

RESPONSE

LECTURE

The Political Silence of Athletes: Funding Dependency and the Myth of Sport – Politics Separation



Wednesday, 26 August 2026



14.00 – 15.30



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The relationship between sport and politics has long rested on an ideological fiction: that the two spheres are, and should remain, autonomous. This assumption ties to what Coakley (2015) calls the Great Sport Myth – the conviction that sport is inherently pure and good, a belief that obscures how sport is sponsored despite its costs and often lets elites appropriate public money for private gain. Yet the sociology of sport repeatedly shows this separation to be illusory: sport is embedded in political and economic power. The myth does not describe reality so much as discipline it, demanding that athletes «stick to sports». This passage argues that athletes' political reticence is not genuine apoliticism but a rational response to their entanglement in the sport–politics nexus. Literature shows governments fund elite sport instrumentally, so federations, facilities, and stipends are mediated by political actors. Athletes reliant on state programmes or connected sponsors thus face material risk when they dissent, with documented professional, financial, and reputational costs. Athlete behaviour should therefore be analysed through the institutional and economic relations in which athletes are embedded – making the scarcity of activism evidence of a system that rewards silence. The lecture will be devoted to the above-mentioned issue and to a preliminary outline of an international study of athletes in the context of their political activism.

ABOUT DOBROŚLAW MAŃKOWSKI:



Dobrosław Mańkowski, PhD, is a sociologist. Before becoming an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology of Sport and Health, Institute of Sociology at the University of Gdańsk, he worked in various areas of sport, gaining experience in the organisation of sporting events and other cultural events. He subsequently worked for an ice hockey sports club, the Polish Luge Federation, and the Polish Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation. He then undertook doctoral research on the social factors of survival or erosion of sports clubs in Poland during the period of systemic transformation after 1989. His current main research fields include the sociology of sport, sociology of organisations, political sociology, social change, and globalisation processes. His scholarly work is informed by phenomenological sociology and critical sociology. Outside academia, he is a fan of many sports, ranging from rugby and ice hockey to mountain biking.



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