

Masterchef and the 'Sportification' of Popular Culture... and Society

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ABSTRACT: Sport has developed into an essential phenomenon in popular culture and in (post)modern society, and seems to have, which is the rationale of this essay, a great deal to tell us about human life and (post)modernity. The process of sportification of popular culture is the main thrust of the argument, as well as presenting an alternative strategy for the study and understanding of the relationship between sport and society, and the influence and impact of sport. The essay does not focus on various added values, such as integration, health and economic growth. Neither is the ambition to present society's impact on sport logics. The essay analyses, as an alternative, sport as a general (mental) horizon in society. It focuses on the sportification of popular culture, and specifically on the television reality show called Masterchef. The essay conceptualises docusoaps in light of the phenomenon of sport. In a wider perspective, initial attempts at sportification of science are also considered. Given the observed amalgamation

of sport with the entertainment industry, the essay argues for a revitalisation of Guttman's theses, and suggests a broadened concept, in line with 'from ritual to event(ification)'.

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Introduction

The interaction between sport and society has been intensely surveyed, and clearly acknowledged.¹ However, basically, organized sport has played a fairly unimportant part when it comes to the *essence* of social life, compared to, for instance, the law or questions of how to avoid famine, war and diseases.² Notwithstanding this principal point of departure, sport stands out as imperative in our everyday life. Sport is also supposed to add social values, such as public health, identity and integration, as well as image and economic growth. Yet, this gospel of sport could be critically scrutinized and contradicted based on social exclusion, sexual harassment, violence, injuries and medicalization, post-colonialism, nationalism and even fascist attitudes. Still, in our opinion, the question whether sport is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for individuals, groups or society has to be tested empirically.³ Regardless of opinion, the discussions indicate the existence of a crucial relation between sport and society, in that sport seems to play a significant part in society and, congruently, that various forms of social development have an impact on sport(s).

This position is, for instance, manifested in sport’s ‘colonization of the lifeworld’, to rearticulate Jürgen Habermas’ illustrious expression (and his description of the juridification process).⁴ In the view of the ‘colonization thesis’, sport, mediated through the fitness and entertainment industry, has invaded individuals’ leisure time and our public discourses, as well as our attitudes and mentality by a temperament that is shaped by a culture of speed and the emphasis on champions, (world) records and statistics in different social spheres. In sum, sport – together with its characteristics – has developed into an *essential* phenomenon in popular culture and in (post)modern society and seems to have a great deal to tell us about human life and (post)modernity.⁵

The sportification of popular culture will be the main target of this essay. In this respect, the alternative strategy is to discuss the relationship between

1 Coakley, *Sports in Society*; Nixon II and Frey, *Sociology of Sport*; Molnar and Kelly, *Sport, Exercise and Social Theory*; Dunning, *Sport Matters*.

2 Carlsson and Hedenborg, ‘Position and relevance of sport studies’.

3 Coakley, *Sports in Society*.

4 For analyses of the juridification of sport, see: Foster, ‘The juridification of sport’; Greenfield and Osborn, ‘The legal colonization of cricket’; Carlsson, ‘Insolvency and the domestic juridification’. Cf. Carlsson, ‘Re(con)fusion of law and sport’, for an analysis of the amalgamation of sport and law.

5 Cf., Carlsson and Hedenborg, ‘Position and relevance of sport studies’.

sport and society, and the influence of sport. We do not intend to discuss different added values, such as integration, health and economic growth. Neither is it our ambition to present society's impact on 'sport logics' such as the 'juridification of sport',⁶ or the medialization of sport through TV logics and sponsorship (e.g., 'power break' in ice hockey). Without doubt, modern sport has become a central part of the entertainment industry; in other words, it has developed into an event, representing a broader model beyond the traditional concept of a match, or a competition. Besides, sport is, for instance, mirrored in different computer games, with its particular 'gaming' logic.⁷ In this essay we intend to take the discussion further by looking at the sportification process in docusoaps in an attempt to shed some light on the 'interference' of sport and its logics and impact on related areas in the entertainment industry⁸ – in our case, Masterchef, more precisely the Swedish Masterchef.⁹

The Experience of Rise and Fall in Swedish Masterchef¹⁰

The adrenaline is flowing, the pulse is pumping and the excitement is towering. The whole body is twitching, preparing to perform. Some in the audience, representing the family and a few close friends, are cheering encouragingly during the last few minutes before the contest. Right now, it's time for the first round in the qualification round for the Swedish Masterchef. The food, which is cooked in a careful manner comparable to a boxer's pre-gaming bandaging of his fingers, is presented for the referees. This first confrontation with the combatants, and with the referees, is scary for all participants. The referees

6 Foster, 'The juridification of sport'; Greenfield and Osborn, 'The legal colonization of cricket'; Carlsson, 'Insolvency and the domestic juridification'.

7 Carlsson, 'The Representation of Virtues in Sport Novels and Digital Sport'.

8 EA Sport's computer games, e.g., NHL 2012, FIFA, 2013, FIFA Football Manager are representations of sport in the framework of strategical and war games.

9 Masterchef is an American/Australian product, which has been licensed to TV4, a commercial Swedish TV channel.

10 Martin Svensson has competed in the Swedish Masterchef (http://www.tv4play.se/program/sveriges-maesterkock?video_id=2256151), albeit with minor success. This 'case' is based on Svensson's experiences. Importantly, Svensson is also one of the top Swedish contestants in MMA, (see, <http://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Martin-Svensson-31065>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwWrXVJqOPE&list=UU00maDUiBdxCLhBNQ_j952A), and he also has an MA in Sport Studies from Malmö University.

are symbolically placed at a level above the competitors' kitchen islands. In addition, there are cameramen and lighting technicians in all corners. The perspiration is enormous, on a line with a five-mile run. "Start cooking! Do something extraordinary!", the referees yell. The frustration and the feeling of a blackout are accurately like the first hit in a boxing match. But, suddenly, the pancreas releases all possible adrenaline. It's time for peak performance, skills and tactics. Perhaps a post-chicken masala will work safely, or perhaps a Scandinavian fusion of long-boiled reindeer chuck will give you the upper hand. You have to be instrumental!

Wow! What cooking, what a game! All of the competitors that have cooked better than their opponents are qualified for the next round. Scandinavian fusion, no doubt, was a winner in this contest! (Mikael Samuelsson, the star chef, has had an impact on the art of cooking and competing, like that of Zlatan Ibrahimovic on Swedish football.) The feeling of 'scoring' – and succeeding – is tremendous, like a final successful put on the golf green.

The unbeaten competitors get a chance to relax. There is a pause. During this pause the competitors are mingling, and in their interaction it becomes obvious that their group is quite heterogeneous. They are all reserved, and they assess the opponents with suspicion. And like training in a gym, the contestants boost their 'muscles', their mental capability. It's time for new challenges: 'Don't forget, it's your dreams that are at a stake, at play.' The atmosphere is similar to the tension in a dressing room before the players enter the pitch. The new contest takes place in a circular room with thirty different kitchen islands. All the contestants find their places, take up a firm position at the kitchen range and wait for the challenges. They have to cook meatballs in thirty minutes. All are nervously waiting for the starting pistol. 'Ready, steady, cook!' The contestants run straight to the table with all the necessary ingredients. They run into each other, and their competitors' elbows nudge several contestants. The sweat is dripping and the tension is exceptional. What a game, what a play!

'Stop!' (The match is over.) 'Leave the stove!' It's time for the referees to assess the results (the dishes). During this review the contestants are interviewed: 'How does it feel?' 'Are you satisfied?' 'Could you have performed differently?' The entertainment logic and the representatives of (sport) media are in place, eager to capture the emotions of 'blood, sweat and tears'.

It's time, once again, for the referees to decide which of the combatants are going to the next qualification round. The contestants are lined up and some are asked to take a step forward. It's like waiting for the boxing judge's decision. Whose arm is going to be raised? Suddenly, the result arouses joy and euphoria in some of the participants, whereas others turn jealous and bitter. They feel spontaneously like losers!

Pause! Then it's time for the final qualification match. The contest is to produce a dish of free choice from some part of a pig. The pantry is almost unlimited. Still, those contestants that have trained and whose tactics are firm have an obvious advantage. The time is limited, only one hour. One of the contestants is too ambitious, trying to boil pork legs. Another fails, burning the pork. A third combatant cuts his finger badly. 'Stop! Time is up!' Several of the combatants are already disappointed, feeling that their strategy and efforts have been in vain. Tears are falling.

The combatants are guided individually via a floodlit path back to the referees for the final judgement. Who is going to be qualified for the 'real tournament', The Champions League?

Unfortunately, this was the culmination and the bitter end (for the 'observer')!¹¹

There is no doubt that the idea of Masterchef is designed and presented as a drama with an uncertain ending. But is it a sport drama, with 'the sweet tension of the uncertainty of outcome'? Perhaps the actions are essentially to be regarded as well-produced and predesigned entertainment, despite their image of 'sporting characteristic', such as fair play, tensions, peak performance, temporality and uncertainty. These are exciting questions which this essay is going to analyze. This will basically be done through utilizing and revitalizing Allen Guttmann's conceptualization of modern sport.¹² Guttmann's sport categorization will be tested and developed by reviewing two different materials: a) an analysis of two seasons of the Swedish Masterchef, and b) a retrospective and participant observation of competing in the qualification rounds of the 2012 Swedish Masterchef .

The basic questions that will arise and be tested are:

11 Martin Svensson failed to deliver, due to inadequate tactics and a too artless recipe (Swedish meatballs), and since he was beaten in the last game/play/combat, he did not qualify for the finals.

12 Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record*.

- What are the reasons and the rationale for including sport characteristics in docusoaps?
- Can (Swedish) *Masterchef* be grasped, comprehended and conceptualized according to the characteristics of modern sport(s) in light of Guttmann's typology? or:
- Do we, additionally, need to reformulate the concept of contemporary (post)modern sport, in order to capture and integrate current social changes and the development and mixture of sport, popular culture and the entertainment industry? And, in the wider sense:
- Is it possible to understand the phenomenology of sport through a drama in the field of docusoaps? Besides:
- Normatively, will the characteristics and the horizon of (post)modern sport run the risk of becoming the essence of our social and cultural (and academic) life?

The Sportification Process: Towards a Typology of Modern Sport

We can certainly find a number of serious attempts to capture and conceptualize the essence of sport. For instance, a pragmatic attempt: Sport is what the actors, sport media and the spectators consider it to be.¹³ Another, more academic definition, states: Sport is an institutionalized – organized – competitive activity that requires extensive physical efforts or complex physical skills. These actions are conducted by various contestants who are motivated by internal or external rewards.¹⁴ Norbert Elias, notably, conceives sport as a 'mimetic battle', as a struggle in an imaginary setting.¹⁵ Eric Dunning, following Elias, argues that it is crucial to have a developmental approach in order to comprehend the characteristics of sport.¹⁶

In a philosophical investigation, Mikael Lindfelt has presented a phenomenological description of sport,¹⁷ in which he argues that equality and fairness are two phenomenological dimensions that constitute the character of sport in addition to the principles of competition and rivalry. Likewise, he

13 Jönsson, *Idrottsfilosofiska introduktioner*.

14 Coakley, *Sports in Society*.

15 Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*.

16 Dunning, *Sport Matters*.

17 Lindfelt, *Idrott och moral*.

declares, the idea of autonomy is fundamental. Accordingly, the norms and rules of sport(s) have to be (re)produced internally, beyond the manifest and firm influence of society.

Despite these broad and ambiguous perceptions of sport, it is hard to believe that ordinary people, including sport scholars, would describe the phenomenon of Masterchef as the equivalent of modern sport. Regardless of the arbitrariness in the depiction of sport, there are still traditions, normative influences and pressures in hegemonic sport culture that indirectly identify what ‘ought to be sport’, or more exactly, ‘what should not be considered as sport’.

The focus on competition appears to be essential. Still, is competition enough to declare an activity as sport? No, of course not! In most descriptions of the phenomenology of sport we find the concepts of ‘competition’ and ‘rivalry’, as well as ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’.¹⁸ Yet, the efforts to declare and announce a winner seem to be central to modern sport, and ideally, the result has to be obtained in a proper and fair manner. Thus, the ‘ethical’ values of equality and fairness are pure functional imperatives for constructing a competition involving tension and uncertainty.¹⁹ Unpredictability – the sweet tension of the uncertainty of outcome – stands out as an indispensable factor in the conceptualization of sport.

To the tricky question: Does sport presuppose physical activity, and if so, what is to be regarded as a sober and definitely physical activity. Evidently, in some sports such as casting, dart, (digital) motor sport, curling and bowling,²⁰ the degree of physical activity or physical skills could be discussed, and perhaps even compared to intensive cooking, or more obviously to carpeting and gardening. Hence, there are plenty of analyses of e.g., eSport in light of Elias’ concept of the sportification process as well as Guttmann’s typology of modern sport, arguing that there are distinctive similarities between computer games, such as Counterstrike (CS), and modern sport.²¹ In this context, e.g., ‘virtuality’ is tested as a possible characteristic of (post) modern sport.²²

In addition to this discussion it is possible to supplement the sportification process by an alternative tendency, which is related to the ‘sportifica-

18 *ibid.*

19 *ibid.*

20 All these sports are included in the Swedish Sports Confederation

21 Jonasson and Thiborg, ‘Electronic sport and its impact on future sport’; Carlsson and Thiborg; ‘Law and Morality in Counterstrike’; Thiborg, *Att göra (e)sport*.

22 Jonasson and Thiborg, ‘Electronic sport and its impact on future sport’; Jonasson, *Sport has Never been Modern*.

tion of society' in general.²³ It is not only the case that sport takes up more and more space in society, but the sport logics and its psychology and 'ethos' have, moreover, intruded and influenced a number of its social spheres (cf., below, particularly in the 'Discussion').²⁴

Guttman's Typology of Modern Sport

Indisputably, the best known and most formalized attempt to describe and categorize modern sport and its developmental phases is probably Allen Guttman's contribution.²⁵ Guttman starts with Huizinga's cultural and anthropological studies of play and argues that there are sports that are still of an autotelic character. Nevertheless, increasing professionalization and rationalization have taken modern sport far beyond its original objectives. In order to map the development towards modern sport, Guttman, in the Weberian tradition, introduced several typologies and categories as a manner to grasp the elements of this developmental process. Still, we must acknowledge that these typologies were produced at an early phase of the 'transition process'. Since then, sport has been profoundly influenced and marked by the process of, e.g., commercialization, urbanization, technologization, globalization, medialization and juridification. During this process sport has become increasingly involved in and adapted to the entertainment industry. Evidently, this development has had an impact on our understanding and typologization of contemporary sport. Still, a start in Guttman's Weberian typologization of modern sport is, in our scrutinizing strategy, productive.

Guttman's major intention was to distinguish modern sport from other forms of play and physical activity. In his review Guttman distinguished seven characteristics located in the progress of modern sport and its 'sportification'. Play and games have been part of all societies and games have been played according to stipulated, but solid, rules. In addition, sport is differentiated from play, because of its emphasis on competition. What distinguishes our society and the progress of modern sport is that playing has been transformed in light of a 'sportification process', which includes secularity, equality, specialization, rationalization, bureaucratization, quantification and the striving for records.

23 Cf., Carlsson, 'Re(con)fusion of law and sport'; Thiborg, *Att göra (e)sport*.

24 Cf., Carlsson, 'Re(con)fusion of law and sport'.

25 Guttman, *From Ritual to Record*.

First of all, in modern sport there is no professed religious purpose behind celebrating and praising hallowed Divinities, regardless of the development of 'sacred symbols' (logos and brands) in sport culture. Modern sport can therefore be described as secular in this respect. *Second*, in modern sport there is a functional emphasis on equality and fairness. Accordingly, in a theoretical perspective, all individuals should have the chance to compete. All rules and conditions are, likewise, to be similar and fair for the competitors. In line with the sportification process, modern sport requires, *third*, more advanced specialization. The implication is that athletes have become increasingly differentiated, due to distinctions between a range of sports, as well as in their skills and competences. The force behind this categorization is society's demand for efficiency and success. In order to perform proficiently and become victorious, higher degrees of specialization is required in different sports. Rationalization is a *fourth* fundamental in the development of modern sport, which is illustrated by the more advanced rules and principles than in previous sports and games. Modern sports have, in addition, become increasingly standardized, in that equipment, rules and spaces are now more or less universal. Furthermore, science has become a part of the general development. Modern sports are studied, measured and analyzed by (natural) scientific methods in order to increase performances and results. Consequently, teaching and preparation constitute an important career in modern sport. *Fifth*, and in line with this development, the bureaucratization of sport appears profitable and productive for its progress. The bureaucratization process facilitates the control of its standards and practice. At the core of this development lies homogenization, which makes it possible to create fair competition in different (global) contexts and localizations. Due to the involvement of science and the industrialization of society, modern sport is now, *sixth*, characterized by 'quantification', which means that all results are measured, archived and compared. In this process, the media have emerged as interesting mediators and supporters of results and comparisons. In sum, this development points towards the final characteristic, integrating all the other characteristics – the focus on records. In order to produce records and peak performances modern sports demand fair conditions, a high degree of specialization, developed rationalization and bureaucratization as well as a focus on quantification. Record is 'the marvellous abstraction that permits competition not only among those gathered together on the field of sport, but

also among them and others distant in time and space'.²⁶ The record is the mark of modern sport.²⁷

This short odyssey presents the condition and the characteristics of modern sport, according to Guttmann. Yet, in order to develop substantially, modern sport has *gained* by the support of the media (as an audience) and the market (for financing). Still, the huge influence of the media and the market is perhaps more to be regarded as an essential characteristic of post-modern sport with its emphasis on event and entertainment. This late development, however, goes beyond Guttmann's typology – or ideal – of modern sport. Besides, Guttmann, via his typology, seems to fear this progress and the possible transition of modern sport.

Docusoaps and Master Chef: A Brief Background

Perhaps the transition of modern sport, as well as its characteristics and typologies, can be viewed in light of sport's interaction with popular culture and its position as part of the entertainment industry. For instance, the culture and the horizon of (specialized) sports have been integrated into various computer games. We find several movies with sporting contexts. By focusing on docusoaps, and docusoaps' sporting characteristics, this article takes the reflection to a new level. To start with, there is a wide variation of docusoaps, with explicit or implicit 'sporting labels'. Most of these programs and contests are produced for commercial TV channels. The following summary item by item might work as an introduction:

- *Theme:* Everyday life and social interaction
Programs: 'Big Brothers', 'Robinson', 'Paradise Hotel', 'Bachelorette' and 'The Farm'.
Rationale: Exclusion and inclusion as well as humiliation and deprivation during the program and through malicious ballots in order to find a winner! Psychological pressure. Entertainment. 'Robinson' is especially interesting because it also involves physical stress and starvation, in addition to various physical competitions/games (to become immune from exclusion in the following episode (match)).

²⁶ Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record*; Connor, *A Philosophy of Sport*, p. 88.

²⁷ ... and, culturally, alternatively an indication of the madness of the rationalisation process in society. Cf., Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*.

- *Theme:* Talents and skills.
Programs: ‘Idol’, ‘Top Model’, and ‘Talent 2014’.
Rationale: Who has the highest skills, makes the best performance? Finding a winner! Entertainment.
- *Theme:* Produced sport.²⁸
Programs: ‘The Gladiators’, ‘Biggest Loser’, ‘Master of Masters’.
Rationale: Entertainment. To find a winner. Records in ‘Biggest Loser’. The latter is surely very interesting in light of the program’s incorporation of media logic and entertainment, as well as its physical activity, prejudices and psychological stress, the hegemonic obesity discourse and the theme of insiders and outsiders.
- *Theme:* Amateurs performing in the context of a profession (music, food and design).²⁹
Programs: ‘Idol’, ‘Masterchef’, ‘The Great British Bake Off’, ‘Top Chef Master’, ‘Project Runway’, ‘Top Model’, ‘Masterchef Junior’.
Rationale: To find a winner. Skills and techniques.
Stress. Fair play. Entertainment.

Notwithstanding the noteworthy characters in for instance ‘Biggest Loser’ and ‘Robinson’, the main subject in this article is ‘amateurs performing in the context of a profession’. As mentioned in the introduction, the empirical material and the analysis will focus on Swedish Masterchef [*Sveriges mästerkock*].

The program, which is based on the British original format and brand, MasterChef from 1990, is, according to the Swedish producer, an entertainment reality show, as well as a competition in cooking and culinary skills among amateurs. The amateurs step up from their own everyday kitchens to produce advanced dishes and demanding menus in front of a TV audience and referees (who are widely praised chefs of famous restaurants). The participants have different backgrounds and experiences from their social and professional life. All of them are dreaming of transforming their interest in cooking from leisure to profession. A career in the restaurant business looms as a vital attraction – as a medal for their efforts that will hopefully lead to victory. At the end of every program – competition – the referees decide who are the losers, while letting loose a lot of emotions. The jury – the referees – evaluate both the quality of the cooking and of the performance.

28 We do not include everyday life sport, such as STIHL Timber Sport and Tractor Pulling, in this typology.

29 In this field we have professionals competing against other professionals: Cf. Masterchef: the Professionals.

One after the other, contestants become excluded as the series proceeds. There is a hectic atmosphere of uncertainty and unpredictability, since all of the participants have to perform on top in order to survive to the next game (program).

For British copyright reasons the concept is a firm and fairly standardized production and competition. There are thus huge similarities between the British and Swedish *Masterchef*, and other international duplicates as well. Since its start in 1990, the production has become increasingly homogenized by using stable rules and organization as a way of strengthening the entertainment quality. Still, in the Swedish *Masterchef*, there is sometimes a deeper focus on the Scandinavian Cuisine and on local food and ingredients.³⁰

As a commercial supplement, and in the wake of the ‘cooking escalation’ as a leisure activity and in popular culture, the *Masterchef* format has been expanded to include ‘*Masterchef: the Professionals*’, ‘*Celebrity Masterchef*’ and ‘*Junior Masterchef*’. These productions have also reached the Swedish TV landscape for local production. Besides, ‘*Sweden is Baking*’ and ‘*Grillmasters*’ are productions and competitions with similar rules, principles and logics as part of the ‘sportification of cooking’. Noticeably, ‘*Grillmaster*’ is branded as a competition in a Swedish ‘national sport’, barbecuing.

Masterchef in light of the concept of Modern Sport

The following presentation is constructed in light of Guttman’s typology of modern sport. The empirical material, that is the foundation of the presentation, has been selected and collected in two different ways. Initially, the design was primarily an observation study. The first strategy was based on an observation of two seasons of the Swedish *Masterchef* (2011 and 2013) from the qualification and elimination rounds to the finals. In addition to this observation, alternative empirical material was obtained retrospectively through self-reflection by Martin Svensson (one of the authors) on his participation in the 2012 competition as part of his experience of ‘doing sport’.³¹

30 Cf. in football, where Brazilians are, regularly, claimed to play ‘samba fotball’, whereas Germans are playing efficiently and Koreans play like ‘robots’. Cf., e.g., Guilianotti’s analysis of globalization and local cultures, in Guilianotti, *Football*.

31 Svensson is also an established Swedish competitor in MMA.

There are indeed several ethical demands to be handled in this methodological design. First of all, the participants – the amateurs – in the program will not be identified. The analysis is not related to their individual position, performance or standards. Furthermore, the retrospective ‘participant observation’ has to be handled with respect and caution in accordance with a mutual legal agreement between Svensson – the observer – and the TV channel and the production team.

Yet, the intention in this analysis is not to show disrespect to Masterchef, and belittle the program. The intention of using Masterchef as an illustrative case is to highlight the ‘sportification of popular culture’ and to discuss the (possible or necessary) development of (post)modern sport, beyond the typologies of Guttman. Thus, we will apply Guttman’s characteristics of modern sport on the phenomenon of Masterchef.

Guttman in General

Initially, and following Guttman’s definition, Masterchef ought to be regarded as ‘sport’. Masterchef contains rules and principles as well as advanced elements of competition. Besides, in this competitive form, cooking is physically very demanding for all the competitors. Still, is Masterchef a modern sport, according to Guttman’s seven characteristics? Or, perhaps, is it only possible to trace some of the ‘ingredients’ in Masterchef to these characteristics? The following presentation will try to answer this question. In so doing, we have to trust the interpretation of the observations of the two seasons of Masterchef, and in the retrospective reflection on performing and competing in the Masterchef tournament.

We start, casually as well as hypothetically, our analysis with secularization (1) as an indication of the progress of modern sport. Neither in the observations nor for a participant was it possible to find any manifest example of ‘religious forms’ celebrating divinity and sacred symbols in the programs. In that respect, Masterchef is to be considered as a modern sport. Still, like sport in general, cooking as a ‘hegemonic’ everyday leisure activity could be regarded as ‘opium’ for ordinary people. It might also be viewed as a celebration of consumerism, as a real and practical gospel of the capitalist creed. Hence, matching religion against secularism with regard to sport – and celebration and glorification – is a tricky subject.

Equality (2)

A fundamental principle in modern sport is equality. This is, significantly, not an ethical standard, but above all a functional principle for establishing fair and unpredictable competition, creating tension related to the uncertainty of the outcome. Still, to be honest, modern sport has been shaped by various forms of cheating and instrumental manipulations that have violated and corrupted this ‘characteristic’.³²

In the design and production of Masterchef the rules and the conditions appear to be fair to all the participants (the ‘chefs’). Their dishes are to be judged by a jury that possesses an image of objectivity and impartiality, and yet of being threatening and tough. The road to the final – comprising twelve selected competitors – starts with the qualification, which takes place in different cities in Sweden. The candidates are informed from the start that it is basically their skills in cooking as well as their personality that will be appraised. This stipulation is a condition and is recognized, as well, by all candidates. The question is whether it is reasonable to evaluate personality in the perspective of ‘autonomy’, which is actually an issue outside this context (cf., tackling in ice-hockey). In this context, it is part of the rules and principles for the competition and stipulated in advance. Yet, the criteria and principles concerning ‘personality’ are difficult and not very transparent.

From the sidelines, competition in Masterchef gives the impression of being fair and impartial. As in sports in general, and particularly in ‘judged sports’, such as diving, figure skating or gymnastics, there is scope for interpretations and discussions of the fairness of and the reasons for different decisions. Still, from the perspective of the observer, Masterchef contains crucial and significant signs of equality, which is an essential characteristic of modern sport(s).

Yet, from the horizon of a participant, several parts of Masterchef are impregnated by unfairness and arbitrariness. After cooking (performing), for instance, the contestants are told to leave ‘Coliseum’, the arena, during a period in which the jury tastes and evaluates the dishes or menus. After this interruption while the referees consult among themselves, the contestants are supposed to re-enter the arena and the cameras start again. The contestants present their dishes individually. The referees taste the food in a serious and curious way in front of each combatant. Then the contestant receives the final judgement. The question arises, in light of this procedure: Is the individual decision made in advance, or is it – as the drama and media

32 Carlsson, *Excitement, Fair Play and Instrumental Attitudes*.

logics suggest – produced during this confrontation. Still, if the results and the verdicts are determined in advance, what are then the principles beyond these doubtful conclusions?

Perhaps it is the focus on ‘personality’ that, in such a case, obstructs a fair treatment of all the contestants. By way of comparison, in sport in general ‘personality’ plays an insignificant role as a legitimate source of judgement in the actual competition.³³ Still, in sports such as MMA, athletes might be selected for combats on account of their ability to entertain and of their ‘popularity’. This selection – basically a market strategy – is based on a mixture of brilliant performance and personality. Nevertheless, the standard of the personality is not a vital reason for triumph, as in Masterchef.

Specialization (3)

In order to improve and become increasingly successful, athletes have to develop and become more specialized, even though Ajax, for example, playing ‘total football’, was in some way a successful contrast to the thesis – and the ideology – of specialization.³⁴ Specialization has nevertheless become a general prospect and a dynamo in the development of modern sport. At first glance, Masterchef apparently has some difficulty in facing these characteristics of modern sport. Although the contests involve different skills and elements – e.g., cutting onions, tasting herbs, boiling eggs, it is hard to argue that these competences are specialized, as they are all included in one general competence, ‘cooking’ and you can be better or worse at these skills! However, in professional life – for instance in a star restaurant – there exists, in contrast, a huge amount of specialization and differentiation with positions such as sushi chef, sous chef, pastry chef and cold-buffet manageress.

Despite this basically roundabout reasoning, there are elements of specialization even in Masterchef’s blend of leisure and profession. For instance, shows –combats – may use various starting points such as Italian, Indian, the French or Scandinavian cuisines. The selection of cuisines is unpredictable and hidden from all the contestants before the combat/cooking. For this reason, the contestants ought to have a broad spectrum of competence and skills. Yet, in one of the contests, the combatants have to choose one of

33 Of course, there is a difference in personality between, for instance, David Beckham and Vinnie Jones, which has an implicit effect on the referee’s discretionary powers. Still, personality is not a reason for judgement.

34 Barend and van Dorp, *Ajax, Barcelona, Cruyff*.

their own favourite plates to be served. In another form of match a winner of a previous contest has the possibility to chose one of his or her special cuisines, in which area all the other contestants have to compete. In this combat there is scope for pre-tactics and strategies. Besides, several of the contestants were skilled in ‘entertainment’ and ‘drama’, as demonstrated by them performing dramatically and enthusiastically (such as screaming and yelling). Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that this counts as specialization from Guttman’s horizon.³⁵

As a structure of competition, Masterchef is specialized in certain respects, due to its selected and profiled competition in different and specialized cuisines. However, even though international kitchens are specialized in various and traditional cuisines, contemporary professional chefs are branding ‘fusion’, in resemblance to ‘Ajax’ total football’.

Rationalization (4)

In a global perspective, modern sports have adopted a relatively uniform standard of equipment, firm rules and comparable size of areas or pitches. Besides, science – particularly natural sciences – has become a vital factor in the progress of modern sport. Eating and sleeping, in addition to the improvement of training methods, have become crucial parts in the preparation of the athletes in order to peak their performances. This is, according to Guttman, a description of the rationalization process of modern sport, which has occurred parallel to the rationalization and standardization of society in general.

In comparison, Swedish Masterchef has experienced a comparable development. The program, harmonized with the British copyright, has become increasingly standardized. A production in Sweden is quite similar to a production in England, or in Denmark or Holland, for axample. In this manner, Masterchef and modern sport, like popular culture in general, reflect the homogenization of society.³⁶

As amateurs in cooking, the participants have trained in their own kitchens before the qualification games, making buckets of Béarnaise Sauce, cooking Bouillabaisse, filleting Norwegian Salmon or preparing Osso Buco. As potential participants, the Swedish amateurs are also guided and inspired

³⁵ Cf., in football, where we find players who have been ‘specialized’ in producing goal gestures.

³⁶ Cf., Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlighthenment*.

by the American Masterchef, which has been broadcast before the Swedish version. This ‘contextual setting’ of inspiration and guidance functions as a kind of normative structure for the amateurs’ training and preparing for the tournament, whose activities are in these respects rationalized, and quite homogenized.

Bureaucratization (5)

Teaching and preparation form the basis of an important career in modern sport. In line with this development, the bureaucratization of sport appears profitable and productive for its progress. The bureaucratization process makes it possible to control the standards and the practice of modern sports. In this development homogenization is in focus, which may facilitate fair competition in different (global) contexts and localizations

Masterchef, certainly, follows a bureaucratic structure, because of its copyright rules, which create an atmosphere of predictability and homogenization in the program. Besides, in order to produce entertainment, a number of competences have to be involved in the arrangement of the competition. The production team has, consequently, created a solid organization adapted to handling the mixture of predictability and uncertainty in the competitions.

Quantification (6)

Modern sport is shaped by the culture of quantification. The ‘*citius, altius, fortius*’ theorem has been transformed into pure positivism, in which all of kinds of statistics of athletes, teams and performances become important – and even interesting and entertaining – information, at least in a sport context. They are listed, archived and judged. Yet, modern sport is not an isolated phenomenon. Society at large is quantified, measured and evaluated, too³⁷

In a similar manner, Masterchef is softly quantified and positioned by applying quotas. Gender and age are announced. Various timetables and time limits are introduced in order to create excitement and – for the TV-audience – calculable performances. A contest might be restricted to 60 minutes in the views of the TV audience, containing for dramatical reasons a psychological

37 Ibid.

and stressful countdown. In practice, in the production of the contest, the actual time for preparation is 90 minutes. This production logic creates better entertainment as well as a higher performance image.³⁸

However, the quantification culture in Masterchef is rather immature. There is still a developmental potential when it comes to informative statistics, in contrasting the ‘chefs’ performances’ – their ranking – individually or in comparison.³⁹ This is an area where Masterchef has the implicit potential for improving the characteristic of ‘quantification’.

Records (7)

In Masterchef the ‘record’ concept is frequently in use. The youngest participant, the fastest ever, as well as the ‘worst dish ever’, are epithets used to announce ‘records’. However, ultimately, this usage is predominantly directed towards the logics of entertainment, and not towards supporting and celebrating peak performances. Besides, the criteria for announcing records are rather arbitrary in Masterchef.

When it comes to ‘peak performances’ and ‘records’, such as Bob Beamon’s long jump or Usain Bolt’s 100-meter run, we find a number of replays. In Masterchef, the production team ordinarily generates replays in which the referees are yelling at the contestants for amateurish dishes and cooking, or when the contestants are crying or jubilating. Essentially, it is the status of entertainment that directs the interest in ‘records’ and replays in Masterchef, not ‘peak performances’ as in sport records.

Masterchef and Sport: ‘From Record to Event’

In all, Masterchef does not include all of Guttmann’s typologies for being described as a ‘modern sport’. Several of the characteristics are still prematurely developed. Still, the competition is in progress, and might well develop into a serious modern sport in the wake of the increasing emphasis on equality and specialization. Particularly, as an effect of producing an entertaining event, the principles of equality are obstructed. It is not the

38 The representations become more real than reality, cf., Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

39 In this respect, the medialization of Major Leagues could be an inspiration for the production of statistics and archived material.

tension of uncertainty obtained by the functional logic of equality that is the rationality of the entertainment. On the contrary, it is a mixture of personality, performances and media drama that constitute the entertainment. The idea of equality is violated also in the practice of sport, through cheating and instrumental manipulations of the rules.⁴⁰ Regardless of this critical observation, there exists a key difference with regard to 'equality'. In modern sport, in general, the violation is normally due to different 'actors' or to the 'culture', while in Masterchef the violation is internalized in the 'structure' of the program.

Although provocative and beneficial as a method of comparison, we are not entirely satisfied with the 'Guttmanian review' of Masterchef as a potential sport. Notably, Guttman's conceptualization of the development of modern sport is, logically, related to the Western industrialization of society with its social character of production. As a counterbalance to the production thesis, the growth of contemporary societies is decidedly guided by consumption (and entertainment). Subsequently, these new and energetic characteristics ought to have an impact on the development of (post) modern sport and on our comprehension and conceptualization of it.

Hence, Allen Guttman's categorization from the 1970s has to be revitalized and expanded by a 'new' category; a characteristic which Guttman actually observed but noted rather as a threat to the purity of sport. According to Guttman, the athletes infringe 'the code of sports' when they try to draw attention by entertaining the audience beyond the pure performance. In this perspective, to pay attention to the aspect of 'amusement' in a sport context is to focus on trivialities. Still, sport as an entertainment industry has progressed and turned in different directions. In this respect, entertainment is an important characteristic in contemporary (post) modern sport. In continuation of this reasoning we have to define the surplus character of entertainment and event.

Entertainment (8)

In Masterchef, as in docusoaps in general, entertainment is in focus. The participants compete in order to entertain, not to 'score goals', or even to produce respectable plates or menus. The exclusion of participants and the tension this creates form part of the entertainment. The interviews of winners and losers are more substantial than the presentations of the prepared dishes,

40 Carlsson, *Excitement, Fair Play and Instrumental Attitudes*.

the result, the potential ‘record’. Due to media logic and media techniques, these interviews – which are produced parallel to the ongoing competition – are technically and visually merged with the cooking (the performances).

The program – the contest – is visually quite compressed. It is, in fact, far from real time cooking, performing and competing. The contest might take more than an hour to produce in reality, but is visualized for the audience in no more than ten minutes. The rest of the show is filled with a) interviews expressing expectation, joy and bitterness, and b) social reportages related to the participants’ local and professional life. The ‘cooking sport’ is only shown selectively. Still, the tension of the triumph of presenting a winning menu, is visualized and broadcast in the same way as a glorious football goal.⁴¹

Sport might be entertaining – as well as boring. Yet, the character of entertainment in modern sport has its origins in the tension of uncertainty, as well as in peak performances. The development of current sport business has built on that image. Today we present sport as entertainment.⁴² In addition to this basic character, contemporary sport has developed an increasing focus on athletes’ personalities – comparable to the focus in *Masterchef*. Moreover, the ‘star quality’ of athletes is stressed. Stars like David Beckham, Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods become a legitimate target for media and are exposed to worship.⁴³ More interestingly, however, due to the focus on entertainment, the audience will currently receive interviews with the athletes during minor breaks in the competition, as well as pre- and postgame interviews focusing on personalities. The tabloids are covered with pre- and post-game social features and psychological interviews. Thus (post)modern sport has a resemblance with the drama and the entertainment logic of *Masterchef* and other docusoaps.

To sum up, the core in modern sport has become a ‘fusion’ of competition (records) and entertainment (event). The value of sport is, consequently, increasingly shaped by a ‘polycentric’ point of departure,⁴⁴ in which event

41 Interestingly, Swedish *Masterchef* has had the ambition to win Swedish Golden Globe [Kristallen] as being the *crème de la crème* in its category, entertainment. The tacit focus in this perspective is not the contestants’ triumph, but victory in the tournament. The contestants’ performances are in this perspective a vehicle, not the result and the essence of the competition. In comparison, it is rather hard to comprehend Champions League in itself as the winner (different years), as the major result, ahead of Real Madrid’s, Manchester United’s, FC Barcelona’s or Bayern Munich’s victories.

42 Westerbeek and Smith, *Sport Business in the Global Marketplace*.

43 Smart, *Stars*.

44 (Legal) polycentry is a concept used in the sociology of law to describe the pluralism of normative sources and legal origins. Cf., Petersen and Zahle, *Legal Polycentricity*.

and entertainment, like characters, play significant roles in the development of modern sport, in line with, for instance, equality, quantification and specialization. Sport's internal elements of amusement –uncertainty and peak performances – are not enough to produce complete entertainment. Consequently, the match or the competition has to be transformed to an 'event', whereby modern sport becomes part of the entertainment industry. In this industrial perspective, the number of viewers and sponsors and the amount of media coverage (which is, ironically, a supplementary form of quantification), will eventually become categorical for those sports whose entertaining value will survive in this industry.

Discussion

Sport's impact on society is more crucial – and problematic – than its praised contribution to health, identity, integration and economic growth. Sport has an impact on our world-views, horizons, speed and concepts. Still, ordinary researches on sport are regularly focused on sport's added value(s) in society, its *instrumental* impact on everyday life. Likewise, there are several studies dealing with society's influence on the development of sport. In spite of fruitful and critical reasoning in these analyses, they seldom contain reflections on sport's *existential* impact on society, as a 'world-view'.

The effort in this article has been to grasp the amalgamation of modern sport with popular culture as an entertainment industry, and to highlight their differences and similarities as well as their mutual influences. One might ask, critically, if the drafted scenario is truly a problem; and, truthfully, who really pays attention to this subject?

No, it is probably not a huge problem, if this mixture and the confusion of rationalization and trivialization – and the 'sportification process' – were only directed towards popular culture. We would, most likely, survive as 'enlightened civilization' due to the 'imaginary settings' of the entertainment circus. Still, when this 'sporting' and 'entertaining' attitude and world-view intrude in other social spheres, such as the law,⁴⁵ or in science, we will most likely face a more critical problem.

In fact, it is possible to notice a certain 'sportification of science', through 'science slam' and 'speed science',⁴⁶ in light of instrumentalism (*altius, citius, fortius*) and the quest for popular entertainment. The following mes-

45 Carlsson, 'Re(con)fusion of law and sport'.

46 Speed science! Cf., Silk, et.al., 'Slowing the social sciences of sport'.

sage,⁴⁷ from the Faculty of Education and Society, Malmö University, was delivered to the staff's email boxes:

'Science Slam at the University! Do you get the point? Is the research description entertaining, clear and apposite? There are a few things you should consider when you take part in selecting the best team at the Faculty in oral presentation. Come to the Faculty's first science slam, on May 14 at 17 o'clock in room C127, for an easy-going clash between departments' smartest researchers. The challenge is for the teams to present their research in the best way in just a few minutes. Welcome to two or three pleasant hours and get an insight into what our colleagues are doing, and then socialize over a light meal. Regards, the Dean'.

Of course, the Sport Science Department entered this challenge triumphantly by sending its young talents to the competition, and the team's appointed 'coach', eager to receive fans and support, promoted the event by an email: 'I would like to remind you about Science Slam... Sign up and root for the Sport Science Team... Do we have some running cheers?' Signed 'The coach'.

This is, conceivably, the prototype of 'Master Professors', a pioneering docusoap!⁴⁸ In a specific perspective, this development is a 'victory' for sport and for Sport Science. The logic of sport intrudes into other social spheres. It ought to make sport science – and the analysis of entertainment, tensions, consumption and peak performances – into an imperative part in the domain of social science. Consequently, the vital parts of modern sport science must be armed with theoretical strategies and instruments in order to handle this social development, in which 'sport mentality' plays a significant part.

According to this diagnosis of society, despite its differentiation, everything in society appears to be mixed up and becomes confused. In fact, science, soap and sport in a merger of rationalization and trivialization⁴⁹ is a unfortunate and slightly depressing outcome of this intermingling of phenomenological, logical and cultural variances. In this existential call, re-

47 There are other similar eMails in the box. E.g., one of the most important research founders in Sweden announced a newly established fund, by inviting to a 'release event'.

48 The concept of 'Science Slam: Speed' has been recognized and transported to the famous and annual Almedal Week, by Lund University and Malmö University. Cf., <http://www.almedalsveckan.info/1091>.

49 Cf., Carlsson, 'Re(con)fusion of law and sport'.

ardless of social-theoretical shortcomings, sport studies have a privileged position to comprehend and analyze this contemporary societal development.⁵⁰

As mentioned, a general tendency in society appears to be the fusion of various social spheres, such as law, education, sport, media, science and popular culture, in which the search for ‘entertainment’ – and the production and consumption of ‘entertaining tensions’ – seems to have a significant position. The law becomes part of popular culture, and popular culture influences the image and the production of law;⁵¹ representations of reality, and virtual reality, are presented and produced as more authentic than reality. In this context, modern sports encounter the media, sponsoring and other forms of popular cultures, in an horizon of increasing entertainment and amusement.

Sport should be entertaining, and soaps should be dramatic, involving a ‘production’ of tension, precisely as education ought to be applied, shortened, and ultimately visualized, as also sciences struggle to be presented popularly – and enjoyably – in order to gain societal weight. No doubt, in a society in which almost every part becomes mixed and fused, it is interesting and challenging to analyze sport’s part in this ‘process of amalgamation’. Due to its character of being an important world-view, and a horizon in other social spheres, sport science could play an energetic role in the analysis and diagnosis of contemporary society’s social tendencies and social development(s).

At the end of the day, in this social perspective sport is not special,⁵² but modern sport appears to be an accumulation of the modern rationalization process, and the way (post)modern sport has taken *citius, altius, fortius* to new dimensions by the amalgamation of sport and society, where sport, like popular culture, consumption culture and the entertainment industry, evidently plays a vital role in the ‘sportification processes’ in society. Consequently, modern sport, in the present form, is problematic for our culture and civilization, due to its psychological impregnation on society and individuals.

Doubtlessly, it is rather ‘unproblematic’ to compete and to be entertained through sport,⁵³ but when the logic of sport competition, on top of the dra-

50 Cf, Carlsson and Hedenborg, ‘Position and relevance of sport studies’.

51 Sherwin, *When Law Goes Pop*.

52 In the wake of EU and its relation to sport, we find several articles arguing and discussing whether sport is special, and whether it should be treated differently than other social spheres.

53 Of course, sport cannot violate, e.g., children’s rights.

ma and entertainment of popular culture in general, invades other social spheres, such as science and law, we might be faced with serious problems, which were recognized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁵⁴ Society turns into a 'playground' of rationalization versus trivialization, with sportification and eventification as the sovereign 'stars'.

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54 Cf., Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

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