

Jørn Møller
Idrætsfork, Denmark

Sports Research as Cultural Research in the Process of Globalization

Anthropology has a number of classical paradoxes: should the anthropologist try to exert her influence when she witnesses rituals that are barbaric according to her own moral standards, or should she act as a neutral observer? What if the rituals are

staged in her honor? What if they offend human rights? What if her own countrymen are subjected to them? Should the anthropologist report the deep secrets of taboo revealed to her by the shaman of the tribe as a privilege but under condition that they are never passed on? Is a promise a promise, or is it only valid in one's own cultural context? Should the researcher rather completely abstain from the knowledge?

Similar dilemmas occur when the native cultural researcher chooses to "go international." The paradoxes are present in at least three fields: the field of relevance, the field of language, and the field of formalities. For example, if a native researcher uses his skills and efforts to develop knowledge that is relevant largely to the international community, he might deprive the local society of valuable contributions to its own cultural process. Similarly, there is considerable pressure on Danish researchers to speak to an international audience in the English language. (Of course, you can present your research in Danish, but if you want a career, you'd better do it in English.) This undermines the cultural researcher's contribution to the care and maintenance of the Danish language, which is, from a cultural point of view, hardly progressive. In addition, presenting complicated matters in a foreign language has its problems: first, a halting, clumsy language, and second, the difficulties of translation. The best example in our field is the difficulty of translating simple word like "sport," which has many cultural connotations and shades of meaning.

Finally, the main road to an academic career is through international recognition, the standards of which are copied from the natural sciences. The catchword is "globalization," the immediate motivation is the European Union, and in the rush there is little time for reflection. This paper argues that these standards might be well suited for the accumulation of "universal" knowledge characteristic of the natural sciences, but they are not applicable to historical research and cultural knowledge. Historical and cultural knowledge are less about piling up information than being able to enter public discourses and thus contribute to argument and debate.

Globalization has its hopes and prospects, but culturally you may also "go native" (or, rather, "go primitive") when you "go global." The conclusion is not that I should never present this or any paper in a foreign language in an international setting. Rather, the conclusion is that the cultural researcher (the sport historian) must walk on two legs by being responsible to both the local tribe and the international society. Correspondingly, local institutions should reflect this dual responsibility in their accreditation criteria, and international groups should acknowledge that cultural relevance is a very tricky issue. What might be extremely relevant in a local context might be uninteresting in an international setting and *vice versa*. The biggest risk is the development of an independent "congress" culture, of no real value to anyone.