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Citizenship, Sport and the sense of belonging to the European Union

Luc Desaunettes

Abstract :

The 20th World Cup is now over and how full of surprises it was! From the elimination of Spain, the title holder, in the pool phase, to the psychodrama for Brazil, which suffered a severe thrashing by the German team in the semi-final, and the consecration after extra-time of the Mannschaft's collective game in the legendary Maracanã Stadium. True to its reputation the World Cup captivated the world's attention for a month. Few events can boast the generation of collective emotion as intense as the World Football Cup. "War minus the shooting" according to George Orwell, football is the only sport which for a 90 minute period manages to turn the focus of entire populations towards their national affiliations. Chauvinistic behaviour is normalised, supporters take on their flag's colours, the national hymn is sung hand on heart across the land.[1] Conversely the European Union is not part of this emotional tsunami.

Some would say that it does not have its place in this, since sport it seems, as a fundamental element of its identity, is the sole province of the nation. It is therefore striking to note that there is a parallel between the development of modern sporting practice and the structuring of the idea of the Nation.[2] As early as the 19th century sport was granted a preponderant role in structuring this political entity: everywhere in Europe where nationalist unification movements were at work there emerged gymnastics clubs, like those founded in Germany by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, where the practice of sport laid claim to being a patriotic symbol. Moreover the power of sport within national identification can also be gauged against its capacity to re-invent a common vision of the nation.[3] The end of the Second World War and the discovery of the camps led to a deep identity crisis in Germany. How could a feeling of national pride be generated after a tragedy like this? The challenge seemed insurmountable. However the victory of the FRG in 1954 gave the Germans reason to be proud. The "Bern miracle" does not lie as much in the German team's performance as in the feeling of belonging that this victory created for the FRG.

Finally, and undoubtedly, its most striking feature is that sport leads to an external projection, generating a confrontation with the "other", which, in the definition of any identity is vital, since it enables the establishment of its external limits.[4] As Arndt notes "the French made the English, the English made

the French, the French will make the Germans"[5]. International competitions serve as a peaceful outlet to this confrontation.[6] By contributing in this way to national visions and by systematically turning a foreign team into an adversary, sport might appear to be a tangible obstacle to the creation of a European identity.

However it seems that the Union should not just surrender this area to the Member States. As film director Wim Wenders observes "there will be no European entity, no real link as long as we have not succeeded in revealing our own legends, feelings, our history". And this observation of the need to create a common European identity takes on its full meaning in the context of the legitimacy crisis now experienced by the European Union. The initial engines of integration, the maintenance of peace or the fear caused by the USSR have now faded away. The introduction of European citizenship in the wake of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 has not resulted in the creation of a sense of belonging that might provide the Union with adequate democratic foundation.[7] Indeed giving civil, political and social rights to Europeans (*passive citizenship*) has not been enough to generate a feeling of belonging to this supra-structure thereby justifying participation in a sovereign political body (*active citizenship*).[8] The traditional reason put forward in explanation of this failure is that the creation of a European political identity would suffer from the competition of the almost affective sense of belonging

1. Iliia XYPOLIA, "More than just a Game: football as the modern opium of the masses", *London Progressive Journal*, 20th June 2012.

2. Fabien ARCHAMBAULT, Loïc ARTIAGA, « les significations et les dimensions sociales du sport », *Sport et société, Cahiers français*, n°320, 2004, p. 38.

3. Iliia XYPOLIA, *op. cit.*

4. Robert FRANK quoted in Fabien ARCHAMBAULT, Loïc ARTIAGA, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

5. Ernst Moritz ARNDT, quoted in Elie BARNAVI, "Identité", in Yves BERTONCINI, et al. (dir.), *Dictionnaire critique de l'Union européenne*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2008, p. 228.

6. David HEAD, "Europeanization through football. The cross-cultural impact of Jürgen Klinsman and Sven-Göran Eriksson in England", *European Journal for Sport and Society*, Vol I, n°1, 2004, p. 24.

7. Frank DELMARTINO, "The collective enthusiasm for sport retains all of its magic", in Julian JAPPERT and Sylvain LANDRA (dir.), *Favoriser l'émergence d'une identité européenne grâce au sport : réalité ou utopie?*, *European think-tank « Sport and Citizenship »*, 2013, pp. 26-27.

8. Margarit DIANA, *Ibid.* ; Will KYMLICKA, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 285-290.

that European citizens have developed regarding their own nation. Moreover it would suffer because of the Union's inability to generate the awareness of any common identity amongst Europeans.[9]

In this context, as highlighted by Vivian Reding, the study of the role played by sport in the creation of a European identity seems to make sense.[10] Indeed if it seems difficult to reconcile the links between sport and national identity with the emergence of a common European identity, other, initially less visible elements help to qualify this observation. This paper aims to show how sport has already enabled the progressive structuring of a public European area with the aim of looking into some ideas that might, by using sport as a lever, lead to the development of a political sense of belonging to the European Union.

I. EUROPE AS A NEW "PLAYING FIELD"

The progressive structuring of a pan-European public space for sport has led to a vision of sport beyond national borders.

1. The progressive structuring of a "public pan-European area for sport"

Initially an extra-institutional creation

The structuring of a European public area for sport was first achieved outside of the framework of the European Union's political institutions. It emerged in the wake of sports competitions between clubs across Europe like the Champions League in football and handball starting in the 1950's. These competitions rapidly established themselves in the sports landscape as references, replacing the national championships with a European standard.[11]

In addition to this a second aspect has enhanced the phenomenon: media coverage. Europhiles deplore the lack of pan-European public debate and blame the media for this deficit. Sport offers an opposite example: the results of foreign championships are analysed with almost the same interest to that shown for national clubs.[12] This media coverage rises beyond national borders and has led to the emergence of a true public pan-European area for sport.

Supporting the process via the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice

The process has been boosted thanks to the rigorous application of jurisprudence on the part of the European Court of Justice in terms of the law of free-movement

in the sporting area. In its *Bosman* ruling in 1995, it deemed that a UEFA regulation that limited the number of community players put on the field during a match to three, was an infringement of the internal market.[13]

This jurisprudence has been criticised by some as the blind application of principles that are designed to regulate economic activities to an area – ie sport – which is supposed to fulfil social and cultural functions. The liberalisation of the transfer market Community wide led to the reorganisation of the European sports network.[14] Indeed only some clubs, due to their financial capacity, benefited from it via the recruitment of foreign players. The strict application of negative harmonisation rules witnessed a distinction on the part of teams ranked as European, whose goals were not just limited to national championships.

2. The political and sociological impact: the creation of a European sporting vision

The change in geographic reality did not just lead to economic and macro-structural effects: it has had sociological effects as it has created a new European sporting vision amongst supporters.

Before the *Bosman* ruling, local teams offered a certain type of national homogeneity facilitating the clubs' affiliation to their country. The ruling quoted here broke this link and the big teams "denationalised". For example Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) does not have a single Frenchman in its team. The phenomenon of supporter identification with their sporting idols now forms beyond the national prism. Hence Tottenham fans are able to identify with German Jürgen Klinsmann and those of Manchester United with Frenchman Eric Cantona.[15] The latter have become "one of them" and British supporters have not hesitated to don the German colours or sing the French national anthem in celebration of their extra-national heroes.[16]

Moreover the commitment to their club in the pursuit of European titles has led supporters to experience "Europe". The latter travelling with their team to matches within the European area encounter new cultures and develop a minimum awareness of Europe as they travel – which potentially leads to a new vision beyond the national borders.[17]

Hence the correlated effect of the organisation of European competitions, extra-national media coverage and negative integration fostered by the European Court of Justice has offered sport a new territorial dimension: Europe has become the sporting community's new playing field.

9. Maurice ROCHE, "Citizenship, popular culture and Europe" in: Nick STEVENSON (dir.), *Culture & Citizenship*, Sage, London, 2001, pp. 77, 87.

10. Viviane REDING, quoted in Roger LEVERMORE, Peter MILLWARD, "Official policies and informal transversal networks: Creating "pan-European identification" through sport?" *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 55, n°1, 2007, p. 148.

11. Roger LEVERMORE, Peter MILLWARD, *Ibid.*, p. 152-153; Paul MARTIN, "The Europeanization of elite football", *European Societies*, Vol. 7, n° 2, 2005, p. 351.

12. Maurice ROCHE, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 et s. ; Roger LEVERMORE, Peter MILLWARD, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

13. Ruling of 15.12.1995, in the case C-415/93, *Belgian Football Association vs. Jean-Marc Bosman*, ECR [1995] I-04921.

14. Robert SIMMONS, "Implications of the *Bosman* ruling for football transfer markets", *Economic Affairs* Vol. 17, n°3, 1997, pp. 15-18.

15. For a qualitative sociological analysis of the impact made by Jürgen Klinsmann see : David HEAD, *op. cit.*, p. 26-29.

16. Maurice ROCHE, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

17. Anthony KING, "Football fandom and post-national identity in the New Europe", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.51 n°3, 2000, pp. 424-426; Miguel Poiates MADURO, "making the sense of belonging to Europe more visible" in Julian JAPPERT and Sylvain LANDRA (dir.), *Favoriser l'émergence d'une identité européenne grâce au sport : réalité ou utopie ?*, European think-tank Sport and Citizenship, 2013, pp. 43.

II. FROM THE "PLAYING FIELD" TO THE CREATION OF A POLITICAL AGORA

1. Common area and sense of belonging, an equivocal link

As Smith quite rightly comments it would be simplistic to establish a direct link between a "common area" and a "sense of belonging" to a political entity: socialisation does not necessarily lead to identity which, in addition, is political.[18] In his sociological study of Manchester United fans King notes that the fact that they are mainly Europhile does not mean that they have developed a sense of belonging to the Union: "*they are only European in the sense that they want Manchester [...] to be at the heart of European football.*"[19]

The fact remains however that the creation of a common area is a vital condition for the establishment of a political identity. Even Rousseau's theory of a social contract, which does not presuppose prior cultural identity to the establishment of a political institution calls for a common area. Moreover a statistical study undertaken on the basis of a 2004 Eurobarometer study tends to show that "sports-lovers" would support greater European involvement in this area.[20] And yet the latter are said to represent a "habitus", understood in the Bordieu sense of the term as a "*systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations,*"[21] which is different from that of the "Europhiles" which would imply that a common sports area has already led to the emergence of a form of political allegiance to the Union.[22] Also, unlike Smith's scepticism the phenomenon of socialisation deserves to be highlighted in the emergence of a political identity.

Conversely the emergence of a common space disconnected from the political entity might impede the development of a sense of belonging to the latter. Indeed there is a geographical asymmetry between the public European sporting area and the European Union: as an example Russian clubs also participate in the Champions League whilst Russia has no vocation to join the Union. We might argue that this issue is not a problem: a fragment of identity can develop within a wider common area. Moreover the zone covered by the European public sports area includes the European Union completely. However within the framework of

political identity that is still ongoing, this distortion appears to be more of a problem. The "other", whose importance is vital in the constitution of an identity, is not a distant "other" but the one who is on the doorstep of that entity since it enables the establishment of a limit.

Although this obstacle does not seem to be one it does however highlights that the transfer over from a common space to a sense of political belonging is not evident and represents a challenge for the European Union.

2. Ensuring the transfer over from a "playing field" to political identity, a challenge for the European Union

It has already been mentioned that unlike European citizenship which seems to be more like a "gift from the elites" (top down) to the populations of Europe, the development of a European public area for sport spontaneously seems to be outside of this institutional framework. The institutions therefore have to anticipate this bottom up phenomenon.

Using the institutions' interest in sport as a lever to promote European identity emerged as of 1984 with the Adonnino Report.[23] This was followed by the Helsinki Report[24] in 1999 which provided the beginnings of non-binding coordination. To date European action in this area has remained particularly limited and void of an overall strategy.

A first explanation of this void lies in the lack of any explicit competence enjoyed by the Union until the Lisbon Treaty. This vacuum has now been filled since article 165(1) of the TFEU provides that: "*The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function.*" The impact of this article is symbolic since the Union does not have any supporting competence in this area. However real political will could use other areas in which the EU does have greater competence like the internal market, healthcare and education.

Simple measures might be adopted to transform the European "playing field" into an engine of political identity. Like "Ireland's Call" the European anthem might be played in conjunction with the national

18. Andy SMITH, « *l'espace public européen : une vue (trop) aérienne* », *Critique internationale*, n°2, 1999, p. 174.

19. Anthony KING, *op. cit.*, pp. 426-427.

20. Charlotte VAN TUYCKOM, "*Sport as vehicle for a post-national identity ? Attitudes of EU-citizens towards a more interventional role for the EU in the context of sport*", pp. 11-13.

21. Pierre BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, p. 88.

22. Charlotte VAN TUYCKOM, *op. cit.*, p. 11-13.

23. Communication by the Commission to the Council, COM(84) 446 final, *A people's Europe, Reports from the ad hoc Committee*, p. 21.

24. Report by the Commission to the Council, COM (1999) 644 final, *Helsinki Report on Sport*.

anthems during international competitions when a European team is playing. Although this measure might appear somewhat superficial it would be important symbolically (if we just think of the Ode to Joy being played during the World Cup Final just before the German anthem!). The creation of a "European scudetto", a badge bearing the colours of Europe that the team which wins the European championship would wear on its strip or stepping up the number of youth sports exchanges are also ways that deserve exploration.[25]

The Union has an interest in asserting itself as a mediator in the sporting arena. Indeed given supra-national organisations like FIFA, the States' means for negotiation are very weak: since these organisations simply have to brandish the spectre of a national team's exclusion in order to impose their rules. Europe itself does not have a team and the banning of all European teams from an international competition would turn the latter into a laughing stock.[26] Assuming this kind of role would provide the Union with political legitimacy that may create "logical loyalty" on the part of European citizens. J. Habermas suggests that individuals can rise above a national affective sense of belonging to rally under a supra-national political organisation if the latter see it as the only one able to implement a policy to the full.[27] Involvement by the Union in the sporting arena might then generate its political acceptance.

In the sporting domain the Union might easily launch a policy to help simple action that whilst being evidently symbolic in the eyes of the citizen, would allow it long term to assert itself as a major player.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that although sport plays a vital role in the national sense of belonging the latter might also be a lever in the emergence of active European citizenship thereby generating a European cultural vision and legitimising the political action of the institutions in this area. This lever seems to be under-exploited still. The introduction of explicit competence for the Union in this area might reverse this trend. Even though the path might seem difficult and its outcome uncertain, in that it invites the Union to challenge one of the pillars of national identity, we can but encourage European leaders to consider the Olympic creed: "*the most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered, but to have fought well.*" Undoubtedly the result will be worth the effort.

Luc Desaunettes

Graduate of the Collège d'Europe (Bruges)

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25. Fabien CAZENAIVE, «Utiliser les symboles européens dans le sport », in Julian JAPPERT and Sylvain LANDRA (dir.), *Favoriser l'émergence d'une identité européenne grâce au sport : réalité ou utopie ?*, European think-tank Sport et citoyenneté, 2013, p. 58-59 ; Philippe LE GUEN, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

26. Miguel Pinares MADURO, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

27. Jürgen HABERMAS, *Raison et légitimité*, Paris, 1978, pp. 198-199.