

Call for contributions

Upcoming themed issue of *Sociologie de travail*

Producing sporting performance

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Contribution proposals should take the form of a text of 8000 to 10,000 characters (excluding bibliography). They must be e-mailed to the assistant editor of the journal (socio.dutravail@sciences-po.fr) before 30 October 2013.

There has been fairly extensive sociological research done since the late 1990s on activity in the sports sector. In France, much of this work has focused on subjects such as the professionalisation of sports organisations, athletes' careers, the emerging outlines of a job market in sport, or careers for university graduates in sports sciences. This research has coincided with the emergence of a structured professional "sports" sector and has largely concentrated on professions in sport, in particular the identification of specifically sports-related skills. At international level, researchers, particularly in the English-speaking world, have focused more on sexual and racial discrimination in access to the sports employment markets, and on the globalisation of these markets and its effects, exploring issues such as migration amongst sports workers.

In this relatively rich field of research, the *work involved in producing performance – in the sense of competition-oriented practice – has been less widely investigated*, despite the fact that classifications and hierarchies lie at the heart of the worlds of sport. Such research as has been done on this topic of the production of performance has taken a largely critical perspective, looking at the different ways in which that production is subordinated to the activity of athletes.

This call for contributions arises out of this recognition of the situation of sociological research on sports work. *The objective of the forthcoming special issue of Sociologie du travail is to cover research that focuses on the production of performance*, in order to provide a diversity of sociological viewpoints on these labour-intensive activities and to

go beyond a simple critique of the marketing of sports activity. In this approach, the research questions proposed to contributors are identified as open and not mutually exclusive avenues for exploration. Here, they are formulated around four major axes.

1. Organisation of the work and production of performance

Performance in sport is often individually embodied in the figure of the champion. However, producing performance demands organised work to which many actors and institutions contribute. Who does what, with whom and how to prepare athletes for competition, recruit them, train them, treat them, fund them or create their media profile? Is it possible to identify the division of roles, the alliances, the conflicts and the hierarchies that emerge with varying degrees of clarity between the different bodies, professional or otherwise, involved in producing performance (trainers, agents, doctors, managers, as well as family, friends, etc.)? How are the contributions of these different actors coordinated, whether in the detection and training of a potential elite athlete, or in the selection and differentiation of talents within the group? Another possible question concerns the mechanisms that make the collective nature of this process invisible, which focus the spotlight exclusively on the superstar and the exception. Other potential questions relate to the skills and qualifications that provide access to these professional groups, such as high-level experience of sport, scientific and technical expertise, etc.

2. Experience of the work and production of performance

Performance in sport is the outcome of long preparation, a mix of training and socialisation, commitment to learning processes and interpretation of specific experiences. Issues that could be explored here include the practice of physical preparation activities themselves, e.g. physiological care, but also the competitive arena itself, in particular the media profile of performances. How do athletes reconcile the two spheres of meaning in which their practices require them to operate: the world of high-level sport, which can often be precarious, and the “secular” world where their public entertainment is produced, funded, utilised and consumed, but where some also experience celebrity? The experience of the work in the production of performance can also be investigated through the processes of socialisation that accompany improvements in performance: what are their effects on the practices and representations of sports workers, how are these workers supported, managed or assisted in these processes? Another possible area of study could thus be the link between, on the one hand, the pleasure mechanisms associated with a form of work in which the body is the instrument, and on the other hand, the more painful experiences arising from intensive labour that places stress on bodies and minds.

3. Vagaries of the work and production of performance

Sports performance develops through processes that differ from one discipline to another, but all are marked by uncertainties and changes of fortune. Although objective, data-based research remains to be done on the subject, precariousness seems to be a feature of the careers of many athletes engaged in the production of performance. Are there ways to identify more effectively the uncertainties they face, the career

interruptions, the flexibility of their working conditions and the fragility of their economic and legal status? In addition, is it possible to describe the practices and systems used to combat the vulnerabilities and vagaries inherent in preparing for competition? The degree to which public and private sports actors are aware of these multiple factors varies greatly. Some sports disciplines include career (and post-career) support policies, but in what do these consist and what impact do they have? What is the role of international, national or local sports organisations in regulating the process of training for sports performance?

4. The markets for sport and production of performance

Sports performance is valued in disparate ways, reflecting the conditions of heterogeneous labour markets. We therefore need a better understanding of these markets, which link the distinctive properties of athletes as workers with the symbolic and monetary rewards that express their value. What are the comparative tests through which differences in performance are perceived, consolidated or argued, and by what mechanisms are they recognised, rewarded or valued? How is the commensurability of exceptional sports performance established? Do the ways in which performance is valued amplify the differences and increase the inequalities through cumulative and self-reinforcing mechanisms? How does this “sports value exchange” differ from one discipline, country and level of competition to another? Is it possible to describe the mechanisms used to regulate this equivalencing process, the network of actors who preside over it? What conflicts are there about the definition of value, and what impact do they have, particularly with respect to the institutionalisation of the criteria used to assess the sporting qualities and properties that justify the rewards? How do changes in the practice and spectacle of sport affect the economics of the assessment of specific performances?

These four axes open up multiple pathways for research, which should lead to a better understanding of the conditions, mechanisms, demands and consequences of the production of sports performance. The papers proposed should make a significant contribution to this central question, which is not confined to the issue of professionalism, developed to a different degree in different sports. Contributors are therefore asked not to confine their investigation only to so-called professional athletes. In fact, the term “sham professionalism” shows that paid athletes are not the only ones prepared to do the work needed to achieve high-level performance. In addition, research should not be restricted to sports practitioners alone; although they are often the ones in the spotlight, performance needs to be approached as a collective production. So it is important to explore the ecology of that performance and the contributions of the multiple actors (professionals, institutions, media, sponsors, spectators, family and friends, etc.), in other words to understand the athlete as a component in this productive and reproductive system. Finally, the objective of this number of the journal, with its focus on sports performance, is to take account of the variety of the ways in which the organisation, the experiences, the vagaries and the markets of the performance process are configured, by bringing together contributions on a wide range of sporting disciplines.

Potential contributors should describe their research subject and its relation to the literature, the empirical study, the materials used and the nature of the findings.

The procedure is a three-stage process:

1. Contribution proposals should take the form of a text of 8000 to 10,000 characters (excluding bibliography). They must be e-mailed to the assistant editor of the journal **before 30 October 2013**.
2. The shortlist will be established by the coordinators, and distributed no later than **15 December 2013**.
3. Authors whose proposals have been shortlisted should send their article (max 75,000 characters) to the sub-editor no later than **15 March 2014**. The articles will be anonymously reviewed under the usual conditions by the journal's editorial committee.

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