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*“SPORT, COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA  
AN ACADEMIC APPROACH”*

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# **SPORT, COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA**

## **AN ACADEMIC APPROACH**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**This paper is meant to be a humble contribution to motivate portuguese universities to develop a new academic teaching and research field. Sport Journalism was an important content of my graduation in Sport Sciences (I had chosen it as my major field of study) and of my present PhD studies at the German Sports University Cologne.**

**I will try to show the importance of „Sport, Communication and Media“ as a new academic teaching and research field in both Sport and Communication giving research and teaching examples. My ‘secret wish’ is to find a portuguese university where I could develop a long-term project in this new and important emerging field.**

## SPORT, COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA AN ACADEMIC APPROACH

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### Introduction

The german academic model about *Sportpublizistik* conceived by Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Josef Hackforth has been growing worldwide. There are courses in Cologne, Munster, Munich, Seoul and Tel Aviv. The model basically mixes the necessary competencies of a media communicator with those of one graduated in sport sciences and physical education. The overloaded german employment market in communication and journalism has received these new sport communication professionals very well. The employment rates of these specialists in sport journalism — six months after their introduction in the labour market — is nearly 91% (see *SportPublik*, 7, ff 48/49).

Thus, undergraduates are choosing more and more *Sportpublizistik* as their major field of study. The German Sports University Cologne is exclusively dedicated to Sport Sciences and Physical Education, having more than 6.500 students in the different fields of study. The major fields of study are open to all students and have no *numerus clausus*. Thus — more and more influenced by the saturation of employment opportunities in the traditional employment fields of physical education and sport professionals in Germany —, the winter semester 2000/2001 has the following student distribution according to the chosen major fields of study: *Prevention & Rehabilitation*, 39%, *Oekonomie & Management*, 27%, *Medien & Kommunikation*, 20%, *Freizeit & Kreativitaet*, 9% and *Training & Leistung*, 5%.

Only after 10 years, the new emerging fields Sport Economics & Sport Management as

well as the major field 'Sport, Communication & Media' have become a strategic supply in these universities' academic programmes. If portuguese students had the same chance to choose freely their graduation majors — to determined themselves their education —, they would choose more and more accordingly to their own will, talent, capabilities, interests and dreams, as well as more and more according to the employment market. Professors would have interested students in university classes with better marks and everyone would be happy! The *individuum* professional satisfaction would rise, it would exist better professionals and university's student population could react instantaneously to social and technological changes in the employment market; more choices mean more at all levels.

### **Journalism and Sport Journalism**

The international discussion around the legitimacy of special university graduation courses concerning sport journalism have always been very intense, putting those who defend that the field of sport journalism has nothing new in relation to the traditional mother field, the journalism, against the others who think that in sport journalism it has to be a different academic approach. In my opinion both are right!

Unfortunately in some portuguese editor's office, sport is still treated like a minor job to do. Their media editors haven't learn yet, that sport became a complex environment, where politics, society, economics and technology have improved their number of interactions in an exponentially increasing speed with a brutal time schedule. These editors don't know anything about e.g. digital publicity in the live transmission of major sporting events or corporate on-line sport communication.

„Building“ sport communication requires knowledge about the ethics of sport and therefore the ethics of sport journalism. Sport news often stresses the grade of information, forgetting completely that this is also an enormous entertainment industry. Some journalists and sport journalists destroy — sometimes without knowing it! — their own field of work, contributing to racism among players, to fan violence, to insults to the refereeing team, to the bad image of soccer, to the dropout process among talented

young athletes, etc. Where is the entertainment? When will it be possible to understand, that sport is “infotainment”? It lives from good actions on the sports field. Not from fouls! I ask myself a lot of times, why is everyone so concentrated on the club’s players and managers, accusing them e.g. to be responsible for the lack of spectators. Why doesn’t anyone ask about the quality and the ethics of sport journalism?

But it is difficult in a country like Portugal, where we have three national sport newspapers competing directly for the latest news and where these things have always been like this for many years, to change attitudes and beliefs. This can only be settled over the years. And that’s one more reason why we need university courses teaching beginners in sport journalism about Sport, Media & Communication.

A new changing sports environment requires from sport journalists new competencies and a lot of interdisciplinary knowledge, e.g. in sport economics, sport management, sport law and all the other, more traditional, fields of Sport Sciences. Coaches sometimes use (and abuse!) of the lack of special sport knowledge of some journalists. These professionals easily become the instrument of club strategies. It is important to know something about sport politics and sport talent scouting and improvement, if you want to provide a good public communication service. Otherwise, one important function of mass media in modern democracies is no longer assured: the critical analysis of sport presented to us by our national politicians, sports club presidents and team coaches.

The power of critics allowed by the freedom of writing and recording our opinion and publishing and sending it to a large number of people, gives us not only the right, but also the obligation to serve public majorities and minorities interests. We always have to know that sport is one of the several fields in society and we have to give sport the place and size it deserves. But not more than that! Sometimes I feel quite stupid, watching portuguese main news blocks. Some of them even open with sport news. Isn’t this crazy? Is there nothing else? Portugal is still a long step away from the other developed countries. Are we blind? Is this the opium we need to survive? What is the function of sport news in the channels’ news blocks? Audience!?

Another reason to support special education in sport journalism is related to the sport itself. Only sportsmen understand what it is all about winning or losing, what are the personal fears and conquests which are invisible to the 'other humans'. This brings up to a statement: „You have to go through what you are writing about!“

Training a team, being an athlete, running a sports club, going for a sport voluntary, all these factors support this statement. Sport journalists should be provided with technical, scientific and practical background. They should feel themselves in the role of a winner, a loser, a coach and a player. This can only be provided by a solid education in sport sciences and physical education, emphasizing on practical sports education.

Recently, an important politician took position about the big failure of portuguese athletes in the Olympic Games in a portuguese weekly. First, the responsible journalist put a lot of effort in giving a large independent and objective report about the results of the portuguese athletes. Secondly, we could read the e-mail comment of this important politician. He defended that portuguese sport policy should permit our older sport stars to involve themselves in national sport management tasks. At that time I thought the same about the education in sport management as I am thinking now about the education in sport journalism: „It is the right mixture of sport sciences with communication sciences that makes the difference!“

### **Research and Education in Sport, Communication and Media**

Sometimes people ask me about the contents in *Sportpublizistik* classes. The most part of portuguese communication and sport scientists don't see what it is all about. They just can't focus on the contents. Explaining it to my colleagues giving practical research examples is probably the best way I have found out until now to conquer their interest and their support.

Normally, I start the conversation giving them the examples which Prof. Hackforth once gave to me. In a very simple approach, Prof. Hackforth asked me once of the Laswell

formula — “Who says What in Which Channel to Whom with What Effect. You have just told me the research fields of *Sportpublizistik!*“, he told me afterwards. Basically, in our science we study all the traditional fields of media and communication sciences, with the difference that it is done focusing on the subject “sport”. The relation of sport in and with media and communication processes is our analysing scientific object.

Using the Laswell formula, we understand five fields of research and education: (1) communicator, (2) message, (3) media, (4) recipient and (5) effect. Thus in other words: a *journalist* writes a *report* in the *newspaper/radio/TV*, having in mind his *public* and aiming (or not) some *effect*.<sup>1</sup>

To explain the first field — the **communicator** research and education field — I use to start asking one simple question, „Who are the people behind the sport information we consume?“ After a short period of reflection time, I keep on questioning:

Are they all professionals? Do they have club preferences? Are they club members? Do or did they practise sports? How do they see their communicator functions in Sport Journalism? What is their interpretation of the ranking and importance of certain news? Do they feel like entertainers or more like information clerks? What is their opinion about the sport news in the main news blocks? What is their willingness to give their own opinions? Do they see sport information as an important public service to the community? Are they full-time or part-time sport journalists? How good or bad are their incomes compared to other journalists? (One good question is:) How many sport journalists are there in Portugal? What about demographic differences concerning e.g. age, sex, household and so on? Do they have political party? What about the differences between sport journalists from different media? How do they in relation to their power in public opinion? What is the education and practical background they wish for their younger colleagues? How is their evaluation about the future of their profession? ...

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<sup>1</sup> One remark excursion has to be done. Laswell is mentioned here for practical purposes only: to structure the following text ideas. His work had, nevertheless, the important role of opening new fields to communication sciences. The evidences of the communication sciences’ development and its practical relevance to the different empiric fields and complex sociological environment, will help us



I think it is easy to understand, that after all this questions, there is no doubt about the importance of this knowledge to all information communicators and consumers!

The second research and education field — the **message** — is mostly approached by content analysis techniques. The messages in the different media are analysed. This research area has been probably the most studied area in communication sciences. In sport, communication and media it is also like that. The main german publication in *Sportpublizistik* analyse the messages in the different media. I could once again ask a lot of questions to present you the importance of such studies, but I feel it is not necessary. You have already understood the sense of Sport, Communication and Media studies!

The third research and education field takes the **media**, themselves, as its research objects and tries to find out e.g. what is the degree of concentration of the media power, what are the philosophies of the editorial boards. Is the number of independent sport editorial office increasing or decreasing? Isn't the same sport editorial office responsible for more than one publication?

One important result is the alert about the freedom of the press and the representation of the variety of society's values and believes in it, a very interesting subject. Sometimes it is difficult to proof ownership, firm funds participation and editorial dependence, because e.g. a minority financial participation is connected to an influent job in the editorial or administrative board or there is a never-ending chain of enterprises, leading from a firm participation to another. The analysis of the national media systems and political structures and laws belong also to this third field.

The fourth research and education field analyses the **recipient**. In sport marketing and corporate sport communication tools this is sometimes connected to the expression 'target groups'. For *Sportpublizistik* this means to take the recipients of the different media and to study them. To know about what kind of people consume what type of media, themes, formats, programs, journalistic styles and so on. Some interesting surveys have been carried through in Germany, mostly connected to a multiple methodological

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to understand the complex structure of the renewed sport communication process.

approach.

The last research and education field of *Sportpublizistik* stresses the **effect** side of the sport communication process. Normally it is related also to multiple methodological approaches, using not only inquiries and content analysis, but also observation and experimentation. Well known international literature try e.g. to connect the live comments of a football match with the growing potential of sport violence.

The *Sportpublizistik* lives from the exchange between theoretical frameworks and empirical data evidences. It is a field action science *par excellence*! The more we are aware about the modern society's complex structure, the more we need to use the multiple method approach to study the same object. The above mentioned five research and education fields have surely a fluid transition from one to another and in the most part of the cases we understand that they are not to be separated from each other in the sport communication process. One good example is the research of corporate communication in sport sponsoring analysis. This brings us up to the theories commonly used to explain how de (sport) communication process works out.

### **(Sport) Communication Process**

Heinz Puerer (1993) gives an excellent resume about the evolution of *Publizistik* through times. In Germany the first school classes on newspapers was held 1916 in Leipzig. With the years this first *mass media science* went from a historical-hermeneutic point-of-view to a empirical-analytic one. Some anglo-american research studies have given their precious contribution to the international development of the analysis of the communication process, namely e.g. Harold D. Laswell (political approach), Kurt Lewin (small group approach), Carl I. Hovland (experimental approach) and Paul F. Lazarsfeld (sample survey approach).

Over all these years some terms have been settled as belonging to the communication process and therefore also to the sport communication process: sender, message and

recipient. The very first unknown definition of communication could easily have been „the exchange of information“. With the modern times, this was of course not enough. Mass communication was defined as being public, indirect, in one direction (from the sender to the recipient), with technical support and to a wider group of people. The new mass media products had to respect the criteria of being updated, periodical, universal and available for everyone.

In the last years terms like media politics have shown us new research areas like the study of the fundamental communication laws, the free access to information (including publicity), the media organisations, the functions of mass communication — informational, critical/controlling, social, cultural/educational and entertainment functions — and the study of mass communication in non-democratic political systems.

Also sociological aspects have become more and more important in mass communication research: the journalistic profession, the integration in editorial offices of newcomers, the joint effect of mass media, the group members interaction, the leadership inside several group sizes and types, the personal interaction for the take over of values, standards, roles and behaviour, the second hand experiences, the construction of stereotypes and prejudice and the media as go-between fear and violence. This sociological approach of mass communication brought into light some thesis about additional functions of mass media: meditation, controlling and social controlling.

Psychological aspects of *Publizistik* are not linked to the analyses of the effects of mass media communication and the identification of the major influence variables.

For the communicator we can identify the following main variables: personality, physical and psychological attributes, relationship to groups and own status, degree of expert knowledge, trustworthiness and prestige.

For the message: sense and content, size and style, language and intelligibility, trustworthiness, type of argumentation and final argument.

For the receiver we have to distinguish between three moments: before, during and after communication. Before communication has begun, variables like knowledge level, opinion, need of communication, expectancy and motivation, self-participation. In the action of communication variables like reception situation, personal selection, personal filter, physical and psychological constitution, evaluation of communicator and content, agreement or disagreement with communicator and/or message. After communication variables like selective memorising and capability of remember, further personal contacts regarding communication contents and reception of other statements for the same communication contents.

All these attributes may contribute to the evaluation and classification of the recipient, leading to acceptance or rejection and, therefore, to an effect. Effects may be of several kinds. The influence can be over knowledge, perception, opinions and attitudes, feelings and sensibility, behaviour and actions. In *Publizistik* the research made around the effects of communication is looking for actors, areas, type, direction, intensity, duration, ways and aims involved in the different dimensions of the communication process' effects.

At the end of this subject it is still possible to go on observing the communication process without ever finishing to report about other points of view and other possible interpretations. Some few terms should be left for meditation of the communication process: media education, media didactics, media language and media speech functions.

### **Theories of mass media (sport) communication**

Gaby Gruendig (1985) was one german student in communication sciences that wrote her master thesis about the importance of the different mass media theories to the sport communication process (sport information). After 1985 some new theories have been added. The following comments are based on her results regarding 1985's state-of-the-art and include updated evidences:

- the **stimulus-response** theory („What do the media do with people?“) does not serve

to explain the entire sport communication process, but regarding exploration surveys in *Sportpublizistik* research, it could bring some light into the analysis of isolated aspects, because of its simplistic empirical application;

- the **two-step-flow of communication** theory („indirect communication effect through opinion leaders“) has some application in sport communication research practice, because in the sport world the opinion leaders and the idols are sometimes the same person and sport journalists love to use them;

- the **uses and gratifications approach** theory („What do people do with media?“) is one important theory to explain adequately the sport communication process, because the sport communication recipient is allocated in the centre of the analysis, although motivation and expected gratification of the sport communication recipients is still being studied (need of information, personal identity, social integration and interaction, entertainment), it explains the reasons and motives of sport media use and analysis the needs and expected gratification of the sport recipients (good combination possibilities with agenda-setting-approach theory);

- the **concept of media reality** theory („What are the differences between sport reality and media sport reality?“) is very useful to *Sportpublizistik*, as it is theoretically looking for how media sport reality starts, develops itself and what are the resulting effects, analysing therefore the components of the (sport) communication process, only the empirical transformation seems difficult, because of the lack of a common agreeable „factual“ reality;

- the **agenda-setting-approach** theory („awareness, salience and priorities of themes are proposed by media“) is, combined with the uses and gratification approach theory, an excellent way to explain theoretically and analyse empirically sport communication, both make it possible to follow the general furtherance of a integrative approach, also in *Sportpublizistik*;

- the **knowledge-gap** theory („mass media increases knowledge asymmetries between

social groups“) is in my opinion probably the worse theory for the explanation of sport communication, BILD in Germany and A Bola, O Jogo, Record in Portugal have one big impact on every social groups, we could even state that lower class read them much more often than higher classes, of course there is no empirical evidence for this personal statement of mine, a minimum of education has still to be available (at least recipients must be capable of reading), the degree of people's interest plays also a greater role too;

- the **special effect of TV** theory („connected to restricted programme choices, to the fact that recipients are obliged to follow previously settled programme schedules and programme agenda, to the actuality of TV, being the first leading to a opinion of the recipients and to the use of video and audio, which are considered the communication channels worth of trust“) is difficult to analyse regarding its contribution to the explanation and deduction of the effects of sport information, TV has had a lower impact on population in the past, still it is not the top sport information source, it has increased its entertainment level and is definitely number one concerning live sports transmissions, we could e.g. concentrate on subjective live sport comments, in this case it would be interesting to find out if the first impression given by the commenting journalist isn't checked out one day after by the spectators in the sport newspapers;

- the **silence spiral** theory („communicators present synchronised themes and opinions“) was never discussed in relation to sport communication, I believe this theory could explain why sometimes journal responsible and sport journalists have the tendency to be very careful in the critics of sport politics and sport club strategies, the pressure in the sport editor's offices in Portugal is tremendous, the competition between media is horrifying, they can not risk to loose their sources,

I still remember the RTP TV shots of 1999 concerning the decision of the Euro 2004 organisation country by UEFA, portuguese sport journalists and sport politicians where one and the same person, they drank champagne together and at that moment I asked myself how it is possible to maintain the necessary distance between sport journalists and sport journalistic sources, going one step further, how is it possible to criticise a „champagne-fellow“,

sport journalists should be given the opportunity to stop working in every day's tasks and meditate about their sport journalistic role and their sport journalistic work in sport journalism, in public sport opinion („Am I an instrument of club rivalries? Am I only reporting actual sports reality? Am I sometimes the subject of sport information, looking for important sport information? Have I ever done investigative sport journalism?“),

one other important aspect that could evidence the silent spiral theory, is that unqualified, inexperienced sport journalists and also sport journalistic collaborators without any practical sport curriculum background, easily let involve themselves in reproducing the same opinions as other sport journalists in order not to isolate themselves in public and intra-professional sport opinion;

- the **dynamic-transactional approach** theory („communicator and recipient develop a reciprocal process, transactions, in their own cognitive system, where knowledge and interest play an important role, and in between them: communicator writes for recipient, recipient has present the image of communicator“) is the best way to explain the communication process, and therefore also the sport communication process, it links different research perspectives, those based on media with those based on the recipients, only the use in *praxis* (operationalisation) seems to be the greatest problem.

**This short overview has shown us that we need always to ask for the global contribution of each theory to our knowledge about the effects of sport communication and each theory's capability to analyse sport communication as the result of multiple influence sources. At the same time we have to ask about the theory's empirical use possibilities, knowing that we have always a restricted financial and methodical framework.**

## **Teaching „Sport, Communication and Media“**

The education in „Sport, Communication and Media“ prepares students to become professionals in the fields of communication professions, especially those related to sport. The specific aims are: to get knowledge in communication sciences and sport sciences in an interdisciplinary perspective and to exercise practical media abilities and capabilities, as they are demanded to today's mass media professionals.

The course will specially qualify future sport journalists to understand the sociological importance of sport in its different manifestations and should result in a correspondent presentation of the socio-economic sport variety in their future sport journalistic work. That's why it links practical sport education and sport sciences with practical media education and media sciences to qualify for profession in fields of sport journalism, media technology, public relations in sport clubs and sport federations, publishing-houses, media pedagogic, publicity, etc.

To be able to role in the course, students have to fulfil a bachelor in sport sciences and visit lectures in related fields of sport history, sport sociology, sport philosophy, sport economy and sport psychology. After that, the sport communication course can be divided in four fields of study: (1) communication science, (2) Sport, Communication and Media, (3) editing praxis and (4) trainee-on-the-job periods. To finish the course, students have to write a research monograph.

In the working area of communication sciences students are introduced to functions and structures of mass media communication. Methodologically they are introduced to theoretical and empirical communicator research, to content analyses, to media research, to recipient research, to effect research, that are related to different aspects of the communication process, using the four main methods of empirical social sciences (inquiry, observation, content analysis and experiment), to statistics and computerised data input, data cleaning and data evaluation.

The working area of Sport, Communication and Media picks up the previous knowledge



and concentrates on how to present, compose and commercialise sport in the different media. Basic themes are: sports in sport information, type and quality of the image of sport in mass media, presentation of sports and sport related areas in mass media, dramaturgy of sport infotainment, influence of the commercialisation and professionalisation of sport in the presentation of sport in the media and the reaction of mass media to this development, environmental conditions of sport information and the consequences to general sports practise (basically the results of the application of former learned methods to sports communication!).

The editing praxis goes towards the production of contents taking into account special procedures and standards in news agencies, newspapers, magazines, radio and TV. These classes are supplemented by practical experience in workshops concerning modern technology in TV, radio and print media editing. Students are exercised in editing classes to compose all kinds of contents in the different journalistic styles, as well as develop their layout knowledge.

There are mainly two trainee periods: one concerning print media and one concerning AV-media.

### **Final Appeal and Research Themes**

If my „secret wish“ (expressed in the abstract of this paper) is not possible in a short or middle term, I would like to leave some suggestions for my portuguese sport and communication sciences colleagues as research possibilities:

- Sport Journalists: Who are they?
- Women in Sport Journalism
- Sport Journalism and Fair-Play
- Press Responsible in Sport Clubs
- Ethics of Sport Communicators
- TV-Sports, Sport in Daily Newspaper

- New Marketing Strategies in Sport Infotainment
- Media Commercialisation and Sports Games Rules
- Sport Sponsoring in Soccer Stadia
- Sport Media and Media Sport
- Life Comments in TV-Sports
- Sport and Publicity — Sponsoring and Marketing
- The Image of Sports in Mass Media
- Uses and Gratification of Sport Consumption Through Media
- The Future of Sport Communication in Mass Media
- Target Groups of Sport Sponsoring
- Sports in the World-Wide-Web
- Digital Sport Publicity
- Sponsoring Trends and Corporate Communication
- Very Special Sport Magazines
- Live-Sport versus Free or Pay TV
- Sport Events and Virtual Publicity

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