

Globalization and international relations: the Olympic Movement and European Integration

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As more and more institutions and governing bodies adapt to the new world order of an integrated global economic system, nations become more and more interconnected. Before globalization became so prominent in the inner workings of the world, humanity was not so integrated; instead there were simply relationships between the different nations of the world. In international relations, a nation would have had many liberties and the sovereignty to accept or deny any pacts or treaties proposed by a foreign country. However, as the world became more connected with technology, transportation and communication devices, that universal sovereignty has begun to dwindle, especially throughout Europe.

Many international organizations, whether they are Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), political entities or sport programs, have felt this pull from globalization, which has become more and more evident through the structural formation of these world-wide institutions. Two examples of this process of integration are the Olympics and the creation of the European Union. While they appear to be very different – politics and sports – their composition and structures have become very similar and politics has been and continues to be a very relevant factor in sports, and vice versa. However, it is important to note that while there are comparable similarities, it is necessary to acknowledge that these are two different institutions, with unique functions, and arguments can be made to contradict most all of these proposed concepts. These differences will not be the focus of this paper because this is an attempt to find connections between the Olympic Movement and European Integration caused by globalization.

1. The changing world

Globalization is a term that has been thrown about quite frequently in recent years, and receives both support and rejection depending on the circumstances and context. Roland Robertson provides a concrete definition of globalization as a concept referring to both “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole ... both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole” (Robertson, 1992:8). The origins of globalization are a topic of much debate, some say it began 500 years ago, and others believe it to be a recent occurrence, beginning only in the last 50 years. Based on Robertson's definition and a general view on the changes occurring in our globe, it seems that it is a phenomenon that has slowly been unraveling but not until recently have strong effects been noted. Globalization has been defined by various theorists such as Marx, Durkheim and Weber, to form various points of view; Marx defines the globalization of modernization as the explosion of capitalism, new markets and consumerism, while Durkheim along with Weber allude to the homogenization of culture and societal norms due to the growing diversity of a more interconnected world (Waters, 2001). There have been many changes in the world order due to globalization, but a clear example of this process has been represented in

the creation of supranational institutions and organizations – bodies that delegate and function above a state level and consist of multi-level governance – such as the foundation of the Olympic Movement and the IOC and the process towards European integration through the creation of the European Union.

In order to understand the way in which globalization has had a dramatic effect upon the Olympic Movement and European integration, it is first important to understand what they are. The Olympic Movement is a complex movement that is comprised of various actors and is based on the founding document called the *Olympic Charter*, which states that “The Olympic Movement is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world’s athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games” (IOC, 2009). The actors include the organization, administration and management groups that facilitate the Olympic Games, the cooperation by the countries who choose to participate in the games, as well as the athletes who create the competition and provide the entertainment. This event, with its media saturation, nationalist fervor, and global image, provide an ideal backdrop for the study of the interconnections between nations, politically, socially, and economically, without the entire trappings of official foreign policy. The Olympic Games provide yet one more opportunity for nations to officially or unofficially connect with other nations in an event sanctioned by the world as “good and fair”.

European integration is a phrase that refers to the continual process of the unification of Europe. In this process, “the nation state continues to exist as the prevailing organizational unit of governance and the main focus of political obligation in Western Europe. But it does so within a complex network of arrangements, procedures and institutions which increasingly constrain it to pool more facets of what were once wholly national prerogatives” (O’Neill, 1996:10). The integration of Europe was, and continues to be, an attempt to unify Europe and create commonalities within the continent, while maintaining each country’s national identity. This integration pertains to a social, cultural, political, and an economic level, not completely homogenous, but where everyone can be understood for their differences and in turn, respected. Actors pertaining to individual state needs are among those who look out for European needs, and together they search for the best possible scenario for everyone.

2. The historical metamorphosis: structural similarities

One of the most important similarities between the Olympic Movement and European integration is the historical unfolding of these two parallel movements. Originally, the Olympic

Games, although widely known, consisted of a rather small grouping of Greek-speaking males, who would compete in Greece to demonstrate their exceptional athletic skills. People did not travel from different countries or continents to compete in the Games, and it is thought that most likely the Greeks exclusively organized the event (Kanin, 1981:10). This organizational structure is comparable to the original structure of European nations, although clearly they functioned differently and are different by nature. Originally each nation had its individual governance system, unique to that situation, and solely encompassing those inhabitants of the specified region. Before globalization and current technology, when there was often a lack of awareness of some issues in other parts of the world, nations and individuals were very isolated, their lives very separated and distinct from those of other nations. Although the effects of globalization affected the Olympic Movement and European integration at different time periods, they are based on the same principles and strive to fulfill many similar goals, those of international mediation in addition to the retention of cultural identity and nationalism.

As the world began to modernize, so did the perceptions of the world and the individual's and nation's place within it. Pierre de Coubertin was the father of the Olympic Movement whose aim was to bring the Olympics back to life into what he called the Modern Olympic Games¹. He traveled the world examining the exercise systems and attempted to influence other educators with his ideas on sport as a means of peacemaking and universal unification (Kanin, 1981:20). After the French and Industrial Revolutions, the world had begun a time of rapid modernization, bringing about the initial evolution of communication, transportation, trade, medicine, and in some areas democratization. These changes facilitated the movement of goods, services and people, which was the key element for the regeneration of the Olympic Games, this time on a world scale. In 1894 Coubertin established the IOC – the main governing and organizational body of the Games – and since then there has been the establishment of other governing bodies such as the Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOG), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the International Federations (IFs) who represent the various actors present in the participation and organization of the Olympics.

European integration underwent a similar process around 50 years later. At this point, the world was experiencing ever-increasing technological advances which meant that all of the sectors that had been influenced by the Industrial Revolution had evolved much more and were creating a growing interdependence between countries around the world. Movement of people and trade had become much easier due to the ease of transportation with the creation of ships, trains, cars and other innovations which had been modified and become much more efficient (Hudson, 1999:5). The combination of these elements caused the market structure of capitalism

¹ Compared to what is called the Ancient Olympic Games that lasted between 776BC-393BC.

to become very popular and therefore in the late 1940's after the end of World War II, Europe realized that if they wanted to remain in competition with the rest of the world, they were going to need to formulate ties within Europe. The integration process began as a cooperative project to strengthen the solidarity between European nations and to create an inter-European market. Europe had suffered so much from the war, structurally, psychically, and economically, that even rival nations needed to cooperate to rebuild. Beginning with the economic unification through the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, other economic and solidarity action was taken to concrete the integration of Europe. The final product was the creation of the European Union in 1992 as the overseeing supranational organization for the resolution and negotiation of European concerns.

In the same way that the organization structure of European integration has evolved over the course of the past 60 years, so has the Olympic movement. Both paradigms contain a supreme governing body –the IOC for the Olympics and the EU for Europe – which is organized in very similar manners. They are the supranational bodies that delegate issues to other smaller organisms and work to create the best possible outcome whether it may be a sporting event or a solution for an energy crisis. Clearly these are two very different issues but they are both based on a similar process because the effects of a globalized world extend into all subject areas. The historical metamorphosis of the European Integration and the Olympic Movement prove that as the world becomes more interconnected there is a need to have diverse and international leadership through the establishment of supranational institutions. These bodies allow for all parties from different backgrounds to be represented in the least biased manner and make decisions based off of the best interest of the organization, not the participating countries.

3. Peace and cooperative objectives: new means for international relations

While the nature of the Olympic Movement and European Integration are very different at a first glance, they become more similar upon close examination of the individual components that comprise these bodies, one such example being the objectives. As stated earlier, the Olympic Movement is based upon a document called the *Olympic Charter* whose laws and regulations are carried out by the IOC. The *Olympic Charter* begins with a section titled the “Fundamental Principals of Olympism,” which are is similar to the mission statement of the Olympic Movement, Olympism, and the basis for the Olympic Games. Principals 2 and 6 state:

“2. The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.

6. Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement” (IOC, 2009; principle 2 & 6)

The main ideas surrounding these two principals and much of what Pierre de Coubertin intended to do by establishing the IOC and the Modern Olympic Games was to use the medium of sport as an international tool for peacemaking and achieving world cooperation and acceptance. Equality on the sport field could be translated into equality in the world. These ideals parallel key concepts of the European Union – the representative body of the efforts to unify Europe in the integration process – and are defined in parts of the mission statement. The European Union seeks:

“To guarantee peace, freedom and security in and around Europe. To promote and protect democracy and universal rights in Europe and around the world...To promote equality and tolerance of diversity in Europe. To promote and facilitate cooperation between Europeans, at individual, local, regional and national level, and in both the public and private sectors”.
(Committee of the Regions)

Once again the central concepts include peace, equality and cooperation, but contrary to the world scale of the Olympics, this pertains to only Europe. Unification and understanding between one another is an important factor for cohabitation in an increasingly interconnected globe. With the globalization and modernization of the world and the ease to move within it, it is important to establish cooperative efforts to avoid misinterpretations and maintain the fluidity of world interactions.

While on the surface sports and politics are very different, they have been linked for centuries. Sport has been used as an international mediator in many cases around the world for many years. However, sport has increasingly become a means for establishing international relations with the increasing amount of travel and diverse interaction between people and different nations.

“Sport is frequently a tool of diplomacy. By sending delegations of athletes abroad, states can establish a first basis for diplomacy relations or can more effectively maintain such relations. Correspondingly, the cancellation of a proposed sport visit to another nation can be used by a state as a means of voicing displeasure with that specific government or with its policies”. (Epsy, 1979:3)

This alternative method to resolve international conflicts or maintain positive relations already established provides nations with a less confrontational mode of expressing themselves and their political desires. These diplomatic goals lend support to the mission statement goals, which also provide strong support towards the social similarities between the peaceful types of relationships the *Olympic Charter* and the EU are trying to create between the different nations around the world.

Furthermore, the European Union has also proved to be a tool that has smoothed out many relations between nations within Europe. Simply through the amalgamation that occurred in order create the EU, the relations between inter-European nations improved. The union, like the Olympic Movement is based on even more concrete principals of respect between humanity:

“One the one hand, this rhetoric and mission [of the *Olympic Charter*] is compatible with key elements of the rhetoric and mission of post-war internationalism embodied in the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 both as institutions and as the bases of movements and collective actions”. (Roche, 2000:195)

The United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) both re-enforce the attempts for peaceful interactions between the populations of the world. Through an establishment of a group that joins nations around the world, not simply Europe, a greater degree of understanding has been attempted. Both the European Union and the Olympic Movement base their missions on the development of better relations between diverse nations, and the UDHR provides the basis for the written establishment of laws that protect basic human rights.

4. Conclusion

Globalization has impacted the world in a parallel fashion noted through the development of the European Union and the Modern Olympics Games, demonstrating comparable institutions within the global system. Before the prominence of globalization the supranational organizations were not necessary because there were, if any, much more limited interactions on an international level. Not until after the Industrial Revolution and the surge of modernization, which quickly spread globally, did the world become more homogeneous and more connected socially, culturally and economically, the similarities become more apparent. Although the Olympics seem very different from the European Union, a deeper look into the organizational structure, the goals, and even simple aspects such as the mission statements or objectives of

the organizations can be surprisingly similar.

Establishing friendly international relations and peaceful cooperation has become a universal ambition noted through the various legislative acts and political communities such as the EU, which was created as a tool to strengthen the capacity of the European Nations to be represented in the globalized world. The European Union and the Olympic Movement share a similar European cultural root because both are based upon a humanistic and peaceful perspective on world relationships, which have been well connected to ancient European humanistic ideals since the time of the Ancient Olympic Games. This continual mindset has shaped the moral basis for many supranational organizations and has diffused throughout the world. Globalization has been the key factor in the evolution and creation of institutions on an international scale and has therefore made it a necessity to continually attempt to build a peaceful worldwide community.

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