

Call for Papers Vol. 6 (2023)

A game of states? Sport and international politics

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Despite the self-professed neutrality of international sports organizations, the realms of international sport and international politics are deeply entangled, as the bans on Russian and Belarusian athletes introduced following the outbreak of the war against Kyiv have laid bare.

Since their inception, international sports events have been an arena for interactions between states, offering opportunities for diplomacy and détente, as well as soft power projection and great power politics. During the Cold War, international sport provided a platform for symbolic confrontation between the US and the USSR and their respective blocs, but also an avenue for the reintegration of the countries defeated in World War II and the recognition at the international level of the ‘new’ postcolonial states in Africa and Asia. Individual athletes were also able to reclaim the sporting stage to deliver powerful messages, as embodied in John Carlos and Tommie Smith’s iconic gesture at the Mexico 1968 Olympics.

After 1989-91, mega-sports events were often seen as the incarnation of a globalized world – and its many contradictions, as sheer commercialization, huge North-South inequalities and the allocation of events to dubious regimes highlighted. In parallel, international sports organizations had to increasingly engage with a variety of non-state actors – among them, non-governmental organizations advocating for human rights and mega-corporations eager to reach out to billions of sports enthusiasts – and new questions – ranging from increasing attention to the environmental and social sustainability of mega-events to anti-discrimination demonstrations and calls for recognition of non-binary gender identities.

In recent years, the increasing fragmentation of the international system, linked to rising China-US tensions, the emergence of populist movements, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, casts further complexity and uncertainty on international sport, calling for renewed scholarly attention and inquiry.

Against this backdrop, we invite scholars of sport as a social phenomenon and institution – historians, sociologists, political scientists, International Relations and Media and Communications scholars – to submit proposals addressing the multifaceted nexus between sport and international politics, including, but not limited to:

- Sport diplomacy as a tool to establish, improve, strengthen and reset relations between states, and its history;
- International sports events as a platform for the projection of soft power as well as the manifestation of great power politics;

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- The impact of past and present wars and armed conflicts on international sport, and the reaction (or lack thereof) of national and international sports organizations and athletes;
- The use of international sport for nation-building at the domestic level and nation-branding at the international level (including the quest for recognition of new and aspiring states);
- The role and politics of international sports organizations such as the International Olympic and Paralympic Committees and International Sports Federations as international non-state actors;
- The (contested) political economy of mega-sports events and related infrastructure projects, and their sustainability (or lack thereof) in environmental, social and financial terms;
- The agency of athletes and supporters in the international sports arena;
- International sports events as a site for advancing socio-political and human rights causes, including anti-racism, anti-discrimination, gender equality and the recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights;
- The relation between sport and migration – both organized and spontaneous – as encapsulated in the international trade in athletes as well as the political use of sporting citizenship.

Proposals can be written in English, Italian, Spanish or French and must be sent to the following email addresses: valentina.fedele@unical.it; l.goretti@iai.it; n.sbeti@gmail.com

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Notification to the authors: December 12, 2022

Articles submission deadline: February 15, 2023

Articles assessment: March 30, 2023

Final version submission: by May 31, 2023

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