail", ni de préconiser une presse sportive qui se transforme en débat sociologique, mais plutôt de mettre l'accent sur le potentiel positif (d'où la notion de responsabilité positive) d'une couverture plus conséquente de la dimension sociale du sport.

III) Au niveau des médias en tant qu'industrie — Identifier les bénéfices ainsi que les limites inhérentes à une couverture plus conséquente et systématique des aspects sociaux du sport.

En tant qu'industrie, les médias, et donc les journaux, ont un impératif de revenus afin de pouvoir soutenir leurs activités. Les chiffres de la diffusion des journaux sont parfois accablants, comme signalé dans la thèse. Examiner les sujets dont la presse s'occupe et/ou devrait s'occuper sans tenir compte de cette conjoncture difficile reviendrait à prêcher dans le désert. C'est pourquoi la thèse illustre, en plus de l'intérêt de la démarche d'un point de vue éditorial, le "*business case*" de l'analyse sociale du sport dans la presse, afin de montrer le potentiel en termes de rentabilité. Le public est probablement plus intéressé par les aspects sociaux du sport que les journalistes ne le pensent et par conséquent, la couverture de ces aspects pourrait en effet générer des revenus supplémentaires.

## *Approche théorique*

Cette thèse doctorale se veut une contribution aux *media studies*. En tant que telle, elle se caractérise par une approche interdisciplinaire et l'utilisation de divers paradigmes disciplinaires, qui sont en effet des outils et non pas des dogmes. Dans le cadre des *media studies*, cette thèse s'appuie sur la théorie classique du *gatekeeper*, ainsi que sur des cadres théoriques auxiliaires, notamment le *public journalism* et les études sur la responsabilité sociale des entreprises (RSE) dans le secteur des médias. Ces approches

théoriques ont été mobilisées car reconnues comme directement ou indirectement pertinentes pour le sujet de cette étude et pour répondre aux questions de recherche. En termes de sources, cette thèse s'appuie à la fois sur des travaux universitaires et, bien que dans une moindre mesure, sur des livres et articles écrits par des journalistes, qui dans le domaine du journalisme sportif sont parfois comparativement plus riches – le journalisme sportif étant boudé par un grand nombre d'universitaires car considéré comme "moins sérieux".

## *Éléments pour une définition du sport*

La notion de "sport", qui semble aller de soi, est loin d'être univoque et évidente. Alors que les tentatives de définition du sport par la jeune sous-discipline de la sociologie du sport, dans les années 1960 et 1970, se concentraient principalement sur ses formes organisées et compétitives, aujourd'hui la tendance dominante parmi les chercheurs, en sociologie du sport et autre, est d'adopter une définition plus inclusive du sport, qui incarne la culture physique au sens large et même au-delà (le thème des *e-sports*, qui n'est pas abordé dans la thèse, le prouve). Il convient de rappeler que le but, dans la présente étude, n'était pas l'exploration théorique du concept de "sport" en soi, ne s'agissant pas d'une thèse en sociologie ou philosophie du sport, mais de préciser ce que l'on incluait dans cette notion et ce que l'on excluait lors de l'exploration de la dimension sociale du sport.

Afin de contextualiser le phénomène sportif dans la société, la thèse examine également la place du sport dans la culture populaire et les principales théories liées à cet aspect. Enfin, cette partie de la thèse se termine par un aperçu historique de la manière dont les médias, et notamment les journaux, ont contribué au développement du sport dans la société au tournant des XIXe et XXe siècles, jetant les bases de ce qui deviendrait la relation étroite et symbiotique entre les médias et le sport telle que nous la connaissons aujourd'hui.

## *Une cartographie de l'analyse sociale dans le traitement médiatique du sport*

L'élaboration d'une feuille de route originale qui décrive la dimension sociale du sport dans son traitement médiatique a été un point critique dans le déroulement de la recherche. Si définir le "sport" s'avère laborieux, étaler les composantes de sa dimension sociale présente des difficultés similaires, qui y sont par ailleurs étroitement liées. Pour pouvoir déterminer la cartographie des thèmes autour desquels s'articulerait cette dimension sociale, et pouvoir ainsi façonner un cadre analytique original et distinctif, l'étude a commencé par l'élaboration d'un inventaire des thèmes qu'on rencontre le plus souvent dans les manuels de sociologie du sport, qui constituaient la base d'analyse la plus logique.

La procédure visant à déterminer une taxonomie distincte et plus large pour l'étude de l'analyse sociale dans le traitement médiatique du sport a ensuite été informée par d'autres sources. Les textes des organisations intergouvernementales, communément appelées organisations internationales, nous sont souvent précieux pour aider à définir le sport comme objet d'étude, étant donné que plusieurs de ces organismes (Conseil de l'Europe, Commission européenne, ONU et son agence UNESCO, parmi d'autres) ont élaboré des textes officiels visant à la promotion et à la réglementation des activités sportives. Les définitions qui émanent de ce type d'institutions ne sont presque jamais totalement explicites : cela fait partie du jeu diplomatique. Néanmoins, elles présentent l'avantage significatif de conjuguer la substance académique, car ces organisations s'associent généralement avec le milieu universitaire autour de sujets spécifiques, et le contexte réel, dans un cadre donc plus large du sport, correspondant à l'ample cadre d'analyse du sport qui sous-tend cette thèse.

Pour récapituler, la création d'une nouvelle cartographie pour l'étude de l'analyse sociale dans le traitement médiatique du sport a été informée et inspirée par: (a) la recherche sociologique; b) les documents officiels des institutions internationales, parmi lesquels il convient de citer le Livre blanc sur le sport de la Commission Européenne (2007); et (c)

l'expérience professionnelle et académique de l'auteur de la thèse dans les secteurs du sport et du journalisme. Le produit final est une nouvelle taxonomie pour l'étude de l'analyse sociale dans le traitement médiatique du sport comprenant 21 Thèmes et 131 Sous-thèmes. Celle-ci pourra être utilisée par les chercheurs de plusieurs domaines (les sociologues des médias, les sociologues du sport, les historiens, les pédagogues, les experts en éducation aux médias, etc.), en accord avec l'approche multi-paradigmatique sous-jacente un produit de recherche de *media studies*. Au niveau empirique, cette nouvelle taxonomie pourra sensibiliser les journalistes à la portée sociale du sport, en leur rappelant leur pouvoir dans la promotion des valeurs du sport (dans une optique de "responsabilité positive" du journaliste). Le but de cette démarche n'est pas normatif mais purement factuel et prospectif. Enfin, au niveau des médias en tant qu'industrie (business), cette nouvelle taxonomie pourra être utilisée par le management de l'industrie des médias comme modèle pour explorer le potentiel commercial de la couverture des différents sujets et sous-thèmes de la taxonomie, qui résument la dimension sociale du phénomène sportif.

## *La légitimité professionnelle du journaliste sportif*

La thèse aborde le débat de longue date sur la légitimité professionnelle et la crédibilité du journalisme sportif. D'un côté, le biais négatif envers le journalisme sportif par rapport aux domaines soi-disant "plus sérieux" du journalisme (les journalismes politique ou économique, par exemple) est le résultat de stéréotypes persistants, souvent découlant d'une approche snob du sport. Par ailleurs, cette thèse postule que le caractère léger et *entertainment* du sport, loin d'être synonyme de faible impact social, est en réalité une des raisons pour lesquelles le sport est si puissant et omniprésent dans la société. D'autre part, l'image souvent négative du journalisme sportif est le résultat d'une série de défauts réels et presque intrinsèques de ce segment de la profession, dont la thèse présente un petit inventaire.

Parmi les plus fréquents et les plus fréquemment évoqués, nous trouvons le problème, s'il en est un, du journaliste-supporter (fan d'un club, d'un athlète, d'un sport, etc.). A cet égard, la thèse postule l'importance et même l'opportunité à priori d'une dimension passionnelle, qui n'est pas un défaut en soi. Elle le devient lorsque le journaliste, au-delà de sa légitime passion sportive, *se conduit* aussi comme un supporter, affichant un manque de neutralité et donc, au final, de professionnalisme. La proximité des journalistes sportifs avec leurs sources est également parmi les défauts les plus cités par les critiques. Cette proximité peut en effet entraîner une forme de connivence, au détriment de la rigueur journalistique. De façon réaliste, il convient de reconnaître que la proximité avec certaines sources est indispensable au travail journalistique, y compris dans le journalisme sportif. Ce qu'on fait de la relation qui se crée entre le journaliste et sa source dépend ensuite principalement de l'éthique individuelle du journaliste (ce qui n'équivaut pas à nier l'impact des conditions dans lesquelles le journaliste effectue son travail).

Parmi les défauts du journalisme sportif, la thèse met plutôt l'accent sur les conflits d'intérêts potentiels des médias d'information avec les plus puissantes organisations sportives et marques de sport. En ce qui concerne les organisations sportives, le mélange des genres est rendu encore plus problématique par le fait que plusieurs groupes de médias sont également les organisateurs des évènements sportifs dont ils s'occupent dans leurs journaux. Cet élément, qui ne date pas d'aujourd'hui, ne conduit ni automatiquement ni inéluctablement à un manque de neutralité dans le traitement médiatique mais doit néanmoins être pris en compte. Le risque d'autocensure, plus difficile à détecter, est bien présent. Et dans le cas des marques de sport, celles-ci sont souvent parmi les plus importants annonceurs des journaux. La question du conflit d'intérêts peut s'avérer centrale pour comprendre le traitement médiatique de sujets socialement pertinents autour du sport – ou bien son absence – car ces sujets (par exemple, la corruption, les problèmes liés aux conditions de travail, le dopage, etc.) représentent souvent des vérités qui dérangent, et que les journalistes choisissent de ne pas relater.

## *Le langage du journalisme sportif*

Le journalisme sportif utilise souvent un jargon technique ainsi que des expressions familières. Les spécificités sémantiques du journalisme sportif sont inextricablement liées à la dimension émotionnelle du sport et du fanatisme sportif, que le journalisme sportif reproduit et à la fois contribue à créer. Pour certains critiques, le journalisme sportif fait preuve d'une certaine légèreté aussi dans son style et dans son langage. Voici donc la question qui se posait dans le cadre de la présente étude: Est-il raisonnable d'envisager qu'un langage si "vulgaire", aux yeux de ses critiques, puisse légitimement traiter des aspects sociaux du sport? A cet égard, la thèse rappelle la différence entre simple (la simplicité d'un journalisme populaire) et *simpliste*, qui indique en revanche une simplification injustifiée et parfois dangereuse du discours.

Le journalisme sportif a traditionnellement affiché une grande créativité de langage, y compris un usage *ludique* des mots. Ce n'est pas un hasard si, d'un point de vue historique, de nombreux écrivains s'engagent dans le journalisme sportif, souvent décrit comme étant à la croisée du journalisme et de la littérature, pour sa dimension épique et poétique. La thèse présente d'exemples illustres, parmi lesquels Arthur Conan Doyle en Angleterre, Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer aux États-Unis, ou bien Pier Paolo Pasolini et Dino Buzzati en Italie, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. On trouve également plusieurs cas de journalistes sportifs qui ont publiés des romans sur de thématiques non sportives, et qui se sentaient parfois plus écrivains et essayistes que journalistes. Gianni Brera, par exemple, probablement le plus célèbre journaliste sportif de l'histoire du journalisme italien, a été l'auteur de plusieurs romans.

## *Le cas italien, une boîte à outils idéale pour l'étude du journalisme sportif*

La thèse s'intéresse au cas de la presse italienne et le propose en tant que boîte à outils pour l'analyse du journalisme sportif, ceci en raison d'une série de spécificités. Le plus ancien quotidien spécialisé au monde encore publié est un journal sportif, et il est italien.

Il s'agit de *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, fondée à Milan en 1896. Par ailleurs, *Gazzetta dello Sport* est également le quotidien avec le plus grand lectorat en Italie, et non seulement parmi les quotidiens sportifs mais parmi tous les quotidiens, avec un lectorat estimé à plus de 4 millions de personnes les lundis et à plus de 3,2 millions de lecteurs les autres jours (Audipress, III/2019).[1] En outre, le plus ancien magazine de sport au monde encore publié est également italien. Il s'agit du *Guerin Sportivo*, fondé à Turin en 1912, aujourd'hui basé à Bologne. Une autre particularité du cas italien porte sur la présence de trois quotidiens sportifs à diffusion nationale, à savoir *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* et *Tuttosport*. Les quotidiens sportifs ne sont présents que dans certains pays – la thèse propose à cet égard un inventaire des quotidiens sportifs à l'international – et l'Italie est un des rares pays à avoir plusieurs quotidiens de ce type.

Le rôle particulier du journalisme sportif dans l'écosystème médiatique italien est ancré dans l'histoire. C'est pourquoi la thèse propose un excursus historique, centré autour de trois grosses périodes ou thématiques: la période mussolinienne, l'âge des innovateurs à partir de l'après-guerre, et pour terminer, la période post-industrielle.

Reconnaître le rôle du journalisme sportif sous le régime de Benito Mussolini (1922-1943) est essentiel pour comprendre l'évolution du journalisme sportif italien dans les décennies à venir. Mussolini considérait le sport comme un instrument clé de cohésion nationale. Le projet sportif de Mussolini ne s'intéressait pas qu'aux athlètes de haut niveau, ceux qui étaient censés représenter la nation, mais impliquait la vie quotidienne des gens, à partir des écoles et des organisations de jeunesse. La presse sportive joua un rôle important dans le renforcement de cette stratégie. Si l'élévation du sport au rang de dispositif politique majeur est tout sauf une exception historique – les Jeux Olympiques de Berlin 1936 étant l'exemple le plus cité à cet égard – la relation étroite entre un régime politique et ses *journalistes sportifs* est moins courante, et particulièrement évidente sous le régime de Mussolini. Par ailleurs, Mussolini lui-même était à l'origine journaliste. De l'avènement du régime fasciste (1922) au début de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1939),

[1] Audipress publie ses statistiques de lectorat trois fois par an. Les chiffres se réfèrent à la troisième et dernière publication de données pour 2019.

environ 171 nouvelles publications sportives, entre journaux et magazines, firent leur apparition en Italie, dont la plupart pendant les premières années du *ventennio*. La thèse retrace la relation, importante aussi bien qu'ambivalente, qui s'est nouée entre le régime et la presse sportive pendant le *ventennio* mussolinien.

L'après-guerre voit la naissance de deux nouveaux quotidiens sportifs, *Stadio* et *Tuttosport*, en juillet 1945, portant en Italie le nombre de quotidiens sportifs à diffusion nationale à quatre (avec *Gazzetta dello Sport* et *Corriere dello Sport*). Loin d'être préjudiciable, la coexistence de ces quatre journaux a contribué à accroître l'intérêt des Italiens pour le sport, ce qui alimenterait, à son tour, la popularité de ces journaux dans les années 1960 et 1970. Ce sont les décennies des grands innovateurs du journalisme sportif italien. La thèse se concentre sur une série de figures particulièrement représentatives qui ont fait l'histoire du journalisme sportif italien: Gianni Brera, Gino Palumbo e Antonio Ghirelli, parmi d'autres.

La phase post-industrielle, notamment pendant les années 1980, marque un tournant dans la relation entre le monde du sport et le monde des médias en raison du poids grandissant de la télévision et de la publicité, auquel se rajoute l'arrivée de la télévision commerciale. Encore une fois, l'avènement de nouveaux médias, au lieu de déterminer une concurrence meurtrière entre les acteurs, porte la croissance de tout le journalisme sportif italien. La décennie 1980 a été, en effet, celle du boom de la presse sportive en Italie. La victoire de l'Italie lors de la Coupe du Monde de football de 1982 a également aidé les journaux sportifs italiens à battre de nouveaux records.

## *Le journalisme sportif entre presse généraliste et presse spécialisée*

Comme précédemment indiqué, un des aspects qui font la singularité du cas italien est la présence du journalisme sportif quotidien à la fois dans les journaux généralistes et dans trois quotidiens sportifs. Dans les pays où la presse sportive est absente, l'actualité sportive est intégrée dans les journaux généralistes. Dans ces pays, les quotidiens

généralistes proposent parfois des riches suppléments sportifs, qui ne sont cependant pas vendus séparément (par exemple, *Sportbladet* en Suède, distribué avec le quotidien *Aftonbladet*), et qui ne représentent donc pas des titres à part entière. Dans deux pays avec une longue et prestigieuse tradition sportive et journalistique tels que les États-Unis et le Royaume-Uni, pour ne citer que deux exemples majeurs, il n'y a aucun quotidien sportif. Les quotidiens sportifs restent en effet un territoire inconnu pour beaucoup d'analystes, surtout anglophones, et cette thèse est aussi censée contribuer à combler cette lacune.

L'analyse de contenu a concerné un total de six quotidiens italiens à diffusion nationale, dont les trois journaux généralistes avec le plus grand tirage au moment de l'étude (*Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica* et *La Stampa*) et les trois journaux sportifs (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport - Stadio* et *Tuttosport*) représentant la totalité des quotidiens sportifs du pays. L'analyse de contenu a été effectuée sur plus de 6.500 pages, publiées pendant cinq périodes différentes pour un total de 28 jours, allant de septembre 2018 à avril 2020. L'étude a visé à identifier les différences entre les journaux des deux lots, et donc entre presse généraliste et presse sportive, quant au traitement de la dimension sociale du sport. En ce sens, la thèse propose une rare comparaison (peut-être unique) entre la couverture du sport dans les journaux généralistes et celle dans les journaux sportifs, ces derniers étant généralement négligés par les études universitaires, comme précisé auparavant. Cette comparaison était destinée à fournir, entre autres, des indications utiles sur les choix journalistiques qui pourraient être profitablement transférés d'un type de presse à l'autre.

## *L'imprévu de la COVID-19*

La thèse propose un chapitre qui ne faisait pas partie du plan initial, et qualifié pour cette raison de "Post-Scriptum". Ce chapitre a été rajouté dans un deuxième temps en raison de l'irruption de la pandémie de coronavirus en 2020. En plus des effets sur les personnes et l'économie de tous les pays, la pandémie a entraîné l'annulation ou le report de pratiquement toutes les compétitions sportives à l'échelle mondiale. Cette situation sans

précédent a eu des répercussions directes sur le journalisme sportif qui méritaient d'être explorées, ne serait-ce que de manière préliminaire et incomplète.

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSI** | Associazione Stampa Sportiva Italiana |
| **CoE** | Council of Europe |
| **CONI** | Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano |
| **CSR** | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **FIFA** | Fédération Internationale de Football Association |
| **IASN** | International Association of Sports Newspapers |
| **ICA** | International Communication Association |
| **IFJ** | International Federation of Journalists |
| **IGO** | Intergovernmental organisation |
| **IMF** | International Monetary Fund |
| **IOC** | International Olympic Committee |
| **IPC** | International Paralympic Committee |
| **ISSA** | International Sociology of Sport Association |
| **ITU** | International Telecommunications Union |
| **MA** | Master of Arts |
| **MLB** | Major League Baseball |
| **NBA** | National Basketball Association |
| **NFL** | National Football League |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **NOC** | National Olympic Committee |
| **UEFA** | Union of European Football Associations |
| **UJSF** | Union des journalistes de sport en France |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNESCO** | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| **USSI** | Unione Stampa Sportiva Italiana |
| **WAN** | World Association of Newspapers |
| **WAN-IFRA** | World Association of News Publishers |

| | |
|---|---|
| **WHO** | World Health Organization |
| **YoY** | Year-over-Year or Year-on-Year (synonyms) |

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**
*1.1.1 Research questions*
*1.1.2 Key definitions*
*1.1.3 Philosophy*

**1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

**1.3 METHODOLOGY**
*1.3.1 Scope of the study*
*1.3.2 Research approach*
*1.3.3 Thesis stylebook*

**1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

## 1.1 Problem statement

Sports occupy a major place in the media economy of the 21st century. Sport and the media feed each other in a mutually beneficial connection, recurrently described as a *symbiotic* relationship (McChesney 1989, 49; Beck and Bosshart 2003; Collins 2013, 5). Sport delivers key audiences and advertising revenues to the media while media coverage crucially contributes to the popularity and profitability of sport. According to Bradshaw and Minogue (2019, ix), "top-level sport now secures so much media coverage that sport is a central aspect of what it means to be a human being alive in the early decades of the third millennium". Indeed, the two scholars refer to "top-level sport", and for good reason. If we look beneath the surface of this massive coverage of sports, we may realise that the media tend to focus on a relatively limited number of topics, many and yet few when compared to the variety of sport-related matters that might deserve to be addressed. Through the mass media, we readers get to know everything about the wealthiest sports, the big clubs and the athletes who are backed by powerful sponsors. In other words, we mostly get to know about the "top-level sport" Bradshaw and Minogue referred to (ibid.). The focus on elite and the most popular sports has been defined as "the media reality of sports" (Horky and Stelzner 2013, 119). Furthermore, even if the range of sport-related topics that become news has considerably expanded over the past few decades, sport is largely treated by the media with a focus on its entertainment aspects, on and off the pitch. Media sport stories focus on in-game performance as well as the personal lives and attributes of the featured athletes (Lewis and Weaver 2015), proving that sport has also become part of the celebrity world or *showbiz*. How about the rest? Does the media coverage of sports reflect the full extent of the sporting phenomenon? As reminded by Derèze and Zintz (2007, 147), "*[s]ous le déploiement tonitruant de sa dimension spectaculaire et marchande, subsistent ou émergent d'autres façons de faire du sport*" [under the thunderous deployment of its spectacular and commercial dimension, other ways of doing sport subsist or emerge].

There is nothing surprising or morally reprehensible in capitalising on the economic value embedded in sports and athletes. Besides, sport *does* mean entertainment, a salutary

distraction for the mind and the body, whether as active participants or simple spectators. The underlying point here is that sport is also more than that. Sport has considerable power in contemporary society due to its ties to politics, economy and culture, which means that it is important for the public to be "professionally and accurately" informed about it (Schierl and Bertling 2013, 498). Sporting mega-events are a major showcase for the values and achievements of the hosting nation.[2] It was true at the time of the 1936 Berlin Olympics and is still true today. Through sport, people from different generations and backgrounds get together around the passion for the same team. Sport also influences personal development, in children and adults alike, as it helps build discipline and perseverance. The fun dimension of sport, which can be mistakenly taken by its critics as a synonym of superficial or light impact, is actually what makes sport so attractive to the masses regardless of their condition, and is therefore what ultimately makes sport so socially impactful. The fact that sport is also recurrently exploited to convey negative values, such as racism or violence, further highlights its pervasiveness in society.

### 1.1.1 Research questions

#### *Main research question*

This doctoral thesis aims to explore whether or not the press coverage of sports reflects the full extent of the sporting phenomenon, and notably to identify and assess social analysis, or the "social dimension", in the media coverage of sports. What is meant by "social dimension" or socially relevant sport-related topics will be shortly outlined in the present introduction (**1.1.2 Key definitions)**, prior to being developed further and conceptualised in chapter **3. Sport in society**.

[2] The notion of "mega-event" is intuitive and much used, even though one official definition of what mega-event stands for has never been provided by international sports governing bodies. The Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are typically and rather unanimously referred to as sporting *mega*-events while for the other sporting events, opinions and analyses often diverge. Martin Müller has developed a definition and classification scheme for mega-events in general, not specifically sporting events. Interestingly, eight out of the nine large events that he has chosen to develop his indicators are indeed sporting events, the only exception being the Expo. These nine events include: the Expo, Summer Olympics, Winter Olympics, Football World Cup, European Football Championship, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, Pan American Games, and Universiade (Müller 2015).

### *Research sub-questions*

- **RQ1**. To what extent is the social analysis of sport relevant to newspapers? The idea that sports journalism should report not only the latest competitions but also all that is "connected with" sports (health concerns, educational issues, labour issues, etc.) is probably less contentious today than it was a few decades ago.[3] Yet, there seems to be no general consensus about what sports journalism should ultimately cover, and how far it should go.

- **RQ2**. Are there any significant differences, in the coverage of the social dimension of sport, between general-interest newspapers and sports-specialised newspapers? Different types of publications, in this case within newspapers, may show a different "vocation" as far as the choice of topics for coverage is concerned. The Italian press was taken as a case study for this comparison.

- **RQ3**. How realistic is it to expect that the newspapers of the 21st century consistently cover the social dimension of sport? As will be later explained, this thesis focuses on the mainstream media, and these have business imperatives as well.

## 1.1.2 Key definitions

| Press | Social analysis / social dimension | Sports journalism |
|---|---|---|

Since specificity of language is key to understanding the unfolding of a discourse, the use of the terms and expressions *press*, *social analysis* and *sports journalism*, at the core of this thesis, requires preliminary clarification. Needless to say, this is just a preview to set

[3] For a discussion on the notion of "*connesso con*" [connected with] sport in sports journalism, see Spalletta, Marica, and Lorenzo Ugolini. 2016. *(Ti)Fare Informazione: Il Giornalismo Sportivo Italiano e La Sfida Della Credibilità*. Canterano (RM): Aracne Editrice; as well as the section **7.1.2 Sports journalism as hybrid journalism** of this thesis.

the broader framework, as each and every one of these terms and expressions will be the object of extensive analysis in the chapters to come.

In journalism, the use of the term "**press**" derives from the fact that the news media were initially newspapers, and these used to exist only in print format. As etymologically, the word "press" is derived from Middle English (*pressen*), Old French (*presse* as a noun and *presser* as a verb) and the Latin *pressare*, all generally referring to the act of exerting pressure or squeezing and related tools (E. Klein 1971; "Press" 2019).[4] From the early 16th century, the use of the term was extended to refer to instruments for printing as well, and then gradually to periodical publishing, from the early 19th century on, alongside the development of periodical publications. From the early 20th century, the notion of "press" came to be used, by extension, to describe also journalists as a category. Due to its original paper-related connotation, the term "press" could have gone out of fashion following the advent of radio, television and other non-print media. In fact, it has never disappeared and has actually come to be used indistinctively as "a generic term variously applied to newspapers alone, to newspapers and magazines combined, to all news organizations including broadcast and online journalism, and to their journalists […]", as reflected in a recent *Dictionary of Journalism* (Harcup 2014). It is, however, primarily used to refer to "Newspapers and magazines" as well as "[t]he journalists and photographers who work for newspapers and magazines", as reflected in the first two definitions in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* ("Press" 2019). Shoemaker and Vos have also observed that the term "press" still primarily refers to print: "[it] connotes not only news but also news on paper" (2009, 6). Indeed, the two scholars go on by explaining that they prefer not to use the word "press" when their discourse is meant to relate to a larger set of media (ibid.). When combining these arguments, using the term "press" for the title of this thesis seemed like a legitimate choice, as the thesis focuses on newspapers and, specifically, print newspapers (as later explained in section **1.3.1 Scope of the study**).

[4] Middle English was "the vernacular spoken and written in England from about 1100 to about 1500, the descendant of the Old English and the ancestor of Modern English" (The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019). Old French, deriving from Vulgar Latin, was the language spoken in Northern France from the middle of the 9th century to the beginning of the 14th century (Einhorn 1974, 1).

Announcing what is meant by "**social analysis / social dimension**" in the press coverage of sports, also from the title of this thesis, is even more important to introduce this study. The notion may appear disconcerting at first, to hopefully becoming stimulating, although certainly challenging, as the thesis unfolds. When exploring the societal role of sport, most existing research focuses on *individual topics* (e.g. sport and health, disability sports, sport and education, sport and development, etc.), one at a time.[5] This has to do both with the respective interests of the different researchers and, practically speaking, a legitimate need to restrict the scope of the study. While fully acknowledging the relevance of this body of research, and drawing from it, this thesis intends to show that social analysis, specifically the social dimension of sport, can also be observed as a whole. It should be recalled, in this respect, that this thesis is not about the social dimension of sport, but specifically about *the press coverage of this dimension*. It is not a thesis on the role of sport in society, but about the way the press reports on it.[6] In order to define this dimension, the thesis will preliminarily specify the notion of "sport" that is used in the process (section **3.1.2 Defining "sport")**, so as to promptly address the problem of sport as an apparently self-evident and yet utterly ambiguous term, used in diverse disciplines with different meanings. Then, the thesis will present a taxonomy of the Topics and Sub-topics that exemplify the comprehensiveness of the social dimension of sport (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**). Composed of 21 Topics and 131 related Sub-topics, this new and original taxonomy is meant to provide a distinctive analytical framework for (the study of) social analysis in the media coverage of sports. The lengthy process and reasoning that have led to this taxonomy will be the object of a more articulated description in the following chapters, to be found especially although not exclusively in section **3.1.5 The analytical categories for a broader taxonomy**.

[5] "Social" and "societal" will be used in this thesis as synonyms since both describe issues referring to society and social relations.

[6] The leading sociological perspectives to interpret the role of sport in society, including how sports sociologists have confronted the theoretical problem of "defining sport", will be presented in chapter **3. Sport in society**.

Finally, another notion at the core of this thesis, and which requires preliminary clarification, is that of "**sports journalism**". Raymond Boyle, in his seminal book *Sports Journalism: Context and Issues*, wondered whether it was not more accurate, in a situation where sports journalism has come to cover an expanded range of subjects, "to talk about journalism about sports, in its wider context, rather than simply a narrowly defined and niche form of journalism, labelled sports journalism" (2006b, 5). For the purposes of this thesis, the term "sports journalism" will be used to mean what Boyle, in the above passage, defined as "journalism about sports", namely the wider context. Sport has grown increasingly present and pervasive in society, and the boundaries of sports news have concurrently expanded: "[a]s sport has mushroomed, it has been inevitable that what gets reported should also change", said Boyle (ibid., 179). As a general recommendation from this thesis, the distinction between an allegedly narrow "sports journalism" and a wider "journalism about sports" does not seem semantically useful, nor does it appear, in more practical terms, as a viable option for the future of journalism. One of the purposes of this thesis is precisely to study how and to what extent the journalistic coverage of sports has moved toward the "wider context", thereby assuming that sports journalism and journalism about sports are actually the same thing.

### 1.1.3 Philosophy

Four more points need to be made in this introductory part, about what we could call the philosophy behind this thesis. Firstly, this doctoral work was not driven by a desire, more or less unadmitted, to point the finger at media professionals in order to expose that they are not doing their job properly. This must be spelled out because the analysis of how the media handle news coverage is often perceived as a way for academics to chastise the work of the media. As argued by Marchetti, "*parler du 'traitement médiatique' est souvent perçu comme une manière de voir si la presse a 'bien fait son travail'*" (Marchetti 2002b) [talking about 'media coverage' is often perceived as a way of seeing if the press 'has done its job properly']. For Wanta (2009, 118), "Mass communication researchers have often considered themselves to be watch-dogs of the watchdogs — keeping track of the amount and types of coverage the news media devote to certain areas". With reference

to sports journalism, Weedon et al. (2016, 662–63) consider that "positive change [in sports journalism] is more likely to come from the education of tomorrow's sports journalists, and collaborations with current ones, than from critiquing the institutionalized practices of reporters and broadcasters who already have hundreds if not thousands of critics below the line". The responsibility of the media in choosing the news is by all means an aspect of the analysis in this thesis but primarily in terms of *positive responsibility*, that is by looking at how the "power" – in a neutral or positive acceptation of the term (see section **7.2 The power of sports journalism**) – of the media can be fruitfully combined with the power of sport. This is more than just a nuance. To misquote the title of Curran and Seaton's book on the press and broadcasting in Britain, which spoke of *Power without Responsibility* (1997), this thesis is rather grounded on a notion of power *with* responsibility, and the analysis here is axed especially towards the productive potential of this power/responsibility.[7]

Secondly, and connected with the first point, this thesis is not meant to prescribe what so-called "quality" sports journalism should be. Reminding the relevance of the wider picture of sport in its journalistic coverage, as will be done in this thesis, does not automatically imply that reporting on sporting competitions, the athletes' performance or the wealthiest clubs and players, namely what is already being covered in a majority of cases, is therefore low(er)-quality sports journalism. There can be journalistic excellence in the coverage of a goal by Lionel Messi and poor journalistic quality in the coverage of an apparently nobler topic like grassroots sports in a developing country. The editorial choice of reporting *exclusively* on sporting results and performance can be, in principle, totally legitimate.

The third point that needs to be made regarding the philosophy of this thesis has to do with the choice of the thesis topic, and ultimately the function of the news media in the coverage of sports. Focusing on the societal aspects in the press coverage of sports, namely the subject area of this thesis, is not to suggest that sports journalism should turn

[7] The full reference of the cited book is: Curran, James, and Jean Seaton. 1997. *Power without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*. 5th ed. London ; New York: Routledge.

into abstract socio-political enquiry. Although journalists and academics draw from each other's agendas and actions, they constitute two different professional categories, with distinct functions and features.[8] Furthermore, it is utterly desirable that the playful character of sport should continue to be mirrored in the media, and this could hardly happen if journalism assumed the tone of academic inquiry. As previously suggested, adjectives like "light", "entertaining", "playful" or "popular" should not be taken as synonyms for inferior, even less for irrelevant. Cinema could serve, in this sense, as an area for cross-sectoral comparison. Similarly to sport, cinema also is a form of "entertainment" that nonetheless exerts a major influence on social life and trends. The difference, however, lies in the fact that, in terms of perception, the contribution of cinema to contemporary culture, especially in its engaged manifestations, is largely taken for granted whereas the same applies more rarely to sport. This thesis is also meant to help fill this gap.

The fourth and final point is related to the geo-cultural perspective of this work, which inevitably affects its underlying philosophy. This thesis is written from a *Western* perspective. This is not to say that it has been written under the influence of what Mattelart and Neveu (2018, chap. 5) have defined "l'emprise de l'universalisme du *logos* occidental" [the hold of the Western *logos*] (authors' italic).[9] By the same token, the Western perspective of this thesis is unrelated to claims such as "journalism originated in the 'West' and became established as a genre and institution of society before newspapers really existed in Asia and the rest of the world" (McQuail 2013, 4), or "journalism is an Anglo-American invention" (Chalaby 1996, 303; 1998) – and regardless of the validity or invalidity of these claims.[10] More trivially, the Western perspective of this thesis is a

[8] For a comprehensive review of the main differences between sociology and journalism, see Gans, Herbert J. 2018. "Sociology and Journalism: A Comparative Analysis." *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 47 (1): 3–10.

[9] On the global influence of the Western cultural model, see also the best-selling book by Ferguson, Niall. (2012). *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books.

[10] Chalaby's claim is based on a comparison of the development of French and Anglo-American journalism between the 1830s and the 1920s. According to Chalaby, the modern conception of news was invented by American and British journalists while "French journalists, like journalists in many other countries, progressively imported and adapted the methods of Anglo-American journalism" (1996, 303). For a discussion of Chalaby's argument, see also Neveu's (1999) review of Chalaby's *The Invention of Journalism* (1998).

reflection of its geographical focus and of the personal and academic background of its author. Meanwhile, one of the ambitions of this work is to establish avenues for research from other cultural and geographical perspectives as well. This is also one of the reasons why nowhere does this thesis assume or establish hierarchies among the different sports. The leading sport in one country can be a minor or even irrelevant sport in another. This thesis does not assume that the wealthiest and most popular sports are any less valuable for social analysis than minor sports either. As will be widely discussed in section **3.2 Sport as (popular) culture**, popularity is not viewed here as an asset to be punished, and neither is money.

## 1.2 Objectives of the research

The present research work addresses three main sets of objectives:

**A) <u>At the theoretical level</u> — To shed light on the sociologising component in the press coverage of sports while conceptualising this aspect.**

This was knowingly a challenging task. Examining only one single socially relevant topic or subject area in the press coverage of sports would have been more straightforward, and certainly easier to justify. Despite the difficulties that it could well engender, taking (and defining) the social dimension as a whole allowed to highlight the large range of sport-related, socially relevant issues that may be covered by the press – assuming that the press coverage of sports is indeed supposed to reflect the full extent of the sporting phenomenon.

**B) <u>At the empirical level</u> — To raise awareness among journalists of their power and "positive responsibility" in promoting the values of sport.**

Media actors impact society by raising awareness of issues and events, but can only raise awareness of matters of which they are themselves aware. The number of articles in daily newspapers that cover the larger framework of sport has certainly grown over the past few decades, in connection with a booming sports industry that has also grown more

invasive across society. Nonetheless, the number of such articles remains extremely limited, including when current events would hand socially relevant aspects on a plate (events with these characteristics were also chosen for content analysis, as explained in section **6.1 The corpus of analysis**). Furthermore, the larger coverage of sports that has developed alongside the growth of the sport phenomenon has, in fact, involved mostly the financial aspects of sports (player transfers, sponsorship deals, ownership of clubs and leagues, etc.), leaving the social aspects of sport out of focus. This state of affairs, which was also confirmed by content analysis, suggests that newspaper professionals are generally aware of the economic and political leverage of sport but appear to be comparatively less conscious of the influence of sports in cultural and societal terms, or comparatively less willing to cover it anyway. One of the objectives of this thesis is to operate as a highlighter to raise the journalists' awareness of their power and responsibility in presenting the multiple repercussions of sports on society. As previously argued, this responsibility is mostly intended here with a focus on the potential *positive* outcomes that would derive from this posture, as opposed to lecturing on what is supposedly not being done.

**C) <u>At the industrial level</u> — To identify the benefits as well as the inherent limits for the press of a coverage that takes more account of the social aspects of sports.**

As an industry, newspapers need revenues to support their organisation. Circulation figures have declined dramatically in recent years due to competition from internet players and social media and the related possibility for readers to get news from an unprecedentedly large set of sources, many of which for free (see also section **7.3.1 The crisis of print newspaper**). Analysing what is and/or should be covered by the press without considering this difficult conjuncture would be preaching in the wilderness. There are stringent economic reasons, among others, that lead to covering certain subjects on a regular basis while leaving other subjects aside. At the same time, from a deontological point of view, newspaper professionals are not supposed to cover only topics that are easy to sell to advertisers and the public. Furthermore, through the choice of the topics for coverage, they themselves favour or even *create* an interest in a particular topic. To summarise, on the one hand, we should wonder whether the current state of

affairs in the media industry can realistically coexist with (enhanced) social analysis in the coverage of sports. On the other hand, the public is probably more interested in the social aspects of sports than journalists realise, hence the coverage of these aspects might actually generate additional revenues (as later discussed in section **7.3.2 The business case for social analysis**).

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 Scope of the study

This doctoral research focuses on the work of professional journalists and mainstream media. There is no question that the irruption of so-called citizen journalists and user-generated news sources has profoundly modified the world of journalism and the way we all consume news, but opposing citizen journalism to professional journalism is simply not a purpose of this thesis, neither is assessing the respective weight of the different players. In today's society, the lines between media audiences and journalists are certainly more blurred due to the possibility for everyone to disseminate information through digital tools. This does not eliminate the need for a distinction between the diverse players and sets of sources. In an article entitled "We Are Not All Journalists Now", Temple and Hudson (2010) have contested what they define "the widespread belief that technological developments have us 'all journalists now'":

> While accepting that blogging and independent online news sites challenge both established perceptions of journalism and supposedly authoritative journalistic accounts of the world, we argue that they have clear differences from established journalistic norms, most notably in their commitment to the "truth" (ibid., 63).

With specific reference to sports journalism, it has been observed that journalists are more likely than bloggers to contextualise stories in wider social concerns (Hardin and Ash 2011). This element, directly related to the core subject of this thesis, will be explored in further details in section **2.2.3 Traditional media vs. new gatekeepers?**

Within mainstream media and professional journalism, the analysis for this thesis focused in particular on daily newspapers, building on the first-hand experience that the author of this study acquired in this segment of the industry between 2007 and 2011, working first for the World Association of Newspapers (WAN, later known as WAN-IFRA as of July 2009, following the merger with IFRA) and then its sports branch, the International Association of Sports Newspapers (IASN).[11] The main corpus of analysis was constituted by the print editions of selected newspapers, whose titles will be mentioned later in this chapter and, in further details, in chapters 5 and 6.[12] These two choices - daily newspapers and print - need to be justified.

### *Why newspapers?*

The personal work experience of the author of this thesis in this particular segment of the media industry, as described above, certainly played a role in the choice of focusing on newspapers, since inside professional knowledge was likely to contribute background information and (hopefully) compelling research questions. Moving from personal justifications to the scientific significance of that choice, it could be opined that the topics that require deeper analysis, as tends to be the case with those involving social analysis, can more typically be found in magazines, which use long-format journalism, as opposed to newspapers, which mostly report current events and use shorter articles. In fact, things have been changing in this respect. In order to be informed about the current events of sports – the result of a match or the running speed of an athlete – the public does not need to buy a newspaper. This type of information is available live or immediately afterwards

[11] The author of this doctoral thesis, Rosarita Cuccoli, served as the secretary general of the International Association of Sports Newspapers (IASN), within WAN and then WAN-IFRA, all along IASN's existence, from late 2008 to 2011. The IASN was founded in 2008 by *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *L'Equipe* (France), *Mundo Deportivo* (Spain), *Marca* (Spain), *Diario Olé* (Argentina), and *Lance!* (Brazil). The six founding newspapers were later joined by other member newspapers from around the world, bringing IASN membership to represent a combined multiplatform readership of about 45 million readers worldwide. IASN president all along the association's existence and until its dissolution was Santi Nolla, the editor of *Mundo Deportivo*. Prior to her role with the IASN, Cuccoli held roles since 2007 at IASN's mother association, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN, then WAN-IFRA as of July 2009), including head of international marketing information, with a view on the newspaper industry at large.
[12] Print and/or digital replica of the print newspaper.

on the web or social media, and obviously on television as well, depending on the accessibility of the event on free-to-air vs. pay-TV. This wide and instant accessibility of sports news has progressively pushed print newspapers to shift their focus of attention from current events to more in-depth analysis. This development is pertinent to the subject of this thesis, and finding out whether and to what extent this development has involved the analysis of social phenomena in sports was one of the focuses of the present study.

### *Why print?*

It could be argued that focusing on print newspapers leaves too large a field of research unexplored at a time in which television and digital platforms are so central in journalism. Indeed, expanding the analysis of the issues that are explored in this thesis to other media platforms would be desirable for future research. Meanwhile, according to Rowe, the centrality that television and then digital platforms have acquired over the past decades is one of the reasons why print media have been neglected in recent studies on sports media, "in spite of their historical precedence and very substantial readership" (1992, 97). Since Rowe wrote so nearly 30 years ago, the trend has remained the same. In fact, the obituary of print has become a mainstream subject.

The print media feature a series of traits and characteristics that appear of particular interest to this thesis. Print cannot be reduced to a nostalgic extravagance. Bolter and Grusin's notion of "Remediation", from the title of their celebrated book (2003), could serve as a good starting point for this discussion.[13] According to Bolter and Grusin, the new media do not annihilate the pre-existing media but rather refashion them in a process of mutual and ongoing transformation, which they have indeed called *remediation.* This process has a double logic, resulting from two contradictory and yet mutually dependent logics. "Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them" but in reality, they

[13] Full reference: Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. 2003. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. 6. Nachdr. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

argue, old and new media are interdependent because "immediacy depends on hypermediacy" (Bolter and Grusin 2003, 6). Allern and Pollack (2019) have described the idea of the printed newspaper as doomed to death due to new technologies as "a myth", and have recalled the ongoing need to produce both on old and new platforms since "[i]nnovation and digitalisation are not the same", they have argued (ibid., 1439). With reference to sports, Boyle and Haynes (2009, 164) have observed that "despite living in a highly visual media culture, the print media remain an important source of information, gossip and insight for the sports fan". This is true for newspapers in general and is even truer for sports-specialised newspapers. In the countries where this specialist press exists, and Italy is a perfect example, ardent sports fans still like to buy a print copy of their favourite sports newspaper so that they can proudly carry it to their workplace or usual *bar* (café), hoping to animate a lively discussion. Buying the print copy of a sports newspaper is the visible sign not just of a generic passion for sports but of an above-average knowledge of sports. An "ordinary fan" would quickly read sports news on the web or catch up on the latest news on TV.

The ongoing relevance of print has been discussed by Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger in a rather atypical article, entitled "Print Is Future, Online Is Past: Cross-Media Analysis of Temporal Orientations in the News" (2014), described by its authors as the first-ever "systematic examination of temporal orientations in different types of news" (ibid., 1051). The two researchers propose "a 'temporal division of labor' between print and online news in representing the social reality" (ibid., 1052). They move from the idea that news is oriented to time in at least two senses: (a) news production is oriented toward meeting the temporal demands of the news cycle; and (b) "the resulting news stories represent societies' past, present and future" (ibid., 1047-48). Most studies about the shift to a digital news culture have focused on the temporal constraints in terms of how an accelerated news cycle, due to the digital revolution, affects news production (that would be "a"). If we focus on the temporal conditions of news production, print newspapers appear, indeed, to be at a temporal disadvantage vis-à-vis online news outlets and 24-hour television news channels (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014, 1049). That said, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger draw attention to the fact that the temporal conditions

of the news cycle impact not only journalistic production but the temporal dimension of the news stories themselves, i.e. *the content* of these stories, and their past, present or future orientation as well (that is "b"). This leads, in their view, to identify "different journalistic roles assumed by print and online news" (ibid., 1048). Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger's study was conducted in the second quarter of 2012 on two Israeli daily newspapers (*Haaretz* and *Yedioth Ahronoth*) and two Israeli news websites (*Ynet* and *Walla!News*). Similarly to developments in other parts of the Western world, the Israeli news industry has also been confronted with declining readership figures for print newspapers and the need to adapt its business model to a revolutionised media landscape. These characteristics, explain the two scholars, made the Israeli ecosystem an appropriate case study for the analysis of the roles of different news media (ibid., 1054). The following passage, from the cited article, highlights the relevance of Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger's study to the present doctoral thesis:

> The analysis suggests that print newspapers, at least in Israel, assume a more future-oriented role, which involves speculating about future events, analyzing potential outcomes, raising concerns and hopes, and shaping agendas for future action. Online news outlets, on the other hand, assume the more commonly recognized journalistic role of reporting on recent events, while further narrowing the gap between written and broadcast news, or between the recent past and the live present (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014, 1061).[14]

Social analysis, which is at the core of the present thesis, is consistent with the above portrait of "a more future-oriented role [for print newspapers] which involves speculating about future events, analyzing potential outcomes, raising concerns and hopes, and shaping agendas for future action" (ibid.). A long-term, forward-looking approach is comparatively more suitable for social analysis than the simple reporting of present news. Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger do acknowledge the crisis that print newspapers have

[14] The study (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014, 1057–58) showed that 43.4% of the print stories in the authors' sample had a dominant future orientation as compared to 25.5% of the online stories. However, more than half (54.2%) of the online news items had a dominant past orientation, as compared to 36.4% of the print items. The difference was not much in the coverage of the distant past (events happened more than six months in the past), which was very similar in print and online news: 9.1% of the items and 8.1% of the online items. The major difference concerned the near past (less than six months in the past), which largely prevailed in online news. Regarding the coverage of present news, the study showed no relevant differences, with a dominant present temporal orientation of 20.2% of the stories in print newspapers and 20.3% in news websites.

been facing following the advent of a digital culture and related outlets (2014, 1049), but argue that this new state of affairs can translate into a "temporal division of labour" in terms of contents, thereby corroborating the ongoing validity of studies on print under the present circumstances.

The notion of "temporal orientation of news" inevitably raises questions about the more fundamental notion of "news". Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger have observed that "news is no longer conceptualized as rooted solely, or even primarily, in present and recent events. Indeed, the notion of news has broadened in both journalistic practice and academic scholarship" (2014, 1050). They cite (ibid., 1050-51), among others, the work of Michael Schudson (1986, 82), who noted that "even the front page, presumably replete with news of the most important and up-to-the-minute events, has an orientation to time more varied and more complicated than journalistic values would suggest". Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger also mention the work of Barnhurst and Mutz on "American Journalism and the Decline in Event-Centered Reporting" (1997), which highlighted how the definition of news changed and expanded during the 20th century.

The forward-looking orientation of print media, as conceptualised by Tenemboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2014), goes hand in hand with speculations that the print medium is intrinsically less superficial than other media. Burggraaff and Trilling (2020), who recently conducted content analysis of more than 760,000 Dutch news items in order to explore the difference between online news and print news, found that "online news items are more likely to be follow-up items than print items" (ibid., 112). By follow-up news, the two researchers mean stories on a news topic that has already been in the news, and which journalists who write for online media typically update as the event unfolds. According to Burggraaff and Trilling, "[w]hile […] follow-up news can involve investigative reporting, we may speculate that more often, they are comparatively cheap to produce, as they usually do not involve digging up a completely new story" (ibid., 117). With specific reference to sports journalism, Boyle has argued that "[t]he rise of the Internet and alternate sources of news have […] changed what print journalism now views as its natural terrain; to some extent it has become less concerned with news and more

focused on comment and analysis." (2006b, 179–80). And comparing print news with television news, Boyle has observed that "while television offers the immediacy of the live sports event, it is the scene-setting, the pre- and post-event analysis and any attendant scandal or controversy that newspapers are able to help sustain and run with" (2013, 176).

As a corollary to this "defence of print", it is to be reminded that even if we posit that print journalism offers, in principle, a better place for in-depth analysis, this does not mean that, in practical terms, journalists *do* take advantage of this opportunity. Boyle, Rowe and Whannel have argued that print sports journalists actually do not:

> […] print sports journalism is regarded as a key area given the traditional opportunity that the print medium provides (although mostly, as we have noted, discarded by sports journalists) to reflect on its subject in depth rather than to concentrate on its immediate depiction. (2010, 253)

### *General-interest and sports-specialised newspapers*

This thesis discusses the social analysis of sports in both general-interest and sports-specialised newspapers. From the experience of this thesis's author working for international newspapers associations (see footnote 11), including a sports newspapers association, differences in the press coverage of sports may depend on whether the news is treated by a general-interest newspaper or a sports-specialised newspaper.[15] By sports-specialised newspapers, or simply sports newspaper, this thesis indicates *multi-sport* newspapers – i.e. not focusing on one sport or set of sports only – that are issued daily and have national, as opposed to local, circulation. General-interest newspapers and sports newspapers do not necessarily cover the same sport-related topics, and whenever topics coincide, the angle of analysis is often different anyway. Sports newspapers most typically provide technical details of the game and the athletes' performance. Information is often complete with statistics, which are now increasingly present in reporting, in sports

[15] On the articulation around a "generalist" and a "specialised" pole, see: Marchetti, Dominique. 2005. "Sub-Fields of Specialized Journalism". In *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, edited by Rodney Dean Benson and Erik Neveu, 64–82. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity.

as other fields, due to the rise of data journalism.[16] The general press normally does not go as much into technical sport-related details since it speaks to a wider audience, not necessarily of sports specialists. At the same time, the general press covers by vocation a large range of subjects, sports being just one of them. This encyclopaedic approach might suggest that the general press is therefore better suited than the sports press to cover the larger spectrum of sport-related topics, hence to perform the social analysis this thesis is interested in. Finding out whether and to what extent general-interest newspapers actually do so was part of the research process for this thesis. The idea of comparing news coverage between general and specialised press is consistent with Marchetti's suggestion that the role of specialisation in news production should not be studied as a totally independent object of research but rather in relational terms: "*ce serait une erreur de construire l'étude des sous-champs spécialisés de production d'information comme autant d'objets autonomes*" [it would be an error to treat specialised sub-fields of news production as independent objects of study], argues Marchetti (2002a, 51).[17]

In scholarly literature, sports newspapers are hardly ever examined as a category in its own right. Whenever they are referred to as a distinct category, they end up being analysed under the wider and more general umbrella of "sports journalism". This is largely due to the fact that sports dailies are present in some areas of the world but are totally absent from others (see section **4.3.3 Sports-specialised newspapers, the neglected stepchildren**). The tradition of daily multi-sport newspapers can be traced especially in Southern Europe and South America, with scattered cases in other regions of the world and a few national exceptions, like Japan.[18] In most parts of the world,

[16] The notion of "data journalism", also referred to as data-driven journalism, indicates the possibility for journalism to use large sets of digital data thanks to developments in information management technologies. Journalists have always used data in their stories, but new technologies have brought about the possibility of using unprecedented large quantities of data, and to exploit these data with increasingly sophisticated tools. In practical terms, data journalism consists in "gathering, cleaning, organizing, analyzing, visualizing, and publishing data to support the creation of acts of journalism" (Howard 2014, 4). The advent of data journalism is usually dated back to 2010, when WikiLeaks disclosed thousands of classified U.S. military reports covering the war in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2010 (Hewett 2016).

[17] Also in Marchetti, Dominique. 2005. "Sub-Fields of Specialized Journalism". In *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, edited by Rodney Dean Benson and Erik Neveu, 64–82. Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity.

[18] Japan has six sports-specialised newspapers with national reach.

including countries with a long-standing sporting and journalistic tradition – like the United States or the United Kingdom, to name but two major examples – there are currently no national daily sports newspapers at all and daily sports journalism is integrated into the general press. Sometimes general-interest newspapers feature a rich and exhaustive supplement entirely devoted to sports, which is however not sold separately – hence not a "sports newspaper" in its own right (for example, *Sportbladet* in Sweden, distributed together with *Aftonbladet*). One of the ideas underlying this thesis was that examining sports newspapers as a separate category, with distinct features, could bring added value to the analysis. The comparison between sports newspapers and general-interest newspapers was also likely to provide indications of the journalistic choices that might be transferable from one type of press to the other.

### *Italy as a case study*

The Italian media ecosystem emerged as an ideal case study to carry out a comparison between sports newspapers and general-interest newspapers. Italy is indeed characterised, unlike most other countries, by the presence of a strong and diversified specialised sports press, with three daily newspapers with national reach specifically devoted to sports: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*.[19] It means that in Italy, sports news is present every day in both general-interest newspapers and a range of sports-specialised dailies. At the time of writing, there were no free national newspapers specifically devoted to sports in Italy. The three titles above therefore constituted the totality of Italian sports newspapers. Incidentally, Italy is also the country of the world's oldest specialised daily newspaper still published, and this is a *sports* newspaper: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, founded in Milan in 1896. The specificities of the Italian case will be further discussed in section **5.1 The Italian case as a toolkit to study sports journalism**. The coverage of sport's social dimension in the three Italian sports-specialised newspapers was compared to the coverage in the three Italian general-interest

[19] The Sunday edition of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* is called *La Gazzetta Sportiva*, although it is the same newspaper.

newspapers with the largest circulation at the time of the study, namely *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, and *La Stampa*.[20]

The fact that the author of this doctoral thesis is Italian was admittedly an additional determinant in the choice of focusing on the Italian case, as this was likely to bring additional knowledge. Italy was not the only possible case study, though. Let aside Japan, which also features multiple sports newspapers but would have been a difficult case study if only for linguistic reasons, Spain and Portugal also have, like Italy, more than one sports newspaper with national reach – as opposed to France, another country in the same region, which only has one (*L'Equipe*).[21] Spain has four sports newspaper with national reach: *As*, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo* and *Sport*. Portugal has three: *A Bola*, *O Jogo* and *Record*. A broader overview of sports-specialised newspapers around the world will be presented in section **4.3 Sports in newspapers**.

### 1.3.2 Research approach

The approach that was adopted in this thesis was mostly inductive. Consistently with inductive reasoning, the main research question was open-ended: this thesis aimed to assess whether and how the social dimension of sports was integrated by the media – specifically newspapers – in the coverage of sports. Reasoning aimed at moving from specific observations (content analysis of the sampled newspapers) to broad generalisations and the development of a theory, as opposed to testing existing theories.

Inductive reasoning is typically associated with qualitative methods, while a deductive approach is typically associated with quantitative methods, but the two approaches are

[20] The lower case in *la Repubblica* reflects the current look of the newspaper's title, both in the print edition and on the newspaper's website.
[21] In recent times, and only for a short period, France had actually three sports dailies following the creation of *Le 10 Sport* and *Aujourd'hui Sport*, both of which were launched in November 2008. Just a few months later, in March 2009, *Le 10 Sport* moved to a weekly frequency, hence it was no longer a daily. As for *Aujourd'hui Sport*, launched by the Amaury Group – the same as *L'Equipe* – to counter *Le 10 Sport*, it ceased publication in June 2009.

often used complementarily. Indeed, the media content analysis that was conducted for this thesis relied on both quantitative observation and qualitative analysis. This mixed approach is consistent with Krippendorff's observation that "the quantitative/qualitative distinction is a mistaken dichotomy between the two kinds of justifications of content analysis designs: the explicitness and objectivity of scientific data processing on the one side and the appropriateness of the procedures used relative to a chosen context on the other. For the analysis of texts, both are indispensable" (2004, 87). Exclusively quantitative methods are most typically used in content analysis when studying the effects and impact of news, and this research is about journalism, not about audiences.

The study moved from the empirical observation of the press coverage of sports in the sampled newspapers with the purpose of identifying and measuring (quantitative coverage) the inclusion or exclusion of topics that could fall under the umbrella of social analysis. This preliminary observation allowed to identify the choices made by the so-called *gatekeepers* of sports news. As will be further explained in chapter **2. The theoretical framework**, this thesis adopted the gatekeeping theory as its leading (although not exclusive) conceptual framework, in order to study the decisions made by sports editors and reporters as to whether or not to include socially relevant sports subjects in news coverage. The literature on the gatekeeping theory is rather varied and fragmented, both within and between diverse disciplines, but in the area of communication studies, most gatekeeping theories have focused on "the process of controlling the entry of messages into the gatekeeper's space" (Barzilai-Nahon 2009, 5).

Data were collected through the content analysis of the sampled newspapers. Field work and ethnological investigation were left for future analyses.[22] The professional trajectory of the author of this thesis should help explain this choice while mitigating its intrinsic limitations. To summarise, the doctoral candidate previously worked for the international association of the world's press, ran an international organisation of sports newspapers, and has been working in journalism herself as a contributing and research editor ever

[22] This choice, which is not simply methodological, will be further clarified in section **2.1 Media studies and media sport studies**.

since. Contrary to the more typical sequence of the research work that characterises a doctoral thesis on journalism, the "journalists' voice" was heard, so-to-say, prior to the thesis process, since it was also embedded in the personal experience of its author.[23]

**Content analysis: main theoretical axes**

Content analysis is a broad concept and a research technique that can be applied, with adapted tools, not only to communication studies but also to other areas of inquiry, like psychology, the study of language, history, law, and more. In the area of media studies, where it is widely used, content analysis is employed to examine documents and artifacts of various formats – the editorial and advertising contents of newspapers and magazines, whether in print or web formats, as well as texts derived from oral performances (e.g. speeches), pictures, television programmes or other audio-visual texts. In media content analysis, we may consider as content "everything that appears in the mass media" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 28).

Harold D. Lasswell is credited with introducing content analysis as a systematic method in the study of mass communication. He extensively used this method to study the effect of propaganda on the mass audience (Lasswell 1927). This is how Lasswell described content analysis: "An adequate content analysis results in a condensed description of (1) the frequency with which selected symbols have been mentioned, (2) the number of times that the mentioned symbols have been presented favorably, neutrally, or unfavorably, and (3) the number of times the presentations have been made with given degrees of intensity (intensity being measured in terms of prominence—position and emphasis—and dynamic symbol style" (Lasswell 1946, 90). Regarding the preferred method, Lasswell was an advocate of the quantitative approach: "Nothing short of systematic, quantitative methods provide us with what we need to know" (ibid., 74). Lasswell's definition of content analysis is to be read in conjunction with his model of communication: "[a] convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions: Who; Says what; In which channel; To whom; and With what effects" (Lasswell 1948, 37). The "5Ws" in this model also described the five basic elements of communication studies: "Who" refers to control analysis; "Says what" refers to content analysis; "In which channel" refers to media analysis: "To whom" refers to audience analysis; and "With what effects" refers to effect analysis. Content analysis focuses on the "Says what" part of the process, and so does this thesis.

Bernard Berelson offered another definition of content analysis that also recommended, similarly to Lasswell's, the use of quantitative analysis. Berelson described content analysis as a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (1952, 18).

Historically, the early focus in the definition of content analysis was, indeed, essentially quantitative (Macnamara 2005). The emphasis on quantitative tools can also be found, however, in more recent scholarly work. In her 2002 guidebook on content analysis, Kimberley Neuendorf insisted on the need for a quantitative approach to content analysis as a way to ensure scientific validity: "the most distinctive characteristic that differentiates content analysis from other, more qualitative or interpretive message

[23] For information on the author's professional trajectory, see also footnote 11.

analyses is the attempt to meet the standards of the scientific method" (2002, 109). Compared to the time of Lasswell and Berelson, today quantitative content analysis is made easier by two major technological innovations: the availability of texts in digital formats and the availability of dedicated content-analysis software. Combinedly, these tools allow to identify, digest and process unprecedently large amounts of data in a very short amount of time.

Other scholars have argued that quantitative analysis and the use of statistical measures are not the only tools of a scientific method, suggesting that the task of analysing media content may actually require diverse techniques. Dallas Smythe was among the scholars who criticised the quantitative-only approach in the early days of content analysis. He observed that the advocates of the quantitative approach were confusing objectivity with quantification (Smythe 1954). For Krippendorff, quantification is important in science but "qualitative analyses can be systematic, reliable, and valid as well" (2004, 10). In Krippendorff's view, quantitative methods can actually prove inappropriate under certain circumstances: "For analysts seeking specific political information, quantitative indicators are extremely insensitive and shallow. Even where large amounts of quantitative data are available, as required for statistical analyses, these tend not to lead to the "most obvious" conclusions that political experts would draw from qualitative interpretations of textual data (ibid.)". Hansen et al. (1998, 91) have suggested that "rather than emphasizing its alleged incompatibility with other more qualitative approaches [ ...], content analysis is and should be enriched by the theoretical framework offered by other more qualitative approaches, while bringing to these a methodological rigour, prescriptions for use, and systematicity rarely found in many of the more qualitative approaches". For Shoemaker and Reese (1996, 29), "reducing large amounts of text to quantitative data [...] does not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes", although the two scholars also recognised that "quantification has nevertheless great value in summarizing what is to be found in media content [and] systematic repetitive patterns of content make it more likely that content represents some underlying cultural pattern or organizational logic" (ibid.). Their synthesis was that "both traditions have made valuable contributions to the study of media content" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 29).

If, on the one hand, the transferability of the conclusions and theories from qualitative research is inherently more limited compared with quantitative research, qualitative research contains, on the other hand, the possibility of looking at phenomena in a more comprehensive way. Qualitative research has been described, in this respect, as "interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature. Using language to understand concepts based on people's experience, it attempts to create a sense of the larger realm of human relationships" (Brennen 2017, 4). The social scientists who adopt qualitative research methods are recurrently tagged with descriptors such as "research-light", math-phobic, less rigorous and alikes, regardless of the fact that qualitative research can be as challenging and time-consuming as quantitative methods (Brennen 2017, 1). It all depends on whether or not we equate scientific value exclusively with figures, and science with exact sciences. According to Rubin and Rubin, "qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws or physics; rather, the goal is understanding the specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world" (1995, 38).

### *Coding process*

In content analysis, text is to be coded into categories, whose occurrence and frequency is then counted to draw tentative conclusions on the text in relation to the object of the study. The key methodological tool used in this thesis was a "codebook" of the topics or themes that were designed as potentially relevant to gauge social analysis in the press coverage of sports. A purely deductive approach would use existing theory and literature to shape a coding system *before* accessing data. A purely inductive approach would use the data itself (the newspapers, in this case) as the starting point to create the codebook. For this thesis, the codebook was designed using a hybrid approach. A coding frame was initially created on the basis of prior literature, theory and personal experience in the business. In fact, due to the professional experience of the author of this thesis in the newspaper industry, and specifically the sports newspapers segment, the approach could hardly have been, even in the initial phase, purely deductive. Then, consistently with an inductive approach and qualitative research, the initial codebook was adapted, when necessary, on the basis of the analysis of the sampled newspapers. This type of process has been described by Glaser and Strauss as "grounded theory", from the title of their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (2009).[24] Glaser and Strauss argued that "generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses [and] contrast this position with theory generated by logical deduction from *a priori* assumptions" (ibid., chap. 1). One of the advantages of this kind of process is supposed to be the development of a theory that is more closely suited to its supposed uses, as opposed to a prefabricated categorisation that might ultimately prove too generic. In practical terms, the risk when trying to apply pre-constructed coding categories to an unknown text, in a sort of "fishing expedition", is that the majority of the articles may fall into just one of the categories that we had initially established (Hansen et al. 1998, 107).

[24] First published in 1967.

The result of the process was the elaboration of a new matrix of categories (topics and sub-topics) for social analysis in the media coverage of sport (presented in section **3.1.5 The analytical categories for a broader taxonomy – see Table 4**), for use in this as well as further research. The categories that we define for content analysis should indeed be representative enough to remain valuable for future studies and, if necessary, for later reconfiguration. "Consistency" is a key word in the process: "consistency between different coders (*inter-code reliability*), and consistency of the individual coder's coding practice over time (*intra-coder reliability*)" (Hansen et al. 1998, 120). Content analysis was then used to perform the comparison between general-interest newspapers and sports newspapers as far as the social analysis of sports is concerned.

To recapitulate, this thesis used content analysis for: a) the elaboration of a new matrix of analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports (**Table 4**); and b) comparing general press and sports press as far as the social analysis of sports is concerned. In other words, this thesis does not revolve entirely around the results from the content analysis of the sampled newspapers, with a view on the differences in their respective coverage of relevant subjects. The elaboration of an original tool for the study of social analysis in the media coverage of sports on the one hand, constituted by **Table 4** and all the process and conceptualisation that have led to it, was a parallel purpose of the thesis, with equal dignity as the comparison of general-interest and sports newspapers, on the other.

### 1.3.3 Thesis stylebook

Regarding <u>working languages and translations</u>, research for the present thesis primarily utilised sources in English, i.e. the language in which the thesis was written, as well as complementary languages, including primarily although not exclusively French, Italian and Spanish. The sources in French, Italian and Spanish are always cited in-text in the original language, accompanied by an English translation in square brackets, which is placed right after the original or in a new paragraph, in case of long quotes. The translation

into English was always done by the author of this thesis, unless otherwise stated. French, Italian and Spanish are all neo-Latin languages, filled with specificities but also sharing common features that usually enable those who can read one to read with sufficient proficiency the other two as well. More generally, and more importantly, the choice of leaving the original version was grounded in the idea that languages are more than just words and grammar, and this does not only apply to literary texts. Languages carry information about a culture, or at the very least about that of a specific author. A language may therefore constitute relevant information in its own right. Giving the readers access to the original versions is a way to allow for an accurate and more nuanced understanding of the cited authors. In this respect, it is to be remarked that the French abstract in this thesis, required by the University's regulations, has been elaborated from a text that was originally thought and written in English. It is therefore recommended that references to this thesis are rather made to the English text.

Regarding the citation style, this thesis uses *The Chicago Manual of Style* system 17th edition (2017), and specifically the Chicago author-date style. In-text citations comprise the author's name, the publication year and (if relevant) a page number or other identifier (e.g. the source's chapter). Each citation matches an entry in the bibliography, where full details of each source are provided.

The cited authors are always academics, unless otherwise specified. The most frequently cited category outside academics is that of journalists, many of whom have actually taught in universities and/or schools of journalism as well, alongside their journalistic profession. The author of this thesis is also mentioned, from time to time, not only for citations of previous publications but also in connection with pertinent professional experience.

Regarding the layout of this thesis, a certain number of concepts that were deemed to be most important to the analysis are graphically highlighted by dedicated text boxes. These are concepts that may help the reader reconnect with the core subject and research questions of the thesis. Additionally, the text is disseminated with a certain number of

"stories" that narrate relevant case-studies, or provide expanded information on items that have been just previously mentioned in the thesis. These two layout devices, illustrated in **Figure 1**, are meant to offer at the same time a clearer understanding of the issues under examination and a more pleasant and immersive reading experience.

***Figure 1**: Samples of layout devices used in the thesis*

*[Box for key concepts]*

*[Story]*

Finally, for the readers of the digital version, and depending on the software in use, the in-text cross-references (in bold) are internal links that directly lead to the related sections and tables that appear elsewhere in the document. The "Table of contents", "List of tables" and "List of figures" also link directly to the related sections.

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six core chapters, from chapter 2 to chapter 8, plus the current Introduction (chapter 1) and the Conclusion (chapter 9). Chapter 8 has been defined as a "post scriptum" chapter because it was added at a later stage, in mid-2020, during the COVID-19 global health crisis.

**Chapter 1. Introduction**, which is the current chapter, has presented the general topic as well as the main research question and research sub-questions of the thesis. It has also illustrated the objectives of the thesis and the "philosophy" underlying this work. The methodological tools that were used in the thesis process and a guideline section, or "thesis stylebook", were also part of this chapter.

**Chapter 2. The theoretical framework** starts with the classic gatekeeping theory applied to media studies, including its main variants of agenda-setting and framing. This first explanatory framework is then complemented by two auxiliary paradigms that are also considered as pertinent to address the research questions of this study: public journalism and corporate social responsibility (CSR) studies.

**Chapter 3. Sport in society** is where "social analysis" in the journalistic coverage of sport is defined, for the purposes of this thesis and beyond. It therefore elucidates a notion that lies at the very heart of the thesis. The elaboration of an original roadmap for illustrating and treating the social dimension of sport was a critical point in the unfolding of the research. The chapter then examines the value of sport in popular culture and the main theories related to this aspect. Finally, it concludes with an historical overview of how the press contributed to the growth of sport at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, setting the foundation for what would become the tight media-sport relationship as we know it today.

**Chapter 4. Sport in the press** starts by presenting the long-standing debate on the professional legitimacy and credibility of sports journalism. The negative bias toward sports journalism as compared to "more serious" areas of journalism, like political or economic journalism for example, is the result of ongoing stereotypes but is also the result of a series of flaws, which are correspondingly discussed in this chapter. The analysis then continues with the fascinating question of the language of sports journalism. Not only reporters but also writers of literature, in many countries, have often engaged in sports journalism. As this chapter will show, the line between these two professions has recurrently been blurred. The chapter concludes with a description of the international landscape of sports in newspapers, including both general-interest and sports-specialised newspapers. While people and analysts in all countries are widely aware of the presence of sports news in the general press, sports-specialised newspapers remain unfamiliar territory for many, and this chapter is supposed to help fill this gap.

**Chapter 5. The coverage of sports in the Italian press** introduces to Italy's case study, as a stepping-stone toward a comparative study of the social analysis of sports in general-interest and sports newspapers in Italy's media ecosystem. The chapter starts by explaining the specificities of the Italian landscape and what ultimately makes Italy an ideal toolkit to study sports journalism. Many of these specificities are grounded in history. Acknowledging the role of the sports press during Benito Mussolini's regime (1922-1943), for example, is key to understanding the evolution of Italian sports journalism in the decades to come. Another way to apprehend the evolution of Italian sports journalism is by looking at the stories of its major innovators, who are also described in this chapter. The analysis then narrows down to the stories of the newspapers that were sampled for the purposes of this thesis.

**Chapter 6. General-interest newspapers vs. sports newspapers** starts by presenting the details of the sets of data that were collected for the purposes of the comparison between these two types of newspapers. Content analysis was performed on newspapers published during five artificial timeframes (see **Table 9**), each of which featuring different characteristics/events and diverse representativeness in terms of potential contribution to knowledge. These timeframes spanned from September 2018 to April 2020. The chapter then illustrates the multiple results from the cross-correlation analysis of the collected data, or "takeaways" from the comparison.

**Chapter 7. Reporting on the broader framework of sport** is meant to highlight the scope of sports journalism in its full potential. It is difficult to try to put sports journalism into a box, as the chapter will show, and this difficulty is indeed inherently connected with "the broader framework of sports" the title of the chapter refers to. The chapter explores how conventional but also less conventional categories – soft and hard news, hybrid journalism, investigative journalism – may apply to sports journalism. The second part of the chapter attempts to define "the power of sports journalism", by focusing on the social prerogatives of sports reporting as well as the potential influence of sports journalism on identity development, with particular attention to its appeal to children and young people. The chapter concludes with the professional and industrial sides of the

story in order to explore how a systematic coverage of the social aspects of sport can *empower* sports journalism, as a craft and as a business.

**Chapter 8. Post-Scriptum: the 2020 coronavirus crisis and sports coverage in the absence of sports** is very different from the other chapters, and is a rather atypical chapter anyway. It has been called a "post scriptum" chapter because it was not part of the initial outline of the thesis. It was added toward the final stage of the thesis process due to the irruption of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Besides its effects on people and economy at large, the pandemic determined the cancellation or postponement of virtually all sporting competitions worldwide. This unprecedented situation had direct repercussions on sports reporting which deserved to be explored, if only in an incomplete and preliminary fashion.

**Chapter 9. Conclusion** wraps up the main findings from this thesis while highlighting how these may contribute to knowledge. This concluding chapter also overtly exposes the limitations of this study and presents multiple corresponding avenues for future research.

# 2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> Theory may not be needed by journalists themselves to guide their day-to-day activities but it is essential for certain other purposes. It plays a part in explaining, or in justifying, the actions of journalists when these become controversial, and in processes of accountability involving the law or professional self-regulation. In particular, the claim to journalistic freedom as a fundamental principle cannot be sustained without theoretical justification as well as pragmatic arguments.
>
> Denis McQuail (2013, 5)


**2.1 MEDIA STUDIES AND MEDIA SPORT STUDIES**

**2.2 GATEKEEPING AND SPORTS JOURNALISM**

*2.2.1 The role of Mr. Gates*
*2.2.2 Determining which stuff will become "news"*
*2.2.3 Traditional media vs. new gatekeepers?*
*2.2.4 Variants to gatekeeping*
*2.2.5 A wider framework for gatekeeping studies in sports journalism*

**2.3 SPORTS JOURNALISM AS PUBLIC JOURNALISM**

*2.3.1 Jay Rosen, Davis Merritt and the American tradition of pragmatism*
*2.3.2 The emergence of solutions journalism*

**2.4 THE MEDIA'S RESPONSIBILITY AS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)**

*2.4.1 Between commitment and rhetoric*
*2.4.2 The journalist as an employee*
*2.4.3 CSR when the subject is sport*

## 2.1 Media studies and media sport studies

### *Media studies*

This thesis is meant as a contribution to *media studies*. This choice will become self-evident as the analysis proceeds in this and the following parts of the thesis. As described by Cusset,"Media Studies require the simultaneous practice of several disciplinary paradigms, if not their more ambitious interweaving to constitute the media as a new scholarly object" (2012, 2). The present thesis is indeed characterised by an interdisciplinary approach and the parallel use of diverse disciplinary paradigms, which operate as explanatory tools as opposed to dogmas. The choice to privilege content analysis over live individuals and ethnography, for example, reflects a preference for historical methods, based on the use of primary data (in this case newspaper articles), over sociological methods.[25] This preference explains why the professional trajectory of sports journalists is not taken into account in this thesis. The stories of select figures of Italian sports journalism, in sections **5.1.3 The innovators** and **5.1.4 Sports journalism in post-industrial Italy**, are in fact presented with a view of their contribution to the history of Italian sports journalism, and contextualised as such within the thesis's analysis, as opposed to the sociological scrutiny of their gender, race, and class. Meanwhile, case study research, which is most typical of sociological research to identify a small group with a specific and/or representative condition, has been used in this thesis when singling out the case of the Italian press (although sociological research most typically studies small groups of individuals). The study of the interaction between sport and media typically crosses boundaries anyway, and can be found in areas as diverse as history, leisure studies, gender studies, cultural studies and more (Bernstein and Blain 2003, 1).

[25] While the logic behind this choice should only be the promise of scientific understanding, and this aspect was covered by the introductory chapter, this preference was undoubtedly driven also by the academic background of the doctoral candidate – a graduate in *Scienze Politiche, Indirizzo Storico-Politico* (Political Science/History major) from the University of Bologna, and then a graduate student of the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, when pursuing her Master's degree in International Relations.

In terms of sources, this thesis has drawn from both academia and, although to a lesser extent, contributions from the journalistic profession, the latter being frequently and comparatively more abundant as far as sports journalism is concerned. The line is often blurred, although some academics may find this discomforting. Field expertise has consistently allowed media studies to progress, and sports journalism studies are definitely no exception. The author of this thesis did not believe that a rigid separation between academic contributions and the professionalising vocation of journalism schools would positively serve the needs of the thesis.

The academic study of the social impact of mass communication dates back to the early 20th century in the United States. This subject area has been explored at The New School in New York City since its founding in 1919. The first Master of Arts (MA) degree in media studies in the United States was introduced at The New School by John Culkin in 1975.[26] While the teaching tradition of media studies may mostly be of Anglo-American derivation, the scholars and theories that are discussed in this thesis cover a wider geo-cultural scope. The state of media studies is not the object of the present analysis, though, and this thesis does not root for any one "regional" approach anyway.

In the framework of media studies, this thesis has drawn from the classical theory of the gatekeeper as well as some auxiliary paradigms, in particular public journalism and, as far as the industrial or business component is concerned, corporate social responsibility (CSR) studies. These were the theoretical approaches that were acknowledged as directly and indirectly relevant to the topic of this study, and potentially of help to address its research questions. Considering the main purpose of the thesis, gatekeeping theory was somehow a natural choice. As suggested by the thesis title, this work aims to assess the place of social analysis in the press coverage of sports. In order to do so, it looks in the first place at the topics that the news media select – or allow through the metaphorical "gate" – with reference to the societal aspects of sports, as well as the ones that they omit, which sometimes can be even more illuminating. Like this thesis, the gatekeeping theory

[26] See The New School's website at https://www.newschool.edu/media-studies/about/ (last accessed on August 30, 2020).

examines the standards for newsworthiness and ultimately what is selected as news. That theoretical framework also shares, with this thesis's purpose, the assumption that the news media (still) play a role of surveillance/watchdog in society. This is clearly only a fractional use of the broader gatekeeping paradigm (as described in the upcoming section 2.2), as this also looks at organisational policies and does not only focus, like this thesis, on the editorial aspects and the related protagonists/gatekeepers. It is worth noticing that the active role of the gatekeeper can be especially pertinent and decisive when it comes to reporting sports stories of social relevance, as these are stories that are not directly determined by the calendar of sporting competitions. This aspect will be extensively discussed in section **4.1.3 Selecting stories that select themselves**.

The adoption of the classic gatekeeping theory as an explanatory framework for this thesis did not prevent from discussing also some of its purported limits. These include, among others, the difficulties that this paradigm may encounter when trying to interpret a media landscape that is no longer characterised by information coming only from the mainstream media but rather from a variety of information sources (see section **2.2.3 Traditional media vs. new gatekeepers?).**

The conceptual review that is contained in the current chapter 2 will also consider the main variants of the gatekeeping theory, notably agenda-setting and framing, which some scholars regard in fact as separate theories in their own right, followed by the analysis of the two other theoretical frameworks that were deemed to help address the questions and purposes of this thesis, i.e. public journalism and corporate social responsibility (CSR) studies.

### *Media sport studies*

Sport is not a primary object of analysis in media studies as compared to other domains, like the media coverage of politics or economy, for example. This is also one of the reasons why contributions from journalists, alongside those from academic literature,

appear to be particularly precious when studying sports journalism. Wanta has observed that despite the success of sports among newspaper readers ("one of the most highly read sections of the newspaper") and the centrality of sports for television in terms of broadcasting rights, "sports research in mass communication has been largely ignored until the past decade or so" (2013, 76–77). There are some notable exceptions, though. Media studies on sports are largely available with reference to two main subject areas, which are gender and, to a lesser extent, racial issues. Also, media sport studies are rather recurrent in the form of *ad hoc* studies on specific events, such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup (Abbiezzi 2006, 20). Letting aside these exceptions, and as observed by Valois-Nadeau and Bélanger (2018), despite the evolution in the research activity on the sport-communication nexus over the past few years, the number of studies on such nexus remains relatively marginal.[27] Abbiezzi, who has tempted to elaborate an interpretative framework for "media sport studies", has concluded that due to the multiple disciplines that have studied the relationship between sport and the media, often intersecting or even overlapping one another, fragmentation ultimately prevents from identifying it as one distinctive field: "*[esiste] una tale frammentazione che non è possibile evidenziare un corpus organico di studi in questo senso*" [such a fragmentation makes it impossible, in this sense, to highlight one organic *corpus* of studies] (2006, 26). Interestingly in relation to the present thesis, this finding has led Abbiezzi to advocate the need for "[a] reflection on the necessity to observe sports as a product lying in the centre of a relation between society and the media system" (ibid., 28).[28]

There has been, according to Wanta, an evolution in sports communication research over the past two decades, but scholars, says Wanta, are still confronted with the lack of a distinctive theoretical framework for the study of sports journalism:

> One of the most serious problems hampering the development of sports journalism research is the lack of a specific theoretical framework. There is no ''theory of sports communication.'' With no broad guiding theory, conceptual development has taken off

[27] Valois-Nadeau and Bélanger explored, mostly although not exclusively, the French-speaking academic context, but their observation can be applied on a larger geographical scale.
[28] Original English version from the author's "Summary" in English.

> along a number of fronts […] Researchers focused on communication and sport are often tempted to borrow theories from other conceptual traditions" (2013, 78).

Wanta's tone suggests that he considers this state of affairs to be an issue. The epistemological process that has been adopted for this thesis is not much based on "borrowing" from other conceptual traditions because of a deficiency in specific theories, as described by Wanta. The focus of this thesis is on the process that leads professional journalists to choosing some stories for coverage instead of others. Therefore, the gatekeeping theory has *purposely* been adopted as the starting explanatory framework for this thesis, applied to the study of sports journalism. Wanta himself argued, in the aforementioned article (ibid.), that the academic contributions linking long-standing theoretical approaches in mass communication and media studies to sports communication represent "a significant step forward" in recent research (ibid., 83), and that "the varied approaches drawing on other disciplines […] suggest robust ways to conceptualize the sport-media-society nexus" (ibid., 84).

Whether or not the future will lead to the development of a separate theoretical framework for the study of sports journalism, as advocated by Wanta, is yet to be determined. In point of fact, this evolution might be neither indispensable nor desirable for the study of a field – sports journalism – which is strongly and intrinsically cross-disciplinary anyway. Furthermore, if we consider that sport and specifically sports journalism have long been regarded as secondary and "less serious" fields for socio-political analysis (as will be extensively discussed in chapters 3 and 4), narrowing down the theoretical framework risks of becoming one more way to perpetuate this marginalisation. This thesis is probably a presumptuous attempt to keep sport-related journalism on the forefront of the debate.

## 2.2 Gatekeeping and sports journalism

### 2.2.1 The role of Mr. Gates

The theory of gatekeeping, which is by now more than 50 years old, applies to multiple academic disciplines, including communication studies, journalism, sociology and political science, as well as management studies and psychology, among others. Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) is conventionally designed as the first academic who instituted gatekeeping as a theory. Lewin was not a media expert. A German-born psychologist, who pursued part of his academic career in the United States, Lewin looked at "why people eat what the eat" and used the notion of "gate keeper" to design a housewife as the person who selects the food that ends up on the family's dinner table. Food goes from a garden to a family table through channels, and the entrance to a channel can be called a gate, he suggested. Someone controls the gate. Lewin's argument, corroborated by his research, was that not all members of a family have the same power in making food decisions for the family as a whole. His gatekeeping model revolved, indeed, around the idea that the movement from one channel to the next – movement of food, in his study - was determined by the gate keeper's decision, who was ultimately in a position to select whether to purchase the food or not (Lewin 1943; 1947).

Lewin himself later suggested that his theoretical framework could be applied to the news channel: "This situation holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group, for movement of goods, and the social locomotion of individuals in many organizations" (1951, 187). It was however David Manning White, after working for some time as Lewin's research assistant at the University of Iowa, who co-opted Lewin's notion of gate keeper – the controller of the gate – and applied it for the first time to scholarly mass communication studies. For this approach, White credited, besides Lewin, also Wilbur Schramm, and notably Schramm's (1949, 289) observation that "no aspect of communication is so impressive as the enormous number of choices and discards which have to be made between the formation of the symbol in the mind of the communicator, and the

appearance of a related symbol in the mind of the receiver" (as cited in White 1950, 383). According to Shoemaker and Reese (1996), even if research on media content had existed since the early 20th century, modern studies of media content began in fact with David Manning White's 1950 description of journalists as gatekeepers.[29] White wanted to understand how a newspaper editor (a gate keeper) selects some stories as news items while discarding others. While a research professor of journalism at Boston University, he decided to keep track of the work of the wire-editor of the *Peoria Star*, a morning newspaper in a mid-west city of the United States, whom he called "Mr. Gates". White looked at the wire stories that came into the editor's office from three wire services – the Associated Press, United Press, and International News Service – during a seven-day period, from 6 to 13 February 1949.

**David Manning White and the invention of Mr. Gates**

The wire-editor of the *Peoria Star* ("Mr. Gates") was a man in his middle 40s with around 25 years of experience as a journalist, both as reporter and as copy-editor. The job of this editor at the newspaper was to select, from the large number of wire copy that were provided on a daily basis by the Associated Press, United Press, and International News Service, what would end up in the newspaper, as well as to copy-edit and write the headlines for these stories. In White's view, Mr. Gates was "in many respect […] the most important 'gate keeper' of all, for if he rejects a story the work of all those who preceded him in reporting and transmitting the story is negated" (White 1950, 384). White asked the editor to keep the stories he decided not to use in a box, instead of throwing them away, and to write down once he had gone through all the wire stories, why he had rejected each of the stories he was not going to use. At the end of the week period (Feb-6-13, 1949), Mr. Gates wrapped up the remarks that he had been writing in order to examine his own performance. White assumed that the questions that Mr. Gates was going to ask himself about his own performance in the process would be "applicable, with modifications, to all the gate keepers in the communication process" (ibid., 385). This was a key point as for the replicability and long-lasting applicability of the study.

By comparing the wire news which had come in during the week period (around 12,400 inches of news) with the news that appeared in the newspaper for that week, White found that around 90% of the wire copy that Mr. Gates had received had not been used. When looking at the reasons why Mr. Gates had rejected such and such story, White noted that these derived in many cases from "highly subjective value-judgments" (White 1950, 390), thereby acknowledging "how highly subjective, how based on the 'gate keeper''s own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations the communication of 'news' really

[29] Alongside White's (1950) study, Shoemaker and Reese also mention, as a starting point for modern media studies of media content, Warren Breed's (1955) "description of how journalists become socialized to their jobs" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 5).

is" (ibid.). Among the patterns he detected, White found that Mr. Gates did not like stories that included too many statistics and figures, and that whenever Mr. Gates could choose between the stories of the three press associations his newspaper worked with, he chose the "conservative", referred to both its political connotation and the style of writing (White 1950, 388–89). White also found that Mr. Gates did not choose the news depending on the category of the wire story - whether crime, international, science etc. - or at least, he did not apply this selection criterion consciously (ibid., 389).

At the very end of the study, White asked Mr. Gates four additional questions, which were meant to explain in further details why wire stories got selected or rejected: "Question 1: '*Does the category of news affect your choice of news stories*?' […] Question 2: '*Do you feel that you have any prejudices which may affect your choice of news stories?*' […] Question 3: '*What is your concept of the audience for whom you select stories and what sort of person do you conceive the average person to be?*' […] Question 4: '*Do you have specific tests of subject matter or way of writing that help you determine the selection of any particular news story?*'" (White 1950, 389–90) [author's italics]. Mr. Gates's answers to these questions further reinforced White's belief that the editor's choices were mostly driven by individual subjective experiences and expectations. In this respect, White reminded that, according to psychology studies, human beings "tend to perceive as true only those happenings which fit into their own beliefs concerning what is likely to happen" (1950, 390). White did observe that Mr. Gates ended up ensuring, although not necessarily in a conscious way, that the community access as news only the stories which he believed to be true in the first place "as the representative of his culture" (ibid.).

White highlighted an apparently trivial and yet essential question. As remarked by Reese and Ballinger, "by identifying gatekeepers, White brought into focus the intuitive notion that not all that happens in the world gets into the news" (2001, 647). Moreover, by suggesting that news is what editors/gatekeepers say it is, he brought us to question the very role of the news media, as "we can no longer assume that news is an unproblematic reflection of societal events" (Reese and Ballinger 2001, 647).

White's study on Mr. Gates paved the way to further research utilising the same gatekeeper metaphor. If White regarded personal subjectivity as the key force behind the news gatekeeping process, later studies focused on other governing factors. The editors' decisions on what is news may also be impacted, for instance, by news agencies themselves, which somehow suggest to editors their own mix of news (Hirsch 1977; McCombs and Shaw 2006). This may lead to apparently subjective selections by editors that in fact reflect the selection pre-operated by news agencies (Whitney and Becker 1982, 60). Gieber (1956) even regarded the editor as a passive gatekeeper, "caught in a strait

jacket of mechanical details [and] concerned with the immediate details of his work rather than the social arena in which news is made and given meaning" (p. 432). Gieber believed that institutions and their routines were the key governing factors in the gatekeeping process, and went so far as to say that "the wire editor can do little more than the most meager copyreading and editing" (ibid.).

For Pamela Shoemaker, who has long worked on the influences that shape news content, the gatekeepers' selection is driven by their personal values but also by the routines of the organisations they work for as well as by forces outside these organisations, which may additionally influence the overall process (1991). This approach would later evolve into a full theoretical model of news influences, consisting of a hierarchy of five levels of influence and five corresponding levels of analysis: *individual*, related to individual communication workers, with their subjective features and beliefs; *routine*, connected for example to deadlines or proximity; *organisational*, related to elements such as the size of the news outlet, media ownership patterns and others; *extramedia* or social institution, connected with elements outside the media organisation, like government, lobbies or advertising; and *ideological* or social system, related to culture and ideology in the social system (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Shoemaker and Vos 2009). The present doctoral thesis primarily focuses on the individual level.

In 2009, Shoemaker co-authored with Tim Vos a seminal book, entitled *Gatekeeping Theory*, which offered a comprehensive conceptualisation of gatekeeping in journalism. Gatekeeping is defined in the book as "the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day [and] the center of the media's role in modern public life" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009, 1). Shoemaker and Vos credited the work of past media scholars who had previously reached analogous conclusions on the gatekeeping process in journalism. The two authors went as back as the early 20th century, when American writer and Pulitzer Prize winner Upton Sinclair, in his 1919 book *The Brass Check*, harshly criticised the press in the United States for passing on some messages to readers while excluding important ones. Walter Lippmann, who is also credited in Shoemaker and Vos's book, famously wrote that

"[e]very newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have" (Lippmann 1922, 63). The added value in more recent gatekeeping scholarship lies, explain Shoemaker and Vos (2009, 10), in the development of a more structured conceptual framework and "its theoretical lens for studying how media messages come to turn out the way they do". In terms of historical landmarks, the evolution of the gatekeeping theory is generally explored starting with mid-twentieth century scholars (Barzilai-Nahon 2009, 2), as has also been the case with the current section of this thesis.

In *Gatekeeping Theory* (2009), Shoemaker and Vos strongly emphasise the social relevance of gatekeeping:

> The gatekeeping process determines the way in which we define our lives and the world around us, and therefore gatekeeping ultimately affects the social reality of every person […] Yet perhaps the most important aspect of gatekeeping is that issues and events that are not covered are absent from the worldviews of most audience members. People cannot know about what the media fail to tell them, unless the people have personal experience of the event. (2009, 304)

The above passage does not necessarily describe how people stay informed about current events today. Even in the absence of "personal experience of the event", and without media coverage either, people get informed from a variety of other sources (the book was published in 2009, i.e. a long time ago, in times of fast technological developments). What is still true, and this can be observed for example on the occasion of political elections, is that even if media coverage does not automatically equate to the popular success of such and such ideas, "a lack of coverage almost certainly dooms them to failure" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009, 5). The transition to "new gatekeepers" will be explored in section **2.2.3 Traditional media vs. new gatekeepers?** In the meantime, it is important to report, for the sake of completeness, what Reese and Shoemaker have said more recently with reference to their own hierarchy of influences model:

> In spite of shifting conceptual terrain and the spatial turn, the hierarchy of influences remains a useful organizing model and standard against which to measure the

> destabilization and realignment of media forces, and as a means to incorporate explanatory power. Just as it has contributed to building an important field in communication research, of media sociology, we expect it will continue to provide explanatory power well into the future. (Reese and Shoemaker 2016, 407)

### 2.2.2 Determining which stuff will become "news"

A key notion to explain and understand gatekeeping practices is that of newsworthiness. Journalists choose whether or not a piece of information is to become news by attempting to determine the overall newsworthiness, or news value, of that event. Reference is made here to when a piece of information is *to become* news, as opposed to *is* news.[30] This emphasis is consistent with the accent of this thesis on the gatekeeping role of journalists, who do not simply relay what is going on in the world but *actively* select what will become news and what will not (Cuccoli 2010). Farrell and Cupito (2010, 2) have simply put it by arguing that "something becomes news because reporters and editors recognize it as news".

The first extensive reference work on news values as a conceptual framework was written by Galtung and Ruge in the mid-1960s. Focusing on newspapers and broadcast news, the two scholars devised a system of 12 factors, or values, that published news items seemed to display (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Events, they argued, were more likely to become news based on the extent to which they meet some of the following conditions: frequency, threshold (the amplitude and intensity of an event), unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance (between expectations and reality), continuity, composition (connected with the news editor's need to diversify the topics), reference to elite nations, reference to persons, and reference to something negative (ibid., 64-91). These 12 conditions were said to be interrelated to one another. Furthermore, they added, when an event is low on one factor, it may be high on another factor which compensates for it (ibid.).

[30] One of the classic studies on newsworthiness is Gans' *Deciding What's News*. The full reference is: Gans, Herbert J. (2004). *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time / Herbert J. Gans*. Visions of the American Press. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press. The book was originally published by Random House in 1979. Gans's book is not discussed in the short overview of this section, which focuses on studies of newspapers.

Nearly 40 years later, Harcup and O'Neill (2001) proposed an update to Galtung and Ruge's original news criteria. Harcup and O'Neill put to the test the landmark study of their predecessors through the content analysis of three British newspapers, including *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. The empirical analysis on these newspapers led Harcup and O'Neill to a new set of factors to determine newsworthiness. In a section meaningfully entitled "Those Parts of the News That Galtung and Ruge Did Not Uncover" (ibid.), they singled out four factors that, in their view, were additionally to be considered: entertainment, reference to something positive, reference to elite organisations or institutions, and a newspaper's own agenda (Harcup and O'Neill 2001, 261–80). Their re-elaboration of Galtung and Ruge's original news criteria finally led to a new overall taxonomy which included the following list of requirements: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, relevance, follow-up (stories following up from previous coverage), and newspaper's agenda. With regard to the subject of this thesis, the most pertinent contribution by Harcup and O'Neill (2001) lies in the addition, among the news criteria, of the *entertainment* and *celebrity* dimensions. Entertainment is, and has always been a central component in the media coverage of sports. As for celebrity, this has grown as one of the major drives of the media coverage of sports over the past few decades, especially on television.

Interestingly for this thesis, Harcup and O'Neill also suggested that "many news stories are not related to events at all" (2001, 274), one more aspect that differentiated their analysis from Galtung and Ruse's (1965), they claimed. This additional remark is of particular interest when looking at the coverage of socially relevant topics in sports, as these are not related to events in a large number of cases. "Events" in sports are mostly competitions and sporting results, at least in typical media coverage, whereas a sociologising coverage of sports is by definition more open to observing long-term issues.

Harcup and O'Neill also pointed to the rather inconvenient truth, for media scholars, that "by its very nature, no content analysis […] can show us which possible news items were rejected or not even noticed by the news selectors" (2001, 269). This may be true in absolute terms, since no content analysis will ever provide an exhaustive answer on all

the items which could have been included but were not. However, one of the methodological underpinnings of this thesis is that if we move from a mechanistic analysis of the items included and expand the focus of attention to the social relevance of *all the social issues potentially at stake*, it is indeed conceivable to detect news items, sometimes even entire subject areas, which were rejected or overlooked by the news selector (even if reasonably not all of them). This kind of epistemological process presupposes, in both the news selectors and the journalism scholar who examines them, a sufficient knowledge of the content area itself. And as for journalism scholars, it means knowing the world of sport as well, and not just journalism theories and practices.

In 2017, Harcup and O'Neill provided yet another update of their study of news values, which was now meant to examine "the extent to which any taxonomy of news values devised in the age before Twitter, Facebook and other interactive platforms, can be taken as read today" (2017, 1472).[31] Compared with their 2001 content analysis, which looked at three British newspapers (*The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*), their new research encompassed a much larger range of newspaper titles, now including *The Guardian, The Times, The Independent*, *The Sun, Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror, Daily Express,* plus the free-distribution dailies *London's Evening Standard* and *Metro*. Based on their new study, Harcup and O'Neill concluded that one more revised set of news values was needed to mirror contemporary journalism. The updated list, considerably longer than the one in their 2001 article, integrated the following new items: exclusivity, conflict (stories on controversies, strikes, fights etc.), audio-visuals (stories with audio-visual potential), shareability (likely to generate sharing on social media), and drama (ibid., 1470-88). Similarly to the study that had previously led to the 2001 article, the new study also focused on "lead stories published on news pages [while] excluding sports, finance, features and comment pages" (Harcup and O'Neill 2017, 1476). It is to be pointed out that Harcup and O'Neill's content analysis excluded sports "pages" but did not exclude sports altogether. The two authors actually refer to the coverage of sports in various parts of both their 2001 and 2017 articles. In their 2001 article, for example,

[31] The article was first published online in March 2016.

they noticed that the obsession with celebrities in the U.K. press also involved sports stars, among others (Harcup and O'Neill 2001, 270). In their 2017 article, under the updated news value of Entertainment, they included stories concerning "sport", which did not appear in their earlier article.

### 2.2.3 Traditional media vs. new gatekeepers?

Anyone can be a gatekeeper. Anyone who has information about an event can decide whether or not to dispatch it to another person or organisation. Never has this been more true than in today's world, in which digital technologies and platforms make it possible for virtually everyone to reach millions of people in real time. In a pre-Internet, pre- social media era, events tended to be as big as the attention they received from the media. This is no longer the case, at least not to the same extent. The news media are no longer the one way to learn what is going on in the world. However, to argue that the news media have lost their gatekeeping power altogether, or that their gatekeeping leverage is now comparable to that of any alternative news source, would be as inaccurate as continuing to maintain that the mainstream media are still the ultimate gatekeepers and holding on to a world that does not exist anymore. This thesis is based on the assumption that the social influence of the mainstream news media, despite the digital revolution and the transformations this has generated, is still different from that of alternative news sources. Anyone can be a gatekeeper, but this does not mean that anyone *is* a gatekeeper, with the same kind of credibility, scope and social impact. Boyle (2015, 357) has argued, with specific reference to sports information, that although user-generated contents have grown as a primary source of information also for journalists, "it is often when these reports are picked up and amplified by more mainstream journalism that they gain wider public prominence".

At the time of their 2009 book (*Gatekeeping Theory*), Shoemaker and Vos already warned against a rising tendency to point to the death of the media gatekeeping theory altogether due to the advent of the Internet. The major impact of the Internet on the U.S. elections in 2004 and 2008 had persuaded some critics that the Internet had spelled the end of the

gatekeeping theory, but according to the two authors, this conclusion was wrong (Shoemaker and Vos 2009). One of the reasons why the gatekeeping theory is still valid in the Internet era, they argued, is that information units in blogs are hardly ever entirely new and original, hence the "real" gatekeepers have not fundamentally changed:

> Information from blogs is highly redundant and includes information that bloggers could not have experienced first hand. Information diffuses through mass media and interpersonal channels to the bloggers and their staffs, and they combine it with their own understanding of the world. The result may be idiosyncratic, but it is based on information that has traveled through many gates" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009, 7).

More recently, Vos has "revisited" the gatekeeping theory in multiple articles that he has authored and co-authored (Vos 2015; Heinderyckx and Vos 2016; Vos and Finneman 2017; Vos and Russell 2019), all of which stating the ongoing validity of the theory as an applicable conceptual framework.[32] Meanwhile, a transformation of news media and journalism is also acknowledged in these sources that calls for some reform of the theory. The coexistence of the ongoing validity of the theory with the need to somehow reform it has been portrayed as the "dilution of the professional gatekeeping role" of journalists (Vos and Finneman 2017, 277).

Heinderyckx has extensively investigated the aspects that may have changed, or require change in the theory, and has finally referred to gatekeeping as "alive and kicking" (2015, 254). According to Heinderyckx, the five theoretical levels of analysis suggested by Shoemaker and Vos in *Gatekeeping Theory* (2009) and previous work (see section **2.2.1 The role of Mr. Gates**) have not lost their theoretical relevance: "Although the recent evolution of communication technologies and uses has significantly altered each of these levels and their interaction, they remain fully relevant as a powerful analytical tool" (Heinderyckx 2015, 254).

[32] Vos has used the notion of "revisiting" in the title of one of the cited sources. See Vos, Tim P. 2015. "Revisiting Gatekeeping Theory During a Time of Transition." In *Gatekeeping in Transition*, edited by Tim P. Vos and François Heinderyckx, 3–24. New York, NY: Routledge. Vos has also reexamined, with Russell, gatekeeping theory at the institutional level with reference to the impact of Silicon Valley's technology platforms on journalism, in Vos, Tim P., and Frank Michael Russell. 2019. "Theorizing Journalism's Institutional Relationships: An Elaboration of Gatekeeping Theory." *Journalism Studies*, March, 1–18.

For Lazaroiu (2011), the importance of gatekeeping by professional journalists has actually *increased* in the digital era, as they are the ones who can – in his view – seek and check facts in a more objective and less judgmental way, especially in a society where information is circulated so easily and extensively. The proliferation of sources from non-professional journalists and social media has raised increasing concern over the reliability of news and sources. There are no official guarantees that the mainstream media will not also purposely manufacture and distribute false information, but it is especially on the Internet and via social media – comparatively still a lawless "no man's land" – that false information, from impersonal and often uncontrollable sources, finds an easy way to proliferate. The debate on the mainstream media not always being independent from political and commercial pressures, which is a healthy and necessary debate, should not interfere with the basic assumption that a trained professional is generally more likely to perform effectively as a reporter than an improvised reporter, and that the codes and rules that regulate the journalistic profession tend to be a better guarantee for the reader.

The analysis of the booming popularity of social media, arguably the *new* gatekeepers, should also be appraised in conjunction with demography. Despite its pervasive reach, the use of social media is still more widespread among young and very young people than among older age groups. This is one more reason to consider that the digital revolution, while transforming the way news is produced and consumed in the general landscape, has not killed traditional news media outlets as gatekeepers altogether. It is not possible to predict the direction that things will take as today's youth gets older, and whether the pervasiveness of non-professional information sources will further increase or will instead scale down. Incidentally, social phenomena do not necessarily evolve in a linear way.[33] Instead of killing traditional and professional news gatekeepers, the unrestrained proliferation of news sources might actually generate a major push toward a re-evaluation of the founding skills of the journalistic craft, such as accurate information gathering, writing skills, the ability to interview and the ability to create and tell stories, among

[33] The theoretical paradigms that explain social changes would take us too far from the core of the analysis and are not examined in this thesis.

others. Vos has warned against the risk of overrating the current multiplicity of news sources, arguing that "as empowering as it would be to believe that the circulation of news had been democratized through digital media, we would do well to investigate the variety of channels or patterns for how news makes its way to the public. […] So, many, many media gates exist, but audiences attend to a relatively small percentage of those gates" (Vos 2015, 10). He does not specifically refer to demography, but this might well be one of the reasons.

Haynes, Singer and Ceppos (2007) have highlighted the function of *human* gatekeeping, as opposed to that operated by automatic devices, in the digital age. Their study remarks that the advent of new media technologies has certainly challenged traditional media roles, including gatekeeping, and that journalists must find ways to adapt to the new environment. However, they argue, "shifting roles" are accompanied by some "enduring values" – the article is indeed entitled "Shifting Roles, Enduring Values: The Credible Journalist in a Digital Age".[34] The study looks, among other aspects, at the key issue of news aggregators websites on the Internet, on which large numbers of readers nowadays rely for news. These aggregators present the advantage of tailoring the information, but the gatekeeping process in this case is operated by algorithms that do not necessarily pick news items based on the credibility of the sources or their value to civic knowledge. The gatekeeping role, when played by a computer program, is disconnected from the human, individual judgement and values which form the basis of work in an actual newsroom and of journalism ethics (Hayes, Singer, and Ceppos 2007).

In contrast with the "supporters" described thus far, other scholars have in turn denied the ongoing validity of the media gatekeeping theory in a digitally-driven society. For Thomas Ernste (2014), the gatekeeping theory is no longer suitable to describe today's media environment because it was primarily developed to illustrate the media system of the 20th century. Ernste argues that in an Internet-based society, "it has essentially become necessary to once again find the actual gatekeepers. This is one of the most

[34] Full reference: Hayes, Arthur S., Jane B. Singer, and Jerry Ceppos. 2007. "Shifting Roles, Enduring Values: The Credible Journalist in a Digital Age." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 22 (4): 262–79.

important new characteristics of the evolving gatekeeping process—that we can recognize media gatekeepers who now are not affiliated with media organizations". (Ernste 2014)

Williams and Delli Carpini (2000; 2004), who studied gatekeeping in connection with the media coverage of American politics, have concluded that the availability of a virtually unlimited number of sources of political information means that, in fact, there are no longer any gatekeepers. In their analysis of the coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, they noticed the difficulty for the elites – intellectual, political and media alike – in grasping the increasingly limited ability of journalists to operate as gatekeepers (B. A. Williams and Delli Carpini 2000; 2004). The Clinton-Lewinsky scandal illustrated, in their view, "a fundamental change in the contemporary American media environment: the virtual elimination of the gatekeeping role of the mainstream press" (B. A. Williams and Delli Carpini 2000, 61). In a later book, and to reiterate this approach, the same authors wondered if there was, after all, a significant difference between Tina Fey and Katie Couric (B. A. Williams and Delli Carpini 2011). Fey and Couric are both popular figures of American television, but while Couric is an experienced news anchor who has served on all major U.S. television networks, Fey is a comedian, best known for her appearances on the *Saturday Night Live* series.

For Matthew Hindman (2009), the advent of the Internet has moved the gatekeeper's role from the production to the filtering of information:

> Gates and gatekeepers remain a critica1 part of the information landscape, even in the Internet age. Some ways in which online information is filtered are familiar, as traditional news organizations and broadcast companies are prominent on the Web. Other aspects of online filtering are novel. Search engines and portal Web sites are an important force, yet a key part of their role is to aggregate thousands of individual gatekeeping decisions made by others. Ultimately, the Internet is not eliminating exclusivity in political life; instead, it is shifting the bar of exclusivity from the *production* to the *filtering* of information. (Hindman 2009, 13)

This approach is somehow at the intersection between supporters and opposers of the theory. Hindman's explanation recalls Shoemaker and Vos's idea, previously mentioned

in this section, that the information circulated via blogs is "idiosyncratic, but […] based on information that has traveled through many gates" (Shoemaker and Vos 2009, 7).

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To wrap up, this doctoral thesis is evidently founded on the assumption that the gatekeeping theory still has explanatory value. The "dilution of the professional gatekeeping role" of journalists, to quote Vos and Finneman (2017, 277), in a more diverse media landscape does not equate to the evaporation of the gatekeeping role of professional journalists altogether. The arguments that have been presented thus far are meant to highlight that this is not just wishful thinking. History teaches that, especially in time of changes, we should be careful not to throw the baby with the bathwater. At the same time, this thesis is also grounded in the idea that journalism and news media have no choice but to adapt to the new media environment that the digital revolution has brought about, resonating Heinderyckx and Vos's claim that the "gatekeeping theory will remain relevant pending a process of reform that must accompany that of journalism and news media" (2016, 29). The two approaches can and must coexist. In a report entitled *Core Skills for the Future of Journalism*, released by The Poynter Institute for Media Studies in 2014, it is argued that "journalists with the right skills are essential for journalism — and for preserving journalism's role within society" (Finberg and Klinger 2014, 2). It is not just a professional challenge but a larger societal challenge. The journalistic toolkit needs constant updating, and this (necessary) evolution cannot be reduced to a battle between allegedly "old" skills and new skills. Providing a comprehensive blueprint for social analysis in sports reporting, namely the core of this thesis, is also supposed to help revamp the gatekeeping function of professional news media people in a fast-changing environment.

### 2.2.4 Variants to gatekeeping

#### *Agenda-setting*

Gatekeeping theories have been stretched to other perspectives or variants, primarily the agenda-setting theory and the framing theory, which need to be addressed if only shortly in order to consider the potential avenues for deeper analysis. The agenda-setting theory was originally formulated by McCombs and Shaw in the early 1970s, based on a study of the effects of the media coverage of the 1968 U.S. presidential election on Chapel Hill voters. McCombs and Shaw found that "editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position" (McCombs and Shaw 1972, 176). The core proposition was that the news agenda also influences the public agenda, i.e. that there is a correlation between the salience given in the media to issues and the salience the public will attach to the same issues. The cause-and-effect correspondence between media agenda and public agenda is indeed one of the pillars of classic agenda-setting theory. As a synthesis of their theory, McCombs and Shaw (ibid., 177) borrowed Bernard Cohen's remark that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*" (Cohen 1963).

More than 30 years after their original formulation of the theory, Shaw and McCombs reiterated the applicability of the cause-and-effect principle to the new media environment, but expanded the notion of media agenda to comprise a mixed and larger range of information sources and influences on public perception. In the Internet-driven media landscape, they argued, agenda setting is defined by two complementary approaches: civic osmosis and agendamelding. The civic osmosis perspective highlights the fact that today the public absorbs news and information from "a vast sea of news and information, a gestalt of mass media channels where the whole indeed is much greater than the sum of its parts." (Shaw and McCombs 2008, 3). In this scenario, the public agenda is the result of the *osmosis* of journalism messages that the public receives through

a variety of news channels, "not just through a few major outlets, and that collectively we learn from reading newspapers *or* watching news on television *or* talking to people *or* reading blogs *or* watching Jon Stewart *or* from many other sources. From many sources it flows together to form a picture." (ibid., 6-7). In order to explain how audiences borrow from different agendas, Shaw and McCombs added a second, complementary approach, alongside civic osmosis, which they called *agendamelding*. In their view, "audiences do absorb agendas, as suggested in so many agenda setting studies, but […] audiences most probably mix the agendas in ways that are personally comfortable" (Shaw and McCombs 2008, 7). The civic osmosis and agendamelding perspectives provide, they claimed (ibid., 3), a better understanding of the Internet's role in society. Not only did the 2008 update to their original version of the agenda-setting theory (McCombs and Shaw 1972) reflect more accurately the Internet-driven media landscape, but by broadening the picture of public communication to the multiplicity of impactful agendas, the update also moderated the inherently controversial notion of a cause-and-effect correspondence between news media agenda and public agenda.

Regarding the exposure to a variety of inter-related media channels, it is important to remind that the absorption of news and information from an array of channels pre-existed the introduction of digital tools. In the mid-1940s, a study on the 1940 U.S. presidential election, which compared exposure to newspapers, radio and magazines – i.e. the media of the time – found that "[p]eople highly exposed to one medium of communication also tend to be highly exposed to other media. There are relatively few who are highly exposed to one medium and little exposed to the other" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 122). The overlap in the people's use of different media, and therefore the potential exposure of the public to multiple media agenda, was not born with digital media, even though the multiplication of communication channels has made the subject more topical than ever. The present thesis focuses on one specific type of medium, i.e. print newspapers, and on the gatekeeper's selection (of sport-related topics of social relevance), as opposed to its consequences on the public. It is therefore primarily axed on journalistic choices. Further research, more axed on the audience side, could investigate the complementarity of news sources with regard to sport-related subjects of social

relevance, trying to assess their respective influence on audience reactions and whether a particular medium takes centre stage in terms of influence.

In 2012, in his ongoing exploration of the agenda-setting theory, McCombs expressed the idea that, contrary to what some predicted, the agenda-setting role of the news media had not come to an end. To corroborate this statement, he cited the results of a study he had previously participated in (R. Coleman and McCombs 2007) of state-wide surveys in North Carolina and Louisiana, aimed at assessing the weight of the different media channels in relation to age-related differences:

> [D]espite evidence that the youngest generation is not exposed to traditional media as frequently as the older generations, and does use the Internet significantly more, there is little support for the intuitive idea that diversity of media will lead to the end of a common public agenda as we have known it. Rather, different media use among the young did not seem to influence the agenda-setting effect much at all. (Coleman and McCombs 2007, 503, as cited in McCombs 2012, 10).

## *Framing*

The other major variant of the gatekeeping theory, that is the framing theory, takes agenda setting further by suggesting that journalists, besides influencing the topics of the public agenda, also provide a "frame", that is the way news is presented to the audience. Not only do they decide what to think about, i.e. the content, but also meaning. The roots of the framing theory in sociology are generally attributed to the Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman, notably his book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974). Goffman drew from Gregory Bateson's concept of framing. In his book "Steps to an Ecology of Mind", Bateson described cognitive frames as "a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages" (Bateson 1972, 191). Goffman (1974) focused on how conceptual frames structure a person's perception of society. In Goffman's view, journalists highlight certain aspects of an issue, or certain values, in order to direct the audience towards a particular line of interpretation. In mass communication studies, sociological framing research looks at the specific words, images and presentation styles that communicators use to convey information to the audience. A

media frame has been defined as ‘‘the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankard et al. 2001, 3).

Framing has also been described as the second level of agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw 1993). First-level agenda setting, which would be the traditional approach of agenda-setting research, refers to the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda based on the relative salience of *objects* (issues, political figures and other objects of attention). Second-level agenda setting, and that would be framing, refers to the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda based on the relative salience of the *attributes* of these objects (McCombs and Shaw 1993). In Robert Entman’s (1993) definition, “to frame is *to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (ibid., 52 – author’s italic). According to McCombs (2005, 546), Entman’s definition is “complementary to agenda-setting theory in its use of the term salient”. Attribute agenda setting has indeed been described as a natural extension of the original concept (Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw 2004). Other framing scholars, by contrast, argue against subsuming framing under the broad concept of agenda setting, and call for a more specified conceptualisation (Scheufele 2009; Kosicki 1993).

Interestingly, Van Gorp (2007) has emphasised the distinction between framing *by* the media and framing *through* the media. Reporters receive every day press releases from political institutions, economic institutions, interest groups, advertisers and businesses. The actors behind these releases want to persuade reporters to cover a certain situation in the first place: they inform the media. But they may also strategically try to convey a certain viewpoint, hoping that the media coverage will reflect it. In other words, these actors use their own frame, of which the media may become a simple vector. While presenting a distinction between framing “by” and framing “through” the media, Van Gorp (ibid.) suggests, however, that the focus should remain on framing “by” the media anyway, because even quoting a statement made during an interview ultimately rests on

a choice made *by* the medium in question. Assessing whether the framing process derives on the medium itself or is rather the mere indirect result of the leverage of some frame sponsor, is entering into a judgment of intentions. This aspect can be especially relevant when studying sports journalism. In sports journalism, comparatively more than in other areas of journalism, reporters are accused of being too close to their sources, for example the big clubs, the major sports brands or the powerful sports governing bodies (more on this aspect in section **4.1 Sports journalism: are you serious?**). The analysis carried out for this thesis focused on the media content itself without expanding on the influences from external entities on such content, even though these can be absolutely real in several cases (Van Gorp did not imply that these influences were not real either).

### *Network agenda setting*

The current overview of the main variants of gatekeeping concludes with a quick look at a third level of agenda setting, which has been conceptualised as "network agenda setting" (Barzilai-Nahon 2008). Both first and second level agenda setting treat objects and attributes, respectively, as separate elements. By contrast, network agenda setting is grounded in the idea that agenda setting is rather the result of a networked media agenda of objects or attributes. The notion of network refers to networks created by technology, such as the Internet, as well as other types of networks, like social networks (Barzilai-Nahon 2008). Traditional communication literature on gatekeeping mainly focuses on the news selection process, and so does this thesis, whereas network agenda setting looks at the relationships among gatekeepers, as well as between gatekeepers and receivers. Network agenda setting is therefore not directly relevant as a conceptual framework for this thesis. For other research purposes, network agenda setting certainly appears to be suitable to apprehend the evolution of gatekeeping in contemporary society, where the different actors are indeed highly networked and interconnected.

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To wrap up about the relevance of the above variants to gatekeeping to the present thesis, it has been shown that they are not pertinent since they all shift the focus of attention from the topics at hand which may become news to accessory aspects, such as the attributes of these topics or the journalists' motivations in selecting them for the news. The word "accessory" is used here to refer to additional elements and does not imply "less important". The analysis in this thesis stops, by contrast, at the choice of the topics, i.e. the first gatekeeping step.

### 2.2.5 A wider framework for gatekeeping studies in sports journalism

Gatekeeping has been used as a theoretical framework to study sports journalism by a limited number of scholars, and most typically with a focus on one specific topic or set of topics. In fact, in most of these cases, gatekeeping has been used in media sport studies to explain gender-related differences in the coverage of sports, with a focus on the limited and/or stereotypical coverage of women's sports as compared to men's sports.

Marie Hardin has extensively written, as a mass communication scholar, on sports and society issues, with special (although not exclusive) attention for the coverage of women's sports.[35] In 2014, Hardin was named dean of the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communication at Penn State University, a role that she still held at the time of writing of this thesis. In September 2005, the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism, part of the Bellisario College of Communication, was awarded a $1.5 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to set up the "Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society". Among her multiple publications on media sports and society matters, Hardin has specifically written on gatekeeping in sports journalism, although mostly in relation to gender issues. In a 2005 article focusing indeed on gender issues, Hardin described the coverage of women's sports as "Stopped at the gate", from the title of the article (Hardin

[35] Marie Hardin is the author and co-author of dozens of articles and book chapters about societal issues in the media coverage of sports. In this section of the thesis, the focus is specifically on the writings in which she has used, or referred to gatekeeping.

2005), with sports editors systematically sidelining women's sports.[36] The article was based on a survey of 285 sports editors in the Southeastern United States, conducted with the purpose of exploring gatekeeping factors that might affect the coverage of women's sports.[37] The study showed that "many editors fail to systematically ascertain reader interests, many believe that female athletic potential is inferior to that of males, and some say they feel no commitment to hiring women or covering women's sports" (Hardin 2005, 62). Hardin pointed to the poor judgment of many sports section gatekeepers, who "determine content based more on their own sense about audience interests than on the audience itself" (ibid., 72). This aspect is directly pertinent to one of the issues raised by this thesis, which looks among other things at whether news gatekeepers, when they select the news, are genuinely aware of the audience's level of interest in the social analysis of sport or only (mistakenly) assume, based on their own sense – to paraphrase Hardin – that the readers' interest in the social dimension of sport is inherently limited (as further discussed in chapter **7. Reporting on the broader framework of sport**). Interestingly, Hardin (2005) noticed that in her survey, the most experienced editors were the ones who more often admitted they were unsure about their gatekeeping decisions.

Among the other factors that often "stop at the gate" women's sports news, Hardin has also extensively looked at the gender of the gatekeepers/editors (Hardin 2005; Hardin and Shain 2005; Kian and Hardin 2009; Hardin 2013). One of the findings of the aforementioned survey (Hardin 2005) was that female editors think they are more likely to cover women's sports than their male counterparts. In a later article, devoted to the coverage of women's sports in TV news, Hardin has defined sports newsrooms as "a last bastion of hegemonic masculinity", and has argued that in order to increase the coverage of women's sports, women should "reach a critical mass" in sports newsrooms (2013, 241) – the article was meaningfully entitled "Want Changes in Content?: Change the Decision Makers". Hardin has explored the decision-making process in the selection of

[36] Full reference: Hardin, Marie. 2005. "Stopped at the Gate: Women's Sports, 'Reader Interest,' and Decision Making by Editors." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82 (1): 62–77.
[37] The author acknowledged that the Southeastern United States was considered "more socially conservative than other regions", while arguing that although perhaps not universally applicable, the survey findings suggested areas for further research (Hardin 2005, 74).

news, with a focus on the coverage of women's sports, also in a co-authored chapter entitled "Gatekeeping and Sport Communication", written with Steve Bien-Aimé (Bien-Aimé and Hardin 2015) for *The Routledge Handbook of Theory in Sport Management* (Cunningham, Fink, and Doherty 2015).[38]

The relationship between female editor and wider coverage of women's sports is arguably automatic, though. It has even been observed that the claim that more women in sports journalism would increase the coverage of women's sports could be "a myth" (Bruce 2013). Hardin herself has cited, in another co-authored article (Hardin, Whiteside, and Ash 2014, 45), the findings from Tracy Everbach's content analysis of the coverage of women's sports in the sports sections of newspapers in the Dallas-Fort Worth and Seattle areas. Everbach (2008) compared the sports sections headed by female editors with those led by male editors and found that in both cases, regardless of the gender of the editor in charge, the content in the newspapers' sports sections was dominated by men's sports anyway.

**On women as sports editors**

During her tenure as president of the Sport and Citizenship's "European Network on Women and Sport", from 2010 to 2014, the author of this doctoral thesis often heard the chief editors of sports newspapers saying that the women in their newsrooms were as reluctant as their male counterparts when it came to cover women's sports.[39] In fact, female colleagues could often be *more* restrictive than their male colleagues, they said.

This reluctance might be attributed to the fact that alongside women in the media industry (and elsewhere) who proudly vindicate a feminist approach, or simply gender equality, others struggle to show that their gender identity does not influence their decision-making / gatekeeping approach, and that they only base their choices on gender-neutral logics.

What might change in connection with the gatekeeper's gender is not much, or not only the quantity but rather the *quality* of the coverage. The quantity of coverage cannot be

[38] The broader issue of the effects of gender on the work of sports journalists has been explored by Lucie Schoch in multiple publications, mostly with the Swiss daily press as a case study (Schoch and Ohl 2010; Schoch 2011; 2013a; 2013b; 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019). Reference to Schoch's work will be made later in this thesis (see section **4.2 Literature for the people)**.

[39] The "European Network on Women and Sport" was primarily devoted to the promotion of the media coverage of women's sports. On the author's experience in this segment, see also footnote 146.

adopted as the only sign of a balanced and appropriate coverage of women's sports, as quality also matters (Hardin, Whiteside, and Ash 2014). In this respect, it has been noticed that female writers are more interested than their male colleagues in the *sporting performance* of female athletes, similarly to what is done for men's sports, while male sportswriters appear to be comparatively keener on employing consolidated gender stereotypes to describe women's sports (Kian and Hardin 2009; Hardin, Whiteside, and Ash 2014). It is probably worth remembering, to contextualise historically the media coverage of women's sports, that sport was created by men for men, and that the persisting stereotypes in sports have also been mostly created by men.[40]

Erin Whiteside, who has co-authored some of her articles with Marie Hardin (Hardin, Zhong, and Whiteside 2009; Whiteside and Hardin 2011; Hardin, Whiteside, and Ash 2014), has also contributed specific writings on gatekeeping in sports journalism, but once again with a focus on gender issues, which are in fact her primary research interest. And similarly to most existing work, Whiteside has explored the reasons why news gatekeepers tend to devote only limited coverage to women's sports as compared to men's sports.[41]

If we leave the realm of gender studies, which clearly emerges as *the* conventional field for the few studies on gatekeeping in sports journalism, it may be worth mentioning the work of Alan Bairner, which stands out as rather unconventional. A scholar in sport and social theory, Bairner (2017) has proposed to utilise fiction as a source for sports sociology with "novelists as gatekeepers". Bairner argues that some fictional characters can be valuably used to highlight the relationship between sports, individuals and society. The author refers in particular to "sports fiction [including] novels, short stories, poems

[40] Without getting into the origins of modern sports, which would be well beyond the scope of this thesis, many sports that are still played today take their origins from primitive and pastimes activities that were reserved for men. From a long-term historical perspective, women's sport is a recent phenomenon, which goes hand in hand with the evolution of the women's role in society. As such, its level of evolution also differs depending on geography and culture.

[41] Whiteside has also explained that, in her own work, she has "incorporated the concept of the social construction of sports news to offer both an explanation for *why* we see certain trends in content, and *how* various attitudes towards girls and women manifest themselves in sports media" [author's italic] (2016, 340).

and drama in which sport is a significant element but is not necessarily the sole focus" (Bairner 2017, 524). Bairner selected three novels as "evidence", for the purposes of his study: Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc. J. Henry Waugh, PROP* (1971), Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter* (1995), and Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding* (2012). This is how Bairner explains, based on his analysis of these three novels, why fiction can be a source for sociological investigation:

> The stories that the three writers tell are not true but they could be. It is that 'fact' alone that makes them valuable sources of sociological data. First, they allow us to enter worlds that would be difficult, if not impossible, to access using traditional methods of data collection. Second, they are repositories of emerging research themes. Third, they facilitate analysis of themes that are of considerable importance for the sociological understanding of sport (Bairner 2017, 532).

Bairner makes it clear the distinction between fiction and sociology all through his analysis – this is never an issue – but notices that some novelists, as a matter of fact, think sociologically, and it does not have to be a conscious process, he says. Richard Ford's description of Frank Bascombe, for example, who is the protagonist of *The Sportswriter* and indeed a sportswriter, offers the reader "an opportunity to plumb the depths of sports writers' innermost feelings", something it would be harder to explore by other means, says Bairner. Bairner's article is meant as a contribution to sports sociology, as opposed to media sociology. However, one of the three novels he has explored – *The Sportswriter* (Ford 1995) – is about journalism, and that is no coincidence. Bairner explains that the three novels were selected as examples of a genre as well as because they address what he calls "the three key elements in any analysis of the ways in which sport is practised and consumed": fandom (Coover's book), journalism (Ford's book) and athleticism (Harbach's book). Journalism is indeed one of them.

To conclude this section on the sporadic scholarly work that has used gatekeeping theory to study sports journalism, it is worth mentioning Cyrus Saatsaz's Master of Arts (MA) thesis, entitled "Sports Journalists as the Gatekeepers of Cultural and Social Movements: A Comparative Analysis of the Media Coverages of Jackie Robinson, Jason Collins and Michael Sam", written for his MA Degree in Communication at San Diego State

University (2015). Saatsaz's work bears the unusual feature of *not* focusing on the media coverage of women's sports. Another specificity of Saatsaz's thesis lies in its focus on two different issues, as opposed to one, the latter being most typical of scholarly analyses of social issues in sports. The two issues that were under examination in his thesis include racial integration and homosexuality. These were studied through the media coverage of Jackie Robinson breaking Major League Baseball (MLB)'s colour barrier, and Jason Collins and Michael Sam becoming the first publicly outed gay athletes in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and National Football League (NFL), respectively. But the similarities between Saatsaz's contribution and the present thesis stop there. The present doctoral thesis also looks, like Saatsaz's thesis, at more than one set of sport-related social issues, but instead of singling out two (or more) specific issues, the present thesis defines social issues in the media coverage of sports as a body that can be examined in its entirety. Moreover, from a methodological and conceptual point of view, Saatsaz's thesis applies "the theories of gatekeeping, framing, and agenda setting" (2015, iv), whereas the present thesis, as explained previously in this chapter, uses classic gatekeeping theory only. Regardless of the approaches that are chosen by the different researchers, what has clearly emerged from the state of affairs of gatekeeping studies in sports journalism is the need for a wider framework, which the present thesis is meant to address.

## 2.3 Sports journalism as public journalism

### 2.3.1 Jay Rosen, Davis Merritt and the American tradition of pragmatism

Sports journalism does not only mirror society but rather operates as an *active* mirror, which ends up favouring or even generating interest in a particular topic (Cuccoli 2010). This thesis posits that sports journalists are not simple spectators of social processes. They interact and mingle with social processes. The introduction to this thesis also pointed out that the entertainment dimension of sport, far from equating to a light impact on society, is actually what makes sports so attractive to the masses and therefore so socially

impactful, leading to great power and responsibility in reporting on sports. These elements can be condensed into the single notion of journalism building citizenship. In this sense, public journalism, also referred to as civic journalism, needs to be explored as an additional interpretative framework for this thesis, although with the important differences and limitations that will be enunciated in the present section.[42] At the heart of public journalism is the idea that journalism can help empower a community. Public journalism emerged in the U.S. in the 1990s in response to an erosion of trust in the news media. Some journalists considered that a new and experimental approach to journalism – public or civic journalism – was needed to breach the growing distance between the press and the public. This distance was, in their view, largely induced by journalists operating as detached observers. Public journalism was meant to reconnect the reader and the community by bringing to the surface, beyond facts, values and engagement. Jay Rosen, a long-standing professor of journalism at New York University, was one of the earliest proponents and developers of public (or civic) journalism. His book *What Are Journalists For?*, published in 1999, provided the intellectual foundations for the public journalism reform movement. The book, as its title suggests, explained that journalism could resume its vitality primarily by rethinking what journalists are for. W. Davis "Buzz" Merritt Jr., editor of Knight-Ridder's *Wichita Eagle* from 1975 to 1998, is generally considered, with Rosen, the other founding father of public journalism. One of his seminal works is meaningfully entitled *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News is Not Enough* (Merritt 1998).

Rosen described public journalism as "starting where citizens start, allowing new coverage to reflect their concerns" (Rosen, Merritt, and Austin 1997, 8). He compared public journalism to holistic medicine. Similarly to holistic medicine, which focuses on health rather than the disease, public journalism looked into the conditions that would allow for a healthy public life instead of beginning with the "ruptures and breakdowns

[42] The American-based public journalism movement, also referred to as civic journalism, should not be confused with the most recent Internet-based "citizen journalism", and not only because the two have emerged in different historical periods. Public journalism, as was advocated in the 1990s, was practiced by professional journalists while citizen journalism is the more recent, Internet-based form of "journalism" performed by public citizens who collect and disseminate news, exercising a function that used to be exclusive of media professionals.

that make for the news", Rosen said (Rosen, Merritt, and Austin 1997, 6). Regarding the journalist's responsibility, Rosen observed that "[a] whole journalism would not simply inform the public; it would realize that the climate of public discussion is often shaped by the press, by the flux and flow of media attention, and it would take responsibility for this formative power". (ibid., 7).

For Rosen, public journalism was "at least three things. First, it's an argument about the proper task of the press. Second, it's a set of practices that are slowly spreading through American journalism. Third, it's a movement of people and institutions" (Rosen 1995, 35). Public journalism was not born as a theoretical framework. Rosen would repeatedly explain that it was a "movement", proceeding in such a way that practice inspired theory so that theory could inform practice. This kind of approach borrowed from the American tradition of pragmatism. In this respect, Rosen referred in particular to the work of William James – one of the earliest and most influential pragmatists in the United States, together with John Dewey, in the first half of the 20th century – and specifically James's "cash-value" metaphor, consistently present throughout James's writings. James's pragmatism was founded on the assumption that concepts must be judged according to their cash-value for actual experience. What difference would a particular concept make in practical terms? Without getting into the broader philosophical controversy that accompanied the cash-value metaphor from the start, Rosen explained that public journalism has proceeded as an experimental movement, and borrowed from the American tradition of pragmatism, in that "the do-ers gave the talker new things to talk about, while the talkers gave the do-ers a language to describe their doings" (Rosen, Merritt, and Austin 1997, 4). Its cash-value test lied, Rosen said, in considering how public journalism would work as a daily routine compared with traditional journalism *prior to* fully understanding what the very term of "public journalism" would mean or ought to mean (ibid., 5).

This line of attack resonates with this thesis's conceptualising the "social dimension" in sports reporting while assuming that conceptualising about journalism cannot be divorced from the everyday reality of journalists. As also argued by McQuail, "[t]he value of theory

should lie in its potential to explain and assess the reality of journalistic work" (2013, 10). Pragmatism is a founding principle of the present doctoral thesis, in James's terms, in that one of the purposes of this work is to give "the do-ers" new elements to consider which they can realistically integrate into their daily routine. Beyond its theoretical ambitions, this thesis aims to suggest additional ways to empower the journalistic coverage of sports, which means elements and concepts with "cash value", to use James's metaphor (see also section **7.3.2 The business case for social analysis**). The idea of sports journalism as an *active* mirror of society (Cuccoli 2010) that proactively generates the public interest in a particular topic, needs to realistically coexist with the everyday constraints of the journalistic profession. As reminded by Neveu (1993) in his analysis of political journalism, which can be extended to journalism in general, journalistic writing is also to be regarded in relation to the set of constraints which hang over the journalist's work.

Not surprisingly, Rosen considered news *framing* as a key function of journalism and one of the central traits of public journalism. He said that in the philosophy of public journalism, framing was "not only an art but one of the important democratic arts", referring to a list of values that journalism should, in his view, support:

> [T]hese are public values; democratic values; the values of genuine conversation, broad participation, deliberative dialogue, public problem solving; the value of inclusion, civic responsibility, cooperative and complementary action; the values of caring for the community, taking charge of the future, overcoming the inertia of drift; finally, the value of hope, understood as a renewable resource. These are things public journalism is "for," and a philosophy it doesn't apologize for that stance (Rosen, Merritt, and Austin 1997, 14-15).

As for Davis Merritt, the other founding father of public journalism, he also advocated a departure from what he called "One Journalism", meaning the one track thinking that rigidly characterised, in the view of public journalism's advocates, traditional practices. Merritt posited that public journalism, as compared to traditional journalistic principles, should apply an additional set of questions. Reporters traditionally ask themselves questions about the accuracy, fairness and completeness of their job, as well as about the issue under examination and what is not working. Applying public journalism principles meant, in his view, adding more questions to this set:

> What would be, in the broadest sense, the good outcomes? What is the goal? What mechanisms – government, private, public – might come into being to help attack the problem? In other words, what capacity to deal with this problem is missing in public life, and how can that capacity be built and maintained? Who needs to talk with whom (and about what) to resolve the problem? What core values stand in the way of resolution and how and where can they be discussed? That level of questioning and reporting, however, will not occur unless the journalists thinking about the issue have adopted a purpose beyond telling the news. (Merritt 1998, 123)

To simplify, in Merritt's view, the journalists who do not go the extra mile of "adopting a purpose beyond telling the news" are not good journalists. The direction that the present thesis recommends for sports journalism is less ambitious than that. This doctoral thesis does not suggest that journalists should be looking at alternative outcomes, deal with issues and suggest solutions. The direction that this thesis recommends for the coverage of sports relates to the "simple" need, if we can call it like that, for sports journalists to consistently show a comprehensive enough set of news that encompasses what matters to society. This enhanced coverage of sports helps raise public consciousness and concern and can *in itself* improve public life and the capacity to solve problems.

This thesis posits that the "simple" power to select the news already makes of a reporter a potential catalyst for social change.

Incidentally, implying that only the journalists who have adopted the public journalism approach go "beyond telling the news", in Merritt's acceptation of the phrase (1996), seems a bit of a stretch. Many journalists – some might even say too many – do go so far as to suggest solutions and indicate who should or should not implement them. This is true today as it was in the mid-1990s, when Merritt wrote the passage quoted above.[43]

A certain number of newspapers in the U.S. embraced the new gospel of public journalism in the 1990s, even though the intentional lack of a public journalism "manual" makes it difficult for scholars to clearly identify the media organisations that put it into practice.

[43] The first edition of Merritt's book *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough*, from which the citation is drawn, appeared in 1995.

A study conducted for the Pew Center for Civic Journalism by the University of Wisconsin-Madison has shown that between 1995 and 2000, more than one fifth of all U.S. daily newspapers – 322 out of an average number of 1,505 – practiced some form of civic journalism in that timeframe.[44] The study only represented news organisations that had *explicitly* practiced it, researchers said (Friedland and Nichols 2002). In the same period, many in the profession were on a different note and denied the contribution of public journalism to journalism altogether. Opposers mostly observed that what public journalism advocated was actually nothing more than what good journalists had always been doing. We can find a summary of the main criticism to public journalism at the time in an article by Tony Case for *Editor & Publisher* (1994), meaningfully entitled "Public Journalism Denounced". Richard Aregood, for example, an editorial page editor at the Philadelphia Daily News, said that describing the journalists' talking to readers as "bold new journalism" was astonishing since "basically, we're talking about something which good newspapers are already doing" (as cited in Case 1994, 14). Leonard Downie, the executive editor of *The Washington Post* from 1991 to 2008, is also mentioned in Case's article. Downie is one of the leading figures of American journalism. During his tenure as executive editor of the newspaper, *The Washington Post* won 25 Pulitzer Prizes. For Downie, crossing the line between reporting and participating, as advocated by public journalism, is simply not a good idea: "[t]oo much of what's called public journalism appears to be what our promotion department does, only with a different kind of name and a fancy, evangelistic fervor" said Downie (as cited in Case 1994, 14). This is how Downie described his own view of journalism:

> Whether you call it public or otherwise, [journalism] is to provide citizens with as much as possible of the information they need to conduct their lives, private and public, and to hold accountable the increasing number of powerful people and institutions that hold sway in our lives. (ibid.).

With respect to the journalist's role, the approach underlying this thesis is closer to Downie's view than to Rosen's or Merritt's. The present thesis emphasises the need for

[44] The Pew Center for Civic Journalism was active from 1993 to 2002. The J-Lab, a successor project, archives its publications and projects and maintains its website (http://www.civicjournalism.org/about/, last accessed on August 31, 2020).

journalism to cover sport-related news in such a way that comprehensively encompasses matters of social relevance. The process of selecting the news – or gatekeeping– is the ultimate media role and power on which this thesis is focused. In other words, the point is not whether reporters must be "simple" chroniclers or players, i.e. the alleged dichotomy that public journalism suggests, advocating the latter. The standpoint of this thesis is that a chronicler *is* indeed a player.

### 2.3.2 The emergence of solutions journalism

Public journalism lost steam as a movement in the early 2000s, but some of its visionary elements have survived into somehow advanced versions and new labels. American-based public journalism can be seen as an ancestor of solutions journalism, also called constructive journalism. Public/civic journalism sought to engage readers in public discourse for the sake of a healthy democratic process. By the same token, solutions journalism believes that news reporting must play an active role in driving more effective citizenship, but in this case, as the name evokes, stories are framed with solutions as a priority. In order to comply with the dominant adage "if it bleeds, it leads", journalists tend to focus on negative events and conflict-based stories while overlooking many of the positive things that are actually going right. The proponents of solutions journalism suggest that news reporting should present the public with solutions. The emergence of solutions journalism reveals an attempt to empower media professionals that is consistent with the purposes of this thesis, although within the limits that will be described in the present section. Moreover, this thesis aims to call attention to the media coverage of sport-related topics of social relevance, and topics of this nature often coincide with the kind of topics that are advocated by solution journalists. For example, news involving the positive impact of sport in disadvantaged communities would typically fall under the lens of solution journalists.

Leading examples of solutions journalism can be found in France, Denmark and the United States, among others. The list of examples that will be mentioned in this section is inevitably not exhaustive. The French NGO *Reporters d'Espoirs* [Reporters of Hope],

established in 2003, claims in its website that it was "*à l'origine du journalisme de solutions, également appelé journalisme d'impact ou constructif*" [at the origin of solutions journalism, also called impact or constructive journalism].[45] The mission of this NGO is to encourage newsrooms to present possible solutions to contemporary problems. The organisation blames the journalists who fail to do so for spreading fear and immobility: "*L'information, si elle ne montre que les trains qui déraillent, contribue à la propagation de la peur et de l'immobilisme*" [Information, if it only shows derailed trains, contributes to the spread of fear and immobility] (ibid., see footnote 45) In 2004, the association launched the Reporters d'Espoirs Awards, aimed at recognising the work of journalists who report on innovative and meaningful solutions to contemporary problems. In order to promote solutions-based news in the media, Reporters d'Espoirs works with press, web, radio and TV groups. Partnerships have translated into a wide range of initiatives, including collaborative programme contents and co-branded releases, among which the "Libé des solutions", a special issue of the French newspaper *Libération* entirely dedicated to solution-based initiatives. Reporters d'Espoirs has also established a Lab which tracks and analyses the international rise of solutions journalism and the impact of solutions-based reporting on both the public and the media themselves. The organisation organises training sessions and workshops at schools of journalism and newsrooms to build awareness of solutions-based reporting.

In 2012, one of the co-founders of *Reporters d'Espoirs*, Christian de Boisredon, created Sparknews, a social innovation start-up that claims to be the first global community of editors-in-chief focusing on solutions in the media. Sparknews revolves around content sharing, with the organisation acting as an open source platform, where anyone can upload short videos presenting solutions to social challenges. Journalists can access the site and search material of interest for free. At the core of Sparknews's content sharing strategy is the annual Impact Journalism Day. In 2013, the first Impact Journalism Day gathered together 20 mainstream newspapers from different countries, which participated in the initiative by dedicating a 12-page insert to a topic of social innovation. Participating

[45] http://www.reportersdespoirs.org/notre-mission/ (last accessed on August 31, 2020).

newspapers included *Le Monde* (France), *Times of India* (India), *Folha de São Paulo* (Brazil) and *La Stampa* (Italy), among others.[46] For its 2018 edition, Impact Journalism Day attracted 54 media outlets.

In Scandinavia, the practice of solutions reporting is mostly identified as "constructive journalism", and has been developing since 2007. Constructive journalism originated in Denmark from newsroom practitioners, and is indeed a predominantly practice-based approach, although it has gradually built foundations within academia as well. Ulrik Haagerup and Cathrine Gyldensted have been the leading figures in developing the concept in a newsroom context. Haagerup served for ten years as the executive director of news at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, the country's public service broadcaster. Prior to that, he was editor-in-chief at two Danish dailies from 1995 to 2007, first at the *Jyllands-Posten* and then at the *Nordjyske*, from 2002 to 2007. Haagerup graduated from the Danish School of Media and Journalism and was a John S. Knight Fellow at Stanford University. In 2008, he was a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on the Future of Journalism. In September 2017, he founded the Constructive Institute at Aarhus University. The Institute works closely with Aarhus University, where the Institute's headquarters is physically located. The mission of the Constructive Institute, which claims to lie "at the heart of what is now becoming a global constructive journalism movement", is defined as follows: "We work to combat trivialisation and degradation of journalism by emphasising reporting that is more solutions-focused, balanced and connects society. We want to change the global news culture".[47] In his book *Constructive News*, Haagerup has referred to a "paralysed media industry infected by cynicism" and explained the core objective of constructive journalism:

> We need to understand that constructive news is neither an alternative to critical watchdog journalism nor is it an argument for harmless positive news. We need good reporting, which can inspire to possible solutions to the problems facing society, giving way to a new and more meaningful role for journalism: Not only documenting problems and finding who is to blame for them, but also facilitating dialogues in our communities on how they might be solved (Haagerup 2017, 23).

[46] As a reminder, *La Stampa* is one of the six newspapers that were sampled for content analysis for the purposes of this thesis.
[47] https://constructiveinstitute.org/who/what-we-do/ (last accessed on August 31, 2020).

Haagerup has also pointed to the harmful effect of negative reporting on society. He mentions, in this respect, the results of a worldwide survey that was conducted for the purposes of the *Digital News Report 2017*, the annual publication of the Oxford-based Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The survey showed that the number one "reason behind news avoidance" was "It can have a negative effect on my mood", chosen by 48% of respondents. The second and third reasons were "I can't rely the news to be true" and "I don't feel there is anything I can do about it", respectively. Based on these answers, Haagerup observed: "So if I and my colleagues in the news business think that our hard work is to the benefit of society, but in contrast we create depression, distrust and apathy, who should change?" (2017, 18). The society-oriented journalism that is promoted in this doctoral thesis, with reference to the coverage of sports, shares with constructive journalism the idea that journalism should be built on the public's needs and should not harm the public. However, contrary to constructive journalism, the idea of sports journalism at the core of the present thesis has nothing to do with the alleged "positive news versus negative news" dichotomy. Good news is not automatically what the public needs, and bad news does not automatically harm the public. In fact, the contrary may often be true.

Haagerup has also explained that constructive journalism is needed as a response to the crisis of the news media induced by the digital revolution. The response "is not new apps, faster deadlines and more of the same with less money. People do not need more news. They need better news", he argues (Haagerup 2017, 15-16). But this seems to contradict his idea that "too many publishers have been affected by business-school logic arguing, that journalism is just a product to be sold" (ibid., 16). Focusing on the mood induced by (negative) news is just another way to try to sell journalism. To simplify, it is marketing – i.e. a process to satisfy customers – based on the public's mood. This thesis focuses on sports, namely a domain in which the entertaining dimension (good news) is certainly more present than in other subject areas. However, not even in the media coverage of sports can there be a deliberate and preordained preference for good news, in this case for

entertaining purposes. This thesis is an invitation to cover a wider spectrum of sport-related topics of social relevance regardless of their negative or positive connotation.

Cathrine Gyldensted is considered to be the other originator and leading figure of the constructive journalism movement. Like Haagerup, Gyldensted also is Danish-born and a journalist, with 15 years of experience as an investigative reporter and foreign correspondent. After graduating in 2000 from the Danish School of Media and Journalism, she worked at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, where she served as a correspondent from Washington, DC from 2007 to 2011. While sharing Haagerup's key claim about the need for innovation in journalism based on better news, Gyldensted has also pioneered the application of positive psychology to constructive journalism. This is partly related to her academic background, as Gyldensted also holds a Master in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania.[48] In December 2015, Gyldensted became the first-ever director of constructive journalism at the Journalism School at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. In July 2017, she left Windesheim to found, together with Geesje van Haren and Paul van der Cingel, a new school of journalism in Amsterdam, called Open Eyes - The Global Institute for Journalism for the Future.

Gyldensted's idea to combine behavioural sciences with journalism is motivated by a concern for the negative emotional impact of news, on both users and media professionals. Her proposal, as enunciated in her book *From Mirrors to Movers: Five Elements of Positive Psychology in Constructive Journalism* (2015), revolves around five elements. She invites journalists to: 1) expand the mind; 2) storm the brain; 3) change the question; 4) tell it right; and 5) move the world. Not surprisingly, in the "Acknowledgments" section of her book, she praised among others "Jay Rosen, who pioneered public journalism before any other". The book's "Prologue" contains her own manifesto of constructive journalism:

[48] Positive psychology focuses especially on the strengths and benign conditions in the life of individuals and communities, as compared to mainstream psychology, which traditionally focuses on treating how people cope with adverse conditions and negative feelings.

> This book proposes the innovation of journalism through behavioral sciences like positive psychology, moral psychology and neuroscience – not to weaken journalism, but to strengthen it. The intention is to develop even better journalism and broaden the field of our profession – to create content that involves and inspires readers, and to present journalism that adds perspective and gives people the opportunity to act (Gyldensted 2015).

Gyldensted admits that the book (ibid.) is practice-based and non-theoretical, but that work has actually laid the seeds for an academic approach to constructive journalism.[49] Indeed, the book contains reference to the doctoral thesis of Karen McIntyre, then Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, written in 2015 for the purposes of McIntyre's Ph.D. in Mass Communication at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication of that university. Gyldensted describes McIntyre's work as the world's first doctoral thesis on constructive journalism. McIntyre claims that the main theoretical contribution of her thesis lies in introducing the concept of constructive journalism to academic literature:

> Journalists are practicing constructive journalism in various forms in the field, but communication scholars have not yet defined the term or tested its effectiveness. This dissertation offered a definition of constructive journalism, distinguished it from other forms of pro-social journalism such as community journalism, and tested two ways to implement it. (McIntyre 2015, 79)

McIntyre complains that constructive journalism has been used as a sort of umbrella term to describe terms that are actually different from it: "constructive journalism is distinct in its intentions, methods, training, and commitment to journalism's core functions", she argues (2015, 10). In her scholarly struggle to conceptualise constructive journalism, McIntyre has therefore produced a table that valuably summarises what she considers to be the key differences between the various approaches, past and present. **Table 1** is derived from the one, more complete and detailed, in McIntyre's thesis:

[49] For the state of the debate on constructive journalism, see also a Special Issue of the scientific journal *Journalism* (Volume 20 Issue 4, April 2019), entirely dedicated to Constructive Journalism.

***Table 1**: McIntyre's categories for constructive news and other public journalism approaches*

| Type of news | Primary goal | Constructive |
|---|---|---|
| **Community** | Appeal to local readers | No |
| **Civic / public / democratic** | Promote democracy | No |
| **Citizen** | Involve citizens in news process | No |
| **Solutions** | Facilitate productive change | Yes |
| **Positive** | Improve mood, entertain | Sometimes |
| **Constructive** | Engage; improve well being | Yes |

Elaborated from: McIntyre, Karen. 2015. "Constructive Journalism: The Effects of Positive Emotions and Solution Information in News Stories". Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, p. 87.

Perhaps the most pertinent contribution from McIntyre's work (2015) to the present doctoral thesis lies in her definition of what actually is "constructive" in a news story vis-à-vis what suggests solutions (solutions journalism). In her view, including a solution can make a story constructive but is just one in many ways by which a news story can be made constructive, therefore: "A solution-based news story is constructive, but a constructive news story does not require the inclusion of a solution" (McIntyre 2015, 16). This explanation is perfectly consistent with the approach in the present thesis, which does not envisage journalism as a solution provider.

Reference should be made, to complete this overview, to the U.S.-based leading voice in the family of solution-oriented information, which is the Solutions Journalism Network. This NGO was founded in 2013 by David Bornstein, Courtney E. Martin and Tina Rosenberg, three experienced reporters.[50] Headquartered in New York City, the Solutions

[50] Bornstein, who was the CEO of the organisation at the time of writing of this thesis, has a 25-year experience as a newspaper and magazine reporter. His journalistic activity includes writing for the Fixes blog in *The New York Times*, a section focusing on solutions to social problems. He is also the author of books on social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Courtney E. Martin is also the author of books on social innovation, and has frequently appeared in TV programmes like Good Morning America, the Today Show, The O'Reilly Factor and others. She has been the recipient of the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Christian Science Monitor*, among other publications. Finally, Tina Rosenberg is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author. Like Bornstein, she writes for the Fixes blog in *The New York Times*, and has written for several magazines among which *The New Yorker, The Atlantic,* and *Foreign Policy*. Rosenberg has won the Pulitzer Prize

Journalism Network works "to bring solutions journalism to every newsroom worldwide", as stated in its website.[51] The organisation works both nationally and internationally via "local coordinators". Its mission is "to rebalance the news, so that every day people are exposed to stories that help them understand problems and challenges, and stories that show potential ways to respond".[52]

## 2.4 The media's responsibility as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

### 2.4.1 Between commitment and rhetoric

The notion of public interest is closely interrelated with the notion of responsibility. As far as the media industry is concerned, the literature on public interest remains considerably wider than that on the social responsibility of the media (Lee et al. 2014). It is even more the case if we focus more specifically, as this section will do, on CSR studies applied to the media industry.[53] One of the reasons for this may be purely historical, as the notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is comparatively more recent.

Howard R. Bowen's *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, published in 1953, is widely considered as the founding work for the study of CSR (Moura-Leite and Padgett 2011). CSR refers, according to Bowen, to "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (1953, 6). Bowen's book triggered the development of CSR scholarship and practice through the 1960s and beyond, driven by the concurrent expansion of the first large conglomerate corporations.

(1996, General Non-Fiction) and National Book Award (1995 Nonfiction) for her book *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism*.

[51] https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/ (last accessed on August 31, 2020).

[52] Ibid.

[53] For previous studies, see in particular: Siebert, Fred S., Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm. 1984. "The Social Responsibility Theory." In *Four Theories of the Press*. University of Illinois Press. Originally published in 1956.

The concept was not widespread at the time, though. In their overview of the *Historical background of corporate social responsibility*, Moura-Leite and Padgett (2011) argue that the notion of CSR would become almost universally approved in the 1990s. The process was accompanied by the emergence of a literature on CSR corporate strategy. The notion of "triple bottom line", to define CSR as well as sustainable development, became increasingly popular. John Elkington, business writer and co-founder of the consultancy *SustainAbility*, claims to have coined the "triple bottom line" phrase, in 1994 (Elkington 1994; 2018). The so-called triple bottom line model refers to the need for a balance, in a company's operations, between environmental, social, and economic issues.[54] The advocates of the triple bottom line argue that the bottom line, as traditionally reduced to the net profit of a company, does not provide a sufficient view of the company's value and must be complemented with environmental and social performance. In the 2000s, CSR grew as an important strategic issue, Moura-Leite and Padgett argue (2011). The key finding of their historical study (ibid.) is that CSR research has in fact constantly evolved and changed since its onset in the 1950s.

Even if CSR has grown into a popular norm for global business, the notion has generated also a good number of sceptics and detractors over the years. In an opinion column appeared in *The Financial Times* in 2009, Stefan Stern referred to "The Hot Air of CSR", a title that well exemplifies what CSR looks like to most of its critics (2009). The debate on whether or not CSR is an effective business principle famously involved Milton Friedman, the American economist who won the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, commonly referred to as the Nobel Prize in Economics, in 1976. Friedman defined the social responsibility of business as a "subversive doctrine" in a free society, adding that "there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud" (1970; 2002).[55] Friedman

[54] The "bottom line" metaphorically indicates the performance of a company. The image is associated to the final line of a balance sheet, which typically shows the profit or loss of a company.
[55] Originally expressed in his book *Capitalism and Freedom* (Friedman 2002), first published in 1962, then in a 1970 article in the *New York Times Magazine*.

(1970) maintained that the advocates of business with a "social conscience" were in fact "preaching pure and unadulterated socialism. Businessmen who talk this way are unwitting puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades". Friedman's position on CSR may appear rather outdated, to put it mildly, to contemporary readers. We do not know whether he would he use the same words today. The global financial scandals that have occurred since he wrote those words, combined with the raising awareness of the threat represented by climate change, might have led him to different conclusions (or maybe not).

Friedman's contribution to the CSR debate can also be found in other, less frequently mentioned parts of his work. He argued, for example, that businesses cannot have responsibilities because only human beings can:

> What does it mean to say that "business" has responsibilities? Only people have responsibilities. A corporation is an artificial person and in this sense may have artificial responsibilities, but "business" as a whole cannot be said to have responsibilities, even in this vague sense" (Friedman 1970).

The above statement could be interpreted as a denial of the social responsibilities of business. Yet, from a different perspective, Friedman's call to *individual responsibility*, against a more general notion of collective responsibility where no one knows who is to blame and for what, also means advocating stricter ethical standards. Furthermore, Friedman's hyper-pragmatic approach could serve as a warning sign to stay away from the widespread hypocrisy that often accompanies CSR pronouncements. Due to the increase in CSR's popularity over time, the concept has indeed become a sort of compulsive communication tool, for use in commercials and press releases, irrespective of the strategies and business decisions that a company is actually implementing behind closed doors. The overall theme of corporate social responsibility exceeds the scope of this thesis, but the underlying tension between making socially responsible journalistic choices and fulfilling the economic imperatives of the media as a business is part of the present analysis. As previously explained, beyond its academic ambitions of advancing existing or novel theories, this thesis aims to suggest additional ways to empower sports journalism, and that also means elements and concepts "with cash value", to use William

James's metaphor (as seen in section **2.3.1 Jay Rosen, Davis Merritt and the American tradition of pragmatism**) – that is theories that can realistically combine with the constraints of the media as an industry and of journalism as a day-to-day profession.

Moving on to the (non-abundant) literature on CSR applied to the media industry, Grayson (2009) has interestingly suggested to distinguish between corporate responsibility *in* the media and corporate responsibility *of* the media. The former describes what the media report about CSR in other companies while the latter describes how the media organisations pursue their own corporate responsibility strategy as well as their fairness, accuracy and decency in reporting (Grayson 2009). Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2017) have observed that most scholarly publications on media's CSR focus on how media organisations report about the corporate social responsibility of other organisations, i.e. what Grayson would call CSR *in* the media. Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2017) also underline, however, that the two areas are interrelated, because the increasing attention to CSR matters in other companies brings about an increasing attention by media organisations to their own corporate social responsibility issues. For the purposes of this thesis, Grayson's categorisation is interesting in that it highlights the different dimensions of CSR as far as the news media are concerned, but cannot be adopted as a relevant and clear-cut conceptual framework. In fact, the sport-related subjects of social relevance at the core of this thesis are at the intersection between his two areas of interest. The media coverage of CSR in other organisations – CSR *in* the media – perfectly fits with the idea of covering sport-related subjects of social relevance. At the same time, one of the assumptions of this thesis is that covering this kind of subjects is part of the media's own responsibility toward society – and that would be, for Grayson, the CSR *of* the media.

For Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2017), a satisfactory conceptualisation of CSR in the media industries may come from exploring the relationship between responsibility and accountability:

> Responsibility relates to the societal needs that we expect media professionals (especially the members of the newsroom) to respond to. Accountability relates to the way in which

> societal structures set up constraints that hold professionals accountable for their fulfilment of the responsibilities given to them in their various relationships to stakeholders and structures. We believe that the relational constraints emerging from the interplay between individual accountability and structural accountability work together to offer a satisfactory conceptualization of CSR in the media industries. It would thus be important to clarify how current accountability challenges in the media industries can assist us in retrospectively defining the responsibilities that the media has toward society (Painter-Morland and Deslandes 2017, 666)

Interestingly, there is no real distinction in languages other than English – at least in the other languages used for this thesis (Italian, French and Spanish) – between the two corresponding English words of *responsibility* and *accountability*. In Italian, for example, one would interchangeably use the word "*responsabilità*" to mean both. The same applies to the French word "*responsabilité*" and the Spanish "*responsabilidad*". In English, the notion of accountability is larger than that of responsibility. Being accountable means being responsible for something while also being answerable for one's actions. This is why the analyses of media accountability are most typically related to normative elements such as laws, codes of ethics, stylebooks and other professional regulations.[56] Based on the distinction between the two notions in the English language, the present thesis is about the notion of responsibility and does not cover accountability issues involving media laws and regulations.

In this respect, mention should also be made to the fact that the "social responsibility" of the media is often referred to interchangeably as "quality journalism" or "ethical journalism". All of these aspects – ethics, accountability and responsibility – certainly contribute to generate valuable media coverage. However, this thesis is not meant to participate in the body of research that seeks to create tools to determine whether or not we are in the presence of "quality" or "ethical" journalism. Normative and ethically judgmental approaches are simply left for other studies.

[56] For a comprehensive analysis of deontological codes in sports journalism, see Francisco J. Montero Ramos's doctoral thesis, entitled *Deontología Del Periodismo Deportivo. Principios Fundamentales y Tratamiento En Prensa* (2018), written for the purposes of his doctoral degree at the Complutense University of Madrid.

### 2.4.2 The journalist as an employee

The news media constitute an atypical kind of industry in which the industrial dimension is grounded in the journalism profession, which is in turn an atypical profession. The fusion and confusion between corporate ethics and professional ethics, which is a rather universal issue regardless of the sector of activity, is more present in the media industry than in other industries. Furthermore, journalists report among other things on what happens in businesses while being in most cases – in all cases, as far as this thesis is concerned – part of a business themselves. The mainstream media are large companies, increasingly integrated in conglomerates that also comprise businesses whose mission has nothing to do with informing the public. The goal of these entities is the maximisation of profits and returns to shareholders. Incidentally, in this type of environment, the journalistic activity has to coexist with managerial policies that have increasingly been relying on labour flexibility, which foment rivalries among journalists and keep journalists under constant pressure (Damian-Gaillard, Montañola, and Saitta 2019).

The journalists who are employees of large companies and corporations are confronted with the ongoing ethical dilemmas that derive from the need to combine their individual role and deontology as journalists with their being part of a firm. According to Borel-Hänni, an employee, whether a journalist or other, is expected to add value to the business while not holding the productive assets to do that, which means that he cannot claim full social responsibility for his work (2015, 36). From this conceptual perspective, journalists can be compared to the employees of any other industry and the analyses that describe business ethics and the attached ethical dilemmas may be relevant to journalism as well (Richards 2004). The difference, however, lies in the scope of the effects of the choices that are made. Mass media and related journalism have a pervasive role in society, which involves public opinion and identity formation, and this is hardly comparable to what happens in most other businesses (as further discussed in section **7.2.2 Sports journalism and identity development**).

In order to get a better insight into the relationship between the individual accountability of media professionals and that of the companies they work for, Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2017) suggest that we should introduce another element to the analysis: speed. Speed is what characterises interactions in our hyperconnected society. For the two researchers, the speed of interactions in today's media industries is altering media accountability in the media at all levels. Speed, they argue, has intensified accountability challenges for media professionals. Time pressure and fast dissemination of information have always been typical of journalism, even more to daily newspapers, but with the advent of digital tools and the exponential increase in competitiveness among the different sources of information, these imperatives have become more deeply embedded in the profession. In sports journalism, speed and urgency have always been part of the picture as far as the coverage of sports events is concerned. This is an area where the timing is tight and mastery of time is a distinctive professional feature (Souanef 2019, chap. 7). But speed also has a significant impact on the decision about whether or not to cover sport-related stories of social relevance, as these tend to require longer analysis time as compared to fast news, such as reporting sports results. Reflexion requires the luxury of time. Media organisations are expected to deliver accurate news report in a fast and cost-effective way, while making sure their business model is sustainable and in a world where readers are increasingly unwilling to pay for news. How to sort out this potentially lethal combination exceeds the purpose of this thesis, but we cannot reasonably assess the choices that news media make as gatekeepers, assuming they still play this role, without looking reality in the eye. At the same time, the digital revolution cannot justify "fast news" all the time at the price of reflexion and the social function of news.

### 2.4.3 CSR when the subject is sport

One of the assumptions underlying this thesis is that the journalistic coverage of sports can be as socially impactful as any other area of journalism. This has been pointed out since the introduction of this thesis, when reference was made to the fact that the playful

dimension of sport should not lead to regard the journalistic coverage of sports as less relevant, almost of an inferior species, as compared to other areas of journalism. If the literature on CSR in the media industries is limited as compared to that on CSR in other industries, literature on CSR in the media industry with specific reference to the coverage of sports is even rarer. One of the reasons for this may be, indeed, the widespread notion that sport is "not serious", leading the majority of media scholars to concentrate on the "serious" areas of journalism. Many academics assume that dealing with lighter subjects, and specifically sport, will condemn them to be low in the intellectual hierarchy of the scientific community (Whannel 2013). Neveu has noticed, with reference to France, that researchers are typically "*plus zélés à étudier le journalisme politique et la presse parisienne que la PQR ou les journalistes sportifs*" (2013, 40) [more eager to study political journalism and the Parisian press than the regional press or sports journalists]. Quite obviously, the quality of the analysis – and not necessarily the subject – should determine a scholar's standing, but we cannot deny that between a nuclear engineer and a media sport expert, the former is widely assumed to be the smart one. Similar hierarchies also exist in journalism.

The limited availability of studies on journalistic responsibility in sports journalism is also connected with the widespread idea of sports journalism as being somewhere at the intersection of journalism and promotion (Weedon et al. 2016). Once again, we would be in the domain of the "non-serious", from a journalistic point of view. Additionally, the alleged closeness of sports journalists to sports fans, or their personal passion for a particular club, have also been recurrently evoked to justify the low level of sports journalists in terms of social responsibility, as these types of attitude may lead to factionalism in reporting. According to Spalletta and Ugolini (2016, 121–26), the factionalism of the journalist-supporter (*tifoso*) makes sports journalism different from the other areas of journalism because it prevents sports journalism from being perceived as capable of shaping public opinion, namely the social role of journalism. These and other flaws of sports journalism will be discussed at length in chapter **4. Sport in the press.** As a preview, however, this thesis does not support the idea that good sports

journalism presupposes a lack of sporting passion, but quite the opposite. Rooting for a team is not what makes sports journalism socially irrelevant.

We should hope that CSR in sports journalism will attract larger numbers of researchers in the future. Sports broadcasting rights, especially in some sports, have become astoundingly lucrative, and the world of professional sports has been transformed accordingly. The salaries and sponsorship deals of athletes have reached unprecedented levels. The money that surrounds professional sports is largely boosted by the increased media coverage and the revenues that go with it. The evolving relationship between sports and the media may have affected primarily television and then digital platforms, but the two universes at large – all the *media*, regardless of the platform, and all *sports* – have both seen the emergence of a whole new state of affairs, which requires much analysis and a deeper reflection.

# 3. SPORT IN SOCIETY

Studies of sport which are not studies of society are studies out of context.
Norbert Elias (2008, 10)[57]

**3.1 MAPPING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SPORT**
*3.1.1 The emergence of sports sociology*
*3.1.2 Defining "sport"*
*3.1.3 Sport as a human right*
*3.1.4 The social impact of sport*
*3.1.5 The analytical categories for a broader taxonomy*
**3.2 SPORT AS (POPULAR) CULTURE**
*3.2.1 Sport as a cultural indicator*
*3.2.2 Sport as an opiate of the masses*
*3.2.3 The benefits of popularity*
**3.3 THE GROWTH OF SPORT THROUGH THE PRESS**
*3.3.1 The outset of the "sport & media" convergence*
*3.3.2 Historical overview in European society*
*3.3.3 Historical overview in U.S. society*

[57] First appeared in 1986.

## 3.1 Mapping the social dimension of sport

### 3.1.1 The emergence of sports sociology

The study of sport as a social phenomenon is mainly although not exclusively the object of the sociology of sport, a dedicated subdiscipline of sociology. Although this thesis is meant as a contribution to media studies, the elaboration of a roadmap for illustrating and treating the social dimension of sport, that is a critical point for the unfolding of the research, requires the use of terms and theories drawn from the sociology of sport.[58] As a distinct academic subdiscipline, sports sociology is young. Its beginnings have been traced back to a 1965 article by Kenyon and Loy, entitled "Toward a Sociology of Sport", and a 1973 book by Harry Edwards, entitled *Sociology of Sport* (Delaney and Madigan 2015, 6). Kenyon and Loy's article carried a title that was a programmatic statement in its own right. That title was complemented by the kicker "A Plea for the Study of Physical Activity as a Sociological and Social Psychological Phenomenon" (Kenyon and Loy 1965). This is how the two authors defined "sport sociology": "If sociology is the study of social order – the underlying regularity of human social behavior – including efforts to attain it and departures from it, then the sociology of sport becomes the study of the regularity, and departures from it, of human social behavior in a sports context" (Kenyon and Loy 1965, 24).[59] Kenyon and Loy observed that despite the magnitude of sport as a cultural phenomenon, and the fact that sport was also "fast becoming a social institution" at the time, sport as a social phenomenon had received "little serious study" up to that time, and suggested that "the observational techniques and theoretical rationale available to the sport sociologist could provide unique possibilities for viewing the social

[58] The terms "sociology of sport" and "sports sociology" are used interchangeably in this thesis, as they are used interchangeably to indicate the same sub-discipline of sociology by hundreds of researchers around the world. According to Atkinson (2015), European and Canadian scholars tend to prefer the former while Americans widely opt for the latter. Atkinson, who has also tried to identify reasons beyond a mere linguistic preference, has referred to a "division of research agendas" (ibid., 8), which would come down to sociologists of sports working on theory-building vs. sports sociologists using pre-determined theories to collect and interpret data (Giulianotti 2015, 3). The idea that there might be geographic specificities in the use of the two terms further justifies the choice of *not* choosing made for this thesis, which is inherently international: written by an Italian researcher living in France who previously lived in other countries, for the purposes of a doctoral degree at a French university, designed for a broader English-speaking audience.
[59] For the definition of sociology that they include in their text, Kenyon and Loy cite Inkeles, Alex. 1964. *What is Sociology?* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, p. 27.

significance of sport" (ibid.). A few years later, Kenyon and Loy were the editors of what was possibly the first-ever anthology in the subdiscipline of sports sociology, entitled *Sport, Culture and Society: A Reader on the Sociology of Sport* (Loy and Kenyon 1969a). Then came Harry Edwards's *Sociology of Sport* (1973), a book that provided a comprehensive review of the academic literature, as limited and scattered as it was, that had been produced on sports in society till then. Edwards's book has been described as "a major turning point in the discipline [and] a leading textbook for the field" (Delaney and Madigan 2015, 7). Edwards himself (2009) defined it as "the first integrated textbook focusing on a sociological analysis of sport as a social institution". In Edwards's view (1973, 10), "the emergent subdiscipline of sport sociology […] should be concerned with the descriptions and explanation of the interrelations between sport and other societal components", which meant going beyond the focus of previous literature, in sociology and other social sciences, on one aspect *or* another.

In France, the earliest examples of what could be assimilated to embryonic sports sociology have been dated back to the 1890-1914 timeframe – concurrently with the advent of sociology as a distinct subject area in French universities and the first echoes of Anglo-Saxon sports – notably with the sociologists of the *Institut International de Sociologie* [National Institute of Sociology], who looked at games and physical education as part of the process of socialisation of young people (Callède 2010a; 2010b). The structuring period for sports sociology as a distinct academic specialty in France was, however, between the 1960s and the 1980s (Callède 2010b).

If the birth of sports sociology as a formally recognised subdiscipline of sociology is generally dated back to the 1960s, it is worth mentioning also some older texts which had previously paid attention to sport using a sociological perspective, even if we were still in presence of dispersed and unrelated samples. One of the texts that is most frequently cited (Loy and Kenyon 1969b; Edwards 1973; Delaney and Madigan 2015) as pioneering future sports sociology is Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1934), originally published in 1899. Veblen introduced the term of "conspicuous consumption" and, more specifically, "conspicuous leisure" to explain the growing popularity of sports in the

United States at the end of the 19th century. The term "conspicuous", or visible, was used by Veblen to describe the pursuit of leisure, or consumption, as instrumental in showing off wealth and social status. Veblen had a rather cynical view of the social role of sport. With reference to "the encouragement given to the growth of 'college spirit', college athletics, and the like, in the higher institutions of learning", he said:

> These manifestations of the predatory temperament are all to be classed under the head of exploit. They are partly simple and unreflected expressions of an attitude of emulative ferocity, partly activities deliberately entered upon with a view to gaining repute for prowess. Sports of all kinds are of the same general character, including prize-fights, bull-fights, athletics, shooting, angling, yachting, and games of skill, even where the element of destructive physical efficiency is not an obtrusive feature. Sports shade off from the basis of hostile combat, through skill, to cunning and chicanery, without its being possible to draw a line at any point. The ground of an addiction to sports is an archaic spiritual constitution -- the possession of the predatory emulative propensity in a relatively high potency. A strong proclivity to adventuresome exploit and to the infliction of damage is especially pronounced in those employments which are in colloquial usage specifically called sportsmanship (Veblen 1934, 255).

In addition to terms like "predatory" and "ferocity", as seen in the above passage, Veblen explicitly equated some sporting activities with a return to "barbarity". To describe (American) football, he wrote that "[t]he culture bestowed in football gives a product of exotic ferocity and cunning. It is a rehabilitation of the early barbarian temperament, together with a suppression of those details of temperament, which, as seen from the standpoint of the social and economic exigencies, are the redeeming features of the savage character" (ibid., 261-2).

Less frequently mentioned among the earliest works in sports sociology is a text by German writer Heinz Risse, entitled *Soziologie des Sports* (1921). This work has nonetheless been referred to as "the first time that this subdiscipline was explicitly named" (Dunning 1999, 256).

In the 1960s, the growing interest in the sociological aspects of sport across Europe and North America led to the establishment of the International Committee for the Sociology

of Sport (1964), later renamed *International Sociology of Sport Association* (ISSA).[60] From this point on, scientific conferences and congresses started to be organised on a regular basis and theoretical and empirical work began to multiply, alongside dedicated Master's and doctoral programmes on sports sociology. From a theoretical point of view, the multiplication of studies of sport, culture and society, from the 1960s onward, also determined what has been described as a "multi-paradigmatic rivalry" (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018, 22), leading to the widespread idea that it is impossible to identify one single prevailing theory or set of theories in the sociology of sport (Giulianotti 2004a; Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018). Indeed, the fact that the history of sports sociology has consistently been characterised by a diversity of paradigms (Loy and Booth 2006) makes it difficult to describe the "dominant" paradigm(s) of each era.[61]

The current chapter 3 will refer to the sports sociology theories that best help define the social dimension of sport for the purpose of this thesis, which is to explore the *press coverage* of this dimension. The objective here is therefore to map the social dimension of sport, as opposed to mapping the development of the sociology of sport or sports sociology at large. The key question, to borrow one of Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie's (2018, pt. Introduction) core questions in their sports sociology manual, is: "What theories, ideas and concepts can we draw on to explain and analyse the substantive evidence?".

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[60] "International Sociology of Sport Association" (ISSA) was still the name of the organisation at the time of writing of this thesis. The ISSA is a research committee of the International Sociological Association (ISA). The ISSA also publishes the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

[61] For a comprehensive overview of the main theories in the sociology of sport, see for example "Part I: Major Theories and Approaches" in Giulianotti, Richard, ed. 2015. *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport*. London ; New York: Routledge. For a comparative perspective of the field in Europe versus North America, see Tian, Enqing, and Nicholas Wise. (2019). "An Atlantic Divide? Mapping the Knowledge Domain of European and North American-Based Sociology of Sport, 2008–2018." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, October, 1029–55. Tian and Wise's article used CiteSpace, a bibliometric visualization software, to analyse 870 academic articles published in the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, Journal of Sport & Social Issues* and *Sociology of Sport Journal* from 2008 to 2018. For a state-of-the-field review of sports sociology, see: Young, Kevin, ed. (2017). *Sociology of Sport: A Global Subdiscipline in Review*. First edition. Research in the Sociology of Sport, Vol. 9. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing; and Jarvie, Grant, James Thornton, and Hector Mackie. (2018). *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction*. Third edition. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, complemented by the two previous editions of the book.

### 3.1.2 Defining "sport"

Pierre Bourdieu described "modern sport" (author's inverted commas) as "a social phenomenon which we too easily take for granted" (1978, 819).[62] More than 40 years later, this statement has not aged. In fact, we could argue that sport as a social phenomenon is even more taken for granted than it used to. This is paradoxically due to its omnipresence in society, which possibly makes it too close to be seen clearly. Kenyon (1969) has argued that sport is *intrinsically* a social phenomenon in contemporary societies because people of all classes and ages have heard about sports somewhere, somehow. In Kenyon's words, "the cognitive world of most people includes sports. The amount of sport information made available to persons in most countries makes it almost impossible to avoid learning something about it" (1969, 79–80). Kenyon's description proves particularly interesting for the purposes of this thesis in that it also refers to the role played by "sport information" in the process. Incidentally, Kenyon's analysis dates back to 1969, when the availability of sport information was in fact utterly limited as compared to the following decades. The media coverage is evidently, although not exclusively, at the origin of the pervasiveness of sports in society.

The question of the definition of "sport", although seemingly simple, constitutes a first challenge for sociologists (Callède 2010b, 14) and "one of the most basic and extensive [problems]" in the sociology of sport (Meier 1981, 79). Sports sociology itself is characterised by a lack of consensus on how to define sport (Delaney and Madigan 2015, 12). "Sport" is indeed a slippery label, "a highly ambiguous term having different meanings for various people" (Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon 1978, 3). It has been said

[62] The article from which this citation is drawn is the translation of a paper given by Bourdieu at the International Congress of the History of Sports and Physical Education Association in Paris, held at the *Institut National des Sports et de l'Education Physique* (INSEP) in March 1978. The original title of the paper was "Pratiques sportives et pratiques sociales". The French version has been translated into English by Richard Nice. Bourdieu is most typically cited in sport-related studies for his analysis of the corporeal nature of social relations, notably his idea that while the body is part of the social world, it is also true that the social world is in the body (Bourdieu 1987). Bourdieu also established a connection between the conditions of the body, the value attached to the body, and social class, arguing that while a fit and healthy body is valued by the dominant classes as a reflection of their resources (both money and leisure time), the working class typically has a more instrumental relationship to the body (for work), due to its limited resources and leisure time (Bourdieu 1979).

that "[t]he meaning of sport, like time, is self-evident until one is asked to define it" (Snyder and Spreitzer 1974, 469). Klein has pragmatically reminded the difference between knowing a definition of sport and understanding why we adopt a certain definition, stressing that a definition after all is just the final product of a concept and what matters the most is to better understand the concept itself (S. E. Klein 2017, xi). In the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, "Sport" is defined as an "[ac]tivity that you do for pleasure and that needs physical effort or skill, usually done in a special area and according to fixed rules" ("Sport" 2019). This can be a rudimentary starting point, but it does not solve the definitional problem for academics, nor does it allow to overcome a certain number of ambiguities – which set(s) of skills? with or without rules? etc. – which will be debated in the course of this section. As for the etymology of the word, the first use of the word "sport" is generally assumed to date back to late Middle English, when the Old French word "desport", deriving from the Latin "deportare" (to carry away), was anglicised on the other side of the English Channel and shortened into "sport", to describe a pastime and entertainment.[63]

Some scholars argue that besides the absence of "'a one-size-fits-all' definition of 'sport' in sociology", which is ongoing despite decades of debate (Lagaert and Roose 2016, 486–87), a universally consensual definition in fact *cannot* be formulated (ibid., 494). McBride has even discouraged attempts to define the concept of sport, provocatively engaging in a journey "toward a non-definition of sport", from the title of his article (1975). Lagaert and Roose importantly remind us that "how sport is conceptualised is time- and context-dependent", further adding to the inherent fluidity of the concept (2016, 488).

Today, sport is typically used as an umbrella term to describe phenomena that can be considerably different from one another. As a scientific field, it is studied by academic disciplines as diverse as physical education and finance, social science and medicine, cultural anthropology and chemistry, and the list could go on and on. As a professional

[63] Among the multiple studies and dictionaries that explain the etymology of the word "Sport", see the section "'Sport': histoire du mot" in Sévin, Lucile, and Pierre-Olivier Douphis. (2011). *Le sport, miroir de la société?* Paris: Ed. Gallimard., pp. 199-203. For a definition of "Middle English" see footnote 4.

field, it involves multiple stakeholders, from diverse economic sectors to educators, federations, and obviously the media. The various players, in their diverse roles, tend to apply their own idea of sport, in accordance with their respective roles and objectives but also with a deeper layer of beliefs (cultural, educational, political, etc.). Far from being a mere academic exercise, the difficulty – for some scholars, as we have seen, even the impossibility or inopportunity – in defining sport has very concrete implications as well. For example, when it comes to making investments or adopting political decisions, "What 'sport(s)' should we promote?", or "Which kind of physical activity is more appropriate in primary education?", and many other questions that ultimately affect people's everyday life. The "all-inclusiveness", hence the ambiguity of the concept of sport is also evident among the students who enrol in sport-related Master's programmes. When asked about the segment in which they would like to work after school, answers typically range from the organisation of lucrative mega-events to working for non-profit organisations at the grassroots level, reflecting the multiplicity of notions of "sport" that students have in mind.[64]

From the late 1960s and 1970s, the early attempts to define "sport" at the outset of the sports sociology sub-discipline resulted in a narrow field of analysis that mostly focused on its structured and competitive forms (Malcolm 2014, 14). In his seminal book on what defines modern sport, first appeared in 1978, Allen Guttmann distinguished between play, games, and sports, with play being a purposeless activity pursued just for the sake of it (non-organised), games corresponding to organised play, and sports consisting of physical contests (Guttmann 2004). Norbert Elias famously coined the term of "sportization", by which he described the transformation of folk games and pastimes into modern forms of sport via the establishment of codified and enforced rules – a process that first appeared in 18th-century England and also led, in Elias' view, to stricter self-discipline and more civilised habits across society at large (Elias and Dunning 1986; Malcolm 2008). As argued by Coakley (2017), today the prevailing trend among sport sociology scholars is that of a departure from the focus on organised sports typical of past

[64] This remark was drawn from the personal experience of the author of this thesis as a lecturer in various Master's degree programmes in France since 2012.

research in order to adopt an inclusive definition of sport that embodies "physical culture" at large, including "*all forms of movement and physical activities that people in particular social worlds create, sustain, and regularly include in their collective lives*" (ibid., 7 – author's italic). Organised sports remain central to the analysis, but the broader focus on physical culture enables to critically examine what Coakley calls "the deeper game associated with sports in society" (ibid.). This perspective, as far as the inclusion of non-organised sports is concerned, also corresponds to the approach adopted in this thesis. For the sake of completeness, Malcolm (2014, 14) has pointed out that the inclusive definition of sport had however a certain number of precursors already at the early stages of the sub-discipline, with sociologists like Günther Erbach (1966), who referred to "the field of physical culture and sport", and Joffre Dumazedier, notably the book in which he described the process *Vers une Civilisation du Loisir?* (1962) [Toward a Society of Leisure].[65]

### *This thesis's definition of sport*

Despite its pompous title (Defining "sport"), the objective of the present section 3.1.2 is not the theoretical exploration of the concept *per se*. As previously stated, this thesis is axed around journalism and the news media's choices, hence it is intended as a contribution to media studies, as opposed to sports philosophy or sports sociology. Given the intrinsic complexity and ambiguity of the concept, it was not possible to reduce the explanation to a dictionary definition either. What is needed here is to specify the concept of sport that was applied in the process toward the conceptualisation of social analysis in the press coverage of sports, i.e. the objective of the thesis. In other words, while exploring the conceptual framework of "sport" exceeds the scope of this thesis, it is necessary to clearly stipulate what was included and what was excluded when exploring (the social dimension of) "sport".

[65] The question mark does not appear in the title of the English version of the book, translated from French by S. E. McLure and published in 1967 by Free Press, New York. The translation in square brackets matches the title of the English version of the book.

In addition to sociology, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), commonly called international organisations, can also constitute a valuable source to help define "sport" as an object of study, as some of these bodies have elaborated official texts for the promotion and regulation of sporting activities. Institutional definitions are hardly ever clear-cut. After all, being diplomatic is in the very nature of these organisations. At the same time, institutional definitions present the significant advantage of combining academic substance, as IGOs typically partner with academia on specific subjects, with the reality of the broader context, and this thesis has "the broader context of sport" in its core. The Council of Europe (CoE) has provided what is by now considered a classic definition of sport, and the one that has been adopted in this thesis to conceptualise the social dimension of sport.[66] The CoE's definition of sport is drawn from an official document commonly referred to as the *European Sports Charter* (2001), which provides a framework for sports policy in the CoE's Member States:

| COUNCIL OF EUROPE | "Sport" means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.<br>(Council of Europe 2001)[67] |
|---|---|

The above definition has a series of implications, which can be summarised as follows:

[66] Founded in 1949 and headquartered in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe (CoE) is the continent's leading organisation for the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Statute of the Council of Europe 1949). The CoE is not to be confused with the European Council, which brings together the heads of state or government from EU Member States and the President of the European Commission to set the EU's broader political direction. The Council of Europe membership is larger than the EU's membership, since the CoE also comprises a certain number of EU's neighbouring states. As of August 31, 2019, the Council of Europe's Member States were: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and United Kingdom (Council of Europe website: www.coe.int. Accessed on August 31, 2019).

[67] This definition is drawn from the Article 2 of the Council of Europe's "Recommendation No. R(92) 13 rev. of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the revised European Sports Charter", also referred to as the Council of Europe's sports charter (Council of Europe 2001).

1) The notion of sport as "physical activity" excludes the activities that do not encompass *stricto sensu* physical exertion. Other activities are often categorised as "sports" that do not imply a significant component of physical exertion. Poker, for example, is often broadcast on TV sports channels. These activities do not fall under the CoE definition of sport. In a paper exploring the multitude of meanings attached to "sport", Lagaert and Roose (2016) refer to a survey, conducted in the Flanders, in which respondents were asked to name the sports they had participated in during the previous year, without any reference to "physical activity" in the question.[68] Some of the respondents, explain the two scholars (ibid.), mentioned activities like bridge and card games, chess, or fishing and hunting, among others. However, those who claimed to do sports while actually referring to these and other non-physical leisure activities accounted for only 3.4% of the total - 69 out of 2,037 (ibid., 491). This finding indirectly suggested that the physical component was taken for granted by the vast majority of respondents (the remaining, so to speak, 96.6%). In principle, the Council of Europe definition also seems to exclude e-sports, a label that encompasses the term "sport" but actually refers to videogaming. Today, e-sports are a booming industry. According to data from Newzoo, the global games market was worth $134.9 billion in 2018, representing a year-over-year (YoY) increase of 10.9%, and is projected to grow by a further 26.7% in 2019, while the estimated global e-sports audience for 2019 is expected to reach 453.8 million people.[69] There is no doubt that e-sports have grown as an important part of the broader sports industry. This also applies to the media, since e-sports have been growing constantly also as a spectator sport. The debate on whether or not it is appropriate to consider videogaming as a sport, and gamers as athletes, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Irrespective of these questions, this thesis has chosen,

[68] Lievens, John, and Hans Waege. 2011. *Participatie in Vlaanderen: Basisgegevens van de Participatiesurvey 2009*. Cited in Lagaert and Roose 2016, 490-92.

[69] Newzoo, a global company that specialises in e-sports analytics, releases an annual *Global Esports Market Report*, among other market studies. It also publishes periodical estimates of the key e-sports market figures via its website www.newzoo.com, from which the data in this chapter were drawn (accessed on June 14, 2019).

consistently with CoE's definition of sport, to exclude e-sports from its own definition of sport.

2) The Council of Europe's definition of sport refers to physical activity involving an element of competition as well as physical activity outside of a formal competition. This approach matches this thesis's underlying assumption that it is not much the competitive element that makes sport socially relevant as being physically active anyway, because of the benefits that can derive from physical activity itself, for body and mind (*mens sana in corpore sano*). The competitive component assumes a particular significance when one is to explore the media coverage of sports. Even at first glimpse, prior to performing any in-depth analysis of media materials, it is strikingly evident that the media generally give priority to sport-related news in which competition *is* indeed part of the picture – the current tournaments, the recent matches, the mega-events of the year, and so forth. With regard to the competitive component of sport, Coakley (2017) has pointed out that this is comparatively more present in North America than in much of Europe. Forms of general physical exercise like walking or cycling, for example, are considered to be "sports" in Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries while for most people in North America, sports would automatically involve rules and formally organised competition, says Coakley (ibid., 7-8).

3) By referring to "casual or organised participation", the Council of Europe's definition of sport does not presuppose the institutionalisation component. Historians and sports sociologists have commonly highlighted the evolution of sport from recreational activity for the elite into popular and then mass phenomenon over the past century or so (Meier 1981; Cuccoli 2019). While we can logically regard this transformation as coinciding with a progressive institutionalisation of sport and the rise of regulatory patterns and organisational bodies, this does not automatically imply that all contemporary sport therefore *is*, or must be institutionalised. In fact, the sport's transformation into increased levels of institutionalisation implicitly suggests that sport is not inherently institutionalised

– "[t]hat is, uninstitutionalized sport must exist prior, and be a logical predecessor, to any selective transformation into institutionalized sport" (Meier 1981, 89).

4) Occupational physical activities, i.e. the manual and physical tasks performed at work, are not categorised as "sport", since the Council of Europe's *Charter* defines sport as "aim[ing] at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels". The primary aim of sport, as defined in the CoE's *European Sports Charter* (2001), clearly does not involve occupational activities.

### 3.1.3 Sport as a human right

The Council of Europe's definition of sport gathers together a series of elements that make it suitable for the needs of the present analysis. Meanwhile, other intergovernmental organisation (IGOs) have recurrently highlighted the importance of sport in their decisions, sometimes by releasing specific documents on the matter, other times including sport within a broader range of tools to attain the organisation's objectives. Studying the relevant documents of the main intergovernmental organisations was indeed part of the process toward mapping the social dimension of sport for the purposes of this thesis.

The United Nations (UN) has referred to sport in several documents and declarations, mostly to emphasise the function of sport to help promote development and peace, in line with the mission of the Organisation. Sport has long been seen by the UN as a tool that contributes to the attainment of the broader purposes of the Organisation, defined in Article 1 of the UN Charter, which include: the promotion of international peace and security; the development of friendly relations among nations; and the promotion of international co-operation to solve economic, social, cultural and humanitarian international problems (*Charter of the United Nations* 1945). In July 2002, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened an Inter-Agency Task Force to review the activities involving sport within the UN system, and to ensure that sport play a stronger role in the

global peace and development agenda. The analysis undertaken by that task force resulted in a report, entitled *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals* (2003), which contained what would later be cited as "the UN definition of sport":

| UNITED NATIONS | Incorporated into the definition of "sport" are all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include: play; recreation; organized, casual or competitive sport; and indigenous sports or games.<br>(United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace 2003, v) |
|---|---|

More recently, the UN Resolution 70/1, adopted on September 25, 2015, entitled *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, included sport among the tools that help achieve sustainable development, although only a few lines were devoted to sport in that document:

> Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives (United Nations 2015, para. 37).

On December 3, 2018, the UN General Assembly dedicated a specific Resolution (A/73/L.36) to explicitly recognise "the power of sport" in the promotion of sustainable development. The document was entitled *Sport as an Enabler of Sustainable Development* (2018). Following the release of the document, the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Thomas Bach, commented: "We welcome the Resolution approved today by the United Nations, as it reaffirms the universality of sport and its unifying power to foster peace, education, gender equality and sustainable development at large" (United Nations 2018). Resolution A/73/L.36 also makes reference

to previous resolutions and declarations in which the UN highlighted the social (and political) importance of sport, hereby catalogued in **Table 2**.[70]

***Table 2**: UN Resolutions highlighting the socio-political role of sport (2003–2017)*

| UN Resolution | General Assembly's agenda item | Date of adoption |
|---|---|---|
| A/RES/58/5 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace*<br>Including the decision to proclaim 2005 as the "International Year for Sport and Physical Education". | 3 November 2003 |
| A/RES/59/10 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace*<br>Including the decision to launch, on November 5, 2004, the "International Year for Sport and Physical Education". | 27 October 2004 |
| A/RES/60/1 | *2005 World Summit Outcome*<br>Para. 145 on sport, highlighting the contribution of sport to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals, within a section entitled "Culture of peace and initiatives on dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions". | 16 September 2005 |
| A/RES/60/9 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 3 November 2005 |
| A/RES/61/10 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 3 November 2006 |
| A/RES/62/271 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 23 July 2008 |
| A/RES/63/135 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 11 December 2008 |
| A/RES/65/1 | *Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*<br>Para. 67 on sport, highlighting the role of "sport, as a tool for education, development and peace [to] promote cooperation, solidarity, tolerance, understanding, social inclusion and health at the local, national and international levels". | 22 September 2010 |
| A/RES/65/4 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 18 October 2010 |
| A/RES/67/17 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 28 November 2012 |
| A/RES/67/296 | *International Day of Sport for Development and Peace* | 23 August 2013 |
| A/RES/69/6 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 31 October 2014 |

[70] Table 2 is not an exhaustive list of all UN acts and decisions somehow related to sports adopted in the 2003-2017 timeframe, but does comprise all the Resolutions recalled in what was the most recent sport-related UN Resolution (A/73/L.36, adopted on 3 December 2018) at the time of writing.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A/RES/70/1 | *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*<br>Para. 37, defining sport as "an enabler of sustainable development" and highlighting the "growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives". | 25 September 2015 |
| A/RES/71/160 | *Sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace* | 16 December 2016 |
| A/RES/72/6[71] | *Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal* | 13 November 2017 |
| A/RES/73/1 | *Political declaration adopted at the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit*<br>Para. 18: "Sports and the arts in particular have the power to change perceptions, prejudices and behaviours, as well as to inspire people, break down racial and political barriers, combat discrimination and defuse conflict". | 24 September 2018 |

In addition to previous resolutions, UN Resolution A/73/L.36 (*Sport as an Enabler of Sustainable Development* 2018) also makes reference to other types of UN documents where sport was highlighted as a tool for the promotion of UN objectives, including: the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*;[72] the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Article 31) and the outcome document of the 27th Special Session of the General Assembly on children entitled *A World Fit for Children*;[73] the five-year review of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* and the commitments made therein to ensure access to recreational and sports activities for women and girls;[74] the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (articles 1 and 30);[75] the revised *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport*;[76] and the *International Convention*

[71] In the paragraph recalling this Resolution, UN Resolution A/73/L.36 also generically recalls all the previous Resolutions (prior to A/RES/72/6) related to the promotion of peace "through sport and the Olympic ideal" (*Sport as an Enabler of Sustainable Development* 2018).
[72] *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.
[73] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531; and Resolution S-27/2, annex, adopted on 10 May 200, respectively.
[74] Resolution S-23/2, annex; Resolution S-23/3, annex; and *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.
[75] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2515, No. 44910
[76] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Thirty-eighth Session, Paris, 3–18 November 2015*, vol. 1, Resolutions, sect. IV, resolution 43.

*against Doping in Sport*.[77] Also mentioned in UN Resolution A/73/L.36 (2018) is UNESCO's *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport* (2015), which deserves a special mention if only for the special role that UNESCO holds within the UN system in connection with sports.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is the United Nations lead agency in the area of Physical Education and Sport (PES). The *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport* (2015), which is UNESCO's own "Sport Charter", was originally adopted in 1978, at UNESCO's 20th General Conference.[78] The 2015 edition, which is a revised version of the 1978 text, was adopted at UNESCO's 38th General Conference (November 3-18, 2015). The UNESCO Sport Charter (2015) recognises sport as a fundamental human right:

| UNESCO | Article 1 – The practice of physical education, physical activity and sport is a fundamental right for all.<br>(*International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport* 2015) |
|---|---|

The UNESCO Sport Charter (2015) also highlights the social value of sport, stating at Article 2 that "Physical education, physical activity and sport can yield a wide range of benefits to individuals, communities and society at large" (ibid.). A paragraph of the document is specifically devoted to the role of the media in this framework:

> The media can play a crucial role in providing information on and raising awareness of the societal importance, ethical values and benefits of physical education, physical activity and sport. It is both a mutual responsibility and opportunity to increase co-operation between the media, the scientific community and other stakeholders with a view to informing public debate and decision making. (*International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport* 2015, para. 6.5).

[77] Ibid., vol. 2419, No. 43649.
[78] The original title was *International Charter of Physical Education and Sport.*

By stating that "[t]he media can play a crucial role in providing information on and raising awareness of the societal importance, ethical values and benefits of physical education, physical activity and sport", UNESCO stresses what is also one of the leading arguments and motives of the present thesis.

Another international organisation, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has also clearly spelled out in its official documents that sport is a human right. As opposed to the Council of Europe and UN bodies, which are governmental organisations, the IOC is a non-governmental body. More specifically, the IOC is "a not-for-profit independent international organisation made up of volunteers".[79] It is also the world's leading sport organisation. The notion of sport as a human right is the fourth of the seven "Fundamental Principles of Olympism" that are stated in the *Olympic Charter*:

| INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC) | 4. The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practising sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.<br>(International Olympic Committee 2019c, sec. Fundamental Principles of Olympism) |
|---|---|

The *Olympic Char*ter codifies the fundamental principles of Olympism and also serves as statutes for the IOC.[80]

### 3.1.4 The social impact of sport

This thesis manifestly assumes that sport has social functions, beyond game or just leisure. Indeed, this section 3.1.4 could have been entitled "The social *functions* of sport",

[79] https://www.olympic.org/about-ioc-olympic-movement (last accessed on September 4, 2020).
[80] The title "Olympic Charter" is generally used in reference to all the editions, even though that title first appeared only in 1978. The first edition was published in 1908, under the title of *Annuaire du Comité International Olympique.* Some of the rules contained in the 1908 document were previously written by Pierre de Coubertin around 1898 (International Olympic Committee 2019b).

but the term "function" is not neutral as it immediately recalls "functionalism", one of the leading sociological perspectives, also in the study of sports. Functionalism is in reality only one in many theoretical lenses that can be used to understand the functions of sport in society.

**Perspectives on sport in society**

Jarvie and Maguire (1994)'s comprehensive categorisation of the theoretical approaches to study sport in society has involved the following paradigms: functionalism, interpretative sociology, pluralism, classical Marxism / political economy, cultural studies (focus on Gramsci's work), figurational sociology, feminism, fields of power (focus on Bourdieu's work), and postmodernism.

Giulianotti (2016), in his review of sociological theories applied to sport, has focused on the following theoretical paradigms: functionalism, interpretive approaches ("Weberian and microsociological approaches"), Marxism and neo-Marxism, cultural studies, race and ethnicity studies, gender and sexuality studies, post-modernism, globalisation studies, as well as influences from the work of Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu.

Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie (2018), who have recommended the literature reviews in both Jarvie and Maguire's (1994) and Giulianotti's (2016), both cited above, have also stressed how focusing on one specific set of problematics ultimately results in highlighting certain questions about sport while marginalising others (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018, pt. Introduction).[81]

Functional perspectives view society as a complex system whose constituent elements (institutions, customs, norms, etc.) work in relationship to each other, and focus on the functionality of these components. Sociologists like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber influenced the creation of the sociological school known as functionalism (Delaney 2015, 20). A common denominator among the proponents of this approach is that "functionalism strongly emphasize[s] the pre-eminence of the social world over its individual parts (i.e. its constituent actors, human subjects)" (Giddens 1984, 1). The focus is therefore macro-sociological. This is how Talcott Parsons, who also introduced a variation to classic functionalism called "structural functionalism", described society:

[81] Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie's book *Sport, culture and society: an introduction* (2018) is also one of the textbooks that were used to compile an inventory of the themes most often encountered in commonly used textbooks offering a sociological analysis of sport (see the upcoming section **3.1.5 The analytical categories for a broader taxonomy**).

> [A] social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the "optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols (Parsons 1951, 5–6).

The emphasis tends to be on consensus and equilibrium within the social system, where the different components function in such a way to contribute to the overall operation of society. Parsons assumed that social systems are naturally self-balancing because its components work together to create a state of equilibrium, rather than conflict or disorder (Levin 1993, 76–77). Criticism of functionalism typically relates to this overemphasis of harmony and consensus (Loy and Booth 2006; Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018, 23).

This also applies to criticism of the functionalist paradigm in sports sociology. The notion of system is very pertinent to sport. As reminded by Delaney, "the more common clichés expressed by coaches and players alike involve some variation of 'playing within the system'" (2015, 25). The system in sport can be the team, or a coach's chosen scheme for the game, all of which supposedly requiring a certain structure and harmony to operate properly. Reference has occasionally been made, by part of the sociological literature, to a *negative* functionalism (Defrance 2011; Duret 2019) and the fact that "sport possesses both functional and dysfunctional aspects" (Delaney and Madigan 2015, 31). However, describing sport in functionalist terms has mostly equated, in sports sociology literature, to describing the positive functions of sport in society.

Whether explicitly or not, the functionalist argument is generally endorsed by the advocates of sport and sport participation (Delaney 2015, 21), so as the functionalist approach has typically acknowledged the positive potential of sport in handling social tensions (J. J. Coakley 2017). A functionalist approach tends to consider sport as a positive institution in society, hence to focus on the stability of the social order and ultimately the defence of the *status quo* (Rowe 2004a).[82] In the 1970s, several sports

[82] Rowe highlights this "tendency of functionalism" but also warns of the risks of providing "a caricature of a functionalist perspective" (2004, 99).

sociologists embraced the functionalist perspective and described sport as advancing social order, among whom Enk Allardt (1970), Andrzej Wohl (1970), Günther Lüschen (1970), Richard S. Gruneau (1975), and George H. Sage (1979) (Figler and Whitaker 1991; Delaney 2015).

There is no definitive list of the (positive) functions of sport. There are, however, recurring themes in sports sociology literature, as well as broader macro-categories that have been suggested to regroup these functions. According to Sage (1979, 1), based on a functional explanation, "there are seven major categories of functions of play, games, and sport: instinct, developmental-cognitive, mastery, social integration, socialization, social control, and personal-expressive". In Sage's description of these seven functions: the "instinct functions" fundamentally revolve around Konrad Lorenz's (1966) notion of sport as a safety valve to relieve the aggressive instinct in humans; "developmental-cognitive functions" refer to the role of play in the cognitive development of children, and in the development of the self in general; the "mastery" function refers to the fact that play enables children to learn to master problematic situations; "social integration" expresses the idea that sports typically bring individuals together around a common cause or a shared symbolic meaning; "socialization function" refers to sport as an agent to help integrate a person into society, for example by building character in such a way that will be of use in life in general; the "social control function" suggests that sport, starting at school, helps keep individuals distracted and under control; and finally, the "personal-expressive function" highlights the fact that play, game and sport provide an opportunity for personal joy and self-fulfilment (Sage 1979, 7–14). If we compare Sage's classic portray of the social functions of sport with more recent versions, things may vary slightly depending on the different backgrounds and approaches, but the descriptions and categories used by those who advocate the positive, social functions of sport have not changed much.

Vogler and Schwartz, also from a functionalist perspective, have focused in particular on the "nearly sacred status" of sports in American society, and have provided their own list of functions, in which we can indeed identify some familiar items:

1. Transmit cultural values.
2. Is educational.
3. Provides a release for physical and psychological pressures.
4. Provides a feeling of group membership.
5. Provides a means of social mobility.
6. Generates a sense of personal competition

(Vogler and Schwartz 1993, 6).

This is, once again, a very comprehensive set of functions and yet, the description of the positive functions of sport in society can be even more extensive than that. Lenger and Schumacher (2015, 55), for example, have argued that sport has "an internal function", which is to create social cohesion within a given society, as well as "an external function", in that it promotes the power of a nation abroad. What Lenger and Schumacher call "an external function" is most typically described, by both theorists and practitioners, as a *political* – rather than social – aspect, but regardless of how we label it, Lenger and Schumacher's suggestion contributes to fully understand the potential scope of the subject.

Moving back to the title of this current section ("The social impact of sport"), the implied focus on the positive in the conventional descriptions of the social *functions* of sport, or at least an overstatement of the positive, and not only among conscious functionalists, is the reason why the section has not been entitled "The social *functions* of sport", since this would have not accurately represented the focus of inquiry of this work. As previously suggested in the Introduction as well as in the section of this thesis about solutions journalism (see section **2.3.2 The emergence of solutions journalism**), the "social dimension" of sport that is being examined here, with reference to its coverage in the press, is not necessarily a positive dimension. The notion of social "impact" of sport is more neutral and therefore best reflects the reasoning behind this thesis.

Against the belief that sport is inherently positive and socially cohesive, Spaaij – who has edited an entire volume devoted to *The Social Impact of Sport* (2011) – has pointed out that sport can potentially generate both positive and negative outcomes, and can in fact

even reinforce social inequalities (2009; 2011).[83] A typical example of the positive bias in the analysis of the social functions of sport has been observed in the assessment of the "legacy" of sporting mega-events, a term that has indeed long been used to imply a positive legacy (Bob and Swart 2010). Since the legacy of sporting mega-events can actually contain both positive and negative aspects, Chappelet has suggested that we talk about "legacies" in the plural instead, or that we replace it with the term "consequences", which is "intentionally a neutral one" (2013, 81). Chappelet's reasoning is similar to that described for the choice of the term "impact", in place of "functions", in the present section of the thesis. The term "impact" is also preferred to "consequences" here in order to accurately reflect the approach to the social analysis of sports that was adopted in this thesis. Although all these terms can be used interchangeably in numbers of situations, the term "consequences" implies the existence of a cause-effect relationship. The term "impact" indicates a simple influence on something or someone whereas a "consequence" indicates the outcome of a phenomenon. For example, we can all agree that fandom has an influence (impact) on violence in stadia, which is different from arguing that violence in stadia is a consequence of fandom – because many fans are not violent, and because violence around sports can also come from sources other than fandom.

The exclusion of the functionalist paradigm does not mean that this thesis then naturally leans toward critical theory, which stresses, contrary to the functionalists' harmony, the inequalities of wealth in society and the centrality of conflict between social groups. Conflict is attributed to differences in gender, race, class and other aspects, leading to a corresponding series of subfields within critical theory, such as feminism, theories of race, and others. This is how Vaugrand has described "the quintessential aspects of the critical theory of sport":

> The critical theory of sport is articulated around four ideas/notions/concepts which include the whole of human activity: psychosocial transition of the fascination exerted by sport; sporting iatrogenesis concept as a whole of relations to the body, as a result of individual alienation and repression; state ideological apparatus concept as ideological

[83] The content of the 2011 book *The Social Impact of Sport* had previously appeared as a special issue of the scientific journal *Sport in Society*, in 2009.

> superstructure of bourgeois domination; and finally, the economic and the social with the homology's relation to the capitalistic production mode. (Vaugrand 2001, 193).

With its founding focus on class struggle, Marxism has historically been the primary influence on conflict theory for a critique of sport, although according to Rowe (2004a), in more recent times, the Marxian belief in the centrality of class struggle has been challenged by the postmodernist emphasis on anti-determinism. This is only a preview of the extended discussion on critical theories that will be featured in section **3.2 Sport as (popular) culture**.

### 3.1.5 The analytical categories for a broader taxonomy

If defining "sport" can be a challenging endeavour in its own right, unpacking the components that define its social dimension presents similar and largely related difficulties. In order to come up with a distinctive analytical framework, the study began by compiling an inventory of the themes most often encountered in commonly used textbooks offering a sociological analysis of sport.[84] Some are textbooks written by a single author while others are anthologies gathering together contributions from different experts and perspectives. Anthologies, as opposed to textbooks, tend to lack in cohesion but present the additional advantage of covering a wide range of individual themes (Leonard 2016), which is of particular interest when one is trying to map these themes. The inventory was based on 14 books, purposely including: 12 recent books, first released or revised in the 2010s; and two classics of the sociology of sport.[85]

The recent textbooks are:

- Jacques Defrance's *Sociologie du Sport* (2011);[86]

[84] A previous textbook content comparison can be seen in Coakley and Dunning's (eds.) *Handbook of Sports Studies* (2006, chap. General Introduction).
[85] David J. Leonard (2016) has also contributed a review of sports sociology textbooks, for an article in the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport.* His books review includes, among others, Coakley's (2017), Delaney and Madigan's (2015), Eitzen's (2015), and Karen and Washington's (2015) books, which can also be seen in this chapter's review.
[86] Defrance's book was included in the analysis in that it constitutes a relevant contribution from French sociology, even though it has not the structure of a manual covering the different social issues around sports,

- Helmut Digel's *Sociological Aspects of Modern Sports* (2013);[87]
- Tim Delaney and Tim Madigan's *The Sociology of Sports: An Introduction* (2015);
- Stanley D. Eitzen's (ed.) *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology* (2015);
- Richard Giulianotti's (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport* (2015);
- Barrie Houlihan and Dominic Malcolm's (eds.) *Sport and Society* (2015);
- David Karen and Robert E. Washington's (eds.) *Sociological Perspectives on Sport: The Games Outside the Games* (2015);
- Peter Craig's (ed.) *Sport Sociology* (2016);
- Ronald B. Woods' *Social Issues in Sports* (2016);
- Jay J. Coakley's *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* (2017);
- Grant Jarvie with James Thornton and Hector Mackie's *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction* (2018); and
- Pascal Duret's *Sociologie du Sport* (2019).

The two classics are:

- Harry Edwards's *Sociology of Sport* (1973); and
- Eric Dunning's *Sport Matters* (1999).[88]

Harry Edwards's book (1973), a pioneering work of the discipline of sports sociology, hence a classic *par excellence*, has already been presented earlier in this chapter, in section **3.1.1 The emergence of sports sociology.** Regarding the other "classic" in the list, i.e. *Sport Matters*, its author, Eric Dunning, is also considered as one of the most representative scholars of the discipline, or even "a founding father of the sociology of

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as is the case with the other books under review, but rather that of a work trying to concisely define, mostly from a theoretical point of view, what the sociology of sport is about.

[87] The book includes a foreword by Jacques Rogge, then president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

[88] *Sport Matters* (Dunning 1999) is the third book in a series, following *Quest for Excitement*, co-written by Dunning with Norbert Elias (Elias and Dunning 1986), and *Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process: Critique and Counter-Critique,* co-edited with Chris Rojek (Dunning and Rojek 1992). Dunning himself has said that S*port Matters*, included in this chapter's books review, "should be seen as a sequel" to these two books (Dunning 1999, ix). A revised edition of *Quest for Excitement* was later published in 2008 (Elias and Dunning 2008) which includes an extra essay by Norbert Elias as well as an updated essay on football hooliganism, written by Dunning himself.

sport", as described by his colleague Ivan Waddington when Dunning passed away in February 2019, in his obituary for *The Guardian* (Waddington 2019). Dunning was a student and later a colleague of Norbert Elias' at the University of Leicester. As reminded by Waddington, when he was a student in Leicester, in the 1950s, Dunning considered football as a possible focus for his post-graduate studies "but found that it was regarded as an unsuitable field of study for sociologists. Eric [Dunning] and his colleague Norbert Elias set out to overturn that view" (Waddington 2019). For French sociologist Nathalie Heinich, Elias and Dunning were indeed the first sociologists to take sport seriously: "*Elias […] fut le premier sociologue, avec son jeune collègue Eric Dunning, à prendre au sérieux le sport et, en particulier, le football*", said Heinich (2015, 77) [Elias […] was the first sociologist, together with his young colleague Eric Dunning, to take sport and, in particular, football seriously].[89]

The inventory of topics in the upcoming **Table 3** includes the topics to which the respective author(s)/editor(s) devoted at least one specific section of their book (entire chapter or part, clearly identified as such in the table of contents). Although additional topics and sub-topics may also be covered inside those books, the authors' or editors' choice to single out and highlight some specific topics instead of others is a meaningful element in its own right, as it denotes the respective importance they conferred to the diverse issues at stake. The inventory in **Table 3** has been compiled instrumentally with a view to explore the coverage of relevant themes in the sampled media, that is as a tool for media analysis, without any ambition of being exhaustive from the specific angle of the sociology of sport. Exceedingly general themes like "culture", "sport and economy", "sport and business" or "sport and politics" have not been included in the inventory. These wide-ranging subject areas would not be of help in identifying specific issues that could be covered by the media under the angle of "social analysis", that is the focus of this thesis. As for the theme of "sports in the media", which also recurrently appears in sports sociology manuals, this has not been included either in the inventory, considering that, on the one hand, it is also too wide and general and, on the other hand, the media

[89] The article cited above – Heinich, Nathalie. 2015. "La quête d'excitation." *Revue du MAUSS* 46 (2): 77 – first appeared in the French newspaper *Libération* on September 20, 2014.

coverage is itself the overall focus of this thesis. This is to avoid inconclusive (and rather odd) self-reflexive descriptions that typically end up folding on themselves.

The topics in **Table 3** are ordered alphabetically, to avoid suggesting some kind of prioritisation:

***Table 3**: Recurrent topics in the study of the social impact of sport*

| TOPICS | TEXTBOOKS' AUTHORS / EDITORS |
|---|---|
| **Cities hosting sporting events** | (Digel 2013); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Corruption** | (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Development cooperation** | (Digel 2013); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Woods 2016) |
| **Deviance**[90] | (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Eitzen 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017) |
| **Disability** | (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018); (Duret 2019) |
| **Doping** | (Digel 2013); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Woods 2016); (Duret 2019) |
| **Education and school** | (Edwards 1973); (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Eitzen 2015); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Duret 2019) |
| **Environment** | (Giulianotti 2015); (Craig 2016); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Fandom** | (Edwards 1973); (Dunning 1999); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Duret 2019) |

[90] "Deviance" can mean different things for different authors. For example, it can or can*not* include doping, which can otherwise be treated as a major and separate topic in its own right, and is indeed treated as a separate topic in most cases. The same diversity of methodological options applies to gambling and other types of deviance. "Deviance" can also be used to mean cheating in general. Despite its inherent ambiguity, "Deviance" was nonetheless included in the list of "recurrent topics" because the tables of contents of some books do mention it as such, without detailing what it comprises if not inside the book. In Karen and Washington's book (2015), for example, a section entitled "Breaking the Normative Rules: the Problem of Deviance in Sports" includes chapters/topics as diverse as the following ones: "Creating the Frankenstein Athlete: The Drug Culture in Sports"; "Discourses of Deception: Cheating in Professional Running"; "Male Athletes, Injuries, and Violence"; "The Sprewell/Carlesimo Episode: Unacceptable Violence or Unacceptable Victim?"; "Unnecessary Toughness? School Sports, Peer Networks, and Male Adolescent Violence"; "The Dark Side of Social Capital: An Ethnography of Sport Governance"; and "Women Athletes as Falsely Accused Deviants: Managing the Lesbian Stigma". As will be explained later in this chapter, "Deviance" was not adopted as an analytical category for social analysis in the final taxonomy devised for this thesis (**Table 4**), which means that this thesis does not recommend "Deviance" as a category for the study of social analysis in the press. This is precisely due to the indefiniteness of the notion and the risk of using it as a catch-all term. For the sake of clarity, breaking it down into more specific items (doping, gambling and others) appears to be a more viable option.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Gambling** | (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Gender and sexuality** | (Edwards 1973); (Dunning 1999); (Defrance 2011); (Digel 2013); (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Eitzen 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Craig 2016); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018); (Duret 2019) |
| **Globalisation** | (Digel 2013); (Eitzen 2015); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Craig 2016); (Woods 2016); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Governance** | (Defrance 2011); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Craig 2016); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Health and lifestyles** | (Edwards 1973); (Eitzen 2015); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Labour rights** | (Eitzen 2015) |
| **Migrants and refugees** | (Karen and Washington 2015) |
| **Race** | (Edwards 1973); (Dunning 1999); (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Eitzen 2015); (Giulianotti 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Religion** | (Edwards 1973); (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Houlihan and Malcolm 2015); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |
| **Social class** | (Eitzen 2015); (Giulianotti 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Craig 2016); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018); (Duret 2019) |
| **Socialisation** | (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Eitzen 2015); (Craig 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017) |
| **Violence** | (Dunning 1999); (Delaney and Madigan 2015); (Karen and Washington 2015); (Woods 2016); (J. J. Coakley 2017); (Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018) |

The names of the "Topics" in the above table were assigned so as to regroup, under a same coherent category, the diversity of topics that were covered by the respective authors and editors in the books reviewed. The names of the Topics in the above table, therefore, do not necessarily match the exact labels that the respective authors and editors used in their work. For example, "Race" (one of the Topics in the above table) would include titles in the books reviewed such as "Racial issues" and alike. The choice of the Topics' names was meant to be exclusively lexical, to still reflect the authors' own section titles. The wide scope of the Topics in **Table 3** is one more evidence of the inherent difficulty

in setting thematical and theoretical boundaries in the study of sport. At the same time, it clearly highlights the pervasiveness of sport across a variety of aspects of social life.

Many of the themes that we can typically encounter in sociology of sports textbooks are also reflected, as such or within broader categories, in the European Union (EU)'s *White Paper on Sport* (European Commission 2007). Once again, the official text of an international organisation proves a convenient device for systematic synthesis. Incidentally, the EU's *White Paper on Sport* states, in a footnote to the document, that it uses the definition of "sport" established by the Council of Europe, previously reported in section **3.1.2 Defining "sport"** and the one adopted for this thesis. The EU's *White Paper on Sport* "focuses on the societal role of sport, its economic dimension and its organisation in Europe" (ibid.). In order to describe "The societal role of sport", Section 2 of the *White Paper* itemises the following sub-sections or themes:

- Enhancing public health through physical activity;
- Joining forces in the fight against doping; enhancing the role of sport in education and training;
- Promoting volunteering and active citizenship through sport; using the potential of sport for social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities;
- Strengthening the prevention of and fight against racism and violence;
- Sharing our values with other parts of the world; and
- Supporting sustainable development.

**The EU's *White Paper on Sport* (2007)**

The *White Paper on Sport* marked the first time that the European Commission addressed "sport-related issues in a comprehensive manner" (European Commission 2007). Prior to the release of that document, sport was already part of European policies. Indeed, sport touches a number of areas that are subject to the application of EU and Member States policies. The role of sport in European society was recognised by the European Council in Nice in December 2000. The Annex IV of the Conclusions of the Presidency of the Nice Council, entitled *Declaration on the Specific Characteristics of Sport and its Social Function in Europe*, stated as follows: "Even though not having any direct powers in this area, the Community must, in its action under the various Treaty provisions, take account of the social, educational and cultural functions inherent in sport and making it special, in order that the code of ethics and the solidarity essential to the preservation of its social

role may be respected and nurtured" (European Council 2000). The *White Paper* that followed in 2007 went further in that it built on the multiplication of consultations between the EU Commission and sport stakeholders on issues of common interest around sports, and on the perception by the Commission that "considerable expectations exist concerning the role of sport in Europe and EU action in this area" (European Commission 2007).[91]

By combining the topics in **Table 3: Recurrent topics in the study of the social impact of sport** with the above list of topics from EU's *White Paper on Sport* (European Commission 2007), we get a rather long and wide-ranging list. Nevertheless, as large as this list may seem, it can still be complemented with additional pertinent items.

At this stage of the process, it is time to design a comprehensive list of topics, broken down into sub-topics, to represent the largest possible range of socially relevant issues (analytical categories for the thesis) that could, in principle, be of interest to media coverage. This table is suggested to serve as a matrix for social analysis in the media coverage of sports.

To recapitulate, the procedure toward determining a distinctive and broader taxonomy for the study of the social analysis in the press coverage of sports, which will be found in the upcoming **Table 4**, was primarily informed and inspired by: (a) the sociological research reviewed in **Table 3: Recurrent topics in the study of the social impact of sport**; and b) the broad categories of issues that the EU's *White Paper on Sport* (European Commission 2007) utilises to define "the societal role of sport"; complemented by (c) the professional and academic experience in the sports and journalism sectors of the author of this thesis.

[91] More on the institutionalisation of European sport, including events and initiatives prior to the 2007 *White Paper*, can be found in: Gasparini, William, and Jean-François Polo (2012). "L'espace européen du football. Dynamiques institutionnelles et constructions sociales". *Politique européenne* 36 (1): 9–21.

***Table 4**: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports*

| TOPICS (Sport and / for …) | SUB-TOPICS |
|---|---|
| **Charity** | Charitable initiatives and contributions from athletes |
| | Charitable initiatives and contributions from sports organisations |
| **Corruption** | Bribes for the allocation of sports mega-events |
| | Conflicts of interest at the top |
| | Kickbacks for player transfers |
| | Match-fixing to a draw or a fixed score |
| | Money laundering through sponsorship and advertising arrangements |
| | Referee match rigging |
| | Tax havens |
| **Development cooperation** | Construction and management of sport infrastructures in developing countries |
| | Intercultural dialogue |
| | Job creation in developing countries |
| | Peace-building through sport |
| **Disability** | Barriers to participation |
| | Competitions |
| | Opportunities for participation |
| | Physical activity for disabled kids at school |
| | Unified sports |
| **Doping** | Animal doping |
| | Banned drugs |
| | Bans and disqualifications of results |
| | Blood doping |
| | Law-enforcement |
| | Prevention |
| | Side effects (short- and long-term) |
| | State doping |
| **Education** | Athletes as role models / Inspirational |
| | Character development |
| | Child and youth development |
| | Coaching |
| | College sports[92] |
| | Dual career training |
| | Moral values in sports |
| | Physical education at school |
| | Prevention of juvenile delinquency |

[92] "College sports", which is a major commercial component of sport in some countries – especially in North America – is included in this taxonomy in connection with its social rather than economic impact. As an analytical category, it is obviously more relevant when used to examine the media coverage in these countries, although the popularity, or at the very least the knowledge of college sports today, often extends beyond national borders.

| | |
|---|---|
| | Sport and failure[93] |
| **Environment** | Impact on nature of elite and recreational sports |
| | Mobility: transportation and commuting to and from sport facilities |
| | Sports facilities: design, construction and management |
| | Sportswear and equipment: sourcing, production, product lifecycle |
| **Fandom** | Camaraderie |
| | Fan violence |
| | Fans' solidarity |
| | Identity |
| | Nationalism |
| | Political tribalism |
| | Stress relief |
| | Tickets to sports events: availability and prices |
| | Traditions and connections through school, alma mater, district, hometown, state, country |
| **Gambling** | Addiction |
| | Illegal gambling |
| | Match-fixing for gambling purposes |
| | Organised crime |
| | Policy and regulatory issues |
| **Gender and sexuality** | Cheerleaders |
| | Equal prize money |
| | Homophobia |
| | Intersex athletes |
| | Pay gap |
| | Sexism |
| | Sexual abuse |
| | Sexual harassment |
| | Transgender athletes |
| | Women's access to leadership positions |
| | Women's access to sports |
| **Globalisation** | Elite migrant athletes |
| | Evolving geography of sports |
| | Global audiences |
| | Internationalisation of club ownership |
| | Internationalisation of teams and leagues |
| **Governance of sports organisations** | Corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies |
| | Fan relationship management |
| | Image of sports |
| | Self-regulatory measures |
| | Sport development |
| | Transparency and integrity |

[93] "Sport and failure" was deliberately singled out as a separate sub-topic, as opposed to considering it as part of "Character development", because sport is most typically "a world obsessed with winning, power, prestige, and privilege", largely and almost automatically associated with winners and statistics of success (Sheppard 2019, 268).

| | |
|---|---|
| | Women's access to governance |
| **Health and lifestyles** | Ageing |
| | Alcohol abuse |
| | Animal welfare |
| | Children's physical development |
| | Diseases associated with sport |
| | Eating disorders |
| | Fitness |
| | Injury[94] |
| | Lifestyle (sedentary vs. active) |
| | Nutrition |
| | Obesity |
| | Overtraining |
| | Painkiller abuse |
| | Psychological and mental health |
| | Public health |
| **Hosting sports events** | City and country promotion |
| | Forced displacement of locals |
| | Housing gentrification |
| | Jobs |
| | Legacy |
| | Tourism |
| | Urban renewal |
| **Illegal equipment** | Equipment that may harm opponents |
| | Technology doping |
| | Unauthorised substances on clothing, person or equipment |
| **Labour rights** | Exploitation of underage players |
| | Internationalisation of athletes' careers and contracts |
| | Labour rights at sporting infrastructure projects |
| | Moral and sexual harassment of athletes |
| | Trafficked players |
| **Racism** | Cyber-racism (sport-related) |
| | Discrimination and exclusion from decision-making roles |
| | Display of racist banners and symbols |
| | Racial abuse from other players |
| | Racist chants and insults |
| | Sports initiatives against racism |
| **Religion** | Neutrality of sport |
| | Religious signs in actions and clothing |
| | Sport as religion |
| **Social integration and socialisation** | Availability of sports facilities |
| | Elderly citizens |
| | Intercultural integration |
| | Migrants |

[94] Excluding the reporting of match-related injuries involving specific athletes.

| | |
|---|---|
| | Poverty and social mobility |
| | Refugees |
| **Violence** | Athletes' domestic violence |
| | Athletes' violence on the pitch |
| | Emotional abuse by coaches |
| | Hazing |
| | Terrorism |
| **Volunteering** | Community sports development |
| | Disadvantaged neighbourhoods |
| | Non-profit sport |
| | Youth volunteering at sports events |

The following are the key selection criteria that were used to design this new set of analytical categories (**Table 4**), for the purposes of this thesis and beyond:

- The focus is on contemporary issues and current or emerging trends. This also means that topics and sub-topics are included on the basis of their mainstream meaning in contemporary society. For example, in the English public school of the 19th century – but we could generalise this to the Western world at large in that period, as well as the first half of the 20th century – "character development" through sport mostly referred to the contribution of sport to *manliness* development. Although it could be argued that a manliness issue still accompanies the world of sport, that vision does not coincide with what "character development" has generally come to mean in the 21st century, or what is by now broadly advocated anyway.

- The names of the Topics in **Table 4**, which would become the analytical categories for this thesis, were chosen so as to appear as clear, straightforward and unambiguous as possible. For example, "Volunteering" was preferred to analogous concepts like "active citizenship" or "solidarity", which were deemed too wide to be singled out as categories. Incidentally, active citizenship or solidarity in sports most often take the form of volunteering. By the same token, an indefinite label like "Deviance" was avoided because it is too a large and undefined subject area. Deviance in sport may include diverse behaviours, the most relevant of which were singled out as distinct categories in the proposed classification (e.g. doping, gambling, etc.).[95] The category

[95] On this point, see also footnote 90.

"Social Inclusion" was equally avoided because it similarly refers to a large and rather undefined variety of topics – ranging from inclusion across different social classes to the inclusion of minorities, the inclusion of athletes with disability, and more – and individual topics were included instead, wherever appropriate.

- Attention was paid to avoid mixing different levels of categorisation. For example, among the sub-topics of "Doping", it would have been incorrect to include both "Prevention" and "World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)", the latter being in fact a sub-category of the former.

- The topics and sub-topics in **Table 4** were ordered alphabetically, to avoid suggesting some kind of prioritisation.

## 3.2 Sport as (popular) culture

### 3.2.1 Sport as a cultural indicator

Stating that sport is culture may almost seem trivial today, given the place that sport occupies in contemporary societies and its presence across a variety of domains. In the mid-1960s, long before sport became so ubiquitous, Kenyon and Loy already argued that defining sport as "a cultural phenomenon of great magnitude and complexity is an affirmation of the obvious" (1965, 24). In reality, the association of the two notions of "sport" and "culture" is far from being unchallenged, especially if we do not specify what we mean by "culture" – and as previously discussed, what we mean by "sport". Adding the adjective "popular" is not a totally neutral operation either, although the popularity of sport would appear comparatively self-evident. "Popular" was deliberately left in brackets, in the title of this section 3.2, as a way to stress the focus here on the debate about the *cultural* component of sport. Considering the ideological and political connotations that have been attached to the notion of culture across diverse intellectual disciplines and currents of thought, it may be useful to recall its plain, dictionary definition. The following is the leading definition of *culture* in the *Oxford Learner's*

*Dictionaries*: "the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group" ("Culture" 2019). In his book *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, Raymond Williams identified three broad and competing uses of the term "culture" in its modern developments: "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetical development" […]; a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general […]; the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (1983, 90).[96]

If we narrow down the analysis to sport, we can state, for a start, that sport unquestionably *reflects* culture, and there is simple empirical evidence to support this statement. Despite our globalised world, where the geography of sports has become more homogeneous than it used to be and many sports and championships are followed on an international level, we can still mention several sports that have large numbers of participants and spectators in certain regions of the world and virtually none in others. This is due to the ongoing truth that "the great diversity of sport is a result of the diverse world we live in" (Delaney and Madigan 2015, 13–14). Sport indeed remains one of the elements that distinguish cultures from one another. Football, for example, which is the sport with the largest numbers of spectators and participants among all sports at the global level, is far from being the most popular of sports in each and every country. In the United States, for example, and even if its popularity in the country has grown considerably over the past few years, "soccer", as they call it there, is all but part of the national culture (while *American* football is). Cricket, namely the most popular sport in some of the most populated country in the world – India being the foremost example – is a marginal sport in many other countries and regions of the world.[97]

[96] On Williams' definitions of culture and the intrinsic complexity of the notion, see also Rothman, Joshua. (2014). "The Meaning of 'Culture.'" *The New Yorker*, December 26, 2014. https://www.newyorker.com/books/joshua-rothman/meaning-culture (last accessed on September 4, 2020). The article was written on the occasion of Merriam-Webster's announcement that "culture" was their 2014 "Word of the Year". Rothman rightfully commented that, in fact, "'culture' is a confusing word, this year or any year" (ibid.).

[97] India was the world's second most populated country at the time of writing, with a population of nearly 1.353 billion in 2018, while China topped the ranking with nearly 1.428 billion (United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019).

Before coming to culture, the relationship between the diversity of cultures and the diversity of sports is undoubtedly determined by the natural environment in which a society operates. Winter sports obviously tend to be more developed in countries that do experience a winter season. But right after the geographical essentials, the prevalence of one sport over another has historically been strictly connected with the essentials of cultural traditions and habits. Aspects such as the level of deference to authority, for example, or a philosophy of winning at all costs versus sportsmanship, which may vary significantly from one culture to another, tend to impact the choices and attitudes in sport as well (Delaney and Madigan 2015, 75). The priority that some cultures assign to community over individual interests, while other cultures do exactly the opposite, is also reflected, mostly unconsciously, in how people participate in sporting activities, as it tends to influence the way they behave in a team environment and their priorities in the game.

### 3.2.2 Sport as an opiate of the masses

An attempt is being made in this thesis to treat sport, here an indirect object of study, without necessarily choosing whether to love it or hate it, to vulgarise the dichotomy between opposite schools of thought. Multiple elements of interest to this thesis are present in alternative theories. As previously seen in this chapter, functionalism, in its conventional versions, praises the values and social contribution of sport. On the opposite theoretical shore are the harshest critics of sport, whose contribution is of special relevance to the analysis of the cultural component of sport. The title of this section 3.2.2 suggests that we are primarily looking at Marxist and critical theory contributions. Their common refrain is a certain abhorrence of sport, often seasoned with overt contempt, against what is regarded by critics on this front as one of the symbols of capitalism. The first thought that may logically come to mind when approaching these theorists is that such a keen interest in sport would hardly be justified if sport were in fact not considered by the same critics as part of culture, and a powerful one. It is also quite clear that the Marxist criticism of sport presupposes a certain idea or definition of “sport”. It mostly criticises sport in its professional and highly competitive version. As a reminder, the

present thesis assumes that sport is a much more comprehensive universe and concept than its purely professional and competitive versions.

This little preamble was to describe a common feature across the Marxist tradition vis-à-vis sport, that is criticism of sport, but in reality, the assessment of sport within the Marxist tradition has historically translated into diverse approaches, not all simplistically reducible to "anti-sport". According to Giulianotti (2004b), "the critical component within social analysis is given fuller assessment when we turn to look at the imaginative Marxist contributions of Theodor W. Adorno, Antonio Gramsci and C.L.R. James" (ibid., 5).[98] Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), a leading figure of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, certainly does not owe his fame to his writings on sport. In fact, Adorno supervised the work on sport of Heinz Risse, the author of *Soziologie des Sports* (1921), as well as Bero Rigauer's work for *Sport und Arbeit* [Sport and Work] (1969), as also reminded by Dunning in *Sport Matters* (1999, 256). A passage from *The Culture Industry* (Adorno 1991) helps illustrate Adorno's vision of sport, and notably of the place of sport in society:

> Sport itself is not play but ritual in which the subjected celebrate their subjection. They parody freedom in their readiness for service, a service which the individual forcibly exacts from his own body for a second time. In the freedom which he exercises over his body the individual confirms what he is by inflicting upon this slave the same injustice he has already endured at the violent hands of society. The passion for sport, in which the masters of mass culture sense the real mass basis of their dictatorial power, is grounded in this fact. (Adorno 1991, 89)

Despite the severity of these and other analyses, it has been observed that reducing Adorno's approach to "a crudely elitist denunciation of sport" would not be correct (Inglis 2004, 86). According to Inglis (ibid., 89), we have to consider that Adorno was "a master of irony and ambivalence [and his] extravagantly negative statements on sports and other

[98] Giulianotti's (ed.) anthology *Sport and Modern Social Theorists* (2004b), from which the citation is drawn, offers a comprehensive inquiry into the contribution of modern social theorists to the study of sport, featuring chapters by different experts on the theorists mentioned above – with contributions about Adorno (Inglis 2004), Gramsci (Rowe 2004a), and James (Stoddart 2004) – as well as chapters about other sociologists, including Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Freud (Ingham 2004), Anthony Giddens (Horne and Jary 2004), Pierre Bourdieu (Tomlinson 2004), and Jürgen Habermas (William J. Morgan 2004), among others.

matters are, in their excessive negativity, quite explicitly designed as 'shock-tactics'". Whether or not we share this interpretation of the depth of Adorno's aversion to sport, there is little doubt that Adorno epitomises the mainstream critical/Marxist approach to the sociological study of sport, which revolves around social class differences and domination-subordination dynamics within society.

The ideas of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), another key thinker, in Giulianotti's view (2004b), to describe the overall Marxist criticism of sport, have recurrently been used in the social theorisation of sport (Duarte 2012). Rowe (2004a, 97) has defined the ideas of the Italian philosopher as "highly influential in the social analysis of sport". Gramsci's theories have been used, among other things, to write "in Gramscian terms of the hegemony of Western sports" (Guttmann 1994, 5–6). Compared with Adorno, Gramsci's writings about sport are considerably rarer. A discussion of Gramsci's ideas in the framework of sports studies will be suspended until the next section (**3.2.3 The benefits of popularity**). In spite of his well-known and legitimate place in Marxian scholarship, associating the Gramscian perspective on sport with an "opium-of-the-masses" type of approach would be rather far-fetched, given that some of Gramsci's ideas actually highlighted positive connotations of sport (Rowe 2004a).

Within Giulianotti's (2004b) tryptic of the authors who help, in his view, get a fuller assessment of the Marxist contribution to the social understanding of sport, C.L.R. (Cyril Lionel Robert) James (1901-1989) emerges as an atypical case, for both his geographical origin and his background. Unlike Adorno and Gramsci, James was not raised in Europe. He was born in Tunapuna, Trinidad, then a British territory. Furthermore, James was himself a sportsman, specifically a cricketer. Similarly to Gramsci, James also employed a Marxist, critical lens without using it to demonise sport. In James, the paradox in this respect is even more evident. James's contribution to the social understanding of sport can be primarily found in *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), a book on cricket that was at the same time a journalistic piece on sports and a sociological description of West Indies in the early 20th century. James himself described the book as "neither cricket reminiscences nor autobiography" (1963, sec. Preface). The book showed that although

slavery was abolished in the 19th century, West Indian cricket carried on the patterns of social relations that had been developed during slavery through the 20th century (Stoddart 2004). In this sense, the sport of cricket carried a negative responsibility toward society. However, contrary to what one might expect, that acknowledgment did not translate into an author's aversion to the sport. In other words, James's devotion to a Marxist vision of society coexisted, in his work, with a passion for cricket as it was. According to Stoddart (2004, 112), James was aware of this paradox and "saw his deep love for cricket […] at odds with his desire for social and political change in that cricket was an 'establishment' game seeking to preserve into the industrial and post-industrial ages a set of social relations more appropriate to a pre-industrial time". Malcom has observed that if James's *Beyond a Boundary* is now regarded as a seminal work, the text was for a long time neglected – Malcom says "almost entirely ignored" – by those mapping the literary emergence of the sociology of sport, and that was due, in Malcom's view, to "a particular Anglo-American (and white) conception of sociology" (Malcolm 2014, 9).

In France, a neo-Marxist sociology of sport was first inspired by the work of Jean-Marie Brohm, starting with his 1968 contribution in a special issue of the magazine *Partisans* ("Sport, culture et répression" 1968). The title of that pamphlet – in English, "Sport, culture and repression" – and its contents marked the appearance of the critical theory of sport in France (Vaugrand 2001). Brohm devoted his own doctoral thesis to the *Sociologie Politique du Sport* [*Political Sociology of Sport*] (1976). Remarkably, this thesis was published in 1976, i.e. a year before his author defended it, in 1977. Brohm has defined himself as a "Marxist intellectual" and, with reference to sport, a representative of a current of thought that has described sport as "*un opium du people fantastique, une machine à décerveler les masses et [...] un moyen d'aliénation idéologique qui empêchait, entre autres, la classe ouvrière d'être porteuse d'un autre projet social*" [an amazing opiate of the people, a mass brainwash machine and (…) a means of ideological alienation which has prevented, among other things, the working class from carrying on an alternative plan for society] (Brohm 1983, 38). The notion of sport as opiate of the people is indeed one of the key ideas in Brohm's vision of sport (Vaugrand 2001, 193). In a more recent article, co-written by Brohm with Fabien Ollier, sport is called "a weapon

of mass distraction [used] as a buffer of criticism and social commitment" (Brohm and Ollier 2019, 429). And Brohm's anti-capitalist critique does not only relate to the wealthy and often opulent sport of contemporary times. For Brohm, the story of the Olympic Games of the modern era has been corrupted by money since the very beginning:

> L'acte du baptême de l'olympisme est marqué de l'infamie de l'argent et du capital. Les premiers Jeux Olympiques, ceux d'Athènes, ne purent avoir lieu que grâce à la collaboration d'un riche bourgeois, Georges Averoff. *C'est donc dès l'origine que le capital financier prend en main les destinées de l'olympisme*. (author's italic) (Brohm 1996, 339)
>
> [The act of the baptism of Olympism is marked by the infamy of money and capital. The first Olympic Games, those of Athens, could only take place thanks to the collaboration of a wealthy bourgeois, Georges Averoff. *It is therefore from the outset that financial capital takes over the destiny of Olympism*].

Interestingly for a doctoral thesis that was completed during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, in a 2004 article co-written with Marc Perelman and Patrick Vassort, Brohm described the extension of the sport's sphere of influence across society as a "sport pandemic" ("*Cette pandémie sportive – l'extension de sa sphère d'influence au sein de la vie quotidienne*") (Brohm, Perelman, and Vassort 2004, 26).

Speaking of French scholars in the same theoretical stream as Brohm, Marc Perelman is indeed among those who have also described sport as opium of the people. In a 2012 interview with the radical magazine *Dazed* (dazeddigital.com), Perelman argued that sport is worse than religion: "Sport is as much an opium as religion, but worse because religion is a form of protest against reality, whereas sport does nothing but increase the most miserable reality" (2012).[99] The interview from which those words are drawn was centred around a book that he had recently written, meaningfully entitled *Barbaric Sport: A Global Plague* (Perelman 2012).[100] On a similar note, Perelman is also the author, with Brohm, of *Le Football: une peste émotionnelle* [*Football: An Emotional Plague*] (Brohm

[99] The comparison with religion, in the use of the "opium" metaphor, is not to be found in French sources and authors only, and has not been raised exclusively by academics. David Remnick, for example, the editor of *The New Yorker* since 1998 and a Pulitzer Prize winner in 1994, has written that "Sports, not religion, is the opiate of the people", comparing the quantity of time that (American) people spend to attend a Mass to the time that they spend following sports (Remnick 2011).

[100] The book was first published in French as *Le Sport Barbare. Critique d'un fléau mondial* (Éditions Michalon, Paris 2011).

and Perelman 2006). More recently, in an article for the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, Perelman expressed once again his concern over money in sport, in this case with reference to the fire of the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris in April 2019, and the plan by the French authorities to restore the monument in time for the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics (Perelman 2019). In the article, entitled "Sauvons Notre-Dame des Jeux Olympiques!" [Let's save Notre-Dame from the Olympic Games!], Perelman expresses his fear that the Parisian monuments ultimately become mere signals of a sporting event on the occasion of the 2024 Olympics (ibid.).

Like other scholars that have been evoked in this section 3.2.2, Noam Chomsky certainly does not owe his fame to sport-related writings either. His critique of sport is nonetheless rather well-known, and is consistent with his view of society as organised around capitalism and the control of society by capitalist forces. In Chomsky's view, sport is one of the propaganda tools that capitalism uses to control people:

> One of the functions that things like professional sports play, in our society and others, is to offer an area to deflect people's attention from things that matter, so that the people in power can do what matters without public interference (Chomsky 1987, 36).

Sut Jhally, another anti-capitalist scholar, has also represented the distracting role of sports, although in a way that would sound, at first, more mitigated than Chomsky's: "Sports are an explicit celebration of the *idealized* structures of reality – a form of capitalist realism. They mediate a vital social dialectic, providing both an escape from the alienated conditions of everyday life and a *socialization* into these very same structures" (1984, 51). In the same article, however, Jhally also describes sports in more unequivocally Marxist terms:

> While sports reflect the major characteristics of the wider mode of production (sale of labor as a thing, the quantification and objectification of human actions, the Taylorization of the workforce and the body, the specialized division of labor reflecting both sexism and racism, and the separation of mental and manual labor), it is their mediation through the symbolic and human canopy provided by sports that legitimate and mask the true nature of these authority structures and make them appear as concrete, personal and human, rather than as an abstract, technical, alienating authority. (ibid., 54)

Sports sociologist Jon Dart, citing Chomsky as well as Perelman, and more broadly the current of thought that views sport as serving the interests of capitalism, has argued that "dismissing sport outright as a crass display of muscle-bound dullards, as appeasing 'bread and circuses', or an opiate drug fails to adequately engage with and explain its popularity" (2018). After all, Dart argues, "[s]port may be an opium of the people – but it matters" (ibid.). This leads us to explore the other side of the story, i.e. the positive potential of sport's social attractiveness.

### 3.2.3 The benefits of popularity

Sport is popular, in that it is a widespread and well-liked phenomenon in contemporary societies in terms of both direct participation and audience. That being said, however, it all comes down to one question: is being popular a good thing or a bad thing? This may appear over-simplistic, yet the question is crucial, because the conceptual fate of "sport", as far as its role in society is concerned, is heavily influenced by the answer that is given to that simple, background question. The cultural value of a phenomenon that is also popular and a commercial success is typically called into question. Conversely, a cultural product of little commercial relevance – for example a less popular sport as compared to a powerful one – is generally regarded as more culturally acceptable (Lenoir 2013, 283). Huizinga, in his well-known portrait of the *Homo Ludens* (1980), emphasised the fundamental, anthropological connection between play and human culture, with play being one of culture's formative elements.[101] This is how Huizinga described play as a cultural phenomenon: "Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing" (ibid., 1). Huizinga also stated that play and culture are naturally intertwined regardless of whether we look at playing just for fun, playing competitively or watching others playing as spectators, all of which being part of the "play-category", as he called it (ibid.). Interestingly, Huizinga has defined the importance of play while

[101] *Homo Ludens* was first published in German in Switzerland in 1944, then in English in 1949 by Routledge & Kegan Paul. In 1980, it was reprinted in English, also by Routledge & Kegan Paul, based on the author's own translation.

steering clear, at the same time, of the temptation to hyper-intellectualise the phenomenon. This temptation arises when one searches significance beyond play's inherent (playful) nature:

> [Play] goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity. It is a significant function - that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, "instinct", we explain nothing; if we call it "mind" or "will" we say too much. (Huizinga 1980, 1).

In suggesting that play, including watching others play, is a primary and spontaneous human activity, Huizinga undermines the idea of the popularity of sport as the symbol of a dangerously super-imposed cultural model. The fact that a cultural phenomenon is popular and has an impact on behaviours does not mean that individuals then all act like carbon copies of a same cultural model (Allison 1982, 13). No matter how powerful a cultural model and its forces may be, each individual has the liberty to move and choose within that model and to adapt it – at least in free and democratic countries. Furthermore, culture itself is hardly ever a frozen monobloc of rules, but is rather a dynamic body of patterns that evolve in time – faster than ever in contemporary, hyper-technological societies. Gramsci himself, while coming from the Marxist philosophical tradition, had a more nuanced and positive approach than other philosophers in the same current of thought, some of whom have been discussed in the previous section 3.2.2. Gramsci did acknowledge social class differences, in terms of leverage and availability of resources, but did not conceive a ruling class as having *complete* control over the working class (Rowe 2004a, 102).

It has been argued that Gramsci's interest in sport was in reality "close to nil" (Guttmann 1994, 6), and that "[s]port is the one important aspect of popular culture that is almost completed neglected by […] Gramsci", despite the major importance granted by Italy's Fascist regime to organised sport (W. J. Morgan 2002, 247). Contending these views, mostly associated to part of Anglo-Saxon historiography, Anastasi (2018) has maintained that Gramsci's vast and comprehensive oeuvre *did* encompass also reflections on sport.

Gramsci's best known contribution to the socio-political analysis of sport is a column entitled "Il Foot-ball e lo Scopone" ["Foot-ball and Scopone"], first appeared in the Turin edition of *L'Avanti* on August 16, 1918, and also included in the anthology *Sotto la Mole (1916-1920)* (Gramsci 1960).[102] Gramsci identified football as a symbol of individualistic society, in the same tone as the Marxist's critique of sport, but also described its positive and modernising features:

> Osservate una partita di foot-ball: essa è un modello della società individualistica: vi si esercita l'iniziativa, ma essa è definita dalla legge; le personalità vi si distinguono gerarchicamente, ma la distinzione avviene non per carriera, ma per capacità specifica; c'è il movimento, la gara, la lotta, ma esse sono regolate da una legge non scritta, che si chiama «lealtà», e viene continuamente ricordata dalla presenza dell'arbitro. (Gramsci 1960, 433)
>
> [Let's observe a foot-ball game: it is a model of the individualistic society: initiative is exerted, but is defined by the law; personalities are distinguished hierarchically there, but the distinction is based not on career, but on specific skills; there is movement, a contest, a struggle, but these are all regulated by an unwritten law, which is called "loyalty", constantly recalled by the presence of the referee].

Gramsci complained, in the same article, about Italians not participating enough in sport. According to Gramsci, Italians preferred "*la clausura in una bettola caffè*" [the seclusion of a dump cafe], where they could play *scopone*, to the open-air spaces of sport (ibid.). Beyond the unhealthiness of sedentary habits, which was in itself a rather ground-breaking argument for those times, Gramsci attributed a surprising – considering his political credo – sociological connotation to those habits:

> Lo sport è attività diffusa delle società nelle quali l'individualismo economico del regime capitalistico ha trasformato il costume, ha suscitato accanto alla libertà economica e politica anche la libertà spirituale e la tolleranza dell'opposizione. Lo scopone è la forma di sport delle società arretrate economicamente, politicamente e spiritualmente […]. Lo sport suscita anche in politica il concetto del «gioco leale». Lo scopone produce i signori che fanno mettere alla porta dal principale l'operaio che *nella libera discussione ha osato contraddire il loro pensiero* (!?) (Gramsci 1960, 433–34)
>
> [Sport is a widespread activity in the societies in which the economic individualism of the capitalist regime has transformed habits, and has raised - alongside economic and political freedom – also spiritual freedom and tolerance of the opposition. Scopone is the form of sport of economically, politically and spiritually primitive societies […]. Sport raises, also in politics, the idea of "fair play". Scopone produces the kind of gentlemen

[102] *Scopone* is an Italian card game and a variant of *Scopa*, another card game.

> who discard the worker who has *dared to contradict their thinking in a free discussion* (!?)].[103]

Italian journalist and writer Pasquale Coccia has recently written, in an article discussing the "Foot-ball and Scopone" piece for the communist newspaper *Il Manifesto*, that if Gramsci was alive, he would go to the stadium (2015).[104] It is important to remind here that Gramsci rejected the idea of the intellectual as a self-referential, sectarian individual looking down upon the masses. Gramsci's humanism was reflected in the idea that it is necessary for intellectuals to *know* as well as to *feel* (Rowe 2004a, 102). This is how Gramsci described, in *Quaderni dal Carcere* [*Prison Notebooks*], the role and mistakes of intellectuals in society:

> L'errore dell'intellettuale consiste nel credere che si possa sapere senza comprendere e specialmente senza sentire ed essere appassionato (non solo del sapere in sé, ma per l'oggetto del sapere) cioè che l'intellettuale possa essere tale (e non un puro pedante) se distinto e staccato dal popolo-nazione, cioè senza sentire le passioni elementari del popolo, comprendendole e quindi spiegandole e giustificandole nella determinata situazione storica […]; non si fa politica-storia senza questa passione, cioè senza questa connessione sentimentale tra intellettuali e popolo-nazione (Gramsci 1975, 2:1505).
>
> The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge); in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation […]; one cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and the people-nation.[105]

The present thesis builds on the principles described in Gramsci's above extract at least in two respects: (a) this thesis is grounded in the idea that what is popular and "even" involves passion, in this case sport, should not be regarded with contempt and condescendence; and (b) analysing a phenomenon presupposes understanding it as well, and conceivably being passionate about it, since having a certain knowledge of it may not

[103] Gramsci's analysis of football is also discussed in: Liguori, Guido. (1997). "Una Palla Di Cartapesta. Le Riflessioni Di Gramsci Tra Football e Democrazia." *Lancillotto e Nausica*, no. 2–3: 40–47.
[104] The Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto* is described here as a "communist" newspaper in accordance with the way the newspaper qualifies itself. The definition of "Quotidiano comunista" [Communist newspaper] appears on the top of the title page.
[105] Translation from Gramsci's Italian version by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Gramsci 1999, 737).

always be good enough. A certain degree of "contamination" with the object of study, although not indispensable, might be recommendable. As far as sport is concerned, namely a domain in which passion is a key component, it is legitimate to wonder whether it is really possible to advance our understanding of the phenomenon through exclusively abstract and philosophical knowledge.

Gerald Graff (2001, 23) has pointed to the "Hidden Intellectualism", from the title of his article, in apparently anti-intellectual places like sports. As a student, he explains, he preferred sports over studying but his "preference for sports over schoolwork was not anti-intellectualism so much as intellectualism by other means", as he realised several years later (ibid., 24). This is how Graff explains what could be defined as the intellectualising process through sport and the socialisation process that goes with it:

> It was through reading and arguing about sports that I learned what it felt like to propose a generalization, restate and respond to a counterargument, and the other complex operations that constitute what we call "intellectualizing," and these skills were there to be transferred when I eventually sought an academic career. […] [S]ports were full of challenging arguments, debates, problems for analysis, and meaningful statistical math in a way that school conspicuously was not. Furthermore, sports arguments, debates, and analyses made you part of a community, not just of your friends but of the national public culture. (Graff 2001, 27–28)

Graff's observations about sport serving as a stepping stone to knowledge call to mind Boltanski's (1975) conceptualisation of the process of cultural legitimation of comic strips in France, gradually evolving from "low culture", when comic strips emerged, at the end of the 19the century, to "high culture" from the 1960s onward. And it would be impossible not to mention, in this discussion, Bourdieu's *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement* (1979), translated into English as *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), in which Bourdieu addressed his concern about highly educated people ("high culture") designating tastes and ultimately establishing what belongs to high culture and what does not.[106] Collovald and Neveu, within an anthology (Coulangeon and Duval 2013) celebrating 30 years since the publication of Bourdieu's

[106] The French word for "taste" did not appear in the original (French) title of the book.

*La Distinction*, have used the Bourdesian lens to inquiry into the popularity of detective stories, which accounted for a quarter of book sales in France at the time of their piece (Collovald and Neveu 2013). Using an approach that could also be adopted in the social analysis of sport, Collovald and Neveu have looked at the success of detective stories to apprehend the transformations in relationship to culture. For Collovald and Neveu, detective stories are providers of *échappées identitaires* [an escape from identity] (ibid., 134), which enable the reader to break free from their everyday social and professional roles and pave the way to the discovery of unexpected social relations and cultural resources. Collovald and Neveu describe this occurrence as "*une marge de jeu identitaire inattendue*" [an unexpected margin of identity game] (ibid.).

As far as sport is concerned, the process of cultural legitimation that authors such as Graff (2001), Boltanski (1975) and Collovald and Neveu (2013) have identified in other domains is a long way from completion. One of the purposes of the present thesis is also to draw attention to the role that the press can play in this direction. The United States represent, to a certain extent, an exception. Stempel (2019) has looked at the particular role of "Sport as High Culture in the USA" (the title of his article), and recommended that we blend Bourdieu's theory on class-based cultural divisions with Michèle Lamont's (1992) focus on "moral capital". Lamont (ibid.) argues that the "self-actualisation" of the U.S. dominant classes is based more on moral boundaries than on aesthetic ones and, in Stempel's view (2019), the history of sport participation in the United States is representative of this development.

Going back to "The benefits of popularity", the title of the present section 3.2.3, and to answer the initial question about whether being popular is ultimately "a good thing or a bad thing", this thesis uses the term "popular", when it refers to sport and related aspects as "popular culture", in a neutral and non-ideological fashion. Sport is, as a matter of fact, one of the most popular phenomena and cultural aspects of contemporary societies. Popularity is not a good thing or a bad thing *per se*. John Storey (2018) has observed that popular culture is typically defined in terms of "*otherness*", that is in opposition to other conceptual categories, such as dominant culture or high culture, leading to the idea that

popular culture is "an *empty* conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use" (ibid., 1 – author's italic). Although exploring the broader theoretical framework behind the notion of "popular culture" would exceed the scope of this thesis, the concern for a certain conceptual vagueness of the notion, as pointed by Storey, seems justified and pertinent. Rejecting what is massively popular as inferior and not culturally worthwhile, or studying it only to demonstrate, to paraphrase Storey, its "otherness", is a perfect way to elude understanding the society we live in while mistakenly assuming to make it better.

## 3.3 The growth of sport through the press

### 3.3.1 The outset of the "sport & media" convergence

In order to be able to examine and interpret media sports, it is necessary to set the basics of the historical background of the relationship between sport and the media.[107] The sport and media convergence is so ingrained in our contemporary societies that we have ended up taking it for granted, almost as a fact of nature, while it has been provocatively stated that "[t]here is, after all, no necessary reason why they should be connected in any but the most perfunctory of manners" (Rowe 2004b, 11). If sport has evolved from elite recreational activity for a privileged few into a popular, then a mass phenomenon, this is also – we could say largely, if not mostly – due to the contribution of the increasing media coverage of sporting competitions and events. For Horne, the role of the media has historically been so crucial that the very question "what is sport" has been answered by looking at what was covered in the media:

> The relationship between the mass media and sport has always been an important one, and the media have helped to construct what is meant by sport. In the early part of the nineteenth century 'sport' was a word restricted to describing field sport (hunting, shooting and fishing) and what later became known as 'cruel' sports, such as bull and bear baiting and cock fighting. At the end of the nineteenth century the newly forming modern press assisted in boundary marking and boundary shifting of what was defined

[107] The notion of "media sports" refers to "the correlation between sports and media which has developed over the past few decades" (Horky and Stelzner 2013, 120).

> as sport, and even what a champion was. During the twentieth century commercial leisure expanded in many ways, but the mass media, especially television, has been a central factor and formulator of sporting culture from the mid-1950s onward. The philosophical question – 'what is, and what is not, sport' – has been decided pragmatically by what appears in the sport sections of newspapers or in radio or television broadcasts. (Horne 2011, ix–x)

Today, we tend to immediately associate the "sport & media" connection with television, but the sport-media linkage largely pre-existed the advent of television (Rowe 2004b, 31). Even the idea of sport as a show, which we assume to be largely an effect of television broadcasting, is in fact older than that. Wille has highlighted the primary role of newspapers in the process:

> Les journaux dès le milieu du XIX$^{e}$ siècle ont contribué à l'émergence d'un sport spectacle: ce sont en effet les titres populaires qui organisaient les grands événements sportifs et leurs récits mobilisaient à chaque époque les techniques de communication les plus avancées. (2015, 154)
>
> [Newspapers from the middle of the 19th century contributed to the emergence of a sporting show: it was indeed the popular titles that organised major sporting events, and their story-telling used the most modern communication techniques in each era].

Historically, the press has indeed been the first medium to inform people about sports on a regular basis (Beck and Bosshart 2003, 6). Interestingly, sport as a mass phenomenon and sport information, i.e. sport as regular content for journalism, grew almost concurrently from the mid-19th century onwards (Haynes 2015; Cuccoli 2019).

In Europe and North America, the industrial revolution, from the late 18th century onwards, transformed the economy and society. Labour moved from the countryside to the factory and society evolved from a rural society to an urban and industrial society. At the time, sport was still a privilege reserved for those few who could afford to spend time for leisure. But the transformation of labour would eventually trigger a demand by the working class for better life conditions. During the first half of the 20th century, social struggles and the unions got increasingly structured. The workers' claims would eventually lead to a progressive decrease in daily working hours and the creation of "free time", which the working class could now also devote, similarly to the wealthy elites, to leisure and sport. In the second half of the 20th century, sport developed into a significant

element of people's everyday culture, especially in the United States and Europe but also, to different degrees, in other parts of the world, such as the economically developed parts of Asia and Latin America and other developing regions (Digel 2013).

Europe and North America, namely the first regions where socio-economic transformations historically determined a "massification" of sport, have been singled out in this part of the thesis to describe the concurrent growth of sport itself and its coverage in the media, and how the two phenomena fed each other.

### 3.3.2 Historical overview in European society

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, while working conditions and lifestyle were evolving and socio-economic transformations were propelling the popularisation of sport, the European press started for its part to expand its coverage of sport events, further contributing to the popularity of sport in society. In December 1892, Pierre Giffard and Paul Rousseau launched in France *Le Vélo*, the first-ever French daily newspaper entirely devoted to sports. The sales of the newspaper went from 24,000 to 82,000 copies per day in just one year, a big enough progression that proved both the booming popularity of sport, especially in urban areas, and of the role that the press was playing in the growth of sport as a mass phenomenon (Diana 2015, 12). At that time, France was also at centre stage in the development of sport at the international level. On November 25, 1892, at the annual meeting of the *Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques* (UFSA) [Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports], the UFSA's secretary general Pierre de Coubertin first publicly proposed the idea of reviving the ancient Greek Olympic Games. The UFSA, established in 1890, was a French multi-sport governing body, of which Coubertin was a founding member. From 16 to 23 June 1894, the auditorium of the Sorbonne University in Paris hosted the first-ever Olympic Congress. The invitation to the Olympic Congress was sent out by Coubertin himself, in his role as UFSA's secretary general. The participants in the inaugural Olympic Congress included delegates from France, Belgium, Great Britain & Ireland, Greece, Italy, Russia, Spain, Sweden and the U.S. The Congress led to the establishment of the International Olympic Committee

(IOC) and on June 23, 1894, the final day of the Congress, a resolution was unanimously adopted that revived the Olympic Games. The first modern Games would take place in Athens in 1896 (International Olympic Committee 2019a).

The revival of the ancient Greek Games was a clear sign of the mounting role of sport in European societies at the turn of the century, and Europe was driving the process at a wider global level. Of the 14 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) that registered for the 1896 Athens Olympics, 11 represented European nations. The only non-European exceptions were the United States, Australia and Chile.[108] Coubertin's model was not France, his own country. Born in Paris in 1863 to an aristocratic family, Coubertin graduated in law and public affairs at the École Libre des Sciences Politiques in Paris, the ancestor of the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris and the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, jointly known as Sciences Po. Coubertin decided to concentrate his career on education. In 1883, he visited England for the first time as a student, then again twice in 1888. During his study tours of English public schools, he saw first-hand that physical activity was a key component in the educational process of these schools, as opposed to the limited time and resources devoted to sport in French high school, and that cultural shock would inspire his future mission to promote a similar model in France (Bermond 2008). In 1889, his trip to Canada and the United States, i.e. two countries that applied an English-style model, further reinforced Coubertin's belief in the validity of that model. On the occasion of his three-month stay in North America, Coubertin saw the sporting infrastructures available to students at McGill University in Montreal, Canada as well as the universities of Princeton, Berkeley, Columbia and other universities in the United States, all of which seemed inconceivable in France and most parts of Europe at the time (Bermond 2008). Coubertin did not advocate the importance of physical activity *above* intellectual activity, though. He wanted to preserve the academic tradition in the first place and his emphasis was rather on the need for a balance between intellectual and bodily skills (Clastres 2005).

[108] The other participating countries were Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain & Ireland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland.

If Coubertin is widely acknowledged as the father of the modern Olympics, and by extension of modern sport, his activity as a journalist is far less known. For French media scholar Jean-François Diana, the figure of Coubertin was actually "*fondatrice des premières relations passionnelles entre la presse et le sport*" [a founding figure of the early passionate relationships between the press and sport] (Diana 2015, 13). Among his various actions to promote sport, Coubertin was the founder of a monthly magazine, *La Revue Athlétique*, in January 1890, the first French periodical devoted exclusively to athletics. Coubertin also founded in 1901 *La Revue Olympique*, the oldest regular publication of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the official magazine of the Olympic Movement, which is today a quarterly publication in English (*Olympic Review*), French and Spanish versions. Coubertin was a registered member of the *Association des Journalists Parisiens* [Association of Parisian Journalists] since 1895, and a press card holder. He wrote more than 1,200 articles for newspapers and magazines, in France and abroad. Starting in 1902, he became a regular contributor to *Le Figaro*, for which he wrote a bi-monthly column, mostly related to foreign policy issues (Bonniel 2017). He also wrote for *Le Gaulois*, *L'Indépendance Belge*, *La Gazette de Lausanne*, *Le Sport Suisse*, *Deutsche Revue*, *The Times*, and *The New York Herald*, to mention but a few, adding to the multiple articles that he wrote for *La Revue Athlétique* and *La Revue Olympique*, his brainchildren. Interestingly, Coubertin often chose to write about historical and political issues when the article was for use by the sports press, and about sports when the article was for use by a political or historical journal (During 2015, 40–41). It was perhaps a way for him to highlight the socio-political dimension of sport and the legitimate place of sport in history.

In Italy, the end of the 19th century saw the birth of a new multi-sport newspaper, the *Gazzetta dello Sport*. The newspaper was issued from the merger of two periodicals on cycling – *Il Ciclista*, based in Milan and led by Eliso Rivera, and *La Tripletta*, founded by Eugenio Camillo Costamagna and based in Turin – both focusing on cycling. Rivera and Costamagna wanted to create a new newspaper covering all sports. The titles of the two ancestor publications continued to appear under the header of the new *Gazzetta dello*

*Sport* until 1897. *Gazzetta dello Sport* started out with two issues per week, on Mondays and Fridays. The first-ever issue of the newspaper was released on April 3, 1896, three days before the start of the Olympics Games in Athens, and therefore just in time to cover the Games. The 20,000 copies of the first four-page issue of the newspaper were sold out. *Gazzetta dello Sport* was initially printed on green paper, like *Le Vélo* in France. Starting on January 2, 1899, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* was printed on pink paper, which is still today the newspaper's distinctive colour, and the reason why it is also referred to as "*la rosea*" (*rosa* is the Italian for pink).[109] In 1902, Adolfo Cotronei and Vittorio Argento founded in Naples *Tribuna Sport*, a weekly that is considered the first sport-specialist periodical in the South of Italy, amid a sports press that was rapidly expanding, in the years to the outbreak of World War I, all over the country (Ghirelli 2001, 322). The year 1905 saw the birth in Milan of another sports newspaper, called *Gli Sports*, the first *daily* sports newspaper in Italian history (*Gazzetta dello Sport* would become a daily newspaper in 1919). Edgardo Longoni was hired from *Gazzetta dello Sport* to lead it. *Gli Sports* ended publications in 1906. In the same period, Spain also saw the birth of a multi-sport newspaper, *Mundo Deportivo*, first published in Barcelona on February 1, 1906.

## *Newspapers as sports event creators*

The fact that sport itself and sport information were developing concurrently at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries is further demonstrated by the role that some of the newly-appeared sports newspapers played in the birth of major sporting events. In France, when two textile manufacturers, Théodore Vienne and Maurice Perez, had the idea of launching the Paris-Roubaix, a bicycle race in northern France, they contacted *Le Vélo* for support and publicity. Paul Rousseau, the newspaper's director, accepted to support them. *Le Vélo* also collaborated in designing the route of the new cycling race, and Rousseau himself personally started the first edition of the Paris-Roubaix, on April 19, 1896. The linkage between the race and the newspaper proved mutually beneficial. The newspaper helped

[109] A first few pink-coloured pages had already been included, among the usual green pages, a few days earlier, in the *Gazzetta dello Sport* issue of December 27, 1898, as a preview to the forthcoming look of the newspaper.

launch the new event, and the event turned out to be a tremendous circulation aid for the newspaper, for it was the way for the public to follow up the event. Television did not exist at the time. In 1901, *Le Vélo* staged the second edition of another cycle race, the Paris-Brest-Paris, originally created by Pierre Giffard in 1891 for *Le Petit Journal*, the newspaper where Giffard worked at the time. For *Le Petit Journal*, Giffard had also launched the Paris-Belfort, a large-scale foot race, in 1892, as well as the Paris-Rouen, a city-to-city competitive motor race, in 1894, and the inaugural Paris Marathon in 1896.

*Le Vélo* had a direct competitor. It was *L'Auto-Vélo*, the ancestor of *L'Equipe*. *L'Auto-Vélo* was first published in France on October 16, 1900. The launch of *L'Auto-Vélo* went beyond simple journalistic rivalry, since it was originally connected with the notorious Dreyfus political scandal. At the end of the 19th century, France was split as to the innocence or guilt of Alfred Dreyfus, a French artillery officer of Jewish descent who had been convicted of selling secrets to the Germans. The editor of *Le Vélo*, Pierre Giffard, had overtly manifested his Dreyfusard positions and stood for Dreyfus's acquittal, in contrast with the anti-Dreyfusard opinions of the leading advertisers of the newspaper. Among them was Jules Félix Philippe Albert de Dion. Dion brought together a group of anti-Dreyfusard manufacturers, among whom the cycle maker Gustave Adolphe Clément, and founded *L'Auto-Vélo*. Henri Desgrange, a notary clerk reconverted to a successful bicycle racer, who occasionally wrote for the magazine *Bicyclette*, was chosen as editor-in-chief of the new newspaper, alongside Victor Goddet as managing and finance director. Similarly to *Le Vélo*, *L'Auto-Vélo* was also a multi-sport newspaper, but was printed on yellow paper, to distinguish itself from *Le Vélo*, which used a green-tinted newsprint. *L'Auto-Vélo* covered the sports of automobile, cycling, athletics, yachting, ballooning, fencing and horse riding, all of which were diligently listed in that order under the title of the newspaper. *L'Auto-Vélo* relied on 542 correspondents in France and abroad, a strong asset as compared to *Le Vélo*, which had never afforded that many ("16 Octobre 1900: Henri Desgrange Crée L'AUTO-VÉLO" n.d.). During an editorial meeting on November 20, 1902, the head of the cycling section of *L'Auto-Vélo* , Géo Lefèvre, whom Desgrange had recruited from *Le Vélo*, launched the idea of organising a men's multiple stage bicycle race, primarily meant to boost the newspaper's circulation and

make it more competitive vis-à-vis *Le Vélo*. On January 19, 1903, *L'Auto* – the newspaper had been forced to drop part of its name in the meantime, to avoid confusion with *Le Vélo* – finally announced the birth of the Tour de France, pompously described as "*la plus grande épreuve cycliste du monde entier*" [the biggest cycling event in the world] ("Juillet 1903: L'Auto Lance Le Tour de France" n.d.).

The first edition of the Tour de France was to be run in six stages, passing through the cities of Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux and Nantes, and finally back in Paris, with arrival at the Parc des Princes. Lefèvre, who was only 26 years old at the time, was appointed as the director of the Tour as well as official timekeeper and judge at the start and finish of the race. On July 1st, 1903, the front page of *L'Auto* devoted five columns to the start of the first-ever Tour de France. As the organiser of the event, the newspaper could offer to its readers first-hand details of the race that were unknown to the other publications. *L'Auto* sold a record 65,000 copies per day during July 1903, as compared to the 20,000 copies per day that it sold prior to organising the Tour ("Juillet 1903: L'Auto Lance Le Tour de France" n.d.). A few months later, in 1904, its rival *Le Vélo* ceased publication. To describe the unfolding of the sport-media relationship in France at the beginning of the 20th century, and the role of the press in that process, French sports historian Paul Dietschy has written: "*[l]a presse ne se contente pas de narrer la légende du sport, elle l'invente de toute pièce*" [the press does not just narrate sports, it invents it from scratch] (2013, 214). Starting in 1919, the jersey worn by the race leader of the Tour de France would be yellow, the famous *maillot jaune* [yellow jersey], the same colour as the paper *L'Auto* was printed on. The connection between the race and the newspaper that organised it was reflected also in that visual element.

Italy experienced a similar story, in many respects, which also highlights the role of the press, and notably the specialised sport press, in the development of sport at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. At the time of the foundation of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, in 1896, sport was by no means a mass phenomenon in Italy. The first-ever registered sport association, the *Reale Società Ginnastica di Torino* [Royal Gymnastics Society of Turin],

was only founded in Turin in 1844, when Italy was not yet a unified country.[110] Turin was also to be the birthplace of the *Club Alpino Italiano* [Italian Alpine Club], in 1863. The first sporting federation of unified Italy, the *Federazione Ginnastica Italiana* [Italian Gymnastics Federation], was founded in Venice in 1869.[111] At the time, there were only six sport associations altogether in the country. The year 1885 saw the creation in Pavia of the *Unione Velocipedistica Italiana* [Italian Velocipedistic Federation], while the *Rowing Club Italiano* [Italian Rowing Club] was established in Turin in 1888. In the young unified Italy, the participation in physical education was still essentially reserved for the rich, who could afford the luxury of leisure activities, but was also starting to expand through the middle class and then, the rising working class alongside the process of industrialisation, which favoured the development of sports associations (Condini 2018). In 1901, a national survey conducted by the Italian Gymnastics Federation – the first-ever survey of that kind – showed that there were a total of 120 affiliate sporting associations in the country (Trifari 2012, 14; Condini 2018, 15). At the beginning of the 20th century, only an estimated 10,000 people participated in physical activity in Italy out of a total population of 34 million, and these were mostly wealthy Italians living in the North and Centre of the peninsula (Trifari 2012, 16). This low participation rate made it difficult for the young Italian sports federations to organise sporting events, and things began to change precisely when sports newspapers started to organise a number of sporting competitions themselves (Trifari 2012; Condini 2018).

In 1896, *Gazzetta dello Sport* organised its first-ever sporting event. It was a fencing match between two champions of the sport, the Italian Agesilao Greco and the Belgian Fernand Desmet. The match was held at Milan's *Ciclodromo* (cycling track) in Via Argelati, on August 4, 1896. As a reminder, the first issue of *Gazzetta* had only recently appeared, on April 3, 1896. It was to be the first in a series of sporting events that *Gazzetta dello Sport* would organise in those years, and in a variety of sports, from running to motor sports and, of course, cycling. In 1902, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* organised a long-distance cycling race (*Gran Fondo*) from Milan to Turin. In 1905, the newspaper created

[110] The creation of the *Regno d'Italia* [Kingdom of Italy] was declared in 1861.
[111] A sports *federation* is a union of sports *associations*.

another cycling event, the *Giro di Lombardia* [Tour of Lombardy], a road cycling one-day race. In 1906 alone, *Gazzetta* organised 21 sporting events (Trifari 2012, 16). In 1907, the newspaper organised the first edition of the Milano-Sanremo, a road cycling one-day race from Milan to Sanremo, a small town on the Mediterranean coast of Liguria, in north-western Italy. That year, the newspaper reached the circulation milestone of 100,000 copies (Gregori 2014). In the early 20th century, the sport of cycling in Italy and *La Gazzetta dello Sport* were literally booming hand in hand.

On August 24, 1908, the front page of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* announced the creation of a new major cycling competition, the Giro d'Italia [Tour of Italy], a multiple-stage road cycling race across Italy. The idea of a race across a large portion of the country's territory followed in the footsteps of the Tour de France, launched on the other side of the Alps a few years earlier, in 1903. Domestically, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* was to face competition from another Italian newspaper, the *Corriere della Sera*, which was about to launch its own multiple-stage cycling race. First published in 1876, *Corriere della Sera* was not a specialised sports newspaper but a general-interest newspaper. Like *Gazzetta dello Sport*, the *Corriere della Sera* was also headquartered in Milan.[112] In 1901, *Corriere della Sera* had co-organised with the Automobile Club of Turin an automobile race called *Giro d'Italia Automobilistico*, and was now willing to launch a similar race for bicycles. But *La Gazzetta dello Sport* beat them to it. The inaugural edition of the Giro d'Italia, *Gazzetta's* brainchild, took off in Milan on May 13, 1909, and concluded back in Milan on May 30. During the first edition of the Giro d'Italia, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, which until then had been released twice a week, evolved to a three-times-a-week frequency. In 1913, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* became a daily newspaper. Even if cycling undoubtedly occupied a special place in *Gazzetta's* evolution, as in Italian sports in general in the early 20th century, other sports also contributed to boost the newspaper's circulation, and were boosted, in turn, by the newspaper's direct contribution. As an example, on February 17,

[112] While writing this thesis, it was hard to imagine *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere della Sera* as competitors, as these two newspapers have long been part of the same media group. Rizzoli–Corriere della Sera, the publisher of *Corriere della Sera*, completed the takeover of N.E.S. (Nuove Edizioni Sportive) S.p.A., the publisher of *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, in 1977. The group later acquired the name of Rizzoli Corriere della Sera MediaGroup, abbreviated to RCS MediaGroup in 2013.

1909, the 120,000 copies of a special issue of *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, dedicated to the World Fighting Championship in Milan, were sold out (Trifari and Arturi 2012, 18). The event was organised by the newspaper itself.

The French and Italian stories best epitomise the contribution of a rising sports press in the transition of sport, from elite phenomenon to mass phenomenon, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In Spain, another country with a strong tradition in the area of sports specialised newspapers, the beginning of the 20th century saw, as previously mentioned, the appearance of *Mundo Deportivo*. This Barcelona-based sports newspaper, first published on February 1, 1906, was initially released as a weekly, and became a daily newspaper in 1929. *Mundo Deportivo* is the second oldest sport publication still published in Europe, after *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. Since 1926, *Mundo Deportivo* has been involved in the organisation of the Jean Bouin running event in Barcelona, one of the oldest athletic competitions in the country. The race was first held in 1920. After the 1926 edition and some other editions, *Mundo Deportivo* has permanently been the organiser of the Jean Bouin each and every year since 1941. As for Portugal, its sports newspapers were all founded at a later stage in history. *A Bola* was founded in 1945, and its periodicity evolved from twice a week to daily 50 years later, in 1995. *Record* first appeared in 1949, and moved from weekly to daily newspaper in the 1990s. Finally, *O Jogo* was founded in 1985, with a daily periodicity from the start.[113]

### *The British case*

To conclude this continental overview, it is interesting to mention, if only shortly, the early days of the sport-newspapers relationship in Britain. The British case is not directly pertinent to this thesis, as Britain does not feature a specialised sports press – the comparison between general-interest and sports-specialised newspapers being a central

[113] More on these and other sports newspapers can be found in section **4.3 Sports in newspapers**.

part of the analysis.[114] The relevance of the British case is more generally connected with the pioneering role of Britain in the birth of modern and organised sport, as Britain set an example for the evolution and codification of sport internationally. More specifically, with reference to the press, Britain saw the birth of the first-ever dedicated sports section in a newspaper.

According to sport historian Tony Collins, the development of a "symbiotic, mutually interdependent relationship" between sport and the press in this part of the world dates back to the early 18th century (2013, 5). At the time, Britain was already characterised by a situation in which "the press was both the driver of commercial sport and also its beneficiary — as would be the case for radio and television in the twentieth century" (ibid., 6). Collins interestingly adds that "the reporting of sport in the press both reflected and shaped its relationship with the wider culture of society" (ibid.). The interdependency between sport and the media, which would strengthen in the following century with the advent of television, therefore originated in newspapers (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 27). By the end of the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), daily newspapers in Britain typically featured regular sporting reports, and specialised weekly and monthly sports journals were starting to appear (Collins 2013, 57). In 1817, the *Morning Herald*, a daily newspaper founded back in 1780, was the first-ever newspaper in the world to feature a special sports section, followed in 1818 by another English newspaper, *The Globe* (Beck and Bosshart 2003, 6). In the absence of telegraph transmission, those sports section covered, at the time, only local news (ibid., 7).[115]

The activities of periodicals like the *Bell's Life in London & Sporting Chronicle*, founded in London in 1822 by printer-publisher Robert Bell, or *The Field*, a weekly publication established in 1853, went beyond the simple reporting on who had won such and such race. These publications often acted as arbitrators in disputes on the unfolding of sporting competitions, "turning from a commentator into a participant in the evolving sporting

[114] The European tradition, with regard to the presence (or absence) of a specialised sports press in the different countries, will be further presented in chapter 4.
[115] British newspapers would start to use the telegraph in the 1860s (R. Boyle and Haynes 2009, 22).

world" (Collins 2013, 57). They played an embryonic role in the formalisation and codification of sports (Collins 2013, 57; Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 26). We are not yet looking at the codification of major sports like association football or rugby, as publications like *Bell's Life* or *The Field* mostly covered prize-fights and horse races.[116] It was during the Victorian era (1837-1901) that English newspapers progressively expanded to the coverage of new sports. The people's overall interest in sports, as both readers and participants, concurrently increased. Among the main sport and leisure innovations for the middle class were association football, rugby, tennis, golf and mountaineering (Huggins 2004, 6). *The Times*, which had created its sports section in 1829 (Beck and Bosshart 2003, 6–7), moved from 19 different sports featured in 1874 to 27 in 1901 (Huggins 2004, 6). For Bradshaw and Minogue, the rise of football was made possible by the press: the "association football's rise to prominence in the 1870s would not have been accomplished were it not for the media. Crowds at football matches were relatively low at the time, but grew as match reports appeared more frequently and the popular press stoked the fires of local rivalries" (2019, 30). By 1901, the emerging sports had been codified and had grown international in scope, while older sports were also standardised and now included local and regional variants (Huggins 2004, 6).

### 3.3.3 Historical overview in U.S. society

It would be virtually impossible to understand the sport & media connection, and the history leading to this connection, without looking at how it has developed in the United States. Sports play a role in the U.S. society that is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. "For better or for worse, it gives form and substance to much in American life", as described by Robert H. Boyle in a volume entitled *Sport: mirror of American life* (1963, 4). This is indeed the country that "has spawned many of the world's preeminent developments in sports communication, several of which epitomize modern sports-media relationships" (Bryant and Holt 2009, 22). In order to describe the history of sports

[116] Prize fights, i.e. boxing matches for a prize or purse, were particularly popular in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries.

coverage in the United States, McChesney (1989) has peremptorily argued that "Media Made Sport" in this country.[117]

Some scholars (Betts 1953; Goldlust 1987) have stressed that various English popular publications covering sports – among which the *Bell's Life*, the *Weekly Dispatch*, the *London Sporting Magazine* and the *English Sporting Magazine* – pre-existed their American counterparts, which actually used them as models (R. Boyle 2006b, 31), thereby emphasising that the outset of the sport & media connection is rather to be found in Britain. Others argue that this legacy should not be overestimated as "most future innovations in sports and media were to come from America" (Bryant and Holt 2009, 23). According to Boyle, even if the earliest coverage of sports is generally associated with English publications, "it would be across the Atlantic that the development of particular forms of sports journalism would really advance, driven largely by a more commercially oriented sports and entertainment industry and newspapers keen to grow revenues from advertisers by capturing and holding onto readers." (2006b, 31).

One of the earliest journalistic accounts of sports in the United States was featured in the *Boston Gazette* on March 5, 1733, with a few lines that described a prize fight in England, reprinted from an English newspaper (Enriquez 2002, 198). The 99-word piece of news appeared on page 2 of the Boston-based four-page newssheet. Although the match between Bob Russel and John Faulconer, considered the favourite for victory, unexpectedly saw Faulconer knocked down in eight minutes, the journalistic account of the match focused primarily on the size and social significance of the event, as opposed to the sporting result (Washburn and Lamb 2020, chap. 1). The event was indeed covered as general news. Interestingly, the newspapers of the colonial period covered sports "particularly when the sporting event was relevant within some larger social context" – for example, they covered a horse race insofar as this saw a Northern horse racing against a Southern horse – showing that the focus of attention was not (yet) sport in its own right

[117]From the title of his article: McChesney, Robert W. 1989. "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States". In *Media, Sports, & Society*, edited by Lawrence A. Wenner, 49–69. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.

(Bryant and Holt 2009, 23).[118] In any case, even though mediated sport first appeared in U.S. newspapers during the colonial period, the coverage remained sporadic. The spread of sports journalism on a larger scale would occur nearly a century later and through the advent of sports *magazines*, "an early specialized medium" (ibid.)

In the years following the American Revolution, the literacy rate gradually increased (McChesney 1989, 50).[119] As opposed to the coverage of sports in newspapers, which mostly focused on horse racing and boxing, sports magazines could offer a wider coverage of sports, even if sport was hardly ever the only type of content they offered. Dozens of such magazines appeared in the 1820s and 1830s, among which the *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*, first published in 1829, and the *Spirit of the Times*, founded in 1831. These two magazines would merge into the latter in 1839. By the end of the 1840s, the *Spirit of the Times*, published in New York City, reached 100,000 readers (Bryant and Holt 2009, 24).

In the realm of newspapers, the 1830s saw the advent of the so-called "penny press", named after the new retail price of newspapers (one cent).[120] Among the new penny papers were *The Sun*, founded in New York in 1833, the *New York Herald* (1835), and the *New York Tribune* (1841), among others. The transition from hand-crafted to steam-powered printing now allowed publishers to mass-produce newspapers and sell them at a considerably lower price. Previously, in the early 19th century, most newspapers cost six cents, a price that was beyond the reach of many potential readers. A cheaper newspaper was a revolution. Newspapers, no longer a product reserved for the upper class, became accessible to a broad social base. Their contents also changed. Penny papers replaced the usual political and mercantile news of standard dailies, targeting politicians and merchants, with the coverage of more sensational subject areas, especially crime and entertainment. In this new effort to be popular to the masses and increase circulation,

[118] The colonial period in the United States ran from the early 17th century until 1776, with the incorporation of the colonies into the United States of America.
[119] The American Revolution occurred between 1765 and 1783.
[120] In the United States, the one-cent coin, equalling one one-hundredth of a U.S. dollar, was often called the "penny".

penny papers introduced categories of news coverage that would later become the norm, such as gossip, religion and, indeed, sports, thereby anticipating in many respects modern journalism (Thompson 2004). According to McChesney (1989, 51), the founder, editor and publisher of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, was "one of the first exponents of 'sensationalism' as a means of generating circulation, and sport fit comfortably within this rubric". Sports in the penny press mostly meant equestrianism, boxing and wrestling (Bertrand 1987, 215).[121]

Even if penny papers did feature sports, they did not include anything like "sports pages" or sports columns on a daily or otherwise regular basis, though. It was rather in the second half of the 19th century that sport in U.S. society and sport in the U.S. media experienced the fastest growth. This evolution was driven by the spread of communication technologies (telegraph, telephone, radio) and the further improvement of printing and composition technologies (Bryant and Holt 2009). Urbanisation operated as an important factor in favouring the popularisation of sports. The United States was experiencing the arrival of massive waves of immigrants from Europe, who mostly settled down in urban areas and accelerated the process of urbanisation of the American society. Immigrants arriving into urban areas helped provide "the critical mass needed to support professional sports teams" (Bryant and Holt 2009, 26). The process of urbanisation was also fed, domestically, by the population that moved from rural areas to cities, as a consequence of the shift toward an increasingly industrialised society. Sports events started growing as "the weekend love affair of all those whose workday was strictly regulated by production schedules" (Zillman and Paulus 1993, 601). In the United States, this evolution was accompanied by sports also getting more and more organised and commercialised (Bryant and Holt 2009).

During the Civil War years (1861-1865), baseball had grown as the preeminent national team sport, with soldiers on both sides of the War playing the game (McChesney 1989). Newspapers played an important role in the development of the National League of

[121] U.S. newspapers started to get an interest in the major North American sports that we know today after the creation of the Intercollegiate Football Association, in 1876 (Bertrand 1987, 215).

Professional Baseball Clubs, commonly known as the National League, formed after the war (1876) to replace the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players (1871-1875). Henry Chadwick, who is thought to be the first ever full-time sports reporter for a daily newspaper in the United States, was indeed hired by the *New York Herald* in 1862 to cover baseball (Oriard 1993, 58). Similarly to the role that sports magazines had played in the promotion of horse racing in the previous century, newspapers were influential in the advancement of the new baseball league, as they "helped standardize and make more sophisticated the rules of and techniques for reporting about baseball, developing format innovations like box scores and detailed statistical analyses of pitching and hitting, which helped draw new fans to the new league" (Bryant and Holt 2009, 25). The parallel growth of sports and newspapers in those years, and the special role of baseball in this process, has also been described by Enriquez: "[b]aseball was a solidly middle class sport with considerable appeal to the working man, a perfect sport for newspapers trying to expand downward across class lines to reach the middle and working classes" (2002, 199).

In 1883, the *New York World* was the first newspaper in the United States to create a separate sports department, shortly after it was acquired by Joseph Pulitzer (Oriard 1993, 59; Brian 2001, 72; Enriquez 2002, 200; Moritz 2014, 14). The appointment of H. G. Crickmore as editor-in-charge of the first such department was in fact one of Pulitzer's initial moves as the new publisher of the newspaper. In order to form the new sports department, Pulitzer required experts in each category of sports and asked that they contribute articles on a regular basis, at least one in every Sunday issue of the newspaper (Juergens 1966). The *New York World* saw its circulation grow from 60,000 at the end of 1883 to 150,000 by 1885, and 250,000 two years later (Oriard 1993, 59). At the time, the *New York World* was still the only paper with a distinct sports department, but by the end of the 1870s virtually all the major newspapers in the main U.S. cities had appointed "sporting editors" with trained staffs (Mott 1941). The first newspaper in the United States to feature, starting in 1895, an entire section devoted only to sports was the *New York Journal* (Wanta 2009, 112), owned by William Randolph Hearst. *The New York Times* also had a pioneering role in that in 1896, it introduced a Sunday picture section – a breakthrough in its own right at a time when visuals in newspapers were mostly limited

to woodcuts – that also featured photographs of sports from the previous week (Reinardy and Wanta 2009, 3).

While sport was becoming a regular feature in newspapers, sports magazines also continued to play a role in the development of sports in the American society. According to Bryan and Holt, two new magazines in particular, *Sporting Life* (1883) and *The Sporting News* (1886), "helped further legitimize baseball and fueled the fervor associated with this new, relatively egalitarian, national pastime" (Bryant and Holt 2009, 26). Interestingly, these two magazines were based outside the usual New York media hub – in Philadelphia and St. Louis, respectively. Bryan and Holt have pointed out that it was precisely the regular reporting of sports in the press, both newspapers and magazines, that made sports become so central in American society:

> This regular, routine reporting of sports in newspapers and specialized magazines helped shift the cultural attitude towards sports in general, and during the 1870s through the 1890s, America's love affair with sports began. The antisports attitudes of the Puritan era quickly dissipated and were replaced with a new "progressive" credo that sports were important for the development of mind, body, and society (Bryant and Holt 2009, 26).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, sports reporting became a regular feature of daily newspapers across the United States at large (ibid., 27). By the mid-1920s, virtually every newspaper in the country had a distinct sports section (Moritz 2014, 14).

## *The American star sportswriters*

When compared to Europe, where the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries also defined what mediated sport was later to be in society, U.S. sports journalism presented a major specificity. The process in the United States was fuelled by the emergence of real "star sportswriters", such as Joe Vila of the *New York Sun*, Damon Runyon of the *Denver Post* and *New York American*, and Charles E. van Loan, who wrote for various Californian and New York-based papers, among others (Mott 1941). But two in particular stood out as real icons of American sports journalism in the early 20th century: Charles Dryden and

Grantland Rice. Charles Dryden (1860-1931) has been described as "the seminal figure" in the transformation of American sports journalism toward a new and distinctive language at the turn of the century:

> As the 19th century yielded to the 20th, sports pages acquired a new language and a distinctive flavor. The seminal figure in this transformation was Charley Dryden, who began his newspaper career in San Francisco in 1890. He brought wit and humor to sports news and combined a passion for journalism with a talent for entertainment. He introduced lively, slangy language into his stories. (Enriquez 2002, 200)

As for Grantland Rice (1880-1954), he became famous across the U.S. mainly thanks to his syndicated column, *The Sportlight*, which first appeared in 1913 and came to be featured in around 250 newspapers (R. Boyle 2006b, 33). Rice was best known for his flowery prose and lyrical style. In his descriptions of games and athletes, he employed warfare metaphors, references to Greek mythology and allusions to the Bible (Berkow 2007, 105). His description of a University of Notre Dame vs. Army football game in the *New York Herald Tribune* on October 18, 1924, and notably its famous lead describing the backfield of the Notre Dame's team as the "Four Horsemen" of the Apocalypse, has been called "the most famous football lead of all-time" (Maraniss 2000, 35) and "[t]he sports story that changed America" (Barra 1999). The four players, or "Horsemen", were Harry Stuhldreher (quarterback), Jim Crowley, Don Miller and Elmer Layden. Rice compared them to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse for the damage they inflicted to the Army's team, which was defeated 13–7 by Notre Dame in that game. Here is the text of Rice's famous lead:

> Outlined against a blue-gray October sky the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as famine, pestilence, destruction and death. These are only aliases. Their real names are: Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds this afternoon as 55,000 spectators peered down upon the bewildering panorama spread out upon the green plain below (Rice 1924).

According to Barra (1999), with these few sentences "Rice changed his own life, his profession, the course of college football and the character of American leisure culture".

In the 1920s, press coverage and its star sportswriters allowed sport to reach an unprecedented popularity in American society, a story that was set to continue. As reported by American historian Arthur Schlesinger (1933), the coverage of sports in the average American newspaper reached between 12% and 20% of its editorial space by the 1920s, as compared to only 0.04% in 1880, and 4% in 1900. This percentage would remain fundamentally unchanged until the 1970s (Farrell and Cupito 2010, 14).

# 4. SPORT IN THE PRESS

Sports journalism's position within popular culture is a complex one, given that it is devoted to representing one popular cultural form by means of another.

David Rowe (1992, 97)

If journalism is about disseminating information and facilitating discussion on a range of social, political, economic and cultural issues pertinent to society, then sports, however much some academics may dislike it, is part of that mix.

Raymond Boyle (2006b, 13)

**4.1 SPORTS JOURNALISM: ARE YOU SERIOUS?**
*4.1.1 The professional legitimacy of sports journalism*
*4.1.2 The role of the sports journalist: informing and entertaining*
*4.1.3 Selecting stories that select themselves*
*4.1.4 When sports journalism is not serious*

**4.2 LITERATURE FOR THE PEOPLE**
*4.2.1 Playing with words*
*4.2.2 The language of heroes and emotions*
*4.2.3 National identity in media sports*
*4.2.4 Writers in sports journalism*

**4.3 SPORTS IN NEWSPAPERS**
*4.3.1 The international landscape*
*4.3.2 Sports in general-interest newspapers*
*4.3.3 Sports-specialised newspapers, the neglected stepchildren*

## 4.1 Sports journalism: are you serious?

### 4.1.1 The professional legitimacy of sports journalism

Similarly to sport itself, whose cultural significance is certain and yet controversial, in some respects and for some schools of thought, sports journalism has long suffered from a relative lack of credibility when compared to other forms of journalism. This negative bias has often stemmed from lingering stereotypes that do not necessarily reflect the reality of the profession, although some actually do. The problem may indeed lie in the specificities of sport as a subject of analysis: too light and popular to be serious in the eyes of some detractors, as discussed in chapter 3. In their analysis of the sports journalists' "quest for professional legitimacy", Dargelos and Marchetti (2000, 75) have observed that "[*d]ans le journalism comme dans bien d'autres domaines, le sport, notamment dans ses forms les plus populaires, n'est pas considéré comme un objet noble*" [in journalism as in many other fields, sport, especially in its most popular forms, is not considered a noble object]. Whether about sport or sports journalism, it seems to be a recurring refrain. The paradox is that regardless of its image, sports journalism represents a key source of revenues for the media industry, and specifically for the newspaper industry (R. Boyle 2017). The economic relevance of the sports beat has increased considerably over the past decades, and it would be difficult not to share Torrijos and Ramon-Vegas's observation that "[f]ar from traditional consideration as the 'little brother' of the profession, sports journalism plays a key role in the new information ecosystem" (2018, 351). As noticed by Pulitzer Prize winner and journalist David Remnick (2011), "[n]ewspapers that have dropped international coverage and closed their Washington bureaus would not dream of dumping the sports section".

This state of affairs translates into what Wille (2013, 3–4) and Diana (2013, 35) have described as a situation of double legitimacy, with public legitimacy on one hand and professional legitimacy on the other, apparently opposing each other. Wanta has called sports reporting "a study in contrasts: heavily consumed by the general public but merely tolerated in newsrooms and among many scholars" (2013, 77).

Sports journalism generates mixed feelings, as effectively described by late French sports journalist Jacques Marchand:

> Le journaliste sportif est un professionnel d'un type particulier, un peu marginal, parfois dédaigné comme la matière qu'il traite et pour laquelle il se passionne toujours, mais souvent envié parce qu'il mène une vie active dans un milieu jamais sclérosé, parce qu'il voyage beaucoup, parce qu'il est à la fois un informateur, un reporter et un critique. (1989, 26)
>
> [The sports journalist is a professional of a particular type, a little marginal, sometimes disdained as the subject he treats and for which he is still passionate, but often envied because he leads an active life in a never-sclerotic environment, because he travels a lot, because he is at the same time an informant, a reporter and a critic].

Marchand's description highlights the mixture of disdain and envy with which a good number of critics, within the profession as well as academia, have been looking at sports journalism for a long time. Boyle, Rowe and Whannel have observed that "[t]he sports round has not been, to make the point in an understated manner, one of the more prestigious within the culture of news and journalism" (2010, 245). Weedon et al. (2016, 639) have written that "[a]mong the various frameworks being put forward to describe and encourage 'excellent' journalism in its various forms, sport is seldom mentioned – a legacy perhaps of its perennial dismissal as trivial subject matter". Spalletta and Ugolini (2016, 27) have even referred to a condition of "isolation" (authors' inverted commas) of sports journalism within the journalistic profession.

To a certain extent, the state of the debate has progressed in the past few years, and we cannot carry on as if the place and image of sports journalism had never evolved at all. According to Lawrence Wenner, the author of the seminal work *MediaSport* (1998) and one of the pioneers in the development of the field, things have changed significantly since the late 1970s and early 1980s, a time in which there were "remarkably few published studies that considered media and sport" (2009, 47).[122] By now, says Wenner, "[t]he 'popular' has long been popular and no longer is seen at odds with the legitimate.

[122] Wenner is credited for suggesting "a research agenda for the field of sport communication, or 'MediaSport'" (Sherwood and Nicholson 2013, 84).

Cultural studies has made its mark and the study of media and sport has become truly interdisciplinary" (ibid. 49). At the same time, however, the exponential growth in the media coverage of sports, combined with the explosion of sport's commercial relevance, has concurrently raised *increasing* questions about the values of sports journalism as is practised in this context. In other words, although on the one hand academics are slightly more interested in sports journalism than they used to, the debate on the poor qualitative level of sports journalism is far from being a problem of the past. It might actually be more topical than ever. Wenner himself has argued that "[w]hile much in the cultural climate has changed in terms of taking sport and its mediation seriously in academic and other spheres, there remain strong voices and much public sentiment for us to look the other way, to let the masses have a little fun" (2009, 60).

Regarding the topicality of the professional legitimacy of sports journalism, this thesis considers that this is an ongoing issue. We must separate the commercial leverage of sports journalism, which is by now widely recognised at all levels, from the standing of sports journalists within the profession, which has not evolved concurrently. The contrary may actually be true, precisely as a consequence of the exponential increase in the economic leverage of sports, and of sports journalism with it. This type of evolution has further nurtured the doubts, which already existed but to a lesser extent, about the compliance of contemporary sports journalism with the ethical foundations of the journalistic profession. As for academics, the number of studies on sports journalism remains unreasonably low as compared to other areas of journalism.

Alan Rusbridger, during his tenure as the editor-in-chief of the *Guardian* (which lasted from 1995 to 2015), wrote an article entitled "Versions of Seriousness" (2000) that could be of help to this discussion on the "seriousness" of sports journalism. Rusbridger commented, in that article, on the alleged "dumbing down of the broadsheet press", which had been the object of an assembly of editors shortly before the publication of the article. Whether or not one agrees with Rusbridger's overall approach to journalism, his opinion on the notion of newspapers' seriousness may help set the standard, as he is widely recognised as a major figure of contemporary journalism. Robert Kaiser, a former

managing editor of *The Washington Post*, has defined Rusbridger as "probably the best and most successful British newspaper editor of his time" (2018). This is how Rusbridger, with his usual straightforwardness, defined "seriousness" as far as newspapers are concerned:

> There is plenty of dumbed-down journalism about - often in the very papers which shriek most volubly about declining standards. A serious paper does not have inevitably to be serious, but it must aspire to serious ethical standards, including fairness, accuracy and a willingness to correct its mistakes. Without these there can be no bond of trust between paper and reader. Serious papers paint in the greys. They know that they have some kind of duty to represent life in all its complexities. And serious papers recognise that they also have a duty to cover areas of life which otherwise would be neglected or ignored. That includes a duty towards serious theatre, art, literature and music. It means writing about such things as economics, foreign news, the environment and social policy. Seriousness doesn't mean purging your pages of all subject matter that might more naturally feel at home in a tabloid (Rusbridger 2000).

Even though Rusbridger does not mention sport, his notion of newspapers not having "inevitably to be serious" but needing to "aspire to serious ethical standards, including fairness, accuracy and a willingness to correct its mistakes" (ibid.) can serve as a starting point for this discussion on the notion of legitimate sports journalism.

In principle, a sports journalist should be regarded primarily as a journalist. A sports journalist simply *is* first and foremost a journalist. There are sports reporters who come from other areas of journalism and reach the sports desk at a later stage, and journalists who initially cover sports and later move to other areas.[123] While this might sound like stating the obvious, the credibility and the very legitimacy of sports journalists have frequently been at issue (Papa and Collet 2013; Wille 2013; Spalletta and Ugolini 2016), as if they constituted a separate lot with distinctive features, with sports journalism on the one side and "more pure forms of 'serious' journalism" on the other (English 2016, 1001). Reinardy and Wanta have observed that "<u>some would call sports journalism an oxymoron</u>" (2009, 176).

[123] The focus here is on professional journalists, letting aside in this discussion the former athletes who serve as freelance commentators of sporting events, mostly on television and radio.

The credibility of sports journalism is a sensitive issue, including for sports journalists themselves. During a series of interviews with Italian sports journalists, Spalletta and Ugolini noted that the issue of how sports journalism is perceived among journalists at large emerged, in the course of the interviews, notwithstanding the absence of a specific question on that matter (2016, 56). The two researchers cite, among other examples, an answer from Sandro Piccinini, in which the journalist categorically denied any difference between sports journalism and journalism *tout court*: "*Il giornalismo sportivo non esiste. Esiste il giornalismo per cui il professionista deve avere un bagaglio culturale importante*" [Sports journalism does not exist. There is journalism, for which the professional must have a large cultural background] (Piccinini as cited in Spalletta and Ugolini, ibid., 53)[124]. Another interviewee, Andrea Schiavon, observed that the big names of journalism (non-sport) are typically asked to write about sports on the occasion of leading sporting mega-events, mainly for the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, but sports journalists are hardly ever asked to write about the main non-sporting events, like a G8 or the World Economic Forum in Davos, for example (Schiavon as cited in Spalletta and Ugolini, ibid., 55-56).[125]

## *The "toy department" and other epithets*

A series of derogatory epithets have been used over the years, by both journalists and academics, to describe sports journalism. Whannel (2013) has observed that the study of media and sport has traditionally been snubbed by academia and the liberal intelligentsia, who have stigmatised it as "a Mickey Mouse subject". The most famous among all derogatory epithets is possibly that of the sports desk as the "toy department" of the

[124] Sandro Piccinini (1958) is an experienced Italian sports journalist and commentator. He has worked for more than 30 years as a leading sports TV commentator for Mediaset, the media group founded by Silvio Berlusconi, which he left in 2018. He joined Sky Sport in 2020. Piccinini has also co-authored an essay about the rise of private and local television broadcasters in Italy, entitled *Il mucchio selvaggio. La strabiliante, epica, inverosimile ma vera storia della televisione locale in Italia* (Mondadori, 2006), written with Giancarlo Dotto.

[125] Andrea Schiavon (1974) has written, among others, for *Tuttosport*, *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *La Stampa*. In 2013, he won the 50th edition of the Premio Bancarella Sport for his book *Cinque Cerchi e una Stella* (ADD Editore, 2012). In 2015, he won the 2nd edition of the Premio Letterario Sportivo Meme Geremia – Città di Padova for *La Fatica Non Esiste* (Mondadori, 2014), written with Nico Valsesia.

newsroom. Numbers of journalism scholars have referred to the "toy department" anecdotal label in their analyses, regardless of their respective approaches to the matter (Frütel 2005; Rowe 2007; Hardin, Zhong, and Whiteside 2009; Carvalho et al. 2012; Popik 2012; Whiteside, Yu, and Hardin 2012; Morrison 2014; Cassidy 2017; McEnnis 2018).[126] Rowe has somehow conceptualised the notion of toy department by defining it as the way to indicate that sports journalism is "a place dedicated to fun and frivolity, rather than to the serious functions of the fourth estate" (Rowe 2007, 385; 2004b). At a first glimpse, the toy department label might even sound like a benevolent nickname, but in reality, it has mostly been used to point to the alleged lack of professional standards of this area of journalism as compared to others (Cassidy 2017).

Considering the frequent references to the "toy department" metaphor also by academics, it cannot be reduced to coffee talk. It may be therefore worth looking at its origins. It all started when American sports journalist Howard Cosell (1918-1995) used an aphorism previously coined by Jimmy Cannon (1909-1973), another American sportswriter, in which Cannon stated: "[s]ports is the toy department of life" (Cosell 1986, 16; Reinardy and Wanta 2009, 176). This aphorism was clearly used to describe sports, but was later adopted, by transitive property, to describe *the sports department* in media outlets.[127] Cosell would later regret using the toy department metaphor to describe the sports desk, arguing that sports were "no longer fun and games, […] they can affect the basics of our lives" (Cosell 1986, 16). He had once "bought" Cannon's dictum on sports, he said, but would "never again" do so (ibid.).

[126] The list of cited authors is inevitably not exhaustive as others have also referred to the "toy department" metaphor in their work. However, all the authors that are mentioned above have included the "toy department" image in the titles of the cited sources.

[127] Cosell is often mistakenly cited as the primary source of this dictum, which Cosell himself instead attributed to Jimmy Cannon (Cosell 1986, 16). None of the authors who cite Cannon as the primary source, however, at least among the sources that were consulted for the purposes of this thesis, cite the specific occasion or source in which Cannon allegedly first did so. For a comprehensive list of these sources, see "Sports is the toy department of life" in the blog *The Big Apple*, of American etymologist Barry Popik, at: https://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/sports_is_the_toy_department_of_life (2012).

As a corollary to the discussion on the "toy department" epithet, it could be observed that the very notion of toys as implicitly unessential items, hence somehow inferior as compared to serious stuff, is itself highly debatable. Huizinga's portrait of the *Homo Ludens* (1980), previously seen in section **3.2.3 The benefits of popularity**, served a good illustration of the fundamental and anthropological connection between play and human culture. In this respect, in a more recent and alternative interpretation of the "sports as life's toy department" metaphor, Kelly (2019, 1) has suggested that this metaphor should not be taken at face value, as many scholars seem to do. Cannon actually chose it, suggests Kelly, because "a toy store is a serious business", just as sports, both being indeed "serious fun" (ibid.).

"Fans with typewriters" is another familiar jibe that has recurrently been used to refer to sports journalists, and which has also been discussed by academics (R. Boyle 2006b, 171–76; Cuccoli 2019). It does not sound like a flattering one either. Indicating that sports journalists are primarily "fans", implying of the clubs and athletes they write about, suggests that sports journalists take sides and therefore cannot maintain the neutrality that good journalism would require. The widespread perception of a certain proximity of sports journalists to fans heavily affects the professional prestige of sports journalism. And the advent of the blogs and bloggers of digital journalism, namely of fans who also act as "reporters", has made matters worse in this respect, as fans and journalists are now "playing on the same pitch" (McEnnis 2017).

The fan-with-a-typewriter jibe presents a fundamental weakness in that it implies that neutral judgement can never coexist with ideas and passion. Many political journalists, for example, are "fans" of an ideology, a party or specifically of certain politicians. Spalletta and Ugolini (2016, 66) have indeed reminded that among all journalistic fields, sports information and political information are the ones that have most contributed to challenge the myth of journalistic objectivity during the past century. Although virtually all political journalists have their own intimate political beliefs, that does not automatically prevent them from meeting high journalistic standards, including balance and impartiality, if they wish to do so. The same mechanism is likely to occur in sports

journalism. The passion for a sport or a team may certainly obfuscate a reporter's impartiality, but so does a journalist's political orientation in the case of political journalism. In both cases, the result primarily depends on what the journalist decides to do with it, resonating with the notion of *individual* responsibility that underlies the present thesis.

**Gianfranco Civolani, fanhood in quality journalism**

The history of sports journalism is filled with examples of respected sports journalists who never hid their sporting passions, and who were nevertheless widely regarded as those who set the highest standards for the profession. In the Italian sports journalism, which will be the country case under scrutiny in a latter part of the thesis, the Bolognese journalist Gianfranco Civolani (1935-2019), among others, personified the possibility for burning sport passion to coexist with journalistic and intellectual rigour. Civolani sadly passed away during the writing of this thesis. During his career, Civolani shamelessly and consistently displayed his support for his favourite teams – Bologna F.C. 1909, commonly referred to as Bologna, in football and Virtus Pallacanestro Bologna in basketball. Meanwhile, he could be the harshest commentator of the choices and performances of these teams. This freedom is actually not unusual among local reporters, who tend to be more straightforward in their comments as compared to their colleagues at the national and international level. After a career in national newspapers, Civolani did work mainly for local media outlets toward the end of his career.

Gianfranco Civolani, or "il Civ" as he was friendly called, worked as a correspondent for *Tuttosport* from 1961 to 1986, and then for *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* until a few days before passing away. During his journalistic career, he covered seven FIFA World Cups and two Olympic Games, in addition to dozens of other sporting events around the world (*La Repubblica* 2000; Monari 2019; Bortolotti 2019). For most of his career, Civolani worked for the print media, but he was also a broadcast journalist and collaborated with radio and TV channels. He held a law degree and a post-graduate specialisation in occupational psychology, and was the author of more than 20 books, mostly but not exclusively about sports. In the 1960s, he also served as the artistic director of the Teatro La Ribalta, a Bologna-based theatre. Furthermore, he served as a sport business executive, holding for 43 years, from 1962 to 2005, the role of president of Libertas Bologna, a Bologna-based women's basketball team. On the top of all that, he did narrate for over 60 years the stories of Bologna F.C., the glorious football club of his hometown Bologna, of which he was a passionate fan. In the press release that was posted on the Bologna F.C.'s website on November 4, 2019, the day after his death, the club wrote: "*Aveva il Bologna nel cuore, anche quando esibiva il distacco richiesto da una professione che ha onorato come pochi, da vero fuoriclasse*" (Bologna F.C. 2019) [He had Bologna in his heart, even when he exhibited the detachment required by a profession that he honoured as few, as a true champion].

It was previously observed that the "toy department" epithet may also have a positive connotation. By the same token, the notion of the sports journalist as a "fan with a

typewriter" does not necessarily have to be a curse. Not only does fanhood allow for good journalism, as shown by Civolani's story, which is just one in many examples, but the opposite may be true. This is how Amy Lawrence, a sports broadcaster and former football writer for the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, has described the key function of passion in the job:

> A bit like getting in the zone where you are covering a game, there is so much to do and think about during a live game, that personal bias doesn't come into it. Of course you might want a goal to go in, but you need that passion. You cannot write about the game if you have no passion for the game. [From Raymond Boyle's interview with Amy Lawrence on August 9, 2005, as reported by Boyle (2006b, 173)]

The fact that nowadays a large number of sports journalists are educated and come with a journalism degree, as opposed to becoming sports reporters on the field, may further contribute to "immunise" them from the risks of carrying (in the wrong way) fanhood into their writings. In an article appeared in 1989, Garrison and Salwen described sports journalists as "more skilled and better educated" than their past colleagues (1989, 57). The two scholars dated back the start of the process to the early 1970s, if not earlier – they referred to the previous two decades (ibid.). On a similar note, Boyle (2006b, 173) has observed that although there are still sports journalists who have entered the profession through the clubs' magazines or fanzines, especially in football journalism, more sports journalists now come from journalism training, and this difference, in his view, has rendered the issues related to sports journalists as fans with typewriters "less acute than they once were". Journalistic training certainly helps raise awareness of the requirements of good journalism, including neutrality, and better equips journalists in this and other respects. However, a solid educational background does not *automatically* guarantee impartiality. The safety distance between the fan and the reporter primarily stems from individual ethical standards and a reporter's willingness to use the technical tools at hand for the sake of that distance.

To wrap up the above considerations on sports journalists allegedly confusing the roles of reporter and fan, <u>this thesis posits that: (1) a passionate fan can make a great sports journalist, as one profile does not automatically exclude the other; (2) passion can actually</u>

be regarded as a positive element in that it generally means better knowledge (Gramsci docet, as discussed in section 3.2.3 – "*L'errore dell'intellettuale consiste nel credere che si possa sapere senza comprendere e specialmente senza sentire ed essere appassionato (non solo del sapere in sé, ma per l'oggetto del sapere*)" [The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge)] (Gramsci 1975, 2:1505); and (3) "fanhood" is not only present in sports journalism but also in journalistic beats that are typically considered more serious, e.g. politics, hence it should not be attached to sports journalism as a distinctive feature of this beat.

Looking at this issue in perspective, it will be interesting to explore, in the years to come, what robot journalism will bring, and to what extent it will modify the perception of bias in sports reporting. The problem may be bias itself as well as a *perception* of media bias among readers and critics, an aspect that Waddell (2019) has indeed explored with reference to the advent of computational journalism. Sport is one of the areas in which robot journalism is primarily being used, alongside whether forecasts and finance. Whether or not this is a promising direction for sports journalism, it certainly is a promising path for further research.

### *The work to "legitimise" sports journalism*

Before getting into the question of how to legitimise sports journalism, if necessary, we should draw attention to the fact that the status and perceived legitimacy of sports journalists may vary from one national context or journalistic tradition to another (Rowe 2007, 386; R. Boyle 2017). Boyle reminds us that "[j]ournalism is clearly shaped by the institutions in which it is located, and in turn these media organisations are products of a wider, culturally specific set of political and economic influences" (2006b, 161). On a similar note, Rowe has observed that "[s]ports journalists […] vary in their occupational practice not only in relation to their professional ideologies, but also to their structural location, proximity to, and dependency on, their principal sources" (2005, 134).

Furthermore, the place of sports journalism in the journalistic hierarchy is connected also with the place of sport itself across different cultures (Souanef 2019, 18). It is by no chance that the leverage and, to a large extent, the prestige of sports journalism in the United States are hardly comparable to the status of the sports beat possibly in any other country of the world. Rowe has argued that sports journalism is "traditionally more highly regarded" in the United States than in Britain or Australia, even though things has been changing in Britain, adds Rowe, as far as some "'respected' columnist in broadsheet newspapers" are concerned (2007, 387).[128] Rowe admits that comparative data on national differences are "rare and difficult to obtain" (ibid.). This lack of resources, which has not significantly changed since Rowe wrote the cited article, in 2007, might offer an avenue for future comparative research, keeping however in mind two major difficulties. Firstly, elements like "prestige" and "status" are always difficult to measure, and the findings risk of being more arbitrary and subjective than factual. Secondly, in a globalised world, the argument of national journalistic traditions does not always help, as journalists often work and/on collaborate with media outlets in different countries, or have themselves lived in more than one country. All considered, it is probably safer to conclude, for the time being, that sports journalism generally remains comparatively less prestigious than other beats, although with significant differences from one reporter and media outlet to another, which may or may not be connected with their respective origins or geographical location.

The work to "legitimise" sports journalism has often been done by journalists themselves (Montérémal and Souanef 2013). In France, Jacques Marchand (1921-2017) emerged as *the* leading advocate for considering sports journalism at the same rank as the other journalistic specialties (Cuccoli 2019). When Marchand died in 2017, at the age of 96, the obituary in *Le Monde* described him as a "[*g]rande figure du journalisme de sport […]qui s'est battu[e] pour que le sport soit considéré comme un champ journalistique à*

[128] There is a difference, in the British journalistic tradition, between broadsheet newspapers and tabloids. This difference was originally based on the page sizes of such papers: large-format (broad) pages in the former vs. smaller pages in the latter. The difference also lies, however, with the respective contents, with broadsheets (e.g. *The Independent*, *The Times* etc.) being more strictly informative vs. tabloids (e.g. *The Sun*, *Daily Mail* etc.) reporting preferably on celebrities and through sensationalism, as they target the widest possible audience.

*part entière*" [a great figure of sports journalism who fought to have sport considered as a journalistic field in its own right] (Van Kote 2017). This is how Marchand described the need for a sports journalist to be, first and foremost, a journalist:

> Le journaliste de sport doit d'abord être un journaliste. Une fois que vous êtes généraliste de l'information, vous pouvez effectivement adopter une spécialité, adopter le sport exactement comme on adopte l'économie, les spectacles ou la politique" (Bureau et al. 1987, 208)
>
> [A sports journalist must first be a journalist. Once you are an information generalist, you can actually opt for a specialty, and opt for sports exactly as you would opt for economy, the showbiz or politics].

This was not a way for Marchand to imply that any journalist could therefore be a sports journalist, though. On the contrary, he concurrently emphasised the need for additional and specific competences, which were somehow more necessary than in other specialties, he suggested:

> [J]e pense malgré tout que le sport réclame une compétence spécifique. Le journaliste sportif moderne et idéal doit avoir une double formation, il est obligé d'avoir une connaissance, une compétence, une culture du sport. Dans la spécialité sportive, nous avons le lectorat le plus exigeant et le plus averti. Nous nous adressons à des lecteurs, auditeurs, téléspectateurs qui ont pratiqué des sports, qui sont convaincus de bien les connaître et à partir de ce moment-là ils ne vous pardonnent pas la moindre erreur (Bureau et al. 1987, 208).
>
> [I still think that sport demands specific skills. The modern and ideal sports journalist must have dual training, he must have knowledge, a culture of sport. In the sports specialty, we have the most demanding and knowledgeable readership. We address readers, listeners, viewers who have practiced sports, who are convinced that they know them well and from that moment on, they will not forgive you for the slightest error].

Marchand long worked at *L'Equipe*, the French sports newspaper, for which he served as editor-in-chief from 1955 to 1977. He was also a founding member of the *Union syndicale des journalistes de sport de France* (USJSF), now *Union des Journalistes de Sport en France* (UJSF), the union representing sports journalists in France. In line with the key ideas underlying the present thesis, Marchand also highlighted the social importance of sport, and therefore the importance of the journalism covering sports:

> Le phénomène [sportif] est, sinon éternel, assez durable, à travers les siècles et les civilisations. Les stades existaient en Grèce et dans la Rome antique. Les excès, les débordements, les tricheries, les scandales aussi. Raison de plus pour que le journalisme de sport soit sérieux et pris au sérieux par ceux qui le dirigent (les patrons), ceux qui le pratiquent (les journalistes), ceux qui le consomment (lecteurs, auditeurs, téléspectateurs et maintenant internautes). (Marchand 2002, 166)
>
> [The [sporting] phenomenon is, if not eternal, quite lasting, through centuries and civilisations. Stadia existed in Greece and ancient Rome. Excesses, cheating and scandals, too. All the more reason for sports journalism to be serious and taken seriously by those who run it (the bosses), those who practice it (journalists), those who consume it (readers, radio listeners, viewers and now internet users)].

One more element to reinforce the legitimacy of sports journalism is the idea of sports journalists as innovators of the profession. According to Morrison (2014), their constant search for new ways to engage a public of passionate fans has led sports journalists to continuously test new and creative ways to present a story. This specificity, further brought to light by the advent of new technologies and digital media, has in fact always been there, says Morrison, as "[t]he internet only accelerated sports media's role as chief innovator" (ibid.). In line with Morrison's observations, it may therefore be "legitimate" to wonder whether it has *ever* been appropriate to question the professional legitimacy of sports journalism, after all.

### 4.1.2 The role of the sports journalist: informing and entertaining

> Sport, with its mixture of entertainment, drama and news values, offers a particular challenge for journalists in their need to both inform and entertain in an increasingly fast-paced news environment while addressing, in many cases, an increasingly knowledgeable audience.
>
> Raymond Boyle (2006b, 181)

> It is essential to bear in mind that professional sports are, foremost, entertainment […]. Don't try to analyze whether the cheerleaders represent objectification or empowerment. It's simply entertainment […]. Overanalysis is common in American culture. We read far too much into political personalities, the Oscars, fashion, even the weather. So, in a way, the media going over the top for the Super Bowl is part of the event – everything about the game is excessive, including the coverage. Just don't try to find any larger significance, because there isn't any.
>
> Gregg Easterbrook (2005)[129]

One of the key questions for sports journalism scholars is related to the difference and/or relationship between information and entertainment in the beat. This question becomes even more relevant if we investigate the coverage of socially relevant topics, as is the case with this thesis.[130] Are we sure, as it seems to be taken for granted in this thesis, that sports journalism also means expanding the coverage from the fun of sports events and actors to the broader spectrum of the ways by which sport impacts society?[131] Meanwhile,

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[129] Gregg Easterbrook is an American journalist and writer. He is the author, among other books, of *The game's Not Over: In Defense of Football* (2015), *The King of Sports*: *Football's Impact on American Society* (2014), and *Tuesday Morning Quarterback: Haiku and Other Whimsical Observations to Help You Understand the Modern Game* (2001). He has been a staff writer, national correspondent and contributing editor at *The Atlantic* for nearly 40 years, and has written for several other periodicals, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New Yorker*, and the *Harvard Business Review*, among others. In 2017, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. (https://www.greggeasterbrook.com/. Accessed on February 29, 2020).

[130] This section focuses on this specific aspect, with neither the objective nor the ambition to discuss the broader issue of "the role of sports journalism" at large. For a review of the academic research on the role of sports journalism, see Boyle, Raymond, David Rowe, and Garry Whannel. 2010. "Delight in Trivial Controversy'? Questions for Sports Journalism" in *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, edited by Stuart Allan, 245–55. Routledge Companions. London: Routledge. This article includes references, among others, to Tunstall's (1971) pioneering work on specialised journalists. Another useful source on the scholarly debate on the role of sports journalism is English, Peter. 2016. "Mapping the Sports Journalism Field: Bourdieu and Broadsheet Newsrooms." *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 17 (8): 1001–17, which focuses on sport in the journalistic field while highlighting the under-representation of sports journalism in media studies. Tunstall's (1971) analysis of the rise of football reporting in specialist journalism is also examined by Boyle in *Sports Journalism: Context and Issues* (2006b, 41), within his description of "The professional sports journalists" (chap. 2 "Sports journalism and the print media tradition").

[131] In her experience in the professional milieu of sports journalists, the author of this doctoral thesis often found herself raising the question of the low or missing coverage of aspects related to the social impact of

other critics and analysts might wonder whether the role of a journalist, including a sports journalist, should include entertaining at all. Horky and Stelzner, for example, have complained that "some sports journalists have turned from critical eyewitnesses into entertainment vendors" (2013, 123). The question is not new and involves journalism beyond sports. As reminded by Thussu, "[s]ince the advent of mass media, there has been a tension between informing and educating the public and entertaining the crowd in the market place" (2007, 15).

A point that is made in this thesis is that the alleged dichotomy between covering the entertaining dimension of sports and informing on sports is not one, or at least, it should not be. An accurate description of this position is offered in one of the most recent books on sports journalism to date, which speaks of "the balance that should be struck between sports journalism that informs and sports journalism that entertains" (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 1). Striking this balance is not always an easy task, and has even been referred to as "a significant dilemma for sports journalism" (Rowe 2005, 126), but the key point, and one of the arguments underlying this thesis, is that entertainment and information are not mutually exclusive. Information and entertainment are actually bound to coexist *especially* in the journalistic coverage of sports because of the complex nature of sports. This does not mean that they *do* coexist all the time and that sports journalism is therefore automatically a synonymous of "infotainment".[132] In this sense, the statement that "[g]ood sports journalism should simultaneously be able to both inform as well as entertain" (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 65) is a bit stretched – in its saying that it *should*. Sports journalism is supposed to embrace both information and entertainment, and sports journalism that entertains is not necessarily worse, or somewhat of a less qualitative nature, than sports journalism that informs. As should be clear by now, this thesis is not much interested in excluding subjects for coverage. It rather aims to show

sport, indeed raising it as "an issue", and the answer was often that it was *not* the job of sports journalism to cover those kinds of aspects. Incidentally, the tone of the answer was usually annoyed, and the conversation on that particular aspect typically and abruptly stopped there.

[132] The intuitive notion of *infotainment* presupposes "an amalgamation of informative and entertaining content and style" (Horky and Stelzner 2013, 120). On the evolution of infotainment, see also Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2007. *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage – previously cited in this section.

that sports journalism can be utterly comprehensive and inclusive, as highlighted by the scope of the taxonomy of subjects for coverage that was suggested through **Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**.

This thesis suggests that the very idea of distinguishing between a sports journalism that primarily entertains, on the one hand, and sports journalism that primarily informs, on the other, simply does not make sense. **Sport is a crossover subject made up of both news leaning on the entertainment side and others of perceived urgency.** The lengthy analysis on the nature and social relevance of sport, carried out in Chapter 3, was also meant to introduce and support this assumption.

According to British media scholar Rob Steen, who has also been a journalist and sportswriter for 25 years, the respective share of information and entertainment has shifted over time:

> The priority was set in stone long ago: inform, then, if space and/or time permit, entertain. The weight of emphasis, if not completely reversed, has [now] certainly altered. (Steen 2015, 53).

Boyle, Rowe and Whannel (2010) have highlighted the upsurge of "a surveillance society" filled with scandals, a transformation that has, in their view, involved also the world of sports. This transformation is to be taken into account when looking at the information/entertainment dyad.

> With the growth of a 'surveillance society', scandals involving sport become front-page news. The rise of celebrity culture means that sport stars appear more often in other sections of the media – in fashion shoots, gossip columns, show business, celebrity profiles, chat and game shows. The sheer scale of the sports business has made it a subject for the financial and business sections of the print media. The intense focus on mega events such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games transcends the narrow boundaries of the sports section. In other words, sport as a subject has found itself spreading beyond the confines of sports journalism and, indeed, often beyond the territory of sports journalists themselves. (R. Boyle, Rowe, and Whannel 2010, 250)

Both Steen's (2015, 53) and Boyle, Rowe and Whannel's (2010, 250) approaches are correct and shareable, but they tackle the question from a different angle when compared to this thesis. The ontological position expressed in this thesis is that speaking of a clear-cut distinction between information and entertainment in sports journalism does not make sense anyway, regardless of the historical transformations of society, which are a fact. Incidentally, as observed by Baym, "the dividing line between news and entertainment is fundamentally porous, if not entirely arbitrary, and difficult to define with any meaningful measure of precision" (2010, 376). The readers of sports news are primarily driven by passion and a desire to take their mind off everyday life. It means that the entertainment dimension is inherently present. Nonetheless, this need for distraction is not exclusive of an interest in all that surrounds the sports they love, including what this thesis has identified as sport-related topics of social relevance.

In order to understand the weaknesses of the historical argument, it might help to look at how the alleged divide between news and entertainment has been assessed with reference to politics. Prior (2005) has observed that in the high-choice multimedia environment that characterises today's society, politics constantly finds itself competing with entertainment in content preferences. However, argues Prior, the digital revolution has paradoxically not transformed political knowledge noticeably, as people can now search among a larger range of sources what they were in fact *already* interested in:

> "[G]reater media choice makes it easier for people to find their preferred content. People who like news take advantage of abundant political information to become more knowledgeable […] In contrast, people who prefer entertainment abandon the news and become less likely to learn about politics […]. (Prior 2005, 577)

Prior's approach reinforces the idea that the historical transformation of the communication landscape, and notably the digital revolution, with its dramatic increase in contents availability, should not be taken as a catch-all explanation for all that happens in the news media environment, and is not sufficient to explain the dynamics in the news-entertainment relationship. Marshall has observed that although the coverage of entertainment has massively increased, "celebrity and journalism have been twinned for

most of the past 200 years" (2005, 19), further reinforcing the idea that the transformations that have recently occurred in the world of the media do not fully explain the current state of affairs in the news-entertainment relationship.

### 4.1.3 Selecting stories that select themselves

When focusing on the role of journalism in the coverage of sports, and specifically the gatekeeping function that journalism plays in the choice of the sport-related stories that will become news, one has to consider a major specificity of sports journalism in comparison with other beats. The coverage of sports is largely calendar-driven, as the occurrence of the main events that will be covered is typically known well in advance. In other words, we could say that sports stories "select themselves". The date of the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games, but also of sporting events of much smaller magnitude, is known years or at least months in advance. The Sunday coverage of football matches in print newspapers in the countries where matches are mostly played on Saturdays does not really come as a surprise, neither for journalists nor for readers. In contrast, the news coverage in other fields, whether politics, finance or other areas, is mostly determined by sudden events. It is obviously impossible for reporters to anticipate events like an earthquake, the death of a head of state or a terrorist attack. This is not to say that the unexpected is absent from sports news. Incidentally, if we think of sport competitions, the date may be known but the result of the game is not: "*La prevedibilità del tempo di svolgimento è caricata di fascino dall'imprevedibilità del risultato*", observes Abbiezzi (2006, 12) [The predictability of the timing is turned into fascination by the unpredictability of the result]. Sports information is nonetheless different from other areas of information in that the share of events to cover that are known in advance is considerably larger in sports than in other beats. And this can make a huge difference, especially for sports-specialised newspapers. A real-life anecdote can help illustrate this point. During her tenure as secretary general of the International Association of Sports Newspapers (IASN), from 2008 to 2011 (see footnote 11), the author of this doctoral thesis attended a meeting of chief editors of sports newspapers from different countries, in which participants clearly stated that there were the years *with* the FIFA World Cup or

Summer Olympics (especially the former, they said) and the years *without* any of the above. As we know, these two mega-events are scheduled several years in advance, allowing newspapers, and especially sports-specialised newspapers, to get organised accordingly, so as anticipate the readership and business/advertising potential of the different periods.

The natural limitation to the scope of the gatekeeping options for sports journalists that comes from the events' calendar should not be overestimated, though. First of all, it comparatively applies more to broadcast media than print media. The coverage of sports by broadcast media outlets (television and radio) is primarily driven by the *live* coverage of events, preceded and followed by debates and talk shows. Unlike the episode of a TV series, which can be watched virtually any time on replay platforms, people prefer to watch a match at the same time as their favourite champions are playing it, and not when it is over and the result is known. The print media, by contrast, come into play when the match is over. Like all the media covering sports, the print media are also impacted by the calendar of events, but are not directly concerned with the notion of "live", and that makes a big difference. A second reason why we should not underestimate the gatekeeping power of sports journalism is connected with the advent of digital media. The role that print newspapers used to play in informing their readers about sporting results and championship has largely been taken over, in the age of the Internet, by digital media, determining what Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger's (2014) have described as "the different temporal orientation of print media vs. online media" (widely examined in Chapter 1). As a reminder, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger maintained that "a future temporal orientation is more prevalent in print media, which assume the role of projecting upcoming events, analyzing potential outcomes, and shaping collective expectations. In contrast, online news tends to assume the more commonly recognized journalistic role of informing the public on recent-past events" (ibid., 1047). If the task of reporting recent-past events is now principally handled by online media, then print media outlets are left with more time and space for analysis and investigation. The advent of digital news has therefore considerably bolstered the gatekeeping leverage of print, namely the possibility for the sports journalists who work for print media outlets to select the stories that will

become news. Like the colleagues who work on the live coverage or sports events or publish online, print media journalists also need to report on the events in the calendar, i.e. the stories that have somehow selected themselves, but the number of stories that do *not* select themselves and are potentially left for coverage is, in their case, substantially larger. This line of reasoning obviously collapses if print news media, instead of applying the new division of labour suggested by Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger's (2014), decide to emulate the speed and culture of immediacy of online media, playing catch-up to online content (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 50–51). In cases like these, the resulting scenario is quite the opposite, with the gatekeeping role of journalists of print media being actually shrunk by time pressure and the choices of their online "antagonists".

The stories that are not directly related to the occurrence of a sporting event, as is the case with the majority of the stories that look at the social repercussions of sport, are by their very nature less dependent, or not dependent at all on the calendar of events. Their level of unpredictability is more similar to that of other domains of the news, which means that the media have a considerable level of gatekeeping power in their coverage.

To conclude this thesis's discussion on sports stories supposedly selecting themselves, and to clarify what it posits, it should be noted that there is no such thing as a "basic" sports journalism that simply reports on recent-past and ongoing events and a more "sophisticated" sports journalism that looks at the other aspects of sport. Of any sporting event, and at any time, a reporter can choose whether surfing on surface, to produce an informative but relatively shallow story, or otherwise looking at what even an apparently minor event can mean in the broader social picture. We can think, for example, of a tiny sporting event organised by a local association and what it means to the youth of that particular neighbourhood, also in prospect. The wide taxonomy of analytical categories for social analysis that has been suggested through **Table 4** in this thesis is filled with suggestions that can apply indifferently to the tiny event in the local neighbourhood and the sport mega-event that will make history.

### 4.1.4 When sports journalism is not serious

The lack of credibility that recurrently accompanies sports journalism may come from misplaced snobbery and stereotypes, but is often grounded in actual malpractices. This section 4.1.4 will try to review the main shortcomings of sports journalism, especially those that have generated in time more criticism.

A first malpractice may consist in **sports journalists behaving like fans**. If rooting for a team does not prevent from being a good reporter, as maintained previously in this thesis, *being* a fan and *acting* like a fan while performing journalistic duties are not quite the same thing. Sometimes "fan with a typewriter" as a pejorative jibe is indeed well-deserved. For someone who is passionate about sports, covering sports as a media professional is a dream job. It is the kind of occupation that looks more like a pleasant hobby, and for which one even gets paid. So, is that a problem? The idea that work means sacrifice, and therefore should *not* be fun, is as widespread as debatable. Incidentally, the idea that covering sports is a sort of constant playground for journalists is rather superficial and may betray a certain ignorance about what the profession actually entails. It can be fun but is indeed a job, and an often demanding one.

To help solve this conundrum, McEnnis (2017, 549) has spoken of "[s]ports journalism's perceived proximity to fandom", bringing about once again the useful notion of the "perception" of a certain image. The point is that "perceived proximity" is itself an issue. Gisondi (2018), and this will finally solve the conundrum, has enumerated the basic rules for a sports journalist not to behave like a fan, summarised here as follows: (a) as opposed to fans, who "can make unsubstantiated comments without consequences", sports journalists must be detailed and diplomatic in reporting; (b) sports journalists cannot openly cheer their favourite teams and players because "cheering clouds perspective"; (c) sports journalists must comply with professional codes of conduct, which prevent them, for example, from accepting free food or tickets, as fans can happily do; (d) sports journalists cannot use others' work and phrases, as fans typically do, for example, when they talk or communicate via social media; (e) sports reporters do not have the privilege

to choose the time, date and whether of the games they follow, whereas fans are free to decide whether or not to physically go to the game; (f) fans can complain that a game or championship was totally uninteresting whereas reporters must always find something interesting to say in order to fill their articles; (g) reporters, contrary to fans, need to prepare for the games through exhaustive research and reporting; and finally, (h) a professional sports journalist must also "look like one, by dressing properly", and that refers in the first place to avoiding clothing that represents one of the competing teams (Gisondi 2018, 3–4). To wrap up on fandom as an issue, and based also on these contributions, we can argue that being a fan is not prejudicial *per se* but does coincide with bad journalism, or non-serious journalism, whenever it prevents intellectual detachment and comes to negatively impact a reporter's balance and impartiality.

A journalist's emotional attachment to a club, an athlete or a sport should not be confused with certain unhealthy forms of **proximity of sports journalists to their sources, which may result in connivance and complicity with these sources**. Incidentally, specialised journalists in general are criticised, more than generalists, within the profession for their alleged excess of proximity with their sources (Marchetti 2002a). The problem is not proximity itself. Personal connections and a well-stocked contacts book are primary tools for all journalists, and sports journalists are no exception. The only way for journalists to break interesting stories is to have sources, with whom they end up developing relationships, often close relationships. According to Andrews, "[t]he relationship between sports journalists and the sports they cover is inevitably a close one" (2013, 85). Suggs (2016) has observed that the proximity between reporters and their sources may be particularly close in sports due to the frequency of their encounters, every time there is a game, as opposed to reporters in other areas of journalism, who typically meet their sources on specific occasions, such as breaking-news stories or earnings releases in financial journalism. Suggs describes this specificity as "the much-institutionalized nature of contacts between sports reporters and their sources" (ibid., 276).

A good journalist must be able to preserve the relationship with his sources without getting *too* friendly, and most importantly, without falling into the trap of gratefulness to

sources that are also the objects of coverage. As Bradshaw and Minogue have argued, "if there is never any tension between club and journalist, then the journalist is arguably not doing their job properly" (2019, 104). Similarly to what has been observed with reference to the risks stemming from a reporter's passion, proximity with the sources turns into non-serious sports journalism when it crosses the line that results in lack of impartiality and ultimately, in this case, in "promotional journalism". Clever, experienced journalists may be especially talented at concealing their proximity to the clubs and athletes they are covering, including when this proximity does cross the line. If a journalist sounds like the PR (public relations) of a club or an "in-house reporter", that is when sports journalism loses credibility altogether. At the same time, being overtly unfriendly or reporting systematically the dark sides of sports may result in losing access to vital sources, with journalists falling into "black lists", no longer able to interview players and coaches:

> If you are too accommodating with a club, then you run the risk of becoming complicit with the club, inasmuch as you can become little more than a mouthpiece for the club. Switched-on fans can pick up on this, and this can lead to a loss in credibility. On the other hand, if you burn your bridges with a club, then being "on the outside" can lead to a club no longer providing you with information or tip-offs, and in some instances even banning you from press conferences or from attending matches in the press box. (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 103)

The increase in the number of in-house media and internal press officers in sports governing bodies and sports clubs over the past few decades, occurred alongside the explosion of sport as a major media and commercial phenomenon, has made the direct access for journalists to primary sources increasingly difficult. According to Olabe Sánchez, who has examined these dynamics in the case of FC Barcelona, "the departments of Communication of football clubs, such as FC Barcelona, have become gatekeepers" (2016, 463). Most sports organisations now have their own media and deliver their own news, which means that they have developed the potential ability to control both the media and the message (Sherwood, Nicholson, and Marjoribanks 2017). Back in 2006, Boyle already argued that sports journalists considered the limited access to key sports players as "one of the most significant changes" occurred in their profession in recent years (2006a), and the multiplication of communication officers has further expanded since Boyle's 2006 study. Public relation (PR) consultants and the media

officers who work for clubs and star athletes offer to sports journalists plenty of ready-for-use contents, but these contents are obviously designed to promote the image of their clients, far from the balanced reporting that journalism is supposed to provide (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 86). Grimmer, who has examined this issue with reference to German football, considers that with clubs and federations now handling directly communication, without relying on traditional media, we have come to a situation in which "soccer clubs determine journalism in the German Bundesliga" (Grimmer 2017, 607). Mirer (2019) has pointed to the additional problem of the mixture of genres that has developed in the first two decades of the 2000s between in-house and external reporting, as sports organisations have been transforming their websites into news portals, and have been hiring reporters who write stories for these websites which look like those produced by independent reporters.

Among the reasons why sports journalists are pointed for their incestuous relationship with the sports they cover are also the privileges they may benefit from in connection with their activity, such as free tickets for events, travel and accommodation expenses offered by event organisers and sponsors, and other kinds of gifts. These aspects are usually regulated by media groups. The journalism manual of the *New York Times*, for example, entitled "Ethical Journalism: A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Editorial Departments", stipulates as follows (see the two relevant passages below):

> Staff members who review artistic performances or cover athletic or other events where admission is charged (for example, the New York Auto Show) may accept the press passes or tickets customarily made available. No other staff members, not even editors in the culture and sports departments, may accept free tickets. Even when paying the box office price, no staff member may use his or her Times position to request choice or hard-to-get seats unless the performance has a clear bearing on his or her job. (The New York Times n.d., sec. Pursuing the News)
>
> Except for journalists who receive press passes to cover sporting events, members of the sports department may not accept tickets, travel expenses, meals, gifts or any other benefit from teams or promoters. (The New York Times n.d., sec. Rules for Specialized Departments)

The presence of sports journalists in the same ostentatious parties as star athletes does not really boost the credibility of sports journalism. Feeling part of the same "circus", to use

Boyle's expression (2006a), may result in neglecting relevant topics to avoid hurting the circus.

If the personal proximity of sports journalists to their sources is probably overestimated as "an issue", and the judgement on this aspect is often undermined by a substantial lack of realism, the **conflict of interest between news media and sports organisations or powerful sports brands** is, by contrast, a major and comparatively underrated problem. Hardin and Ash (2011, 24) have noted that "[e]thics scholars have indicted sports journalism in general for operating in a perpetual state of 'conflict of interest'". Although generalising may seem rather extreme, understanding the presence of potential conflicts of interest is absolutely crucial to the understanding of the coverage, or lack of coverage, of socially relevant subjects around sports, since these subjects (e.g. corruption, labour issues, unhealthy sports practices etc.) often consist of inconvenient truths that reporters choose not to report. If an excess of personal proximity to the sources can be regulated by the journalist's professionalism and individual ethics, conflicts of interests at the corporate level may be harder to cope with. Furthermore, while an excess of proximity to the sources is likely to be commercially beneficial, hence something no one will reasonably complain about at the top of the organisation, asserting full editorial independence against the pressures exerted by such-and-such stakeholder hardly makes a journalist popular with his publisher. What happens when sports owners – of teams, events etc. – also own media outlets? And, how does advertising impact editorial freedom in the coverage of sports, especially if instead of coming from an array of advertisers, advertising revenues mostly come from a few key commercial partners?

Section **3.3 The growth of sport through the press** of this thesis has described the birth of major sporting events which were, like the Tour de France or Giro d'Italia, created by newspapers, in the early 20th century. Today, these two events are still owned and organised by the same media groups, which also ensure their journalistic coverage. These are only two in an array of cases of the same kind. The overall question of editorial independence is obviously more complex than that. Ownership of a media outlet does not mechanically lead to decisive interference with editorial choices. In fact, the potential

conflict of interest in these situations is in the open, as opposed to numbers of cases in which it is much less transparent than that. In any case, the very existence of potential conflicts of interest should be taken into account when examining journalistic contents. In 2013, journalist and media academic Dean Starkman wrote, with reference to the acquisition of the *Boston Globe* by the parent company of the Boston Red Sox: "How will the *Globe* cover the 'Sawx'? Very carefully" (2013).[133] Moving from newspapers to broadcasters, Starkman highlighted in the same article what he called the "ESPN's journalism problem", providing the financial details of some of ESPN's television rights deals with sports leagues, in his attempt to understand "the relationship its newsroom's surrounding organization has with the institutions it is supposed to cover" (ibid.). Exploring how media organisations internally regulate potential conflicts of interest, which typically occur through codes of ethics or ethical journalism handbooks, would exceed the scope of this thesis.[134] Within the boundaries of the present thesis, it was important to note that possible conflicts of interest are to be taken into consideration when assessing the media coverage of socially relevant aspects in sport. As a corollary to this, and to present a potential counter-argument, it must be said that the fact that sports media are owned by sports leagues or sports events owners does not automatically lead to fearful deference and partiality in the coverage. In principle, the exact contrary might be true. For example, if the organiser of a sporting competition gets to know about misconducts of some sort in the framework of the race, and that organiser also owns a media outlet, one option could be to do all that can be done to conceal the story and avoid a scandal, but an alternative option could be, in turn, to be the first to report it. Setting aside ethical considerations, both solutions may be seen, in their own way, as being in the interest of the event.

Both the close relationship with the sources and the presence of potential conflicts of interest may translate into **self-censorship among journalists**. Starkman (2014) has

[133] The Red Sox are an American professional baseball team based in Boston, Massachusetts, competing in Major League Baseball (MLB). They are known locally as "the Sawx".
[134] The normative aspects of sports journalism ethics have extensively been studied and conceptualised, in recent years, by José Luis Rojas Torrijos and Xavier Ramon-Vegas (Ramon-Vegas 2013; 2016; Ramon-Vegas and Rojas-Torrijos 2017; 2018; Rojas Torrijos and Ramon-Vegas 2018).

picturesquely referred to this flawed form of journalism as "The Watchdog That Didn't Bark", from the title of his book on the softened coverage of the 2008 financial collapse in the business press. What is omitted from media messages typically tells as much as what is there, sometimes even more. The withholding of a fact or opinion because of underlying pressures from powerful stakeholders obviously exists in journalism in general, not just in the coverage of sports. The key process of selecting the news (gatekeeping) should not be driven by pressures of this kind. In the case of self-censorship, pressures are in fact self-inflicted – a sort of automatic self-preserving reflex. Article 3 of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)'s *Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists* stipulates as follows:

> 3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/ she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify any document. He/she will be careful to reproduce faithfully statements and other material that non-public persons publish in social media. (International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) 2019)[135]

Eluding important content in the process of selecting the news contravenes basic journalistic principles. Self-censorship does not necessarily go so far as to suppress controversial issues altogether. It can be subtler than that, for example by asking gentler questions or avoiding harsh criticism. Consummate journalists are capable of insisting on negative issues that do not excessively upset certain stakeholders, in order to show that they are doing their job properly, while actually omitting other and possibly more relevant issues that, in turn, would certainly upset those stakeholders. For all these reasons, self-censorship can be hard to detect, even for journalists themselves, and especially when it consists of habits that have become ingrained into mainstream sports journalism (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 88).[136]

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[135] The IFJ *Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists*, adopted at the 30th IFJ World Congress in Tunis on June 12, 2019, completes the IFJ *Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* (1954), known as the "Bordeaux Declaration". The Charter is based on major texts of international law, in particular the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (International Federation of Journalists 2019)

[136] The question of self-censorship in sports journalism has also been discussed by Tom Bradshaw in a paper entitled "Self-censorship and the Pursuit of Truth in Sports Journalism: A Case Study of David Walsh" (2018). In this paper, Bradshaw examines the moral reasoning of sports journalists through the lens of Immanuel Kant's theoretical perspective.

As for the pressures from advertisers, Schierl and Bertling (2013) have argued that while the influence of advertising is generally more pronounced in sports reporting as compared to other newsroom departments, this is in fact most apparent in television sports journalism than other media platforms. This is primarily due, according to the two scholars, to the extraordinary mass demand for televised sports, as shown by the astounding TV audiences of the leading sports events. The broadcasting of these events represents a golden opportunity for commercial enterprises to promote their products, and not just because of the large audiences. Sport conveys values of dynamism and competitiveness to which corporations like to be associated. This set of conditions results, according to Schierl and Bertling, in companies having "a significant interest in exercising as strong an influence as possible over certain aspects of TV sports reporting, since this can optimize the effectiveness of their ads [making it] ever more difficult to develop high-quality programming under these conditions" (ibid., 493).

## 4.2 Literature for the people

### 4.2.1 Playing with words

Sports journalism often uses a distinctive language made up of coaching and training jargons, slang and colloquial expressions. In what would become a seminal study on the language of sports journalism, Tannenbaum and Noah (1959) coined in this respect the definition of "Sportuguese".[137] Spanish linguist Susana Guerrero Salazar, who has extensively studied the usage of language in sports journalism, has described the language of sport as being "*entre coloquial y literario*" [between colloquial and literary], offering a comprehensive portray of the distinctiveness of this language:

> El lenguaje deportivo es un lenguaje muy peculiar ya que, al mismo tiempo que participa de las características del lenguaje coloquial (frases hechas, muletillas, reiteraciones, pobreza léxica, impropiedades semánticas, redundancias, etc.), ha enriquecido otros

[137] Tannenbaum and Noah's study focused in particular on the *verbs* used in sports reporting.

> lenguajes (como el político). Impulsado por los acontecimientos extralingüísticos y por la necesidad de agilizar el discurso y amenizarlo, el lenguaje deportivo recurre a multitud de campos semánticos, los cuales contribuyen a la renovación del código y al aumento de vocabulario, sobre todo por metáfora. La necesidad de dar fuerza expresiva al mensaje hace que este discurso se acerque al literario, recurriendo a la connotación, al uso ornamental del adjetivo, a juegos de palabras, figuras retóricas, etc. (Guerrero Salazar 2002, 365)
>
> [The language of sports is a very peculiar language because while it shares the characteristics of colloquial language (idioms, phrases, reiterations, lexical poverty, semantic improprieties, redundancies, etc.), it has enriched other languages (such as the political one). Driven by extralinguistic events and the need to simplify and liven up discourse, the sports language draws on a multitude of semantic fields, which contribute to the renewal of the code and the expansion of vocabulary, especially by means of the metaphor. The need to give expressive force to the message brings this discourse closer to the literary one, by resorting to the connotation, the ornamental use of the adjective, puns, rhetorical figures, etc.]

In a fascinating article dating back to 1934, entitled "Use of Slang in Newspaper Sports Writing", J. Willard Ridings thoroughly listed the slang words and puns that he had found in the sports pages of 11 newspapers of the United States.[138] Not only did Ridings offer a fascinating catalogue of these expressions, but he also categorised them based on a series of criteria: "slang based upon literary or other familiar allusions", "descriptive synonyms", "invented words" and so forth. It is by all means a recommended reading for sports journalism scholars and fans. His study led him to the following conclusion:

> A mere cursory examination of the sports pages in any newspaper of our country will convince the uninitiated that a highly specialized vocabulary is required in order to read understandingly […] To the sports writers on many newspapers and to the sports enthusiasts this writing is so familiar and so entirely accepted and understandable that they cease to regard it as slang. (Ridings 1934, 348)

According to sports historian Wojciech Lipoński, "[l]anguage is one of the most important components of the distinctiveness and cultural identity of sport. It determines its spread and social range as shown by the phenomenon of sport media" (2009, 19). In this passage, Lipoński also implies what is largely taken for granted, that is the equation

[138] Ridings studied the content of the 11 newspapers during January and February 1934. The newspapers were (author's italic): "Baltimore *Evening Sun*, Chicago *Tribune*, Dallas *Uncle Jake Sports News*, Fort Worth *Press*, Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* (morning and evening), Kansas City *Star*, Los Angeles *Times*, New York *World-Telegram*, Philadelphia *Evening Public Ledger*, St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, and Washington *Herald*". (Ridings 1934, 349)

"language of sports <=> language of sports journalism". This equation comes from the fact that most of what is referred to as "the language of sports" derives, indeed, from the *journalistic* coverage of sports, even if journalism is obviously not the only source (Rossi 2003).

In December 2018, Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, to comment the delay in the Senate vote on the budget plan, said: "*Siamo in zona Cesarini*" [We are in the Cesarini zone] (*Il Messaggero* 2018) . The expression was meant to indicate that the debate had reached the very final stages and a solution was being found *in extremis*. The first use of the expression "zona Cesarini" is generally attributed to Italian writer and journalist Eugenio Danese (1904-1980).[139] Renato Cesarini, mentioned in that expression, was an Italian Argentine football player and coach who played for Juventus and Italy's national team in the 1930s. In the Italy-Hungary match on December 13, 1931 in Turin, Cesarini scored a goal in the 90th minute, which allowed Italy to win by 3 to 2.[140] That episode would soon inspire Danese. On December 20, 1931, on the occasion of a match opposing Ambrosiana (the ancestor of F.C. Internazionale Milano, known as Inter) to Roma, Ambrosiana beat Roma thanks to a goal scored in the 90th minute, and Danese evoked then a "caso Cesarini" [Cesarini case] ("Perché Si Dice 'Zona Cesarini'" 2018). The expression was later borrowed by other reporters, although the Cesarini "case" turned into the Cesarini "zone". The expression "zona Cesarini" has been used in Italy ever since, and not only in sports, as shown by the Prime Minister Conte's example, to indicate a solution that is being sought *in extremis*. The following excerpt, from an article by Italian writer Alessandro Baricco, is illustrative of the popularity of the expression: "*Cesarini, quello della zona Cesarini, proprio lui: quando dai il tuo nome a un pezzetto di Tempo — il quale è solo di Dio, dice la Bibbia — qualcosa nella vita lo hai fatto*" (Baricco 2015) [Cesarini, the one of the Cesarini zone, precisely him: when you give your name to a piece of Time – which is only of God, says the Bible – it means you have done something in life].

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[139] Danese consistently wrote about sports throughout his career, and also served as the chief editor of *Corriere dello Sport* from August 1943 to January 1944.

[140] In a football match, the duration of the game is 90 minutes, although the referee has the power to add some extra-time.

In the broader spectrum of the politicians who have been borrowing from the language of sports, Silvio Berlusconi certainly provides a perfect example. Berlusconi, the media tycoon and four-time Prime Minister of Italy (1994-1995, 2001-2005, 2005-2006 and 2008–2011), was also the owner of the *AC Milan* football club for 31 years, from 1986 to 2017. In 1994, in order to announce his entrance into Italian political life and the creation of *Forza Italia!*, his new party, Berlusconi famously called his move a "*discesa in campo*" [entry into the field of play], and his election team "*gli azzurri"*, after the nickname of Italy's national teams in sports. British historian John Foot has described *Forza Italia!* as an organisation "whose language was dominated by football terminology" (2007, xxii).[141]

The phenomenon of terms and expressions created by sports journalists that enter the general language is recurrent throughout history, and the exponential expansion of sports media over the past few decades has only made the question of the language of sports journalism ever more relevant (Liponski 2009, 30). The stylistic and linguistic specificities of sports journalism are connected with both the particularities of sport as a subject for coverage and the popular and emotional dimensions of sport, which also means that many of these specificities are probably here to stay. Even if this is not a thesis in linguistics or semiotics, some questions of style and language need to be elucidated, and one reason is that they often have an impact also on the perception of the qualitative standards and professional legitimacy of sports journalism as well. The question that becomes directly pertinent to this thesis is: Can a journalism that tends to exhibits a certain lightness in its style and language – a flaw in the view of its critics – legitimately and accurately cover the (more serious) social aspects of sports?

[141] The present section is looking at the influence of the language of sports on society and politics. A reverse analysis, i.e. of the impact from society and politics onto sports journalism, with reference to Berlusconi, has been conducted by Marica Spalletta and Lorenzo Ugolini in an article entitled "Sport Politics. Il ventennio berlusconiano sulle pagine della Rosea" (2015b). The article presents the results of a qualitative research based on the coverage of Berlusconi in *La Gazzetta dello Sport* ("la Rosea" because it is printed on pink - *rosa* in Italian) from 1994 to 2014.

### *The thin line between unconventional and inappropriate*

As reminded by Wanta (2013, 77), "[u]nconventional writing styles […] can sometimes go beyond appropriateness". Wanta cites the example of an article in *The Austin Statesman* on November 29, 1963, just days after the assassination of President Kennedy, in which the description of a Texas–Texas A&M football game was filled with references to "rifled" passes, "sniper fire" and death (*Austin, American-Statesman* Nov. 29, 1963, p. A-1, as cited by Wanta, ibid.). "The reporter undoubtedly thought these references were clever. Even decades later, the story seems in very poor taste", argues Wanta (2013, 77). Letting aside tactlessness, which is something journalists in general (not just sports journalists) are often blamed for, the use of a creative and unconventional writing style can be seen as a plus but also as a minus, especially when this turns into poor linguistic choices and stereotypes. Souanef (2013), who refers to the problem of vocabulary as "*le stigmate du journaliste sportif*" [the stigma of the sports journalist], cites a passage from the newsletter of the French sports journalists' association, dating back to the early 1960s:

> Nous devons admettre en toute objectivité que le jargon employé depuis cinquante ans par les chroniqueurs de sport a beaucoup contribué au discrédit du journalisme dit sportif. ("La lutte contre le jargon." 1961. *Bulletin de liaison de l'Union Syndicale des Journalistes Sportifs de France*, no. 24, March-April 1961, p. 9. Quoted by Souanef, ibid., 23).
>
> [We must, in all objectivity, admit that the jargon that has been used by sports reporters over the past fifty years has significantly contributed to the discredit of so-called sports journalism.]

By reading the rest of the citation, we discover that the association was, in fact, primarily worried about the use and abuse of English and falsely anglicised words, which it would later try to limit by actively promoting a more rigorous use of the French language. But the association additionally blamed, on the same occasion, "*l'approximation du vocabulaire*" [the sloppy use of vocabulary], the use of slang ("a pseudo-technical slang") and the creation of clichés, all of which providing good grounds for criticism – most often wrongly but sometimes with good reason, according to the association (ibid.).

Regarding the use of foreign words, especially from English, it is to be considered that, as far as the language of sport is concerned, the massive use of Anglicisms heavily derives from the historical origins of most modern sports, first developed in Anglo-Saxon countries (Murrmann and Surmaj 2015, 199). With specific reference to the Anglicisms imported into the French language, Boswell has examined the creation of about 150 nouns in the French vocabulary of sport, and has concluded in favour of this contamination: "the degree to which Anglicisms have penetrated the French vocabulary show the vitality and flexibility of native French resources of word-formation which have been able to assimilate a terminology which comes essentially from a foreign culture and language" (1981, 67). Broadly speaking, today the use of Anglicisms in the language of sports is mostly accepted and somehow taken for granted. Sometimes it is not particularly appreciated by purists, but this rarely turns into equating it to low journalistic standards.

By contrast, the use of clichés and stereotypes in sports journalism is an ongoing issue, or at least is still often perceived as such.[142] This kind of criticism is not reserved for sports journalism only. In *Le Journalisme Sans Peine* (Burnier and Rambaud 1997), an irreverent description of French journalism with stimulating indications on journalism at large, the authors argue that the way for journalists to handle information – the journalist's "worst enemy" – is through the multiplication of clichés. Burnier and Rambaud (ibid.) also provide a fascinating list of 1,249 clichés that can be commonly found in the French media. As far as sports journalism is concerned, clichés and stereotypes are most typically investigated with reference to the coverage of two specific issues: race and sexism. Additional areas that recurrently appear in scholarly studies include homophobia and disabled sports. Language plays a key role in the matter because the use if not the creation from scratch of clichés by the media, some of which may be (perceived) as

[142] "Cliché" and "stereotype" are most commonly used as synonyms, and will also be in this work. Based on dictionary definitions, a *cliché* is "something […] that has become overly familiar of commonplace", while a *stereotype* is "a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary: https://www.merriam-webster.com/. Accessed on January 6, 2019). Considering the "moral and metaphysical dimensions" of stereotypes as opposed to clichés, Zijderveld has interestingly argued that "all stereotypes are clichés, but not all clichés are stereotypes" (1987, 28). Broader theoretical reflections on the nuance between the two terms, however, would not be pertinent to the present doctoral thesis.

discriminatory, largely depends on the choice of words, and how such words are employed throughout the coverage.

Racial stereotypes have long been examined in the coverage of U.S. sports, in connection with the long-standing melting pot nature of U.S. society as compared to other societies. Even if racial segregation in the country is gone by now, race remains a major issue in American sports (and society at large), with waves of topicality that are typically linked with the outbreak of specific cases. According to media sociologist Pat Ferrucci (2018), a former journalist whose studies focus on race and gender issues in sports journalism, "the language of sports journalism [in the U.S.] reveal[s] racial biases", and journalists and broadcasters "consistently and constantly stereotype athletes by race through their word choices [and] use words in a racialized manner". In Europe, race-related issues have grown more relevant in sports coverage over the past few decades, in connection with the soaring number of foreign players as well as the rising flows of migrants from other continents, which have combinedly led to increasing multiculturalism in both sports and societies. The increased multiracialism in European sports is reflected in the growing number of racist episodes, especially in some countries and some sports. Set in historical perspective, the coverage of these episodes in the European media has now reached unprecedented frequency, even though one could always argue that the media could or should do more. In a country like Italy, for example, where racist episodes around football are unfortunately frequent, racism has become a regular feature in the coverage of sports, whether on television, in the press or other media. The question of how race should be treated by sports reporters remains highly controversial though, as testified by the story of the "Black Friday" headline in Italy, in 2019. On December 5, 2019, the front page of *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* ran the headline "Black Friday", next to the photos of two athletes of colour, Romelu Lukaku and Chris Smalling. The newspaper issue was released just a few days after the Black Friday of shopping, on November 29.[143]

[143] Black Friday, the informal name for the Friday following Thanksgiving, has been regarded as the start of the Christmas shopping season in the United States since the 1950s. In the new millennium, the Black Friday has become a shopping day in many other countries as well, including Italy, where *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* is published.

**The "Black Friday" headline (Italy, 2019)**

On December 5, 2019, the front page of *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, one of the three Italian sports newspapers, ran the following headline: "Black Friday". This headline, in large fonts, stood between the photos of footballers Romelu Lukaku and Chris Smalling, both of whom are athletes of colour. The headline was related to the upcoming Serie A match between Inter and Roma, where the two athletes respectively played at the time. But the "Black Friday" headline was soon to become a piece of news in its own right. On his *Twitter* account, Lukaku made the following statement, the same day of the release of the newspaper: "Instead of focusing on a battle between two teams, Corriere dello Sport comes with the dumbest of headlines I have ever seen in my career. You guys keep fuelling negativity and the racism issue".[144] The other involuntary protagonist of the story, Chris Smalling, specifically pointed, on his own *Twitter* account, to the broader responsibility of editors and the power of words: "Whilst I would have liked to spend the day focusing on the big game tomorrow, it is important that I acknowledge that what occurred this morning was wrong and highly insensitive. I hope the editors involved in running this headline take responsibility and understand the power they possess through words, and the impact those words can have".[145] Not only was the "Black Friday" headline criticised by various other actors and analysts in the world of sports, at different levels, but it also generated huge coverage in other media outlets, and not just in Italy. What came to be rapidly known as the "Black Friday headline" was covered in the *New York Times* (Povoledo 2019), the *Guardian* (Christenson 2019), *Le Figaro*'s *Sport24* blog (Malosse 2019) and the *ESPN* website (Richardson 2019), to mention just a few international examples. *The Sun*, in perfect tabloid style, ran the following headline: "'SHOCKING' - Lukaku and Smalling hit out at Italian newspaper Corriere dello Sport over 'Black Friday' race row headline" (capital letters in the source) (Hutchinson 2019). On December 6, 2019, the day after the "Black Friday" headline, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* retorted with the headline "Razzisti a chi?" (Who are you calling racist?), also on the front page, accompanied by a subheading that reminded of the long-standing tradition and anti-racist stand of the newspaper: "Linciaggio contro un giornale che da un secolo difende la libertà e l'uguaglianza" (Lynching of a newspaper that has been defending freedom and equality for a century). The page was complete with old headlines of the newspaper campaigning against racism and discriminations in sports, to highlight its ongoing commitment against these plagues.

Letting aside the broader question of racism in sports, which would exceed the scope of the current analysis, the controversy around the "Black Friday" headline is an indicator

[144] Lukaku, Romelu (@RomeluLukaku9). 2019. *Twitter*, 5 December 2019, 6.28 PM. https://twitter.com/RomeluLukaku9/status/1202641000537239552/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1202641000537239552&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fnews.sky.com%2Fstory%2Flukaku-and-smalling-criticise-italian-sports-papers-black-friday-headline-11879073. Last accessed on February 17, 2020.

[145] Smalling, Chris (@ChrisSmalling). 2019. *Twitter*, 5 December 2019, 6:12 PM. https://twitter.com/ChrisSmalling/status/1202636854249578497?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1202636854249578497&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fnews.sky.com%2Fstory%2Flukaku-and-smalling-criticise-italian-sports-papers-black-friday-headline-11879073. Last accessed on February 17, 2020.

of the power of words, and also of how this can be twisted to serve this or that viewpoint. It is hard to believe that *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* "innocently" published that headline, combined with Lukaku's and Smalling's photos, without anticipating a widespread reaction, especially in a country where the top professional football league, Serie A, had been plagued with racist incidents all along the season. The newspaper's editor, Ivan Zazzaroni, took the opportunity of the Black Friday of shopping to produce an appealing and provocative front page. Meanwhile, alleging that it was done irrespective of racism as an issue, or even from a racist standpoint as some suggested, would seem arbitrary and far-fetched, to say the least, if not totally implausible. The problem is rather that words are *intrinsically* powerful, often regardless of the intentions behind them, or beyond these intentions, and so are the stereotypes that words can carry. The front page that ran the "Black Friday" headline was complete with an unequivocally anti-racist summary, which described Lukaku and Smalling as players who had "*preso posizioni forti contro il razzismo*" [strongly taken a stand against racism]. In addition, the full article on page 2 of the newspaper, signed by Roberto Perrone, was a clear and unambiguous condemnation of racism, in which Perrone also labelled the authors of the abusive monkey chants in stadia, typically addressed to players of colour, as the "*scemi che fanno 'buu'*" [booing idiots]. The national and international controversy around the Black Friday headline completely overlooked the content of the newspaper in its entirety, creating a "racist episode" that never existed as such.

**The intrinsic power of words (and stereotypes)**

Walter Lippmann devoted an entire part of *Public Opinion*, the seminal book in which he explored how public opinion was formed and influenced, to Stereotypes, arguing that "a stereotype may be so consistently and authoritatively transmitted in each generation from parent to child that it seems almost like a biological fact" (1922, pt. 3). Whether on race, gender or other aspects, stereotypes are extremely "effective", largely in an unconscious way. Even the people who consciously reject the use of stereotypes end up using some anyway, since we all come with the luggage of our culture, and that also penetrates the language we use. Stereotyping helps us categorise what we see, and categorising is a general feature of human nature, including in science. In principle, we could say that stereotypes exist and keep existing because they tend to reflect and simplify the general reality, or at least part of it.

The problem with stereotypes is that they also operate like self-fulfilling prophecies. The use of a given stereotype reinforces the assumptions at its core, regardless of the reality

it refers to. It is but a short step from an oversimplified portray of reality to a prejudice. This is why all individuals should consciously seek to avoid using stereotypes, especially negative ones, and why the media in particular, due to the extended responsibility that comes from informing society about events, have an ethical imperative to do so. Reference is not necessarily being made here to the Black Friday headline, which was used and interpreted, as previously explained, well beyond the actual content of the article and newspaper it came from.

In addition to race-related issues, the use of a stereotypical vocabulary in sports journalism has most typically been investigated with reference to a second subject area, and that is sexism. The representation of an unfair coverage of women's sports in the media, which also encompasses the use of a sexist language, has been ongoing in research since the mid-1980s (Biscomb and Matheson 2019, 262). However, the increase in the media coverage of women's sports over the past few years has gradually led to changes also in the language used in their coverage. As women's sports have grown more mainstream, the language has concurrently become more and more similar to the language used in the coverage of men's sports.[146] Indeed, a novel scholarly approach started to emerge in this respect toward the end of the 2010s. According to Kate Petty and Stacey Pope, who have analysed the coverage of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup in the English media, "we have entered a new age of media coverage of women's football and women's sport", and the two scholars also referred to the emergence of a more positive approach in research work on this topic (2019, 486). The 2015 FIFA Women's

[146] The media coverage of women's sport is not a topic of this thesis, and is only shortly addressed here with reference to the use of language. The above statements about the increase in the media coverage of women's sports, which will be corroborated by some relevant figures in the following pages, and its evolution are also based on the first-hand experience of the European context of the author of this doctoral thesis. Rosarita Cuccoli followed closely the evolution of the media coverage of women's sports in connection with her role as president of the "European Network on Women and Sports" for the European think tank Sport and Citizenship, from 2010 to 2014, as well as a participant in the MARS (Media Against Racism in Sport) project, a joint programme of the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE), upon invitation by the Centre for Media and Information Education (CLEMI) of the French Minister of Education, in 2012. In 2011/2012, more than 1.000 experts in the areas of journalism, media production, media literacy, media ethics and editorial management participated in 15 national encounters, three European encounters and more than 30 cross-media exchanges in the framework of the MARS (Media Against Racism in Sport) programme. The joint EU/CoE MARS programme sought to question the media's ability to include diverse and non-discriminative approaches in the coverage of sports. MARS has continued to exist after that two-year period as an Online Resource Centre, providing material on media, diversity and non-discrimination in the coverage of sports. The MARS knowledge platform is accessible on the Council of Europe portal at https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/mars/default_en.asp (accessed on December 21, 2019).

World Cup in Canada marked the first time women's sport was extensively covered by the media (Stacey Pope 2019). The following edition of the tournament, in 2019, would then register the fastest growth ever in terms of media coverage of a women's sport event.[147] The acceleration in the media coverage of women's sports over the past few years has only started to be addressed by media scholars. Considering the recentness of the transformations, it will be more interesting to wait and examine the studies on the media coverage of women's sports, including the language that is used in the coverage, in a few years from now. This will spare us from dwelling indefinitely on limits and flaws in the coverage that do not match reality any more as they may have been overcome in the meantime.

Lucie Schoch, who has extensively worked on the effect of gender on the work of sports journalists (Schoch and Ohl 2010; Schoch 2011; 2013a; 2013b; 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019), has argued that the gender of the journalist also impacts the language that is used in the coverage.[148] According to Schoch, men and women do not use the same language in covering sports. Male journalists most typically use a technical jargon and focus on techniques and tactics, she argues, whereas female journalists wander in more creative directions "*en adoptant souvent une écriture d'ambiance qui donne une place importante aux aspects «humains»*" [by often adopting a writing *d'ambiance* which gives an important place to « human » aspects] (Schoch 2017a, 77–78). Other scholars have argued that male writers, as compared to female writers, may be keener on using consolidated gender stereotypes (Kian and Hardin 2009; Hardin, Whiteside, and Ash 2014).[149]

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[147] The number of broadcasters that took rights packages for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France rose by 25 percent on Canada 2015 to 62, with the tournament now broadcast in over 200 countries and unprecedented audiences for a women's version of the game (Bassam 2019). In Brazil, where football is almost a religion, the round-of-16 match of the Brazilian team against France registered "the largest domestic audience for a women's soccer game anywhere in history", with more than 35 million people watching the game on Globo TV (ibid.). The coverage of France 2019 in newspapers was also unprecedented for a women's sporting event.

[148] The question of the gender of the sports reporter and how it may impact sports journalism was previously discussed, with reference to the gatekeeping theory and the choice of topics for coverage, in section **2.2.5 A wider framework for gatekeeping studies in sports journalism**.

[149] Abisaid and Li have specifically explored the use of language by male and female print sports journalists on Twitter. See Abisaid, Joseph L., and Bo Li. 2019. "He Said, She Said: An Exploration of Male and Female Print Sports Journalist Tweets, Sports Coverage, and Language Style." *Communication & Sport*, May, 1-25.

### *Creativity and neologisms*

The playful use of words to refer to mass phenomena, such as shopping emblems (Black Friday and other), consumer products, movies and more, is particularly frequent in sports journalism. An above-average dose of humour can often be found starting from the headlines. On January 31, 2017, the Madrid-based sports newspaper *Marca* ran the headline "Special K", accompanied by a photo of the Croatian footballer Mateo Kovačić, a Real Madrid player at the time. "Special K" has long been the brand name for a series of breakfast products, marketed internationally. The sports press is filled with examples like this. While all the press uses appealing headlines to attract readers, the use of creative headlines, similar to the ones mentioned so far, is certainly more present in the coverage of sports (and in tabloids). It is hard to imagine *Le Figaro* in France or *la Repubblica* in Italy featuring headlines of the kind on their front pages. At the very least, they would not do it on a regular basis.

Not only media scholars but also linguists have been investigating creativity and neologisms in sports journalism. Quintero Ramirez et al. (2018) have done it by specifically comparing the use of metaphors across sports newspapers in Spanish, French and English. Interestingly, their study (ibid.) has shown that alongside the obvious linguistic differences, newspapers in these three languages share numbers of similarities in their use of metaphorical expressions to report on sports. Guerrero Salazar has focused on neologisms in sports journalism, in both general-interest and sports-specialised newspapers (2002; 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c).[150] Throughout her work, Guerrero Salazar has indeed identified the playful function of neologisms in the journalistic discourse of the sports press, to which she has also devoted an entire book, entitled *Creatividad y juego en el discurso deportivo de la prensa: aportaciones léxico-semánticas* [Creativity and play in the sports discourse of the press: lexical-semantic contributions] (2018a). The title of one of the book's chapters highlights the "*Riqueza del*

[150] Guerrero Salazar (2018b; 2018c) examined the neologisms in the sports headlines of the Spanish press, both general-interest and specialist sporting newspapers, from 2007 to 2017 (2018b); and more specifically, the nouns that presented the structure "name + -azo/-ada" in the headlines of the main Spanish sports dailies (*Marca*, *As*, *Mundo Deportivo* and *Sport*) from 2003 until 2017 (2018c).

*Lenguaje Deportivo*" [Richness of the sporting language] (ibid., title of chap. 2). In the case of the Spanish press, neologisms are most typically generated by adding certain suffixes to nouns: NOUN + *azo/aza*, *ada*, *mania*, *fobía*, *cracia*, etc. (Guerrero Salazar 2018c, 177). Guerrero Salazar has also explained the function of the "*azo/aza*, *ada*" suffixes in the headlines of Spanish sports newspapers:

> Todos los neologismos formados mediante "NP + -azo/-ada" en los titulares deportivos registrados tienen en común, por un lado, que poseen función estilística, es decir, que tienen su razón de ser en la voluntad de estilo del periodista; se trata de términos de carácter expresivo y/o lúdico, marcadores de un discurso diferenciador y sorprendente que sirve de reclamo, bien para captar la atención, producir extrañamiento o con una finalidad claramente tendenciosa. (2018c, 177)
>
> [All the neologisms formed by means of "NOUN + -azo / -ada" in the headlines of sports (journalism) have in common, on the one hand, a stylistic function, that is, that they have their raison d'être in the style of the journalist; these are terms of an expressive and/or playful nature, the markers of a differentiating and surprising discourse that serves as a claim, either to attract attention, produce estrangement or for a clearly biased purpose].

## *A debate that requires historical contextualisation*

During the 1972 broadcast of an NFL game, sports reporter Howard Cosell said of Mike Adamle, a white player of the Kansas City Chiefs of diminutive stature for NFL standards: "Look at that little monkey run!" (Rielly 2009, 76).[151] Nothing happened. Cosell then used the exact same expression in September 1983, during a *Monday Night Football* telecast, speaking about Redskins player Alvin Garrett, an African-American player (Shapiro 1995; Haskell 2008; Rielly 2009, 76). This time, some ten years later and referred to a black player, Cosell's words generated a wave of criticism, which eventually led to his departure from *Monday Night Football* the following season (Rielly 2009, 76). Gianni Brera, the most influential Italian sports journalist of the 20th century and possibly of all times, also described as "the demiurge" of linguistic creativity in Italian sports journalism (Baudorre, Boucharenc, and Brousse 2005, 113), once depicted a sporting result as "the Tutsi's victory over the pygmy" (P. Brera 1994). It happened in the late

[151] Cosell was previously mentioned in connection with the first use of the "toy department" expression to describe the sports desk (see section **4.1.1 The professional legitimacy of sports journalism**).

1940s, in post- World War II Italy. Such language would be unimaginable in today's sports journalism. Words, jokes and innuendos that were normal and accepted practice in the past are unthinkable today. The use of words has become undeniably more careful, although the debate on sports journalism does not always seem to take this evolution into account. In the case of the Black Friday headline, for example, a tweet on the account of the Fare (Football Against Racism in Europe) network, the European anti-discrimination network in football, read: "The media fuels racism every day".[152] Fare's executive director, Piara Powar, reportedly added: "Would they ever take two white Italian players and say it's 'White Tuesday'? They wouldn't and this is the issue. Why would you pick out two players who are black and highlight their race as a way to build up to the match? It crosses the line of acceptability" (Christenson 2019). We obviously cannot say for a fact that a "White Tuesday" headline would never appear if a "White Tuesday" event of some sort actually existed. In any case, and more importantly, generalising statements like "[t]he media fuels racism every day" are never helpful in assessing the actual state of journalism and in this sense "cross the line of acceptability", to paraphrase Mr. Powar's statement. Statements of the kind actually suggest that bias and stereotypes are not necessarily in sports journalism but can sometimes be in the eyes of its observers.

According to award-winning journalist and former *Sports Illustrated* staff writer Andrew Lawrence (2018), the alleged new language of sports journalism does not constitute an improvement because, in his view, the old ideas are still there and are just being hidden under the blanket of a different language: "The open and direct language of athlete stereotyping has taken on more subtle and nuanced forms. Often it's being trafficked by observers who style themselves as egalitarian and unprejudiced". But this still means that the language of sports journalism has, indeed, evolved. What actually lies behind or beneath words, and what words can provoke should rather be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

[152] Fare (@farenet). 2019. *Twitter*, 5 December 2019, 9.32 AM. https://twitter.com/farenet/status/1202506054518620160?lang=en. Last accessed on February 16, 2020.

### *Simple vs. simplistic*

Simplicity is fundamentally a good thing as it means that something is easy to understand, uncomplicated and straight. "Simplistic" suggests, on the contrary, that something has been overly simplified, and is therefore a pejorative. This distinction is of particular relevance when trying to evaluate the style and language of sports journalism. Sports journalism is *deliberately* popular and simple ("literature for the people", to quote the title of this section 4.2). The large use of play-on-words, metaphors and neologism is part of this effort, and does not necessarily lead to simplistic journalism. Professional reporters are trained and technically equipped to make the difference. Incidentally, the most appalling language and stereotypes around sports can be found in *non-professional* reporting and social media.

The coverage of sports requires the same rigour as the other fields of journalism. Meanwhile, erasing its liveliness in favour of a pretentious form of political correctness would not guarantee quality, while it would quite certainly make it unattractive to most of its followers, and ultimately kill it. The myth-making of athletes, which is typical of the coverage of sports, and the object of the upcoming section 4.2.2, is to be regarded in this perspective.

## 4.2.2 The language of heroes and emotions

> When a sportswriter stops making heroes out of athletes, it's time to get out of the business.
>
> Grantland Rice, as quoted by Ira Berkow (2007, 105)

The semantic specificities of sports journalism are connected with the emotional dimension of sport and fanhood, which sports journalism reproduces and contributes to create. Most people enjoy being sports spectators because they want heroes, and journalists are there to provide some. The above quote is from Grantland Rice, one of the

star sportswriters in the history of American journalism.[153] According to Mark Inabinett, the author of *Grantland Rice and his heroes: the sportswriter as mythmaker in the 1920s*, "Rice saw heroes in athletes" (1994, 1), then the popularity of his nationally-syndicated columns elevated these athletes to popular myths. In his 50-year career in sports journalism, Rice set the standard for the profession in many respects, including with his erudition and inspirational prose. When he travelled to cover sporting events, he reportedly carried a suitcase filled with clothes and a second one filled with books (Berkow 2007, 105–6). Gay Talese, another acclaimed American sports journalist, was also famous for employing literary devices that made heroes out of athletes (Hutchison 2019). It was the case, for example, with Talese's coverage of Floyd Patterson, the heavyweight champion boxer, in the 1950s and 1960s, which has been defined in this sense as a "historical-critical case study" (ibid.). This is how Hutchison has described this particular case of journalistic myth-making in sports:

> By most journalistic standards, Patterson did not reflect qualities that would position the boxer as either an enduring hero for the times or as an agent of history. Yet Talese found Patterson to be highly newsworthy in ways that both enlightened audiences at the time and continue to inform contemporary historians. (Hutchison 2019, 48)

Whether in Rice's, Talese's or present times, the idea of sports journalism as myth-making reflects, to a large extent, the reality of the profession, and one that effectively attracts public and readers. Is journalism, including sports journalism, supposed to create myths? Is it really part of the job description? The obvious answer, "No, it is not", is in fact *not* so obvious. Sport and heroes are worlds that inherently go hand in hand, and that is not new, if we consider that "[s]port portrays modern myths that have been updated from the past" (Horky and Stelzner 2013, 119). The notions of *hero* and *myth* are linked with the deliberate "production" of emotions in sport-related information, to such an extent that even the sports journalist may become a sort of hero:

> En este marco, el periodista deportivo se ha convertido en un héroe contemporáneo que transforma el énfasis y la pasión del campo deportivo en magia cultural, y además busca

[153] Rice's quote is drawn from: Berkow, Ira. 2007. *Red: A Biography of Red Smith*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (p. 105). More on Grantland Rice can be found in section **3.3.3 Historical overview in U.S. society** in this thesis.

> el diapasón de las emociones de los aficionados hasta estallar en un mundo de ilusión y arte capaz de atraer el favor del público en estaciones, aeropuertos, fuentes y plazas. (Castañón Rodríguez 2006)
>
> [In this setting, the sports journalist has become a contemporary hero that transforms the emphasis and passion of the sports field into cultural magic, and also seeks the diapason of the fans' emotions to burst into a world of illusion and art, capable of attracting the public favour at stations, airports, fountains and squares].

The analysis conducted thus far has implicitly, and sometimes explicitly suggested that these dimensions – hero, myth, and emotions – are neither detrimental nor undesirable in the journalistic coverage of sports. After all, the emotional dimension is what primarily attracts about sports. As simply put by Boyle (2013, 89), "[i]t is the ability of sport to connect with the emotional, often rather than the rationale element within us that makes it so compelling". Nevertheless, the emphasis on emotions in news coverage has long and widely been regarded as a major shortcoming. Horky and Stelzner have referred to what they call "the emotional trap" in the sports journalism field:

> Sport – with its highly affective content and its large degree of personal involvement – provokes an emphasis on emotions. Instead of educating the viewer with neutral analysis, results and events are being presented with a magnifying glass on sentiment (such as in flash interviews) or with a lack of distance. These stereotypes lead to gray areas with regards to the journalistic norms of separating facts from opinion. The result is sports journalism that is full of clichés and manipulated by 'meaningful' images. (Horky and Stelzner 2013, 125)

Perry Parks (2019a) has conducted a comprehensive study of the evolving role of emotions and "human interest" in U.S. journalism history. Based on the analysis of 75 U.S. journalism textbooks published between 1894 to 2016, Parks has found that "[w]hereas news and human interest were nearly synonymous in turn-of-the-20th-century textbooks, the two concepts were soon separated to facilitate the erasure of feeling and emotion from the most significant news events of the day" (2019a, 1228). As a consequence of news having been "stripped of affective appeal and emotional entry points" (ibid., 1241), which Parks describes as the "unnatural split" (ibid., 1228), audiences have ended up mirroring the same detachment from public affairs as journalists, resulting in reduced civic engagement, Parks argue. His conclusions and suggestions for future journalism studies on this aspect are exemplified in this passage:

> By historicizing the discursive split of human interest from significant news, this study might support a reintegration of affective presentation and substantive news in journalistic practice and research emphasis. Journalists today need not be bound by traditions codified a century ago in a different epistemological era for an emerging mass media with unique commercial affordances and demands that no longer exist. (Parks 2019a, 1242)

In another article, Parks (2019b) has advocated a "humanistic turn for a more ethical journalism", from the title of the article, and has called journalists "to reorient themselves from detached, data-driven social scientists toward caring, storytelling humanists [as this] might change journalists' relationship with publics in ways we cannot imagine in a world where basic reporting is so far removed from basic human truths" (ibid., 14).[154]

On a similar note, Grabe et al. (2017, 907–8) have highlighted the growing number of studies that may lead to "question the veneration of cold, hard facts as the way to engage citizens with the world they live in [and the] idea that an emotional charge strips a news story from its information value". Grabe et al. consider that personalisation "may make issues salient in ways that cold, hard facts do not and cannot" (ibid.), and highlight "the civic engagement potential of affect-centered news stories" (ibid., 922).[155] The title of the article in question meaningfully suggests "Putting a Human Face on Cold, Hard Facts […]" (Grabe et al. 2017).

The aforementioned studies (Parks 2019a; 2019b; Grabe et al. 2017) point to the positive role of emotions in news reporting with specific reference to political and civic engagement. It could be argued that the role of emotions in sports reporting, and how this enhances the audience's involvement, is self-evident and anything but underestimated. In

[154] The full reference is: Parks, Perry. 2019. "Toward a Humanistic Turn for a More Ethical Journalism." *Journalism*, December, 1–17.

[155] As conceptualised in their article (Grabe et al. 2017), "personalisation" refers to a reporting style that includes first-hand testimony from people directly involved in an issue – in addition to the mere facts and expert testimony of the hard news format – in such an affective way that is likely to generate emotion in the audience. The full article reference is: Grabe, Maria Elizabeth, Mariska Kleemans, Ozen Bas, Jessica Gall Myrick, and Kim Minchul. 2017. "Putting a Human Face on Cold, Hard Facts: Effects of Personalizing Social Issues on Perceptions of Issue Importance." *International Journal of Communication* 11: 907–29.

reality, areas for improvement in this respect exist also in sports journalism, and notably in the coverage of the socially relevant issues on which this thesis is focused.

Using emotions also in the coverage of sport-related topics of social importance, and not just in describing the sports myths and heroes of the day, could be of particular help to raise awareness of these topics, as is likely to make these topics more reader-friendly and attract more public.

As summed up by Neveu (2017, 1298), "[u]nderstanding of the most subjective experiences of individuals and groups—the emotional dimensions of social life—can result in meaningful knowledge of social facts". And regarding how to do it, for the coverage of sport-related topics of social importance, reporters should ultimately keep in mind the recommendations of media ethicists Stephen J. A. Ward (2010), who suggested that "the emotions that motivate reporters need to be tested and channeled by the desire to be objective – the desire to verify, and to base stories on facts, expert knowledge, varying perspectives, and historical context". Ward called it "a humanistic journalism that combines reason and emotion" (ibid.).[156]

### 4.2.3 National identity in media sports

> Nessuna istituzione mette in giuoco le legittime ambizioni nazionali quanto lo sport. Esso sotto la forma la più cortese, la più amichevole, riunisce tutte le rivalità eccitando una curiosità immensa nell'animo di tutti.
>
> Eugenio Camillo Costamagna (1896)[157]

The above quote is drawn from the editorial that Eugenio Camillo Costamagna contributed to the inaugural issue of *Gazzetta dello Sport* on April 3, 1896. Sport plays

[156] Florence Le Cam and Denis Ruellan have explored the role of emotions in the journalists' choice of their profession, and how emotions give meaning to their work in a book entitled *Emotions de Journalistes: Sel et Sens du Métier* (2017).

[157] [Tr.: No institution puts legitimate national ambitions into play as much as sport. In the most courteous, most friendly form, it brings together all the rivalries, exciting an immense curiosity in everyone's mind]. The article from which this quote is drawn was signed by "Magno", a pseudonym that Costamagna often used to sign his articles. Costamagna was the co-founder of *Gazzetta dello Sport* in 1896, together with Eliso Rivera.

an important role in forging and reinforcing national identity. This was true at the end of the 19th century, when Costamagna wrote so, as it is today. Sport's vocation to boost national identity is however combined with its capacity to overcome cultural divides – for example, when the child from a wealthy family plays in the same team as a child refugee. This inherent blend of national and international, local and global, may deserve even more attention in the globalised world we now live in, and the language of sports journalism often determines how the scale is balanced.

Arguing that sport has the power to cross boundaries (racial, cultural, political and so forth) may sound exceedingly rhetoric, even romantic, especially if we take it face value, in an orthodoxically functionalist perspective (on this and other paradigms, see section **3.1.4 The social impact of sport**). Nelson Mandela's words about sport having "the power to change the world [and] the power to unite people in a way that little else does", from his speech at the inaugural Laureus World Sports Awards in Montecarlo in 2000, is most often cited as the quintessential outline of this philosophy ("Celebrating the Legacy of Our Patron on Mandela Day" 2019). Regardless of our philosophical credo or theoretical perspective, one of the positive potentialities of sport lies indeed in its capacity to unite people. We can even look at this question from a purely technical point of view. Some sports have rules that are difficult to understand outside of the cultures where they were developed, but in a considerable number of cases, the basics of the game can be grasped everywhere, irrespective of the language and geographical origin of the players or spectators involved. Bellamy has described this feature as sport's "international literacy factor" (2009, 72).

For Rowe (2011), sport has played a crucial role in the globalisation process at large. In his view, "[s]port is no mere bystander in the process – indeed, it can be suggested that it represents a domain where globalization is at its most advanced" (Rowe 2013b, 22). Today, the most powerful and popular sports undeniably have a global dimension. Clastres and Dietschy, in their study on the history of the sport-society-culture interconnection in post- 19th century France, have identified the transition phase "from mass participation to globalisation" in the period from 1981 to 2006 (2006, chap. 7). In

2020, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, with its wave of cancelled sporting events all over the world, has further highlighted the global dimension of today's sports, and in this case, the price that sport may have to pay because of it. "Globalisation turned sport into a cultural-commercial behemoth. This global pandemic has shown, in the starkest terms, that what globalisation giveth to sport, it can just as easily taketh away", Rowe argued (2020). This particular period will be discussed further in chapter **8. Post-Scriptum: the 2020 coronavirus crisis and sports coverage in the absence of sports**. The media have played a key role in the process toward the globalisation of sports. Rowe has described "[t]he sport–nation–communication triad [as] a crucial precursor to sport having any claims to be part of globalizing culture" (2013b, 23). Boyle, Rowe and Whannel (2010, 252) have emphasised that "[s]ince its transformation by television, the major sports have acquired a globalized exposure".

While acknowledging the global dimension of sports, we should at the same time "avoid slipping into a homogenization thesis", as suggested by Maguire (1999, 20).[158] After all, the archetypical global sporting competition, that is the Olympic Games, sees athletes compete against each other while representing their respective *nations*.[159] Furthermore, in the midst of globalisation, the media design the majority of sports contents so as to appeal first to a local audience, as they are going to be sold to a local public anyway – and this is even more the case for the press (Vincent and Hill 2013, 405). Despite the global nature of today's sports, or we could simply say *alongside* this broader global dimension, national identity remains a key element to consider when examining sports, in general, or specifically sport-related media contents. In Mauro's view (2020, 1), "[t]hroughout the 20th century, the growth of international sport events as media

[158] Maguire's work also explores the changing nature of sport in relation to globalisation. See Maguire, Joseph A. 1999. *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations*. Cambridge, UK : Malden, MA: Polity Press ; Blackwell Publishers.

[159] There have occasionally been cases, in the history of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, of athletes participating as Independent Olympians without representing any country. Reasons for this have ranged from political transition to suspension of the respective National Olympic Committees, international sanctions, compassion and other reasons. In 2016, Fehaid Al-Deehani made Olympic history by becoming the first athlete to win gold as a neutral after his country, Kuwait, was banned from Rio 2016 by decision from the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s Executive Board. The IOC provisionally lifted the suspension of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee in 2018, and then fully lifted it in 2019.

spectacles has provided one of the most powerful tools for the projection of national identities [and] traditional media, such as newspapers and private and public broadcasters, have been instrumental in this process". For Rowe, "the nation–globalization question remains central to any analytical understanding of communication and sport" (2013b, 23). Incidentally, the ongoing relevance of national identity in sports also helps explain the phenomenon of myth-making in sports (discussed in section **4.2.2 The language of heroes and emotions**), mostly carried out by and through the media, and through which sports champions typically become national heroes.[160] National identity is also a relevant issue when we investigate the problem of stereotypes in the media coverage of sports (discussed in section **4.2.1 Playing with words**). The process of "othering" – that is the binary division of people into opposite categories ("them" vs. "us") – which accompanies the sense of national identity, largely relies on pre-existing stereotypes, and sports, including some sports journalists, naturally lean toward binary opposites (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019, 45).

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to explore the role that national identity plays in the media's determination of what becomes news as well as how national identity impacts the style and language that is used in the coverage.

It is to be noted that the discussion here focuses on "national identity" as opposed to "nationalism", the latter bearing a negative connotation. National identity simply suggests the presence of cultural identifiers. By contrast, the term "nationalism", which in principle could also be used neutrally to refer to shared attributes (language, religion and other traditions), is in fact largely identified with an extreme form of devotion to the nation, often associated to undesirable developments such as aggressive conservative movements, racism (white nationalism, for example) and separatist movements (the Scots, the Basques etc.). Defining the broader linguistic, philosophical and political significance of nationalism would certainly exceed the scope of this thesis. A short

[160] The public perception of elite athletes on the basis of their nationality has been examined by Jan Haut, Freya Gassmann, Eike Emrich, Tim Meyer, and Christian Pierdzioch (2019) in an article entitled "Heroes at Home, Suspects Abroad? National and International Perceptions of Elite-Sports Success".

digression is needed, however, to rule out the alleged difference between "nationalism" and the sister notion of "patriotism", as this distinction has been evoked by some scholars with specific reference to the media coverage of sports. Bradshaw and Minogue, for example, have observed, with regard to the broadcasting of Britain's national teams, that "the big four sports broadcasters – BBC, ITV, Sky Sports and BT Sport – have traditionally been patriotic rather than nationalistic [reflecting] pride in the nation's sporting achievements without promoting a sense of superiority towards other nations" (2019, 38). Their description is related to broadcasters, and this thesis is about the press, but the argument that Bradshaw and Minogue raise is pertinent and needs to be elucidated. It is generally true that professional journalists, and regardless of the type of media they work for, appeal to national pride in sports reporting without demeaning the other nations, thereby showing the balance that good journalism requires. Nevertheless, the claimed distinction between nationalism and patriotism is not necessarily one. Distinguishing between "nationalism" and "patriotism" does not help because, in the first place, too a large group of people use them as synonymous. One would imagine that a good dictionary can easily sort out the problem, but it is not the case. As explained by a dedicated post in Merriam-Webster dictionary's "Word History" section, "it's more complicated than 'patriotism' good; 'nationalism' bad", and the meanings attributed to these two words have actually evolved across history ("The Difference Between 'Patriotism' and 'Nationalism'" n.d.). Constitutional nationalism expert Jared A. Goldstein, in an article meaningfully entitled "Is There Really a Difference Between Patriotism and Nationalism?" (2018), has also tried to identify the alleged differences between the two notions. The article followed a declaration by French President Emmanuel Macron on November 11, 2018, in which Macron stated that "nationalism is a betrayal of patriotism", in contrast with U.S. President Donald Trump's "America First" approach (2018). Goldstein concluded that "[a]lthough it may be comforting to think of our own feelings of loyalty to the state as falling within the healthy range of patriotism and not veering into the excessive devotion of nationalism, the distinction between the two still proves elusive" (ibid.) Goldstein summarised the key problem in a nutshell: "but how much devotion to one's nation is too much?", he wondered (ibid.). To conclude this short digression, neither "nationalism" nor "patriotism" will be used in this thesis. The analysis

will stick with the role of "national identity" in the media coverage of sports, while generally avoiding words with the suffix "ism", which most typically denote a doctrine or cause.

National identity impacts the way journalists cover sports because national sentiments can be used to heighten the emotional intensity of the description. And prior to the stage of "how" to cover the news, national identity may impact the initial selection of what will become news, or gatekeeping process, as nationalistic orientations may serve more or less consciously as a beacon on the way to attract and excite the public. Giving priority to national athletes and teams as opposed to foreign subjects in the coverage is a first way by which national identity can impact the gatekeeping process, and one that some scholars have even classified among the "dangers in sports journalism" (Horky et al. 2009; Horky and Stelzner 2013). Historically, the preference for national sports actors has progressively decreased as a share of the total coverage, following the advent of television, of the new media, and the ever-rising number of international tournaments. All these elements have contributed to shift the focus of attention toward a geographically broader sports arena. The national focus, however, has certainly not disappeared. Incidentally, it is legitimate to ask ourselves to what extent the process of internationalisation of the topics is inevitable or even desirable in the coverage of sports. One of the reasons for the popularity of sport is that it allows people to identify themselves in a team, a group of fans and indeed, a nation and its culture. Following sports fosters belongingness, which is a feeling that positively impacts self-esteem and well-being. The fact that national identity continues to be a relevant aspect in the media coverage of sports is in this sense appropriate and, to a certain extent, desirable. In this respect, Bradshaw and Minogue argue that globalised sports media have contributed to make sport "a vehicle for destabilising traditional 'national' sporting identities" (2019, 37). The decline of local journalism in most industrialised countries over the past few decades have also and concurrently weakened the sense of community, which used to be reinforced, among other things, by the coverage of local sports teams and competitions in the local media.

These topics can rarely be found in newspapers with nationwide circulation.[161] Rowe has engaged in a stimulating "imaginative exercise", as he has called it, in order to visualise what a "postnational" sport would look like:

> Correspondingly, sport fans would need to be deterred from national identification through sport. This shift would have many consequences, such as the discouragement of national insignia, flags, songs, and any other displays of nationalism at sporting contests. Diasporic sport fans turning back to countries of origin for social subjectivity sustenance would need to seek extranational modes of identification. (2013b, 23–24).[162]

## *A "national identity identifier" for the social analysis of sports*

Beyond the national-vs.-international and local-vs.-global divides, this thesis suggests an additional way to examine the relevance of national identity in the media coverage of sports. The recommended path is linked with the new matrix of "Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports" (see **Table 4**), suggested previously in chapter 3. By scanning if only rapidly the list of categories in that matrix, one can detect several themes that are somehow connected with questions of national or local identities. A new table (**Table 5**) has therefore been devised that gathers together the Topics, extracted from **Table 4**, which reveal such connection. Within each relevant Topic, the Sub-topics that more directly reveal such connection are highlighted in bold:

[161] The decline of local journalism and the question of its effects on local identities and a sense of community have been evoked, with reference to the British case, by Alice Hutton in a post for the BBC website, entitled "The death of the local newspaper?" (2018), as well as by Bradshaw and Minogue (2019, 37) within their analysis of the impact of nationalism and politics on sports journalism.

[162] Rowe's cited article developed out of a paper entitled ''Imagining Post-National Sport'', which he presented at the "Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference" in Paris in July 2012 (Rowe 2013b, 27).

***Table 5**: National identity identifier in the social analysis of sports*

| TOPICS (Sport and / for …) | SUB-TOPICS |
|---|---|
| **Development cooperation** | Construction and management of sport infrastructures in developing countries |
| | **Intercultural dialogue** |
| | Job creation in developing countries |
| | **Peace-building through sport** |
| **Fandom** | **Camaraderie** |
| | **Fan violence** |
| | Fans' solidarity |
| | **Identity** |
| | **Nationalism** |
| | Political tribalism |
| | Stress relief |
| | Tickets to sports events: availability and prices |
| | Traditions and connections through school, alma mater, district, hometown, state, country |
| **Globalisation** | Elite migrant athletes |
| | **Evolving geography of sports** |
| | **Global audiences** |
| | **Internationalisation of club ownership** |
| | **Internationalisation of teams and leagues** |
| **Labour rights** | Exploitation of underage players |
| | **Internationalisation of athletes' careers and contracts** |
| | Labour rights at sporting infrastructure projects |
| | Moral and sexual harassment of athletes |
| | Trafficked players |
| **Racism** | **Cyber-racism (sport-related)** |
| | **Discrimination and exclusion from decision-making roles** |
| | **Display of racist banners and symbols** |
| | **Racial abuse from other players** |
| | **Racist chants and insults** |
| | **Sports initiatives against racism** |
| **Social integration and socialisation** | Availability of sports facilities |
| | Elderly citizens |
| | **Intercultural integration** |
| | **Migrants** |
| | Poverty and social mobility |
| | **Refugees** |
| **Violence** | Athletes' domestic violence |
| | Athletes' violence on the pitch |
| | Emotional abuse by coaches |
| | Hazing |
| | **Terrorism** |

Seven Topics, or broad categories, out of the overall 21 Topics enumerated in the broader taxonomy of **Table 4** are concerned, and 21 Sub-topics in total within these categories. It means that questions of national identity are, more or less directly, part of the picture when covering a considerable number of socially-relevant sport-related topics. In some cases, for example "Intercultural integration", the link is quite obvious and apparent, while in other cases the relevance of national identity on and from media coverage is more implicit, and often unconscious. The suggested "National identity identifier" in **Table 5** could operate as a practical highlighter in this respect. Table 5 also shows that national identity is attached to both items that carry a rather positive connotation, like Camaraderie, and items that carry an intrinsically negative connotation, like Fan Violence. The analytical tool that is proposed with **Table 5** is therefore meant to encourage a more neutral approach to the study of national identity in media sports, in that it shows that national identity is not just a natural path to, and even less a synonymous of, xenophobia and racism. National identity is attached to a much wider range of topics and connotations.

To conclude this section, it seems important to remind, if only shortly, what should probably be obvious. Featuring national identity in the media coverage of sports can indeed turn into a potentially catastrophic and socially irresponsible element, whenever this consists in using a language and style that hostilely present and debase the "others". To quote Bairner's study of nationalism and globalisation in sport (2001, xi), "[s]port and nationalism are arguably two of the most emotive issues in the modern world. Both inspire intense devotion and frequently lead to violence". Reporters should always bear in mind that national partisanship and aggressive dialectic in the coverage of sports may inspire inconsiderate acts by some readers. The emotional charge that underlies the combination of sport and nationalism must be handled with care. A "shortage in care" can most typically be found in social media accounts, and by ordinary citizens (i.e. non-journalists). Cases of this kind are rare(r) in the mainstream media and by professional journalists. Circumstances in which professional journalists convey detrimental

messages, usually in a less blatant fashion thanks to experience and a skilful use of the language, exist but do not seem to represent the rule.

### 4.2.4 Writers in sports journalism

In the North American context, sports journalists are generally referred to as "sportswriters". In other geographical contexts, including Europe and this section of the thesis, the definition of "writer" is rather reserved for authors of literature. The question can quickly become tortuous. Historically, numbers of writers around the world, intended as authors of literature, have put sport at centre stage in their books – but that does not make them "sportswriters", which is something else. Meanwhile, sports journalists (or sportswriters, if we are to call them so) have often and proudly produced literary work as well. To make matters even more intricate, and as will be seen in this section, writers of literature, known and recognised as such, have often worked as journalists, or specifically *sports* journalists, during part of their career or on an occasional basis. Writing is obviously the walkway that links all of the above. After all, as reminded by McQuail, "journalism is only one of many different genres of writing with a bearing on the contemporary reality of society that were stimulated by the invention of printing and publishing" (2013, 11).

The sport-related work of famous writers, intended here as recognised authors of literature, is a promising segment within the analysis of the language of sports journalism, for at least two sets of reasons. Firstly, it is a significant part of the history of sports journalism in a good number of countries. Secondly, it sheds light on the aesthetical dimension of journalism, notably sports journalism, as perfectly illustrated by Guerrero Salazar:

> Frecuentemente los medios de comunicación usan el lenguaje con una finalidad estética y no meramente informativa, sobre todo determinados ámbitos, como el periodismo de opinión, la publicidad, las crónicas deportivas, etc. En el fondo, lo que subyace es un deseo de seducir, de cautivar. Esta intención se da de lleno en el lenguaje deportivo, defendido por algunos y denostado por muchos, dado que las peculiaridades de su discurso lo sitúan en la frontera entre lo erróneo y lo creativo. (2002, 365)

> [Frequently, the media use language for an aesthetic and not merely informative purpose, especially in certain areas, such as opinion journalism, advertising, sports reports, etc. What lies deep down is a desire to seduce, to captivate. This intention is fully present in the language of sports, defended by some and reviled by many, given that the peculiarities of its discourse place it on the borderline between the erroneous and the creative]

Whether it be the drama of competition or the beauties and suffering of the body in motion, sport has recurrently served as a propitious playground for literature. From the *Iliad* and *Odissey* in epic poetry to Nick Hornby describing his own relationship with football, in his celebrated book *Fever Pitch: A Fan's Life* (1992), physical activity and sports have persistently been featured in literature.[163] Sometimes sport serves as a background theme to contextualise the story while in other cases, it is the very subject around which the whole story is constructed. Reading sports literature and about sport *in* literature can be good ways to apprehend how sport and society have evolved over time.[164] Susan J. Bandy (2016) has observed that in the 1980s, sport historians started including creative texts, predominantly novels, in the writing of sport history. In Bandy's view, the use of literature for this purpose should actually go further, by moving from an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspective to a *transdisciplinary* perspective that engages the shared knowledge of sport history, on the one hand, and sport literature, on the other (ibid.). Literature has been a recurrent presence in the world of sports journalism since novelists and poets have often contributed journalism pieces on sports. Some have even started their writing activity as sports journalists, turning into full-time novelists only at a later stage in their career. There have also been reverse cases of sports journalists who concurrently wrote novels and poems, and not necessarily about sports. We can say that the interconnection between literature and journalism around sport is definitely a promising path toward a broader representation of sport, which is after all the *fil rouge* of this thesis.

[163] Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* also formed the basis for two films, in 1997 and 2005.
[164] The use of sport-related literature to get a better understanding of society was previously evoked in this thesis, in section **2.2.5 A wider framework for gatekeeping studies in sports journalism**, with reference to Alan Bairner's suggestion to utilise fiction as a source for sports sociology and "novelists as gatekeepers" (Bairner 2017).

It has been argued that the mass media are ideally equipped to present the most spectacular sides of sports whereas literature can portray the human and existential dimensions of sport (Boroni 2012). This thesis contends that the complementarity between literature and journalism can actually go further, and that mass media are also ideally equipped to portray the human and existential dimensions of sport, with a potential to reach a much larger audience than literature. It is no accident that some of the most cited quotes in sports journalism were contributed by writers (e.g. Pier Paolo Pasolini) or by journalists with a parallel activity in fiction and non-fiction writing (e.g. Gianni Brera).

In **Britain**, one of the best-known examples of writers in sports journalism is probably that of Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), the creator of Sherlock Holmes, who served as a reporter for the *Daily Mail* at the first London Olympics in 1908. Conan Doyle famously reported on Dorando Pietri's unfortunate marathon race on July 24, 1908. Pietri, an Italian long-distance runner, led a good deal of the race. Half his rivals had given up long before. Pietri was the first to enter the White City Stadium in West London for the finish of the race, but due to extreme fatigue and dehydration, he suddenly took the wrong path. The umpires redirected him and also helped him when he felt down, four times. He did eventually finish the race first, but U.S. officials filed a protest and Petri was disqualified because he had received outside assistance. John "Johnny" Hayes, the American runner who had been the second to enter the stadium, was declared the winner. The following day, Queen Alexandra, the wife of King Edward VII, gave Pietri a gilded silver cup as a compensation for the disappointment of missing the first spot. If Pietri became the real hero of a race he had not won, that was also due to Conan Doyle's description of the runner's gestures, in his report for the Daily Mail on July 25:

> He trotted for a few exhausted yards like a man galvanised into life; then the trot expired into a slow crawl, so slow that the officials could scarcely walk slow enough to keep beside him. […] The Italian's great performance can never be effaced from our record of sport, be the decision of the judges what it may. (Conan Doyle 1908)

Conan Doyle, touched by Pietri's story, also launched a fundraiser to help the runner start a business in Carpi, in Italy's Emilia Romagna, where Pietri grew up. The writer contributed the initial five pounds of the fundraiser.

In **France**, literary tradition has often operated as a key source of inspiration for sports journalism. Souanef has placed this aspect within "*l'exception du «journalisme à la française», à savoir l'héritage de la litterature*" [the exception of journalism «*à la française*», namely the heritage of literature] (2019, 39), and has highlighted the influence of the process of dramatisation, typical of literature, on journalism about sports:

> Des écrivains comme Maurice Barrès, Guy de Maupassant, Émile Zola, Jean Cocteau ou Henri de Montherlant s'adonnent à ce nouveau jeu d'écriture. Leurs contributions ne font qu'instituer la métaphore et l'emphase en tant que registres légitimes de l'écriture journalistique sur le sport. (Souanef 2019, 40)
>
> [Writers like Maurice Barrès, Guy de Maupassant, Émile Zola, Jean Cocteau and Henri de Montherlant indulge in this new writing game. Their contributions institute metaphor and emphasis as legitimate registers of the journalistic writing about sports]

A frequently cited quote from Émile Zola shows how French intellectuals could be among the leading advocates of physical activity of their time:

> Vraiment, nous avons bien besoin de gymnases! Nous vivons dans les laboratoires et les cabinets d'études. Nous sommes malades de progrès. Il y a hypertrophie du cerveau, les nerfs se développent au détriment des muscles. On meurt dans notre air. Là est le danger. Il faut arracher l'écolier à son traité d'algèbre et lui faire porter des poids comme un portefaix. Si nous ne voulons arriver fous à la vérité, débiles comme des enfants, et les yeux brulés par l'étude, nous devons rouvrir les gymnases de Sparte et chercher l'équilibre du sang et des nerfs, la santé physique et intellectuelle dans la culture de la chair. (Zola 1872)[165]
>
> [We really need gymnasia! We live in laboratories and study rooms. We are sick with progress. There is brain hypertrophy, the nerves develop at the expense of the muscles. We die in our own air. Therein lies the danger. We must tear the schoolboy out of his algebra treaty and make him carry weights like a porter. If we do not want to arrive mad to the truth, as stupid as children, with the eyes burned by the study, we must reopen the gymnasia of Sparta and seek the balance of blood and nerves, physical and intellectual health in the culture of the flesh.]

[165] Quoted in Schott, Ben. 2004. *Schott's Sport Miscellany*. London: Bloomsbury.

Bauer (2011), who has studied the French sports press as a literary object, has observed that in the 1920s, many French writers were inspired by and explicitly cited sports newspapers, or the sports sections of the general press, in their own fictional work (ibid., 556).

According to Souanef (2019), however, the situation in France has most often been characterised by multiple approaches, notably a dialectic between a creative/literary approach and a purist approach, opposed to such liberty. This variety is also reflected in the diversity of curricula of the main schools of journalism. Souanef (2019, 103) cites the anecdote of a paper that a student wrote at the Paris-based *Centre de Formation des Journalistes* (CFJ), which the school's director characterised as "*très Équipe*" [very Équipe-like] – implying exceedingly passionate and lyric. The CFJ, whose educational offer did comprise a dedicated Sport specialty, apparently wished that its students would distance themselves from the literary inclinations of a certain French tradition in sports journalism. The precise date of the incident is not specified in Souanef's book but from the overall description, it appears to have happened in the 1970s, early 1980s at the latest. During the same period, explains Souanef (ibid., chap. 5), other schools of journalism opted for not offering a Sport journalism specialty at all.

According to Boyle, Rowe and Whannel (2010), the phenomenon of writing about sports "at the interface between journalism and other forms of writing" has been especially present in the **United States**, with major writers contributing as sports reporter and essayists, like Paul Gallico, Ernest Hemingway, A.J. Liebling, Budd Schulberg, Norman Mailer and George Plimpton (ibid., 250). With regard to Hemingway, whose interest in sport is rather well-known, Morris and Bauer have written that "[i]t is hard to talk about how modern writers have used sport – as theme, motif, subject matter, or allusion – without coming to terms with Hemingway" (2019, 251). Bauer has also described how Hemingway mingled with Parisian culture through sport at the time he was in France's capital city, as represented in Hemingway's *A Movable Feast* (1964):

> Hemingway's interest in Parisian sport […] should be considered as an opportunity in his development as a writer. In this way, he was able to step into French cultural life, meet modern and sporting poets, box with his American counterparts as they talked about literature, and define the character of his figures while he polished his writing style. (Bauer 2019, 254)

As for Norman Mailer, his description for *Life* magazine of the boxing match between Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) and Joe Frazier at the New York City's Madison Square Garden on March 8, 1971, is one of the most cited examples of novelists reporting on sports. Mailer's feature story on the match made the cover page of the March 16, 1971 issue of the magazine, which read: "Norman Mailer on the fight". Mailer's article inside the magazine was entitled "Ego", and this passage from that article showcases the use of sports reporting to describe society and a culture:

> What kills us about a.k.a. Cassius Clay is that the disagreement is inside us. He is *fascinating* — attraction and repulsion must be in the same package. So, he is obsessive. The more we don't want to think about him, the more we are obliged to. There is a reason for it. He is America's Greatest Ego. (Mailer 1971, 18F)

Simon Kuper has interestingly written about American writers "taking sports seriously", some of whom through journalism:

> American writers have always taken sports seriously. Ernest Hemingway, Damon Runyon, Ring Lardner, Norman Mailer and Jack Kerouac all worked as sports journalists. Hemingway once got $30,000 from *Sports Illustrated* for a 2,000-word piece on bullfighting. Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud and Don DeLillo set novels in sport. Richard Ford actually wrote a novel called *The Sportswriter*.[166] (Kuper 2013)

## *Focus on Italian writers*

In Italy, we can also say that the history of the intersection between literature and journalism has been characterised by a good number of writers taking sports seriously, including through journalism. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) is best known as a writer, poet and film director. In fact, Pasolini also worked as a journalist all along his career,

[166] Richard Ford's novel *The Sportswriter* (1995) is evoked more extensively in section **2.2.5 A wider framework for gatekeeping studies in sports journalism**.

including a long-standing collaboration with *Corriere della Sera*. His articles also appeared in *La Stampa*, *L'Unità*, *Paese Sera* and other newspapers, in addition to numbers of magazines and academic journals. Pasolini's journalism pieces largely focused on literature and politics but were not limited to these realms. Pasolini liked sports, especially football, and was himself a good football player. He rooted for Bologna F.C. 1909. Born in Bologna, Pasolini spent his high school and university years in the city, the capital of Emilia-Romagna, in Northern Italy. "*Il Bologna*", which would win seven Serie A titles between 1924 and 1964, among other national and international tournaments, was at the highest point of its history at the time. During an interview with Enzo Biagi, Pasolini was asked what he would have liked to have become if he had not worked in literature and cinema, and Pasolini answered: "*Un bravo calciatore. Dopo la letteratura e l'eros, per me il football è uno dei grandi piaceri*" (Pasolini 1973) [A good football player. After literature and Eros, football is for me one of the greatest pleasures]. During the same interview, Pasolini described the time spent playing football in Bologna as the best years of his life:

> I pomeriggi che ho passato a giocare a pallone sui Prati di Caprara (giocavo anche sei-sette ore di seguito, ininterrottamente: ala destra, allora, e i miei amici, qualche anno dopo, mi avrebbero chiamato lo "Stukas": ricordo dolce bieco) sono stati indubbiamente i più belli della mia vita. Mi viene quasi un nodo alla gola, se ci penso. Allora, il Bologna era il Bologna più potente della sua storia: quello di Biavati e Sansone, di Reguzzoni e Andreolo (il re del campo), di Marchesi, di Fedullo e Pagotto. Non ho mai visto niente di più bello degli scambi tra Biavati e Sansone. (Pasolini 1973)
>
> [The afternoons I spent playing football on the Prati di Caprara (I could play up to six-seven hours in a row, uninterruptedly: right wing at the time, and a few years later my friends would call me "the Stukas": sweet, sinister memory) were undoubtedly the best years of my life. I almost have a lump in the throat if I think about it. Back then, Bologna was the most powerful Bologna in its history: that of Biavati and Sansone, Reguzzoni and Andreolo (the king of the field), of Marchesi, Fedullo and Pagotto. I have never seen anything more beautiful than the passes of the ball between Biavati and Sansone].[167]

Pasolini wrote extensively about sports. According to Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro (1992), as an experimenter of new and different languages, Pasolini contributed to the

[167] "Prati di Caprara" is a former military area of Bologna, not far from the city centre, which also served as the first football field of the newly-founded Bologna Football Club in 1909. The nickname "Stukas" refers to the speed of the Junkers 87, or Stuka, a bomber aircraft used by the German Lutwaffe from 1937 to 1945, including in the first half of World War II.

development of a creative and contemporary language also to describe sports.[168] By applying the codes of literature to football, Pasolini conceptualised sport as a semiotic system, as from the following excerpt from the Italian daily newspaper *Il Giorno*:

> Il gioco del football è un "sistema di segni"; è, cioè, una lingua, sia pure non verbale […] Ogni lingua si articoli in varie sotto lingue, in possesso ciascuna di un sottocodice. Ebbene, anche per la lingua del calcio si possono fare distinzioni del genere; anche il calcio possiede dei sottocodici, dal momento in cui, da puramente strumentale, diventa espressivo. Ci può essere un calcio come linguaggio fondamentalmente prosastico e un calcio come linguaggio fondamentalmente poetico […] Bulgarelli gioca un calcio in prosa: egli è un "prosatore realista"; Riva gioca un calcio in poesia: egli è un "poeta realista". Corso gioca un calcio in poesia: ma non è un "poeta realista": è un poeta un po' maudit, extravagante. Rivera gioca un calcio in prosa: ma la sua è una prosa poetica, da "elzeviro". Anche Mazzola è un elzevirista, che potrebbe scrivere sul *Corriere della Sera*: ma è più poeta di Rivera; ogni tanto egli interrompe la prosa, e inventa lì per lì due versi folgoranti. Si noti bene che tra la prosa e la poesia non faccio distinzione di valore: la mia è una distinzione puramente tecnica. (Pasolini 1971)
>
> [The game of football is a "semiotic system"; that is to say, it is a language, albeit non-verbal (...) Each language is articulated in various sub-languages, each possessing a sub-code. Well, such distinctions can also be made for the language of football; football also has sub-codes, from the moment it moves from purely instrumental to expressive. There can be football as fundamentally prose and football as a fundamentally poetic language (...) Bulgarelli plays football in prose: he is a "realist prose player"; Riva plays football in poetry: he is a "realist poet". Corso plays football in poetry: but he is not a "realist poet": he is a poet a little maudit, extravagant. Rivera plays football in prose: but his is poetic prose, like an "elzevir". Mazzola is also an "elzevirist", who could write for *Corriere della Sera*: but he is more of a poet than Rivera; every now and then he interrupts the prose and invents there and then two striking verses. Note well that between prose and poetry, I make no distinction of value: mine is a purely technical distinction].

Pasolini is not the only Italian writer of international renown who also worked as a sports journalist. Prior to Pasolini, Italo Calvino (1923-1985) served as a sport correspondent for l'*Unità* to cover the Helsinki Olympics, in 1952. At the time, Calvino was only 29 years old but was already known as a writer, following the release of *Il Sentiero dei Nidi di Ragno* (1947), a novel, and *Ultimo Viene il Corvo* (1949), a short story collection. Calvino's experience in journalism did not go any further than Helsinki, though. Contrary to Pasolini, he was not very passionate about sport (Deiana 2015). Moreover, Calvino advocated a clear-cut separation between literature and journalism. In 1953, in a letter to fellow writer Raffaello Brignetti, Calvino advised him to immediately stop working as a

[168] Tullio De Mauro also served as Italy's Minister of Education, from April 2000 to June 2001.

journalist since the job was, in his view, incompatible with that of a writer: "*il giornalismo […] non può essere coltivato a fianco della letteratura, perché non puoi nello stesso tempo usare lo stesso strumento: il linguaggio, la scrittura, in due modi completamente diversi*" [journalism (…) cannot be cultivated alongside literature, because you cannot use the same tool at the same time: language, writing, in two completely different ways] – Calvino as cited in Baudino (2017).

Dino Buzzati (1906-1972), mostly acclaimed for his 1940 novel *Il Deserto dei Tartari* (published in English as *The Tartar Steppe*) was also, and perhaps primarily a journalist. At the age of 22, while he was completing his studies in law at the University of Milan, Buzzati was hired by *Corriere della Sera*. He followed a rather typical journalistic career trajectory at the newspaper, starting out as a proofreader to then climb up the ladder as a reporter and correspondent. His articles spanned multiple fields, from crime news to current affairs, music and, indeed, sports. In 1949, he was assigned by the newspaper to cover the Giro d'Italia. He wrote 25 chronicles, posthumously collected in a volume entitled *Dino Buzzati al Giro d'Italia* (1981). Some of those articles made history, especially the one in which Buzzati described the epic duel between Fausto Coppi and Gino Bartali in the 17th stage of the Giro, from Cuneo to Pinerolo, with Coppi escaping the group and climbing alone to the victory. Although the lyrism of Buzzati's journalism pieces on sports immediately reminds of his being a novelist, Buzzati himself used to repeat that the genesis of his work was, in fact, journalism (Breda 2017; Vietti 2018). In other words, it was his journalistic background that informed his writing as a novelist, and not the other way around. The permeability among his different talents went actually further than that. On the top of his being a journalist and a novelist, Buzzati was first and foremost proud of his talent as a painter, which he considered his true vocation:

> Il fatto è questo, io mi trovo vittima di un crudele equivoco. Sono un pittore il quale, per hobby, durante un periodo purtroppo alquanto prolungato, ha fatto anche lo scrittore e il giornalista. Il mondo invece crede che sia viceversa, le mie pitture quindi non le può prendere sul serio. La pittura per me non è un hobby, ma il mestiere - hobby per me è scrivere. Ma dipingere e scrivere per me sono in fondo la stessa cosa. Che dipinga o scriva, io perseguo il medesimo scopo - che è quello di raccontare delle storie.
>
> Excerpt from: Buzzati, Dino. 1968. "*Vecchia Auto*". Milano: Enrico Lossa – out of print – as cited in Lardo (2014).

> [Here is the thing: I find myself the victim of a cruel misunderstanding. I am a painter who, as a hobby, unfortunately for a rather long period, has also been a writer and journalist. The world instead believes that it is the other way around, and therefore cannot take my paintings seriously. Painting is not a hobby to me, it is my job – writing is my hobby. But painting and writing are ultimately the same thing to me. Whether I write or paint, I pursue the same goal – that is telling stories].

Buzzati advocated and practiced the contamination between different crafts and arts. In her analysis of Buzzati's work "between word and image", from the title of her book, Annalisa Carbone (2016) has argued that Buzzati's journalism, with its intertwining of literature, art and popular aesthetics, showed that so-called high culture and low culture were now indistinct.[169]

Another major contribution from a writer to Italian sports journalism came from Giovanni Arpino (1927-1987). His fame, both nationally and internationally, is not comparable to Pasolini's or Buzzati's, in spite of the fact that Arpino won both the Premio Strega, the most prestigious Italian literary award, in 1964, and the Premio Campiello, another prestigious Italian literary prize, in 1980. He is one in few writers to have won both. His novel *Il Buio e il Miele* (1969), published in English as *Scent of a Woman*, was made into two films: *Profumo di Donna* (1974), directed by Dino Risi, and then Martin Brest's *Scent of a Woman* (1992), where Al Pacino played the leading role, and for which Pacino won the Academy Award (Oscar) for Best Actor. Arpino started working as a sports journalist for *La Stampa* in 1969. He also served as a sports journalist for *Il Giornale*, as well as for Italy's leading sports newspaper, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. According to Darwin Pastorin (2017; 2018), a journalist himself who personally knew the writer, Arpino's work as a sports journalist was key in allowing Italian sports journalism to upgrade to "*letteratura di Serie A*" [Serie A literature].[170] Pastorin describes this upgrade as a miracle: "[*f*]*u Arpino a compere il miracolo*" [it was Arpino who performed the miracle], he says

[169] Full book reference: Carbone, Annalisa. 2016. *Dipingere e Scrivere per Me Sono La Stessa Cosa: Dino Buzzati Tra Parola e Immagine*. Soveria Mannelli (Catanzaro): Rubbettino.

[170] "Serie A" is the top tier of Italian professional football. The notion of "Serie A" is often used in the Italian language to describe excellence or the top of a ranking, as opposed to "Serie B", the second-highest division after Serie A, which is also used in non-sporting contexts, to describe a lower qualitative level. This is similar to the usage of "B movie", in English, to describe mediocre movies.

(Pastorin 2017). Gianni Brera, not Arpino, was the leading Italian sports journalist at the time, but Brera, explains Pastorin (ibid.), was known as a "sports" person. It took the advent of a recognised novelist like Arpino to ultimately change the image of sports journalism and "*dare dignità a un genere*" [give dignity to a genre] (ibid.).[171] In his debut article as a sports journalist, in 1969, Arpino blamed Pasolini for reducing sport to "the usual opium of the peoples":

> Le parole di Pasolini, patetiche e paradossali, appartengono a un vocabolario che di volta in volta scarica sullo sport tonnellate di interpretazioni capziose, quasi lo sport fosse soltanto ingannevole evasione, spregevole diversivo, il solito oppio dei popoli, e non una attività, non un crocevia di tecniche diverse e importanti, talora quasi una scienza. Usare lo sport come bersaglio è arma vecchia, è argomentazione qualunquistica, tipica presso certa sociologia avventata. (Giovanni Arpino, 1969, as cited by Pastorin, ibid.)
>
> [Pasolini's pathetic and paradoxical words belong to a vocabulary which from time to time unloads on sport tons of deceptive interpretations, as if sport were only a deceptive escape, a despicable diversion, the usual opium of the peoples, and not an activity, a crossroads of different and important techniques, sometimes almost a science. Using sport as a target is an old weapon; it is a non-committal argument, typical of a certain reckless sociology]

Arpino's comment was referred to an article in the magazine *Tempo* in which Pasolini, in response to a reader's letter, had provocatively expressed his hope that the Italian boxer Nino Benvenuti and Italy's football team would lose their future matches, so as to spare "*delle false consolazioni ai bassi salari*" [low-income people from false consolations].[172] As seen previously in this section, it is hard to maintain that Pasolini did *not* love sport. What is interesting for the present analysis is rather the view on antagonist visions of sport, which resonates the analysis of opposing paradigms in chapter 3.

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Besides Pasolini, Buzzati and Arpino, other important Italian writers, from the second post-war period onwards, collaborated with newspapers and magazines to report on sports. Vasco Pratolini (1913-1991) covered the 1947 and 1955 editions of the Giro

[171] Brera, shortly mentioned in section **4.2.1 Playing with words**, was in fact also a novelist, but his popularity is almost exclusively connected, still today, with his contribution as a sports journalist. His contribution to Italian sports journalism will be discussed extensively in chapter 5.
[172] Pasolini, Pier Paolo. 1969. "Benvenuti Non Serve a Nulla." *Tempo*, January 25, 1969, cited by Pastorin (2017), and previously by Piccioni (1996) and Barrocu (2007).

d'Italia for the *Nuovo Corriere*, a left-wing newspaper based in Florence. Alfonso Gatto (1909-1976), a poet, served as a sports correspondent for l'*Unità* to cover the Giro d'Italia in 1947 and 1948. In addition, Gatto served as a sports correspondent for the *Giornale del Mattino*, for which he covered the 1958 edition of the Tour de France and the 1959 edition of the Giro d'Italia. During the 1970s, Gatto ran a column about football, called *La Palla al Balzo*, for *Il Giornale.* The articles of that column were later gathered together in the volume *La Palla al Balzo: un Poeta allo stadio* (Gatto and Trotta 2006). In an article-letter for that column, which he addressed to football star Gianni Rivera on May 7, 1975, Gatto compared football to poetry and ultimately to life: "*Il calcio è come la poesia: un gioco che vale la vita*" [Football is like poetry: a game that is worth a life].[173] Anna Maria Ortese (1914-1998), a novelist, covered the Giro d'Italia for *L'Europeo* in 1955. Ortese was the first woman ever to provide journalistic coverage of the prestigious cycling race. Finally, Italian writer and film director Mario Soldati (1906-1999) served as a sports correspondent for *Corriere della Sera* to cover the 1982 FIFA World Cup in Spain, at the age of 76.

## 4.3 Sports in newspapers

### 4.3.1 The international landscape

If we aspire to an international comparison of sports coverage in print newspapers, scholarly work is almost of no help. In 2010, Horky noted "a distinct lack of cross-national comparative research on the subject" (2010, 265). Three years later, Horky and Nieland (2013b) reiterated that claim, noting in particular a scarcity of scholarly work offering an international comparison of the *print* media reporting on sports, as compared to the availability of analyses of sports coverage in the audio-visual media or about specific countries. At the time of writing of this thesis, we can state that claims about the scarcity of studies offering an international comparison of print media sport contents are

[173] For a discussion of Alfonso Gatto's writings for the column "La Palla al Balzo", see Soglia, Nunzia. (2018). "'Il Calcio è Come La Poesia, Un Gioco Che Vale La Vita': I Resoconti Dagli Stadi Di Alfonso Gatto." *Sinestesieonline* VII (24): 82–87.

still valid, despite the fact that sport has never stopped growing as a global phenomenon ever since, with media coverage growing along. Cross-national comparative studies of the press coverage of sports are nearly non-existent.

The most recent and comprehensive academic survey of the international sports press to date is still the one that Thomas Horky (the same media scholar who was cited earlier in this section 4.3.1) from the Macromedia University of Applied Sciences in Hamburg and Jörg-Uwe Nieland from the German Sport University Cologne coordinated in 2011. The *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2013a) was in fact an update to a first edition of the survey, launched back in 2005 by the House of Monday Morning, a Danish think-tank on news, and commissioned by Play the Game and the Danish Institute for Sports Studies (IDAN).[174] The 2005 survey ("The International Sports Press Survey 2005" 2005) was rightfully described as "the first ever comparative study [of sports reporting] on a global level" (Horky and Nieland 2013a, sec. Foreword).[175]

**The International Sports Press Survey**

The 2005 *International Sports Press Survey* was financed by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies (IDAN) and Play the Game. The survey included a total of 37 newspapers – in Australia (4 newspapers), Austria (3), Denmark (5), England (3), Germany (6), Norway (3), Romania (3), Scotland (3), Switzerland (3), and the United States (5) – for 14 days of publication in the period from April 11 to July 24, 2005. The survey looked at articles about sports published in three to five major newspapers in each country, including at least a broadsheet paper, a tabloid newspaper and a local newspaper. A total of 10,007 articles were registered in a database, with information about 14 parameters, such as the article's journalistic format, the theme of the article and the gender of the journalist, among others. The results of the survey were summarised in a journalistic article that appeared in the Danish weekly business and political magazine *Mandag Morgen* (Monday Morning), written by its editor Søren Schultz Jørgensen and entitled "The World's Best Advertising Agency: The Sports Press" (2005). The article also provides details

[174] Play the Game, an initiative run by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies (Idrættens Analyseinstitut – IDAN), aims at "raising the ethical standards of sport and promoting democracy, transparency and freedom of expression in world sport" (https://playthegame.org/about/ Accessed on March 11, 2020). The Danish Institute for Sports Studies (IDAN) was set up by the Danish Ministry of Culture in 2004. Play the Game and IDAN merged on January 1, 2011.

[175] The 2005 survey built on a study initiated in 2002 by Play the Game and organised by Jens-Sejer Andersen, which focused on sports reporting in Scandinavian newspapers. Three years later, Andersen decided to launch a study of the same kind on a global level (Horky and Nieland 2013a, sec. Foreword), which was to become, indeed, the first (2005) *International Sports Press Survey*.

of the universities and researchers who were responsible for entering the data into the survey database.

The *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2013a) covered a larger range of newspapers, countries and articles as compared to the previous survey – 81 daily newspapers in 22 countries and a total of 18,340 coded articles – for a period of 14 days between April and July 2011 (two artificial weeks – two from each of the week's seven days). The survey looked at "the biggest national, tabloid and regional newspaper of each country" (Horky and Nieland 2011). The newspapers under examination were based in: Australia (4 newspapers), Brazil (3), Canada (3), Denmark (6), England (7), France (4), Germany (9), Greece (3), India (3), Malaysia (3), Nepal (3), New Zealand (2), Poland (3), Portugal (3), Romania (3), Scotland (3), Singapore (1), Slovakia (2), Slovenia (3), South Africa (3), Switzerland (6), and United States (4). The largest number of coded articles were from England (2,554 articles), Germany (1,899) and Australia (1,671) (Horky and Nieland 2013b, 19). The variables under examination also expanded as compared to the previous edition of the survey, with a codebook that moved from 13 variables, for the 2015 survey, to 18. The preliminary results of the survey (Horky and Nieland 2011) were unveiled at the 7th Play the Game World Conference in Cologne on October 3, 2011.

Interestingly, both the 2005 and 2011 versions of the *International Sports Press Survey* looked at articles related to sport topics in daily general-interest newspapers but did not include sports-specialised newspapers in the sampled contents. The present thesis is therefore set to offer a unique contribution to date in this respect. Furthermore, all the versions of the *International Sports Press Survey* consistently excluded Italy and Spain from the corpus. This may come as a surprise when one considers the importance of sports journalism in these countries, in both general-interest and sports-specialised newspapers (see section **4.3.3 Sports-specialised newspapers, the neglected stepchildren**). At the same time, international comparisons of that scope have no other choice but to make choices and since sports-specialised newspapers were not a subject of analysis, the choice of excluding Italy and Spain was, after all, legitimate.

For the sake of completeness, it is worth mentioning also the few more sources that have somehow engaged in a comparative analysis of the sports press at the international level, although these are either outdated or only partly related to the focus of the present study. Valgeirsson and Snyder produced, in 1986, a cross-cultural comparison of newspaper sports contents. Their work, certainly a precursor of the subject, was based on the content analysis of the sports sections of three newspapers in three different countries: the

*Morgunbladid* ("The Morning Paper") from Iceland, *London Times* from the United Kingdom, and *New York* Times from the United States (ibid.). The article (Valgeirsson and Snyder 1986) had solid foundations in the framework of pertinent sociological theories, and offered quantitative and qualitative insights into the coverage of sports in newspapers, with a focus on the cultural differences across the three countries. But indeed, it dates back to 1986. The effects of the explosion of the broadcasting rights market in sports were yet to come, and so were digital media.

In their excursus of the state of the research, Horky and Nieland (2013a, 13) make reference to two German-speaking sources that have proposed an international comparison of the sports press at large, i.e. not limited to a specific topic for coverage or country case – which is, as previously noticed, quite unusual. The two sources they refer to (ibid.) are: Frütel's (2005) empirical study of international sports journalism, notably on the process of globalisation of this area of journalism; and Schierl and Burk's (2007) inquiry into the sports offering in the international media. These books exist in German version only and source materials in German have not been used for the purposes of this thesis (see details in section **1.3.3 Thesis stylebook)**.[176]

Also in the area of international comparisons, Rowe has contributed an article entitled "The State of the Sports Press: Reflections on an International Study" (2013a), appeared in the *Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication* (Pedersen 2013), but this article is in fact an in-depth analysis of the results of the *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2013a), mentioned earlier in this section 4.3.1. Also in the *Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication*, Zimmerman et al. (2013) have offered what is possibly the most recent scholarly work to date to provide an international comparison of the sports coverage in print media. The article in question (ibid.), entitled "A Global Crisis? International perspectives on the state of print sport media", explores examples of

[176] The full references of the two books are: Frütel, Sybille. 2005. *Toy department for men: eine empirische Studie zum internationalen Sportjournalismus*. Beiträge des Lehrstuhls für Sport, Medien und Kommunikation / TUM, Technische Universität München 1. Pulheim: MedienSportVerl; and Schierl, Thomas, and Verena Burk. 2007. "Das Angebot von Sport in Den Medien International." In *Handbuch Medien, Kommunikation Und Sport*, edited by Thomas Schierl and C. Bertling, 69–80. Beiträge Zur Lehre Und Forschung Im Sport 159. Schorndorf: Hofmann.

print sport journalism in Israel, Germany, China, and the U.S., a geographical selection that is itself meant to show the state of print sport journalism across regions of the world with a diversity of characteristics. As suggested by its title, this article (Zimmerman et al. 2013) is to be situated within the broader debate on the global crisis of print media, although it does focus on print *sports* media. It is therefore only marginally pertinent to this thesis. Zimmerman et al.'s analysis (ibid.) features the rather unusual benefit of including also sports-specialised newspapers, whenever these were present in the countries under examination. Regarding the topicality of Zimmerman et al.'s article (ibid.), the fact that it was published in 2013 does not necessarily make it more recent than the *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2013a), considering the time that typically elapses between collecting data, analysing information and the actual processing of a text that eventually leads to publication.[177]

The forthcoming sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 will offer insight into a specific aspect of the international landscape, which is the comparison of sports coverage in general-interest versus sport-specific newspapers. This aspect has been neglected even more by academic research thus far, for reasons that will become clear as the explanation in these two sections unfolds.

### 4.3.2 Sports in general-interest newspapers

The history of the presence of sports in general-interest newspapers has followed multiple tracks depending on the country. As reminded by Rowe, "[n]ewspaper sports journalism is a very substantial global enterprise with many national variations" (2013a, 175). It is however possible to identify a series of common features.

In the first place, it can be noted that the initial evolution of the sports pages in general-interest newspapers has, almost invariably across countries and regions, unfolded in three

[177] As a reminder, the data for the *International Sports Press Survey 2011* were collected in 2011. The article (Zimmerman et al. 2013) does not provide details of the timing of data collection, nor can this be inferred with sufficient accuracy from the text of the article.

typical steps: (1) a general press with no or only sporadic coverage of sports; (2) a gradually increasing coverage of sports, advancing hand-in-hand with the rise of sport as an increasingly popular phenomenon; and finally (3) the establishment of sport as a regular feature in newspapers, typically leading to a dedicated Sport section. The notion of "increasing" coverage of sports, as mentioned for phase (2), does not refer much to the number of pages in absolute terms but rather the proportion of pages devoted to sports within the overall newspaper. The advent of the Internet, hence competition from alternative news sources, and declining advertising print revenues have later forced many newspapers to cut the number of printed pages in general, and also to have fewer features (Farrell and Cupito 2010, 15–16). This has rarely led, however, to cutting sports pages altogether, or to reducing them as a share of the overall number of pages. Some countries have also experienced an additional phase (4), represented by the creation of sports-only daily newspapers (this category will be examined in section 4.3.3).

The first-ever general-interest newspaper to feature a dedicated Sport section was the London-based *Morning Herald* in 1817 (Beck and Bosshart 2003, 6), although according to Guttmann's historical reconstruction (1986, 85), the newspaper only featured "an occasional sports page". In 1818, the pioneering example of the *Morning Herald* was followed by *The Globe*, another English newspaper, then by *The American Farmer* in the United States in 1819, and *Bell's Life* in Britain in 1824, all of which limiting the sports coverage to local news due to the absence, at the time, of telegraph transmission (Beck and Bosshart 2003, 6–7). Although the first Sport sections appeared in newspapers in the early 19th century, it was only at the end of that century that daily newspapers started to carry a Sports section as a regular feature (Guttmann 1986, 85). Nowadays, the vast majority of daily general-interest newspapers across the world carry a Sport section of some sort.

Carrying on with this overview of the common features that can be identified in the sports pages of general-interest newspapers, their <u>contents</u> most typically cover: (a) the major commercial spectator sports; (b) the sports events of the day, especially those falling under "(a)"; and (c) news of particular interest to the local sport community, with special

attention for the clubs of the city where the newspaper is based. It is to be noted that the content category (c) is not only valid for local or regional newspapers but also for newspapers with nationwide circulation, which tend to have preferential connections with the teams of the city where they are headquartered. For example, *La Stampa* in Italy has nationwide circulation. Nonetheless, its sports pages typically devote special attention to the two leading Turin-based football clubs, i.e. Juventus and Torino – the newspaper being headquartered in Turin.

If we compare the sports pages in today's newspapers with the sports pages of their ancestor newspapers 50 or a hundred years ago, we might be tempted to add a fourth item, or (d), to our list of common featured contents, and that fourth item would consist of international sports news. Topics like the transfer of global star players across different countries and leagues or the foreign championships in the most popular sports are recurrent in today's sports pages, while they were certainly rare or absent in a not too remote past. In fact, this aspect is considered to be englobed in "(a) the major commercial spectator sports". Indeed, we cannot go so far as to say that international sports *tout court* are "most typically" covered in the sports pages of general-interest newspapers. International sports are most typically featured insofar as they involve the major commercial spectator sports, namely (a). Other international topics only benefit from occasional coverage, if any. Some of the potential subjects for coverage, including in the area of international sports, were indeed a concern of this study and can be seen in the suggested taxonomy of **Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports.**

Football has not been added either as an item in its own right because it would also go under "(a) the major commercial spectator sports". Even though football, or soccer if we want to differentiate it from American football or Australian football, is by far *the* most popular and lucrative sport in the world, it is not the number one sport in each and every country of the world (as previously discussed in section **3.2.1 Sport as a cultural**

**indicator**), and therefore cannot be included in the devised list of the common features in newspaper sports pages worldwide.[178]

## *Beyond the "Sports" pages*

The "Sports" pages of a daily newspaper are not the only place where we can find sport-related news in a general-interest newspaper. The relevance of today's sports goes way beyond the strictly sporting aspects of championships and performance. We are looking at a massive economic, financial, political and social phenomenon, filled with implications across different industries.[179] This is one of the reasons why, for example, news about the financial situation of such and such football club – usually the most profitable ones – can recurrently be found in the economy section of newspapers as opposed to Sport. By the same token, news about mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games, especially the Summer Olympics, appear in the front pages of general-interest newspapers, especially during the events themselves, with a salience that is normally attributed to politics or international affairs. The question that naturally arises is, What should the Sport section of a newspaper include? This seems to inevitably

[178] The 20 highest earning football clubs in the world generated combined revenues of €9.3 billion in the 2018/19 season, representing an all-time record and an 11% increase on the previous season. Data are driven from the 23rd edition of the *Deloitte Football Money League* report (2020), an independent analysis of the clubs' financial performance. The combined revenue figure is based on the clubs' respective annual financial statements (company or group related to each club). It includes total revenues, extracted from these financial statements, and excludes player transfer fees, value added tax (VAT) and other sales-related taxes. The role of the media in the football landscape is highlighted by the breakdown of the main drivers of growth. The increase in revenues in 2018/19 was principally driven by broadcast revenues, up by 16 percent, followed by commercial revenues (up by 9%) and matchday revenues (up by 4%). The figures for 2019/20, which were not yet available at the time of writing, will likely be impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) worldwide pandemic, which hit the world in the first months of 2020, and forced football as well as the other sports to stop competitions and postpone events.

[179] The value of the global sports industry is extremely difficult to assess. Sport is in fact a multi-sectorial market that involves multiple industries, both directly and indirectly, in both goods and services. Comprehensive statistics at the global level, as opposed to statistics about specific segments or specific geographical regions, are understandably rare. As a general indicator, according to the report *Sports Market By Type (Participatory Sports, Spectator Sports, Sports Team & Clubs, Racing & Individual Sports And Spectator Sports), By Competitive Landscape And By Geography – Global Forecast To 2022* (2019), released by The Business Research Company, the global sports market was worth nearly $488.5 billion in 2018, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.3% since 2014. With nearly 30.5% of the global market, North America is the largest market for sports, followed by Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific, and then the other regions. The Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East are expected to be the fastest growing regions in the years to come, according to the report (ibid.).

bring us back to primary questions such as "What is Sport?", "What is News?", and therefore, "What is Sports News?". This thesis clearly recommends to adopt a broad notion of sport in media coverage. If there has to be a Sport section in the newspaper, there is no reason why this should not reflect *the broader scope* of the sport phenomenon itself. If the Sport section almost exclusively focuses on the latest matches and the performance of the day, this can only contribute to accentuate the marginalisation of the sports beat and its *de facto* exclusion from the alleged Gotha of journalism excellence. Furthermore, if we specifically look at print journalism, and as repeatedly suggested in the course of this thesis, it is hard for print to compete with digital platforms by reporting what these other news sources have already and more rapidly reported. A Sport section that reflects the broader scope of sport is more likely to offer print newspapers a competitive advantage vis-à-vis alternative news sources and platforms (his aspect will be further examined in section **7.3.2 The business case for social analysis**).

### 4.3.3 Sports-specialised newspapers, the neglected stepchildren

If the journalistic coverage of sports is still an under-researched area as compared to other subject areas, except for specific issues like gender or race, which have been studied extensively, the scholarly offering is virtually non-existent as far as the specialist sporting press is concerned. This is especially the case if we search English-speaking scholarly contributions on this topic. Sports-specialised newspapers, or more simply sports newspapers, are "the neglected stepchildren" of sports journalism studies – with apologies for this indelicate but hopefully effective metaphor. The scholarly literature on sports journalism hardly ever singles out the specialist sporting press as a sub-field for analysis in its own right. Whenever sports newspapers are part of the analysis, they are typically integrated into the study of a wider and general "sports journalism" category. The very limited availability of studies on the specialist sporting press mainly derives from the uneven geographical presence of this press.

**The Western Mediterranean** and **Latin America** are the two regions of the world with the highest concentration of daily sports newspapers. A good number of sports newspapers is also present throughout Central and Eastern Europe, although concentration here is less homogeneous. Outside of these regions, multi-sport daily sports newspapers are rare, including in countries with a powerful sports industry and a long-standing sporting tradition – like the United States and the United Kingdom, for example – where there are none. In most countries of the world, daily sports newspapers as stand-alone publications simply do not exist and daily sports information is integrated into the general press, sometimes in the form of dedicated sports supplements that are, however, not sold separately, and are not always daily either.

The richest scientific literature on sports newspapers comes from Spain, which certainly stands out as an exception. Many of the articles, books and theses that are produced by Spanish or Spain-based scholars, however, are not translated into English, if not in a tiny abstract. This is probably one of the reasons why the existing literature on sports newspapers tends to have limited impact at a larger geographical level, beyond Spain and Latin America, at least if we consider the limited number of studies it has inspired so far. Once again, the limited scholarly interest is understandable in countries where this press is not present at all, regardless of linguistic limitations. Right after Spain, the largest scholarly literature on the specialist sporting press can be found in Latin America, where similarly to Spain, sports newspapers are also widely present.

It was at the end of the 19th century that newspapers exclusively devoted to sports started to emerge in some countries, in parallel with increasing popular participation in sports. As previously seen in section **3.3 The growth of sport through the press**, many of these newspapers played themselves a key role in the growing popularity of sport, especially although not exclusively through the organisation of sports events. The first sports-only publications in history were actually magazines and had emerged earlier than that, some even in the 18th century – *The Sporting Magazine* in England in 1793, then *The American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* in the United States (1829), *Le Sport* (1854) and *Le Vélocipède Illustré* (1869) in France, the *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung* in Austria (1878). But

it was, indeed, at the end of the 19th century that, as also described by Guttmann (1986, 85), "publishers realized that weekly and monthly publications were not enough to slake the insatiable thirst for sports news". The sports-only newspapers that emerged at the end of the 19th century were not all daily papers from day one, but usually had periodicity of more than once a week. *Le Vélo* in France (1892) was a daily from the start, and was in this sense an exception, whereas *La Gazzetta dello Sport* in Italy (1896) was initially released twice a week, prior to permanently becoming a daily in 1919. Other sports-only newspapers would soon follow, at the dawn of the new century, like *Sport im Wort* in Germany (1900), *Mundo Deportivo* in Spain (1906), *Corriere dello Sport* in Italy (1924) and more to come in the following years.[180]

## *Sports newspapers in Europe*

In Europe's Western Mediterranean region, namely one of the two areas of the world with the highest concentration of sports newspapers, along with Latin America, the country with the largest number of sports newspapers is Spain, which has four sports dailies with national reach: *As*, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo*, *Sport*. Spain also has three *regional* daily sports newspapers: *Dxt Campeón* (Galicia), *L'Esportiu* (Catalonia), and *Superdeporte* (Valencia).[181] Italy has three sports newspapers with national reach: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport.* Like Italy, Portugal also has three sports newspapers with national reach: *A Bola*, *O Jogo* and *Record*. As for France, the sports press has a long-standing and prestigious tradition in this country, which has also recurrently emerged in this thesis, but if we focus exclusively on sports newspapers, today France only features one daily multi-sports newspaper, and that is *L'Equipe*. Also in the Mediterranean region, but on the Eastern shore, daily sports newspaper exist in Croatia (*Sportske novosti*), Greece (*Protathlitis*) and Turkey (*Fanatik*, *fotoMac*).

[180] *Sport im Wort* had previously existed as a supplement but became a stand-alone publication in 1900.
[181] *Estadio Deportivo* (Seville), which used to be a stand-alone regional sports daily, has been sold as a supplement of *El Mundo* starting in 2010.

In Central and Eastern Europe, daily sports newspapers are published in Hungary (*Nemzeti Sport*), Poland (*Przegląd Sportowy*), Czech Republic (*Sport*), Romania (*Gazeta Sporturilor*), Russia (*Sovetsky Sport*, *Sport-Express*), Slovenia (*Ekipa*), and Serbia (*Sportski žurnal*).

There are no daily sports newspapers in the other European countries, other than the countries that have been cited above. In this respect, and to mention possibly *the* most emblematic and surprising case, there are no sports dailies today in the United Kingdom, i.e. the country where the modern conception of sport first emerged. Britain is also a part of the world where, historically, there was an early interest in covering sports *in newspapers*. The *Bell's Life in London & Sporting Chronicle*, although not a sports-only newspaper, was founded in London back in 1822, and contained general news as well as sports news since the very beginning, with a prevalence of sport-related news in later years. According to reports in The British Newspaper Archive, in the mid-19th century Britain was already characterised by a competitive environment in sports journalism, with the *Bell's Life* facing "increasing competition from other sporting papers such as *The Field* (1853), *Sporting Life* (1859) and *The Sportsman* (1865)" ("Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle" 2020).[182] Competition became harsher at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, and this time, competition came from the general press. The newspaper industry was rapidly developing and sport contents could help increase circulation. This market evolution was fatal to many sports newspapers across the country. According to Boyle and Haynes (2009, 24), "[it] spelt the death-knell for many of the independent daily and weekly sporting papers that by the 1930s had dwindled to just a handful of publications predominantly catering for horse racing". This historical transition is also a key point to understand the place of sports journalism in countries where sports-only newspapers do not exist. The presence or absence of daily specialist sporting newspapers is not necessarily an indicator of the importance of sports journalism in a given country, and the British example perfectly epitomises this aspect. At the beginning of the 20th century, while daily sports newspapers were expanding in continental Europe, they were

[182] The *Bell's Life in London & Sporting Chronicle* became a daily in 1885, and was then absorbed by *Sporting Life* in 1886.

fading away in Britain (as sports journalism was taking a growing space in the general press), but very few analysts would argue today, amidst the current absence of sports-only newspapers in Britain, that the British sports press is weaker or somehow less prestigious than the sports press in Spain or Portugal, for example – both of which featuring multiple sports newspapers with national reach. Similarly, if we move on the other side of the Atlantic, who could reasonably state that sports journalism in the United States, where there are no sports dailies with nationwide reach either, is a less relevant case study for sports journalism scholars than Spain, Portugal or the alikes?

For the sake of completeness, some sports-only daily newspapers were present in Britain also during the 20th century, some of which until relatively recent years. *The Sportsman*, first appeared in 1865, was published until 1924. Another sports newspaper, also called *The Sportsman* and with a strong emphasis on betting, was published for just seven months from March to October 2006. The *Sporting Life*, established back in 1859 as a bi-weekly publication, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and transformed into a daily in 1883, absorbed its rival *Bell's Life* in 1886, and then ceased publications in 1998.[183] Merely for completeness of information, and to avoid any historical misunderstandings, a newspaper called *Daily Sport* was published in Britain from 1991 to 2011 which now only exists as a website, but it would not be accurate to include it among sports newspapers. This tabloid newspaper was prevalently filled with celebrity news and sexual "allusions". When the *Daily Sport* was shut down, in April 2011, *The Guardian* described it as "a history of lurid headlines, outrageous stories and topless women" (Robinson 2011), while *BBC.com* referred to the *Daily Sport* and its sister publication *Sunday Sport* as "those diligent exponents of tabloid journalism's lower reaches […] having for nearly 20 and 25 years respectively offered a blend of punning headlines, celebrity gossip, soft pornography and, when all else failed, entirely made-up stories"("R.I.P. Daily and Sunday Sport" 2011). To summarise, the *Daily Sport*, in spite of its title, is not part of this story.

[183] For a detailed story of the newspaper, see Lambie, James. (2010). *The Story of Your Life: A History of the Sporting Life Newspaper (1859-1998)*. Leicester: Matador.

## *Sports newspapers in the Americas*

Latin America is filled with countries that have more than one sports newspaper. Mexico has three sports dailies (*Esto*, *Ovaciones*, *Récord*).[184] Honduras has one (*Diez*). Peru has four (*Depor*, *Líbero*, *El Bocón*, *Todo Sport*). Argentina has one (*Olé*), and so does Brazil (*Lance!*). Venezuela has two (*Líder*, *Meridiano*). Finally, Colombia has one (*El Periódico Deportivo*).[185]

There are no sports daily newspapers with national circulation in North America. Toward the end of the 20th century, an attempt was made to establish in the United States the nation's first daily paper exclusively devoted to sports. It was *The National Sports Daily*, mostly referred to as *The National*, first published on January 31, 1990. It only ran for little more than 16 months, though, until June 13, 1991.

**The National Sports Daily (United States)**

Based in New York City, *The National Sports Daily* was founded by Emilio Azcárraga Milmo, the media magnate and chairman of Televisa, a Mexico-based television conglomerate, and other assets including a wave of radio stations, magazines and newspapers. Azcárraga's decision to launch a sports-only newspaper in the United States came after he was approached with the idea by Peter O. Price, former publisher of *The New York Post*. Price found it fascinating that most European and Latin American countries had sports dailies and believed, as he told Azcárraga, that the same success could be replicated in the United States (Jones 1991). As chief editor for the new-born sports daily, Azcárraga hired veteran sportswriter Frank Deford, a celebrated contributor to *Sports Illustrated* and commentator at NPR. *The National Sports Daily* used the printing and distribution network of the *Wall Street Journal* to produce separate editions for the different time zones of the country. When *The National* ended publication, in June 1991, it had a staff of 283 employees and a circulation of around 200,000 copies nationwide, reportedly a third of what it would have needed to break even (Rosenstiel 1991). Profitability issues were caused, among other problems, by difficulties in the distribution process, which ended up limiting the newspaper's circulation. Deford did consider distribution as the main reason for *The National*'s failure (Jones 1991). *The*

[184] To complete the description of the state of play in Mexico, *Estadio Deportes*, previously in print as well, has moved to digital-only, while *Cancha* is a sport supplement of *Reforma*, hence not a stand-alone title. Finally, *AS*, the Spanish sports newspaper headquartered in Madrid, also has a digital-only Mexican version at http://mexico.as.com (last accessed on April 27, 2020).

[185] *Marca*, the Spanish sports newspaper headquartered in Madrid, is also present in Colombia with a digital-only Colombian version, *Marca Claro*, at https://co.marca.com/claro/ (last accessed on April 27, 2020).

*National* relied on the *Wall Street Journal*'s distribution system, but the timing of financial news did not always match the timing of sports news, and by the time the *Wall Street Journal* was ready to hand out the copies of the newspaper for delivery and distribution, *The National* had often not yet been able to include all relevant game results in the newspaper (French and Kahn 2011; Rosenstiel 1991). "We had trucks leaving before games had ended" assistant managing editor Rick Jaffe said (as cited in Rosenstiel, ibid.). Due to these distribution issues, the only sports daily in the country constantly risked of being less complete than the sports pages of its competitors.

While this and other business issues prevented *The National* from taking off as expected, some commentators have highlighted the merits of the newspaper as a journalistic venture. According to French and Kahn, *The National* was "The Greatest Paper That Ever Died", from the title of their article: "Radically brilliant. Absurdly ahead of its time. Ridiculously poorly planned. The National changed everything about sports journalism — and torched $150 million in the process" (French and Kahn 2011). The newspaper was able to attract since the very beginning some of the best-known sports journalists in the country, starting with its editor, Frank Deford. Furthermore, it covered a large span of sports and used innovative colourful graphics. There were also gossip, jokes, long-form pieces and some briefs covering world news. According to French and Kahn, *The National Sports Daily* "attempted to cover sports in a way that no other American publication would, could, or had ever even imagined" and its legacy, perhaps not so visible to the general public, manifested in the number of sports journalism careers that the newspaper launched, as in next generation sports journalism at large (ibid.).

***

The above catalogue, updated to April 2020, has focused on the regions with the highest concentration of sports-specialised newspapers, namely Europe's Western Mediterranean and Latin America, with some additional remarks on other meaningful cases. Additional regions of the world could constitute the object of future investigation. In this respect, we can anticipate that Japan, with its six sports dailies (*Daily Sports*, *Nikkan Sports*, *Sankei Sports*, *Sports Hochi*, *Sports Nippon*, *Tokyo Sports*), stands out as an utterly relevant and atypical country case.

# 5. THE COVERAGE OF SPORTS IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

> Allorché agile procede sul piano, l'abusata immagine della locomotiva che avanza per alternarsi di bielle in rotazione ti viene imposta da Coppi. Allorché, dondolando ritmicamente sui pedali, si attacca ad una salita e tu vedi Coppi al di là di ogni umano limite rinnovare l'antica bellezza dei miti più non osi guardarlo se solo pensi che egli è, come te, uomo. Più non osi per non sentirti a petto suo, troppo meschino. E allora pensi spontaneo esaltarlo come un fenomeno unico dello sport: ed esaltarti in lui che, grandissimo e ineguagliabile campione, è almeno, come te, italiano.
>
> Gianni Brera (1949)[186]


**5.1 THE ITALIAN CASE AS A TOOLKIT TO STUDY SPORTS JOURNALISM**

*5.1.1 The specificities of Italian sports journalism*

*5.1.2 The sports press and political propaganda*

*5.1.3 The innovators*

*5.1.4 Sports journalism in post-industrial Italy*

**5.2 ITALIAN SPORTS MAGAZINES**

**5.3 FOCUS ON THE SAMPLED NEWSPAPERS**


[186] [Tr. : When it moves nimbly on the plane, the abused image of the locomotive that advances to alternate rotating connecting rods is imposed on you by Coppi. When, swinging rhythmically on the pedals, he attacks a slope and you see Coppi, beyond every human limit, renewing the ancient beauty of myths, you no longer dare to look at him if you only think that he is, like you, human. You no longer dare not to feel too mean compared to him. And then you think spontaneously of exalting him as a unique phenomenon of sport: and of exalting yourself in him, a great and unparalleled champion, who is at least, like you, Italian.]

## 5.1 The Italian case as a toolkit to study sports journalism

### 5.1.1 The specificities of Italian sports journalism

Italy's case is not like any other country case as far as sports journalism is concerned. According to Italian historian Mauro Forno (2012), the huge interest in sports information is actually the most distinctive feature in the history of Italian journalism in the 20th century. Below are the main reasons for the singularity of the Italian landscape:

- **The oldest sports magazine in the world still published is Italian**. It is the *Guerin Sportivo*, founded in Turin in 1912.[187]
- **The oldest specialised daily newspaper in the world still published is a *sports* newspaper, and is an Italian one**: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, founded in Milan in 1896.
- **The newspaper with the largest readership in Italy today is a sports newspaper**. It is *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, with more than 3.2 million readers per day, which jump to over 4 million on Mondays (Source: Audipress – 2019/III).[188]

Furthermore, as seen in chapter 4, sports-specialised newspapers are only typical of some regions of the world, and Italy is above average in terms of number of sports-specialised newspapers on its territory when compared to most other countries. The large availability of this specialist press dates back to several decades ago. In July 1945, the creation of *Stadio* and *Tuttosport*, adding to the pre-existing *Gazzetta dello Sport* (1896) and

[187] For the history of this iconic sports periodical, see *Un Secolo di Guerino: La Storia Leggendaria del Più Antico Periodico Sportivo del Mondo* (2012), written on the occasion of its 100th anniversary by Paolo Facchinetti, who served as chief editor of *Guerin Sportivo* in the 1990s. Today a monthly magazine, the *Guerin Sportivo* was initially a weekly publication. In 1945, its headquarters moved from Turin to Milan, and later to Bologna, in 1974, where it is still based.

[188] Audipress (www.audipress.it) is a Milan-based company that collects and releases data on the readership of newspapers and periodicals in Italy, while circulation data are published and certified in Italy by ADS – Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa (www.adsnotizie.it). Audipress releases its readership estimates three times per year. The above data refer to the last release ("III") for 2019, described here as "2019/III".

*Corriere dello Sport* (1924), made of Italy the only country in the world at the time with four newspapers exclusively devoted to sports (Ghirelli 2006, 90).[189] The merger of *Corriere dello Sport* with *Stadio* in 1977, leading to the creation of "*Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*", brought down the total number of Italian sports newspapers to three, which is the current number.

Attempts were later made that would expand the number of sports-specialist newspapers further, an aspect that shows the ongoing vitality of this specialist press in the country. A new daily sports newspaper, called *Olimpico*, was launched on October 26, 1977. Headquartered in Rome, *Olimpico* was owned by its journalists, organised as a media cooperative (Cooperativa Olimpico), under the direction of Mario Gismondi. Its content was characterised by a sober style and a clear-cut separation between news and comment (Cucci and Germano 2003, 102). *Olimpico* stopped publications in 1983.

Another attempt was made in 2007, when sports newspapers were back again to four following the creation of *Dieci*, published by Editoriale Dieci. The newspaper, first released on March 10, 2007 and headquartered in Milan, was characterised by short articles – no more than 50 lines – and the unusual price of 50 cents per copy, half the price as the other sports newspapers (*Prima Comunicazione* 2007). *Dieci* stopped publications on June 26, 2007, little more than three months after its launch. Despite the brevity of the experience, Ivan Zazzaroni, the first editor-in-chief of the newspaper, who resigned from this role in mid-June 2007, declared in an interview that he still believed there was room in Italy for a fourth sports daily newspaper (2007).[190]

The specificities described above make of Italy a special case when studying sports journalism, a sort of ideal companion for sports journalism scholars. Taken individually,

[189] *Tuttosport* was initially published twice a week, then three times a week as from 1946, to finally become a daily newspaper in 1951. Similarly, *Stadio* became a daily at a later stage, in 1948. As for the other two sports newspapers, *Corriere dello Sport*, founded in 1924, was initially released three times a week, and became a daily in 1927. *Gazzetta dello Sport*, founded in 1896 and initially published twice a week, later evolved to a three-times-a-week frequency. In 1913, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* became a daily newspaper.
[190] Zazzaroni was previously mentioned, in section **4.2 Literature for the people**, in connection with his more recent role as editor of *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* (ongoing at the time of writing).

some of these features are not necessarily unique. For example, Japan today has six sports dailies, twice as much as Italy. It is rather the combination of its features that makes Italy's sports journalism landscape a unique case, and one that can be fruitfully adopted as a "toolkit" to understand sports journalism at large.

Most of the specificities of the Italian case originate from historical transformations that occurred in the course of the 20th century. These transformations will be described in the current section 5.1, starting with the Fascist *ventennio* (20 years), from 1922 to 1943. The place and function of the Italian sports press under the Fascist regime helps explain the particular role that the sports press would later acquire in the country. The historical excursus will continue, in the upcoming pages, with the age of "innovators", especially in post-war Italy, to then conclude with the post-industrial period.[191] This excursus is merely functional to the thesis's subject and is by no means exhaustive. Below is a list of suggested textbooks to expand on the history of Italian sports journalism:

**Textbooks on the history of Italian sports journalism**

The sources on the history of Italian sports journalism are unfortunately limited, especially if one seeks a factual chronology for background information, as opposed to analyses of specific figures or timeframes. The main volumes that can tentatively be indicated as "textbooks" include (in chronological order):

- Facchinetti, Paolo. 1966. *La Stampa Sportiva in Italia*. Bologna: Alfa.
- Cucci, Italo, and Ivo Germano. 2003. *Tribuna stampa: storia critica del giornalismo sportivo da Pindaro a Internet*. Roma: Il Minotauro.
- Biscardi, Aldo. 2015. *Storia Del Giornalismo Sportivo. Da Bruno Roghi a Gianni Brera*. 2nd ed. Morrone Editore.
- Ormezzano, Gian Paolo. 2015. *I cantaglorie. Una storia calda e ribalda della stampa sportiva*. Vite inattese 08. Milan: 66th and 2nd [on a more playful tone as compared to the previous titles in this list, but filled with precious details and anecdotes].

[191] In Italy, the beginning of the transition to a "post-industrial" society – i.e. a society that no longer emphasises the industrial production of goods but of services, and increasingly relies on technology – can be dated back to the mid-1970s. Italian sociologist Massimo Paci has studied and identified this transition in the 1974-1989 timeframe. During this 15-year period, explains Paci (1991, 199–200), the workforce in the Italian service sector grew from 7.5 million to nearly 12 million, while industry lost around 1.5 million workers. Meanwhile, the workforce in the service sector reached 58.3% of the nation's total, thereby becoming the leading sector by number of employees. For an overview of the multiple theories using the term "post-industrial" (and post-modern), see Rose, Margaret A. 1991. *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial: A Critical Analysis*. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

### 5.1.2 The sports press and political propaganda

The political relevance of sport in today's world sounds like a platitude. We can get a good idea of where money and power are going in the world by simply looking at the list of the host countries of the main international sporting events and how this list evolves over time. In fact, the use of sport as a political device is all but new. The 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin are probably the most cited example of a country – in that case Hitler's Germany – using sport as a showcase of its hegemony. The sport-politics connection can be synonymous of power also in a totally different way, though. A best-known example of sport diplomacy for peace is the 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa, with Nelson Mandela wearing the green jersey of the Springboks (the South African team) at Ellis Park in Johannesburg, on the day of the final, in front of 65,000 white South African supporters, thereby marking the symbol of the end of apartheid.[192]

Historically, not only sport but specifically the sports press has been an instrument of political propaganda. The relationship between sports journalists and Mussolini's regime during the Fascist *ventennio* in Italy, from 1922 to 1943, is particularly emblematic in this regard. Mussolini considered sport as a key instrument for national cohesion. In a 1936 article for the American journal *Foreign Affairs*, entitled "The Dictators Discover Sport" – hence published during the Mussolini's regime – John R. Tunis highlighted that dictators clearly understood the potential of sport for educating the new generations to the regime's project: "Middle-aged and older persons have their roots in the ground, have affiliations with former régimes. The hope of the dictators, therefore, was to win over youth to the new conception of life, the new system. They found that they could best succeed through sport." (1936, 606). Indeed, Mussolini's sport project did not only involve the elite athletes who could represent the nation, but included people's everyday life, starting from schools, youth organisations and the expansion of sports facilities of

[192] The South Africa national rugby union team is also commonly known as the Springboks. Their emblem is indeed the springbok, an antelope that can mainly be found in southern and southwestern Africa. The final of the 1995 Rugby World Cup was played on June 24.

all size. The following excerpt from Borden Painter's book *Mussolini's Rome* outlines the basics of Mussolini's idea of sport for the sake of the regime:

> Mussolini promised to bring about a fascist revolution that would produce a new and powerful Italy led by a new breed of Italian men, who would be physically fit, imbued with a martial spirit, disciplined, and always ready to fight and, if necessary, die for fascism and the fatherland. Women supported the men as wives and mothers but also participated in sports, physical training and a thoroughly fascist education. Fascism came to power as a youth movement and promised that through youth a new Italy would emerge. Fascist Rome devoted considerable space to sports facilities, large and small, and schools. Education was a matter of training the mind and the body in keeping with classical ideals, now in the service of the fascist state. (Painter 2005, 39)

The sports press played an important role in boosting this strategy. If the elevation of sport to major political device is all but an historical exception, the tight relationship between a regime and *sports* journalists is less common, and is especially evident in the case of Mussolini's regime. According to sports historian Paul Dietschy, the historians of the Fascist *ventennio* should not underestimate the role that the sports press played, whether in the sports pages of the general press or sports periodicals, in what Dietschy calls the "*construction éditorial du «consenso»*" [editorial consensus building] operated by the regime (2007, 63). As seen in section **3.3 The growth of sport through the press**, the years at the turn of the 19th and 20th century had experienced a spread of sports periodicals, in Italy as in other European countries. Italy already had a strong sports press at the beginning of the 20th century (Dietschy 2007, 64), i.e. prior to the Fascist *ventennio*, but the advent of Mussolini's regime propelled the Italian sports press to another dimension, both quantitatively and, in certain respects, qualitatively as well.

The importance that Benito Mussolini attached to the sports press is exemplified by the influence that the regime exerted directly on that segment of the press, in which Fascist figures started to occupy key positions at an early stage. In 1925, Mussolini appointed a journalist, Lando Ferretti, to the role of president of the Italian Olympic Committee, i.e. as head of Italy's sport. In 1926, the regime suppressed the *Associazione Stampa Sportiva Italiana* (ASSI), the Italian association of the sports press, founded in Turin in 1913, of which Ferretti had been the vice-president. ASSI was now absorbed into the newly born

*Federazione Fascista dei Giornalisti Italiani* [Fascist Federation of Italian Journalists]. Mussolini himself was originally a journalist. From 1912 to 1914, he had written for l'*Avanti*, the voice of the Italian Socialist Party. He had also served as chief editor of the newspaper until his split from the Socialist Party, when he founded a new newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia* (November 1914). Lando Ferretti, an early member of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* [National Fascist Party], was recruited by Mussolini from *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, where Ferretti had been working since 1919. With the advent of the Fascist regime, in the autumn of 1923, Ferretti rose to the role of co-chief editor of *Gazzetta dello Sport* alongside Pietro Petroselli. Ferretti would later become the only chief editor of the sports newspaper, a role that he held from December 1923 to January 1924. During his journalistic career, Ferretti also served as head of the sports desk at *Il Secolo XIX*, a general-interest newspaper (Lo Bianco 1997). In his book *Il Libro dello Sport*, a manifesto of sport under the Fascist regime, Ferretti described sport as "*religione al servizio della patria*" [religion at the service of the nation] (1928, 226). In 1928, Mussolini promoted Ferretti to head of the official Press Office, which fell under Mussolini's ambit. Ferretti, however, kept up at the same time his involvement with sports journalism through his role of chief editor of *Lo Sport Fascista*, a monthly magazine available at sports facilities across the country.

## *The multiplication of sports periodicals*

The number of sport-only periodicals that emerged during Mussolini's regime is astounding. From the advent of the Fascist regime (1922) to the start of World War II (1939), an estimated 171 new sports periodicals made their appearance in Italy, most of which during the first years of the *ventennio* (Giuntini 2000, 154). The bulk of new sports periodicals – 121 new titles – appeared between 1924 and 1934 (Grozio 2009, 191). One of the segments that most contributed to the explosion of the Italian sports press during the *ventennio* was that of local sports newspapers, with titles like *Il Mezzogiorno Sportivo* (founded in Naples in 1923), *Romagna Sportiva* (Forlì, 1924), *Perugia Sportiva* (Perugia, 1926), *Calabria Sportiva* (Cosenza, 1926), and *Genova Sport* (Genoa, 1927), among

others (Giuntini 2000, 156). Meanwhile, the regime also promoted the development of overtly propagandistic sports periodicals, like *La Palestra Fascista*, *Gran Sport*, *Milizia e Sport*, *Lo Sport Fascista* (created by Ferretti), all of which founded in 1928, and *Sport Littorio*, founded in 1933 (Baudorre, Boucharenc, and Brousse 2005, 105; Grozio 2009, 190).

The case of the *Corriere dello Sport* / *Littoriale* is particularly representative of the evolution of sports journalism under the Fascist regime. *Corriere dello Sport* was founded in Bologna in 1924 by a group of sports enthusiasts, led by Alberto Masprone and Enzo Ferrari – the same Ferrari who would later create the legendary motor racing team and car manufacturer. *Corriere dello Sport* was initially released three times a week. In December 1927, the control of *Corriere dello Sport* passed to Leandro Arpinati, a fascist party official. Arpinati renamed it *Il Littoriale*, which means pertaining to the fasces, and transformed it into a daily newspaper. "Littoriale" was indeed a symbolic name. In Ancient Rome, the *littori* [lictors] were civil servants who were tasked to protect the most powerful magistrates. In order to fulfil this role, they carried rods decorated with fasces. Mussolini adopted the lictoral fasces as a symbol of the Fascist regime. "Littoriale" was also the name of the new multi-sport stadium in Bologna inaugurated by Mussolini on October 31, 1926.[193] Upon its inauguration, the stadium, whose construction was financed by the Bolognese fascist party, led by Arpinati himself, was described as the "*primo anfiteatro della rivoluzione fascista*" [first amphitheatre of the fascist revolution] as well as a "*momumento della nuova epoca*" [monument to the new era] (Comune di Bologna n.d.). In 1929, the headquarters of the *Littoriale* newspaper was transferred from Bologna to Rome, one more visible sign of the control of the newspaper by the central power.[194]

The astonishing development of the sports press that characterised the early years of the Fascist regime was not to be repeated in the following decade, at least not to the same extent. The growth of that segment of the press slowed down and "only" 14 new sports

[193] The stadium is currently called *Stadio Renato Dall'Ara*. In 1983, the stadium was renamed after Renato Dall'Ara, the chairman of Bologna F.C. for thirty years, from 1934 to 1964.
[194] The newspaper would permanently resume its original name, *Corriere dello Sport*, as from 1944.

periodicals made their appearance between 1936 and the end of the regime, in 1943. It was still a large number compared to most other countries. Between 1934 and 1939, 51 sports periodicals ceased publication (Giuntini 2000, 154; Grozio 2009, 192).[195]

After the end of World War II, the political climate in Italy was no longer favourable to the sports press, now accused of having colluded with the demised Fascist regime (Baudorre, Boucharenc, and Brousse 2005, 106). Today, we know that the end of the regime would certainly not make the sports press disappear from the country. However, its presence would never again be quantitatively comparable to those years. And from the perspective of contents, the end of the Fascist regime determined a radical change in the style of the sports press, which moved away from the elegiac rhetoric of the Fascist sports heroes to become more rigorous, including through an increasing use of irony and denunciation (Ghirelli 2001, 341–42).

## *The multifaceted legacy of the Fascist years*

According to Dietschy (2007), the situation of the sports press under the regime was characterised by a certain "ambivalence". On the one hand, sports journalists took orders from the regime and manifested "elective affinities" with it, says Dietschy. Incidentally, this state of affairs was furthered, says Dietschy, by the aversion to sport of part of the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), on the opposing political side, who viewed it as a bourgeois diversion from the working class's objectives (ibid., 65).[196] On the other

[195] For a comprehensive overview of the evolution of sports periodicals during the Fascist *ventennio*, see also Facchinetti, Paolo. 1966. *La Stampa Sportiva in Italia*. Bologna: Alfa.

[196] A socialist sports magazine, called *Sport e Proletariato*, made a short appearance in 1923. This publication had the objective of promoting a working-class approach to sport. *Sport e Proletariato* was a four-page weekly magazine, printed on green paper. The first issue was released on July 14, 1923. The 22nd and last issue appeared on December 8 of the same year. On December 10, the printing house that printed the magazine was set on fire by fascist squads. For the story of *Sport e Proletariato*, see: Provvisionato, Sandro. (1986). "Terzini d'attacco. L'alternativa Di Sport e Proletariato." *Lancillotto e Nausica*, no. 3: 66–74; and more recently, Di Monte, Alberto. (2016). *Sport e Proletariato: Una Storia Di Stampa Sportiva, Di Atleti e Di Lotta Di Classe*. Milano: Mursia. Di Monte is also the author of *Sentieri Proletari. Storia dell'Associazione Proletari Escursionisti* (2015), devoted to the story of the *Associazione Proletari Escursionisti* (A.P.E.), the first overtly socialist sport organisation in Italy. The A.P.E., founded in 1919, promoted the access to sport for the weaker sections of society. In 1926, following the adoption of a series of repressive measures by the Fascist regime – the so-called "*leggi fascistissime*" [ultra-fascist

hand, observes Dietschy, relegating the Italian sports journalism of the *ventennio* to mere transmission belt of the regime's values ("*une courroie de transmission des valeurs du régime*") would be reductive. In fact, the editorial space sport benefitted from during the regime also allowed, in Dietschy's view, to express "relatively neutral information":

> Si les journalistes sportifs italiens, à l'instar de l'ensemble de la profession, furent aux ordres, il serait toutefois réducteur de n'envisager la presse sportive italienne de la période fasciste que comme une courroie de transmission des valeurs du régime. En effet, l'espace éditorial consacré au sport a pu aussi être un lieu d'expression d'une relative neutralité, voire d'exposition des déviances alimentées par un sport professionnel et une passion sportive s'éloignant des canons d'un sport authentiquement fasciste. Ce sont ces formes d'ambivalence et de contradictions, où se rejoignent les fortes contraintes pesant sur la presse de l'époque fasciste et les marges *d'autonomie* offertes par le sport à ses acteurs, que nous chercherons ici à explorer; des «affinités électives» qui unirent très tôt le mouvement nationaliste, puis fasciste, à la presse sportive aux douloureux reclassements des étés 1943 et 1945. (Dietschy 2007, 63–64)
>
> [If the Italian sports journalists were, like the entire profession, acting under orders, it would be reductive to consider the Italian sports press of the Fascist period as a transmission belt of the regime's values. In fact, the editorial space granted to sport also served as a place to express relative neutrality, and even to display the deviations that were fed by professional sport and a sporting passion that were at some distance from the canons of authentically Fascist sport. The discussion that follows will seek to explore these forms of ambivalence and contradiction, in which the strong constraints weighing on the press of the Fascist era combined with the margins of *autonomy* that were granted by sport and to its actors. The discussion that follows will also seek to explore the «elective affinities» that united at a very early stage the sports press to the nationalist movement, then to its Fascist descendant, until the painful reassessments of the summer of 1943 and 1945].

Whether or not one ultimately agrees with Dietschy's idea of "ambivalence" to describe the Italian sports press of the Fascist *ventennio*, which is a debate that would exceed the purpose of this thesis, Dietschy's analysis helps consider the phenomenon in its complexity while contributing to avoid the determinism, regardless of its political side, that frequently accompanies the analyses of that period of Italy's history. In his book *Sport Italia: The Italian Love Affair with Sport*, sports historian Simon Martin reminds what one should probably keep in mind when handling Italian historiography, including sport historiography, which is that Italy is the country that "created and overthrown Fascism before supporting the largest Communist Party in post-war Western Europe"

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laws] – the association stopped its public activities and moved to the underground. The association later resumed activities. It still exists today (http://www.ape-alveare.it/ - last accessed on September 10, 2020).

(2011, 3).[197] Still today, the analyses of Italian history are often impacted by this deep-seated ideological antagonism.

Another suggested reading to complement Dietschy's analysis, and one that also helps us understand the complexity of the position of the sports press during the *ventennio*, is constituted by Belloni's article entitled "The Birth of the Sport Nation: Sports and Mass Media in Fascist Italy" (2014). Similarly to Dietschy (2007), Belloni has also identified a certain ambivalence – although Belloni does not specifically use this word – in the nature of the relationship between the sports press and the regime. Like the rest of the press, sports journalists received instructions by the regime through the system of the "*veline*", i.e. sheets of thin paper ("*carta velina*" in Italian) that were sent to newspapers to tell them what they should and should not print. In the sports field, the general philosophy of the *veline* was to exalt as much as possible the sporting achievements of Fascist Italy. There is no doubt that the regime had put in place a system to control the press that also included the sports press. However, argues Belloni, from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of sport-related *veline* and the analysis of the actual sports coverage, in both sports newspapers and the sports pages of national newspapers, emerges "the impression of a regime that intervened rather little in the transmission of sports news […] This would seem to confirm the idea according to which sports journalism enjoyed more freedom of expression, or in any case, was less controlled, with respect to political or daily news" (2014, 56).

Belloni also proposes what she calls "a 'triangular' view of fascism, mass media and sport", in which the press (and the radio) served the fascist's machine of consensus and sports news played a role "in favoring the development, both qualitative and quantitative, of these means of mass communication" (2014, 53). Indeed, Belloni suggests that we

[197] For his book *Sport Italia: The Italian Love Affair with Sport* (2011), British historian Simon Martin was awarded the Lord Aberdare Literary Prize for Sports History in 2012. Martin had previously won that prize in 2005, for his book *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (2004). The Lord Aberdare Literary Prize is awarded each year by the British Society of Sports History for the best book on the history of sport in Britain or for the best book on sports history written by a British author.

should focus not only on the quantitative expansion of the sports press under the regime but also its qualitative advances:

> The quantitative data […], although important, do not sufficiently do justice to the turning point of the sports press during the fascist era […] Throughout its evolutionary process, the sports press ended up serving as a pioneer, anticipating tendencies that, in most cases, the political and informative press used only in the years following the war. (Belloni 2014, 55–56)

Among the new *qualitative* elements that emerged during that period were the diffusion of a local sports press, the specialisation within disciplines, and the use of large underlined headlines a well as of photos, caricatures and drawings, among others (Facchinetti 1966; Belloni 2014, 55). Furthermore, the sports press of the *ventennio* operated as an instrument for spreading the sport-spectacle, a rather innovative approach for the time, due to "the intuitions of the regime regarding the instrumental power of the sport-spectacle" (Belloni 2014, 56).

Interestingly, both Dietschy and Belloni have also evoked, in the above-mentioned articles (Dietschy 2007; Belloni 2014), the problem of the low status of sports journalists as compared to the colleagues in other beats, and have both referred to an evolution in their status during the Fascist *ventennio*. For Dietschy (2007, 66), the broad support of the sports press to the *Listone*, Mussolini's Nationalist List for the legislative elections of April 1924, was a "social revenge" of sports journalists, after being considered as failed journalists by their peers during liberal Italy. For Belloni (2014, 57), the sports journalist of the Fascist regime was "in search of legitimization. Up until that moment sports journalism had been barely recognized: the collective idea was that the sports journalist was a low-quality journalist or an amateur prone to improvisation".

As a corollary to Dietschy's and Belloni's contributions, we should mention Antonio Ghirelli's assessment of the sports press during the Fascist regime, which similarly highlights the underlying ambivalence of its position and performance in that period. According to Ghirelli, a declaredly left-wing journalist, essayist and historian, sport-specialist periodicals and the sports pages in the leading generalist newspapers in the

1930s reached "a significant degree of maturity, despite the excesses of nationalism and the verbal emphasis imposed by fascism" (2003).[198]

The analysis of the state of journalism under totalitarian regimes can never be separated from the very nature of these regimes, which typically put in place mechanisms to control the media output, in diverse and yet similar ways. The logic behind the analysis in this section 5.1.2 has been to try to establish the legacy of the sports press of that period for sports journalism in the years to come, keeping as distant as possible from ideological considerations, while bearing in mind the context in which the story unfolded.

### *The early post-war years*

The Italian sports press overcame quite rapidly the crisis determined by the chaos of World War II and the difficult climate of the immediate post-war period. With the creation of *Stadio* and *Tuttosport* in July 1945, adding to the existing *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere dello Sport*, Italy now had four sports newspapers with national reach. The possibility for all of them to have a market in the same country was favoured by their different spheres of geographical influence: *Tuttosport* for Turin and the Tyrrhenian belt; *Gazzetta dello Sport* for Milan and the Po Valley; *Stadio* for Bologna, the region of Veneto, the Apennine belt and the Adriatic side; and *Corriere dello Sport* for Rome and the South of the country (Ghirelli 2001, 316). Far from being mutually detrimental, the coexistence of these four newspapers contributed to increase the interest of Italians for sports, and this would later fuel, in turn, the popularity of the newspapers in the 1960s and 1970s (ibid., 317).

In 1950, Italy's sports journalists relaunched their association. ASSI (*Associazione Stampa Sportiva Italiana*) had been suppressed by the Fascist regime in 1926. The association was officially relaunched on February 16, 1950, when its general assembly

[198] Ghirelli's own contribution to Italian sports journalism is described at length in section **5.1.3 The innovator**.

approved the statutes of a new organisation. The professional body was renamed USSI (*Unione Stampa Sportiva Italiana*). Bruno Roghi, who had already been at the helm of both *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere dello Sport*, became the first president of the USSI.

### 5.1.3 The innovators

Gian Paolo Ormezzano, one of the deans of Italian sports journalism and the chief editor of *Tuttosport* from 1974 to 1979, has divided the history and protagonists of Italian sports journalism into three phases: Love, Eroticism and Pornography – the third being still ongoing (Ormezzano 2008; 2015).[199] This is clearly the most unconventional interpretation that has ever been proposed to describe the evolution of Italian sports journalism, but its irreverent tone should not mislead. Ormezzano's portraits of journalists are a precious basis to identify, as suggested by the title of this section, the "innovators" of Italian sports journalism. In addition to a lifelong career in journalism, Ormezzano is also the author and co-author of several essays about the history of sports (Ormezzano 1959; Panza, Colombero, and Ormezzano 1974; Ormezzano and Colombero 1978; Ormezzano 1980a; 1980b; 1985; 1989; 1997; Conti and Ormezzano 2007; Ormezzano 2008; 2010; 2015).

With the sports journalism pioneers of the end of the 19th century, the relationship between journalism and sport was a Love relationship, explains Ormezzano (2015), characterised indeed by the journalists' love for sport. Reporters were like poets or singers, and "*articoli come canzoni*" [articles like songs] (ibid., 13). That age ended in the early 1960s, when a new generation of sports journalists emerged who had a more technical, academic approach to sport. This is when sports journalism shifted from love

[199] This interpretative scheme first appeared in 1994, in *La Stampa Italiana Nell'Età Della TV: Dagli Anni Settanta a Oggi,* edited by Valerio Castronovo and Nicola Tranfaglia. The year 2008, in one of the in-text citations, refers to a later and revised version. In both editions, the three-phase interpretative scheme has appeared in a chapter, written by Ormezzano, entitled "La Stampa Sportiva". The 2015 citation refers to *I Cantaglorie. Una Storia Calda e Ribalda della Stampa Sportiva*, in which Ormezzano re-proposes the three-phase scheme through the stories of 27 Italian sports journalists of the 20th and 21st centuries.

to the study of love, i.e. Eroticism. Gianni Brera was the symbol of this new phase, says Ormezzano. Then, with the advent of the massive broadcasting of sporting events on television, and the economic stakes that went with it, came the third phase, characterised by what had now turned into an obscene representation of love, i.e. Pornography (the show of sports), with its pornographers (sports reporters) (ibid.).[200] Ormezzano (2015) admits having himself participated in all three phases. This peculiar codification of Italian sports journalism history, largely drawn from Ormezzano's personal experience in the profession, has been elevated by media analysts to "interpretative model of the evolution of sports information" (Sorice 2006, 95) and "historiographic (and interpretative) paradigm of Italian sports journalism" (Brambilla 2015).

**Love, eroticism and pornography: the protagonists of Ormezzano's three-phase history of Italian sports journalism**

The three phases in Ormezzano's scheme of the evolution of Italian sports journalism – love, eroticism and pornography – were marked by leading figures whom Ormezzano has characterised as the "museum pieces" (*giornalisti da museo)* of Italian sports journalism (2015, Kindle loc. 508).

Under the phase of **Love**, that is the phase of the poets ("*i cantori*") of sports journalism, Ormezzano includes: Emilio De Martino (1895-1958), who led *Gazzetta dello Sport* from 1947 to 1950; Orio Vergani (1898-1960), who worked at *Corriere della Sera* for over 30 years, covering 25 Giri d'Italia and as many Tours de France; Emilio Colombo (1884-1947), a football player and referee who later became a sports journalist, up to heading *Gazzetta dello Sport* for three different periods, between 1922 and 1936; Bruno Roghi (1894-1962), who led all three sports newspapers – *Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport* and *Tuttosport* – in the timeframe between 1936 and 1962; Ruggero Radice (1908-2002) of *Tuttosport*, best known as a cycling reporter and close friend to Fausto Coppi and his brother Serse, to such an extent that a road in Castellania, where the Coppi brothers were born, in Piedmont, is named after Radice; Vittorio Pozzo (1886-1968), best known as the coach who led the Italy national football team to victory in the 1934 and 1938 World Cups; Giuseppe Ambrosini (1886-1980), the founder of the iconic *Guerin Sportivo*; Bruno Raschi (1923-1983), the inventor of a column for *Gazzetta dello Sport*, called "Ronda di notte", which he wrote after each stage of the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France;[201] Carlo (Carlin) Bergoglio (1895-1959), who started out as a caricaturist for *Guerin Sportivo* and later served as chief editor of *Tuttosport*, taking over the role of Renato Casalbore

[200] Ormezzano (2015) explains in the book (ibid., Kindle loc. 133) that he borrowed the metaphor of big sports events as pornography from Oliviero Beha, another Italian journalist.
[201] These columns are collected in *Ronda Di Notte. Storie, Personaggi e Fiabe Del Giro e Del Tour*. Legnano: Edizioni Landoni (Raschi 1984). In his journalistic career, Bruno Raschi covered 30 editions of the Giro d'Italia and 18 editions of the Tour de France.

after Casalbore tragically died in an air crash on May 4, 1949;[202] Nicolò Carosio (1907-1984), best known as a radio and television commentator and the official commentator of the matches of the Italy national football team for over 30 years; Dino Buzzati (1906-1972), a writer of literature (see section **4.2.4 Writers in sports journalism**) who also covered sports events as a reporter – including the Innsbruck 1964 Winter Olympics, which Ormezzano describes as "*il momento più alto dell'incontro fra letteratura e sport, se non altro per il giornalismo italiano*" [the highest moment of the meeting between literature and sport, if only for Italian journalism] (2015, Kindle loc. 812–13); Gianni Mura (1945-2020), disciple of Gianni Brera, best known for his coverage of the Tour de France;[203] and finally, Giovanni Arpino (1927-1987), another writer of literature (see section **4.2.4 Writers in sports journalism**), like Dino Buzzati, who also had in common with Buzzati a certain modesty and humility, says Ormezzano (2015, Kindle loc. 845-846).

For the second phase, that of **Eroticism**, one name stands out in the crowd. It is Gianni Brera's (1919-1992). According to Ormezzano, Brera was in fact the inventor of sports eroticism (2015, Kindle loc. 864-865). It was with Brera that the journalistic coverage of sports moved from love *tout court* (the time of poets) to the *study* of sport, says Ormezzano. Incidentally, Brera was the first to define himself as a sport scholar [*uno studioso dello sport*] (ibid., Kindle loc. 124). The other sports journalists, alongside Brera, that Ormezzano (2015) has included under the eroticists category include: Mario Fossati (1922-2013), a brotherly friend to Brera, who worked for *Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Il Giorno* and *Repubblica* to follow Brera in all three newspapers (ibid., Kindle loc. 918-919); Antonio Ghirelli (1922-2012), who served as chief editor of the Roman edition of *Gazzetta dello Sport* and then of *Tuttosport* and *Corriere dello Sport*, among other prestigious roles in Italian journalism; Gino Palumbo (1921-1987), who served as head of the sports newsroom at *Corriere della Sera* and then chief editor of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, and whose vision of football was famously antagonist to Brera's; Vladimiro Caminiti (1932-1993), a great specialist of football, and specifically Juventus, who spent 30 years at *Tuttosport*; Gianni Minà (born in 1938), who began his journalistic career at *Tuttosport*, of which he was also chief editor from 1996 to 1998 – although Minà is best known as a television host and commentator, not only of sports; Sergio Zavoli (1923-2020), a great expert of cycling and the inventor of the iconic *Processo alla Tappa* [The Stage on Trial], a television programme that began right after each stage of the Giro d'Italia, widely recognised to have revolutionised the way sports were covered on television; Enrico Ameri (1926-2004) and Sandro Ciotti (1928-2003), jointly defined by Ormezzano as "the ideal bridge between radio and television" (2015, Kindle loc. 1214-1215); Giorgio Tosatti (1937-2007), who worked for *Tuttosport* and served as editor-in-chief of *Corriere dello Sport*, in addition to being a highly respected television commentator; Mario Sconcerti (born in 1948), who began his career at *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, served as deputy editor-in-chief for la *Gazzetta dello Sport* and, more importantly, created the sports pages of *Repubblica* in 1979.[204]

Finally, there are the sports journalists that Ormezzano (2015) has ascribed to the third and possibly less flattering phase of **Pornography**. These include: Aldo Biscardi (1930-2017), who

[202] Renato Casalbore, the founder of *Tuttosport*, perished on May 4, 1949 in the Superga air disaster, on the outskirts of Turin, alongside the entire Torino football team – the legendary *Grande Torino*. More on Casalbore can be found in section 5.3, in the part of the section focusing on *Tuttosport*.

[203] In 2015, Gianni Mura was the winner of the *Prix Antoine Blondin*, the French literary prize that rewards literary work on sports. Mura was the first non-francophone to win the prize. The prize is named after French novelist and sports journalist Antoine Blondin (1922-1991). Blondin covered several editions of the *Tour de France* for *L'Equipe*, the French sports newspaper.

[204] *La Repubblica*, founded in 1976, initially did not have a sports section, nor was it released on Mondays.

started out working for the press, at *Il Mattino* and *Paese Sera*, but mainly owed his fame to *Il Processo del Lunedì* [The Monday Trial], a sparkling sports talk TV programme about football, which he hosted for several years; Maurizio Mosca (1940-2010), who spent 20 years at *Gazzetta dello Sport* but became famous especially as a television commentator and a regular feature at Biscardi's *Processo del Lunedì*; Adriano De Zan (1932-2001), the voice of Italian cycling in television reporting; Candido Cannavò (1930-2009), the editor-in-chief of *Gazzetta dello Sport* for 19 years, until 2002; Gianni Clerici (born in 1930), a tennis commentator, journalist and author, after being a tennis player himself, who was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2006;[205] Rino Tommasi (born in 1934), a prior organiser of boxing events, best known for forming a TV duo of tennis commentators with Gianni Clerici; and finally, Fabio Fazio (born in 1964), the youngest figure in Ormezzano's overall gallery and the host, from 1993 to 2001, of *Quelli che ... il Calcio*, a TV show based on live commentary of football matches – although Fazio is best known as a television presenter and talk show host and is usually not identified as "sports journalist".[206]

Each and every one of the 27 sports journalists featured in Ormezzano's survey (2015) would deserve a much longer description than the few lines provided in the above text box, which definitely do not do justice to their outstanding and long-standing achievements. The journalists whose stories are more directly pertinent to the subject of this thesis – Gianni Brera, Gino Palumbo, Antonio Ghirelli and Candido Cannavò – will be singled out for further analysis at a later stage of this chapter. It should be specified that Ormezzano did not intend to set a clear-cut separation between his three groups of *cantori*, *erotisti* e *pornografi* – corresponding to the three phases of love, eroticism and pornography, respectively. Sometimes elements of all three typologies were present in one same journalist, Ormezzano has argued (2015, Kindle loc. 510). In any case, and as personal and arbitrary as these categories might be, they constitute an easy lead to understanding the contributions of these journalists to Italian sports journalism.

Before moving to the profiles of some of these innovators of Italian sports journalism, reference should be made to an alternative interpretation of the evolution of Italian sports journalism, beside Ormezzano's. Instead of three phases, as in Ormezzano's model, Ghirelli (2006) has described three different and concomitant "impulses" that operated in

[205] The International Tennis Hall of Fame (https://www.tennisfame.com), located in Newport, Rhode Island (USA), honours players and other contributors to the sport of tennis.
[206] The above descriptions (in the grey text box) of the 27 journalists included in Ormezzano's "catalogue" occasionally comprise elements that were not included in Ormezzano's own descriptions of those journalists, for the sake of completeness.

Italian sports journalism and changed Italy's sports press, in the period from 1960 to 1980. In Ghirelli's words, this is the period in which the Italian sports press "metamorphosed" (ibid.). The first impulse came from a new focus on the human side of sports, with sports journalism now providing information on players themselves, off the pitch, as well as the people associated to them for either professional or personal reasons. This approach was initially triggered by Gino Palumbo at *Il Mattino*, the daily newspaper published in Naples, says Ghirelli. The second impulse was primarily triggered by Gianni Brera, whose revolution consisted in investigating and highlighting the tactical aspects of team sports, mainly football, to an unprecedented extent. The third impulse, continues Ghirelli, was brought about by the advent of new techniques in the design and layout of newspapers. Innovative headlines and a new language embodied, as part of this third impulse, the evolution of sports journalism from the post- World War II style to the new society of the 1960s. In Ghirelli's view, Gino Palumbo was a protagonist also of this third impulse. Palumbo ran the sports section of *Corriere della Sera* in the 1960s, and was at the helm of *Gazzetta dello Sport* from 1976 to 1983. Among the central figures of this third phase, Ghirelli (2006, 92) also mentions Maurizio Barendson, mainly known as a television commentator, and Giordano Goggioli, head of the sports newsroom of *La Nazione*, the daily newspaper published in Florence. Ghirelli places his own journalistic work in this third current or impulse (ibid.).

## ***Gianni Brera*** *(1919-1992)*

If one had to pick just one name among the Italian sports journalists of the 20th century, or perhaps of all times, Gianni Brera would quite certainly be the one. Brera was appointed co-editor-in-chief of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, alongside Emilio De Martino, in 1949. He was only 30 years old at the time, the youngest editor-in-chief of a newspaper in Italy. While being a famous sports journalist, Brera was also the author of novels like *Il Corpo della Ragassa* (1969), *Naso Bugiardo* (1977) e *Il Mio Vescovo e le Animalesse* (1983).[207] A film was made from *Il Corpo della Ragassa* in 1979, directed by Pasquale

[207] *Naso Bugiardo* was re-released in 1998 with the new title *La Ballata del Pugile Suonato*.

Festa Campanile. In addition, Brera wrote essays on his beloved region of Lombardy, like *Lombardia Amore Mio* (1982) and *Storie dei Lombardi* (1993, published posthumously) as well as theatre pieces and food and wine books. Despite being also a full-fledged writer and essayist, there is no doubt that Brera represents, in the collective imagination of most Italians, *the* quintessential sports journalist, and this is still true some 30 years after his death. In order to commemorate Brera on the first anniversary of his passing, his colleague Gianni Mura wrote a memorable article for *Repubblica*, entitled "I Senzabrera" [*senza* is the Italian for "without", hence "The Withoutbreras"] (1993). Mura's article gives an idea of scale of how sports journalists since Brera's death had to confront his myth (Foot 2007, 278). The current sub-section about Brera does not have the ambition to draw a comprehensive portrait of this titan of sports journalism. Even focusing "exclusively", so to say, on his contributions as an innovator of sports journalism would require an entire chapter, possibly a book. More modestly, this section is limited to describing how Brera contributed to connect sports journalism with society, within the core subject of this thesis.

Brera was more than a serious and rigorous professional. He was austere and commanded respect. In his presence, no one would reasonably question the seriousness and legitimacy of sports journalism, to name a long-standing issue in the business that has also recurrently emerged in this thesis. His strong personality actually led to some legendary duels with other journalists. The most famous rivalry was that with Gino Palumbo. The two journalists had a philosophically different vision of Italy's national sport of football. Palumbo was an advocate of attacking play whereas Brera was a supporter of defensive football based on counter-attack. And the duel was not only verbal, as evidenced by an episode occurred in the 1960s. While Brera and Palumbo were both covering a football match in Brescia (Brescia vs. Torino) on April 10, 1966, Palumbo slapped Brera's face and Brera responded with a straight punch (Arturi 2012, 301). Palumbo judged that Brera had diminished a colleague (Antonio Ghirelli), and by extension the overall journalism of southern Italy, and wanted to defend that cause, of which he was a fervent advocate (Cucci and Germano 2003, 98; Del Tufo 2019). Both Ghirelli and Palumbo were born in

southern Italy – Naples and Cava de' Tirreni, respectively – whereas Brera was proudly born in the upper Po Valley (San Zenone al Po), in the North of Italy.

Brera's fame was indeed due as much to his journalistic qualities as to his strong temperament. It was precisely the magic of this combination, and the popularity it attracted, that dragged Italian sports journalism at large toward enhanced visibility and legitimacy. One day Ormezzano told Brera that he should ask colleagues to kick him back part of their salaries, considering how their salaries had increased thanks to Brera's contribution to the prestige of sports journalism (Ormezzano 2015, Kindle loc. 898-899). In their volume on the history of Italian sports journalism, Cucci and Germano have argued that sports journalists were redeemed by Brera's *magistero stilistico* [stylistic mastership], "*non più reietti e confinati ad una sorta di alfabetismo minore*" [no longer rejected and confined to a sort of lower literacy status] (2003, 89).

Brera's journalism provides a perfect example of the distinctiveness of the language of sports journalism, a question that was extensively dealt with in section **4.2 Literature for the people** of this thesis. Brera is credited for innovating the Italian language with new terms such as "*libero*" (sweeper) in football, used in the Italian version also in other languages, among others, and for coining nicknames for Italian football players that have often made history, like "*rombo di tuono*" (thunderclap) for Gigi Riva, "Bonimba" for Roberto Boninsegna, or "Stradivialli" for Gianluca Vialli, to mention but a few.[208] He also coined the "*masturbatio grillorum"*, an expression which he used to point to the sterility of ball possession as an end it itself in football. This expression, later borrowed by commentators also off sports, is a good sample of both Brera's linguistic genius and his lack of rhetoric or "political correctness", as we would call it today. His unique use of the Italian language, combined with knowledge and a strong personality, made him a very popular figure of Italian journalism. At the time he worked for *Il Giorno*, a national

[208] The above examples are all related to football and football players. Even if Brera is mainly remembered as a football expert, almost a football "scientist", football was by no means the only sport he wrote about. He was also a specialist of other sports, especially athletics and boxing. For Brera's journalism with a focus on boxing, see Giuntini, Sergio. (2016). "Il Pugilato Di Gianni Brera." *Quaderni Della Società Italiana Di Storia Dello Sport* V (6): 137–49.

general-interest newspaper based in Milan, he brought an estimated surplus of 40,000 sold copies per day, directly attributed to his personal contribution to the newspaper (Giuntini 2007, 144).[209]

While entertaining the public, Brera's creative language also attracted the interest of intellectuals, generating contrasting opinions. This is what Cesare Garboli (1928-2004), one of the most important Italian literary critics of the 20th century, wrote about Brera:

> Si riconosca – è tempo – a uno dei nostri più inventivi giornalisti il talento dello scrittore: Gianni Brera è un saggista, un costruttore di pure invenzioni, di squisiti arbitrii di intelligenza. Cosa importa se l'argomento che egli tratta quasi quotidianamente strania dalla letteratura? (Garboli 1966)
>
> [Let's recognise – it's about time – to one of our most inventive journalists the talent of the writer: Gianni Brera is an essayist, a creator of pure inventions, of exquisite acts of freedom of intelligence. What does it matter if the topic that he deals with almost on a daily basis is estranged from literature?]

For Garboli, Brera's opposers were still attached to an aristocratic idea of literature – "*la vecchia idea aristocratica, avant-guerre, che la letteratura sia figlia soltanto della letteratura*" (ibid.) [the old aristocratic, avant-guerre idea that literature can only be the child of literature]. Diametrically opposed was Umberto Eco's position. Contrary to Garboli, Eco disdainfully described Brera's use of the language as "*gaddismo spiegato al popolo*" [gaddism explained to the people] (1964). At first sight, this definition would seem to innocently characterise Brera's style as a popular version of Gadda's literature. It could actually appear quite flattering. Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893-1973), a Milan-born writer and poet, was known for "playing" with the Italian language, to which he added elements from technical jargon and dialect. Gadda shared with Brera both the Lombard origins and this playful use of words, including from dialect. Eco's description of Brera's style was, in reality, all but flattering, when one reads the rest of Eco's commentary. And in any case, Brera did not appreciate the parallel with Gadda anyway. Below are samples from the entertaining cut and thrust between Eco and Brera:

[209] Brera was appointed as head of the sports desk of *Il Giorno* on April 25, 1956, just a few days after the first-ever issue of the new newspaper (Moroni 2019).

Eco describing Brera's use of the language:

> Un esempio deteriore di impiego gratuito di stilemi ex-colti è dato dalla prosa del cronista sportivo Gianni Brera, che rappresenta un esempio di "gaddismo spiegato al popolo", là dove il "popolo" avrebbe bisogno solo di un linguaggio appropriato alla materia trattata. (Eco 1964)
>
> [A low example of groundless use of ex-cultured stylistic devices can be found in the prose of sports reporter Gianni Brera, which represents an example of "gaddism explained to the people", where the "people" would only need a language that is appropriate to the subject matter.]

Brera's responses:

> Infine viene Eco, e scopre l'acqua calda: non sapendo a quale prototipo addebitare un linguaggio per lui nuovo, cerca nell'elenco bibliografico: vedi mo' qua Carletto Emilio Gadda … Un bel niente! Carletto Emilio è uscito col *Pasticciaccio* quando *el Gioânn* scriveva cronacazze muscolari da venti anni. El por Gioânn non ha mai preteso di far letteratura. Se ha dovuto inventarsi un linguaggio, non già una lingua (scherzèm minga), lo ha fatto perché non esisteva. A scrivere di sport erano letterati minori, senza gran nerbo, o tecnici di sport che non sapevano di letteratura. (G. Brera 1963)
>
> [Finally Eco comes, and he reinvents the wheel: not knowing to which prototype he could attribute what was to him a new language, he searches the bibliographical list: let's see here Carletto Emilio Gadda ... A whole lot of nothing! When Carletto Emilio came out with the *Pasticciaccio*, *el Gioânn* had been writing muscular reports for twenty years. El por Gioânn never claimed to create literature. If he had to invent a lexicon, certainly not a language (*scherzèm minga*), he did so because it did not exist. Those who wrote about sports were minor writers, without much character, or sports technicians who knew nothing about literature].[210]

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> [Gadda] Macché, lo detesto. È anche lui uno scapigliato che non racconta nulla, fa degli arpeggi da cui non escono melodie […] È un insieme di bozzetti. Il signor Eco Umberto, prima di diventare un grande botanico, era un professore pieno di spocchia che pretendeva di giudicare i miei articoli di sette o otto cartelle scritti in un'ora e mezzo. Diceva che ero un Gadda spiegato al popolo: non teneva conto che il giro mentale era diverso. (G. Brera 1992)
>
> [Referred to Gadda] Come on, I hate him. He is also a disheveled one who tells nothing, he makes arpeggios that do not produce melodies […] He is a set of sketches. Mr. Eco Umberto, before becoming a great botanist, was a haughty professor who expected to judge the seven- or eight-page articles that I had written in an hour and a half. He said that I was a Gadda explained to the people: he did not take into account that the mental lap was different.

[210] "Pasticciaccio" refers to *Quer Pasticciaccio Brutto de Via Merulana*, a novel by Carlo Emilio Gadda, first published in 1957 by Garzanti. The book exists in English under the title *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana.* "El Gioânn" and "scherzèm minga" are expressions from the Lombard dialect. "El Gioânn" refers to Gianni Brera himself, whose full first name was Giovanni Luigi (Gioânn is the Lombard dialect for Giovanni). "Scherzèm minga" is the Lombard for "let's not joke about it".

Brera maintained, as explained in one of the above excerpts, that his creative use of the language was not an end in itself but rather a need determined by the lack of a good enough language to describe sports. That was his actual "mental lap" (*giro mentale*), to which he refers at the end of the second citation, and which Eco had in his view misunderstood. Paolo Brera has written that his father Gianni, as surprising as it may seem, never attached too much importance to his writing style: "*L'essenziale, ripeteva, è avere qualcosa da dire; poi, sì, bisogna raccontarlo il meglio possibile – ma solo dopo*" (P. Brera 1994) [The essential, he used to repeat, is to have something to say; then, of course, one has to tell it as well as possible – but only afterwards].

Whatever the drive behind Brera's unique style and language, the outcome was astonishing powerful. According to award-winning sports journalist and writer Luigi Garlando (2018), Brera's main lesson has been that writing is more powerful than images, contrary to the widespread notion that images through television or the Internet are stronger and faster. It is obviously not a derby between nostalgia and innovation. It is not even about the qualitative level of journalism. It is rather about what creativity may bring to sports storytelling. In a tribute article to Brera, Giancarlo Padovan (2019), a journalist and former colleague of Brera's at *Repubblica*, has argued that sports journalism has even got better since Brera in some respects, for sport is now explained with plenty of details that were not reported 50 years ago. The difference from Brera and other leading sports editors of his time, says Padovan, lies in the fact that today's sports journalism has become homologated.

Brera's journalism has epitomised sport as the *trait d'union* between intellectuals and popular culture and the role of sports journalism in the process. Brera did not like it when people said he was wasted in the sports grandstand, because he believed that sport is multifaceted and that by writing about sports, one can actually write about anything (Ormezzano 2015). In this respect, a special mention goes to *L'Arcimatto*, Brera's feature in the *Guerin Sportivo* from 1960 to 1973. The articles for *L'Arcimatto* moved from a

piece of sports news – the pretext – to expand into literature, history, food, philosophy, psychology, anthropology and more.[211]

Cucci and Germano have described the social role of sports journalism through the figure of Gianni Brera:

> Sotto il segno di Brera, il giornalismo sportivo razionalizzò le proprie specificità, producendo un *unicum* stilistico, quasi drammaturgico nell'individuare, una volta per tutte, il nesso fra sport e società. (Cucci and Germano 2003, 91)
>
> [With Brera, sports journalism rationalised its specificities by producing a stylistic *unicum*, almost dramaturgical in that it identified, once and for all, the link between sport and society].

## ***Gino Palumbo*** *(1921-1987)*

If the core of Brera's innovative power was in the language, Luigi (Gino) Palumbo revolutionised the way sports newsmaking was organised within the newspaper. Ghirelli (2003) described Palumbo as "perhaps the greatest organiser that the (sports) press has ever had after World War II", thanks to his ability to manage both the technical and human resources of the newspaper. For Ormezzano (2015), Palumbo was a "natural-born organiser and great motivator" (Kindle loc. 1025). After heading the sports desk of *Corriere della Sera*, Palumbo directed *Gazzetta dello Sport* from 1976 to 1983. Upon his arrival at *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Palumbo radically changed the graphic design of the newspaper and introduced larger and more sensational headlines.

Palumbo has been described as carefully, "almost maniacally" opting for popular topics, intended as the topics that were frequently featured in people's conversations (Arturi 2012, 300). According to Ormezzano (2015), Palumbo would come back from the stadium by tramway just to listen to what people said about the match in order to then

[211] The articles that Gianni Brera wrote for his weekly feature *L'Arcimatto*, published in the *Guerin Sportivo*, have been collected in two volumes: Brera, Gianni. (2016). *L'Arcimatto, 1960-1966*. Milano: Book Time; and Brera, Gianni. (1995). *La bocca del leone. L'Arcimatto (1967- 1973)*. Milano: Baldini & Castoldi.

reproduce it in the newspaper (Kindle loc. 1032-1035). This approach had a major supporter in Ghirelli, who was also a close friend of Palumbo's and praised Palumbo's looking at the human side of sport and players (Ghirelli 2006, 91). This is how Franco Arturi has condensed the core of Palumbo's idea of sports journalism: "*Il campione era un uomo come chi ne osannava le gesta: i suoi sentimenti, le reazioni emotive lo avvicinavano al pubblico e un giornale popolare doveva raccontarli*" (Arturi 2012, 299) [The champion was a man so as those who praised his deeds: his feelings and emotional reactions brought him closer to the public, and a popular newspaper had to tell them].

Brera regarded this approach as sentimental and thought it was actually meant to conceal a substantial lack of knowledge of the technical and tactical aspects of the game (Ghirelli 2003) – namely the elements which were, in turn, at the core of his own journalism. Besides a different approach to football – defensive for Brera and attacking play for Palumbo – and the significant fact, in the dynamics of their exchanges, that Brera was from the North of Italy while Palumbo was from the South, their respective use of language in journalism was also profoundly different. Brera famously loved to play with words. By contrast, Palumbo had no particular focus on writing, as explained by Cesare Lanza (2017), a journalist who knew Palumbo personally. What mattered the most to Palumbo was the choice of the news, and in this role of news gatekeeper, his main concern, says Lanza (ibid.), was to pick up what was likely to most interest the readers.

The bottom line was that Palumbo's approach proved utterly successful. When he was hired to lead *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, in 1976, the newspaper was down to ten pages and a circulation of 120,000 copies (Arturi 2012, 300). Under his direction, *Gazzetta dello Sport* came to sell more copies than the main general-interest newspapers in the country, *Corriere della Sera* and *Repubblica* (Ghirelli 2003). In the seven years of Palumbo's tenure, the number of readers of *Gazzetta dello Sport* increased by 130% (Arturi 2012, 301).

## ***Antonio Ghirelli*** *(1922-2012)*

Along with his friend Palumbo, Antonio Ghirelli was the other leading member of the so-called *scuola meridionale* [southern school] of sports journalism. Both were born, as previously mentioned, in the Naples area. Sports historian Marco Impiglia (2012, 10) has written that Ghirelli and Brera have been the ultimate samples of Italy's *questione meridionale* [southern question], with Brera obviously representing the northern counterpart. The expression "southern question" was used to indicate the backwardness that had long characterised the development of southern Italy versus northern Italy after Italy's unification in 1861. Ghirelli himself once wrote that Brera's idea of the southern school of sports journalism as a "sentimental retreat" was in fact heavily influenced by what Ghirelli considered to be Brera's "*pregiudizio antimeridionale*" [anti-southern bias] (Ghirelli 2003).

Ghirelli's career spanned well beyond sports journalism. The sports segment, however, was a central and long chapter in his professional path. He worked for all three Italian sports newspapers. He collaborated with *Gazzetta dello Sport* and reached the role of editor-in-chief at both *Tuttosport* (1959-1961) and *Corriere dello Sport* (1965-1972).[212] He is also the author of important volumes on sports history, like *Storia del Calcio in Italia* (1967), which has been defined as "the first real history of the game […] based on serious historical research" (Foot 2007, 279), and *Tre Volte Campioni del Mondo: Tutte le Partite degli Azzurri dal 1934 al 1990 nel Racconto dei Più Grandi Giornalisti* (1994). These books add to the multiple essays that he devoted to Italy's political history. Outside of sports, he worked for *Paese Sera* and *Repubblica*, and served as editor-in-chief of *Il Globo* and *L'Avanti*.[213] He also reached top positions in the Italian public television, serving as director of TG2 (the news programmes of Rai 2) in 1986-1987. Sandro Pertini, once elected the seventh President of Italy in 1978, appointed Ghirelli as chief press

[212] *Corriere dello Sport* had not yet merged with *Stadio.* The two newspapers would merge in 1977, leading to a new sports daily called *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*.
[213] The list is not exhaustive as Ghirelli also collaborated with *La Voce*, *Il Politecnico*, *Il Mondo*, *L'Unità*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Milano Sera*, and even *Topolino* (Impiglia 2012, 10).

officer for the Presidency. From 1983 to 1986, during Bettino Craxi's government, Ghirelli served as chief press officer of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

As a sports journalist, Ghirelli was not keen on flowery language. His fluid prose has been described as English-style, in contrast to Brera's elaborated use of the language (Impiglia 2012, 10). Ghirelli's style has even been labelled as quintessentially *antibreriano* [antibrerian] (Cucci and Germano 2003, 94). When he was editor-in-chief of *Tuttosport*, Ghirelli opted for big and attractive headlines – ahead of Palumbo at *Gazzetta dello Sport*. He thought this transformation was needed to simplify the message and attract a larger public, amidst a new media landscape in which radio and television were now challenging the old predominance of the press (Ghirelli 2001, 351–52). This is how Ormezzano (2015), who has included Ghirelli among the "eroticists" of sports journalism (because he was devoted to "*lo studio dello sport amato*" [the study of beloved sport]), has emphasised Ghirelli's role as an innovator of Italian sports journalism:

> In pochi mesi Ghirelli incise eccome non solo su «Tuttosport», ma su tutta la stampa sportiva italiana, che conobbe nuovi orizzonti e voglia di andare oltre, avanti, lontano, di proiettare lo sport sulla società che intanto si interessava sempre più dello sport (ibid., Kindle loc. 1007-1008).
>
> [In a few months, Ghirelli had an impact not only on «Tuttosport», but on the entire Italian sports press, which knew new horizons and the desire to move further forward and to project sport onto a society that in the meantime was increasingly interested in sport].

Ghirelli has also been credited by Ormezzano (1980a, 346; 2018) for introducing political analysis in sports newspapers. Interestingly, Ghirelli had previously credited Ormezzano for understanding that politics could not be excluded from sports newspapers, when Ormezzano was at the head of *Tuttosport* from 1974 to 1979 (Ghirelli 2001, 353).[214] Allowing politics into a sports newspaper was a contentious choice, though, as critics frequently emerged to remind that sport was to stay in its yard (Ormezzano 2018). With reference to the span of topics that might be integrated into a sports newspaper, Mallozzi

[214] Ghirelli's essay "La stampa sportiva", which includes the above observation, first appeared in 1976. At the time, Ormezzano had been *Tuttosport*'s chief editor since August 1974, a role that he would hold until April 1979.

has argued that for Ghirelli, even moon landing could become a sporting gesture for the front page (2018, 175).

During his tenure as editor-in-chief of *Corriere dello Sport*, Ghirelli created a special section in the newspaper for young readers, called *Forza Ragazzi* [Come on guys!]. Published twice a week, *Forza Ragazzi* focused on the needs of the youngsters in their everyday life, and covered non-sporting topics like school, university and access to work, among others. In accordance with the readership geography of the newspaper, largely concentrated in Italy's centre and south, *Forza Ragazzi* mostly focused on the issues with which young people were confronted in those parts of the country (Ghirelli 2001, 356–57; 2003). *Forza Ragazzi* epitomised Ghirelli's idea of a sports newspaper that reflects the place of sport within the broader framework of society.

### 5.1.4 Sports journalism in post-industrial Italy

On July 11, 1982, Italy's football team beat West Germany in the final match of the FIFA World Cup at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in Madrid. It was Italy's third world title, after those of 1934 and 1938. The following day, *Corriere dello Sport-Stadio*, with its memorable "*Eroici*" [Heroic] headline, sold nearly 1.7 million copies, beating *Gazzetta dello Sport* by 300,000 copies (Ghirelli 2003). The victory in the World Cup in the early years of the decade generally boosted Italy's sport-related industries. More importantly, the 1980s marked a turning point in the relationship between the world of sports and the world of media because of the fast-rising role of television and advertising. Sport was not new to television. The first broadcasting of a football match in Italy dated back to 1954, which was also the inaugural year of broadcasting of RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana, the national public broadcasting company.[215] In the 1970s, the sports press had already found itself facing the increasing presence of sports on the television schedule, but the change occurred considerably faster in the following decade (Cucci and Germano 2003, 101). The 1980s saw the advent in Italy of what Umberto Eco called "*neotelevisione*" [neo-

[215] The first match on the Italian television was Italy vs. Egypt, broadcast on RAI TV on January 24, 1954.

television], a neologism that Eco first used in 1983 to indicate the new competitive television landscape characterised by public *and* private broadcasters (2000, 163–79).[216] The age of the monopoly of public television was over. The advent of *neotelevisione* was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the amount of transmission time devoted to sports events, and it was not just a quantitative change. It was also a radically new mindset and a role reversal ["*un ribaltamento dei rapporti*"], as Italian television critic Aldo Grasso (2003) has described it. Until then, television had simply been covering sports and although the two were interconnected, television and sports had been operating as two self-contained interlocutors. In the new landscape of *neotelevisione*, sports started to adapt the organisation of its events to the logic and needs of television. In other words, it was no longer television simply covering sports but the world of sports now subordinating its decisions to television coverage (the role reversal described by Grasso). The primary objective was to maximise television audience. As part of this evolution, sport also became "the natural container for advertising", adds Grasso (ibid.).

The sports press was not downsized by the massive coverage of sports events on television. On the contrary, instead of causing a sense of saturation, sports on TV acted as a tow (Murialdi 2000, 279). The larger accessibility of sports events made sport ever more popular, extending its popularity also amongst women, elderly people and children (Ghirelli 2003). In fact, the 1980s were *the* booming decade for the sports press (Ormezzano 1980a; Cucci and Germano 2003, chap. 7). As a reminder, it was in 1982 that a sports newspaper, *Gazzetta dello Sport*, got to temporarily overtake *Corriere della Sera*, the leading general-interest newspaper, in terms of circulation (Cucci and Germano 2003, 107), a primacy that *Gazzetta dello Sport* maintained for two years (Murialdi 2000, 279).

The age of the innovators of sports journalism, marked by the legendary names emerged in the 1950s (Brera and the others), was not to be repeated in this new historical phase. In Italy's post-industrial landscape, the success of sports journalism was no longer to be

[216] Originally appeared in an article for the magazine *L'Espresso* entitled "Stravideo" on January 30, 1983.

built upon individual names but rather on teams of editors (Ghirelli 2003). One name, however, was to stand out in the crowd: that of Candido Cannavò.

### ***Candido Cannavò*** *(1930-2009)*

Candido Cannavò took over the role of director and chief editor of *Gazzetta dello Sport* from Gino Palumbo in March 1983. Cannavò would hold that role until March 2002. With his 19 years at the helm of the *Rosea*, Cannavò is the longest in charge in the history of the newspaper. For this reason, he was also referred to as "*il direttorissimo*" (Cervi and Giuntini 2014). In Italian, the suffix "*issimo*" is used to form the absolute superlative. In his native Sicily, Cannavò had been a competitive junior middle-distance runner himself.

Cannavò's work relationship with *Gazzetta* began in the 1950s, when he started collaborating with the newspaper as a correspondent from Sicily, and continued also after March 2002, when the top role at *Gazzetta* was taken over by Pietro Calabrese. He wrote for the newspaper until three days before his sudden death, on February 22, 2009. Cannavò succumbed to a brain haemorrhage. Carlo Verdelli, who was at the head of the newspaper when Cannavò, now his subordinate, passed away, has written that whoever occupied the top role at *Gazzetta* after Cannavò felt somehow illegitimate, and that this feeling mirrored what was also felt outside the newspaper: "*Per la gente, per gli sportivi, per gli atleti, e soprattutto per i lettori, il direttore (giustamente) restava Candido*" [For the people, for sports enthusiasts, for the athletes, and above all for the readers, the director (rightfully) was still Candido] (Verdelli 2010, II). Another successor at the helm of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Andrea Monti, has written that every morning he felt he was somehow illegitimately occupying Candido's office (2019).[217] The so-called *maglia bianca* [white jersey] at the Giro d'Italia, which identifies the top rider of the young rider classification in the cycling race, has been named after Cannavò ever since his death.

[217] Andrea Monti served as director of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* from February 2010 to June 2020.

During Cannavò's tenure at the head of the newspaper, *Gazzetta dello Sport* became the best-selling sports newspaper in Europe. It also launched its website (gazzetta.it). Cannavò carried on the editorial choices of Gino Palumbo, his predecessor, (Arturi 2012, 301). Considering the success of Palumbo's leadership, it would have been difficult to do otherwise. Indeed, when he took over as director of the newspaper, Cannavò explained that "continuity" was to be the inalienable, key concept of the new management as well as an obvious and realistic choice (1983). In his unconventional categorisation of Italian sports journalists, Ormezzano (2015) has included Cannavò among the "pornographers", although Ormezzano admits that Cannavò also incarnated the other two categories of poets and eroticists. Cannavò was a pornographer, explains Ormezzano (ibid.), in that he had the ability to exploit at best all that was made available to him, in technical and financial terms, to promoting sport. Ormezzano has described this feature as a sort of quality pornography: "*il suo esercizio della pornografia era di qualità [...] Come se Federico Fellini avesse girato un film con Rocco Siffredi*" [his practice of pornography was of quality ... As if Federico Fellini had made a movie with Rocco Siffredi] (ibid., Kindle loc. 1441-1448).[218]

The love for sport and the values of Olympism was probably Cannavò's main trait, a *mélange* of passion and ethics. In his forward to Gianfranco Piantoni's book *Diritto allo Stadio: Sport, Costume e Valori* (2005), Cannavò spoke indeed of the "*due monumenti dello sport e della vita: l'incomparabile sapore delle emozioni e l'immensa importanza dei valori morali"* [two monuments of sport and life: the incomparable taste of emotions and the immense importance of moral values] (C. Cannavò 2005, 8). A recent anthology of Cannavò's articles for *Gazzetta dello Sport* was entitled *Storia Sentimentale dello Sport Italiano* (2019). The word *sentimentale* [sentimental] was chosen on purpose, and in the positive acceptation of the term, explains Andrea Monti (2019) in the foreword to the anthology, so as to describe the essence of Cannavò's sports journalism: passion. Cannavò's double objective was consistently to report sports news while defending the

[218] Rocco Siffredi is the stage name of Rocco Antonio Tano, Italy's most famous pornographic actor.

values of sport. This was his manifesto, as set in the piece that he wrote for the front page of *Gazzetta dello Sport* on his very first day as director, on March 12, 1983:

> Noi dobbiamo portare avanti un giornale diventato grande, con tutte le esigenze e i problemi legati alla sua nuova dimensione […] Ci guiderà un principio basilare: la difesa dei valori dello sport. Sarà questo il nostro caposaldo. […] Lo sport italiano da una parte continua ad allargare i suoi riflessi sociali e dall'altra attira sempre maggiori interessi economici e politici. Certi processi non si fermano. Ma noi abbiamo il dovere di controllarli difendendo da ogni tentativo di aggressione e di stravolgimento quei valori sui quali si fonda la straripante popolarità del fenomeno. (C. Cannavò 1983)
>
> [We must carry on a newspaper that has grown up, with all the needs and problems related to its new dimension (...) A key principle will guide us: the defence of the values of sport. This will be our cornerstone (...) Italian sport continues, on the one hand, to broaden its social repercussions while attracting, on the other hand, ever greater economic and political interests. Certain processes cannot be stopped. But we have a duty to control them, by defending the values on which the overflowing popularity of the phenomenon is based from any attempt at aggression and distortion.]

The defence of the values of sport recurrently put Cannavò in a rather uncomfortable position. We can borrow examples of this from the list of episodes that has recorded his son Alessandro (A. Cannavò 2010, X), also a journalist. After the tragedy at the Heysel stadium in Brussels on May 29, 1985, for example, in which Juventus F.C. beat Liverpool F.C. and won the European Cup Final but 39 supporters died on the stands, Cannavò suggested that the winners should give back the trophy.[219] It is to be noted that the Agnelli family, which owned Juventus, were also the main shareholder of the RCS media group, of which *Gazzetta dello Sport* was part through their holding company Gemina. Among his father's inconvenient battles, Alessandro Cannavò (ibid., IX-X) also mentions the relentless fight against doping in sports, the battle against football clubs tolerating violent supporters, his father's chastising politicians of any party for neglecting youth sports, and also Candido Cannavò's opposition to hunting, which was "not a sport", as he said,

[219] On May 29, 1985, 39 people, mostly Italians (32), were killed and around 600 were injured in a human stampede that occurred before the start of the 1985 European Cup Final at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels. The fans were trying to escape from Liverpool hooligans and were pressed against a wall, which suddenly collapsed under the weight. The match was played despite the tragedy, and Juventus beat Liverpool 1-0. The disaster resulted in UEFA banning English football clubs from all European competitions for five years. For Liverpool, the ban was set at ten years, later reduced to six. Belgium was banned from hosting a major European final for ten years.

despite the fact that hunting was recognised as such by the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI).

The most relevant aspect of Cannavò's contribution to sports journalism in relation to the subject of this thesis lies probably in his attention to the marginalised in society. In an article appeared on February 23, 2009, the day after Cannavò passed away, Gianni Mura (2009) wrote that *Gazzetta dello Sport* could certainly boast a series of great directors throughout its history, like Brera, Roghi, Palumbo and Gualtiero Zanetti, but none had ever exerted that role with the same civil passion as Cannavò, said Mura. From 2006 until his death, Cannavò had a daily feature in *Gazzetta dello Sport*, entitled *Fatemi capire* [Make me understand]. According to his son Alessandro (A. Cannavò 2010, XI), those pieces perfectly epitomised his father's interest for the connection between the world of sport and the world of solidarity. Toward the end of his career, Candido Cannavò wrote three books about the marginalised: *Libertà Dietro le Sbarre* (2004), in which he described his conversations with the prisoners of the San Vittore penitentiary in Milan; *E Li Chiamano Disabili* (2005), on the theme of disability; and *Pretacci* (2008), about the so-called street priests who choose to spend their life in difficult neighbourhoods. Not surprisingly, a foundation was established after his death – the *Fondazione Candido Cannavò per lo Sport* (https://fondazionecannavo.gazzetta.it/) – that uses sport to help and empower the marginalised in society. RCS MediaGroup, the publisher of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, is the "*Fondatore Promotore"* [Founder-Promoter] of this Foundation (Art. 9 of the Foundation's Statutes).

## 5.2 Italian sports magazines

Although this thesis is about newspapers, it could be useful to provide also an overview of the larger landscape of sport-related print publications in Italy. **Table 6** is a list of the Italian sports-specialised magazines, updated to July 2020. The vast majority of these magazines are not multi-sport, as they specialise in one sport or set of sports only (for example equestrian sports, motor sports or other). The most relevant exceptions, in that

they are indeed multi-sport, are *Guerin Sportivo* and *Sport Week*, although the latter is actually a supplement of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and is not sold separately.

It is to be noted that the list in **Table 6** is not the copy of a pre-existing list but was specially created for the purposes of this thesis, since there seems to be no "official" list of Italian sports magazines. The 2016 edition of the *Annuario Nazionale dell'U.S.S.I.*, the yearbook of the Italian sports press association (USSI), which contains a series of information and contact lists by type of publication, served as a starting point for compiling the new and updated list. The USSI yearbook is not for sale. The 2016 edition of the yearbook was made available by the *Biblioteca Sportiva – Centro Studi e Documentazione del CONI* [Sports Library – CONI Study and Documentation Centre] in Bologna. The data were all integrated and updated with information from the publishers' websites as of July 2020. The official magazines of sporting clubs and federations are not included in **Table 6**. Trade publications that are only available to businesses are not included either.

***Table 6**: Sports-specialised magazines in Italy (print, national reach)*

| Name | Frequency | Publisher |
|---|---|---|
| **AM** | Monthly<br>(a supplement of *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*, not sold separately) | Conti Editore S.r.l. |
| **Arco** | Every two months | Greentime S.p.A. |
| **Armi e Tiro** | Monthly | Sportcom S.r.l. |
| **Autosprint** | Weekly | Conti Editore S.r.l. |
| **Basket Magazine** | Monthly | Media Print |
| **Bolina** | Monthly | Editrice Incontri Nautici S.r.l. |
| **BS Bici Sport** | Monthly | Compagnia Editoriale S.r.l. |
| **Caccia & Tiro** | Monthly | Greentime S.p.A. |
| **Calcio 2000** | Every two months | TC & C S.r.l. |
| **Camminare** | Every two months | Fusta Editore |
| **Carp & Catfishing** | Quarterly | Ediservice S.r.l. |
| **Cavalli & Cavalieri** | Monthly | Remolino546 S.r.l. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Cavallo Magazine** | Monthly | Monrif Group |
| **Correre** | Monthly | Editoriale Sport Italia S.r.l. |
| **Cyclist** | Monthly | Edisport Editorials S.r.l. (licensing agreement) |
| **Dueruote** | Monthly | Editoriale Domus S.p.A. |
| **Golf & Turismo** | Monthly | GO. TU. Surl |
| **Guerin Sportivo** | Monthly | Conti Editore S.r.l. |
| **Il Giornale della Vela** | Monthly | Panama Editore |
| **Il Gommone e la Nautica per Tutti** | Monthly | Koster Publishing S.p.A. |
| **Il Mio Cavallo** | Monthly | Prisma Associati S.r.l. |
| **Il Nautilus** | Every two months | S. C. Editore Soc. Coop. |
| **Il Nuovo Calcio** | Monthly | Editoriale Sport Italia |
| **Il Tennis Italiano** | Monthly | Sportcom S.r.l. |
| **In Sella** | Monthly | Unibeta S.r.l. |
| **La Pesca Mosca e Spinning** | Every two months | Zona Franca Edizioni |
| **Men's Health** | Monthly | Edisport Editoriale S.r.l. (licensing agreement) |
| **Meridiani Montagne** | Every two months | Editoriale Domus S.p.A. |
| **Moto4** | Every two months | Hero Edizioni Srls |
| **Motociclismo** | Monthly | Edisport Editoriale S.r.l. |
| **Motociclismo Fuoristrada** | Monthly | Edisport Editoriale S.r.l. |
| **Motocross** | Monthly | Editrice Diamante Soc. Coop. Giorn. |
| **Motosprint** | Weekly | Conti Editore S.r.l. |
| **Mototurismo** | Every two months | L'Isola |
| **Mountain Bike Action** | Monthly | GPR Publishing |
| **Nautica** | Monthly | Nautica Editrice S.r.l. |
| **Pallavolo SuperVolley** | Monthly | Mediaprint S.r.l. |
| **Pesca In** | Monthly | Ediservice S.r.l. |
| **Pesca da Terra** | Monthly | Ediservice S.r.l. |
| **Pesca in Mare** | Monthly | Ediservice S.r.l. |
| **PescaSub & apnea** | Monthly | Bianco & Blu S.r.l. |
| **Riders** | Monthly | Bel Vivere S.r.l. |
| **Runner's World** | Monthly | Edisport Editorials S.r.l. (licensing agreement) |
| **SCI – Il mondo della neve** | Every two months | Bel Vivere S.r.l. |
| **Sciare** | Monthly | Ottis |
| **Scienza & Sport** | Quarterly | Editoriale Sport Italia S.r.l. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sport Week** | Weekly<br>(a supplement of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, not sold separately) | RCS Mediagroup Spa - divisione quotidiani |
| **Strength and Conditioning** | Quarterly | Calzetti & Mariucci |
| **SUB** | Every two months | Bianco &Blu S.r.l. |
| **SuperBike Italia** | Monthly | Edizioni Start S.r.l. |
| **Super Wheels** | Monthly<br>(a supplement of *Motociclismo*, not sold separately) | Edisport S.r.l. |
| **Tempo Sport** | Monthly | Centri Sportivi Aziendali e Industriali (C.S.A.In.) |
| **Tutto FuoriStrada** | Monthly | Free Wheels S.r.l. |
| **Triathlete** | 9 issues per year | Editoriale Sport Italia S.r.l. |
| **TuttoRally+** | Monthly | 1Media S.r.l. |
| **Undici** | Every two months | Studio Editoriale S.r.l. |
| **Vela e MOTORE** | Monthly | Sportcom S.r.l. |
| **VFR Aviation** | Monthly | Aero Media Press TV S.r.l. |
| **XOff Road** | Monthly | Editoriale Domus S.p.A. |

The list of print sports-specialised magazines tends to be quite fluid, though. Most are niche publications from small, independent publishers and some have turned online-only over the past few years or months. Incidentally, circulation figures from ADS (Accertamento Diffusione Stampa), the body that releases and certifies data for the Italian press and a member of the International Federation of Audit Bureaux of Circulations (IFABC), are available only for a few of these publications, and specifically for: *Autosprint*, *Motosprint*, and *Sport Week*.[220]

As a reminder, and to complete the overview of Italy's sport-related press, the sports-specialised newspapers that were sampled for content analysis for the purposes of this thesis, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*, already represented the totality of sports newspapers at the time of writing, hence there was no

[220] The latest check of ADS circulation figures on http://www.adsnotizie.it/_dati_DMS.asp was completed on July 19, 2020, on data related to May 2020.

need for a more inclusive table of that category. Tegarding the free press, there were no free sports-specialised newspapers in Italy at the time of writing.

## 5.3 Focus on the sampled newspapers

The comparison between general-interest and sports-specialised newspapers that was conducted for the purposes of this thesis, and which will be further explored in chapter 6, was based on the analysis of six Italian daily newspapers, including: the three general-interest newspapers with national reach and the largest circulation at the time of the study, namely *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, and *La Stampa* (see **Table 7**), all of which featuring a dedicated Sport section at the time of the analysis; and the three Italian multi-sport newspapers with national circulation, namely *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*, representing the totality of sports-specialised newspapers in the country.

***Table** 7: Sampled newspapers by circulation*

| Newspaper | Category | Parent company | Average daily circulation - February 2020(*) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corriere della Sera** | General-interest | RCS MediaGroup S.p.A. | 273 171 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 193 020 | Print |
| **la Repubblica** | General-interest | GEDI Gruppo Editoriale S.p.A. | 188 199 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 138 407 | Print |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport, Monday edition** | Sports | RCS MediaGroup S.p.A. | 154 198 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 137 801 | Print |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport** | Sports | RCS MediaGroup S.p.A. | 139 289 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 123 884 | Print |
| **La Stampa** | General-interest | GEDI News Network S.p.A. | 128 313 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 102 954 | Print |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio, Monday edition** | Sports | Corriere dello Sport S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 71 157 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 69 139 | Print |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio** | Sports | Corriere dello Sport S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 58 427 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 56 448 | Print |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tuttosport, Monday edition** | Sports | Nuova Editoriale Sportiva (N.E.S.) S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 42 096 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 40 295 | Print |
| **Tuttosport** | Sports | Nuova Editoriale Sportiva (N.E.S.) S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 37 503 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 35 690 | Print |

***(*)*** *"Totale diffusione cartacea + digitale", Italy + abroad*
*Source: ADS - Accertamento Diffusione Stampa*[221]

It is to be noted that the above circulation figures refer to February 2020, i.e. the last "ordinary" month in 2020, right before Italy's government imposed a national lockdown in connection with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The national quarantine, which entered into effect on March 9, 2020, restricted the movement of population and imposed the temporary closure of most shops and businesses, virtually paralysing the nation's economy. The global spread of the pandemic would soon lead to the cancellation of sporting activities and competitions worldwide. The consequences of the lockdown for sports and the press are discussed in chapter **8. Post-Scriptum: the 2020 coronavirus crisis and sports coverage in the absence of sport.**

**Table 7** highlights, alongside circulation figures, also the concentration of media ownership that characterises Italy's media ecosystem, like many others around the world. This aspect is clearly beyond the scope of this thesis and could be investigated in future studies. Background information on the larger picture of Italian newspapers, including the 20 leading titles by circulation and readership in the country, can be found in this thesis's **Appendix**.

[221] ADS (Accertamento Diffusione Stampa), a member of the International Federation of Audit Bureaux of Circulations (IFABC), releases and certifies data for the Italian press. The figures in Table 7 are the monthly estimates notified by the publishers (DMS = Dati Mensili Stimati). For newspapers, publishers notify to ADS estimated monthly data within 30 days. ADS then releases the data seven days after notification. This allows to provide regular updates prior to certification, which is a longer process. ADS's overall certification process takes around two years. Further details on the process can be found on ADS' website at www.adsnotizie.it (last accessed on May 5, 2020).

## *Corriere della Sera*

The *Corriere della Sera* is an Italian daily general-interest newspaper headquartered in Milan, with local editions in Bergamo, Bologna, Brescia, Florence, Milan (*ViviMilano*), Rome, southern Italy (*Corriere del Mezzogiorno* for Bari, Caserta, Catania, Foggia, Lecce, Naples, Palermo and Salerno), Turin, and Veneto (*Corriere del Veneto* for the overall region + *Corriere del Veneto* Belluno, Padua, Rovigo, Treviso, Venice, Verona and Vicenza).[222] The publisher of *Corriere della Sera* is RCS, a multimedia conglomerate that also publishes, in the newspaper business, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* in Italy as well as *El Mundo*, *Marca* and *Expansión* in Spain. The *Corriere della Sera* has a daily circulation of about 273,000 copies. Its estimated readership is about 2 million people (print + digital replica figures), as shown in **Table 8**. It is the best-selling newspaper in the country and the most-widely read among general-interest newspapers, while it is the second most read among Italian newspapers of any kind after *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.[223]

***Table 8**: Readership of the sampled newspapers*

| Newspaper | Category | Parent company | Average estimated daily readership, III/2019 (in thousands)[224] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corriere della Sera** | General-interest | RCS MediaGroup S.p.A. | 2 039 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 1 883 | Print |
| **la Repubblica** | General-interest | GEDI Gruppo Editoriale SpA | 1 878 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 1 731 | Print |
| **La Stampa** | General-interest | GEDI News Network S.p.A. | 1 132 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 1 096 | Print |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport** | Sports | RCS MediaGroup S.p.A. | 3 252 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 3 199 | Print |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport, Monday edition** | Sports | RCS MediaGroup S.p.A. | 4 169 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 4 115 | Print |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio** | Sports | Corriere dello Sport S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 1 403 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 1 371 | Print |
| | Sports | | 1 636 | Print + digital replica |

[222] Updated July 28, 2020.
[223] Circulation figures (source: ADS) refer to February 2020 while readership figures (source: Audipress) refer to the third and final part of 2019, as Audipress releases its readership estimates three times per year (see footnote 188). In both cases, these were the latest available figures at the time of writing.
[224] Figures refer to the third ("III") and final data release in 2019 ("III" does not stand for third quarter). See also footnote 188.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio, Monday edition** | | Corriere dello Sport S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 1 601 | Print |
| **Tuttosport** | Sports | Nuova Editoriale Sportiva (N.E.S.) S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 856 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 832 | Print |
| **Tuttosport, Monday edition** | Sports | Nuova Editoriale Sportiva (N.E.S.) S.r.l. / Gruppo Amodei | 1 100 | Print + digital replica |
| | | | 1 071 | Print |

*Source*: Audipress (www.audipress.it)

The first issue of *Corriere della Sera* was published on March 5, 1876. "Corriere della Sera" is the Italian for "Evening Courier". The newspaper was indeed established as an evening paper but retained the name when it became, as it is today, a morning daily. Its founder was a journalist, Eugenio Torelli-Violler, who also led it for more than 20 years, until 1898. Torelli, who was born in Naples, had previously worked at *L'Indipendente*, the Naples-based newspaper founded in 1860 by Alexandre Dumas (*Alexandre Dumas père*), and *Il Secolo*, a newspaper based in Milan (Murialdi 2000, 71). It was under the editorial direction of Luigi Albertini, from 1900 to 1921, that *Corriere della Sera* established itself as the first Italian newspaper (Murialdi 2000, 288; "Corriere Della Sera" 2010).

## *La Repubblica*

*Repubblica* is an Italian general-interest newspaper headquartered in Rome, with local editions in Bari, Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Parma, Rome and Turin.[225] It has a daily circulation of about 188,200 and an estimated daily readership of 1,878,000 (print + digital replica figures).[226] It is the second largest newspaper in the country by paid circulation after *Corriere della Sera*. In terms of estimated daily readership, *Repubblica* ranks second among general-interest newspapers after *Corriere*

[225] Updated July 29, 2020.
[226] As previously explained, and due to statistics availability from different sources, circulation figures (source: ADS) refer to February 2020 while readership figures (source: Audipress) refer to the third and final part of 2019 (Audipress releases its readership estimates three times per year).

*della Sera*, and third among newspapers of any kind after *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere della Sera*. *Repubblica* is part of the GEDI multimedia group, which is also the publisher of other newspapers including *La Stampa*, *Il Secolo XIX* as well as 13 local dailies.[227]

The first issue of *Repubblica* appeared on January 14, 1976. The newspaper was founded by Eugenio Scalfari, a journalist who had also previously co-founded the news magazine *L'Espresso*, in 1955, together with Arrigo Benedetti.[228] *Repubblica* was initially published from Tuesday to Sunday. The Monday edition was only added in the 1990s. Scalfari's idea was to create an innovative newspaper, different from the ones that already existed in Italy, with no local news, very little sport and mostly political, economic and cultural news because, according to Murialdi (2000, 254), he imagined *Repubblica* as "a second newspaper" for its readers. Scalfari held the role of editor-in-chief of *Repubblica* until May 1996. During his tenure, *Repubblica* managed to temporarily overtake *Corriere della Sera* as the number one best-selling newspaper in the country, from November 1986 to 1989 (Murialdi 2000, 288–89). *Corriere della Sera* had uninterruptedly led the ranking since 1904. As opposed to the other general-interest newspapers that were sampled for the purposes of this thesis (*Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*), and to the vast majority of general-interest newspapers, which normally feature a dedicated Sport section, *Repubblica* did *not* have one when it was created in 1976. Sports news were featured as a marginal subject within other sections of the newspaper. *Repubblica* introduced a Sport section in 1979. Three years later, in 1982, *Repubblica* hired Gianni Brera, the star of Italian sports journalism (as seen in section **5.1.3 The innovators**). Gianni Mura would later observe, in an interview: "*Repubblica era nata senza sport, ma poi prese il migliore*" [Repubblica was born without sports but then hired the best] (Mura and Smorto 2019).

[227] The 13 local newspapers include 12 dailies: *Il Tirreno* (Livorno), *Messaggero Veneto* (Udine), *Il Piccolo* (Trieste), *Gazzetta di Mantova* (Mantua), *il Mattino di Padova* (Padua), *la Provincia Pavese* (Pavia), *la Tribuna di Treviso* (Treviso), *la Nuova di Venezia e Mestre* (Venice), *Gazzetta di Reggio* (Reggio Emilia), *Gazzetta di Modena* (Modena), *la Nuova Ferrara* (Ferrara), *Corriere delle Alpi* (Belluno); and *la Sentinella del Canavese* (Ivrea), which is published three times a week. This list, drawn from GEDI's website (www.gedispa.it), was last updated on July 29, 2020.

[228] Scalfari was also among the promoters, in 1955, of the *Partito Radicale* [Radical Party], founded by the left wing of the *Partito Liberale* [Liberal Party].

Brera would continue to write for *Repubblica* until 1992, when he suddenly died in a car accident.[229]

## *La Stampa*

*La Stampa* is a daily general-interest newspaper headquartered in Turin. It also runs the following local editions: Alessandria, Asti, Aosta, Biella, Cuneo, Imperia and Sanremo, Milan, Novara, Rome, Savona, Turin, Verbano Cusso Ossola, and Vercelli. It is owned by GEDI, the same media group that also owns *la Repubblica*. It has an average daily circulation of around 128,300 and an estimated daily readership of 1,132,000 (print + digital replica figures).[230] *La Stampa* is the third general-interest newspaper in Italy by circulation, after *Corriere della Sera* and *Repubblica*, and the fifth among Italian newspapers of any kind, after *Corriere della Sera*, *Repubblica*, *Il Sole 24 Ore,* and *La Gazzetta dello Sport.* In terms of daily estimated readership, it is the third most read among general-interest newspaper, after *Corriere della Sera* and *Repubblica*, and the fifth most read among Italian newspapers of any kind, after *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Repubblica*, and *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*.

*La Stampa* was first published on February 9, 1867 with the name of *Gazzetta Piemontese*. The newspaper was founded by journalist and novelist Vittorio Bersezio with the collaboration of Casimiro Favale, a politician who also owned a printing house. The newspaper was indeed printed in Favale's facilities in Turin. Bersezio served as editor-in-chief while Favale was the newspaper's publisher. On March 30, 1895, a new title – *La Stampa* – appeared on the front page of the paper. The original title, *Gazzetta Piemontese*, did not disappear but *La Stampa* was now displayed as the main name (Rugafiori n.d.). This new phase in the newspaper's history, including the new name, was Alberto Frassati's idea, as Frassati wanted the newspaper to relaunch and acquire a

[229] The Monday edition of *Repubblica* was added after Brera's death (P. Brera 1994).
[230] As previously explained, and due to statistics availability from different sources, circulation figures (source: ADS) refer to February 2020 while readership figures (source: Audipress) refer to the third and final part of 2019 (Audipress releases its readership estimates three times per year – see also footnote 188).

national scope (Marcucci 1998, 211). Frassati bought the newspaper in 1900 and became its editor-in-chief the following year. Both *Gazzetta Piemontese* and *La Stampa* continued to appear on the front page of the newspaper until 1908 (Ventavoli 2010), when the name finally became *La Stampa*. In 2010, *La Stampa* was the first national daily to digitalise the totality of its contents and make it available to readers online, starting from the very first issue of the newspaper in 1867, when it was still called *Gazzetta Piemontese* (Ventavoli 2010).

## *La Gazzetta dello Sport*

*La Gazzetta dello Sport* is a sports-specialised, multi-sport daily newspaper based in Milan. It is printed on distinctively pink paper, which is why it is also called "*la rosea*" (*rosa* is the Italian for pink). Its slogan is indeed "*Tutto il rosa della vita*" [All the pink of life]. This appears every day under the name of the newspaper. *La Gazzetta dello Sport* is part of RCS MediaGroup, the same that also owns *Corriere della Sera*. *La Gazzetta dello Sport* has an average daily circulation of nearly 139,300 (print + digital replica), rising to 154,198 on Mondays (source: ADS – related to February 2020). It is the first sports newspaper in the country by circulation and the fourth by circulation among newspapers of any kind, after *Corriere della Sera*, *Repubblica* and *Il Sole 24 Ore* – taking into account average ordinary days as opposed to Mondays. With an estimated daily readership of more than 3.2 million per day, which exceeds 4 million on Mondays (print + digital replica figures), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* is the most-widely read newspaper in Italy. Excluding Mondays, the daily average readership exceeds 3 million anyway. The gap with the second most-read, *Corriere della Sera*, is noteworthy. Based on Audipress' estimates (see **Table 8**), the gap in terms of readership exceeds 1 million readers every day, with the readers of *Gazzetta dello Sport* becoming twice as many as the readers of *Corriere della Sera* on Mondays. This is not much a competition issue, since both *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere della Sera* are, as previously said, part of the same media group, that is RCS. It is rather one more indicator of the relevance of sports newspapers in the Italian media landscape, where they are far from representing a niche press.

*La Gazzetta dello Sport* was first published on April 3, 1896, just three days before the start of the Athens Olympics – the first Olympic Games held in modern history. The newspaper resulted from the merger of *Il Ciclista*, based in Milan and led by Eliso Rivera, and *La Tripletta*, founded by Eugenio Camillo Costamagna and based in Turin. The titles of the two ancestor publications continued to appear under the header of the new newspaper until 1897. Besides its main role as news provider, *Gazzetta dello Sport* has always been involved in the organisation of sporting competitions and events. The most representative and *Gazzetta*'s quintessential brainchild is the Giro d'Italia, the annual multiple-stage bicycle race. The leader of the general classification in the Giro is identified by a pink jersey (*maglia rosa*), the colour of the paper on which *Gazzetta dello Sport* is printed.[231] RCS MediaGroup, the owner of *Gazzetta dello Sport*, has a dedicated sports subsidiary, called RCS Sport. This sports & media company holds a large portfolio of professional sports and mass participation events. In cycling, for example, RCS Sport organises other iconic races, in addition to the Giro d'Italia, like the Milano-Sanremo and the Giro di Lombardia [Tour of Lombardy], among others. These two cycling races are among the five "Monuments" of cycling, the name given to the five most prestigious one-day races in road cycling.[232] It is to be noted that despite being by all means a sports-specialised newspaper, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* includes a daily feature that covers non-sporting information, called "Altri Mondi" [Other Worlds]. In the print edition, this section usually occupies two pages at the very end of the newspaper.

## *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*

*Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* is an Italian daily sports-specialised newspaper headquartered in Rome. It has an average daily circulation of about 58,400 copies, which rises to more than 71,000 on Mondays (print + digital replica figures related to February

[231] More on the history of *Gazzetta dello Sport* can be found in section **3.3.2 Historical overview in European society.**
[232] Besides the Milano-Sanremo and Giro di Lombardia, the Monuments also include the Tour of Flanders, Paris-Roubaix and Liège-Bastogne-Liège.

2020 – source: ADS). It is the second sports newspaper by circulation after *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and the tenth among newspapers of any kind, after *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *La Stampa*, *Avvenire*, *Il Messaggero*, *QN-Il Resto del Carlino* and *QN-La Nazione* – taking into account its circulation on average ordinary days, as opposed to Mondays. In terms of readership, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* has a daily estimated readership of about 1.4 million, which rises to more than 1.6 million on Mondays (print + digital replica figures related to the third and final part of 2019 – source: Audipress). It is the second most read among sports newspapers after *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, and the fourth most read among Italian newspapers of any kind, after *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere della Sera*, and *Repubblica*. *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* is owned by Corriere dello Sport S.r.l. (Amodei group), which also controls *Tuttosport*.

The current name of the newspaper is the result of the incorporation by *Corriere dello Sport* of Bologna-based *Stadio*, another sports newspaper, in 1977. *Corriere dello Sport* itself, today based in Rome, was originally created in Bologna in 1924. It was the idea of a group of sports enthusiasts led by Alberto Masprone, a discus thrower and football coach, who also served as chairman and coach of Hellas Verona between 1908 and 1915.[233] In December 1927, during Mussolini regime, the control of *Corriere dello Sport* passed to Leandro Arpinati, a fascist party official, who renamed it *Il Littoriale*. In 1929, Arpinati transferred the newspaper's headquarters to Rome.[234] In 1944, the newspaper resumed its original name, *Corriere dello Sport*. Between 1976 and 1977, the publisher of *Corriere dello Sport*, Franco Amodei, operated the acquisition of *Stadio*, a sports newspaper founded in 1945, which was headquartered in Bologna. The acquisition was designed in such a way that the name of *Stadio* was also retained on the front page, alongside *Corriere dello Sport*. According to Adalberto Bortolotti (2015), who served as the last managing director of *Stadio* prior to the merger, Amodei's decision to acquire *Stadio* was driven by Amodei's intention to expand *Corriere dello Sport*'s reach to the

[233] Hellas Verona is a Verona-based football club.
[234] The story of *Corriere dello Sport / Littoriale* during the Fascist regime (1922-1943) is reported in further details in section **5.1.2 The sports press and political propaganda.**

North of the country – or perhaps Amodei simply took pity on a newspaper (*Stadio*) that proudly tried to survive, adds Bortolotti (ibid.)

### *Tuttosport*

*Tuttosport* is an Italian daily sports newspaper based in Turin. With an average daily circulation of about 37,500 copies, rising to nearly 42,100 on Mondays, it is the third sports newspaper by circulation, after *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, and the 14th among national newspapers of any kind, taking into account average ordinary days as opposed to Mondays.[235] *Tuttosport* has an estimated daily readership of 856,000, making it the third most read among sports newspaper, after *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, and the eighth most read among newspapers of any kind.[236] Its estimated readership rises to 1,100,000 on Mondays (source for readership figures: Audipress).

*Tuttosport* was founded in 1945 by Renato Casalbore, a journalist who had previously worked at *La Stampa* and the now-defunct *Gazzetta del Popolo* (1848-1983). Casalbore died on May 4, 1949 in a plane air disaster in Superga, on a hill on the outskirts of Turin, which killed all 31 people on board. The plane carried the entire Torino football team, the legendary *Grande Torino*, which had won five national championships (*scudetti*) and one Coppa Italia in the 1940s. Two other journalists, Luigi Cavallero of *La Stampa* and Renato Tosatti of *Gazzetta del Popolo*, also died in the crash.[237] *Tuttosport* has nationwide circulation and covers sports topics of national interest, although it devotes a large amount

[235] By average daily circulation, *Tuttosport* is the 14th among Italian newspapers with national reach of any kind after: *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *La Stampa*, *Avvenire*, *Il Messaggero*, *QN-Il Resto del Carlino*, *QN-La Nazione*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, *Il Gazzettino*, *Il Giornale*, and *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (source: ADS – related to February 2020).

[236] By estimated daily readership, *Tuttosport* is the eighth among Italian newspapers of any kind, taking into account its readership on ordinary days as opposed to Mondays, after: *Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, *La Stampa*, *QN- Il Resto del Carlino* and *Il Messaggero*.

[237] Renato Tosatti was the father of Giorgio Tosatti, also a sports journalist. Giorgio Tosatti was previously mentioned, in section **5.1.3 The innovators**, within Gian Paolo Ormezzano's list of *Cantaglorie* (2015), from the title of Ormezzano's book.

of attention to Juventus and Torino, the two major Turin-based football clubs. In 2003, *Tuttosport* established the European Golden Boy award, also referred to as Golden Boy, which honours the best Under-21 football player in Europe's top tiers during the calendar year. The winner is chosen from a list of finalists by a jury of European sports journalists, among whom the editors of the three Italian sports newspapers.

# 6. GENERAL-INTEREST NEWSPAPERS VS. SPORTS NEWSPAPERS

Researchers should think of journalism in the plural.
Erik Neveu (2017, 1303)

**6.1 THE CORPUS OF ANALYSIS**

**6.1 THE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE COMPARISON**

## 6.1 The corpus of analysis

In order to carry on the comparison between general-interest and sports newspapers, as far as sport's social analysis is concerned, this thesis adopted Italy's media ecosystem as a case study. The specificities of this country case were explained in the previous chapter. Content analysis for the purposes of this comparison involved six daily newspapers, including:

- *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, and *La Stampa*, namely the three Italian general-interest newspapers with national reach and the largest circulation at the time of the study; and
- *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*, namely the three Italian multi-sport newspapers with national circulation, representing the totality of sports-specialised newspapers in the country.

The corpus of analysis included the print copies of the sampled newspapers in their entirety.[238] The study was not limited to specific types or genre of content, nor to specific sections of the newspaper (therefore not only the Sport section in general-interest newspapers), but covered each sampled issue in its entirety.[239]

The total number of pages reviewed was 6,501.[240]

[238] The digital replica of the print edition during the 2020 coronavirus global health crisis (period 5 in Table 9).

[239] The magazines that periodically accompanied the sampled newspapers, if any, were not examined. These supplements were fully accessible only when the newspapers were purchased directly from a newsagent. By contrast, they were only rarely and randomly available when newspapers were consulted at the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa*, the main public library in Bologna, Italy. This thesis specifically focuses on journalism in daily newspapers anyway, as opposed to long-format journalism in magazines.

[240] The number was actually higher, likely approaching 7,000. The analysis revealed at a later stage that in some cases, the number on the last page of the newspaper issue did not correspond to the total number of pages of that issue, as the additional local edition(s), if any, and supplements, if any, were numbered separately. It was not possible to re-count the pages of the relevant newspaper issues due to the library closure during the lockdown period, in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. The re-counting would have concerned only some days/newspapers in relation to the coverage of the Special Olympics World Games (period 2 in Table 9) anyway. The content of all the pages of the sampled newspapers on the sampled dates, including the pages not included in the counting, was fully analysed.

## *The units of analysis*

The units of analysis – which in media content analysis go down to what is being counted – were the media items in the sampled newspapers that dealt with socially relevant aspects of sport, based on the new taxonomy devised in this thesis (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**), which was therefore immediately put to a test.

All types of media items were taken into account and regardless of their length, insofar as they comprised a text. They included editorials, reports, columns, chronicles, snippets, commentaries, letters, surveys, and even simple images with a caption, whether a simple one-liner or longer paragraph. For example, a caption below a photo that contained not just the name(s) of the people in the photo but also informative content on the subject matter, was comprised in the counting/analysis. Other units of analysis that are typically examined in media content analysis for print media, and were not for this thesis, may include words, sentences or paragraphs.

## *The sampled dates*

The newspapers reviewed covered five different artificial timeframes and a combined period of 28 days, spanning from September 2018 to April 2020 (see **Table 9**).

***Table 9**: Sampled dates for newspaper content analysis*

| Data set | Period | Event | Newspapers |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) | 29 September – 5 October 2018 | Neutral – no major events (sports or other news) | ▪ Corriere della Sera<br>▪ la Repubblica<br>▪ La Stampa<br>▪ La Gazzetta dello Sport<br>▪ Corriere dello Sport – Stadio<br>▪ Tuttosport |
| (2) | 13 – 22 March 2019 | Special Olympics World Games | ▪ Corriere della Sera<br>▪ la Repubblica<br>▪ La Stampa<br>▪ La Gazzetta dello Sport<br>▪ Corriere dello Sport – Stadio<br>▪ Tuttosport[241] |
| (3) | 11 April 2019 | Clashes between football fans prior to Ajax-Juventus in Amsterdam on April 10 | ▪ Corriere della Sera<br>▪ la Repubblica<br>▪ La Stampa<br>▪ La Gazzetta dello Sport<br>▪ Corriere dello Sport – Stadio<br>▪ Tuttosport |
| (4) | 6 – 7 October 2019 | Pilgrimage of fans in Bologna to show support for Siniša Mihajlović, the coach of Bologna F.C. | ▪ Corriere della Sera<br>▪ la Repubblica<br>▪ La Stampa<br>▪ La Gazzetta dello Sport<br>▪ Corriere dello Sport – Stadio[242] |
| (5) | 23 – 30 April 2020 | Cancellation of most sporting events and activities worldwide due to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. | ▪ La Gazzetta dello Sport |

Period (1) is defined as a "neutral" period in that it was characterised by the absence of major events, in sports or elsewhere, which would otherwise significantly interfere with the news selection process at the sampled newspapers. Indeed, when the object of the analysis is sports journalism, the choice of the study periods has to take into consideration a major specificity of sports journalism. Unlike news in general, the media coverage of sports is heavily influenced by the calendar of the main sporting events, which is normally known well in advance (as discussed in section **4.1.3 Selecting stories that select themselves**). It could be argued that today sport is a huge business phenomenon and

[241] Incomplete series for *Tuttosport*, covering only March 20, 21 and 22, 2019.
[242] *Tuttosport* was not available at the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa* in Bologna, the library where the analysis was conducted. For the availability of this newspaper, see also footnote 248.

sporting competitions are actually spread over 365 days a year, but events do not all benefit from the same popularity and media coverage. For example, during the two biggest events of the sporting calendar, the FIFA World Cup and the Summer Olympics, the media coverage of sports gets completely revolutionised. This is why, in order to take a so-called "neutral" sample of sports coverage, a timeframe was chosen in autumn 2018 that did not coincide with any of these two leading mega-events, nor was it close enough to be significantly impacted by them. Since the sampled newspapers also included general-interest newspaper, the same kind of precaution was applied to non-sporting news. It was important that the selected timeframe did not see the occurrence of any catastrophic, exceptional or otherwise highly significant event outside of sports (war, earthquake, scandal, etc.), as this would have significantly impacted the content of the sampled newspapers.

For period (2), the observation comprehended samples of the newspapers' coverage of an event of uncontroversial social relevance, the Special Olympic World Games, organised by Special Olympics, a major international multi-sport event for athletes with *intellectual* disabilities. The observation covered the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi, which were held on March 14-21, 2019, during the drafting of this thesis. As indicated in **Table 9**, content analysis for this second timeframe included also the eve of the Games (pre-event coverage) on March 13, as well as the day after the end of competitions on March 22 (post-event coverage), which is typically used by the press to wrap up results and comments on the event that has just concluded. This type of event is directly pertinent to the topic of the thesis because it concerns an area of sport of major social significance, in terms of social inclusion. The Special Olympics sporting movement involves the participation in sports of children and adults with intellectual disabilities. The reporting of disability sports has considerably increased over the past few years but mostly as far as *physical* disability is concerned, especially after the turning point of the London 2012 Summer Paralympics, which benefited from unprecedented attention.[243] This is not

[243] According to figures published by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), the London 2012 Paralympic Games were broadcast in more countries than ever before (more than 115 countries and territories) and were watched by a cumulated international audience of 3.4 billion, excluding the host market, representing the biggest ever international audience for the event and a 37% growth on the Beijing

necessarily the case when disability sports involves intellectual disability. Furthermore, the Special Olympics World Games provided an interesting case study for the purposes of this thesis because their coverage was ideally at the intersection of the simple reporting of a current sporting event with the analysis of a subject of social relevance, such as disability sport. It was therefore interesting to explore whether the press fully took that opportunity.

For the data set and period (3), the six sampled newspapers were examined on April 11, 2019 in order to study the post-event coverage of the clashes, on April 10, between Dutch and Italian supporters in Amsterdam for Ajax-Juventus, the first-leg quarter-final fixture of the UEFA Champions League. The clashes and acts of vandalism occurred outside the Amsterdam Arena as well as in Amsterdam's city centre, with fans carrying inappropriate objects (like knives and crowbars) and lighting fireworks. The disturbances reportedly resulted in more than a hundred arrests. Similarly to the Special Olympic World Games, this type of event also highlights the impact of sports events on society, although this time in a negative way. Supporters typically arrive in town and make it difficult for citizens to carry on with their normal life routine. It was interesting to explore whether and to what extent, in that particular case, the press was ready to cover the clashes, or if it limited the coverage to the match itself.

The sampled timeframe (4) is related to the pilgrimage of football fans in Bologna, Italy to show support for Siniša Mihajlović, the coach of the local Serie A team (Bologna F.C.), in his fight against leukaemia.[244] On October 6, 2019, fans headed to the iconic Sanctuary of the Madonna di San Luca, a church atop a hill (*Colle della Guardia*) 300 metres above the city plain, via a 3.8km 666-arche monumental roofed arcade, the *Portico di San Luca*, which is also the longest portico in the world. The Madonna di San Luca sanctuary is the symbol of the city of Bologna and an historical pilgrimage destination. Content analysis

2008 Games ("London 2012 Paralympics Proves a Worldwide TV Ratings Winner" 2012). In the U.K., the host country, one in four TV viewers watched Channel 4's Paralympic coverage every day during the Games, marking an increase of 251% from the 2008 Beijing Paralympics ("No. 13: Channel 4 Creates a Blueprint for Commercial Paralympic Broadcasting" 2012).

[244] Serie A is the top tier of the Italian football league system.

included both October 6, 2019 i.e. the day of the pilgrimage, and post-event coverage on October 7. The pilgrimage on October 6 followed up a similar initiative earlier in the year, on July 21, but was ever more special this time in that Bologna F.C. supporters had now invited SS Lazio supporters to join them. The date of this second pilgrimage coincided, indeed, with the Bologna-Lazio Serie A match, to be held in the afternoon of October 6. An initiative like a fans pilgrimage, and notably a joint pilgrimage of fans of opposing teams, epitomises the place of sport in the local community as well as the positive dimension of fandom. Assessing its press coverage was useful and pertinent to the thesis topic.

Finally, an additional study period – data set 5 in **Table 9** – was added at a later stage and toward the end of the thesis process, in the first half of 2020. This additional study period could have never been anticipated at the beginning of the thesis process, as it coincided with the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Besides the health crisis itself and its economic repercussions, this period was characterised by the cancellation of sports competitions worldwide. Because of the conditions and limitations under which it was conducted, the newspaper analysis for this particular timeframe could not meet the same standards as for the other timeframes/events. It needed to be adapted to the conditions of the moment, and was mostly meant to pave the way for future research. Health and safety measures during the pandemic entailed long-standing travel bans and major lockdown restrictions for citizens around the world, including library closures. Italy was the first country in the world after China, where the health crisis was believed to have begun, to enter a coronavirus-related lockdown in March 2020. In this context, an eight-day period in April 2020 was sampled to analyse the coverage of whatever sport was left in *Gazzetta dello Sport*. A more complete analysis of sports journalism in this (hopefully) unique period of contemporary history will have to follow in the years to come. At the time the content analysis on this timeframe was conducted, the lockdown was over in certain countries and travelling restrictions had started to ease, but with major differences from one country (or even area within the same country) to another and ongoing unpredictability about the future, since the virus was still circulating and claiming lives.

In fact, restrictive measures resumed in many countries in autumn 2020, when approaching the completion of the thesis.[245]

In content analysis, the choice of the sampling units is always somehow arbitrary, but it is important that the personal element in the choice does not introduce additional bias. The selection of the sampled periods for the purposes of this thesis aimed to meet the two key criteria for content analysis exemplified by Krippendorff: "Content analysts must define sampling units so that (a) connections across sampling units, if they exist, do not bias the analysis; and (b) all relevant information is contained in individual sampling units, or, if it is not, the omissions do not impoverish the analysis" (2004, 99).[246] Considering that it is virtually impossible to examine the media coverage of any given subject in its entirety, one has to find a way to obtain a "reasonably representative sample of material [meaning] a sample which is not skewed or biased by the personal preferences or hunches of the researcher, by the desire to 'prove' a particular preconceived point, or by insufficient knowledge of the media and their social context" (Hansen et al. 1998, 102–3). The study of a so-called neutral period was meant to investigate the news selection process under ordinary circumstances, in the absence of extraordinary sporting or non-sporting events which would otherwise crucially affect the news selection process. Ordinary circumstances, however, do not necessarily provide opportunities (or space) for the coverage of socially-relevant topics, which meant that the content analysis of a neutral timeframe was not sufficiently significant for the thesis analysis. This is why additional dates were sampled with events that provided, in principle, ideal opportunities for social analysis. Cross-correlating these different sets of data – neutral + non-neutral periods – was expected to offer a clearer view of the news selection process as far as the social analysis of sports was concerned.

[245] As of October 6, 2020, the coronavirus death toll exceeded one million victims (1,044,051 global deaths), according to the Coronavirus Resource Center of the Johns Hopkins University (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/), with 35,483,758 total confirmed cases worldwide across 188 countries/regions (data updated when approaching the completion of the thesis).
[246] The citation is drawn from Krippendorff's *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, first published in 1980. For this seminal work, Klaus Krippendorff received the ICA (International Communication Association) Fellows Book Award in 2004.

Regarding the access to data and the collection of information, for sampled period (1), from September 29 to October 5, 2018, an issue of each of the six Italian newspapers under examination was purchased from a newsagent's in Bologna.[247] Two of the general-interest newspapers in the sample, *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*, comprised the national newspaper as well as their additional Bologna (local news) section. For *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, one of the sports newspapers in the sample, the collection process for sampled period (1) involved the national edition of the newspaper (*Corriere dello Sport*), as opposed to its Bologna (*Stadio*) edition. As previously indicated in section **5.3 Focus on the sampled newspapers**, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* resulted from the merger, in 1977, of *Corriere dello Sport*, headquartered in Rome, and Bologna-based *Stadio*. The full title of the newspaper, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, currently appears in all editions, but either *Corriere dello Sport* or *Stadio* are highlighted in the title, respectively, depending on whether it is the national edition, for the former, or the Bologna edition, for the latter. As for the press coverage of the 2019 Special Olympics World Games (study period 2 in **Table 9**), the print copies of the six sampled newspapers were consulted on site from the archives of the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa*, the main public library in Bologna, in April 2019. The analysis covered the entire period under examination for this event, from March 13 to March 22, 2019, for all the sampled newspapers except for *Tuttosport*, which was not available at the library. It was however possible to purchase an issue of *Tuttosport* in the final days of the Special Olympics World Games, on March 20-21, 2019, as well as on March 22, the day following the end of the Games, for post-event coverage.[248] For study period (2), the issues of *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica* and *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* that were made available

[247] Gianni Degli Esposti, the owner of the newsstand in Via Toscana 50/C-D in Bologna at the time of the newspapers collection, preciously collaborated in the process by putting aside a copy of each of the six newspapers every day, through this as well as other study periods. The stacks of newspapers were then sent to France, where the analysis was completed.

[248] *Tuttosport*'s headquarters in Turin was contacted by phone in March 2019 to know about the accessibility of their archives. Unfortunately, the newspaper itself does not hold archives of the print paper any more, they said. The only known alternative to consult old issues of *Tuttosport* was the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale* [National Central Library] in Florence, the only library holding archives of the newspaper, based on information in the catalog of Italian libraries (OPAC SBN). This library, which was also contacted by phone, only received copies of *Tuttosport* with a delay of several months, though. The few issues of *Tuttosport* that were missing and needed for the purposes of this thesis were therefore not yet available at the time the library was contacted.

from the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa* were the respective Bologna editions.[249] For study period (3), related to the coverage of the fans' violence on the occasion of the Ajax-Juventus in Amsterdam on April 10, 2019, the six sampled newspapers on April 11 were all purchased, and were all available. For study period (4), related to the coverage of the fans' pilgrimage to support the coach of Bologna F.C. during his illness (October 6-7, 2019), the print copies of five out of six sampled newspapers were consulted on site from the archives of the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa* in Bologna in December 2019. *Tuttosport* for this period was not available at that library (see footnote 248). Finally, for study period (5), during the coronavirus health crisis, the analysis was conducted exclusively on *Gazzetta dello Sport*, on the digital replicas of the newspaper from April 23 to April 30, 2020.

## 6.2 The takeaways from the comparison

Below are presented the main findings from the comparative analysis of the sampled newspapers in the two groups of general-interest newspapers and sports-specialised newspapers.

### *A) Social analysis is more present in general-interest newspapers in neutral periods*

When conducted during a so-called neutral period, that is in the absence of extraordinary sporting or non-sporting events which would otherwise crucially affect the news selection process, sport-related socially relevant topics appeared to be considerably more present in general-interest newspapers than in sports newspapers (see **Table 10** and **Table 11**). It

[249] As a general rule for all the five study periods in Table 9, *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* were available complete with their local-Bologna section, whether they were purchased at the newsstand or consulted at the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa* library. For *Corriere dello Sport - Stadio*, content analysis was conducted on the national (*Corriere dello Sport*) edition when the newspaper was purchased at the newsstand, and the Bologna (*Stadio*) edition when the newspaper was consulted at the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa* library.

seems, in other words, that general-interest newspapers follow their vocation to social analysis also when it is about covering sports and regardless of topicality whereas, by contrast, sports newspapers need the wakeup call of a specific event.

***Table 10**: Social analysis in general-interest newspapers (7-day neutral period)*[250]

| Newspaper | Total number of pages of the newspaper issues | Pages in the Sport sections[251] | Relevant media items | Prevalence of relevant media items in the Sport sections[252] | Average prevalence in the Sport sections |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corriere della Sera | 810 | 51 | 18 | 0.35 | 0.41 |
| la Repubblica | 576 | 46 | 26 | 0.57 | |
| La Stampa | 308 | 34 | 11 | 0.32 | |

***Table 11**: Social analysis in sports newspapers (7-day neutral period)*[253]

| Newspaper | Total number of pages of the newspaper issues | Relevant media items | Prevalence of relevant media items | Average prevalence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| La Gazzetta dello Sport | 396 | 42 | 0.11 | 0.12 |
| Corriere dello Sport – Stadio | 296 | 38 | 0.13 | |
| Tuttosport | 288 | 31 | 0.11 | |

[250] Content analysis conducted on the print issues of the three sampled general-interest newspapers published from September 29 to October 5, 2018 (period 1 in Table 9).
[251] There were multiple Sport sections in the same issue of a newspaper whenever the newspaper included a local edition which also featured a specific Sport section.
[252] Prevalence indicates the proportion of the representative sample (the pages reviewed) that present the specific characteristic under examination (relevant media pieces) in a given period (prevalence = # of relevant media pieces / # of pages reviewed).
[253] Content analysis conducted on the issues of the three sampled sports newspapers published from September 29 to October 5, 2018.

"Relevant media items" indicates the pieces about sport-related socially relevant topics, or social analysis, as identified by the new matrix proposed in this thesis (**Table 4**). Their measurement only has comparative value rather than an objective value of its own, as its purpose was to assess the presence of these kind of topics in the general press *as compared to* the sports press.[254] The comparison between the two sets of data (**Table 10** and **Table 11**) shows that although the number of media items about socially relevant topics is much higher, in absolute terms, in sports-specialised newspapers (more than double), the prevalence of such topics is in fact considerably lower in sports newspapers as compared to general-interest newspapers (0.12 in sports newspapers against 0.41 in general-interest newspapers). As far as general-interest newspapers are concerned, the prevalence of socially relevant topics was calculated on the Sport sections of these newspapers, including both the Sport section in the national edition and the Sport section in the local edition that were available for review, whenever any such distinction was also made in the local section of the newspapers (sports news are not always separated from the rest of the news in the local editions). This measurement method was considered to be more accurate than measuring the prevalence in the overall newspaper, since a general-interest newspaper covers also a large range of non-sporting subjects, in contrast with sports-only newspapers. It is to be noted, however, that there is a minimum margin of imprecision anyway because the sport-related topics that have been defined in this thesis as "socially relevant" were recurrently found in sections of the general-interest newspapers that were *not* their Sport sections, and this leads to findings under B).

## *B) Social analysis is often covered outside of the Sport section in general-interest newspapers*

In general-interest newspapers, the social analysis of sport is more present in the Sport sections than in other sections of the newspaper, in absolute terms, but we cannot argue

[254] In order to have also internal value within each category of newspapers, the measurement should take into account additional elements such as the number of pages in which relevant media items are present, the size and length of the relevant media items, their prominence of mention in each sampled issue of the newspaper and/or other variables.

that it is "concentrated" in the Sport section (still referred to "neutral period"). In fact, the gap as compared to the presence of socially relevant topics in other sections of the newspaper is much smaller than one would probably imagine. In nearly half (42.6%) of the cases under review, the editors of the general press considered that the social analysis of sports was *not* pertinent to the Sport section of their newspaper (see **Table 12**) and that this type of news was to be integrated somewhere else in the newspaper.

***Table 12**: Socially relevant topics outside of the Sport section (general-interest newspapers)*

| Newspaper | Relevant items outside the Sport sections[255] | | | Relevant items in the Sport sections | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corriere della Sera** | 7 | 38.9% | 42.6% on average | 11 | 61.1% | 57.4% on average |
| **la Repubblica** | 16 | 61.5% | | 10 | 38.5% | |
| **La Stampa** | 3 | 27.3% | | 8 | 72.7% | |

The fact that the breakdown between sport and non-sport section is, after all, quite balanced suggests that the editors of the general press cannot make up their mind about whether or not the social analysis of sport is part of "sports journalism". At the same time, the presence of social analysis in the Sport sections in a large number of cases (57.4% on average) suggests that even for the editors of the general press, who cover by definition a wide range of subject areas, sports journalism is not just about results and entertainment but is also about the role of sports in society.

The point is rather about the extent of the coverage in the Sport sections as opposed to other sections: why was the social analysis of sport *excluded* from the Sport pages in more than 40% of cases, in the newspapers reviewed?

[255] There were multiple Sport sections in the same issue of the newspaper whenever there was a dedicated Sport section also in the local edition that was reviewed.

### *C) Outside of the Sport section, general-interest newspapers place the social analysis of sport in a variety of other sections*

In general-interest newspapers, the sport-related topics of social relevance that appeared outside of the Sport section (still referred to "neutral period" and **Table 12**) could be found across multiple other sections, ranging from general news (national or local) to weekly features on specific subjects and more. The analysis did not show any specific pattern in the choice of the section outside of Sport for inclusion of socially-relevant issues.

Outside of the Sport section, sport-related stories of social relevance could be found in the following sections of the newspapers reviewed, during the sampled neutral period:

- *Corriere della Sera*: Cronache [General news] (4 items); Tempi Liberi [Leisure] (2); Buone Notizie [Good news] (1).
- *Repubblica*: Salute [Health] (4); Cronaca [General news] (3); Bologna [Bologna – Local news] (3); Rubriche [Columns] (2); Club [Club – miscellaneous category: home, fashion, tourism, etc.] (1); L'Altra Pagina [*literally* The Other Page – feature articles] (1); Mondo [International news] (1); Commenti [Editorials] (1).
- *La Stampa*: Primo Piano [Feature articles] (3).

There was no identifiable pattern either regarding the types of topics that were chosen for either the Sport section or the other sections of the newspapers. The same type of topic or sub-topic could recurrently be found in both.

### *D) In non-neutral periods, general-interest newspapers and sports newspapers do not show significant differences*

In addition to a seven-day neutral period, from September 29 to October 5, 2018, additional dates were sampled for content analysis with events that, in turn, theoretically

provided newspapers with an ideal opportunity for the coverage of the social aspects of sports. Cross-correlating these different sets of data was expected to offer a clearer and more reliable view of the news selection process in sports journalism as far as the social analysis of sports was concerned. As explained under item A) of the findings, the analysis did show significant differences in the social analysis of sport between general-interest and sports newspapers during a so-called neutral period, when editors were freer to select the topics for coverage. By contrast, the comparison between general-interest and sports newspapers did *not* show any significant difference during non-neutral periods, when reality in principle handed sport-related events of social relevance on a silver plate.

The most flagrant example of this pattern could be seen in the coverage of the Special Olympics World Games, a sporting event of uncontroversial social relevance. As a reminder, the Special Olympics World Games are an international competition for athletes with intellectual disabilities. The 15th edition of the Games (summer edition) took place during the drafting of this thesis, on March 14-21, 2019. Content analysis included also the eve of the Games (pre-event coverage) on March 13, as well as the day after the end of competitions on March 22 (post-event coverage), for a total of ten days of coverage. As highlighted by **Table 13**, content analysis showed that there was no interest whatsoever in the event, whether in general-interest newspapers or sports newspapers.

***Table 13**: Coverage of the Special Olympics World Games*

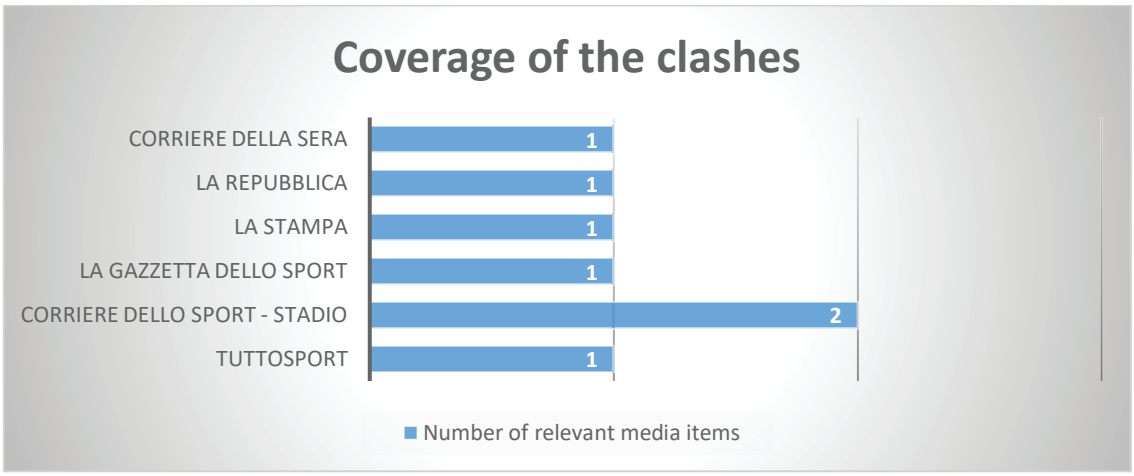
| Date | Corriere della Sera | la Repubblica | La Stampa | Gazzetta dello Sport | Corriere dello Sport – Stadio | Tuttosport[256] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 March 2019 (pre-event) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – |
| 14 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **1** (short article) | 0 | – |
| 15 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – |
| 16 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – |
| 17 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – |
| 18 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – |
| 19 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | – |
| 20 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 21 March 2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 22 March 2019 (post-event) | 0 | **1** (photo with five-line caption) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The Special Olympics World Games have a global dimension and are only held every four years, or two years if we consider that they alternate between Summer and Winter Games (similarly to the Olympic and Paralympic Games). They are the flagship event of Special Olympics. Since the purpose here was to compare the coverage in general-interest vs. sports newspapers, we can say that these two types of newspapers are, in this respect, (sadly) even. In both types of newspapers (combined result), it was only possible to identify two relevant media items over a ten-day period. The (minor) difference lies in the fact that the piece in a sports newspaper, which was *Gazzetta dello Sport*, consisted in a short article that roughly took a quarter of a page, while the media item in a general-interest newspaper, found in *Repubblica*, was just a photo, although with a relatively long caption.

[256] Incomplete data series. *Tuttosport* was not available at the *Biblioteca Sala Borsa*, the main public library in Bologna, when the analysis was conducted, in April 2019. The only known alternative to consult old issues of *Tuttosport* would have been the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale* [National Central Library] in Florence, the only library that held archives of the newspaper, according to the online public access catalog (OPAC SBN) of Italian libraries. However, this library only received copies of *Tuttosport* with a delay of several months. The issues of *Tuttosport* that were needed for the purposes of this thesis were therefore not available at the time the library was contacted. Meanwhile, it was possible to purchase a copy of the newpaper on March 20, 21 and 22, 2019.

Like disabled sports in the case of the Special Olympics World Games, fan violence is also a kind of event that clearly highlights the impact of sports on society, although this time in a negative way. The analysis of the post-event coverage of the clashes between Dutch and Italian supporters in Amsterdam before Ajax-Juventus (data set 3 in **Table 9**) did not show any significant difference either between the general press and sports newspapers (see **Figure 2**). There is a tiny internal difference within sports newspapers, with *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* showing a larger number of relevant pieces, but intra-category analysis, which incidentally would have needed a larger sample to be meaningful, was not the purpose of the analysis, while comparison was.

***Figure 2**: Post-event coverage of fans clashes (Ajax vs. Juventus, April 2019)*




Regardless of the type of newspaper, the very limited number of media items across all six newspapers indicates that the clashes between supporters, despite their magnitude in that particular case, were not considered as a priority for coverage. In this regard, and although this thesis did not look at the salience of coverage, it is worth noticing that *La Gazzetta dello Sport* relegated the coverage of the clashes to the very end of its extended (nine-page) coverage of the match.

It was also interesting to verify whether or not the clashes were mentioned in the front page of the six sampled newspapers (see **Table 14**):

***Table 14**: Mention of fans clashes on the front page (Ajax vs. Juventus, April 2019)*

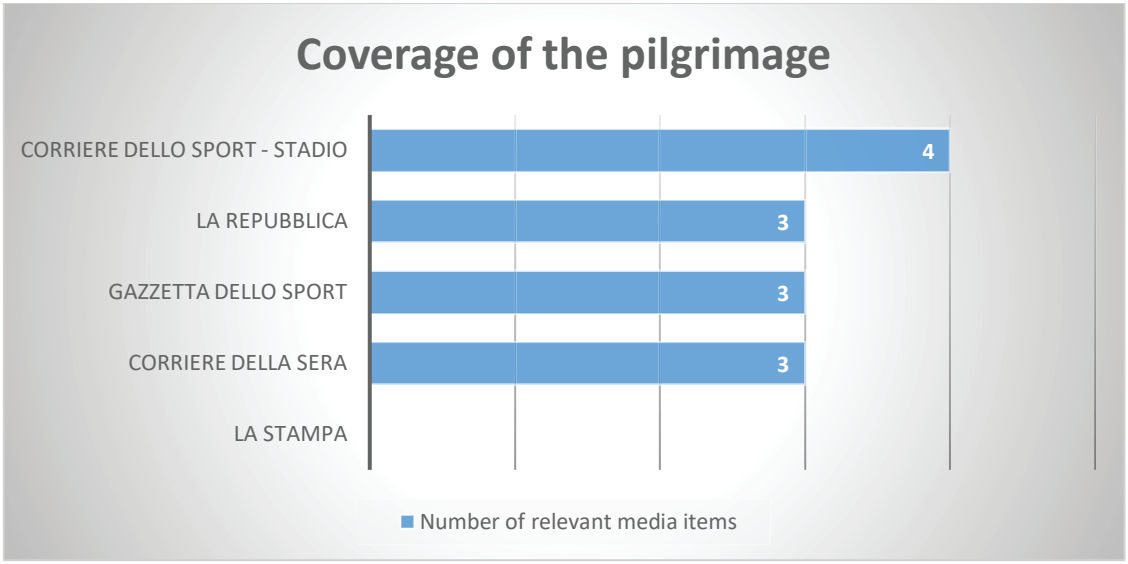
| Newspaper (11 April 2019 issue) | The clashes appear on the front page |
|---|---|
| **Corriere della Sera** | No |
| **la Repubblica** | No |
| **La Stampa** | Yes |
| **Gazzetta dello Sport** | Yes |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio** | Yes |
| **Tuttosport** | No |

The most surprising element that emerges from the above table is the complete absence of the clashes from *Tuttosport*'s front page, even if the front page on that particular day was almost entirely dedicated to the match and despite the fact that *Tuttosport* is, like Juventus F.C. (one of the competing teams), based in Turin. Without speculating on the reasons why this choice was made in that particular case, which would require a different methodological approach including fieldwork and interviews, and while simply drawing from prior discussions in this thesis, these kinds of choices risk of corroborating the stereotype of sports journalists being "too close" to their sources and maintaining exceedingly friendly relationships with the most powerful clubs and/or their fans. Meanwhile, the counter-argument could be that fan violence was not considered as "sport", hence those episodes were not deemed worth the front page of a "sports" newspaper. "Fan violence" was quite obviously included in the taxonomy of **Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports,** as there is no doubt that it constitutes a socially-relevant issue around sports. Whether or not fan violence should be offered the visibility of the front page is much more controversial, though.

With reference to the general press, the most unexpected finding from the data in **Table 14** is the absence of the clashes in the front pages of *Corriere della Sera* and *Repubblica*, even if the front pages did mention the match, in both newspapers. Interestingly, all three sampled general-interest newspapers, i.e. these two newspapers as well as *La Stampa*, covered the clashes in their Sport sections.

Another set of data on another socially relevant event (therefore, also in a non-neutral period), that is the data set 4 in **Table 9**, confirmed the substantial similarity between general-interest and sports newspapers when coverage occurs in non-neutral periods. The event under examination was the pilgrimage of fans in Bologna to the Sanctuary of the Madonna di San Luca to show support for Siniša Mihajlović, the coach of the local Serie A football club – Bologna F.C. – in his fight against leukaemia. Content analysis included both October 6, 2019, i.e. the day of the pilgrimage, and post-event coverage on October 7. The analysis showed no major differences between general-interest and sports newspapers as regards the coverage of the event (see **Figure 3**).

***Figure 3**: Coverage of the joint pilgrimage of Bologna and Lazio supporters (October 6, 2019)*




We could notice that *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* stood out in the lot, but establishing the "school reports" and scores of the sampled newspapers was not an objective of the analysis. A distinctive element that emerged from the set of data on the pilgrimage was rather the local vs. national dimension of the event. Not surprisingly, among the three sampled general-interest newspapers, *La Stampa* was the only one without a Bologna edition, and happened to be the only one in the lot with no coverage of the event at all. Both *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* have a Bologna edition, which was the one consulted at the Biblioteca Sala Borsa library in Bologna for the purposes of this thesis,

and the coverage of the pilgrimage was indeed mainly found in their local (Bologna) sections.

## *E) Sports newspapers are hero factories*

Based on the suggested taxonomy for social analysis (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**), and when looking not just at the most recurrent Topics but also at the more specific *Sub-topics*, sports newspapers appear to be much more interested in inspirational subjects about athletes than general-interest newspapers. In the sampled neutral period (from September 29 to October 5, 2018), which is in this respect the most reliable type of period to understanding the gatekeeping logic in the selection of news, the sub-topic labelled as "Athletes as role models / Inspirational" (Re.: **Table 4**) appeared in 17 media items in sports newspapers as compared to only three in general-interest newspapers over the same period (see **Table 15**). Sports journalism as praised by Grantland Rice (he said that "When a sportswriter stops making heroes out of athletes, it's time to get out of the business") is therefore reflected in sports newspapers, which appear to be *the* quintessential hero factories as far as sports are concerned in the realm of the daily press.[257]

***Table 15**: Topics and sub-topics of social relevance in the sampled newspapers*[258]

| Topic | Sub-topic | Number of relevant media items by type of newspaper | | Total numbers of relevant media items | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | General-interest newspapers | Sports newspapers | | |
| Fandom | Camaraderie | 0 | 4 | 4 | 28 |
| | Fan violence | 1 | 5 | 6 | |
| | Fans' solidarity | 0 | 2 | 2 | |
| | Identity | 4 | 0 | 4 | |
| | Tickets to sport events | 2 | 4 | 6 | |
| | Traditions and connections through school, alma mater, | 1 | 5 | 6 | |

[257] Grantland Rice's citation as quoted in: Berkow, Ira. 2007. *Red: A Biography of Red Smith*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (p. 105). Previously discussed in section 4.2.2.
[258] Related to the period from September 29 to October 5, 2018 (so-called "neutral period").

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | district, hometown, state, country | | | | |
| **Education** | Athletes as role models / Inspirational | 3 | 17 | 20 | 27 |
| | Character development | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| | Moral values in sports | 2 | 2 | 4 | |
| **Health and lifestyles** | Diseases associated with sport | 0 | 1 | 1 | 20 |
| | Fitness | 5 | 0 | 5 | |
| | Injury | 4 | 7 | 11 | |
| | Lifestyle (sedentary vs. active) | 2 | 0 | 2 | |
| | Nutrition | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| **Gender and sexuality** | Homophobia | 1 | 0 | 1 | 15 |
| | Intersex athletes | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| | Sexual abuse | 8 | 5 | 13 | |
| **Charity** | Charitable initiatives and contributions from athletes | 1 | 8 | 9 | 14 |
| | Charitable initiatives and contributions from sports organisations | 0 | 5 | 5 | |
| **Racism** | Racist chants and insults | 1 | 12 | 13 | 13 |
| **Doping** | Bans and disqualification of results | 4 | 7 | 11 | 11 |
| **Governance of sports organisations** | Image of sports | 0 | 2 | 2 | 11 |
| | Self-regulatory measures | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| | Sport development | 1 | 3 | 4 | |
| | Transparency and integrity | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| | Women's access to governance | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| **Environment** | Impact on nature of elite and recreational sports | 3 | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| | Sports facilities: design, construction and management | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| | Sportswear and equipment: sourcing, production, product lifecycle | 2 | 0 | 2 | |
| **Disability** | Competitions | 0 | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| | Opportunities for participation | 0 | 1 | 1 | |
| **Globalisation** | Evolving geography of sports | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| | Internationalisation of teams and leagues | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| **Social integration and socialisation** | Intercultural integration | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| **Development cooperation** | Peace-building through sport | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| **Violence** | Terrorism | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| **Hosting sports events** | Jobs | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| | Urban renewal | 1 | 0 | 1 | |

Meanwhile, the most surprising element in the above Table 15 is probably the gap in the coverage of racist chants (the sub-topic labelled as "Racist chants and insults"). This sub-topic was found in 12 media items across sports newspapers and only in one media item in general-interest newspapers. The width of the gap between the two types of newspapers is actually hard to explain. It certainly suggests that sports newspapers are by no means "second-class" in the coverage of racism, unfortunately a widespread social phenomenon around sports. The coverage of racism in sports newspapers was previously discussed in this thesis, from a different angle, in the part about the use of language in sports journalism (section **4.2 Literature for the people**). If we combine the two examples – of inspirational athletes, on one side, and racist chants, on the other – we could say that sports newspapers want to make heroes in sports but do not want to make "sport" *tout court* a hero, as demonstrated by their emphasis in the coverage of one of the worst issues in today's sports (racism).

### *F) Wellness issues do not interest sports newspapers*

If we look at the frequency of coverage of "Fitness", "Lifestyle (sedentary vs. active)" and "Nutrition", from the data elaboration in the above table (**Table 15: Topics and sub-topics of social relevance in the sampled newspapers**), based on this thesis's taxonomy of analytical categories (**Table 4**), which have been condensed into the definition of "wellness", we notice that these wide-ranging sub-topics were totally absent from the sports newspapers' coverage during the neutral sampled period. Meanwhile, during the same days, i.e. within the same news context, general-interest newspapers did cover these questions. This finding suggests that sports newspapers, rather than print sports journalism at large, separate wellness issues from "sports". The idea that mass media tend to focus on elite sports, to such an extent that according to some authors, this actually constitutes "the media reality of sports" (Horky and Stelzner 2013, 119), was evoked in the very first pages of this thesis. Data analysis reminds us that, in this and other respects, it is more prudent and appropriate to speak of "sports journalisms" in the plural – to

expand from Neveu's quote at the opening of this chapter ["Researchers should think of journalism in the plural" (2017, 1303)].

Beneath this simple truth, when we observe how wellness issues are covered in the daily press, various concepts and notions that were previously discussed in this thesis are at stake. First of all, the very idea of "sport" is at stake, and this is also why the analysis of sport's coverage in the media always presupposes a clear definition of what we/they mean by "sport", as was preliminarily and extensively done in this thesis. Is it really socially and journalistically appropriate to divorce health issues at large, because this is what it goes down to, from competitive and elite sports? As will be seen in the post-scriptum chapter, drafted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it took a global sanitary crisis for sports newspapers to move health issues from virtually nowhere in the coverage to centre stage (see **8. Post-Scriptum: the 2020 coronavirus crisis and sports coverage in the absence of sports**).

In connection with this first consideration, it could be argued that there is nothing surprising, after all, in sports-only newspapers comparatively neglecting wellness matters, since it is (allegedly) not their primary content vocation ("comparatively" because this is obviously not true in absolute terms but in relation to general-interest newspapers and in a specific although representative period). In point of fact, this thesis advocates an extended coverage of the socially-relevant aspects of sports *for sports journalism at large*, therefore including sports newspapers. And based on the suggested taxonomy of topics and sub-topics for coverage (**Table 4**), wellness matters are definitely considered to be a pertinent part of the picture. Moreover, this thesis refutes the idea of sports newspapers as some kind of subordinate press with specific, implying lower, standards. Multiple findings that have emerged from the historical analysis as well as content analysis in the course of the thesis process, and which have been presented in this work, corroborate this claim. Once again, the approach underlying the present thesis is more propositive than critical or normative. The purpose is to show what is being done and the potential in an expanded coverage of certain subjects, as opposed to chastising what is supposedly not being done right.

To conclude, another issue that has been discussed in the present thesis is also at stake if wellness matters are not part of the coverage, and that is the notion of social responsibility of the press. If health issues, of which wellness is part, are left out of the picture, this might convey the idea that sport is *exclusively* about competing and winning. Although these are, quite obviously, pertinent elements when covering sports, the "How" to get there is somehow eluded. What about Doping, Overtraining, Painkiller abuse (all of which are present in the suggested taxonomy of **Table 4**) and other health-related issues that derive from a *distorted* – at least from the point of view of this thesis – competitive-only notion of sport? It is difficult not to recall, in this respect, the oft-quoted verses from the poem of, once again, one of the most famous sportswriters of all times, that is Grantland Rice: "For when the One Great Scorer comes to mark against your name, He writes - not that you won or lost - but how you played the Game" (1941).[259]

## *G) General-interest newspapers and sports newspapers tend to ignore the same subjects*

What is not covered by the press is often as revealing as what is covered. Some would argue that it is even *more* revealing. Not all the sub-topics of the taxonomy suggested in **Table 4** were featured in the newspapers of the sampled neutral period (data set 1 in **Table 9**). This is absolutely normal and does not indicate anything in particular about the coverage of sports in newspapers. During the neutral seven-day period of the sample, which is the representative data set for this purpose, there was not necessarily room or reason to write about College Sports, to take an example of sub-topic from **Table 4**, incidentally in a country (Italy, the chosen country case) where college sports happen not to exist. It was therefore more significant to look at the macro-topics (or simply Topics) of **Table 4** as opposed to the specific sub-topics that were totally absent in the sampled period, whether in the general or specialised sports press.

[259] From a poem entitled "Alumnus Football", which Rice, an alumnus of Vanderbilt University, reportedly wrote in 1908 for a gathering of the Vanderbilt Alumni Association (Furlong 2018).

The analysis of the sampled newspapers showed that the following topics were totally absent from both general-interest and sports newspapers: Corruption; Gambling; Illegal equipment; Labour rights; Religion; and Volunteering. In the suggested taxonomy for social analysis (**Table 4**), these macro-areas comprise a combined total of 27 possible sub-topics for coverage. The size of the sample reviewed was consistent with the specific purpose of the analysis, i.e. specifically the comparison between general-interest newspapers and sports newspapers. In order to have also internal validity within each category of newspaper, or to allow for valid generalisations in other respects, the analysis of the coverage would require a larger sample. It is however possible to suggest some tentative hypotheses, if not conclusions, to help explain the absence of these particular topics despite their scope and importance.

It seems quite evident that, except for Volunteering, which is unharmful, each and every one of the other missing topics in the above list may constitute, one way or another, "inconvenient news". These are news lands that many journalists prefer not to visit. We can hardly maintain, let aside a few virtuous exceptions, that the vast majority of (sports?) journalists look forward to putting issues like tax havens or illegal gambling, to name but a couple of nasty examples, at the centre of their activity. The analysis in this respect will be complemented by the discussion on investigative sports journalism and the safety concerns for sports journalists contained in the upcoming chapter (see **7.1.3 Sports journalism as investigative journalism).**

Extracting the list of potential Sub-topics for coverage from the Topics of the overall taxonomy of analytical categories that has been devised through the present thesis (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**), with specific reference to the missing Topics, can help reveal the substance of the problem. Below are the multiple issues (sub-topics) highlighted in Table 4 under the Topics that were found totally missing from the coverage in both general-interest and sports newspapers:

Corruption

Bribes for the allocation of sports mega-events; Conflicts of interest at the top; Kickbacks for player transfers; Match-fixing to a draw or fixed score; Money laundering through sponsorship and advertising arrangements; Referee match rigging; Tax havens.

Gambling

Addiction; Illegal gambling; Match-fixing for gambling purposes; Organised crime; Policy and regulatory issues.

Illegal equipment

Equipment that may harm opponents; Technology doping; Unauthorised substances on clothing, person or equipment.

Labour rights

Exploitation of underage players; Internationalisation of athletes' careers and contracts; Labour rights at sporting infrastructure projects; Moral and sexual arrassment of athletes; Trafficked players.

Religion

Neutrality of sports; Religious signs in actions and clothing; Sport as religion.

Volunteering

Community sports development; Disadvantaged neighbourhoods; Non-profit sport; Youth volunteering at sports events.

As far as Volunteering is concerned, a tentative explanation for its absence could be that the problem lies not much in self-censorship or conflicts of interest, previously evoked among the most problematic issues in sports journalism (see section **4.1.4 When sports journalism is not serious**), and comparatively more compelling in the case of the other missing topics, but rather in the limited interest of sports journalism in grassroots and community sports.

***

## *Summary of findings*

***A)*** Social analysis is more present in general-interest newspapers in neutral periods.

***B)*** Social analysis is often covered outside of the Sport section in general-interest newspapers.

***C)*** Outside of the Sport section, general-interest newspapers place the social analysis of sport in a variety of other sections.

***D)*** In non-neutral periods, general-interest newspapers and sports newspapers do not show significant differences.

***E)*** Sports newspapers are hero factories.

***F)*** Wellness issues do not interest sports newspapers.

***G)*** General-interest newspapers and sports newspapers tend to ignore the same subjects.

# 7. REPORTING ON THE BROADER FRAMEWORK OF SPORT

> Is it acceptable for some journalists in popular fields, such as the sports round, to leave 'hard', investigative and critical journalism to others on the more 'serious' journalistic rounds like politics, law and business?
>
> David Rowe (2005, 125)


**7.1 BACK TO BASICS: PRESENTING ALL SIDES OF THE STORY**
*7.1.1 Soft news or hard news?*
*7.1.2 Sports journalism as hybrid journalism*
*7.1.3 Sports journalism as investigative journalism*

**7.2 THE POWER OF SPORTS JOURNALISM**
*7.2.1 The social prerogatives of sports reporting*
*7.2.2 Sports journalism and identity development*
*7.2.3 The appeal to children and young people*

**7.3 THE PRAGMATISM OF DREAMS**
*7.3.1 The crisis of print newspapers*
*7.3.2 The business case for social analysis*

## 7.1 Back to basics: presenting all sides of the story

### 7.1.1 Soft news or hard news?

It proves difficult to put sports journalism into a box. Previously, this thesis discussed the classic question of whether sports journalism is about informing or entertaining (see section **4.1.2 The role of the sports journalist: informing and entertaining**). The only definite answer on that point was that there cannot be any definite answer, because sports journalism is both. Here comes another classic distinction that highlights the elusiveness of sports journalism, and that is the one between soft news and hard news. Is sports journalism soft news or hard news? Prior to tailoring the debate to sports journalism, we should succinctly present the basics of the soft news / hard news distinction in journalism.

Although it is not possible to date the start of the debate, the notions of "hard news" and, by opposition, "soft news" were first used by U.S. journalists to classify different types of news, with these terms only making their way into academia at a later stage (Reinemann et al. 2012, 223). In a widely cited study, Gaye Tuchman (1973) addressed the issue from the newspeople's perspective, and found that journalists used five terms or categories to classify events-as-news – hard news, soft news, spot news, developing news, and continuing news – although the main distinction they really made was between hard news and soft news (ibid., 113). According to Tuchman, in the journalists' mind, hard news simply consists of "factual presentations" of newsworthy events that are potentially available for analysis.[260] While hard news is about *important* matters the public should be informed of, soft news is in turn about *interesting* stories, but Tuchman also explains that the newspeople in her study then found it hard to go more in-depth with this distinction because, in practical terms, it is often "difficult – if not impossible – to decide whether an event is interesting or important or is both interesting and important" (1973, 114). Tuchman's study found that in some cases the same event was treated as feature

[260] Tuchman's analysis was based on two-year participant observation at a local independent television, part of a major network, and a daily newspaper with a circulation of around 250,000, both located in the same city (Tuchman 1973, 112). Previously, Tuchman discussed the notions of "factual presentations" and "objectivity" in journalism in: Tuchman, Gaye. (1972). "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity." *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (4): 660–79.

story (soft news) by one media outlet and hard news by another. As for the spot news – developing news dichotomy (Tuchman 1973), examples of spot news would include a fire, an earthquake or a murder, hence a subcategory of hard news. However, when asked to provide examples of developing news, the newspeople in Tuchman's survey ended up mentioning the same types of events as spot news (ibid.). To differentiate spot news from developing news, newspeople then said that as they learned of an unexpected event, this was "spot news", but if it took time to learn the "facts" associated with an unexpected event, they would rather call it "developing news", thereby introducing the amount of available information as a distinguishing factor (ibid., 114-15). The fifth and final category in Tuchman's study, that of "continuing news", is more straightforward to define, as it consists of "a series of stories on the same subject based upon events occurring over a period of time", like a legislative bill or a war, for example (ibid., 115).

Going back to the leading distinction, that between soft and hard news, this has generated a large body of research in communication studies for over 30 years (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky 2010; Reinemann et al. 2012), to become "a key concept of political communication research" (Reinemann et al. 2012, 223). Nevertheless, this long-standing discussion has never led to a real consensus on how to define them, leaving persisting differences across literature that are not just minor but "fundamental and not negligible" (ibid.). Setting aside the interpretative variations of the soft vs. hard news dichotomy, whose review would exceed the scope of this study, the focus here will be on the limited value of this alleged dichotomy for the study of social analysis in media sports, and possibly of sports news in general.[261]

According to Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010, 37–38), hard news has been most commonly characterised in academic literature as "having a high level of newsworthiness, i.e. news value […] demanding immediate publication [while] 'soft'

[261] For the main theoretical approaches to hard and soft news, see the comprehensive reviews in: Lehman-Wilzig, Sam N., and Michal Seletzky. 2010. "Hard News, Soft News, 'General' News: The Necessity and Utility of an Intermediate Classification". *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 11 (1): 37–56; and Reinemann, Carsten, James Stanyer, Sebastian Scherr, and Guido Legnante. 2012. "Hard and Soft News: A Review of Concepts, Operationalizations and Key Findings". *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 13 (2): 221–39.

news does not necessitate timely publication and has a low level of substantive informational value (if at all), i.e. gossip, human interest stories, offbeat events". A first problem, based on this explanation, lies in the misleading blend of newsworthiness and urgency of coverage. Information with high news value may require taking the time to investigate and find more, i.e. the opposite of "immediate publication". Meanwhile, there is news of limited substantive value (soft news, if we posit the limited substantive value of soft news) that has short lifespan and only deserves to be covered, if ever, insofar as it breaks immediately. Let us see how this confused categorisation applies to the topic of this thesis. A sport-related topic of social relevance, like doping for example, typically has a high level of newsworthiness but its coverage generally requires time, if only to find reliable or additional evidence. And, to take another example of sport-related topic of social relevance, the human and inspiring story of an athlete – which would presumably fall into the realm of soft news – can hardly (or arguably) be defined as of "low level of substantive informational value" (also from Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, ibid.). In other words, hard and soft news are contentious definitions that become even more so when the subject is the social analysis of sports. Chapter 3 highlighted that, when trying to define "sport", everyone intuitively knows what it is as long as they are not asked to define it. The same difficulty seems to pertain to the notions of hard and soft news. People use the same words while often intending and referrring to different things.

If the hard vs. soft news dichotomy is so vague, one might wonder why then it has been so massively present in academic literature for over 30 years. Reinemann et al.'s comprehensive review article, entitled "Hard and soft news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings" (2012), offers a rather satisfactory answer. Besides the obvious function of allowing to explore how journalists categorise news, the soft-vs.-hard news dichotomy has been used, according to Reinemann et al. (ibid.), to address other related issues such as: how the different forms of news are produced, why soft news has grown increasingly present in the media, how the dichotomy is used from a feminist

perspective, and the effects of hard and soft news on audiences (ibid., 222).[262] This explanation certainly helps understand the success story of the soft vs. hard news dichotomy. Unfortunately, it does not necessarily make it any more beneficial to the study of social analysis in the media coverage of sports.

Rowe (1992) has devised an original taxonomy of the "different modes of sports writing" which also includes the hard vs. soft news distinction. Rowe has identified four (admittedly inexhaustive) modes of sports writing – hard news, soft news, orthodox rhetoric, and reflexive analysis – and has argued that "different modes of sports writing facilitate different writer/reader relations" (ibid., 109). Hard news in sports reporting is, in Rowe's view, the mode of writing that seeks to match the journalistic standards and "seriousness" (he does use this word) of political news. By contrast, soft news consists of more entertainment and less news, including an "unashamed tendency to exhibit clichés and formulas" (ibid., 102). As for the other two modes of sports writing that he evokes, orthodox rhetoric is the one that generates and capitalises on controversy, says Rowe: "[t]he sports media function here is not simply to record newsworthy sports information of variable seriousness but consciously and actively to intervene in sports discourse" (ibid., 104). Finally, the fourth mode of sports writing, reflexive analysis, is grounded in an ideal and abstract representation of sport and is, in Rowe's view, minority in sports journalism (ibid., 106). Besides conceptualising these four modes of sports writing, Rowe also comes up with a rather detailed explanation of their respective functions:

> Hard news […] subordinates the reader by means of the depersonalization and naturalization of its stories. Soft sports news, in spite of its often self-consciously parodied excess of trivia and melodrama, reproduces the sporting power structure through its emphasis on celebrity and its mechanical simulation of a common speech assigned to, rather than emanating from, its reader-consumers […] Orthodox sports rhetoric, which can be insightful and incisive in advancing critiques of dimensions of sport, is usually directed at the reader by the professional analyst rather than running with the grain of the reader's sensibilities in a collaborative literary process. Reflexive sports analysis, while not universally superior to other modes, is more effective *qua* popular culture because of its focus on shared experience and affectivity of writer and reader. It is on this basis that a more successful exploration of the politics of sport is possible. (Rowe 1992, 109–10)

[262] The authors of the article (Reinemann et al. 2012) cite examples of scholarly contributions for each of these angles of analysis. The article is based on the examination of studies published since 1990 in 13 European countries, whether in English or other languages.

What all these modes of sports writing have in common, adds Rowe, is their operating "to cover sport, to position sport in the cultural and social structure and to negotiate the splits between participant and spectator, partisanship and impartiality, and, of course, between writer and reader" (ibid., 99). Rowe's four-mode classification complements the classic view of the hard/soft news dichotomy by specifically addressing sports reporting, and is in this sense relevant to the present analysis. At the same time, in its blatantly presenting soft news as the lowest level of all, as it does not present soft news as simply "different" from the other modes, his explanation is not much different, in this sense, from mainstream classifications. Furthermore, although it enriches the debate with a series of additional interpretative elements, it does not lead to a *definite* distinction between hard news and soft news in sports reporting as far as content is concerned.

### 7.1.2 Sports journalism as hybrid journalism

This thesis has widely discussed the multidimensionality of sport, which translates into multidimensionality in sports journalism as well. Although multidimensionality is an intrinsic feature of sports journalism, according to Spalletta and Ugolini (2016), the scope of sports newsmaking has been expanding especially since the beginning of the years 2000s, with sports reporters now forced to "juggle" (*destreggiarsi fra* in Italian) politics, judicial news, finance, medical information, gossip and more (ibid., 23-24). For the two researchers (ibid.), the expansion in the scope of sports newsmaking is part of the broader tendency to *hybridity* that has recently involved journalism at large, as theorised by Chadwick in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* (2017).[263] Originally published in 2013, Chadwick's book conceptualises the contemporary media landscape as an *hybrid media system* :

> The hybrid media system is built upon interactions among older and newer media logics – where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and

[263] Chadwick's book won the Best Book Award of the American Political Science Association Information Technology and Politics Section in 2014, and the International Journal of Press/Politics Best Book Award in 2016.

> organizational forms – in the reflexively connected social fields of media and politics. Actors in the system are articulated by complex and ever-evolving relationships based upon adaptation and interdependence and concentrations and diffusions of power. Actors create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable the agency of others, across and between a range of older and newer media settings. (Chadwick 2017, xi)

The idea of sports journalism as hybrid journalism, as suggested by Spalletta and Ugolini (2016), paves the way to a more contemporary approach to the study of this segment of journalism. If we focus on its content-related aspects, the hybrid character of sports journalism actually dates back to well before the beginning of the years 2000s. In this sense, it would be more accurate to speak of different historical phases alternating between different kinds of sports reporting. As seen in the historical excursus of chapter 3, the U.S. newspapers of the colonial period, for example, covered sports "particularly when the sporting event was relevant within some larger social context" – for instance, when a horse race saw a Northern horse competing against a Southern horse (Bryant and Holt 2009, 23) – suggesting that the idea of sports journalism not limited to the coverage of the sport event itself but as part of a broader social picture was already in the background at the earliest stages of the profession. Something, however, has indeed changed over the past 20 years, as suggested by Spalletta and Ugolini (2016). The two researchers have conducted a survey among Italian sports journalists to explore the journalists' opinion on the expansion of sports newsmaking. A first finding from their survey is that for many of the respondents, the tendency to a broader notion of "sports news" is actually not new, since the contamination between strictly sporting news and news connected with sports has been going on for decades (ibid., 37). In most cases, respondents have attributed this contamination to the simple and general fact that sport is part of society and a mirror of it. Meanwhile, some of the respondents have mentioned other reasons that explain, in a more specific fashion, the acceleration in the expansion of the scope of sports newsmaking over the past two decades. These include: 1) the evolution of the media landscape; 2) the rising importance of the economic component of sport; and 3) the growing public interest in the private dimension of sport (ibid., 38). Each and every element in the list has generated important changes, but the third element is probably the

one that has mostly impacted social analysis, and what it actually means, at the level of contents.

If broadening the terrain of sports coverage equates to a perverse fascination with the personal details of sports stars, then sports journalism, in this type of expanded version, means "gossip-sport" (Spalletta and Ugolini 2016, 40). This is how one of the sports journalists who participated in Spalletta and Ugolini's survey, Roberto Perrone – previously mentioned in this thesis with reference to the Black Friday front page (see section **4.2.1 Playing with words**) – has exemplified this evolution:

> Una volta si andava a cercare la moglie del calciatore se c'era un *trouble* come dicono gli inglesi, un tumulto tra di loro. Adesso invece si va a cercare la moglie del calciatore comunque […]. Noi, al «Corriere della Sera», abbiamo fatto un'intera pagina sulla fidanzata di Prandelli, perché è la fidanzata di Prandelli, nelle pagine dello sport. Questo fatto, che fino a vent'anni fa era inusitato, adesso invece passa normalmente. [Roberto Perrone as quoted in Spalletta and Ugolini (2016, 40)][264]
>
> We used to look for the footballer's wife if there was *trouble*, as the English say, a tumult between them. Now, in turn, we look for the footballer's wife anyway […] At «Corriere della Sera», we have devoted an entire page to Prandelli's girlfriend, because she is Prandelli's girlfriend, in the sports pages. This would have been rare until twenty years ago while it is normal now.

Spalletta and Ugolini (2016) have also used their survey to try to delimit the notion of "*connesso con*" [connected with] sport in sports reporting. How far should it go? What topics should it include? Interestingly, their survey (ibid.) showed that (Italian) sports journalists draw a distinction, at least in principle, between the topics that are "connected with" sport in a structural way and gossip. Italian sports journalists generally acknowledge that the broadening of sports newsmaking has also historically coincided with the rise of gossip-sport, but most of them consider, at the same time, that gossip is *not* structurally "connected with" sports. The question becomes more contradictory when it comes to the sports journalists' *real* choices, in their everyday professional life, in relation to gossip. In this case, the survey no longer showed a substantial homogeneity in the respondents' answers but rather a diverse range of opinions, explain the two authors

[264] Cesare Prandelli is an Italian football coach and former football player. He was the coach of Italy's national football team from July 2010 to June 2014.

(ibid.). Incidentally, questions that more or less implicitly refer to quality journalism or journalism ethics may be particularly tricky in a survey or interview. Gossip is hardly ever mentioned among the "must cover" of quality journalism, and while some journalists-respondents may be keen on admitting or even showing off a certain pitiless realism, others may opt for a "journalistically correct" answer while possibly doing the opposite in real life. Spalletti and Ugolini's survey did not provide a conclusive answer on the limits between what is structurally "connected with" sports and gossip, nor did it show a prevailing view among sports journalists of the appropriate limits internal to gossip itself. It should be reminded that the process of "gossipisation" of news is not specific to sports news. With reference to politics, for example, Franca Roncarolo (2004) has spoken of the marketing of private lives, to paraphrase the title of an article in which she investigates the relationship between media and politics in the Italian landscape.[265] The same argument has been applied to sports journalism by Bonnet and Mennesson (2019, 7), who have argued, in relation to the media coverage of athletes: "*Cette médiatisation va de pair avec une forme d'individualisation qui tente de faire émerger des figures selon une logique de vedettariat bien connue dans le marketing du politique*" [This media coverage goes hand in hand with a form of individualisation that tries to bring out figures based on a logic of stardom that is well known in political marketing].

To wrap up, we could say that the present thesis is about the *thematic hybridisation* of sports journalism in that it proposes a new taxonomy for the social analysis of sports which comprehensively looks at multiple topics and sub-topics that could be described as "connected with". Because of its specific focus on social analysis, this thesis does not have the ambition of delimiting the boundaries for sports newsmaking at large, though. And in any case, its underlying approach is quite the opposite of "delimiting". The taxonomy that has been suggested in this thesis for the social analysis of sports is not meant as a way to delimit what should be in and what should be out, but rather as a far-reaching framework to encourage the coverage of a broader framework of sport-related subjects of social importance. In fact, if we take the example of Spalletta and Ugolini's

[265] Roncarolo, Franca. 2004. "Mediation of Italian Politics and the Marketing of Leaders' Private Lives." *Parliamentary Affairs* 57 (1): 108–17.

observations (2016) on the pertinence of gossip to the realm of the "connected with" sports news, several topics and sub-topics that are included in the suggested taxonomy (**Table 4**) may fall into gossip, depending on what we mean by that. The English word "gossip" indicates informal stories about other people's private lives, but also often tends to imply that these stories may not necessarily be true. Spalletta and Ugolini (2016, 44) explain that the sports journalists in their survey used the word "gossip" to indicate, more neutrally, also what might otherwise fall into general news ("*cronaca bianca o cronaca rosa*").

### 7.1.3 Sports journalism as investigative journalism

According to American reporter Isaac Chotiner (2014), there are two distinct types of sports journalism: the first type covers issues like corruption, race, gender illegal doping and sports economy – the "serious" one, in his view; the second is the sports journalism of the press conferences and interviews about a game as well as of the predictions to satisfy the fans' curiosity. Chotiner goes so far as to state that "only one of them is really journalism", from the title of the article, implying the first type (ibid.).[266] The "serious" type, as Chotiner labelled it, certainly includes investigative sports journalism, but let us start by saying that this thesis does *not* share Chotiner's normative assumption in that respect. Investigative sports journalism was rather chosen as a topic for this section of the thesis because of its relevance to the definition of "the broader framework of sport"– from the title of the current chapter 7 – in sports reporting, and not because it is *the* best sports journalism, or even the only serious journalism to report on sports.

Investigative journalism is clearly an ideal tool to explore many of the topics and sub-topics that have been suggested in this thesis for the social analysis of sports. Before going any further, specificity of language is, once again, required. In *The International*

[266] The article is entitled "There Are Two Kinds Of 'Sports Journalism.' Only One Of Them Is Really Journalism." The article was written for *The New Republic*, of which Chotiner has been senior editor. At the time of writing of this thesis, Chotiner was a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. He previously served as staff writer at *Slate*. He has also written for the *Times*, *The Atlantic*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

*Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies* (Vos et al. 2019), "investigative journalism" is defined as "a particular way of newsgathering practice where journalists deeply investigate one or more stories over a longer period of time in order to create deeper knowledge on the subject and confirm multisourced information and build a trusted report" (Hoxha 2019). Investigative journalism expert Sheila Coronel has singled out the key difference between investigative reporting and journalism in general. Against the notion that "all reporting is investigative", Coronel argues that although digging for facts is generally part of the job, the daily practice of journalism tells a different story:

> The reality is that daily news coverage is usually not probing or investigative. It reports mainly what officials or institutions say as well as other people's responses to what has been previously said. Much of what we consider "news" are reports on official statements or reactions to official statements. Daily journalism is also mainly about events that reporters have witnessed or interviewed witnesses about—such as a train collision, a demonstration, a criminal being arrested. There is no digging beyond what has been said or what has been seen. Daily news reporting is seldom investigative, it is mostly reactive. (Coronel 2012, chap. 1)

As close as this description may be to the everyday reality of many journalists, Coronel's portrait seems to dissociate *daily* news reporting from other types of reporting that would, in turn, be able to encompass investigative journalism.

This thesis focuses on *daily* newspapers and assumes that several topics that could fall within investigative reporting (e.g. corruption scandals, illegal doping, but also positive topics like sport-related investments in a developing country or a long-term educational programme through sport) should indeed have their place also in *daily* reporting.

If the focus is on sports journalism and, specifically, *print* daily newspapers, the new media landscape of the digital era makes daily reporting not only suitable for investigative journalism but a particularly propitious place for it. The day-to-day rush is not a good argument to support the opposite, at least not to the same extent as it used to be a few decades ago. As previously discussed in this thesis, the new media landscape has generated and should actually encourage a division of labour within the system. In their study of the temporal orientations in the news, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger have

referred to "a 'temporal division of labor' between print and online news in representing the social reality" (2014, 1052), where print news reflects a more forward-looking orientation as compared to online news (as extensively examined in section **1.3.1 Scope of the study,** within the discussion on the choice of focusing on print).

What might significantly challenge investigative journalism in sports reporting are rather the potential conflicts of interest with the most influential brands/advertisers and sports organisations, in addition to the internal tensions between journalists and publisher for editorial independence – these issues being often connected with one another. In an old but rarely specific article on the "Barriers of Investigative Sports Journalism", Jürgen Emig argued that "[t]he structural conditions of journalism, which result from the interdependence of the political and editorial system, promote the traditional model of informative journalism in contrast with the investigative approach" (1986, 114). Some findings in Emig's study may be partially outdated but his concluding remarks have not aged and deserve a long citation:

> [N]ewspapers show an unambiguous tendency to suppress reports concerned with social-political tasks of state and sports. Reports that treat structural problems of sport also have a small chance of being published. This is especially so, when they are not presented with examples from first-class sports. On the contrary, reports concerning social, economic and political aspects are often driven out into other fields, which draws the attention to the self-evidence and the place of sports journalism. These aspects are only drawn to the attention when they have an impact on the performance ability of the top sportsman, so that the national prestige is affected as well […] The whole of social problems, which also structure this domain, are further excluded as factors outside sports. A change of this reporting model in the field of sports cannot be obtained from "one side of the communication press" only, i.e. neither from the side of the recipient nor of the communicator alone. The total social dysfunctionality can only be eliminated through a structural reversal of a changed opinion about mass communication. Therefore, the function of sports and especially their entertainment value should not be underestimated. (Emig 1986, 127)

The above excerpt provides abundant food for thought. The tendency by newspapers to "suppress" socially-relevant reports is not necessarily the main element to retain, as things have partially evolved since 1986 (the publication's year), following the expansion in the scope of sports newsmaking. Meanwhile, the distinction between first-class sports and other sports is still relevant – regardless of the fact that, as previously explained, this

thesis does not consider or establish hierarchies among the different sports (see section **1.1.3 Philosophy**).

Emig (ibid.) also raised the ongoing issue of the perceived newsworthiness of the social, political and economic aspects of sports only insofar as these aspects are relevant to the performance of the top sportsman. This aspect is linked with the problem of (poor) sports journalism maintaining "incestuous" relationships with the top athletes, previously discussed in chapter 4. The long-standing omissions in the journalistic coverage of Lance Armstrong's doping scandal, unveiled only at a late stage and principally by Irish sports reporter David Walsh, provide a good example of how far self-censorship can go when the subject is a star athlete, supported by wealthy sponsors. Walsh led the way in exposing the systematic doping of the American cyclist, and devoted multiple books (Ballester and Walsh 2004; Walsh 2007; Walsh, Kimmage, and Follain 2012; Walsh 2013) and articles to the Armstrong case. Besides unveiling the scandal, Walsh also pointed to the guilty silence of many fellow journalists: "[a]ll the evidence was out there since 2004 and people will still say there is no evidence", claimed Walsh (Urquhart and Walsh 2012). Before Armstrong's doping history was officially revealed, and confessed by Armstrong himself in 2013, numbers of sports journalists both in the United States (his home country) and elsewhere centred their reports on Armstrong's battle against testicular cancer and his extraordinary determination to win, both his health problems and in sports, thereby creating a hero (see also **4.2.2 The language of heroes and emotions** on myth-making in sports journalism). Only a few reporters at the time would question what might lie behind his astounding sporting performance.[267]

Finally, when Emig evokes "the total social dysfunctionality" of the sports reporting model, as he calls it in the above citation (1986, 127), and argues that this "can only be eliminated through a structural reversal of a changed opinion about mass communication", he correspondingly suggests not to underestimate "the function of

[267] Media scholar Sada Reed (2018; 2019) has extensively discussed the creation and perpetuation of Lance Armstrong as a hero myth, and notably how sports journalists handled the collapse of the myth and the process of so-called "paradigm repair" in that case.

sports and especially their entertainment value" (ibid.). This remark is consistent with the idea, underlying this thesis, that the entertaining dimension of sports does not diminish their value but actually makes sports extremely impactful on society. From this stems the importance for sports journalism, including investigative sports journalism, not to underestimate the entertaining dimension of sports.

### *The state of investigative sports journalism*

To describe the state of today's investigative sports journalism, as far as the daily press is concerned, we could say that this is characterised by persisting obstacles but also new factors that are more likely to promote it. The combination of these elements has been condensed, based on the elements in this and previous chapters, in the upcoming table:

***Table 16**: Elements affecting investigative sports journalism in the daily press*

| Obstacles to investigative sports journalism | Incentives to investigative sports journalism |
|---|---|
| Conflicts of interest with sports organisations and advertisers. | Need to cover topics that have not already been presented on TV and online media. |
| Tensions with the publisher on both topics and resources. | Forward-looking orientation of print media, beyond the simple reporting of current events |
| Idea of "sports journalism" that does not encompass investigative reporting, if not as an exception. | Contemporary idea of "sports journalism" that embraces the broader framework of sports. |

Pros and cons are hardly ever evenly balanced, though, and one has to weigh the different components in order to make a choice. If we compare the Obstacles with the Incentives, in Table 16, we could argue that the Obstacles can be virtually insurmountable while the Incentives look more like legitimate but comparatively marginal aspirations. As suggested in various parts of this work, this thesis is focused and grounded on a notion of *individual* responsibility of journalists (which by no means implies that organisational and other constraints are not present or, even less, irrelevant). The synthesis between obstacles and incentives ultimately lies upon what the sportswriter decides to write or to elude. Like in any other business (see also the discussion in section **2.4.2 The journalist**

**as an employee**), journalists are confronted with the ongoing dilemma of combining their individual role and ethics with their being part of "a firm". This dilemma does not only apply to journalists who are employees of media conglomerates but also to freelance journalists who collaborate with newspapers. As was also previously argued, what changes as compared to other businesses is rather the social impact of certain "products" as compared to others, and news are clearly more socially impactful than tomatoes – with all due respect for this delicious fruit.

When sports journalists reckon that the conflict of interest with their sources, the newspaper's advertisers or others is so dramatic that it prevents them from doing their job properly, then they should probably consider reviewing their career plan and change employer altogether. Alternatively, they may want to try "changing their employer" instead of "changing employer", by advancing in small steps. The world of sports journalism may not be filled with the likes of David Walsh, the brave reporter who decisively unveiled Armstrong's doping scandal, but valuable contribution can be made to different degrees. In this respect, the presence of multiple media sources today, including social media and non-professional information sources in general, operates as a facilitator. It is not unusual that episodes that deserve further investigation first emerge in social media or marginal blogs, not affected by conflict of interest or other corporate issues, paving the way for professional journalists to expand on these stories while not taking responsibility for breaking the news. As discussed in section **2.2.3 Traditional media vs. new gatekeepers?**, although user-generated contents have grown as a primary source of information also for sports journalists, "it is often when these reports are picked up and amplified by more mainstream journalism that they gain wider public prominence" (Boyle 2015, 357). And as a corollary to all that, the flip side of the story is that publishers are not necessarily opposed to investigative journalism, since this often leads to scandals that actually attract more attention, more readers and additional advertising revenues (see also the complementary discussion on sports journalists' self-censorship in section **4.1.4 When sports journalism is not serious**).

**Investigative journalism: examples from sports newspapers**

The widespread idea that sports journalists are allegedly and somehow biologically opposed to investigative journalism because they desperately need their sources – as if this was fundamentally different from what happens in other beats – does not match what the author of this doctoral thesis has seen first-hand in her professional experience, especially in her role as the secretary general of an international sports newspapers association (the IASN).[268] There certainly were members of the sports journalism community who appeared to be literally obsessed with developing new partnerships with the major sports brands and thought that any other question was fundamentally irrelevant. Others were particularly passionate about the number of ads that appeared in every single page of their newspaper, which they (legitimately) waved as a trophy. Since meetings typically involved media professionals at the highest hierarchical level, most of whom holding both editorial and managerial responsibilities, business concerns were always somehow part of the picture. However, the vast majority of them were concerned first and foremost with the qualitative and ethical standards of the newspaper they represented. The cases where they seemed to shy away from inconvenient truths that deserved to be investigated and covered were rare, close to non-existing.

To mention one example amongst many, Juan Ignacio Gallardo, the editor of the Spanish sports newspaper *Marca* at the time of writing of this thesis, and a member of IASN's board at the early stages of the association, co-authored with Miguel Serrano a famous front-page article in *Marca* on January 13, 2009, which overtly accused the then president of Real Madrid, Ramón Calderón, of irregularities in the club's General Assembly.[269] The article followed what was described as a long-standing and documented journalistic investigation. The article's headline read: "Le Votaron Compromisarios Falsos – Calderón Robó la Asamblea" [False delegates voted for him – Calderón stole the Assembly]. Calderón resigned shortly afterwards. Like Real Madrid, *Marca* is also headquartered in Madrid. Regardless of the nature and content of that particular article, or the specific conditions that led to its publication, it nevertheless seems to confute the idea of sports newspapers that avoid investigating because of their "inevitable" connivance with the big clubs, and that this would happen almost "by default" when these are based in the same town as the newspaper. Exactly one year after the publication of that investigation, *Marca* celebrated the anniversary with the following front-page headline: "Un año de la noticia que cambió la historia del Madrid" [A year has passed since the news that changed the history of Madrid] (Serrano 2010).

## *Media freedom and safety issues*

The study of investigative sports journalism cannot elude the problem of the reporters' personal safety. Although this thesis will not expand into the broad subject area of media

[268] See footnote 11.

[269] Gallardo represented *Marca* as one of the founding sports newspapers of the International Association of Sports Newspapers (IASN) within the then World Association of Newspapers (WAN), then WAN-IFRA, in 2008. See also footnote 11.

freedom, the journalists' choices in the realm of investigative reporting cannot be discussed without at least reminding the potential risks for journalists in pointing to integrity breaches, in sports as elsewhere. This is a seriously underrated problem, as sports journalism is most typically associated with the bright side of the profession. The "toy department" can be all but fun. The Danish organisation Play the Game, which was previously mentioned in this thesis for being at the origin of the *International Sports Press Surveys* (see **4.3.1 The international landscape**), has extensively contributed to raise awareness of issues related to transparency and freedom of expression in sport, which are at the core of its mission. Several articles specifically devoted to the press freedom of sports journalists have appeared over the years on the *Play the Game* portal.[270]

A study by Kirsten Sparre of Aarhus University, which was presented at the Play the Game 2017 conference, identified 78 incidents across 35 countries and six continents in which sports journalists underwent some form of violation, from simple threats to verbal of physical assault, detention, kidnapping, and even murder in four cases. The study, entitled "The Dangers of Sports Journalism" (Sparre 2017), showed that the perpetrators of attacks to the media freedom or personal safety of sports journalists ranged from the powerful officials of sports clubs and international sports federations to simple fans and athletes, among others. Furthermore, Sparre reported: "none of the press freedom organizations working with UNESCO or other intergovernmental bodies on protecting journalists has paid specific attention to the issue of sports journalist safety […]" (ibid., 205). The media freedom and personal safety concerns of sports journalists appear to require additional attention at both the academic and institutional level.

***

To conclude on a positive note, the most celebrated investigative sports reporters at the international level are probably David Walsh, previously mentioned in the current section

[270] For a catalogue of these articles, see "Press Freedom in Sports Journalism". 2019. *Play the Game* (blog). 3 May 2019. https://www.playthegame.org/news/news-articles/2019/0567_press-freedom-in-sports-journalism/ (last accessed on September 11, 2020).

and best known for his work on the Armstrong doping case, and Andrew Jennings, who has investigated especially corruption issues around the IOC and FIFA. Walsh is two-time recipient of the UK Sportswriter of the Year award (2000; 2003), and was named Journalist of the Year as well as Sports Journalist of the Year at the 2012 British Journalism Awards, to mention but a few of his recognitions. Jennings was awarded the Play the Game Award in 2011, which he shared with Jens Weinreich, "in recognition of their tireless work documenting and bringing the enormous levels of mismanagement and corruption in the world's leading sports organisations into public view" (Sparre 2011).

## 7.2 The power of sports journalism

### 7.2.1 The social prerogatives of sports reporting

> Nous affirmons que *le journalisme sportif fait partie du journalisme*, non seulement d'un point de vue nominal ou formel (le fait d'être appelé journalisme, ou d'être véhiculé par les mêmes médias), mais aussi d'un point de vue substantiel, puisqu'il participe à la création d'une opinion publique avertie et, si nécessaire, critique vis-à-vis de la société: c'est-à-dire le principe et la mission fondamentaux de la profession journalistique.
>
> Marica Spalletta and Lorenzo Ugolini (2015a, 12)[271]

In section **4.1.4 When sports journalism is not serious**, this thesis has discussed the flaws that may justify criticism of the beat, which may also mean how sports journalism "harms" society. The current section will look, from a more constructive angle, at the aspects of sports journalism that make it prominent in society. The word "prerogative", in the title of this sub-section 7.2.1, has not been chosen by accident. In its main dictionary definition, the notion of "prerogative" is described as "a right or advantage belonging to a particular person or group because of their importance or social position" ("Prerogative" 2020). The idea is precisely that sports journalists hold what will be described here as

[271] [Tr.: We maintain that *sports journalism is part of journalism*, not only from a nominal or formal point of view (because it is called journalism, or because it is conveyed by the same media), but also from a substantial point of view, since it participates in the creation of a public opinion that is informed and, if necessary, critical of society: that is to say the fundamental principle and mission of the journalistic profession].

"social prerogatives" because of their specific competence and their position in the profession and society.

To complete these preliminary notes on terms, the notion of social "power", as is used in section 7.2 and this thesis at large, is not meant to indicate "control", which would most typically connote a deliberate intention to direct people's behaviour or the course of events. Even less has it to do with the idea of a propaganda model of communication, in which the power of the media would consist in "manufacturing consent" (Herman and Chomsky 2002).[272] The debate here is clearly not about "the power of journalism" at large, a debate that is "as old as press itself" and so wide as to encompass "*vision enchantées et histoires d'horreur*" [enchanted visions and horror stories], as summarised by Neveu (2013, 81).

The "power of sports journalism" to which the title of this section refers is meant to indicate the social leverage of sports journalism that comes from combining the social leverage of the media with the social leverage of sport.

The study of the communicative power of *media sport* presupposes the study of the social and cultural power of *sport*, which is precisely what this thesis has been aiming to, if one only looks at the sequence of the chapters. This aspect has been clearly elucidated by Abbiezzi:

> Il punto di partenza per un'osservazione che voglia […] circoscrivere il proprio interesse all'aspetto mediale dello sport, deve muovere dalla considerazione del potere comunicativo del fenomeno sportivo, produttore e prodotto di senso (dal punto di vista dei valori, del linguaggio, delle regole), all'interno della società e della cultura, a partire dalla sua originaria connotazione festiva. (Abbiezzi 2006, 4–5)
>
> The starting point for an observation that is intended [...] to limit its interest to the media aspect of sport must move from considering the communicative power of the sporting phenomenon, producer and product of meaning (from the point of view of values, of the language, of rules), within society and culture, starting from its original festive connotation.

[272] Herman, Edward S., and Noam Chomsky. 2002. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books. First published in 1988.

The present analysis is axed towards the *productive potential* of this combined leverage (leverage of sport + leverage of journalism, as from previous text box), and without implying that its effects are always and invariably positive. The idea of "power of the press" underlying this thesis reflects the milder definition proposed by McQuail:

> The news media can affect choices in matters of consumption, voting and public reputation, whether intentionally or not. We should keep in mind, however, that the 'power of the press' is not an intrinsic property of the media, but largely the outcome of forces at work in the society that are mediated by way of the media. Aside from sheer reach, it depends on the degree of trust and respect accorded by the public to media sources. We need to look elsewhere for the true bases of social power and influence. (McQuail 2013, 19)

Two key sources of power, on the two sides of *media* and *sport*, have extensively been discussed in this thesis: the press's ability to select what will become news (gatekeeping power, section **2.2 Gatekeeping and sports journalism**) and sport's ability to attract and gather together people with different backgrounds and conditions (chapter **3. Sport in society**). Sports journalism epitomises the fusion of these two powerful forces.

By choosing what will become news, the sports press sheds light on certain topics and leaves others aside. This means that it also contributes to shape a certain idea of sport. At the same time, sport has a social force of its own that media coverage conveys and enhances.

Interestingly, the press and sport share an inherent tendency to the public good, regardless of the actual outcomes of their action. As far as the press is concerned, McQuail has spoken of "the self-image of the social role of the press", of which the newspapers' titles are, in his view, a first manifest example: "[t]he newspaper press has often shown a voluntary dedication to the public good, and the titles traditionally chosen by newspapers have often reflected such public-spirited purposes" observes McQuail (2013, 22). The titles of the newspapers often use metaphors and images of the newspaper's role in society, says McQuail: words like *Journal* or *The Times* to evoke actuality and timeliness,

*News of the World* or *Globe* to indicate international coverage, *Voice* to evoke the newspaper's role as a public voice, *Guardian* to remind of the watchdog function of the press, and so forth (ibid., 23). The same notion of self-image can be borrowed to describe the "self-image of the social role of sport". Whether or not we adopt a functionalist perspective in the social analysis of sport (see **3.1.4 The social impact of sport**), i.e. a paradigm that fundamentally praises the positive functions of sport in society, and despite all the difficulties in defining "sport" (evoked in section **3.1.2 Defining "sport"**), sport is most largely conceived, and certainly conceives itself, as an intrinsically beneficial social phenomenon. The proof is that whenever sport generates non-beneficial outcomes, analysts immediately refer to a "betrayal" of the values of sport, thereby implying that sport is something else.

Moving from these grounds, it now seems important to define, more schematically, the social prerogatives of sports reporting.

### *A tool for the study of sports journalism's social prerogatives*

The elaboration of a conceptual tool for this purpose (**Table 17: The social prerogatives of sports journalism**) was inspired, as always in this thesis, by a desire to go beyond any one specific cultural pattern. Schudson's lesson in this respect, from his book on *The Power of News* (1996), should not be forgotten:

> The news […] is produced by people who operate, often unwittingly, within a cultural system, a reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse. It is organized by conventions of sourcing – who is a legitimate source or speaker or conveyer of information to a journalist. It lives by unspoken preconceptions about the audience – less a matter of who the audience actually may be than a projection by journalists of their own social worlds. News as a form of culture incorporates assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in, what range of considerations we should take seriously. A news story is supposed to answer the question "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why" about its subject, but understanding news as culture requires asking of news writing what categories of people count as "who," what kinds of things pass for facts or "whats," what geography and sense of time are inscribed as "where" and "when," and what counts as an explanation of "why." (Schudson 1996, 14)

Any notion of power of the press is inevitably tied to the cultural background in which it has developed. Incidentally, it was made clear in the introduction (section **1.1.3 Philosophy**) that this doctoral study is admittedly written from a Western perspective. The efforts to overcome the cultural boundaries of the analysis do not guarantee success. As reminded by Schudson (ibid.), there is always "a reservoir of stored cultural meanings" in the background, but this does not prevent from trying to design conceptual and operational tools for a larger audience.

Schudson's above excerpt serves as a perfect introduction for a scheme of sports journalism's social prerogatives also for another reason. It mentions Lasswell's classic contribution to communication theory, which can be a good starting framework. In the seminal article entitled "The structure and function of communication in society", Lasswell (1948) proposed his famous "5W" model of communication, cited by Schudson (1996, 14), and theorised that "[t]he communication process in society performs three functions*: surveillance* of the environment, *correlation* of the components of society in making a response to the environment, and *transmission* of the social inheritance (author's italic).[273] *Surveillance* of the environment consists in collecting and disseminating information so as to allow citizens to be informed about news and events that take place in society. *Correlation* stresses the role that communication plays in interconnecting and thereby generating points of views that circulate throughout society. *Transmission* refers to the transfer of cultural norms and values from one social group (a generation, but arguably others as well) to another.

Charles R. Wright added a fourth function, that of *Entertainment*, to Lasswell's three-function model: "entertainment refers to communication primarily intended to amuse people irrespective of any instrumental effects it might have" (Wright 1960, 609). While adding the entertainment function is relevant to the study of sports journalism, the idea of this function as "irrespective" of its effects is highly debatable. This thesis has consistently refuted the demonisation of the entertainment function of sports journalism.

[273] Lasswell's so-called "5W" model of communication was previously referred to, in this thesis, with reference to the content analysis process (see chapter 1).

However, the purpose here is not to discuss the flaws and virtues of Lasswell's or Wright's paradigms but rather to build upon what is possibly the most basic model of communication (Lasswell's, complemented by Wright's fourth dimension) to develop a specific tool for the study of sports journalism's prerogatives. Incidentally, another part of Wright's analysis turns out to be helpful in this respect. In the same work, Wright has argued that "many of the functions of one mass-communicated activity can be interpreted as social mechanisms for minimizing or counteracting the dysfunctions produced by another activity, in order to keep the system from breaking down" and, in this framework, he goes on to explain the social upside of entertaining:

> For example, news about war or international events sometimes increases personal tensions and anxiety which, in turn, leads the individual to reduce his attention to the news (hence disturbing the normal state of equilibrium). From this perspective, it is significant that the same mass media which provide surveillance and correlation often serve as a source of entertainment in a mass society. Indeed, the entertainment aspects of events may be interspersed with or woven into the news itself, in such forms as human-interest stories, oddities in the news, scandal, gossip, details of private lives, cartoons, and comic strips. One function of mass-communicated entertainment, then, is to provide respite for the individual which, perhaps, permits him to continue to be exposed to the mass-communicated news, interpretation, and prescriptions so necessary for his survival in the modern world. (Wright 1960, 620)

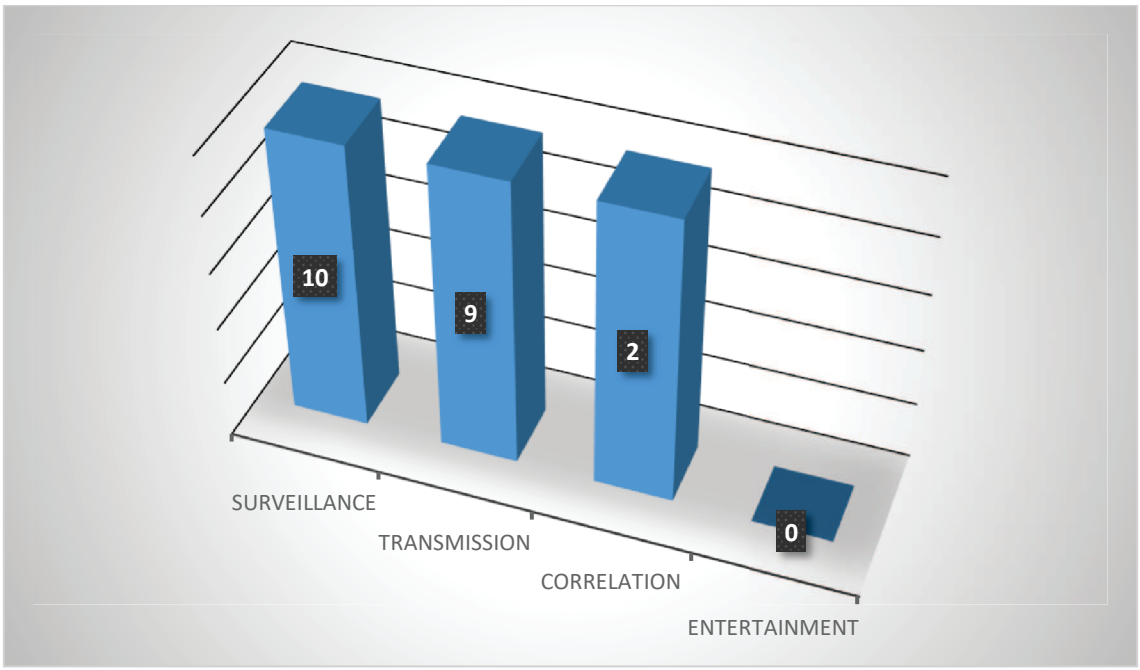
The scheme in **Table 17** (next) has been obtained by crossing the four-function basic model of communication – Lasswell + Wright – with the matrix for social analysis that has been developed for this doctoral thesis (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**). Each Topic in the matrix of Table 4 has been associated to a function from Lasswell+Wright's model, whenever appropriate, in order to measure the prevalence of Surveillance, Correlation, Transmission, and Entertainment (the four functions).

***Table 17**: The social prerogatives of sports journalism*

| Media functions | Topics for social analysis |
|---|---|
| **Surveillance** | Corruption |
| | Development cooperation |
| | Doping |
| | Environment |
| | Gambling |
| | Governance of sports organisations |
| | Hosting sports events |
| | Illegal equipment |
| | Labour rights |
| | Violence |
| **Correlation** | Charity |
| | Fandom |
| **Transmission** | Disability |
| | Education |
| | Gender and sexuality |
| | Globalisation |
| | Health and lifestyle |
| | Racism |
| | Religion |
| | Social integration and socialisation |
| | Volunteering |
| **Entertainment** | — |

For completeness of information, data were also crossed at the level of sub-topics and the result was substantially the same, given the internal coherence between each topic and its assigned sub-topics. As graphically illustrated in Figure 4 (next), it was found that social analysis in the press coverage of sports, as conceptualised in this thesis, mostly reflects the media functions of Surveillance and Transmission. Correlation is marginally present, while Entertainment is completely absent.

***Figure 4**: Media functions in the social analysis of sports*




The absence of Entertainment may call into question, perhaps in media analysis at large, the actual necessity of that fourth function, but this debate would exceed the scope of this thesis. More specifically, the absence of Entertainment may suggest that in sports journalism, including when this deals with social analysis, Entertainment is in fact a meta-category that is either at the forefront, especially outside of the specific framework of social analysis, or in the background of *all* sport-related news. If we take Fandom, for example, this topic comprises both elements of social or sociological importance and purely entertaining elements, all of which are of interest to the journalistic coverage of sports. In Development Cooperation, the construction of a sports infrastructure in a developing country is certainly a matter of social relevance, but entertainment is in the background because that infrastructure will likely be used for games. The problem is how this meta-category (Entertainment) is used. We can partially borrow, in this sense, from Wirth and Schramm's study on "Media and Emotions", in which the two scholars argued that "emotions in the media provide a very acceptable and welcome tool for the reduction of high complexity in the environment of civilized societies. Certainly, another question

is how adequate this kind of coping with complexity is" (2005, 25). Here we could point to *how adequately Entertainment is used to cope with complexity*.

### 7.2.2 Sports journalism and identity development

This section will look at how sports journalism has "the power" to potentially intervene in identity development. The question of sport and identity was also discussed previously, but with specific reference to national identity (section **4.2.3 National identity in media sports**). Identity "development" is being preferred here to identity "formation", although they can and will be used as synonyms, because the notion of "formation" tends to suggest a focus on the early years while the focus in the present analysis is rather on the continuousness of the process.

The phases of childhood and adolescence are key in identity formation – and in this case "formation" is utterly appropriate. These are the initial stages of the process, when the foundations are built. The next section of this chapter (7.2.3) will indeed be devoted to sport and identity as far as these age groups are concerned. However, identity does not develop only in these phases, nor does it grow once and for all. Identity "development", as we would rather call it in this case, is illustrated by American psychology scholar Jane Kroger as the "move toward 'wholeness'":

> Identity is shaped and reshaped by contextual forces as it mediates or is mediated by them. Identity's normative time of ascendance as an issue of primary concern is during adolescence and young adulthood, when decisions about the foundations on which one will enter adult life press for clarification and resolution. Much theory and research over the past five decades has been devoted to understanding the process and contents of identity development through adolescence and emerging adulthood. Identity, however, is not a static entity, remaining fixed once initial resolutions are made. Changing life circumstances, coupled with changing biological and psychological needs, will likely spur ongoing identity developments over the course of adulthood years. (Kroger 2015, 65)

Kroger's approach builds primarily on the theories of Erik H. Erikson, a pioneer in considering the continuation of identity development through adulthood (ibid., 66).

The study of the construction of identity has grown increasingly important in contemporary societies. Côté and Levin have noted that "[f]or most of human history, identity formation was not a matter of individual choice and negotiation" as only with the advent of modern forms of social organisations did choice replace obligation as the basis of identify formation (2014, 1). For Côté and Levin, identity formation has grown as a problematic issue especially in Western societies, including the societies that undergo their influence: "recent cultural changes have made forming and sustaining a sense of identity more problematic for virtually everyone in, and affected by, Western culture", they argue (ibid., xi). Even though generalisations are always partial pictures of a more complex reality, Western societies generally tend to be more individualist than other societies. In countries like Japan, China or India, for example, culture generally places more value on the collectivity.

The suggested taxonomy of analytical categories for the social analysis of sport (**Table 4**), devised for this thesis, comprises several categories – both broad topics and specific sub-topics – that highlight the relationship between sports journalism and identity development. In some cases, categories highlight a direct relationship, for example in areas such as Education, Fandom and Gender, among others. In other cases, the relationship is indirect, for example in categories like Charity or Volunteering, where it is mediated by inspiring figures.

Through the topics it chooses to represent, sports journalism may impact identity development in multiple ways, which this thesis defines as "**influence carriers**".

The ways by which sports journalism may impact identity development are abridged in **Table 18**.

***Table 18**: Sports journalism's influences on identity development*

| INFLUENCE CARRIERS | THE JOURNALIST'S OPTIONS |
|---|---|
| **The represented "sport"** | ➢ Hyper-pro only?<br>➢ What types of sports?<br>➢ What values? |
| **The choice of the athletes** | ➢ Men? Women? Athletes with disability?<br>➢ Winners only?<br>➢ Positive models or anyone who can attract attention? |
| **Sport-related issues of social relevance** | ➢ Are they comprised in the picture?<br>➢ Which ones, and how often?<br>➢ Inside or outside of the sports pages (for the generalist press)? |

While this entire thesis evidently concentrates on "Sport-related issues of social relevance", in **Table 18**, the table is in fact supposed to align such issues with other families of *influence carriers* that lie within the hands of sports journalists and likely impact identity development. Regarding the first item in the table (The represented "sport"), sports journalism's first task is quite obviously to represent sport, but this thesis has recurrently reminded that this statement is less trivial than it seems, if only because the very notion of "sport" is hard to grasp (see section **3.1.2 Defining "sport"**). Sports journalists make choices that contribute to shape what sport is across society (represented by the column of "The Journalist's Options" in **Table 18**). If journalists mostly concentrate on the top clubs in the top sports, they convey a certain idea of sport. Readers will tend to automatically associate sport with professional sports in the first place and, more specifically, "hyper-pro" sport (to indicate not just professional versus amateur sports but the restricted world of multimillion clubs and players). Hyper-pro sport is all but a restricted world, one might argue, but is in fact a tiny world when compared to the world of sport at large, which is a much larger and multifaceted universe. Furthermore, sports journalists choose topics that highlight certain values of sport. For example, if hurting or insulting an opponent on the pitch is a non-topic because the reporter considers these actions as natural by-products of the game, readers will likely integrate that these kinds of actions are, indeed, a natural part of the game and ultimately what sport is about. If, on the other hand, sports storytelling highlights these types of behaviour as a distortion,

readers will likely develop a totally different idea of sport, and will probably behave accordingly when they play (or live) in their everyday life.

Moving on to the second influence carrier in **Table 18**, that is the The choice of the athletes, if the journalistic coverage mostly involves male athletes, for example, the emerging model of sport will be male-centred, and will suggest that sport is fundamentally a guy thing. If, on the other hand, women's sports also benefit from journalistic coverage, sport is no longer a guy thing but rather a social thing. By the same token, if athletes with disability are systematically ignored in sports reporting, regardless of their sporting achievements and how inspiring they can be, people with disability will likely assume that society is only interested in able-bodied athletes/people. If, on the other hand, disability sports get good journalistic coverage, people with disability will feel empowered and consider participating in sports themselves. One could argue that sports reporters simply follow the news and therefore, the choice of the athletes for coverage is determined by their sporting performance in the first place. If they win, they get coverage. If they do not win, they do not. In reality, this is hardly ever the only criterion for coverage. Incidentally, should it be the primary criterion in the first place? If athletes are worth media coverage only insofar as they win, where is failure in all that? One of the main lessons of sport is learning to lose and how to recover from defeat, but if the athletes in media stories are all winners, the lesson of sport as is conveyed by sports reporting is quite different, i.e. that only winning makes you worthwhile. And winning is not the main criterion anyway, in the actual selection of news, because sports enthusiasts know that there are athletes who win all the time and hardly get a two-liner while others who have not won anything for years keep being in the press on a regular basis anyway. The latter typically happens when the athlete has become a star (also) for non-sporting reasons, which can range from his/her physical attractiveness to the level of celebrity of their partners in private life, the size of their mansions, or less edifying reasons like marital infidelities, driving offences and nightclub fights. If journalists choose the athletes for coverage not much based on sporting or human prowess but for the level of public attention they can attract "no matter how", it means that sports journalism is conveying a certain idea of "valuable" athlete. Let us not forget that due to the virtuous circle that is

generated by journalistic coverage and public attention, sponsors will follow, and so lucrative contracts. This model cannot not have an impact on the individuals who follow these athletes in the media and the idea of success they develop, for themselves in the first place.

To conclude, and as a corollary to this discussion on sports journalism's influence upon identity development, it may not be superfluous to reiterate that this influence is not inherently beneficial. Some of the examples presented above have substantiated this aspect. Bourgeois and Whitson have spoken of a "commodification of identities", in an article meaningfully entitled "*Le sport, les médias et la marchandisation des identités*" [Sports, the media and the commodification of identities] (2002). In their view, the development of professional sport has favoured the emergence of a "promotional culture" that has in turn determined the commodification of identities:

> La marchandisation du sport, les médias et la mise en marché des identités contribuent à façonner un marché d'identités et une identité mosaïquee. La formation de ce marché et de cette forme d'identité marquent l'avènement d'une culture promotionnelle où l'individu est systématiquement interpellé en tant que consommateur et non en tant que citoyen. (Bourgeois and Whitson 2002, 151)
>
> [The commodification of sport, the media and the marketing of identities help shape an identity market and a mosaic identity. The formation of this market and of this form of identity marks the advent of a promotional culture where the individual is systematically dealt with as a consumer and not as a citizen]

At the same time, against a nostalgic view of what sport allegedly used to be prior to this era of promotional culture, Bourgeois and Whitson usefully remind us that if we look at the outset of sports events production in North America, business was part of the picture from the start (ibid., 152).

### 7.2.3 The appeal to children and young people

Sport can be a popular subject among all age groups, and it is. However, children and young people can be singled out as a specific and special public, for at least three main reasons:

- Firstly, these age groups constitute the main active participants in sports, if only because adulthood typically brings about work and family obligations which limit the amount of available time for leisure.
- Secondly, school is typically the first place where people ever engage in sporting activities, which means that it is at a young or very young age that sport-related preferences and habits originate.
- Thirdly, and no less importantly, sport has a special appeal to children and young people, who seem to be naturally attracted to sports. This does not mean that children and adolescents are *all* naturally attracted to sports, nor is this statement meant to underestimate the rising attraction to the non-physical leisure of the digital world (social media and videogames in the first place), often at the detriment of physical activity. The notions of *special appeal* and *natural attraction* here refer to the fact that parents and teachers often find it hard to persuade children and adolescents to study maths, philosophy and other disciplines while they typically find no difficulty in persuading the same children and adolescents to train for the next intra-school football tournament. The same kind of special fascination applies to children and young people as sports spectators. In a survey among 10-year children, virtually anywhere in the world, to find out how many know Lionel Messi and how many can name the Prime Minister of their own country, Messi's fame would quite certainly prevail. The same survey risks of producing analogous results among older students as well.

In an article about the influence of popular culture on children's identities, entitled "Dedicated followers of fashion? The influence of popular culture on children's social identities", British sociologist Sharon Boden has argued that the two main universes that impact children's identities are sport and pop music, in that order:

> I identify two substantive aspects of popular culture which appear influential on the desires of children to construct and present a 'fashioned body'. The first influence is sport, including the activity itself, the associated brands and logos, and the styling of popular sports stars, and the second is pop music, its stars, their videos, their outfits, overall image and lifestyle, and their own clothing lines. Such influences are further related to cultural

> intermediaries such as television and print media, all providing key sources of information for children about the role of fashion and the consumption of image. (Boden 2006, 289)

Not only does Boden maintain that sport constitutes, alongside pop music, the number one influence from popular culture on children's identities, but she also highlights that this influence is "further related to cultural intermediaries such as television and print media", to which she assigns the function of "key sources of information […] about the role of fashion and the consumption of image" (ibid.). Boden argues that popular cultures influence children "in complex, highly nuanced ways […] altering children's self-styling and the presentation of their identity" (ibid.).[274]

### *Role models in the sports press*

As seen previously in this chapter (section **7.2.1 The social prerogatives of sports reporting**, and notably **Figure 4**), Transmission – the transfer of cultural norms and values from one generation or social group to another – emerges as one of the leading functions of the social analysis of sports as conducted by the press. Meanwhile, the content analysis of Italian newspapers performed for the purposes of this thesis has shown that athletes' inspirational stories are among the most recurrent topics in sports coverage, especially in sports newspapers (see section **6.2 The takeaways from the comparison**). The question of athletes who often become popular heroes, largely through the coverage of their stories in the media, has also been explored at different stages in this thesis, especially in section **4.2.2 The language of heroes and emotions**. According to a basic, dictionary definition from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a "role model [is] a person that people admire and try to copy" ("Role Model" 2020a). For the corresponding entry in the *Cambridge Dictionary*, which says almost the same word by word – "a person who someone admires and whose behaviour they try to copy" the first example that is given to explain that entry is drawn from sports: "Sports stars are role

[274] Boden's comments are based on data from a research project entitled "New Consumers? Children, Fashion and Consumption"(2004), conducted by Boden herself together with Christopher Pole, Jane Pilcher and Tim Edwards at the Department of Sociology of the University of Leicester in the early 2000s.

models for thousands of youngsters" ("Role Model" 2020b).[275] The notion of role model incorporates *admiration* and *emulation*. As commonplace as it may be, the assumption that a role model is a positive model is quite arbitrary. Indeed, the dictionary entries for "role model" do not suggest that it is an example worth following. People do not only admire what deserves to be admired. History is filled with criminals who "inspire" similar acts – the so-called copycat crimes – showing that role model influences can take multiple forms. Furthermore, value judgments tend to vary from one culture to another, making certain acts reprehensible in one historical or geographical context and perfectly legitimate or even praised in another. Yesterday's heroes may be today's monsters and the other way around.

According to Reid, the idea that athletes are role models has typically been used as a supporting argument for the social value of sport but this, Reid argues, has also led "sport philosophers at a variety of levels [to object that] not only do athletes seem unsuited to be heroes or role models in the conventional sense, [but] it is unclear more generally what the social and educational value of athletic excellence could be" (2017, 40). To borrow from the title of an article by Gill Lines, are athletes "Villains, Fools or Heroes?" (2001).[276] This aspect will not be discussed any further since this thesis is on the press, and is not a discussion about whether or not athletes are suited to be heroes, or even less, if athletic excellence has social and educational value at all (which should be obvious per se). The question of athletes as role models is included in the present analysis because: (a) today's sports stars *are* role models regardless of whether or not they deserve to fulfil this function; (b) sports journalism actively participates in turning athletes into role models; and (c) role models have a social impact on people, which can be even stronger on children and youngsters as compared to other age groups.

[275] In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* ("Role Model" 2020a), the first example that is provided for the "role model" entry is related to women – "We need positive role models for young women to aspire to" – and no other example in the list is drawn from sports.
[276] Full reference: Lines, Gill. 2001. 'Villains, Fools or Heroes? Sports Stars as Role Models for Young People'. *Leisure Studies* 20 (4): 285–303.

Athletes are role models in that they induce *admiration* and *emulation*, i.e. the two constitutive elements of a role model. They are admired when they set a good example and positively contribute to society (e.g. through donations, support to civil society organisations, and also honourable gestures on the pitch). And, as reminded by Leng and Phua, "[a]thletes are considered potential role models for young adults even though some of them exhibit inappropriate behaviours" (2020, 1), i.e. when the "model" is not that positive. As for the emulation of sports stars, this can be seen in young people wanting to dress like their idols, asking their hairdressers for the same haircut and aspiring to the same wealthy lifestyle. But the most important element in the desire to emulate role models from sports is that it often operates as the most effective factor in encouraging children and adolescents to participate in sports.

It could be argued that the youngest age groups now rely primarily on social media, and that the sports press therefore plays a marginal role in this mechanism. Contrary to this assumption, a recent study in Spain (Orfila Giner and Moya-Mata 2019) has shown that primary school children are directly influenced by the stories that come from the sports press. The study cross-correlated the contents of the sports newspaper *Marca* during five weeks in 2018 with the results of a survey of the sports preferences of 26 pupils in a primary school in Valencia, and found that the sporting choices of the pupils reflected the newspaper's prevailing contents. In that particular study, it meant that children knew a lot about male sports and football and very little about women's sports, minor sports and non-professional sport (on "minor" sports, see also the upcoming text box). Print sport journalists operate in a broader media ecosystem, and this can be studied more productively and be better understood in terms of complementarity among the different actors and platforms, as opposed to simply trying to identify who has disrupted what and who is doomed to disappear.

The correlation between media coverage and sports participation is far from linear and guaranteed, though. In Britain, a 2007 study on the impact of mediated sports events on the active participation of young people in sports, based on the analysis of daily diaries and interviews, concluded that "whilst there are associations to be made in relation to

motivation, modeling and performance levels, connections between the intensity of media sport coverage and sustained involvement and improvement in young people's sporting activity remain tenuous" (Lines 2007, 349). By combining the results of the two cited studies, the Spanish study and the British one, we could tentatively conclude that media coverage encourages, in principle, but does not guarantee, in reality, young people's active participation in sports. However, the lack of media coverage significantly limits the chances for young people to familiarise with certain sports, thereby reducing significantly the probability that they will embrace these sports in their everyday life. This conclusion resonates with Shoemaker and Vos's argument, in their seminal work on the *Gatekeeping Theory*, that "[w]hereas media coverage does not ensure acceptance of new ideas […] a lack of coverage almost certainly dooms them to failure" (2009, 5), previously discussed in section **2.2 Gatekeeping and sports journalism**.

**The problem with "minor" sports**

This thesis has explained since its earliest stages (see sections **1.1.3 Philosophy** and **3.2.1 Sport as a cultural indicator**) that it does not establish hierarchies among the different sports, one reason being that it has a cross-cultural ambition and a "major" sport in one country, including football, can be a "minor" sport in another. The notion of "minor" sport, which is widely used, and is also occasionally adopted in this document, is a conventional way to describe the sports that do not benefit from great popularity and, indeed, from significant media coverage. With reference to this aspect, it is probably useful to mention some relevant experience on the field.

When holding the role of secretary general of the International Association of Sports Newspapers (see footnote 11), the author of this thesis recurrently experienced a certain hostility from the delegates of the sports organisations representing some of the so-called minor sports. The tone and substance of their questions at symposia or trade meetings and the comments they made, more privately, during lunch conversations and other direct exchanges made it crystal clear that, in their eyes, sports newspapers were *not* on their side. In other words, their attitude suggested that they perceived this specialist press as inherently associated with the major and wealthiest sports only. Sometimes this predisposition translated into physical distance as well, leading to a sort of ideological and even emotional divide, good guys vs. bad guys, pure vs. impure – "what are the bad guys doing here?" one would read in their eyes. The paradox was that the participation of a delegate of sports newspapers in these professional and/or academic events was often driven by exactly the opposite reason, i.e. promoting sports and its media coverage at large.

## 7.3 The pragmatism of dreams

### 7.3.1 The crisis of print newspapers

It would be neither honest nor productive to sideline the question of the crisis of print newspapers altogether because of this thesis's focus on print. Some key figures are needed to highlight the main trends within the industry, so as to put the more specific data of this thesis into a broader perspective. The state of play also allows to assess the feasibility of propositions.

Total print newspaper circulation declined by 17 percent on average over the five-year period from 2014 to 2018, according to data in WAN-IFRA's *World Press Trends 2019* report.[277] During the same five-year period, digital news subscribers worldwide increased by 208%, with analysts expecting a further 13% increase in 2019. In 2018 alone, global print newspaper circulation declined by only 1% year-over-year (YoY), but digital news subscribers increased by 11%. Print totalled 599 million daily paying users in 2018, representing a 0.5% decline YoY, while digital registered a 15% increase YoY and 41.3 million daily paying users.

Print counterintuitively continues to deliver the largest share of revenues to the newspaper industry. Print revenues accounted for around 86% of news publishers revenues in 2018,

[277] WAN-IFRA (World Association of News Publishers) is the global organisation of the world's press. *World Press Trends*, published annually by WAN-IFRA since 1989, is a source of data on the newspaper industry worldwide. *World Press Trends 2019*, released in October 2019, is based on data from 51 countries which represent the largest markets on every continent, according to the organisation. WAN-IFRA's data sources for *World Press Trends 2019* included: the World Bank, PwC, ZenithOptimedia, Ipsos, WAN-IFRA member associations, Chartbeat, IO Technologies, and Parse.ly, with additional data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Unless otherwise stated, the figures in the current section 6.3.1 are drawn from WAN-IFRA's report, and more specifically, from the presentation webinar of the *World Press Trends 2019* results, recorded on November 20, 2019 (https://youtu.be/VfpuIN6Y2oM), as well as the online articles summarising the report's findings on WAN-IFRA's website (https://www.wan-ifra.org/reports/2019/10/28/world-press-trends-2019 and http://www.wptdatabase.org/world-press-trends-2019-facts-and-figures) and the Nieman Foundation's website (Hazard Owen 2019) – all of which last accessed on August 24, 2020. The full *World Press Trends 2019* report is accessible free of charge to WAN-IFRA member organisations only. The full reference of the report is: Nel, François, and Coral Milburn-Curtis. 2019. "World Press Trends 2019". Frankfurt: WAN-IFRA.

as compared to 89% in 2017. However, print *advertising* revenues in 2018 declined by 7% YoY, while digital advertising revenues increased by 5% YoY, and are expected to increase further in 2019. Interestingly, WAN-IFRA's report indicates that when people surveyed around the world were asked about their trust in advertising by type of media, printed newspapers emerged as the most trusted media.

## *Asia vs. Rest of the world*

While we can generally and legitimately refer to a global crisis of print newspapers and an upward trend for digital news, the situation is actually quite assorted as far as print newspaper circulation is concerned, with significant differences sometimes within a same continent. In Europe, for example, Sweden has emerged as the poorest performing print newspaper market, amongst the markets tracked for *World Press Trends 2019*, during the 2014-2018 period, with print circulation down by nearly a third (–31%) over the five-year period. In Germany, print newspaper circulation declined by only 5% in the same period. Meanwhile, print newspaper circulation saw a 50% drop in Australia.

In contrast with this general downward trend are the data from some developing countries and, more importantly, two large economies that stand out as the major exceptions: China and India. In China, print newspaper circulation increased by more than 15% during the 2014-2018 period. Print newspaper circulation also increased in India, where it was up by nearly 8%. In addition, analysts expect a further increase of around 3 percent in these two countries for 2019.

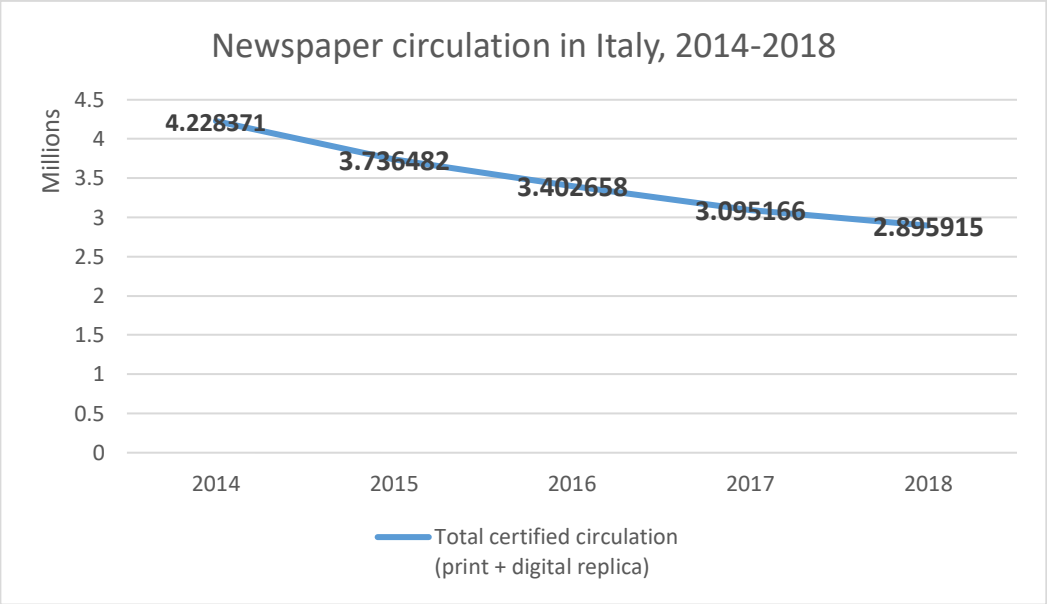
Asia is by all means a special case as far as print newspapers are concerned. The top 10 newspapers globally by paid print circulation are all Asian newspapers. The Japan-based *Yomiuri Shimbun* tops the world ranking with a print circulation of 8.12 million copies in 2018, followed by another Japanese newspaper, the *Asahi Shimbun*, with 5.60 million, and then an Indian newspaper at the third spot, the *Dainik Bhaskar*, in Hindi, with a print circulation of 4.32 million. The other newspapers in the ranking are: the Chinese *Cankao*

*Xiaoxi* at the fourth spot (3.75 million), followed by the Indian *Dainik Jagran* at the fifth spot (3.41 million), the Chinese *People's Daily* at the sixth spot (3.18 million), *The Times of India*, an Indian English-language newspaper, at the seventh spot (3.03 million), the Japanese *Mainichi Shimbun* at the eighth spot (2.45 million), the Indian *Malayala Manorama*, in Malayalam, at the ninth spot (2.37 million), and finally, at the 10th spot, one more Japanese newspaper, *The Nikkei* (2.35 million), which is also the world's largest financial newspaper and the only specialised newspaper in this top 10.[278]

## *Long-term evolution among Italian newspapers*

Special attention is being given here to the Italian case, which was singled out as the case study for content analysis for the purposes of this thesis. Figure 5 shows the evolution of the Italian print newspaper market during the 2014-2018 period:

***Figure 5**: Evolution of the Italian print newspaper market by circulation, 2014-2018*




Elaborated from data of: ADS – Accertamento Diffusione Stampa (http://www.adsnotizie.it/)

[278] Sources: see footnote 277.

By total circulation, the Italian print newspaper market declined by 46% in the 2014-2018 period.

The circulation figures of the six sampled newspapers for the purposes of this thesis in the same five-year period are presented in **Table 19**, which also allows for a comparison between general-interest newspapers and sports-specialised newspapers in the sample:

***Table 19**: Average daily circulation of the sampled newspapers, 2014-2018*

| Newspaper | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | Evolution |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corriere della Sera** | 420 882 | 378 652 | 340 321 | 297 246 | 285 443 | - 47% |
| **la Repubblica** | 368 873 | 331 446 | 271 411 | 220 421 | 210 569 | - 75% |
| **La Stampa** | 222 721 | 212 360 | 188 079 | 170 781 | 154 738 | - 44% |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport, Monday edition** | 262 467 | 225 784 | 200 597 | 187 941 | 172 519 | - 52% |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport** | 233 753 | 208 106 | 190 763 | 177 657 | 165 089 | - 42% |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio, Monday edition** | 136 926 | 124 073 | 109 492 | 102 252 | 83 367 | - 64% |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio** | 119 903 | 108 072 | 96 837 | 90 511 | 76 493 | - 57% |
| **Tuttosport, Monday edition** | 79 998 | 75 511 | 69 397 | 61 976 | 53 660 | - 49% |
| **Tuttosport** | 67 333 | 69 017 | 62 998 | 56 742 | 50 229 | - 34% |

Print + digital replica ("Totale diffusione cartacea + digitale"), Italy + abroad
Elaborated from data of: ADS – Accertamento Diffusione Stampa (http://www.adsnotizie.it/)

The drop in average daily circulation figures in the 2014-2018 period is double-digit for all six newspapers, and ranges between -34% and -75%. The evolution was calculated as the difference in percentage between the beginning (2014) and the end (2018) of the five-year period. The breakdown by type of newspaper shows an average drop of 55% among general-interest newspapers and an average drop of 50% among sports-specialised newspapers. Although the difference by type of newspaper is marginal, sports newspapers performed slightly better. The fact that the sample of general-interest newspapers only

included the three best-selling newspapers in the category further corroborates this conclusion. Sports newspapers therefore seemed to be comparatively more resilient to the crisis of the newspaper industry than the general press. Furthermore, sports newspapers also performed better than other specialised newspapers in other fields. The circulation decline for financial newspapers – *Il Sole 24 Ore* (-129%) and *Italia Oggi* (-107%) – was of 118% on average in the same five-year period. In other words, it was not the daily specialised press in general that proved more resilient, but specifically the daily sports press.

Italy does not appear to perform well as far as digital subscriptions are concerned when compared to neighbouring states with similar markets. Italian digital newspaper subscriptions fell by around 6.6% in 2018, according to data in WAN-IFRA's *World Press Trends 2019,* which also predicted a further drop of 4% for 2019. It is the worst performance in digital subscriptions among the 51 countries of WAN-IFRA's survey. By comparison, digital subscriptions in France, for example, increased by 43% in 2018, and are expected to grow by another 34% in 2019.[279]

### 7.3.2 The business case for social analysis

The expression "business case" is borrowed from studies of corporate social responsibility (CSR), where it indicates the *measurable payoff* of CSR initiatives to a company as well as its stakeholders. The notion of CSR was previously discussed in the dedicated section **2.4 The media's responsibility as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**. As a reminder, in one of its earliest definitions, CSR is described as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen 1953, 6). Instead of focusing on the moral value of CSR initiatives, the business-case model stresses the material advantages that these initiatives can bring:

[279] Sources: see footnote 277.

> According to the business case for CSR, firms will increasingly behave more responsibly not because managers have become more public-spirited – though some may have – but because more managers now believe that being a better corporate citizen is a source of competitive advantage. (Vogel 2005, 19)[280]

Milton Friedman, as also discussed in chapter 2, famously abhorred the very idea of corporate social responsibility and argued that "there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud" (1970; 2002).[281] Regardless of one's position on the suitability of CSR paradigms to run and describe businesses, the news media as an industry need revenues to support their organisation.

As we have just seen from the previous section on the crisis of print newspapers (7.3.1), the press is, in this respect, in trouble. The only audible solutions are those that are likely to bring some breathing room. Not only are journalism scholars well-placed to suggest solutions, but they have a duty to ensure that the solutions they present are not totally disconnected from the profession's needs. This, at least, is the approach behind this thesis, as widely explained in various previous sections, consistently with McQuail's claim that "[t]he value of theory should lie in its potential to explain and assess the reality of journalistic work" (2013, 10). This thesis has thus far presented multiple arguments that suggest that the social analysis of sports is nothing but part of the job – the job being sports journalism. It is now time to engage hard-headed rationality to explore the business viability of these arguments. The business-case model presupposes, in this case, demonstrating that the allocation of resources to social analysis is likely to produce measurable payoff and bottomline benefits.

[280] For a comprehensive review of the research and concepts that define the business-case approach in CSR, see also Carroll, Archie B., and Kareem M. Shabana. (2010) "The Business Case for Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review of Concepts, Research and Practice". *International Journal of Management Reviews* 12 (1): 85–105.

[281] Originally expressed in his book *Capitalism and Freedom* (Friedman 2002), first published in 1962, then in a 1970 article in the *New York Times Magazine*.

This is how McQuail has illustrated the coexistence of journalism with the business imperatives of the news media industry:

> The imperatives of large media corporations and market forces (more so than of governments) seem to many observers more threatening to freedom, with more idealistic goals subordinated to market discipline. The counter argument is that journalism has to be viable and earn a living, but profitability does not have to exclude other goals, even in an era of global mega-corporations. In fact, profitability can support independence and the ideals of journalism can still be pursued and may even be profitable. There are many different markets for information, not just a mass market, and ideal purposes also have a public following. (McQuail 2013, 21)

McQuail's observations might sound utterly idealistic, or "wishful thinking". In fact, by arguing that "[t]here are many different markets for information, not just a mass market, and ideal purposes also have a public following" (ibid.), McQuail is pointing to the fact that nothing can be more pragmatic than dreams, to paraphrase the title of the current section 7.3. The figures of the crisis, presented earlier in this chapter, should operate as a warning sign *especially* to those who assume that sports journalism is not serious and is basically a promotional tool for big clubs, sports governing bodies and powerful sponsors. If this is what sports journalism is mostly about, i.e. "commercial journalism", then commercially, it does *not* work, or not enough. Making it even more promotional could make matters worse, in a media landscape where low-quality information is already massively present via non-professional online information sources.

The social analysis of sports, as performed by competent journalists who have a knowledge of both journalism and sport, might not be "the" solution to the crisis of the industry, but has the potential for empowering sports journalism.

At the core of the business-case model is the notion of competitive advantage. One of the main reasons, if not *the* main reason, for the crisis of the media industry lies in the competition from alternative sources of information. How can the social analysis of sports, in concrete terms, contribute to enhance the competitive edge of media outlets, and ultimately help them survive? Below is a list of arguments that show how social

analysis in sports reporting, beyond its intrinsic journalistic value, has the potential for enhancing the media's competitiveness:

- The massive availability of sources that present sporting events and results in the current communication landscape requires that so-called "traditional" media outlets propose a different journalistic offer, in terms of contents.

- Sports journalists are the best placed to look at the "connected with" sports, which is legitimately part of sports news.

- The long-term "temporal orientation" of print journalism as compared to the shorter-term orientation of online journalism, conceptualised by Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2014), suggests that print journalism is particularly well-suited to the topics that have been presented in this thesis as socially relevant in sports reporting.

- The interest of readers in the social and human stories of sports is not limited to the personal life of star athletes (or gossip). The media and commercial success of the London 2012 Paralympic Games can serve as an example. London 2012 was a turning point in showing the "huge appetite for Paralympic sport", as described by Sophie Christiansen (2013), triple gold medallist in dressage at the Games.[282] This thesis suggests that specific readership surveys be performed with reference to this aspect.

- The current popularity of the CSR philosophy and related notions (sustainability, business ethics, corporate citizenship etc.), across both businesses and society

[282] According to figures from the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games peaked at 11.6 million viewers in the U.K. alone, the biggest audience in more than a decade for Channel 4, the event's broadcaster ("No. 13: Channel 4 Creates a Blueprint for Commercial Paralympic Broadcasting" 2012). One in four TV viewers watched Channel 4's Paralympic coverage every day during the Games, marking an increase of 251% from the 2008 Beijing Paralympics. Excluding the host country, the London 2012 Paralympic Games were watched by a cumulated international audience of 3.4 billion, representing the biggest ever international audience for the event and a 37% growth on Beijing 2008 ("London 2012 Paralympics Proves a Worldwide TV Ratings Winner" 2012).

could be applied more extensively to sports reporting, and become mainstream also in sports journalism.

- A more systematic coverage of the socially-relevant elements of sports could be a way to tackle the long-standing issue of the credibility of sports journalism, thereby contributing to reinforcing the role and leverage of sports reporting within journalism and media outlets.

- If trying to better monetise sports reporting translates into resembling more and more to blogs, sports fanzines and the clubs' or leagues' news platforms, then "real" sports journalists might not be needed at all any more.

# 8. POST-SCRIPTUM: THE 2020 CORONAVIRUS CRISIS AND SPORTS COVERAGE IN THE ABSENCE OF SPORTS

Prenez garde à la tristesse. C'est un vice.
Gustave Flaubert (1878)[283]

[283] [Tr.: Beware of sadness. It's a vice]. Flaubert, Gustave. 1878. *Lettre à Guy de Maupassant*, Croisset, 15 août 1878.

## *An unprecedented situation, an ongoing crisis*

This chapter was not part of the original outline of the thesis. The idea of this "post-scriptum" chapter arose during the lockdown period due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was first identified in the city of Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that may affect animals or humans. Their name derives from their genetic structure, notably from the crown-like protein spikes on their surface (*corona* is the Latin for "crown"). The World Health Organization (WHO) gave to the novel coronavirus an official name on February 11, 2020, when it announced via Twitter that it would be called COVID-19 – "CO" stands for corona, "VI" for virus and 'D' for disease. In humans, some coronaviruses may cause minor respiratory infections, like the common cold, but others cause more severe diseases, like the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Starting from the beginning of 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 rapidly spread from China to most countries worldwide. On March 11, 2020, for the first time the WHO officially labelled the COVID-19 outbreak as a "pandemic".[284] Human-to-human transmission is thought to occur through close contact, mainly via the respiratory droplets that are generated when an infected person sneezes, coughs or simply talks. Many aspects of the disease, however, are yet to be discovered, including whether or not people who are asymptomatic can spread the virus. At the time of writing of this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and there is no specific treatment for the disease, nor is there yet a vaccine. As of October 6, 2020, the COVID-19 death toll was of more than one million victims (1,044,085 global deaths) attributed to the virus, according to data from the Coronavirus Resource Center of the Johns Hopkins University (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/), with 35,485,738 global confirmed cases across 188 countries/regions.

In addition to the health crisis itself and its multiple economic repercussions, the state of lockdown in which many countries were put during the first months of the virus was

[284] A pandemic occurs when a new virus spreads around the world.

accompanied by the cancellation or postponement of virtually all sporting competitions worldwide. While the vast majority of human activities were brought to a standstill, sports were no exception, and that applied to both elite and grassroots sports. Stadiums remained closed. Athletes were forced to stop training, if not for individual training at home. The 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo were postponed to 2021. The 2020 New York Marathon, which is the world's largest marathon, was cancelled. It was only the second cancellation in the 50 years of history of the race, after the cancellation due to Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The 2020 edition of the Boston Marathon, the world's oldest annual marathon (established in 1897), was cancelled for the first time ever in its history. In club football, most domestic European leagues were impacted, especially in February and March 2020. Various matches were either rescheduled or played behind closed doors. In Italy, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced on March 9, 2020 that all sport was suspended at all levels, including the Serie A (top tier) football tournament. By March 19, the Belarusian Premier League was the only active top tier football championship in all 55 UEFA national member associations (*AS* 2020). On April 1st, the organisers of the iconic Wimbledon tennis tournament (The Championships) announced that the 134th edition of the tournament, scheduled to take place from June 29 to July 12, 2020, was cancelled – the first cancellation of the tournament since World War II. The situation was not different in other continents. On March 11, 2020, the National Basketball Association (NBA) announced that the 2019/20 NBA season was suspended until further notice. The 2020 Australian Football League (AFL) season, in Australian rules football, was suspended after the first round of games on March 19-22. The list of national and international sports events that were either rescheduled or cancelled in the first months of 2020 would be virtually endless.

For the purposes of this thesis, four sampled periods for content analysis had already been chosen prior to the coronavirus outbreak. The thesis process, however, was still ongoing when the global health crisis began. Sports journalism was clearly going to be severely affected by the absence of sports competitions worldwide. General-interest newspapers could readjust their contents but what about sports-only newspapers? From this unprecedented situation came the idea of adding a fifth sampled period in the midst of the

crisis, from April 23 to April 30, 2020, to see how the Italian sports press was coping with it. The results of the analysis are contained in the present chapter. Due to the particular conditions under which this additional work was conducted, the content analysis for this timeframe could not meet the same standards as the other timeframes/events. Among the health and safety measures that governments adopted during the pandemic were long-standing travel bans. These added to other material consequences of lockdown restrictions, including the closure of universities and libraries and an unprecedented stay-at-home order, which lasted for an extended period of time in various countries, as a way to limit the spread of the virus. On the top of all that, there was the fear of a new lethal and largely unknown disease, combined with the prospect of falling ill and possibly dying alone. Hospitals indeed stopped allowing visitors altogether due to the risk of contagion and thousands of patients around the world died, of COVID-19 or other diseases, without the comfort of family and friends at their beside. In this exceptional context, an additional eight-day period in April 2020 was sampled for the purposes of this thesis to analyse the coverage of whatever sport was left in one of the sampled newspapers, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. The analysis was based on the available digital replicas of the print newspaper. A larger sample and temporal distance will allow, in the future, to pursue the study of this (hopefully) unique period in contemporary history. The analysis in this post-scriptum chapter can only be incomplete and preliminary, and is purely meant to pave the way for future research.

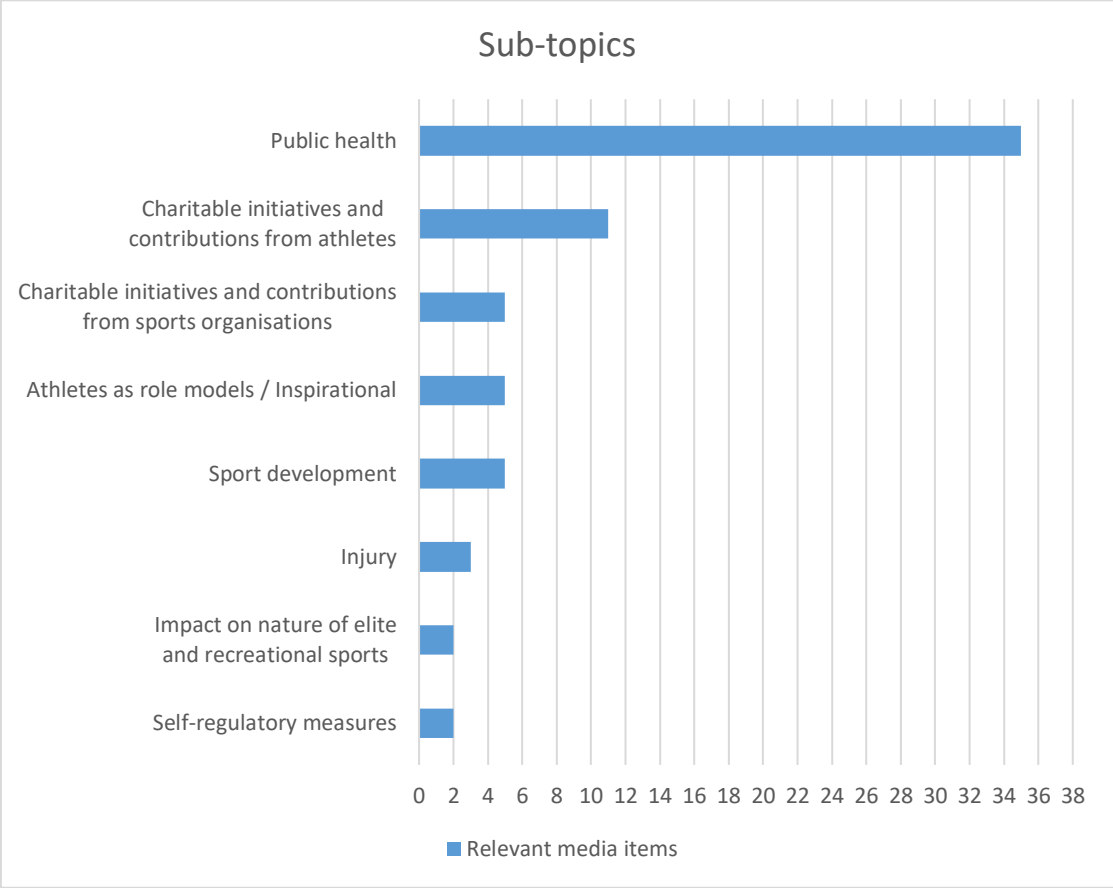
At the time of writing of the present chapter, in August 2020, the lockdown has been eased or lifted in many countries and travelling restrictions have also eased considerably as compared to the pre-summer period, but major differences remain from one country to another, as the virus is still circulating and claiming lives in various parts of the world. Furthermore, measures and restrictions vary depending on the unfolding of the epidemic waves.

### *Public health rises from extraordinary to routine topic*

The content analysis of the fifth sampled period, during the coronavirus lockdown, further put the proposed matrix of categories for the social analysis of sports (**Table 4**) to the test. At first, the additional period seemed to require a new sub-topic in the matrix, called "Health security" or something like that, within the macro-category "Health and lifestyles". The list of topics and sub-topics had already evolved from an early version, following the analysis of the newspaper samples of the other periods. The idea that health security issues could move from extraordinary to ordinary in sports was utterly disturbing, though. In the end, and even if health security had indeed become a routine subject during the pandemic, the matrix that was finalised pre-coronavirus in **Table 4** proved perfectly suitable also during a global health crisis, since the proposed taxonomy already comprised a pertinent sub-topic, labelled as "Public health". The novel nomenclature of topics and sub-topics for social analysis in the media coverage of sports, as proposed in this thesis (**Table 4**), was designed to be specific enough to suggest a maximum of issues for coverage, but also general enough to adapt to the largest possible spectrum of situations. Needless to say, this does not, in principle, exclude future adjustments.

The content analysis of the fifth sampled period, during the coronavirus crisis, involved a total of 332 pages reviewed, corresponding to the eight issues of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* published from April 23 to April 30, 2020. Based on the matrix in **Table 4**, the content analysis of this sample found that "Public health" issues related to the coronavirus, notably about how the world of sport was handling them, were by far the most recurrent matter in the newspaper's coverage (see Figure 6 next). Public health accounted for nearly half (47.3%) of the socially-relevant media items in the sample.

***Figure 6**: Sub-topics of social relevance in Gazzetta dello Sport during the COVID-19 crisis*[285]




Charitable initiatives and contributions from athletes and sports organisations followed in the ranking. In most cases (13 out of 16 items), charitable initiatives and contributions were in fact related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Among all macro-topics (or Topics), "Health and lifestyles" emerged by far the most present category in the sample (see **Table 20**), largely driven by its Public Health sub-topic.

[285] The figure presents only the sub-topics that were found in two or more relevant media items.

***Table 20**: Topics and sub-topics of social relevance in Gazzetta dello Sport during the COVID-19 crisis*

| Topic | Sub-topic | Number of relevant media items | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Health and lifestyles** | Public Health | 35 | **40** |
| | Injury | 3 | |
| | Diseases associated with sport | 1 | |
| | Lifestyle (sedentary vs. active): | 1 | |
| **Charity** | Charitable initiatives and contributions from athletes | 11 | **16** |
| | Charitable initiatives and contributions from sports organisations | 5 | |
| **Governance of sports organisations** | Sport development | 5 | **7** |
| | Self-regulatory measures | 2 | |
| **Education** | Athletes as role models / Inspirational | 5 | **6** |
| | Child and youth development | 1 | |
| **Environment** | Impact on nature of elite and recreational sports | 2 | **2** |
| **Corruption** | Match-fixing to a draw or a fixed score | 1 | **1** |
| **Fandom** | Traditions and connections | 1 | **1** |
| **Volunteering** | Disadvantaged neighbourhoods | 1 | **1** |

## *The effects on sports*

In addition to the immediate impact of stopping virtually all tournaments worldwide, the COVID-19 crisis has raised questions about the very model of contemporary sport, of which the media are key players. According to sports law expert Alberto Carrio Sampedro (2020), the coronavirus has highlighted that the model of sport promoted by international sports governing bodies, which revolves around the global commercialisation of elite sports, may be "unsustainable" in the years to come:

> This model of sport is currently offside. Obviously, without sports events there is nothing to broadcast; nothing to sell and no income; no funds to transfer from international to national federations, neither to solidarity nor social responsibility programmes […] While the present is depressing, the future is worrying […] Perhaps we will see a half-way product between live sports and e-sports which already generate huge profits and attract investments from international sports governing bodies. TV channels and betting

> agencies that are desperate for content might be ready to accept this in the near future. (Carrio Sampedro 2020)

This forecast might be realistic or perhaps, exceedingly dark. The flip side of the story is that whenever the easing up of the lockdown has allowed games to take place behind closed doors (without public), cameras and TVs were still there, and so were the related broadcasting rights. The crucial role that broadcasting rights play nowadays in funding the world of sport may actually have been enhanced by the crisis. If we look at how the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is funded, for example, we can see that nearly three quarters (73%) of the IOC overall funding comes from broadcasting rights.[286] Today, whether or not the public is physically present, TVs and couch spectators are, looking forward to following sporting events. In June 2020, *during* the coronavirus pandemic, the German Bundesliga cut a new four-year €4.4 billion deal with Sky and DAZN for the TV rights of its football matches for Europe. The amount was €200 million less than the previous €4.6 billion deal and, according to a *Financial Times* reporter (Ahmed 2020), "the first sign the market for live sports has weakened because of the coronavirus crisis". In fact, it was a *slightly* softening market despite a *severely* impacted context, not enough to suggest that the system has started to fall apart. The question of the sustainability of the current sport model, which Carrio Sampedro (2020) has rightfully evoked in his article, is real but exceeds the coronavirus crisis. It rather has to do with the financial excesses that have been characterising certain sports over the past few decades and what these can trigger (surreal deals for the transfer of champions, corruption and other aberrations). Money is necessary and welcome for the world of sport to operate. Incidentally, the money that allows grassroots sports to exist largely comes from the show of elite sports. By contrast, financial excesses – although it is admittedly difficult to define them – tend to generate situations that are not always compatible with the values of sport and Olympism, which were widely presented in past sections of this thesis (especially in **section 3.1 Mapping the social dimension of sport**).

[286] Data from the IOC website (https://www.olympic.org/funding), last accessed on October 6, 2020.

At the time of writing of the present chapter, it is not possible to predict to what extent, in the medium-long run, the world of sport will be affected by the health crisis, and not just because the effects of all major crises typically spread over time. Uncertainty is *still* lingering about the virus itself, as it is currently unclear how long the pandemic will last in the first place.

### *The effects on sports newspapers*

Sport is an ecosystem in which the different stakeholders rely on one another in multiple ways, and sports newspapers are important actors of this ecosystem. Interdependence may negatively contaminate the system, but may also extend advantages across the system. Previously, this thesis showed examples of the benefits of interconnection within sport, notably within the sports media. In the 1980s, the massive advent of sporting events on Italian television did not cause a sense of saturation in the system, therefore a potential crisis for the sports press. Instead, it boosted the popularity of the sports press, making the 1980s *the* booming decade for sports newspapers in the country (see section **5.1.4 Sports journalism in post-industrial Italy**). Prior to that, in the post- World War II period (see section **5.1.2 The sports press and political propaganda**), the creation of *Stadio* and *Tuttosport* in 1945, two new sports newspapers that added to the pre-existing *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *Corriere dello Sport*, increased the interest of Italians for sports, fuelling the popularity of all four newspapers in the 1960s and 1970s (Ghirelli 2001, 317). Italian sports newspapers were severely impacted during the first months of the 2020 coronavirus crisis, but the resuming of some sporting events behind closed doors, broadcast on TV, immediately reversed the trend (see **Table 21**).

***Table 21**: Evolution of the circulation of the sampled newspapers during the COVID-19 crisis*

| Newspaper | Average daily circulation (*) (print + digital replica) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Feb. 2020 | March 2020 | Apr. 2020 | May 2020 | June 2020 |
| **Corriere della Sera** | 273 171 | 260 418 | 271 253 | 275 289 | 258 925 |
| **la Repubblica** | 188 199 | 182 185 | 188 646 | 184 053 | 169 002 |
| **La Stampa** | 128 313 | 121 878 | 118 246 | 117 784 | 113 248 |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport, Monday edition** | 154 198 | 89 451 | 53 558 | 54 912 | 69 418 |
| **La Gazzetta dello Sport** | 139 289 | 84 306 | 56 150 | 55 336 | 67 704 |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio, Monday edition** | 71 157 | 41 887 | 27 495 | 29 188 | 39 053 |
| **Corriere dello Sport – Stadio** | 58 427 | 38 136 | 28 936 | 30 613 | 40 094 |
| **Tuttosport Monday edition** | 42 096 | 31 492 | 22 391 | 23 761 | 31 607 |
| **Tuttosport** | 37 503 | 27 376 | 23 254 | 25 650 | 33 606 |

(*) "*Totale diffusione cartacea + digitale*", Italy + abroad

Source: ADS – Accertamento Diffusione Stampa (http://www.adsnotizie.it/)

Italy's Serie A tournament, the sporting event that has the biggest direct impact on Italian sports newspapers' circulation, was suspended from March 9 to June 20, 2020. The beginning of the lockdown had a dramatic impact on sports newspapers. The circulation figures of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* dropped by around 40% in just one month, from February to March 2020. For *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio*, the average drop (combining Monday and other editions) was of 38%, while *Tuttosport*'s circulation dropped by 26% in the same period. Sales figures continued to tumble from March to April 2020, when *La Gazzetta dello Sport* saw a further drop of 36.5%, and the average daily circulation of *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport* declined by 29% and 22%, respectively. Circulation figures, however, began to grow starting in May for all three sports newspapers, and growth pursued in June, when Serie A finally resumed. Circulation figures might well continue to progress up to resuming pre-coronavirus levels, if national and international sporting events gradually go back to normal.

Meanwhile, general-interest newspapers showed a different trend, in some cases even a reverse trend. Let aside *La Stampa*, whose circulation figures constantly declined in the period under consideration, both *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* seemed to

temporarily benefit from the coronavirus crisis, especially at the beginning of the crisis. The sales figures of these two newspapers registered an increase between March and April 2020. *Corriere della Sera* showed an increase also in May. Sales started to decline, however, as soon as the peak of the health crisis seemed gone. On the whole, the trend among general-interest newspapers was mixed anyway. The fourth and fifth best-selling Italian general-interest newspapers, *Avvenire* and *Il Messaggero*, after the three that were sampled for this thesis (*Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica* and *La Stampa*), showed declining circulation figures all through the first months of the coronavirus crisis.[287] *Avvenire* had a daily circulation (print + digital replica) of 113,609 in February, down to 105,968 in March and further down to 99,857 in April 2020. For *Il Messaggero*, circulation figures also evolved downward, from 87,782 in February 2020 to 72,809 in March and 70,028 in April. By contrast, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, the tenth best-selling general-interest newspaper in the same ranking, saw average daily circulation increase constantly during the same period, from 39,483 copies in February to 45,325 in March and 56,209 in April.[288] While general-interest newspapers showed mixed trends, they all shared a common feature when compared to sports newspapers, though. When general-interest newspapers showed a decline, this was always considerably smaller than the dramatic drop faced by all sports-specialised newspapers. Sports-specialised newspapers therefore emerged as the first victims of the health crisis at its peak.

Interestingly for this thesis, it has been argued that because of the coronavirus crisis, sports journalism should "pivot to public service journalism". This is the point of view of sports reporter Shira Springer, who served as a Boston Globe staff writer for almost 20 years:

> Return-to-play scenarios need to be carefully, intelligently, and objectively reviewed […] At this point, any decision that leads to group gatherings — to play or not to play — risks lives. What does all this mean for sports journalists? They should put sports coverage into the larger context. They should challenge the premise that society *needs* sports now. While games signify normalcy and define daily routines and annual traditions in our

[287] *Avvenire* and *Il Messaggero* were respectively the fourth and fifth best-selling general-interest newspapers, after *Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica* and *La Stampa*, based on February 2020 average daily circulation figures from ADS – Accertamento Diffusione Stampa.
[288] The source for all circulation figures is ADS – Accertamento Diffusione Stampa. See also footnote 221.

> sports-obsessed country, it's important to remember they're a luxury not a necessity. Even more important, sports journalists should call out sports figures who spread misinformation or attempt to minimize the threat posed by the coronavirus. Reporters have to hold pro leagues and teams and college football coaches accountable in different ways, to question whether returning to play is medically, socially, and ethically responsible. This is not the moment for blinders-on sports exceptionalism. (Springer 2020)

Springer's comments are specifically related to return-to-play issues and how these were being handled in the United States – her "sports-obsessed country", as she calls it. Considering the special place that sport has in American national culture, the U.S. case study is always worth exploring. This thesis quite evidently shares Springer's accent (ibid.) on the opportunity for sports journalism to "put sports coverage into the larger context". In other respects, however, Springer's arguments appear to be quite distant from the claims that have been made all through this thesis, if only philosophically.[289] Springer rightfully pinpoints the risks associated to resuming normal sports events when the health crisis is not totally over. However, by arguing that games "are a luxury not a necessity", she seems to *undermine* – which is more than just *underestimating* – the role that sport has in society, in the United States as elsewhere. If "games signify normalcy and define daily routines and annual traditions", as she argues in the article, then normalcy, daily routines and annual traditions cannot be called "a luxury".

## *The legacy of the crisis*

The idea that a better world will or should emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, including in the realm of sports journalism, seems filled with (inevitable) rhetoric and seasoned with demagogy. Wishful thinking may be good company during a terrible crisis but is not necessarily helpful when it comes to trying to imagine the future. Should we really regard the COVID-19 crisis as the providential swansong of the current sports model? The number of advantages if the world of sports goes back to pre-coronavirus levels largely exceeds the disadvantages of its imperfections. Sports journalism is well-placed to devote

[289] Some of these differences are made clear by the analysis in section **2.3 Sports journalism as public journalism.**

time and space to the social analysis of sports regardless of the situation. That is actually one of the mainstays of this thesis: it should not be extraordinary. It does not take a pandemic to push it in that direction. On the contrary, would sports journalism survive to the lack of sports events? And, would this ultimately be a gain to societies and their lifestyle?

If we are to search a lesson from the crisis, that lies in having "put sports coverage into the larger context", to cite Springer (2020). This is probably the most important legacy of the crisis for sports journalism, while hoping that journalist will have lots of sporting events to cover in the months and years to come.

# 9. CONCLUSION

9.1 MAIN FINDINGS

9.2 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

9.3 STUDY LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

## 9.1 Main findings

The study revolved around a main research question – identifying social analysis in the media coverage of sports, with specific reference to newspapers – and three research sub-questions to further investigate: to what extent social analysis is actually relevant to daily newspapers (RQ1); the differences in the coverage of the social dimension of sport between general-interest newspapers and sports-specialised newspapers (RQ2); and how realistic it is to expect that newspapers consistently cover the social dimension of sport in view of their business imperatives, while in the midst of the ongoing crisis of the mainstream media as an industry. Defining the "social dimension", or social analysis in the coverage of sport was in fact at the core of the thesis. While presenting the main theoretical axes as well as the inherent difficulties that scholars have encountered in defining the social role(s) of sport, starting from the slippery definition of "sport" itself, this thesis intended to show that social analysis, and specifically the social dimension of sport, can also be observed as a whole, as opposed to focusing on one specific aspect or set of aspects at a time. In order to do so, this thesis has designed a new taxonomy for social analysis in the media coverage of sports (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**) that does indeed describe such social dimension. The contribution that this tool is meant to represent will be described in further details later in this chapter, in section **9.2 Contribution to knowledge.** It should be recalled, in this respect, that this thesis was not about the social dimension of sport but specifically about *the press coverage* of this dimension.

The analysis of 6,501 pages in six Italian daily newspapers was cross-correlated with the taxonomy of topics and sub-topics that was created by this thesis to define social analysis in the media coverage of sports (**Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**). Italy was chosen as the case study for content analysis because of the specific characteristics of sports journalism, and notably the sports press, in this country. Unlike most other countries, Italy features a strong and diversified specialised sports press, with three daily newspapers with national reach specifically devoted to sports: *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*.

Sports news is therefore present every day in both general-interest newspapers and a range of sports-specialised dailies. Among the other specificities of the Italian case, the newspaper with the largest readership in Italy is a *sports* newspaper, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, with more than 3.2 million readers per day and over 4 million on Mondays (Source: Audipress – 2019/III).[290] Furthermore, *Gazzetta dello Sport* is the oldest *specialised* daily newspaper in the world still published, not just among sports newspapers (it was founded in 1896). The oldest sports magazine in the world still published is also Italian, and is the *Guerin Sportivo*, founded in 1912. The analysis involved the three Italian general-interest newspapers with the largest circulation at the time of the study (*Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, and *La* Stampa) and the totality of Italian sports-specialised newspapers (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport – Stadio* and *Tuttosport*), published during five different artificial timeframes and a combined period of 28 days, spanning from September 2018 to April 2020.

During a seven-day neutral period, that is in the absence of extraordinary sporting or non-sporting events which would crucially affect the news selection process, the average prevalence of relevant media items, i.e. pieces covering sport-related socially relevant topics, in the sampled newspapers was of 0.27.[291] It means that relevant media items were present on average in 27% of the pages reviewed. This thesis considered as relevant media items (units of analysis) all types of media items as long as they comprised a text – therefore also a simple caption below a photo, as long as it contained not just the names of the people in the photo but also informative content on the subject matter. It is to be reminded that the purpose was not to measure social analysis as a proportion of the overall newspaper content but as a proportion of sports coverage. This element, which is irrelevant in the case of sports-only newspapers, needs to be specified as far as general-interest newspapers are concerned. Evaluating whether that proportion is low or high, sufficient or insufficient, was not an objective of this thesis – assuming it would ever

[290] Audipress releases its readership estimates three times per year. The above data refer to the last release ("III") for 2019, described as "2019/III". See also footnote 188.
[291] Prevalence is the proportion of the pages reviewed (the representative sample) that display the characteristic under examination (the presence of relevant media pieces) in the sampled period (prevalence = # of relevant media pieces / # of pages reviewed).

make sense to prescribe guidelines on such a wide range of potential topics and sub-topics for coverage (i.e. those indicated in **Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**).

Answering the main research question was, in fact, also part of the process toward defining the taxonomy in **Table 4**. In order to create the final codebook of topics and sub-topics of **Table 4**, a coding frame was created at first, on the basis of prior literature, theory and personal experience in the business. Then, the initial codebook was adapted and expanded based on the analysis of the sampled newspapers.

## *RQ1: To what extent is the social analysis of sport relevant to newspapers?*

The first research sub-question (RQ1), related to the actual pertinence of social analysis to the newspaper coverage of sports, was a sort of self-inflicted trial, a necessary medicine for the sake of intellectual honesty. Pragmatism, in William James's terms of focusing on concepts that have "cash-value", was stated as a founding principle at an early stage in this thesis.[292] It would have been difficult to move further if the answer to that first sub-question had been in the negative. For the same reason, it was particularly important to avoid bias in this phase.

Multiple arguments could be raised against the suitability of daily newspapers for the social analysis of sport. It could be argued that the long-format journalism of magazines is better suited than daily newspapers for informing the public on subjects that often require lengthy articles and a long data collection period. And since the study specifically concerned print newspapers, another objection could be based on the claim that online journalism would elude space/time restraints, and would therefore provide better flexibility. The study did not overlook these issues, which were actually discussed in various parts of the thesis. Nonetheless, <u>not only did the study conclude that newspapers,</u>

[292] More on William James and how this thesis has borrowed from his approach in section **2.3.1 Jay Rosen, Davis Merritt and the American tradition of pragmatism**.

and notably print newspapers, are excellent media for the social analysis of sports, but it also identified some specific strengths in that respect. An article by Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger, entitled "Print Is Future, Online Is Past: Cross-Media Analysis of Temporal Orientations in the News" (2014), inspired a reflection on what the two scholars have called a "temporal division of labour" between print and online news. While acknowledging the crisis that print newspapers have been going through following the advent of digital media and related outlets, as this thesis has also done, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger have observed that, if we compare print and online news, "print newspapers […] assume a more future-oriented role, which involves speculating about future events, analyzing potential outcomes, raising concerns and hopes, and shaping agendas for future action" (ibid., 1061).[293] A forward-looking approach is comparatively more suitable for social analysis than the simple reporting of present news.

The first research sub-question, related to the actual pertinence of social analysis to the newspaper coverage of sports, can also be broken down into separate considerations for general-interest newspapers, on the one hand, and sports-specialised newspapers, on the other. The general press, which covers by vocation a broader range of socially-relevant topics, would appear to be the obvious place for social analysis, including of sports, as compared to a sports press that is largely thought to target passionate supporters who only care about the latest game and next match. Setting aside who targets what and why, since this thesis was not meant as a study of audiences or media effects, content analysis showed that, to paraphrase Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger's image of division of labour between distinct media, there is no clear-cut division of labour between general press and sports newspapers as far as the social analysis of sport is concerned.[294] The

[293] As a reminder, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger have based this conclusion on the analysis of a sample of Israeli newspapers and news websites. As explained by the two researchers (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014, 1054), and previously discussed in this thesis in section 1.3.1, the Israeli news industry has been confronted with declining readership figures for print newspapers and the need to reconsider its business model in a revolutionised media landscape, similarly to developments in other parts of the Western world. These characteristics, explain the two scholars, made the Israeli ecosystem an appropriate case study for the analysis of the roles of different news media (ibid.).

[294] Audience studies focus on the relationship between media content, technologies and organisations and media audiences, exploring why and how media audiences engage with the media. The related area of media effects specifically looks at the impact of media content on audiences. As widely explained in the first two chapters, this thesis focuses on news selection (gatekeeping).

differences, which are more nuanced, will be dealt with in the answer to the second research sub-question (RQ2). What can already be said is that arguing that the general press is "more virtuous" and systematically devotes more space to the social analysis of sports, and conversely, that sports newspapers prove inadequate for the task, would be highly inaccurate. As for the respective vocations of the two types of press, the historical examples that have been mentioned in the course of the thesis prove how sports newspapers have often shown the way to highlighting also the social dimension of sport. As seen in chapter 5, Antonio Ghirelli, for example, during his tenure as editor-in-chief of *Corriere dello Sport* (1965-1972), created *Forza Ragazzi*, a special newspaper section for young readers that moved from sports to look at various matters of interest to the youngsters in their everyday life. More recently, Candido Cannavò, the iconic director of *Gazzetta dello Sport* for 19 years (1983-2002), was praised for his civic engagement in that role (Mura 2009), in an article that his late colleague Gianni Mura meaningfully entitled "L'impegno sociale di un grande giornalista" [The civic engagement of a great journalist]. Furthermore, from 2006 until his death, Cannavò had a daily feature in *Gazzetta dello Sport*, entitled *Fatemi capire* [Make me understand], which epitomised the connection between the world of sport and the world of solidarity. A foundation was established after Cannavò's death, the *Fondazione Candido Cannavò per lo Sport*, which uses sport to help and empower the marginalised in society.[295] These are examples from this thesis, among many others.

### *RQ2: Are there any significant differences, in the coverage of the social dimension of sport, between general-interest newspapers and sports-specialised newspapers?*

While it cannot be argued that, as a general rule, one type of newspaper is keener on social analysis than the other, since both are, content analysis has shown some significant differences in the coverage under specific circumstances. In neutral periods, that is in the absence of extraordinary sporting or non-sporting events that may significantly affect the

[295] More on Ghirelli's and Cannavò's respective contributions can be found in section **5.1.3 The innovators.**

news selection process, the social dimension of sport has appeared to be comparatively more present in general-interest newspapers than in sports-only newspapers (see the tables and discussion in section **6.2 The takeaways from the comparison**). This element would seem to suggest that while the general press engages in social analysis regardless of topicality, sports newspapers comparatively need the wakeup call of a specific event. This preliminary conclusion was corroborated by the results of cross-correlating this finding with comparative content analysis of non-neutral periods, when reality would offer sport-related events of social relevance on a silver plate. The most flagrant example could be seen in the coverage of the 15th edition of the Special Olympics World Games (March 14-21, 2019), a multi-sport international competition for athletes with intellectual disabilities and the flagship event of the Special Olympics organisation. Content analysis related to the coverage of this event showed that there was no interest whatsoever in the competition, whether in general-interest newspapers or sports newspapers (as highlighted by **Table 13**). In both types of newspapers (combined result), only two relevant media items altogether were identified over a ten-day period, and one was just a photo caption, even though a rather long textual caption. The only difference, and not a meaningful one, lied in the fact that the piece in a sports newspaper, *Gazzetta dello Sport*, consisted in a short article of a quarter of a page while the media item in *Repubblica* (general press), was a photo+caption. The comparative content analysis of the coverage of the social dimension of sport during additional non-neutral periods showed the same result, that is a substantial similarity between general-interest and sports newspapers, in non-neutral periods.[296]

The most relevant difference in the coverage of the social dimension of sport, between general press and sports press, was identified in the different image of the athlete that they convey and their myth-making faculty, often evoked with reference to sports journalism. Using the new taxonomy of topics and sub-topics for social analysis designed by this thesis (**Table 4**), sports newspapers were comparatively found to be quintessential "hero factories". Based on the "Athletes as role models / Inspirational" sub-topic label in

[296] For the overall list of sampled periods, see Table 9.

the table, applied to a neutral period, media items that fell within this category appeared in 17 media items in sports newspapers as compared to only three in general-interest newspapers over the same period. A much less flattering subject like "Racist chants and insults", however, was also and perhaps surprisingly found to be considerably more present in sports newspapers than in general-interest newspapers. If we combine the two findings – inspirational athletes and hero-making on one side and racist chants on the other – we can conclude that sports newspapers make heroes in sports but do not make "sport" *tout court* a hero, as demonstrated by their emphasis in the coverage of one of the worst issues in today's sports, that is racism (related to, although not exclusively impacting the Italian case study).

### *RQ3: How realistic is it to expect that the newspapers of the 21st century consistently cover the social dimension of sport?*

It would have been easier to describe the wonders of social analysis in the coverage of sports in the form of a series of normative recommendations. It seemed more fascinating, although certainly more challenging, to check whether the social dimension of sport, as originally defined by this thesis, was also applicable and helpful to journalists in their day-to-day activities. As a reminder, this thesis focused on newsmaking by media professional and mainstream media, which means on the news media also as an industry. The pragmatism that has repeatedly been (self-)advocated in this thesis should not be confused with unscrupulous pursuit of business imperatives no matter how or a relativist/utilitarian approach, although a good number of self-proclaimed pragmatists tend to consider all these notions as synonyms. When dreams come with a plan, they can actually be *the* most realistic option, as they combine the motivation and tools to move on. This was the whole philosophy behind "the pragmatism of dreams", suggested by the title of section 6.3. In times of crisis for the press (see the figures in **section 7.3.1 The crisis of print newspapers**), media professionals are ready to listen to solutions that are more likely to bring some breathing room. And this is why this thesis presented a "business case" for the social analysis of sport, an expression that was borrowed from CSR studies and that indicates the measurable payoff of initiatives that are desirable for

society. A business-case model must demonstrate that the allocation of resources, in this case to the social analysis of sports, beyond its intrinsic journalistic value, is likely to produce measurable payoff and bottomline benefits to media outlets.

This study found multiple arguments that support the business viability of the social analysis of sport in newspaper coverage. Firstly, in a highly competitive media landscape, where sporting news and results are immediately available via online platforms and often for free, print newspapers can use social analysis to differentiate themselves and ultimately, to continue to be necessary. If trying to better monetise sports reporting consists in mimicking social media, sports fanzines and the clubs' or leagues' news platforms, then "real" sports journalists might no longer be needed. Professional journalists are the best placed to look at the broader framework of sports, or the "*connesso con*" [connected with], as widely explored by Spalletta and Ugolini (2016) as well as section **7.1.2 Sports journalism as hybrid journalism** of this thesis. Incidentally, this thesis has posited that the social dimension of sport is not much a matter of "connected with" but rather "an integral part of" sport.

Secondly, as testified by the largely unexpected media success of an event like the London 2012 Paralympic Games, there is public appetite for the social and human stories of sports, and not just the personal life of star athletes (or gossip).[297] This thesis suggests that specific readership surveys be performed in future research with reference to this aspect, using the new taxonomy in **Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports**. The current popularity of notions like sustainability, business ethics, corporate citizenship etc., across both businesses and society at large, could be leveraged also in sports reporting.

Finally, this thesis has repeatedly explored the issue of the professional legitimacy of sports journalism. A systematic coverage of the socially-relevant elements of sports could be a way to tackle the long-standing issue of the professional legitimacy and credibility

[297] For the media statistics of the London 2012 Paralympics, see footnotes 243 and 282.

of sports journalists, thereby contributing to reinforcing the role and leverage of sports reporting within journalism and media outlets. Sports journalists can hardly claim that they are still needed unless they are perceived as competent, independent and credible.

## 9.2 Contribution to knowledge

The contribution to knowledge from this thesis is twofold, and mainly consists in offering: 1) a new analytical tool for social analysis in media sports; and 2) a contribution to the niche study of sports newspapers. This current section 9.2 will present how these two contributions have been achieved, starting from the theoretical agenda that was devised to pursue them.

### *A multi-paradigmatic, original approach in the service of the thesis's topic*

This study did not have the ambition to devise a brand new paradigm, nor was it designed to confute or revolutionise existing theories. Incidentally, since this thesis was intended as a contribution to *media studies*, the approach was inherently multidisciplinary and the resulting state-of-the-art analysis was accordingly extensive. The analysis of the relevant theoretical approaches spans from an expanded chapter **2. The theoretical framework** to the relevant theories in the definition of sport (chapter 3), and then the pertinent theoretical approaches that may help to define (or to not define) sports journalism as hybrid journalism and investigative journalism (chapter 7), to mention but the main theoretical axes under consideration.

It could be argued that this was done to the expenses of the in-depth scrutiny of one specific theory or paradigm. Presenting the relevant theories was not an end in itself, and even less was the espousal of one theory or set of theories over the others. Each and every theoretical framework was adopted insofar as it was deemed as a potential contribution to address the research questions of this thesis. The theoretical approaches under

consideration were adopted as explanatory frameworks for the purposes of the thesis's topic and were originally combined so as to serve this goal.

The same "line of attack" inspired the portraits of historical cases. The historical accounts in this thesis were never meant to fulfill a merely descriptive purpose, for which they would have certainly proven insufficient, but were always chosen, used and originally combined with a view to serve the thesis's topic.

It goes without saying that a multi-paradigmatic and multi-disciplinary approach can be considered as the highway to superficiality by some commentators, or conversely, an enriching adeterministic approach by others, and that this thesis is believed to lean toward the latter. The author of this thesis aimed to make the best use of her academic background (political science from an historical perspective) and professional experience (in journalism, journalism associations, international organisations and businesses), all of which were put to use at the service of the thesis.

### *A new taxonomy of categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports*

This thesis provides a new and comprehensive taxonomy of "Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports" (see **Table 4**), which comprises 21 Topics and a total of 131 related Sub-topics. This matrix has been designed for use by academics, journalists and media executives, consistently with the three sets of objectives of the research, which included the theoretical, empirical and industrial level (as described in **section 1.2 Objectives of the research**).

At the theoretical level, academics will be able to use the new matrix to identify and study the social dimension of sports in media coverage. The tool may be of interest to scholars in multiple areas, including media sociologists, sports sociologists, historians, pedagogists, media literacy experts, and probably more, in accordance with the underlying multi-paradigmatic approach of a media study artefact. At the empirical level,

the taxonomy is meant to raise awareness among journalists of the scope of "sport" as a broad social phenomenon for coverage. This would concurrently raise awareness of their power and "positive responsibility" in promoting the values of sport. Responsibility is mostly intended in this study with a focus on the potential *positive* outcomes that are deemed to derive from this posture (i.e. the social analysis of sports). The proposed tool has an informative as opposed to normative ambition, and that is to show how many socially relevant subjects can be covered, in the largest possible extensive way. Finally, at the industrial or business level, the taxonomy of analytical categories for social analysis could be used by media executives as a template to explore the business potential of the coverage of the different topics and sub-topics in the taxonomy. This can be done, for example, by commissioning specific readers surveys. This marketing approach, however, should be ideally preceded by an internal discussion with the members of the editorial staff, who know the subject matter (sports) and dispose of the field experience that allows to better explore the viability of the different options. In this respect, and as reminded in previous work and previously in this thesis, sports journalism does not only mirror society or the readers' tastes but rather operates as an *active* mirror, which ends up favouring or even generating interest in a particular topic (Cuccoli 2010). Sports journalists are not simple spectators of social processes.

This thesis has also contributed a complementary tool for the study of national identity in sports journalism, which has been called a "national identity identifier" for the social analysis of sports (see **Table 5**). This tool, developed as a spin-off from the main taxonomy of **Table 4**, highlights the aspects and topics/sub-topics of sports that are somehow related to, or impacted by national identity. The so-called "national identity identifier" (**Table 5**) shows that national identity is attached to both items that carry a negative connotation, like Fan Violence, and others that carry a positive connotation, like Camaraderie. The thesis had preliminarily set the context for this new tool by discussing the ongoing relevance of national identities – as opposed to "nationalism" – in sports, including in our globalised world (see section **4.2.3 National identity in media sports**).

### *Data and analysis on sports newspapers, and a comparative analysis with general-interest newspapers*

If sports news is not a subject of preference for media scholars, as often reminded in this thesis, research on sports newspapers as a type of press in its own right is even rarer, especially in English-speaking scholarly literature. Sports newspapers are "the neglected stepchildren", from the title of section 4.3.3, in a category, that of sports journalism, which is already neglected as compared to other specialist fields of journalism. As explained in this thesis, this scarcity of sources is largely due to the simple fact that sports dailies are present in some areas of the world but are totally absent from others (regional details can be seen in section **4.3.3 Sports-specialised newspapers, the neglected stepchildren**). The tradition of daily multi-sport newspapers can be traced especially in Southern Europe and South America, with scattered cases in other regions of the world and a few national exceptions – like Japan, which has six daily sports newspapers with national reach. Two countries with a long-standing sporting and journalistic tradition like the United States or the United Kingdom, to name possibly the most relevant examples, do not have any daily sports newspaper – which clearly does not mean their sports journalism is comparatively weaker.

Because of the regional distribution of sports-specialised newspapers, the relative shortage in English-speaking scholarly literature should not come as a surprise. The richest scientific literature on sports newspapers comes from Spain, which certainly stands out as an exception, followed by Latin America, where similarly to Spain, sports newspapers are also widely present. A growing number of theses on sports journalism, although only occasionally singling out sports newspapers as a category in its own right, have been submitted in Italian universities over the past ten years or so (mostly at the level of *tesi di Laurea*), suggesting that a new breed of sports journalism scholars might appear in the years to come.[298]

[298] A "*tesi di Laurea*", in the Italian University system, is still at the undergraduate level, although it can be as long as a doctoral thesis.

The most recent and comprehensive academic survey of the international sports press to date is still the *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2013a), coordinated by Thomas Horky from the Macromedia University of Applied Sciences in Hamburg and Jörg-Uwe Nieland from the German Sport University Cologne, which dates back to nearly ten years ago. Furthermore, that survey reviewed articles related to sport topics in general interest newspapers and did *not* include sports-specialised newspapers in the sampled contents. The present thesis is therefore set to represent a unique contribution to date in that respect.

Another particularity of the present thesis is that it has engaged in a comparative analysis of general-interest and sports newspapers, with reference to social analysis in the coverage of sports. This is also rare and original, partly for the reasons previously evoked above. This comparison was meant to provide useful indications of journalistic choices that might be beneficially transferred from one type of press to the other, hence for sports journalism at large. The principal results of this comparative analysis were summarised in the previous section (see **9.1 Main findings**).

### *Combined sport + journalism foundations*

The fact that this thesis runs on the two parallel axes of sport and journalism was left for the end of this sub-section about the thesis's "Contribution to knowledge" simply because this aspect should be self-evident by now, after some 400 pages. But sometimes what is self-evident in the mind of the author does not emerge with the same strength from the manuscript, and remains hidden in the background. It may also appear terribly trivial. After all, a thesis on sports journalism should (obviously) be written by someone who knows about both sports and journalism. The personal experience of the author of this thesis tells a different story. Studies on sports journalism are recurrently written by journalism experts who never watch a match on TV, and even less go to the stadium. In some cases, these studies are written by journalism scholars who manifestly despise sport, which somehow reveals more masochism than critical thinking. Even if there has been an

evolution in the academic debate over the past few years, and we cannot carry on as if the place and image of sports journalism had never evolved, things have changed but have also remained, in many respects, pretty much the same (as discussed in section **4.1.1 The professional legitimacy of sports journalism**). Similarly, on the sport side, it is quite typical to come across sports experts who expect or even require journalists to cover sports in ways that are fundamentally incompatible with the reality and principles of the journalistic profession. If we move from academia to business, we may come across analogous flaws, with professional journalists who consider that the sports beat is a transitory punishment that is not worth "the extra mile", and sports executives who handle the relationship with the media without having the least idea of how the news media operate.

Whether the effort was successful or not, and this is for the reader to decide, this thesis inevitably incarnates the bridge between the world of sport and the world of journalism that comes from the academic and professional experiences of its author (also summarised in the **Appendix**).

## 9.3 Study limitations and avenues for future research

A series of study limitations should be addressed that may also suggest directions for further research. Some of the limitations descend from the approach that was deliberately adopted for the thesis, and are therefore deliberate exclusions, while others simply derive from the practical time and resource constraints of any research work. Below is a catalogue of the main limitations of the study, complete with some correspondent avenues for future research. Neither is expected to be exhaustive.

- This thesis was about "press coverage" and focused on print newspapers. Future research could look at the social analysis of sports in magazines and online news,

using the new taxonomy of **Table 4: Analytical categories for social analysis in the media coverage of sports** that has been elaborated for this thesis.[299]

- This study only looks at newspapers with *national* reach. The regional / local press might provide additional indications. A certain number of topics in the taxonomy of Table 4 have, indeed, a local rather than national dimension.

- The focus of the present study was exclusively on mainstream media. Future research could look at the social dimension of sports as represented in non-professional journalism (citizen journalism).

- The methodology that was used for this thesis privileged content analysis over field work and ethnography, which means, at least in this respect, historical over sociological methods. Future research could complement this approach by carrying on surveys and interviews.

- Content analysis was limited to the prevalence of relevant media items, in connection with the specific focus of the study, which was on the selection of news (gatekeeping). Content analysis could go further and expand to other elements such as additional units of analysis (words, sentences, paragraphs etc.), or to explore also the salience of the relevant media pieces.

- Content analysis could single out specific topics or sub-topics from the new taxonomy for the social analysis of media sports, which was clearly not in the spirit of the present thesis – focused on the coverage of the "social dimension" as a whole.

[299] Examples such as *So Foot* in France (magazine) and *L'Ultimo Uomo* in Italy (online) might constitute useful starting points for studies on these other media and platforms, although both examples present a spectrum of sport-related subjects that exceeds the "mere" social dimension on which this thesis was focused. On the role of *L'Ultimo Uomo* in Italy's media ecosystem, see: Baghetti, Carlo. 2019. "'Cosa Guardiamo Quando Guardiamo Un Evento Sportivo'? Il Ruolo Dell'Ultimo Uomo Nel Recente Panorama Del Giornalismo Sportivo in Italia. Intervista a Daniele Manusia e Emanuele Atturo." *Italies*, no. 23 (December): 413–26.

- The Western perspective and the highlights on Europe and the Americas, especially North America, could be replaced, for the purposes of future research, by a focus on other geographical regions, while research could also be conducted from a different geo-cultural perspective.

- The Italian case study, which was chosen for legitimate reasons (extensively explained in chapters 1 and 5), could be replaced in future research by other meaningful country cases.

- A large, international comparative study on sports journalism in newspapers could be launched in the years to come, similar to the precious *International Sports Press Survey 2011* (Horky and Nieland 2013a), whose latest edition dates back to more than ten years ago by now. Comparing dozens of newspapers in several countries will reasonably require, as was the case with that survey, the cooperative effort of multiple researchers and universities, as opposed to this thesis, which was the product of one single researcher. A new survey of the international sports press should however include sports-specialised newspapers, which the *International Sports Press Survey 2011* survey did not – while this thesis did.

As for the transformations determined by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, these will need to be assessed at a later stage. This thesis was completed in October 2020, while the pandemic was still ongoing. Chapter **8. Post-Scriptum: the 2020 coronavirus crisis and sports coverage in the absence of sport** was added toward the end of the thesis process in view to encourage future studies in this respect, hoping it will be a one-off experience.

## 9.4 Afterword

To conclude, it is important to recall, in a nutshell, the background and intents of this thesis. This will help assess *a posteriori* its strengths and limitations in relation to them. This thesis is the result of a ten-year reflection, through related professional and teaching activity, on the "power" and "responsibility" of sports journalism in society, as defined extensively in this thesis. Professional experience is therefore embedded in each and every part of the thesis, whether in the text boxes highlighting innovative perspectives, the bullet point lists with findings and recommendations, or the apparently more descriptive historical and theoretical accounts, whose choice and handling is actually quite revealing of background and methodologies that do not only come from academia.

The thesis process was supposed, on the one hand, to take advantage of previous experience, but also demanded, at the same time, an exercise in modesty in order to avoid bias and simplistic empirical conclusions. Stuffing the manuscript with larger numbers of real-life examples would have been faster and easier. An effort was made all along the thesis process to draw from personal experience only insofar as this could help address the specific purposes of the thesis, and while constantly complementing it with the theoretical approaches that were deemed of use to the same purposes. On the same line of reasoning, when analysing data from content analysis, it would have been convenient to make data say more than they did, filling additional pages with stylish speculations and over-extended generalisations, drawn more from prior experience than the strict evidence that emerged from the data themselves. An ongoing effort was made to steer away also from this temptation.

The underlying idea is that there is a major difference between dissecting the evidences and deforming them to corroborate prior convictions, whether these come from experience or from embracing an ideological or theoretical stance over others. It is precisely the thin line between academic synthesis and bias that requires our constant vigilance. The value of ideas lies in an open mind.

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# APPENDIX

A. AUTHOR'S STATISTICS

B. THESIS'S STATISTICS

C. SUPPLEMENTAL NEWSPAPER STATISTICS

D. LIST OF SPORTS JOURNALISTS MENTIONED IN THIS THESIS

E. PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS RELATED TO THE THESIS'S SUBJECT AREA

# A. Author's statistics

Years of combined professional experience (by sector)

Higher education lecturer: sports journalism, sports management and media relations, international relations: 8.
Journalism (trade publications): 8.
International press organisations: 4.
International organisations, other sectors: 5.
Non-profit European sport think tank, including board responsibilities (volunteer): 6.
Banks: 8.

Years of combined professional experience (by employment status)

Self-employed: 9.
Subordinate work: 17.
Volunteer work: 6.

Languages

Fully trilingual

- Italian: mother tongue
- English
- French

Working knowledge

- Spanish

Prior degrees

Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) in International Relations, University of Cambridge, Faculty of History: one-year programme.

*Perfezionamento in Cooperazione Internazionale e Politiche di Intervento nei Paesi in Via di Sviluppo* [Post-graduate Specialisation in International Cooperation and Aid Development Policies], Università di Bologna, Faculty of Political Science: one-year programme.

*Laurea summa cum laude in Scienze Politiche Indirizzo Storico-Politico* [First-class honours degree in Political Science - History major], Università di Bologna, Faculty of Political Science: four-year programme.

# B. Thesis's statistics

Words

Around 142,000 (excluding bibliography, appendix and French abstract).

Bibliographical references

Around 630.

Footnotes

299

Display items

21 tables
6 figures

Languages of the sources (by relevance)

1. English
2. Italian
3. French
4. Spanish

Content analysis

Sampled newspapers, general press:
3 titles.

Sampled newspapers, sports press:
3 titles.

Timeframe of the sampled data:
between September 2018 and April 2020.

Pages reviewed:
over 6,500.

# C. Supplemental newspaper statistics

***Top 20 Italian daily newspapers (of any kind) by circulation***

| Ranking | Newspaper | Average daily circulation print + digital replica (Feb. 2020)(*) |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Corriere della Sera | 273 171 |
| **2** | la Repubblica | 188 199 |
| **3** | La Gazzetta dello Sport, Monday edition | 154 198 |
| **4** | Il Sole 24 Ore | 143 611 |
| **5** | La Gazzetta dello Sport | 139 289 |
| **6** | La Stampa | 128 313 |
| **7** | Avvenire | 113 609 |
| **8** | Il Messaggero | 87 782 |
| **9** | QN – Il Resto del Carlino | 83 487 |
| **10** | Corriere dello Sport – Stadio, Monday edition | 71 157 |
| **11** | QN – La Nazione | 59 904 |
| **12** | Corriere dello Sport – Stadio | 58 427 |
| **13** | Il Gazzettino | 52 674 |
| **14** | Il Giornale | 43 484 |
| **15** | Tuttosport, Monday edition | 42 096 |
| **16** | Il Fatto Quotidiano | 39 483 |
| **17** | Dolomiten | 38 632 |
| **18** | Tuttosport | 37 503 |
| **19** | Il Secolo IXI | 35 841 |
| **20** | QN – Il Giorno | 35 632 |

***(*)*** *"Totale diffusione cartacea + digitale", Italy + abroad*
*Source: ADS - Accertamento Diffusione Stampa (http://www.adsnotizie.it/)*

*Top 20 Italian daily newspapers (of any kind) by readership*

| Ranking | Newspaper | Average estimated daily readership, print + digital replica, III/2019 (in thousands)[300] |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | La Gazzetta dello Sport, Monday edition | 4 169 |
| | La Gazzetta dello Sport | 3 252 |
| **2** | Corriere della Sera | 2 039 |
| **3** | la Repubblica | 1 878 |
| **4** | Corriere dello Sport – Stadio, Monday edition | 1 636 |
| | Corriere dello Sport – Stadio | 1 403 |
| **5** | La Stampa | 1 132 |
| **6** | QN – Il Resto del Carlino | 1 130 |
| **7** | Tuttosport, Monday edition | 1 100 |
| **8** | Il Messaggero | 974 |
| | Tuttosport | 856 |
| **9** | Il Sole 24 Ore | 711 |
| **10** | QN – La Nazione | 627 |
| **11** | Il Mattino | 523 |
| **12** | Il Gazzettino | 521 |
| **13** | La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno | 505 |
| **14** | Giornale di Brescia | 427 |
| **15** | L'Eco di Bergamo | 402 |
| **16** | Il Fatto Quotidiano | 381 |
| **17** | Il Tirreno | 375 |
| **18** | Il Secolo XIX | 357 |
| **19** | Il Giornale | 325 |
| **20** | Corriere dell'Umbria VT RI SI AR | 324 |

*Source*: Audipress (www.audipress.it)

[300] Figures refer to the third and final part of 2019. Audipress releases its readership estimates three times per year.

# D. List of sports journalists mentioned in this thesis

AMBROSINI Giuseppe – Italy
AMERI Enrico – Italy
BARENDSON Maurizio – Italy
BERGOGLIO Carlo (Carlin) – Italy
BISCARDI Aldo – Italy
BLONDIN Antoine – France
BORTOLOTTI Adalberto – Italy
BRERA Gianni – Italy
CALABRESE Pietro – Italy
CAMINITI Vladimiro – Italy
CANNAVÒ Candido – Italy
CANNON Jimmy – United States
CAROSIO Nicolò – Italy
CASALBORE Renato – Italy
CHADWICK Henry – United States
CIOTTI Sandro – Italy
CIVOLANI Gianfranco – Italy
CLERICI Gianni – Italy
COLOMBO Emilio – Italy
COSELL Howard – United States
COSTAMAGNA Eugenio Camillo – Italy
COTRONEI Adolfo – Italy
CRICKMORE H. G. – United States
CUCCI Italo – Italy
DANESE Eugenio – Italy
DEFORD Frank – United States
DE MARTINO Emilio – Italy
DESGRANGE Henri – France
DE ZAN Adriano – Italy
DRYDEN Charles – United States
FACCHINETTI Paolo – Italy
FERRETTI Lando – Italy
FOSSATI Mario – Italy
GALLARDO Juan Ignacio – Spain
GARLANDO Luigi – Italy
GHIRELLI Antonio – Italy

GIFFARD Pierre – France
GOGGIOLI Giordano – Italy
JENNINGS Andrew – United Kingdom
KUPER Simon – United Kingdom
LAWRENCE Amy – United States / United Kingdom
LAWRENCE Andrew – United States
LEFÈVRE Géo – France
LONGONI Edgardo – Italy
MARCHAND Jacques – France
MINÀ Gianni – Italy
MONTI Andrea – Italy
MOSCA Maurizio – Italy
MURA Gianni – Italy
NOLLA Santi – Spain
ORMEZZANO Gian Paolo – Italy
PADOVAN Giancarlo – Italy
PALUMBO Gino – Italy
PASTORIN Darwin – Italy
PERRONE Roberto – Italy
PETROSELLI Pietro – Italy
PICCININI Sergio – Italy
POZZO Vittorio – Italy
RADICE Ruggero – Italy
RASCHI Bruno – Italy
RICE Grantland – United States
RIVERA Eliso – Italy
ROGHI Bruno – Italy
ROUSSEAU Paul – France
RUNYON Damon – United States
SCONCERTI Mario – Italy
SCHIAVON Andrea – Italy
SERRANO Miguel – Spain
SPRINGER Shira – United States
STEEN Rob – United Kingdom
TALESE Gay – United States
TOMMASI Rino – Italy
TOSATTI Giorgio – Italy
TOSATTI Renato – Italy
VAN LOAN Charles E. – United States
VERDELLI Carlo – Italy

VERGANI Orio – Italy
VILA Joe – United States
WALSH David – Ireland
WEINREICH Jens – Germany
ZANETTI Gualtiero – Italy
ZAVOLI Sergio – Italy
ZAZZARONI Ivan – Italy

# E. Publications and presentations related to the thesis's subject area

***Book sections***

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2013. "Foreword." In *Women, Sport and Media Coverage in Europe: The "Television without Frontiers" Directive: For a Better Media Coverage of Women's Sport*, 29–31. Saumur: Think Tank Sport et Citoyenneté.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2013. "Le Sens de l''espace Privé Dans Les Dynamiques Relationnelles: Les Individus, Les Équipes, Le Milieu de Travail." In *Espace Mondialisation*, edited by Deborah Jenner and Malou L'Héritier. Discours Identitaires Dans La Mondialisation. Paris: L'Harmattan.

***Book reviews***

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2018. Review of *Rédactions En Invention. Essai Sur Les Mutations Des Médias d'information*, by Jean-Marie Charon. *Questions de Communication* 34: 429–31.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 1998. Review of *United Nations in the Contemporary World*, by David J. Whittaker. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* XI (2): 262–63.

***Dictionary entries***

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2019. "Journalisme Sportif." In *Publictionnaire. Dictionnaire Encyclopédique et Critique Des Publics.* http://publictionnaire.huma-num.fr/notice/journalisme-sportif/.

***Encyclopaedia articles***

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2013. "Sports Bars." In *American Sports: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas*, edited by Murry R. Nelson, 1230–33. Santa Barbara, Calif: Greenwood.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2013. "Substance Abuse." In *American Sports: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas*, edited by Murry R. Nelson, 1295–97. Santa Barbara, Calif: Greenwood.

*Congresses and conferences*

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2015. "Communication Power and the Social Responsibility of Professional Athletes in Europe." Presented at the Sport & EU Conference, Angers, June 25-26, 2015.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2014. "Sport, médias et éducation." Presented at the International Forum Éthique et Sport - Union Nationale du Sport Scolaire (UNSS), Clermont-Ferrand, April 7, 2014.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2014. "The fight against racism in sport." Presented at the 45th Session annuelle d'enseignement, Institut International des Droits de l'Homme (IIDH), Strasbourg, July 17, 2014.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2013. "How news media shape the world of sport." Lectio magistralis at University of Monaco-Montecarlo, February 4, 2013.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2013. "L'informazione sportiva, fra educazione e diseducazione." Presented at Medi@tando – Congresso Nazionale sulla Media Education, Rimini, January 10-11, 2013.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2012. "Sport, médias et construction identitaire." Presented at Rencontres Nationales du Programme MARS (Media Against Racism in Sport), CLEMI – Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Médias d'Information, Paris, April 11-13, 2012.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2012. "Sport and volunteering: How to attract the media." Presented at SPORTVISION 2012 European Conference, Copenhagen, March 19-20, 2012.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2010. "Sport content and advertising: best friends." Presented at WAN-IFRA International Advertising Summit, Hamburg, October 7, 2010.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2010. "Sports media as an 'active mirror' of society: creating tomorrow's leaders through sport." Presented at European Athletics - UNESCO Young Leaders Forum, alongside the European Athletics Championship, Barcelona, July 28, 2010.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2010. "The sport press and young readers: a natural bond." Presented at the WAN-IFRA Iberica Conference, Madrid, May 5, 2010.

Cuccoli, Rosarita. 2009. "The sports press and young readers." Presented at the 62nd World Newspapers Congress, Hyderabad, India, November 30, 2009.

UNIVERSITÉ DE RENNES 1

**Titre:** La place de l'analyse sociale dans la couverture médiatique du sport : Une comparaison entre journaux sportifs et presse généraliste dans l'écosystème médiatique italien

**Mots clés :** Aspect social, Italie, Journalisme, Journaux, Sport

**Résumé :** La thèse traite de la couverture médiatique des sports dans les journaux et notamment, de la dimension sociale du phénomène sportif dans ces médias. Le sport bénéficie d'une couverture médiatique massive. Cependant, et bien que l'étendue du sport médiatique permette de présenter, en principe, une multiplicité de sujets et d'angles d'analyse, la couverture des sports a tendance, en réalité, à se concentrer sur un éventail relativement limité de sujets (les athlètes les mieux payés, les tournois les plus lucratifs, etc.). A partir de cette préoccupation centrale, à savoir si la couverture médiatique des sports reflète ou non l'ampleur du phénomène sportif, l'étude a été consacrée à l'élaboration d'une taxonomie de thèmes qui permette de définir cette plus ample "dimension sociale" dans la couverture médiatique du sport. Cette taxonomie, conçue à la fois comme un outil conceptuel et opérationnel, est au cœur de l'étude. L'analyse s'est ensuite centrée sur les résultats de l'analyse de contenu de plus de 6.500 pages de journaux, en prenant la presse italienne comme étude de cas. L'analyse a été menée en vue de comparer l'analyse sociale du sport dans la couverture des journaux généralistes avec celle des journaux sportifs. Cette approche constitue également une contribution significative à la connaissance, les journaux sportifs n'étant pratiquement jamais considérés comme une catégorie à part entière. L'Italie a été choisie, entre autres, pour la présence de plusieurs journaux sportifs. Enfin, compte tenu de la chute de la diffusion des journaux, la thèse s'intéresse aussi au potentiel commercial – ou "business case" – de l'analyse sociale dans la couverture des sports, en montrant pourquoi celle-ci est susceptible d'attirer, de manière peut-être inattendue, de nouveaux lecteurs.

**Title :** The place for social analysis in the press coverage of sports : A comparison of sports newspapers and general press in Italy's media ecosystem

**Keywords :** Italy, Journalism, Newspapers, Social aspects, Sport

**Abstract** : This thesis focuses on the coverage of sport-related matters of social relevance in daily newspapers. Sports benefit from massive media coverage but even though the extent of sports reporting allows to deliver, in principle, a multiplicity of subjects and angles of analysis, the coverage of sports tends, in reality, to focus on a limited span of topics (the wealthiest sports and athletes, the most lucrative tournaments, etc.). Moving from the concern about whether or not the coverage of sports reflects the full extent of the sporting phenomenon, the study has engaged in the elaboration of a new taxonomy of topics to define the wider "social dimension", or social analysis, in the media coverage of sports. This taxonomy, intended as both a conceptual and operational tool, is at the core of the study. The thesis has then engaged in the content analysis of over 6,500 newspaper pages, taking the Italian press as a case study. The analysis has been conducted with a view to compare social analysis in the coverage by general-interest newspapers with that in sports-specialised newspaper. This approach also constitutes a significant contribution to knowledge, as sports newspapers are hardly ever examined as a category in its own right. Italy was chosen, among other reasons, for the presence of multiple sports newspapers. Finally, considering the current decline of press circulation, the thesis also shows the business potential – or "business case" – of social analysis in the coverage of sport, and why this can attract, perhaps unexpectedly, new readers.