

# Sport, Space and Memory: Extending the Sociology of Sport

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## Abstract

These reflections relate directly to the current status of the sociology of sport in the UK and, to some extent, in North America but they also have more general relevance. As a sub-discipline of both mainstream sociology and of the sport and exercise sciences, the sociology of sport faces three major challenges – (i) the emergent hegemonic position of the natural sciences in sport science departments, (ii) the relationship between the sociology of sport and sociologies of the body and of health, and (iii) the marginal position of the sociology of sport in relation to mainstream sociology. Having briefly commented on the first two challenges, this paper concentrates primarily on the relationship between the sociology of sport and mainstream sociology and argues that the former has become unimaginative, dominated as it is by two or three dominant perspectives, and that what is needed is a greater willingness to learn from other areas of sociological inquiry (for example, the sociology of memory) and from other disciplines (most notably human geography's conceptualisation of space). The paper concludes with some suggestions as to how specifically the sociology of sport might be extended.

Key words: Memory, Space, Sociology of Sport



## Introduction

This essay focuses on the main challenges that currently face the sociology of sport. The evidence upon which the following arguments are based has been primarily drawn from personal experience of the United Kingdom and North America. However, most of the challenges that are discussed here are almost certainly being faced, or are likely to be faced in the future, by sociologists of sport throughout the world. Before proceeding, however, it is worth mentioning in passing that one particular challenge which confronts East Asian scholars but is not experienced by their counterparts in the UK or North America – the challenge posed by the hegemonic position of the English language in academic publishing. Although the emergence of the People's Republic of China as a global superpower may in time result in increased status for Mandarin, for the time being at least the challenge for East Asian sociologists of sport to publish in English will remain. How that challenge can best be met is clearly a matter for further discussion elsewhere. For the time being, however, what of the challenges that are universal in their reach?

Three such challenges seem particularly significant. First, there is challenge from the natural sciences. Second, there is the challenge from mainstream sociology. Third, there is the challenge which we have set ourselves and which, it will be argued, requires new intellectual innovations of the type discussed in the final sections of this essay which highlight ways in which we might seek to extend the sociology of sport by engaging with mainstream sociology and with other academic disciplines.

## The Natural Science Challenge

The overwhelming majority of sociologists (and, indeed, social scientists in general) of sport work in university departments which, whilst given various titles, are centred on what are collectively described as the sport and exercise sciences. Dominant amongst these are physiology and psychology, the subjects that students regard as vocational and which are seen by governments and by funding bodies as worthy of investment, increasingly so if the main focus of attention is health related. This prevailing view as to what is and what is not socially useful does not affect the sociology of sport alone; it has a negative impact on the critical social sciences more generally. Writing in 1959, C. P. Snow (1998: 17) observed, 'the separation between the scientists and non-scientists is much less bridgeable among the young than it was even thirty years ago'. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the gulf is even greater.

According to Bryan Turner (2006: 170), 'we do not have public intellectuals because we do not have a social role for them; in sociological terms, we need to look at the availability of social space for intellectuals rather than asking questions about possible inhabitants'. For Turner (2006: 176), focusing specifically on the United Kingdom, this means examining intellectual life 'within the context of the rise and fall of Britain as a capitalist nation and as an imperial power'. However, the immediate problem for social scientists may be far more immediate, albeit undeniably linked to the development of capitalism. Responding to Turner, George Ritzer (2006: 210) argues that 'a productivist bias continues to dominate not only academic circles (especially in the USA), but also public thinking and the media'. Despite the commercial success of his own work on McDonaldization, Ritzer suggests that people are more interested in consuming than in reading about consumerism and that the majority of best-selling books that do appear in the sociology section of bookshops were written not by professional sociologists but by journalists. Indeed, 'sociology has a bad odour among people in the trade publishing business and that is another important reason why there is so little public sociology' (Ritzer, 2006: 212). The fact is that 'in a given institutional context, the critical intellectual is frequently also an accredited technician in the social sciences or the humanities' (Michael, 2000: 2) and he or she, I would add, must act as such.

Opportunities exist to make our work marketable. A good example is Sudhir Venkatesh's *Gang Leader for a Day* (2008) which carries the sub-title, *A Rogue Sociologist Crosses the Line*. It is certain, however, that Venkatesh's academic standing owes more to the publication of such works as *American Project: The*

*Rise and Fall of the Modern Ghetto* (2002) and *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* (2006). As Ritzer (2006: 212) puts it, for the most part, sociologists do not want 'to McDonaldize their ideas'. Indeed, 'if they do, they are well aware that that will adversely affect their academic careers' (p.212). For this reason, he concludes that 'the very nature of success in the academic world militates against success in the public realm' (p.212). This is increasingly so in an environment where everything is quantified, including published output.

Whilst think tanks offer alternative and potentially more publically influential spaces for intellectual activity, the overwhelming majority of those who are defined traditionally and increasingly globally as intellectual social scientists work within the higher education system. This brings with it certain constraints. In the United Kingdom, for example, the pressures of a research assessment exercise (now called the Research Excellence framework) have ensured that most young scholars are obliged to work according to a schedule centred on peer-reviewed output and funding applications (themselves commonly responses, as indicted earlier, to government-led initiatives as to what constitutes meaningful research). Indeed, much of the funded research conducted in recent years has itself ensured, as Simon Jenkins (2008: 20) claims, that 'lecturers became civil servants and research departments worked to Whitehall contracts'. As Jenkins puts it, '[British] universities have spent the last quarter-century cosying up to government in the hope of being rewarded for their servitude' and, he goes on, 'this Faustian pact has been a betrayal of the academic enterprise' (p.20). For younger scholars in particular, deviation from this path in order to publicly address matters of personal (and more general) concern or to make critical interventions are normally foolhardy if academic advancement is to be secured. In such a climate, we should not be surprised by the absence of critical public intellectualism, in place of which there has only been the rise of celebrity academics, particularly in the field of history, whose main responsibilities have been to popularise their subject, maximise television viewing figures and increase book sales. In my view, sociologists of sport are affected by such developments as much as any other group of academics and more so than natural scientists who are deemed to be engaged in quantifiably valuable research – hence, the increasing emphasis on impact factors and citation indices.

It is difficult to prevent the emerging hegemony of the natural sciences. One feasible response, of course, is for sociologists to move away from studying professional sport and its fans and to focus instead on health-related issues. For those of us who continue to see value in studying the social significance of sport more generally, however, the intellectual climate is harsh, particularly given the ongoing, additional challenge that comes from mainstream sociology. Here academic snobbery is at the heart of the problem.

## **The Mainstream Sociology Challenge**

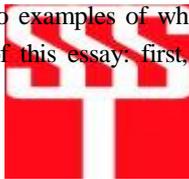
Sport is by no means the only subject to have been treated contemptuously by the self-appointed guardians of what is deemed to be worthy of academic attention in a series of disciplines. In the world of musicology, pop music has often been dismissed as too frivolous for serious study. In literature, only the study of 'good' writing has traditionally been encouraged. Elsewhere the question of what is or is not 'good' art has exercised the minds of historians and critics alike. In such ways has a narrow definition of culture been constructed and reproduced even into an era in which popular culture has threatened to overwhelm its more esoteric adversaries. To call professional sport a new religion might seem blasphemous to those with delicate spiritual sensibilities and wholly outrageous to the elite that decides what is or what should be regarded as truly important. But one does not have to endorse the misguided claim made by former Liverpool Football Club manager, the late Bill Shankly, that football is more important than life and death to recognise the highly significant role that sport plays in the modern world. Stadia throughout the world have become the contemporary equivalents of Gothic cathedrals, highlighting the wealth of those who have authorised their construction and testifying to the importance of what is enacted within their walls. The pilgrims arrive for major sporting occasions, many of them having travelled long distances to be part of the faithful gathering. They buy their various artifacts, sing and chant in the appropriate manner and are deeply

affected by the drama that unfolds before their eyes. Their sense of attachment is reinforced by the experience of 'being there' and, courtesy of television, in many cases, being 'seen to be there' and they return home feeling blessed by their deeply personal relationships with the object of their worship. All of this may seem far-fetched to those who would insist that at the end of the day sport is only harmless fun. For many, however, sport, pop music and countless other forms of popular culture have filled the space once occupied by religion and/or ideology. For anyone, but particularly for those who claim to have a serious academic interest in the world in which they live, to dismiss these phenomena as trivia is little short of disgraceful.

It is almost as difficult to overcome this dismissive attitude, as it is the challenge from the natural sciences. There is, however, another challenge has to be confronted and, if we can deal with it successfully, we shall go some way towards taking on the second challenge identified here, even if not the first. This is the challenge from within.

## The Challenge from Ourselves

It is imperative that we do as much as we can to make the sociology of sport more vibrant. In addition to keeping sport at the centre of our research, we must be more methodologically innovative and theoretically adventurous. We cannot afford to be slaves to the ideas of a handful of prominent theorists, including Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault. Nor should we restrict our studies to gender, 'race', and globalisation, each of which, together with analyses of the body, is disproportionately well represented in the pages of our leading journals. Furthermore, we should go beyond those journals in order to disseminate our ideas and increase our impact. For all of those reasons, it is vital that we learn from mainstream sociology (and from other academic disciplines). Two examples of where we might look to develop this extended approach are discussed in the remainder of this essay: first, the sociology of memory and, second, the academic study of social space.



### (a) Sport, Memory and Space

'Space and place', according to Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 3), 'are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted'. That said, space is only natural in part for, as Henri Lefebvre (1991: 77) observes, 'social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information'. It is in this respect, for example, that 'the city is a place, a center of meaning, par excellence' (Tuan, 1977: 173) – a symbol in itself and also the location of numerous highly visible symbols. Not surprisingly, therefore, social spaces such as cities are hugely important in the construction and reproduction of memories and identities. In addition, within those social spaces, sporting sites *and* sights perform important roles in identity formation and consolidation, not least as repositories of collective memories (Bale and Vertinsky, 2004).

Huysen (2003: 11) claims that 'one of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key cultural and political concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity'. Memory itself can best be understood as a social activity inasmuch as 'the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society' (Halbwachs, 1992, p.51). According to Johnson (2002: 294), 'the concept of social memory has been linked to the development of emotional and ideological ties with particular histories and geographies'. 'Together', as Hoelscher and Alderman (2004: 348) argue, 'social memory and social space conjoin to produce much of the context for modern identities – and the often – rigorous contestation of those identities'. One specific site of contestation concerns the use of public spaces and the erection of monuments as mechanisms for remembering. In fact, the concept of public space is itself contentious. For Doreen Massey (2005: 159), 'multiplicity, antagonisms and contrasting temporalities are the stuff of all places'. Thus, the analysis of social space, Lefebvre (1991: 226) argues,

'involves levels, layers and sedimentations of perception, representation, and spatial practice which presuppose one another, which proffer themselves to one another, and which are superimposed upon one another'. As for public spaces, according to Massey (2005: 152), 'from the greatest public square to the smallest public park these places are a product of, and internally dislocated by, heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting social identities/relations' (p.152). Despite, or arguably because of, their potential to provoke controversy and dissent, however, politicians and policy makers are often intent on manipulating such public spaces not least for the monumentalization of memory. As Connerton (1989: 3) comments, 'concerning social memory in particular, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order'. An example of this can be found in the redevelopment of Beirut in the 1990s, a process which, according to Nagel (2002: 718), 'has represented not only rehabilitation of physical infrastructure, but, equally, an attempt to reinterpret Lebanon's tumultuous past – and, indeed, to create a new collective memory for the Lebanese "nation"'. The success of such efforts, not only in Lebanon but also in other post-conflict, divided societies, depends, of course, on the extent to which the collective memory is inclusive. This is no easy matter when the past and with it the present (and the future) remain contested.

As Leib (2002: 289) suggests, 'one place where the power to control the landscape ideologically is most obvious is the placing of public monuments commemorating the past in public spaces'. The debate surrounding the location of a statue of the late African American tennis star and human rights activist Arthur Ashe, in his native city of Richmond, Virginia, is a highly relevant example (Leib, 2002). Perversely united on this occasion, were traditional white southerners and African American activists who objected, albeit for very different reasons, to erecting the statue on Monument Avenue close to a memorial to Confederate General Robert E. Lee. As Leib (2002: 307) notes, 'the intensity of the Ashe debate illustrates the importance of iconography and landscape in society'. Similar debates have taken place in relation to the naming of streets in American cities in honour of Martin Luther King, Jr (Alderman, 2005). In east Asia, the city of Taipei also provides numerous examples of the monumentalization of memory with a variety of buildings, parks and museums, each of which is capable of evoking conflicting emotions for Taiwan's citizens.

In terms of sport and the sociology of memory, the researcher can make substantial use of personal memories in relation to events, people and places, of collective memories of sport and sport-related events (to paraphrase Connerton, how sporting communities remember) and of the (auto) biographies of sports men and women (although with these, it is often necessary to read between the dramatic chapter headlines).

As sources of data, the autobiographies of sports stars (many of them ghost-written), like celebrity autobiographies more generally, have a poor reputation. Widely regarded as poorly written, they are also dismissed for the vacuous quality of their contents. Many such works consist either of boring account of goals scored and saves made or of a racy celebration of various extra-curricular activities. In large part, what is involved is the presentation of self and the author is only too happy to present himself 'in accordance with his audience's presumed expectations' (Amossy: 675). This explains the emphasis on on-field exploits and off-field indiscretions. On the other hand, the celebrity author 'must also cope with the audience's growing demands for authenticity; he is summoned to display his intimate self. In other words, he is asked to remove the masks of social roles and show the flesh and blood character under the ... stereotyped parts' (Amossy: 675). Often though it is actually in those passages of an autobiography that neither the author nor the audience might consider important that the researcher finds the most useful data – asides that keep the narrative moving along but which offer, almost certainly unintended, insights. These include references to the links between schooling and sport.

For the purposes of teaching the sociology of sport, it is also very useful to engage with our students' recollections. Although they are young, many of them have vivid memories of their introduction to sport and of the people and places they have encountered whilst developing their athletic careers. They are often pleased to talk about places where they learned to play sport, achieved a personal best performance or even represented their country for the first time. This is the kind of narrative that should be built on. For that

reason and, as part of the more general attempt to extend the sociology of sport, the final section of this essay considers one way of studying sporting places.

### (b) Studying Sporting Places: Methodological Observations

Sporting places are central to the construction of collective memories. Consider, for example, the Wulihe Stadium in Shenyang, China, which was demolished in 2007, just 18 years after its construction. As the venue where the Chinese national football team, by beating Oman 1-0, qualified, for the first time, for the FIFA World Cup Finals, it lives on in the minds of the nation's fans (Observer, 17 January, 2010: S17). It is for reasons such as this that the study of sporting places is sociologically important.

In this respect, the contribution of John Bale, a geographer by training but a polymath by instinct, to the social sciences of sport has been remarkable. In particular, Bale has pointed us in the direction of understanding the social significance of sport and leisure spaces in the urban setting. There are various ways in which sociologists might build upon Bale's insights. One such technique is that of the flâneur.

According to Gluck (2003: 53), 'the flâneur has become a generalized symbol of urban experience and cultural modernity in recent scholarly debates'. Despite the flâneur's status as a cultural icon, however, Gluck notes that 'considerable ambiguity surrounds the figure' (p.53). As Tester (1994: 1) indicates, 'flânerie, the activity of strolling and looking which is carried out by the flâneur, is a recurring motif in the literature, sociology and art of urban, and most especially of the metropolitan existence'. At one level, as Edmund White (2001: 16) claims, the flâneur is 'that aimless stroller who loses himself in the crowd, who has no destination and goes wherever caprice or curiosity directs his or her steps'. Yet the fact that the flâneur is curious about the life of the city helps to explain why, as Tester (1994: 1) argues, 'the figure and the activity appear regularly in the attempts of social commentators to get some grip on the nature and implications of the conditions of modernity and post-modernity'.

The idea of flânerie originates in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, according to Burton (1994: 1), 'no figure belongs more thoroughly to Paris and to the early nineteenth century than the flâneur'. Key figures in the history of flânerie include such otherwise disparate individuals as Charles Baudelaire, Walt Whitman and Walter Benjamin. The former, in the words of Brown (2002: xiii), 'enjoyed taking "a bath in the crowd", plunging into the multitude of Parisian pleasure-seekers and strollers or identifying vicariously with anonymous passers-by and the often downtrodden figures haunting the boulevards and public gardens'. As for Whitman, according to Warner (2004: xviii), 'many who knew him tell us how widely he was known and liked in the streets; he would glad-hand street-car conductors, porters, laborers of all kinds'. Nowhere in his writing is Whitman's sense of urban life more apparent than in his aptly named poem, *Once I Pass'd through a Populous City* (1860).

Once I pass'd through a populous city imprinting my brain  
for future use with its shows, architecture, customs,  
traditions...

It is the activity of seeing that is crucial if the city is to be understood and, unlike the *badaud*, the *flâneur* seeks understanding. According to Burton (1994 1), 'the *badaud* absorbs and is absorbed by the flux of urban life and, to that extent, is closer to the Baudelairean *homme de foules* of the Second Empire'. The *flâneur*, on the other hand, 'stands apart from the city even as he appears to "fuse" with it; he interprets each of its component parts in isolation in order, subsequently, to attain intellectual understanding of the whole as a complex system of meaning' (p.1). As Benjamin (2002) expressed it, 'the *flâneur* plays the role of scout in the marketplace' and 'as such, he is also the explorer of the crowd'. According to Burton (1994: 4), 'the *flâneur* belongs to the same social and moral universe as the spy, the *agent de sûreté*, and somewhat later, the detective' and certainly the concept of *flânerie* has arguably been most commonly used in relation to crime fiction (Bairner, 1997; Willett, 1996). But the *flâneur* might also be described as an embryonic urban

sociologist and also a sociologist of sport insofar as he is willing and able to take up the type of challenge set by Wirth a century later.

Not all commentators are impressed by claims that the *flâneur* gains insights through his relative detachment from the crowd and the spaces within which he loiters. According to Gluck (2003: 55), for example, 'the *flâneur* was hardly an isolated and silent spectator of urban life'. Rather, she insists, 'he was a sociable presence on the streets of Paris, most frequently depicted in the role of the amiable storyteller, who happily shares his knowledge of the city with whoever approaches him' (p.56). Benjamin could also be cynical about the *flâneur*'s powers of observation (Tester, 1994; White, 2001).

Nevertheless, despite evidence of scepticism, it continues to be argued that the *flâneur* reads the city, and its spaces, sporting or otherwise, as a text and 'from a distance' (Ferguson, 1994: 31). 'In his pre-1850 form', Burton (1994: 2) writes, 'the *flâneur* is first and foremost a "reader" of urban life'. As a consequence, Tester (1994: 18) finds it possible to argue that 'the *flâneur* and *flânerie* become different and intriguing keys to understanding the social and cultural milieu'. Mazlish (1994) goes even further, arguing that 'in the end, the *flâneur*'s vision of life, based on his peripatetic observations, creates reality'.

Some of the claims that are made here in relation to conducting research as a *flâneur* are undoubtedly contentious. That said, they may well be valid and, at the very least, they raise important issues about conducting research 'in the field'. First, *flânerie* is primarily a masculine endeavour. According to Mazlish (1994: 51), 'Baudelaire's heroic *flâneur* is a male, prepared to admire woman and her finery as one would a piece of art'. Featherstone (1998) questions the assumption that the forms of activity normally associated with *flânerie* have been exclusively male. But one cannot ignore the fact that the woman who walks the streets, the streetwalker, is demonised; the man who does so is an idle wanderer, a loiterer but nothing more morally suspect. Even in an era that might be regarded as more enlightened in terms of gender relations, men continue to enjoy much easier access to a wide range of public spaces. Indeed, this may help us to understand why the sociology of sport as opposed to the sociology of exercise and health is male-dominated.

White (2001: 145) goes further and postulates a close relationship between male homosexuality and *flânerie*, suggesting that 'to be gay and cruise is perhaps an extension of the *flâneur*'s very essence, or at least its most successful application'. Whilst this argument may be strengthened by the conventional image of the *flâneur* as a dandy, less controversial and more relevant is the belief that that the *flâneur* should simply be a solitary figure. As Ferguson (1994: 27) argues, 'companionship of any sort is undesirable', especially female companionship. '*Flânerie* requires the city and its crowds, yet the *flâneur* remains aloof from both' (Ferguson, p.27).

It is also important that the *flâneur* has sufficient free time to walk and read the city. As White (2001: 39) observes, 'the *flâneur* is by definition endowed with enormous leisure, someone who can take off a morning or afternoon for undirected ambling, since specific goal or a close rationing of time is antithetical to the true spirit of the *flâneur*'. In addition, it is vitally important that the *flâneur* should walk or, if need be, use public transport. Featherstone (1998: 911) asks, 'How does looking at the world through the window of a passing train differ from perceptions of the strolling *flâneur*?' But surely this is to miss a crucial point about *flânerie*. The *flâneur*'s interest is stimulated not only by the city's physical landscape but also by its smells, its sounds and the snippets of conversations that are overheard as he wanders. In a train it is more likely that the *flâneur* will prefer to observe his fellow passengers than to gaze through a window at a rapidly changing vista. Indeed the opportunity to observe how people travel in the city (and why) is what makes public transport an acceptable field for the *flâneur*'s research. The interior of the automobile, on the other hand, becomes its own private world and the concentration required to drive in the city militates against being able to read the world outside. Featherstone (1998) wonders what difference speed makes. The fact is that inside the bus, the train or, the taxi, people speak and act at normal speed. Only the city appears to move faster.

It is unsurprising perhaps that the *flâneur* can come to be seen as a somewhat sinister figure, as

something of a social deviant. According to Ferguson (1994: 25), 'the sense of disapprobation never entirely dissipates'. Indeed, *flânerie* has even been constructed as a form of criminal behaviour (McDonagh, 2002). The distinction between *flânerie* and certain unlawful activities such as voyeurism or stalking is undeniably narrow. Furthermore, it is important that the *flâneur* is willing to enter the criminal recesses of society, to live 'outside the bounds and bonds of bourgeois life' (Mazlish, 1994: 51). Yet as Ferguson (1994: 28) notes, 'the *flâneur* remains anonymous, devoid of personality, unremarkable in the crowd'. Thus, Baudelaire's *flâneur* rejoiced in his incognito (Mazlish, 1994). The *flâneur*, as Tester (1994: 2) describes him is 'a man who is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically'. It is the city that provides the ideal environment for such a man. In return the *flâneur* is ideally equipped to understand the city in a manner that is reminiscent of Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life' who 'immerses himself in the bath of the crowd, gathers impressions and jots them down only when he returns to his studio' (White, 2001: 36).

Despite Eugène Atget's attempt to forge a scientific *flânerie* through the medium of photography (White, 2001), the *flâneur's* research findings are impressionistic rather than realistic and that is arguably their greatest strength. Impressionistic as they are, they represent the city in more sociologically valid ways than travel writing or fiction can achieve despite the fact that strong claims can be made that travel writers and novelists (Harrington, 2002) are also capable of knowing and communicating their social world in profound ways. Only the *flâneur* can take on the challenge implied by Wynne and O'Connor (1998: 859) when they write, 'the transformation of city cultures is complex and demands context'.

The *flâneur* has more extended experience of his city than most travel writers are likely to possess although, as this research suggests, it is sometimes valuable to return to the city after a period of exile and read it anew. The ideal is to be able to adopt a position halfway between that of the native and that of the outside. Paraphrasing Benjamin with approval, Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk (2005: 216) notes that whereas 'the enthusiasm for seeing a city from the outside is the exotic or picturesque...For natives of a city, the connection is always mediated by memories'. Unlike the creative writer, the *flâneur* cannot invent or re-invent the city even though his reading of the city must inevitably be his and his alone.

The preceding comments relate directly to the study of cities in general. They are equally relevant, however, to the sociological understanding of sporting places within the city. It is surprising, but not at all uncommon, to meet sociologists of sport who spend little or no time in the places where people play and watch sport. Yet, it is in such places that we, as social observers or simply idle wanderers, can learn most about why, in what ways, sport matters to people in the early twenty-first century. Through seeking to developing an understanding of sporting places, we can make a contribution to wider sociological debates as well as enlivening our sub-discipline.

## **Conclusion: Future Prospects, Hopes and Fears**

Much of what has been argued here is as relevant to the teaching of sport sociology as it is to research in the field. We cannot hope to engage the interest of our students in the first instance by subjecting them to arid debates between various theoretical perspectives. At the outset, sport must taking precedence over theory. How we talk about sport, however, relies heavily on a theoretical understanding (not always present in existing work within the sub-discipline) of how it impacts on people's lives, the memories that they have and the social spaces they inhabit.

An agenda exists which favours the natural sciences rather than the social sciences and humanities. That is a fact of academic life. It does not mean, however, that we should give up on the possibility of gaining greater acceptance from mainstream sociology. Nor does it prevent us from addressing our own shortcomings and extending the sociology of sport in potentially exciting ways. In this respect, both memory and space present interesting possibilities.

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# East Asian Sport Thoughts

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