

## **BUEN VIVIR [SUMAK KAWSAY]: NOTES ON THE CONSIDERATION OF SPORT AS A CULTURAL COMMONS**

*BEM VIVER [SUMAK KAWSAY]: NOTAS SOBRE A CONSIDERAÇÃO DO ESPORTE COMO UM RECURSO COMUM CULTURAL*

*BIEN VIVIR [SUMAK KAWSAY]: NOTAS SOBRE LA CONSIDERACIÓN DEL DEPORTE COMO UN RECURSO COMÚN CULTURAL*

**Peter Donnelly\***

---

### **Keywords**

Commons.  
Public Sociology.  
Democratization.  
Enclosure.

**Abstract:** In this paper, an examination of the traditional commons is followed by an explanation of the ways that people have resisted their enclosure – with particular reference to struggles to retain space for the purposes of recreation. I then consider recent research on the commons, and the growing identification of new commons. The final part of the paper explores the implications of considering sport as a cultural commons, and the paper concludes by arguing that the commons provide an exemplary theme for a public sociology of sport.

### **Palavras-chave**

Recursos comuns.  
Sociologia Pública.  
Democratização.  
Cercamento.

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, um exame dos recursos comuns tradicionais é seguido de uma explicação sobre como as pessoas têm resistido ao seu cercamento – com referência específica às lutas para preservar o espaço voltado à recreação. A seguir, examino a pesquisa recente sobre os recursos comuns e a identificação cada vez maior de outros recursos desse tipo. Na parte final, o artigo explora as implicações de se considerar o esporte como um recurso comum de caráter cultural e conclui argumentando que os recursos comuns são um tema exemplar para uma sociologia pública do esporte.

### **Palabras clave**

Recursos comunes.  
Sociología Pública.  
Democratización.  
Cercamiento.

**Resumen:** En este artículo, un examen de los recursos comunes tradicionales antecede una explicación sobre cómo las personas han resistido a su cercamiento –con referencia específica a las luchas para mantener el espacio dedicado a la recreación. A continuación, examino la investigación reciente sobre los recursos comunes y la identificación cada vez mayor de otros recursos de ese tipo. En la parte final, el artículo explora las implicaciones de considerar el deporte como un recurso común cultural y concluye argumentando que los recursos comunes son un tema ejemplar para una sociología pública del deporte.

\* University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.  
E-mail: peter.donnelly@utoronto.ca



*In São Paulo, children do not learn to play [football] on patches of common land – because there is no common land anymore...*

Sócrates Brasileiro S. de S. V. de Oliveira (2014) on “the death of public space”<sup>1</sup>

## 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

Among the many progressive changes that are occurring in South America, the constitutional transformations in Bolivia and Ecuador are some of the most intriguing to this outsider. In fact, my decision to devote this article to the *commons* was motivated by Bollier’s (2014) comment: “Ecuador takes first steps toward a commons economy”. This led me to carry out further research on the political and cultural shifts occurring in Ecuador under the principle of *buen vivir*<sup>3</sup>, and to the recognition that similar political and cultural shifts were occurring in Bolivia under the comparable principle of *vivir bien*. Under the intellectual leadership of Alberto Acosta in Ecuador, and the political leadership of Evo Morales (the first aboriginal President of a South American country) in Bolivia, progressive and indigenous ideals have been combined to establish the principles of the right to a good life and the rights of nature (FATHEUER, 2011). These principles are being introduced without reference to the notion of development as it is understood in the Global North, and without the implication that a *good life* involves the accumulation of individual possessions.

The collective and cooperative ideals of *buen vivir/vivir bien* are closely related to the concept of the *commons*, and in this paper an examination of the traditional commons is followed by an explanation of the ways that people have struggled against their *enclosure* – with particular reference to struggles to retain space for the purposes of recreation. I then consider recent research on the commons, and the growing identification of new commons. The final part of the paper explores the implications of considering sport as a cultural commons, and the paper concludes by arguing that the commons provide an exemplary theme for a public sociology of sport.

## 2 TRADITIONAL COMMONS

Before the gradual ideological emergence of *possessive individualism* during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (MACPHERSON, 1962) in the form of private property, many traditional societies enjoyed a collective sense of ownership of land and water, and the resources they provided. The “right” to use these common spaces was widely recognized – even by “landowners” who, by designation and inheritance, technically “owned” these spaces. Thus, even in societies where “private” spaces are recognized and protected by their “owners”, at various times in their history certain spaces have been acknowledged as public/shared spaces – spaces that are held in *common*. The first documented recognition of this was in Roman law: *res nullius* (property that belonged to no-one) acknowledged what did not belong to anyone, but may be appropriated

<sup>1</sup> Sócrates was cited by Zirin (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this paper were originally presented at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual conference in Québec City, Canada, in November, 2013 (DONNELLY, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> *Buen vivir* (“good living” – ECUADOR), or *vivir bien* (“living well” – BOLIVIA), “refers to the Andean concept of living in harmony with the community and nature, ensuring the sufficient means to live well without always seeking more and thereby depleting the resources of the planet” (FIDLER, 2014). With regard to *sumak kawsay*: “The Andean indigenous peoples have contributed to this debate [on “good living”] by applying other epistemologies and cosmovisions. One of their greatest contributions is the notion of *sumak kawsay*, “life to the fullest”. The notion of development is inexistent in these peoples’ cosmovision since the future is behind us because the concept implies something we do not look at or know. In the Andean cosmovision, the past is in front of us; we see it, we know it, it is ours, and we walk with it” (THE REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR, 2010, p. 18).

(e.g., fish in a lake; trees in a forest); *res communis* (now referred to as “public domain” or as the “common heritage of mankind”) – recognized what could be used by all, but could not be appropriated anyone (e.g., a river, the air).

In the past, where there has been the common right to access certain spaces, and where that right still exists in some societies, those spaces include, for example:

- the *shoreline* of lakes, rivers and the ocean, and the lakes, rivers and oceans themselves – to give all people access to fresh water, to fish, and to recreation (often recognized in law as *riparian* rights);
- *hills* and *mountains* – giving people access to grazing for their animals (still recognized as, for example, range land), hunting and trapping, mineral resources, sacred places, and to recreation;
- *woodland* and *forests* – giving people access to wood for fuel and construction, gathering activities (e.g., collecting nuts, fruit, mushrooms, etc.), hunting and trapping, and to recreation; and
- *pasture* land – giving people access to grazing for their animals, to the possibility of planting and harvesting vegetables and other crops, and to recreation.

For the purposes of this paper, note that the feature underlying all of these examples of commons is *recreation*.

Common rights to certain agricultural lands still exist in many countries – for example, *ejido* in Mexico, *satoyama* in Japan, and *allmende* in Switzerland. The “right to roam”/“freedom to roam” on private land, especially for recreational purposes, is also widespread especially in Scandinavian countries, in Scotland, and in a more limited way in England and Wales. That right is associated with the responsibility to avoid damage to crops or property and to respect the exclusive privacy of others. Access for sport and recreational purposes may also be subject to negotiation between potential users and landowners – for example, rock climbers attempting to achieve access to cliffs on “private” land, or kayakers negotiating access to “private” stretches of river. However, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, common land and commoners’ rights have been increasingly subject to privatization, usually referred to as *enclosure*, and have been – and still are – the object of struggle and negotiation.

### 3 ENCLOSURE

Although I grew up in a country where some open spaces were routinely referred to, or even formally named as “the common” or “commons”, it was not until I was a graduate student that I began to understand, and to question the concept. In reading Marxist social history and sport history<sup>4</sup>, I became aware of the struggles in the United Kingdom (UK), particularly during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, for open spaces and recreational spaces. The fact that these struggles were contemporaneous with the emergence in England of the organized sports that were to have such a powerful impact on world-wide physical cultures made these struggles even more meaningful. By the late 1980s I began to incorporate the idea of the commons into my research on recreational land use (e.g., DONNELLY, 1986; 1993).

<sup>4</sup> The Marxist historians include, Barrington Moore (1966) and E.P. Thompson (1966, 1991), and, more recently, Peter Linebaugh (2014) and Jeanette Neeson (1996); Marxist and progressive social (sport) historians include, Hugh Cunningham (1980), Stephen Jones (1986), John Lowerson (LOWERSON; MYERSCOUGH, 1977) and Robert Malcolmson (1973).

Commons came to be recognized and defined by the threat of and the fact of their *enclosure* – and that is still the case today. Although enclosures and clearances (of peasants and tenant farmers from the land they worked) had occurred earlier, and Game Laws restricting the right to hunt had been imposed on “Royal Forests” in the UK since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the start of the most significant phase of enclosure is often traced to the new Game Laws introduced in 1671. Traditional rights to hunt on common land were severely limited by laws that restricted the right to possess weaponry, and reserved the right to hunt to property owners (MUNSCHE, 1981). These were followed by increasing numbers of Game Laws and Enclosure Acts during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period of privatization that is identified by a number of theorists (e.g., C.B. Macpherson, E.P. Thompson) as the origin of modern capitalism. As Gruneau (2014, p. 8) notes, although “some radical groups during the revolutionary period had argued that the land belonged to all people as a right, because God had created all men as equals”, the new “late seventeenth century game laws reaffirmed [instead] the principle that ‘the people’ had no such rights”.

The conversion of traditional forms of land tenure to private property met with continual resistance. “The broad textbook generalizations tell us that this popular struggle was a failure, that enclosure went ahead, and often add the editorial comment that resisting it was just a matter of short-sighted (if economically needy) traditionalists standing in the way of progress” (CALHOUN, 1994, p. 224)<sup>5</sup>. Progress, in this case, implies the development of capitalism, and resistance, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was increasingly focused on recreational space. Already in 1824, for example, Robert Slaney (*apud* RULE, 1986, p. 216) stated that “owing to the inclosure of open lands and commons, the poor have no place in which they may amuse themselves in summer evenings, when the labour of the day is over, or when a holiday occurs”. And it is in terms of recreational space that resistance to enclosure met with some success. As Thompson (1993, p. 126) notes, for example: “London and its environs would have no parks today if commoners had not asserted their rights, and as the nineteenth century drew on rights of recreation were more important than rights of pasture, and were defended vigilantly by the Commons Preservation Society”. The Commons Preservation Society, now known as the Open Spaces Society (<http://www.oss.org.uk>), still exists, and is still involved in struggles to preserve the remaining patches of common land – most recently, for example, in opposition to the demand for land associated with the London 2012 Olympics.

As Bertrand Russell (1935, p. 17) suggested, “The idea that the poor should have leisure has always been shocking to the rich”, but organizations such as the Commons Preservation Society and other middle class advocates of “rational recreation”, supported by working class resistance, were able to negotiate for the existence of parks and playgrounds. In doing so, they created the spaces for the form and emergence of modern sport. Sports came to be played in specific “enclosed” spaces rather than in wide-open spaces – a characteristic that brought with it all of the attendant consequences regarding regulation and control (cf., EICHBERG, 1986; BALE, 1993; 2003).

#### 4 RECENT RESEARCH AND THE “NEW” COMMONS

Most of the modern interest in the commons can be traced to economists, and particularly to Garrett Hardin’s influential article, *The tragedy of the commons*. In this early precursor of neoliberal thinking, Hardin (1964, p. 1244) laid out a fable: “Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons

<sup>5</sup> See also the subsequent discussion of Hardin (1964).

[...] As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximize his gain". The "tragedy of the commons" is that the commons are ultimately ruined by over-grazing as each herdsman seeks profit maximization. Hardin's argument is based on three supposedly self-evident assumptions (DISKO; KRANAKIS, 2013, p. 14):

- a. the grass is a subtractable resource – each animal's consumption diminished the supply for the rest;
- b. the villagers are only motivated by the aim of maximizing their short term profit; and
- c. the villagers were too stupid to realize the perverse game structure in which they were caught, did not communicate with each other, and were unable to reflexively modify their behaviours to avoid the "tragedy".

Despite the numerous critiques of Hardin's argument, the article has been cited over 25,000 times in academic literature<sup>6</sup> and the citations have usually used Hardin's fable as "an irrefutable argument for the superior efficiency of... privatization" (HARVEY, 2011, p. 101). The most sustained critique of Hardin came from Nobel Prize winning economist, Elinor Ostrom (1990), and others, who pointed out numerous examples from around the world of commons that work perfectly well as communities negotiated their use in a cooperative manner. David Harvey's (2011, p. 101) more succinct critique, which presumes that "If the cattle were held in common, of course, the metaphor would not work", becomes one of the better arguments for socialism that I have heard recently, with Harvey pointing out that the real problem was private property (the cattle), and individual utility-maximizing behaviour.

Hardin's article stimulated two oppositional trajectories. In the first, capitalists found a fresh justification for privatizing "everything" – something that has become painfully evident in the new enclosures of the neo-liberal revolution. In the second, the critiques led to a great deal of new theory and research on the "commons". Ostrom (1990) and other economists gathered anthropological, historical and sociological evidence to show the various ways that people had managed "common pool resources" (CPR), but the critical economic approaches were somewhat limiting, and work opened up when Bonnie McCay (1996, p. 112) proposed a social constructivist perspective – what she called a "social/community paradigm" for understanding commons, which views people as "social beings trying to come to some collective agreement about common problems".

A combination of economic and social constructionist approaches provides the context for Hardt and Negri's (2009) work on the *Commonwealth* [*Common wealth*], especially in their identification of the paradox of the commons:

In the era of globalization, issues of the maintenance, production, and distribution of the common [...] in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central [...] Contemporary forms of capitalist production and accumulation in fact, despite their continuing drive to privatize resources and wealth, paradoxically make possible and even require expansion of the commons (p. viii-ix).

While Hardt and Negri's optimism is welcomed, it seems that capital and governments have often found it easier to privatize public goods such as weather forecasting and the radio spectrum rather than producing an "expansion of the commons."

<sup>6</sup> Citations reported on Google Scholar; this is significantly more citations than has been achieved, for example, by Crick and Watson's article reporting the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA.

Harvey's work reveals two further paradoxes. Noting that thinking about the commons often polarizes "between private-property solutions [and] authoritarian state intervention" (2011, p. 101), Harvey (2014) points out that authoritarian state intervention paradoxically often enables privatization. Further, as suggested previously, current interest in the commons (in the academy, in communities, and in activist organizations such as Occupy) may often be triggered by recognition that a public good previously taken for granted is now being privatized. As Harvey (2014) explains:

[...] further enclosures of the commons (from land and water to intellectual property rights) have expanded a terrain on which capital can freely operate. The privatisation of water provision, social housing, education and health care and even war making, the creation of carbon trading markets and the patenting of genetic materials have given capital the power of entry into many areas of economic, social and political life that were hitherto closed to it (p. 235).

Thus, perhaps the biggest shift in the last decade has been an ongoing recognition and identification of "new" commons – the digital, the cultural, the biological, and the intellectual – all defined by their enclosure or threat of enclosure. Hess's (2008) map of the "new commons" offers the following classifications in addition to *traditional* commons: *cultural* commons, *medical and health* commons, *neighbourhood* commons, *infrastructure* commons, *global* commons, *markets as commons*, and *knowledge* commons. The main difference between traditional and new commons is that the new commons are often not characterized by the logic of scarcity and exclusionary uses that apply, for example, to pasture land (HARVEY, 2011). Hardt and Negri (2009) point out that the cultural common

is dynamic, involving both the product of labor and the means of future production [for example, we can all listen to the same radio broadcast at the same time]. This common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the *social practices* we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth (p. 350, emphasis added).

Although there is an abundance of recent social scientific research on the commons, and although the title of this paper refers specifically to sport as a *cultural* commons (one of the social practices noted above), a persistent search over two years has led to the discovery of fewer than five sport-related articles that refer to any aspect of the new commons. Jay Scherer, with David Rowe (2013) and with Michael Sam (2012), published the only works that I was able to find referring to *infrastructural* commons. They reference the digital/cultural commons in sport, writing about the struggle to maintain free-to-air broadcasting of major events such as the Olympics against the threat of enclosure by various forms of privatized subscription broadcasting. With reference to the *knowledge* commons, only Malcolm MacLean (2014), as far as I know, has ventured into this area with his examination of the intellectual production process in sport studies in the modern corporate university – again with reference to the enclosure of knowledge. The only article I found that actually refers to sport as a *cultural* commons concerns a single sport – David Fagundes' (2011) examination of roller derby as a constructed cultural commons.

By claiming that the social practices of sport, in fact all physical culture, may be considered as a *cultural* commons, I recognize that I am stepping into uncharted territory. And while I was researching the new commons research and theory, I became deeply skeptical. Hess's (2008) map of the new commons, which lists some 50 or 60 distinct "new commons", is not even

complete. For example, human bodies and biological material are now also being considered as a commons and, of course, are subject to enclosure (privatization and commercialization) in all kinds of ways, but are not on the map. It began to seem that the concept of the “commons” had the potential to become all things to all people; that some scholars were falling in love with the concept to the extent that others have referred to their work as “romancing the commons” (see, for example, McCAY, 1998).

However, what finally persuaded me of its value as a collective concept is the way in which the commons *stands in contrast* to the “private”. In a neoliberal world – where the private is normalized; where assumptions about the “rational choice” of private ownership dominate; where we are continually exposed to advertising for privatized products and services; where everything is branded, or sponsored, or owned; and where material accumulation is a major determinant of the worth of human beings – it becomes extremely useful to have a powerful counterpoint; a concept that combines the collective, the cooperative, those aspects of life that we share in common and negotiate their management together.

## 5 SPORT AS A CULTURAL COMMONS

Lewis Hyde (2010, p. 18) defines *cultural commons* as “that vast store of un-owned ideas, inventions and works of art that we have inherited from the past and that we continue to create”. Others add social and cultural practices to the definition. Robert Darnton’s (2010) *New York Times* review of *Common as Air* refers to Hyde’s “eloquent and erudite plea for protecting our cultural patrimony from appropriation by commercial interests”. Which raises the question, is it too late to protect our physical cultural patrimony from appropriation by commercial interests? To what extent have our sports, physical activities and active forms of recreation been enclosed? Or, as I have phrased it previously, “who owns sport?” (DONNELLY, 2013).

The founders of modern organized sports – those who adapted people’s games by writing specific rules and forming local, national and international sports organizations, many of which are still in existence today – did not claim to *own* the sports they codified and institutionalized. They created exclusive clubs and organizations, used amateur and other rules to determine who they would play with, and against, but they did not try to prevent others from playing those sports.

In fact, through churches, schools and youth organizations, they very often encouraged others to play – but usually not with or against them. Older forms of the games were discouraged<sup>7</sup>, and competitive sports came to be enclosed in a literal sense – on courts and fields marked by lines, and in stadia and arenas. Those who wrote the rules and formed the organizations, and their successors, became the stewards of sports – the trustees who came to be entrusted by the players and their families, and the fans of sport, with the governance of activities that, it should be noted, anyone may participate in without reference to them.

Two key moments characterize the privatizing enclosure of sports. The first was the emergence of professionalism during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, marking the start of a long period of struggle between the “moral entrepreneurs” of strict amateurism, who focused on the reformist nature of sports, and the business entrepreneurs who brought sports into the entertainment industry as commercial opportunities (cf., GRUNEAU, 2013; GRUNEAU;

<sup>7</sup> They have not completely disappeared; there are still examples of older forms of “folk football”, and folk games revivals in several countries are beginning to preserve older aspects of human physical cultural heritage.

WHITSON, 1993). The second was the “Prolympic” moment (DONNELLY, 1996), characterized largely by the Los Angeles 1984 Olympics, when finances deriving from television broadcasting and corporate sponsors resulted in a convergence of amateurism and professionalism into what has been referred to as a “global sport monoculture”.

Thus, I argue, we all own sport – sport is a part of the *cultural commons*; but the potentially profitable aspects of sport have been enclosed (privatized and commercialized), largely as a part of the entertainment industry. This results in the absurd labour relations of professional sports. Although some professional athletes receive a great deal of financial remuneration, it is difficult to imagine another legal area of labour where “owners” are able to “draft”, “buy”, “sell” and “trade” their “workers” with little regard for the rights or wishes of those workers. “Third party ownership” of individual players on professional soccer teams, and investors in the careers of professional tennis players and golfers, represents an even more disturbing trend<sup>8</sup>.

But even many forms of sport that do not attract television coverage or ticket-buying fans have been subject to privatization and commercialization. Numerous businesses are involved in manufacturing and supplying shoes, athletic clothing and uniforms, and equipment, and marketing those products to participants (and fans) at every level of sport participation. These are supplemented by, for example, privatized services to provide instruction, advanced training, and support for player/participant development at all levels of sports, and privatized medical and therapeutic services for those whose bodies are damaged as a consequence of their participation. The sport tourism industry is growing as communities recognize the business opportunities that emerge not only from hosting major sports events, but also from hosting events such as youth sport tournaments. Even non-professional sports are being enclosed by entrepreneurs who develop new forms of competition (e.g., Tough Mudder, Warrior Dash and other forms of obstacle races) as profit making businesses, or private agencies that charge significant fees to organize events that were formerly organized by clubs and volunteers (e.g., marathons and other running events)<sup>9</sup>.

However, rather than continue to define the *cultural commons* of sport by its enclosure, it is important to consider those forms of sport that retain essential features of a commons. The ideal types here are pick-up games and other self-organized sports. They are usually played without referees (or coaches, or trainers); they are flexible and adaptable; and they are often inclusive (cf., BISHOP, 2009; SANGER, 2007). As Coakley (1983) noted, in comparison to formal, adult-controlled sports (for children), informal player-controlled sports offer four elements that participants enjoy: more action; more personal involvement; a challenging and exciting experience (e.g., close scores); and opportunities to resolve disputes while maintaining and reaffirming friendships. Many adults enjoy these same features of self-organized sports, which accounts for the popularity of shinny, beer leagues in ice hockey, Sunday morning and pub football (soccer) leagues, co-rec<sup>10</sup> softball, pick-up basketball, and so on<sup>11</sup>.

Even some more institutionalized sports have maintained a high degree of player control. These include: Ultimate (Frisbee); snowboarding; skateboarding; BMX biking; roller

<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to imagine a skilled worker in any other form of business being “owned” by his or her boss, or by a consortium of businessmen from outside the company.

<sup>9</sup> The fitness industry, also an enclosure of the *cultural commons* of physical culture, has followed a parallel trajectory over a similar period of time.

<sup>10</sup> Co-recreational, i.e., open to all genders.

<sup>11</sup> The Makana Football League on Robben Island in the 1980s was one of the more striking examples of a self-organized sport, organized against all odds (KORR; CLOSE, 2008).

derby; surfing; rock climbing; and others. These are all sports where players have reached the highest levels of achievement through practice, creative endeavour, and peer teaching and support. These achievements have been made without the control of sports administrators, coaches, sport psychologists and other agents and agencies that, in the more institutionalized sports (see below), serve to dis-empower players, and remove their control over the rules and ability to innovate.

## 6 SOME IMPLICATIONS OF CONSIDERING SPORT AS A CULTURAL COMMONS

Thinking about sport as a *cultural* commons raises some interesting and interrelated implications. These include:

*a. Increased sensitization to new enclosures:* As I have been discussing the implications of considering sports as a *cultural* commons with various scholars, they have identified some of the ways in which they see sports being enclosed. For example, my colleagues Bruce Kidd (CANADA) and Josey Field (UK) each independently recognized the ways that various running races and endurance events have been privatized, some to the point where costs were being identified as a disincentive for participation. Others have pointed to the lack of democratic decision making as an example of the way that sports are being enclosed. The process(es) by which these new enclosures are occurring represent an important avenue for future research – what are the models for the entrepreneurs?; how complicit and/or compliant are the participants?; and so on.

*b. A renewed understanding of institutionalization:* I have been growing increasingly suspicious of research suggesting that the process of institutionalization of a sport inevitably implies a loss of player control (a form of enclosure). Above I gave several examples of sports (e.g., rock climbing, Ultimate, roller derby) that, while institutionalized, retain a high degree of player control. For others, especially those that have become Olympic sports, the process of institutionalization also became a process of enclosure, to the point where participants have partly, or mostly lost control of their sport (e.g., BMX biking [under control of UCI – the International Cycling Union], snowboarding, freestyle skiing [both under control of FIS – the International Ski Federation], and windsurfing [now under control of ISAF – the International Sailing Federation]). The process(es) of institutionalization have only partially been examined in the case of snowboarding. Some factions in rock climbing, Ultimate and roller derby have Olympic aspirations, and the internal struggles over control in these sports represent potentially important case studies of enclosure.

*c. Player control:* The achievements of participants in player-controlled sports have already been noted, and player control of the form, circumstances and meaning(s) of their participation places a sport fully in the *cultural* commons. Participants often engage in significant struggles and sacrifices in attempts to retain control of their participation. For example, Terje Haakonsen (NORWAY), who was considered to be the best snowboarder in the world in 1998, rejected an opportunity to compete at the Nagano 1998 Olympics. He said: “Snowboarding is about fresh tracks and carving powder and being yourself and not being judged by others; its not about nationalism and politics and money” (as quoted by PERMAN, 1998, p. 61).

Another good example is the following striking and thoughtful extract from an Ultimate online magazine, in which Van Heuvelen (2013) is advocating player-owned teams as a means of retaining control: “The problem with the MLU [Major League Ultimate] and AUDL [American

Ultimate Disc League] is not their ambition, it's their poverty of imagination. Their first failure is to assume that the best way to define a league's success is by the metrics of profit that drive the NBA [National Basketball Association] and NFL [National Football League]". Van Heuvelen goes on to outline a way to develop a professional league that is entirely consistent with Ultimate's place in the cultural commons: "We could just as easily professionalize ultimate as a series of teams, incorporated as nonprofit organizations, that work collectively to form a league whose highest goal would be to showcase 'the ultimate form of athletic competition' [...] We would also protect ourselves from the blinkered vision of a few people with access to money. Decision-making in the MLU and AUDL rests with the owners, who evidently assume that to market ultimate, we have to make it more like other sports. But as Ben Wiggins has eloquently argued, the player-controlled nature of the game is a unique feature that could conceivably distinguish ultimate from the NBA and NFL". Again, to the extent that player control and institutionalization are related, these struggles make important case studies.

*d. Player relations and democratization:* In the United States in 1982, there was an extraordinary cultural moment – for solidarity and fund-raising during a NFL players' strike, the players organized a few of their own games. However, mobilizing the *precariat* to achieve solidarity is extraordinarily difficult unless they see no other hope<sup>12</sup>. It is easy to divide and conquer professional athletes who are paid on such a wide salary scale from journeyman to superstar. As part of the strike, the NFL Players' Association produced a booklet outlining for players the reasons for the strike. It was titled: Q: "Why a Percentage of the Gross? [players were asking for 55% of league revenue] A: Because *We are the Game*" [emphasis added]. It is significant that, over 30 years after a politicized group of players were able to declare, "We are the Game", Troy Polamalu (a current NFL player for Pittsburgh), showed how far players were removed from determining the form, circumstances and meaning of their participation in a sport that is perhaps the epitome of enclosure. He was quoted as saying: "There's rule changes [sic] every year. I do wish, however, that the NFL did have a voice from the players' side, whether it's our players' union president, or team captains, or our executive committee on the players' side. Because we're the guys that realize the risk, we're the guys on the field" (ESPN, 2013).

*e. Good governance:* Shortly after the Sydney 2000 Olympics, Sunder Katwala (2000) wrote: "It is difficult to find anything else in the world quite so badly governed as international sport". He was referring to the lack of equitable representation and democratized governance, corruption, problems with financial transparency and accountability in sport organizations. If anything, the state of governance is even worse 15 years later. In concert with (c) player control and (d) player relations and democratization, achieving good governance represents another form of resistance to enclosure. From an athlete's perspective, good governance would involve transparency, accountability, and democratic representation. Some commentators have argued that, since players are the most crucial component of sport, they or their elected representatives should constitute 50% or more of the boards of sport organizations. Others have maintained that all decisions made by the organizations should be brought to athletes for their approval. Such a system "would require IF [International Sport Federation] and IOC [International Olympic Committee] officials to provide a rational justification for their decisions to athletes and provide a space for athletes to openly challenge decisions in future deliberations" (THIBAUT *et al.*, 2010, p. 298).

<sup>12</sup> While the high pay of a few professional athletes makes it difficult to think of them as a part of the *precariat*, professional sports is an inordinately precarious occupation.

Try to imagine what sports would look like with even a partial reversal of the enclosures that have occurred in the *cultural* commons of sport – if the players controlled the game.

## 7 CONCLUSION: THE COMMONS AND PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY

In a forthcoming article, I argue for a public sociology of sport:

A relevant and engaged sociology of sport can contribute to the terms of the debate, not just by adding to the body of knowledge, but also by having researchers who specifically draw the connections between their work and the larger debates and problems [in society], and by seeking ways to engage various publics when disseminating that research. In this way, the sociology of sport not only continues to contribute to the resolution of the major problems facing the world today, but also may help to secure its own place in the academy (...) With modern communications, research that “makes a difference” can, if we choose to use them, reach those publics in a more timely way (DONNELLY, 2015).

The commons, and their enclosure, are central to major debates in the social sciences, and in society – but the sociology of sport has not yet engaged directly with these debates. In fact, in the broader field of physical culture, the only direct engagement with the commons is among activists attempting to preserve traditional commons for recreation (e.g., ILES, 2007).

The commons are central to various debates against neo-liberalism; cooperatives and commons are seen by many as the only alternatives to unregulated capitalism (e.g., DE PEUTER; DYER-WITHEFORD, 2010); and, as noted in the introduction, Ecuador and Bolivia are attempting to move toward a commons economy<sup>13</sup>. If the sociology of sport is to engage with those debates, it is necessary first to consider the place of physical culture in this conversation, and then make connections to the larger debates. For example, engaging with the commons as a counter to the private helps to sustain the critique of corporate/bourgeois sport and to focus much more attention on the collective, the cooperative, and the commons in physical culture. It encourages us to attend to the enormous diversity of physical cultural production, to the homogenization of physical cultural forms and the emergence of monocultures, and to processes of reproduction and transformation of physical cultural forms.

A recent report from the *Theos Think Tank* in the UK asserts that: “Sport should be released from the political, economic and social demands and reclaimed for the common good” (BICKLEY; TOMLIN, 2012, p. 8). Of course it should, and in a perfect world all of the reforms to return sport to the commons outlined in the previous section would be implemented. But those reforms are more likely to be assured by a socially responsible, engaged, practical and public sociology.

So, what might sport and physical culture as an important element of *buen vivir/vivir bien*, a cultural commons of sport, look like<sup>14</sup>? Sport as entertainment would still exist, with player-owned and player-controlled teams or with management and regulations that assured the health, safety, labour and democratic rights of players. Elite athletes on representative teams would enjoy far more control of their sport organizations, a voice in the form, circumstances

<sup>13</sup> For example: “Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa has personally urged young people to achieve and fight for this open knowledge society. The long-term challenge, of course, is getting governments to whole-heartedly embrace and ratify such visions and working out in detail how Ecuador and other nations might make a smooth transition to a commons-based peer production society” (BOLLIER, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> In March, 2013, I was invited to participate in a conference in Guayaquil, Ecuador, organized by the Coordinating Ministry for Knowledge and Human Talent, on the theme of “The Role of Sport in Training of Human Talent”. At first, I thought that the theme sounded a little too functionalist, but I was impressed by the enthusiasm for increasing participation in sport and physical activity. I regret that it is only since my return to Canada that I have become aware of the political and constitutional changes that are occurring, and I now recognize that the hospitality and enthusiasm that I experienced in Ecuador was a taste of *buen vivir*.

and meaning of their involvement; they would also participate under the banner of healthy high performance. In addition, opportunities to participate in and create physical cultural forms, including sports, would be widespread and assured by public support of the time, opportunities, and spaces and places for participation and recreation – all participants would have the prerogative to negotiate the form, the circumstances, and the meaning(s) of their participation.

This article began with a comment from Sócrates. His thoughts on the appropriation, privatization and uniformity of sport also make a fitting conclusion:

The barefooted tykes kicking footballs on Rio's beaches are not doing so at liberty – they are members of *escolinhas*, Beach Soccer training clubs [...] The freedom that let Brazilians reinvent the game decades ago is long gone [...] For many years soccer has been played in different styles, expressions of the personality of each people, and the preservation of that diversity is more necessary today than ever before. These are days of obligatory uniformity in soccer and everything else. Never has the world been so unequal in the opportunities it offers and so equalizing in the habits it imposes: in this end of the century world, whoever doesn't die of hunger dies of boredom [...] Soccer is now mass-produced, and it comes out colder than a freezer and as merciless as a meat-grinder. It's a soccer for robots (SÓCRATES, cited by ZIRIN, 2014).

## REFERENCES

BALE, J. The spatial development of the modern stadium. **International Review for the Sociology of Sport**, Warsaw, v. 28, n. 2-3, p. 121-133, 1993.

BALE, J. **Sports Geography**. Abingdon: Psychology, 2003.

BICKLEY, P.; TOMLIN, S. **Give us our ball back**: Reclaiming sport for the common Good. London: Theos, 2012.

BISHOP, R. **When play was play**: Why pick-up games matter. Albany: State University of New York, 2009.

BOLLIER, D. **Ecuador takes first steps toward a commons economy**: Government sponsors research on how to transition to commoning and open networks (posted June 16). On the Commons website. Available at: <<http://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/ecuador-takes-first-step-toward-commons-economy>>. Accessed 2014.

CALHOUN, C. E. P. Thompson and the discipline of historical context. **Social Research**, New York, v. 61, n. 2, p. 223-243, 1995.

COAKLEY, J. Play, games, and sports: Developmental implications for young people. In: HARRIS, J.; PARK, R. (eds.). **Play, games and sports in cultural contexts**. Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1983. p. 431-450.

CUNNINGHAM, H. **Leisure in the Industrial Revolution**. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1980.

DARNTON, R. A republic of letters. **New York Times Sunday Book Review**, New York, aug., 2010.

DE PEUTER, G.; DYER-WITHEFORD, N. Commons and cooperatives. **Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action**, Kingston, v. 4, n. 1, p. 30-56, 2010.

DISKO N.; KRANAKIS, E. **Cosmopolitan commons**: Sharing resources and risks across borders. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013.

- DONNELLY, P. Assessing the sociology of sport: On public sociology and research that makes a difference. **International Review for the Sociology of Sport**, 2015 (Forthcoming).
- DONNELLY, P. Who Owns Sport? Some implications of considering sport as a cultural commons. Alan Ingham Keynote Address presented *In: NORTH AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT ANNUAL CONFERENCE*, 2013, Québec City.
- DONNELLY, P. 'Prolympism': Sport monoculture as crisis and opportunity. **Quest**, London, v. 48, n. 1, p. 25-42, 1996.
- DONNELLY, P. The right to wander: Issues in the leisure use of countryside and wilderness areas. **International Review for the Sociology of Sport**, Warsaw, v. 28, n. 2-3, p. 187-202, 1993.
- DONNELLY, P. The paradox of parks: Politics of recreational land use before and after the mass trespasses. **Leisure Studies**, London, v. 5, n. 2, p. 211-231, 1986.
- EICHBERG, H. The Enclosure of the body – On the historical relativity of “health”, “nature”, and the environment of sport. **Journal of Contemporary History**, London, v. 21, n. 1, p. 99-121, 1986.
- ESPN. **Troy Polamalu talks rule changes**. Available at: <[http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/9111820/troy-polamalu-pittsburgh-steelers-says-players-say-rule-changes](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/9111820/troy-polamalu-pittsburgh-steelers-says-players-say-rule-changes)>. Accessed March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
- FAGUNDES, D. **Labor and/as love**: Roller derby as constructed cultural commons. Unpublished manuscript. Available at: <[www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ECM\\_PRO\\_069642.pdf](http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/ECM_PRO_069642.pdf)>. Accessed 2011.
- FATHEUER, T. **Buen vivir**: A brief introduction to Latin America's new concepts for the good life and the rights of nature. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2011.
- FIDLER, R. A new world order for living well: Evo Morales' message of global solidarity. **The Bullet**, E-bulletin n. 1003, jun., 2014. Available at: <[www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1003.php](http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1003.php)>.
- GRUNEAU, R. Aesthetics and the politics of representation: The making of modern English sport. **Amodern**, Montreal, v. 3, 2014. Available at: <<http://amodern.net/article/aesthetics-politics-representation>>.
- GRUNEAU, R. 'Amateurism' as a sociological problem: Some reflections inspired by Eric Dunning. In: MALCOLM, D.; WADDINGTON, I. (eds.). **Matters of sport: Essays in honour of Eric Dunning**. New York, Routledge, p. 57-80, 2013.
- GRUNEAU, R.; WHITSON, D. **Hockey night in Canada**: Sport, identities, and cultural politics. Toronto: Garamond, 1993.
- HARDIN, G. The tragedy of the commons. **Science**, Washington, v. 162, n. 3859, p. 1243-1248, 1968.
- HARDT, M., & NEGRI, A. **Commonwealth**. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2009.
- HARVEY, D. The future of the commons. **Radical History Review**, New York, v. 109, p. 101-107, 2011.
- HARVEY, D. **Seventeen contradictions and the end of capitalism**. Oxford: Oxford University, 2014.
- HESS, C. Mapping the new commons. Paper presented *In: BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF THE COMMONS*, 12., Cheltenham, 2008. **Governing Shared Resources: Connecting Local Experience to Global Challenges**. England: University of Gloucestershire, 2008.

HYDE, L. **Common as air**: Revolution, art, and ownership. New York: Farrar, Straus; Giroux, 2010.

ILES, A. Of Lammas land and Olympic dreams. **Mute**, Berlin, jan., 2007. Available at: <<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/lammas-land-and-olympic-dreams>>.

JONES, S. G. **Workers at play**: A social and economic history of leisure, 1918-1939. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

KATWALA, S. **Democratising global sport**. London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2000.

KORR, C.; CLOSE, M. **More than just a game**: Football v. apartheid. London: Collins, 2008.

LINEBAUGH, P. **Stop, thief!**: The commons, enclosures, and resistance. Oakland: PM Press, 2014.

LOWERSON, J.; MYERSCOUGH J. **Time to spare in Victorian England**. Hassocks: Sussex, Harvester Press, 1977.

MACLEAN, M. (Re)Occupying a cultural commons: Reclaiming the labour process in critical sports studies. **Sport in Society**, London, v. 17, n. 10, p. 1248–1265, 2014.

MACPHERSON, C. B. **The political theory of possessive individualism**: Hobbes to Locke. Toronto: Oxford University, 1962.

MALCOLMSON, R. **Popular recreations in English society, 1700-1850**. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973.

McCAY, B. J., Common and private concerns. In: HANNA, S.; FOLKE, C.; MÄLER, K. G. (eds.) **Rights to nature**: Ecological, economic, cultural and political principles of institutions for the environment. Washington: Island, 1996. p. 111-126.

McCAY, B. J. **Oyster wars and the public trust**: Property, law, and ecology in New Jersey history. Tucson: University of Arizona, 1998.

MOORE, B. **Social origins of dictatorship and democracy**: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world. Boston: Beacon, 1966.

MUNSCHE, P. B. **Gentlemen and poachers**: The English game laws, 1761-1831. New York: Cambridge University, 1981.

NEESON, J. M. **Commoners**: Common rights, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820. Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1996.

OSTROM, E. **Governing the commons**: The evolution of institutions for collective action. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990.

PERMAN, S. The master blasts the board. **Time**, New York, p. 61, jan., 1998.

THE REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR. **National development plan – National plan for good living 2009-2013**: Building a plurinational and intercultural State [summarized version]. Quito: Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo (SENPLADES), 2010.

RUSSELL, B. **In praise of idleness & other essays**. London: George Allen; Unwin, 1935.

RULE, J. **Labouring classes in early industrial England**: 1750-1850. London, Longman, 1986.

SANGER, D. 5, 6, pickup sticks. **The Walrus**, Toronto, p. 63-67, dec./jan., 2007.

SCHERER J.; ROWE, D. (eds.) **Sport, public broadcasting, and cultural citizenship: Signal lost?** New York: Routledge, 2013.

SCHERER, J.; SAM, M. Public broadcasting, sport, and cultural citizenship: SKY's the limit in New Zealand? **Media, Culture & Society**, Glasgow, v. 34, n. 1, p. 101-111, 2012.

THIBAUT, L.; KIHL, L.; BABIAK, K. Democratization and governance in international sport: Addressing issues with athlete involvement in organizational policy. **International Journal of Sport Policy**, Minnesota, v. 2, n. 3, p. 275-302, 2010.

THOMPSON, E. P. **The making of the English working class**. New York: Vintage, 1966.

THOMPSON, E. P. **Whigs and hunters: The origins of the Black art**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.

THOMPSON, E. P. **Customs in common**. New York: The New Press, 1993.

VANHEUVELEN, B. What do we stand for? **SKYD Magazine**, mar., 2013. Available at: <<http://skymagazine.com/2013/03/what-do-we-stand-for>>.

ZIRIN, D. Brazil's legendary soccer-playing socialist medical doctor. **Pacific Standard: The Science of Society**, Santa Barbara, jun., 2014. Available at: <<http://www.psmag.com/politics-and-law/brazils-legendary-soccer-playing-socialist-medical-doctor-83065>>.

**Corresponding author:**

Peter Donnelly

University of Toronto. Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education

55 Harbord St. Toronto, ON M5S 2W6