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Public perceptions, sports ideologies and journalism (II)

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TO EXAMINE THE INFLUENCE of image of audience and the influence of sports ideologies in the construction and contents of their sport agendas it is necessary to know about the influence of image of audience and the ideology of journalist the influence of sports ideologies in the construction and contents of their agendas has not been sufficiently investigated.

The image of the public as an influence in the production of information: the effects of the images of publics on the journalist and its influence on the news production has not been worthy of the privileged attention from specialists in communication and the trend named sociology of transmitters and that is the reason why it has captivated the investigative interest to treat this topic.

It is important to know public perceptions, sports ideologies in sport journalism in a small group of the sports journalists of San Luis; Argentina and how this view influence on news elaboration, who their sources are and what their own ideas are about sports. We were working with qualitative tools interviewing a small group of sport journalist (twenty five) of the central region of Argentina.

On one hand, we aspire to examine how “the sport journalists’ perceptions of public” influences on the construction of the news and on the other hand, what sport ideologies had the sport journalist as a concomitant ingredient on news elaboration.

This aim to know to whom journalists address, recognize their perception of the public – in a context where publics are not completely known – and consider the sports unrealities and beliefs understanding sport as culture, contributes on the one hand to studies of news production which have forgotten and poorly inquired about how these journalist’s “perceptions of public” influence the sport agenda.

Historical Development of Sport

Sport has strongly influenced and interacted in the knowledge of man through his virtue to generate communication and to determine the informative process of the media creating a journalistic and communicative specialty. It has been pointed out that sport has been the most relevant cultural phenomenon in contemporary society. The sport is marvelous but it is not innocent (Eichberg, 1998).

In 1900, the Lumiere brothers’ invention arrived at the Olympic Games of Paris (1900) and later, in the Olympic Games of Berlin (1936), an experimental demonstration of the new technology of television was carried out.

The process of arrival of the new media to the sports went on constantly until the present day

with the coming of webcasting. The Olympic phenomenon is a wide and rich field for social investigation transcending the merely rigid sport frames and Olympism as well as sport in a general meaning erect themselves as points of view from where we can recognize and rethink these social phenomena.

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In the approach towards the field sports-media, we find:

- The history, communication, sociology and psychology elements and the connection of sport.
- The sport as social science and a mass media phenomenon and its synergies.
- The interaction and contradiction between sport spectacle and the popular games of a small towns.
- Sport as a social ritual with the dramatization (Rodríguez, 1995:8).
- The elements of identity and popular culture.

Modern sport has been considered as a relevant phenomenon of the 20th century. In spite of having been born in England in the 19th century as an expression of distinction of the higher classes, sport comes to professionalism during the 20th century as a counterproposal of amateurism and the traditional mass media (newspapers, radio, television) that consider it as a news ingredient of great influence, value and interest for a large sector of the audiences.

The media have been allies from the birth of sport with a different force and influence. In the first modern Olympic Games in Athens (Greece) in 1896 the covering was done by newspapers and magazines and later the cinema. In 1936 during the Olympic Games of Berlin, the television appeared as an experiment.

The modern sport that comes from the game has a strong Anglo-Saxon content (Elias & Dunning, 1992) and it has been considered as a consequence of the development of the capitalist productive forces resulting from the decrease in

the working day, urbanization and modernization of transports (Brohm, 1993:48).

The process of standardization, globalization and systematization has made possible an increasing presence in the mass communication media and has turned the relation between sports and the media in a phenomenon intimately bound.

Miquel de Moragas Spa (1999) talks about the synergies created between communications and sport and distinguishes four main levels of symbolic sport practice in contemporary society: sport as physical activity, sport as entertainment, sport in the mass media and virtual sport.

There are undoubtedly different definitions of sport and different classifications. The word sport turns out to be a polysemic concept and not a word defining a unique concept. In this matter, the Italian sport specialist Ferruccio Antonelli has pointed out that “any human activity can be called sport if it includes three integrated elements: play, agonism and movement⁷” and the Argentine researcher María Rodríguez (1995) has classified sport into: sport as physical education, sport as output, sport as part of the community and sport as entertainment.

In an analysis about the development of sport in European societies, Bart Crum (2001:10) states that the sport culture of society is the consequence of the internal differentiation in the bosom of sport and it has as distinct signs two opposite developments: “the sportification of sport” and “the de-sportification” of sport. Crum (2001:11) points out that in post-modern culture observing is the most important form of perception and the new media turn out to be catalysts and distributors of new fashions, images and styles of life. The sport as entertainment or mediatic sport or “non sport” (Moragas Spa, 1999) appears as opposite to the traditional sense of sport as physical activity and the sport as culture. Nevertheless, new synergies have been established between the media and sport and especially between television and sport. At present, the sport of the 21st century travel through the ideology of entertainment.

The television and sport seem to have been created for each other. They go together to dressing rooms, tracks, screens and stadiums. The presence of sport on the Argentine television has strongly increased in the last years.

The screens cover not only the most traditional sports like soccer, boxing and motoring but also the national team games, the world volleyball league, Latin American soccer cups, the NBA, the World Championships, the Pan American Games and the Olympic Games. The relation between TV and sport is so intimate that it has changed some regulations.

The dynamic of construction of reality of sports agenda.



THE PUBLIC'S IMAGE

All the journalists coincide with the fact that there is an audience that is interested in sports; that is to say, public interested in a kind of specialized information: sport. Sports programs have their own public integrated by sportsmen and sport managers. The public's perception is basically recognized by phone calls and secondarily by the audience's letters and their participation in contests. Journalists consider they have a public interested in sports and almost half of them believe it is a nomadic public; that is, they tune different radio sport proposals. The characterization of the public is described as a public of different ages who likes to know traditional sportsmen, is fond of local sport and listens to or watches the program even when it changes its schedule.

The NBA was demanded to have more dead times to include more commercials; the tie-break was created in tennis to shorten the matches; the rally point system in volleyball allows to add points in spite of not having the service and the feminine teams wear attractive and reduced singles; and even soccer players have to change their singles to improve the line of sight.

The process and connection between the organized sport and the most important sport federation was increased in the last year. A small group of world sports organizations brings together major sponsor companies and sell the TV rights from the sport turned an attractive element for the audience. Corruption cases have grown in world sport, the most paradigmatic case is the corruption scandal of Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA).

Sport Journalism

Within the conception of specialized journalistic information, the phenomenon of specialization in its infrastructure is also taken into account. Since 1976 we witness a constant growth in sport programs, especially soccer, in the television all over the world. Sport as a privileged ambit of social reality has a wide covering on the media and a privileged place within the public's priorities. The complexity in sport modalities has resulted in journalistic processes that were provoking the division of information into sport niches and areas particularly concerning to different groups of fans. This situation generated a transformation in the structures of journalistic companies that had to incorporate a high number of specialists dedicated to each and every sport and had to make use of a higher number of pages to deal with massified information. Sport journalism has acquired more supporters and social prestige and sport fields has become a usual setting for everyday journalism. Telling and reporting about a sport event means to talk firstly about the outcome. This constitutes the logic of a sport recognized as "production of results" (Eichberg, 1998). Then the consequences of this result and the most brilliant and interesting moves will be explained and the strengths and weaknesses of each team and sportsman on the field will be compared. A traditional characteriza-

tion about sport journalism suggests that any sport news concerns first about the result; second about who played the best and finally why it happened. These principles would be the three essential elements concerning sport information but it definitely means a poor journalism. Readers of any written media want to remember the best moves seen on television or heard on the radio. It is possible that they wish that the sport event would be told again. ■

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