

Regionalization- an Actual Socio-economic Mega-Trend

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Abstract

The international trade system reaches almost everybody, although the average length of each link in this case is much shorter than that of the internet. The activities of national economies in some parts of the world have become increasingly regional, such as in the case of Europe, East Asia, or North America, while the Third World countries in Africa and South America are increasingly dependent on other regions without much success of intra-regional integration, despite occasional efforts. Nowadays sports play an essential role in our social life and contributes to shaping the process of regionalization. Based on the sports criteria, in time there developed separate supranational bodies, which are structured as confederations, associations, federations, organizations etc.

Key words: *Regionalization, definition, dimensions, types, theoretical background, sport journalism, sport*

Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century is marked by several parallel integration processes among the socio-economic systems of the world as long as among cultural and sport systems. The internet is becoming a geographically global system, despite being out of reach for the majority of the world's population. The international trade system reaches almost everybody, although the average length of each link in this case is much shorter than that of the internet. **The activities of national economies in some parts of the world have become increasingly regional**, such as in the case of Europe, East Asia, or North America, while the Third World countries in Africa and South America are increasingly dependent on other regions without much success of intra-regional integration, despite occasional efforts. This economic regionalization is accompanied by social

and cultural ones: migration patterns in the Big Regions serve as ready evidence for that.

It is widely recognized that the world economy has experienced an unprecedented intensification of economic and financial integration since the latter part of the twentieth century. Developments such as trade and capital account liberalization, as well as technological innovation in transport and telecommunications, have increased the international exchange of factors of production and final products. What is less often recognized is that the process of ‘globalization’ has been accompanied by the strengthening of economic and financial linkages within geographic regions. Indeed the world economy is simultaneously becoming more ‘regionalized’ and more ‘globalized’. The trend towards regional integration has been supported in many areas by regional policy initiatives, particularly in the field of trade. The result is a proliferation of regional agreements that vary widely in breadth and depth.

Relations of regionalization and sports journalism

Among the most important processes influencing at present both world civilization as a whole as well as the individual states, there belongs globalization, respectively internalization and multilateralism, but also fragmenting, respectively regionalization and integration.

Against the process of globalization, which leads to the universalization of the world economy, there functions the process of fragmenting (differentiation), resulting in its division into smaller economic entities. The regional reflection of the world economy fragmenting is the process, which is labeled as regionalism (regionalization). And it is, as well as other socio-economic mega-trends, understood in different ways.

According to L.A. Winters, it means **any policy aimed at decreasing trade barriers among countries, without regard to the fact, whether they are neighboring countries or any near countries.**

The notion of economic integration itself was rarely used in the previous century and its definition was ambiguous and sometimes unclear. Later, its characteristics emerged as a name for the situations starting from the economic approximation, though co-operation and solidarity, up to the connecting, merging, unifying. As the basic forms of economic integration, there is regarded free, or relatively free, trade, which in itself means integration, even it in its lowest form. Free trade also is, according to the neo-classics, the main reason of economic integration realization.

Joseph Nye defined international region "as a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence", and (international) regionalism as "the formation of interstate associations or groupings on the basis of regions".

Along with economic integration, we can speak about cultural and sport integration. In a few short centuries, primitive pasture games relying on balls of rocks, rags, feathers or hair transformed into global events with intricate rules, with television and the internet tracking cricket matches in Australia to soccer in Zaire.

Any sport can now attract players or audiences in any part of the globe, and yet conventional wisdom suggests that as an activity takes on global stature, it becomes more controlled and competitive, disconnecting from local origins.

Sport's purpose is no longer limited to entertainment, often intermingling with trade, business and politics. Talent, speed and innovation are recognized transnationally in business or sport, and Thomas Hylland Eriksen's essay details reasons why some sport phenomena spread while others do not: The most popular cultural products – whether books, food or sports – tend to require little culturally specific knowledge, have an “emotional, sensory or intellectual appeal” that transcends local concerns; and can be effectively marketed across borders, particularly via television or the internet. “In other words,” he writes, “low common denominators, a cheap entrance ticket and immediate gratification are factors facilitating global dissemination.” For Eriksen, soccer is a hamburger, and speed skating is akin to a husmanskost, or a Swedish fish meatball.

Competition and its regulation need not be very centralized. Global sports such as golf and tennis manage without a world championship, instead competing with a set of world tournaments, with frequent upsets of even the most dominant players, explains Rumsford. Other sports, such as cricket, undergo post-Western transformation as former British colonies tussle with traditionalists over one-day versus multiple-day matches. Rumsford maintains that a global sport such as cricket lacks a single global modernity. Nowadays sports play an essential role in our social life and contributes to shaping the process of regionalization. In sport, it is when a team has multiple "home" venues in different cities. Examples of regionalized teams include a few teams in the defunct American Basketball Association, or the Green Bay Packers, American football team, when they played in both Green Bay and Milwaukee from 1933-1994.

Thumbnailed, sport is a dimension of the economy and the economic and social relations that are created in the region. In order to prepare for the big competitions such as the European Championships, World or Olympic Games are used official sports events on the regional level. The regional competitions have gained a great extent in recent times, especially in Europe, but not only. For example:

- Mediterranean Games;
- Balkan Championships;
- Competitions of Commonwealth of Independent States;
- Nordic Games;
- Competitions of Latin countries.

These competitions are designed primarily as checks for other important confrontations in sports arenas. Many of the regional competitions are not addressing the seniors, but stop at the maximum age group of juniors and youth. On other continents, the examples are similar. Regionalization in sports is emphasized in the Persian Gulf, where we can find various sport competitions designated to the teams from that area. Ethnicity is another criterion of organization of such competition, as an example can serve the Arab Games, Southeast Asian, Pan-American, or even the Commonwealth Games or the Francophone Games.

Based on these sports criteria, in time there developed separate supranational bodies, which are structured as confederations, associations, federations, organizations etc. They admit members among adherents, especially from geographically delimited space. There are can be found exceptions, such as the Balkan Athletics Association, which accepted membership of Croatia, Armenia, Macedonia, Moldova and Cyprus, and received requests for affiliation from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine.

In this context, it is clear that sport is a useful vector towards regional integration and emphasizes regional cooperation and good neighborly relations. Beyond this goal, sports journalism, correctly implemented can serve as an opinion maker who have the ability to explain in detail the utility of regionalization through sport.

Conclusions

The decisive integration process in the world economy is becoming the process of trans-nationalization, which reflects the growing share of transnational corporations in the world gross product and world trade. It

represents, also for sports journalism, a new global division of labor. This functional form of integration includes both the internalized relationships inside the individual transnational corporations and the hierarchic nets of the externalized co-operation relationships, in which the connected transnational corporations usually dominated.

If speaking about sports competitions, it is easier to find unified regional values through regular sport or debate meetings, than in case of sports journalism, as it presents at regional level a greater heterogeneity. It will be difficult to harmonize preferences and professional lines of journalists from different countries using different languages and having different values and objectives. This is not true for North Americans that however is a completely separate example of different possibilities for regionalization. The tradition of common professional leagues of Canada and the USA (baseball, ice hockey, basketball, soccer or American football) is so strong that it has become indestructible in this century. Huge performance, generating tens of millions of dollars, has unified in sports journalists of the two countries, which pursue the same professional lines. Practically, they can be considered in different camps only in international competitions where their countries are facing directly.

Another example is table tennis, with annual meetings between continental teams of Europe and Asia, or idea of the French Athletics Federation that organizes annually a team competition, named Decanathion, that is attended by Balcanic or Northern European teams. All these are examples of regionalization in sports that are sustained intensely by sport journalists, who manage to convince and attract the public opinion towards such type of competitions, paving the way for organizers of such events that are now expected by the public.

A recent example that comes to mind appeared at the World Cup in Brazil in 2014, when sports journalists, beyond the national preferences and through the exact statistics and detailed analysis, generated a distanced dispute between the two major football continents, Europe and South America. The general idea that a European team has not ever won the supreme title in South American reverberated throughout the month reserved for the biggest soccer competition of the last four years.

Another intriguing approach might center in on conflicts among sports or even disdain for a sports culture. Indeed, the book's closing essay, by Gary Armstrong, centers on the 2005 national election in Liberia when international soccer star George Weah lost to Harvard-educated

grandmother Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and offers a reminder of sport's limited power. Gender concerns, economic troubles and diverse talents can outweigh the media attention directed at major figures in sports. Despite sport's special appeal and symbolism, societies expect responsibility from organizers and individual players.

Much of sport's power is derived from the narratives of players and teams that emerge over time, and over-commercialization, rapid growth, intrusive nationalization, arrogant celebrity hierarchies as well as relentless quests for victory or profits that can taint those stories.

Sport and sports journalism are two distinct concepts, but inextricably linked. Moreover, we have here a triangle that is completed with economics that lead and dictate specific strategies in sports or sports journalism.

In an era where professionalism is the cornerstone of all actions and economic regularities have been functioning already for several decades, the relationship between the three cannot be left aside.

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