INTRODUCTION

The comparative study of sport involves the drawing of comparisons and contrasts between aspects of sports culture, provision and organisational structures in different (predominantly Western) countries. It forms a component of a range of academic programmes involving sport and leisure. A comparative focus is also often included within themes or unit titles such as International Issues or Cross-Cultural Perspectives. For reasons of brevity this resource guide will not attempt to cover comparative sport histories of different countries nor will the multidisciplinary field of sport and globalisation fall within its scope. Indeed some of the ground of comparative studies has been influenced by the recent growth in globalisation studies; we now think less in terms of separate national systems but of an interconnected global system.

The following justifications are often used for the inclusion of units of study that include comparative aspects:

1. It is important for students to appreciate international dimensions and organisations since many aspects of sports studies increasingly operate on a global scale, whether these are social trends or business/sporting practices;
2. Making comparisons leads to a deeper level of understanding of domestic provision and organisation of sporting opportunities;
3. Important lessons can be learnt about how domestic provision can be shaped and adjusted for greater effectiveness.

Since there are relatively few resources devoted to the comparative study of sport, this resource guide is structured to highlight materials that are available for a range of countries, then specific countries and finally a selected set of themes in international settings. The set of themes covered are:

- Elite Sport
- The Organisation of Professional Sports Leagues
- Mega Events
- Gender
A discussion of other themes/topics that are covered within the subject and the approaches that can be taken are included in a later section.

**ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Range of Countries**
Six books are covered here and any two or three of these would make good core books for the study of the subject.

This work offers an accessible introduction to public sports provision and motives for investment by governments in five countries - Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Some of the methodological challenges of comparative study are discussed before moving on to the structures and patterns of sports administration in the different countries. Both national and sub-national structures are usefully covered in different chapters and clear distinctions are made between the responsibilities of central or federal governments, state governments and local authorities. Chapters are arranged with sub-sections for each country. The last section of the book moves on to two topics with an international resonance: how policy making has addressed the topical problems of drug abuse in athletes, and the provision of sport and physical education in schools. Obviously there has been considerable change in the detailed government arrangements in some countries and in the two international topics since the research was done in the mid 1990s. For instance, an up-to-date knowledge of recent changes in the UK is needed and considerable caution should be exercised in using some of the drug abuse material since much has changed in this field. However, it remains one of the most widely used books in this area.

Part four of this edited book provides a section headed ‘International Comparison and Context’ in which four very useful chapters by respected authors are included: ‘Sport in the USA and Canada’, ‘Sport in Australia’, ‘Sport; the role of the European Union and the decline of the nation state’, and ‘Sport and Globalisation’. These four chapters provide an excellent overview and starting point for anyone who is beginning to read in the respective areas that they cover.

A further very useful chapter earlier in the book that links with the theme of mega events is that written by Holger Preuss – ‘The economics of the Olympic Games: winners and losers’ (pp 252-271). In this excellent chapter, with good supporting figures, the pattern of public-private financing of the Games since 1972 is outlined along with the different interest groups that interact in the bidding and staging of such an event. The real strength though is in a concise summary of the winners and losers in such a process.

This expensive ($100) book is a library resource rather than a student text. It provides comparative study of different policies and programmes of amateur and professional sports around the world. Its strength is the range of countries covered by different authors: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the former Soviet Union, Cuba, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States. For many of the authors, English clearly is not their first language so some parts require a careful reading, but the diversity of political systems from which they are drawn is unique. For example, it provides good insights into nations such as Cuba and Hungary about which relatively little is written elsewhere. The book appraises the relationships of sports organisations with government; describes important sports activities and organizations; places policies and programmes in historical context, and points to current issues and future prospects. No real attempt is made to compare and some of the material is fairly historical and descriptive. Chalip provides a good chapter on the USA and insightful opening remarks about methodological challenges.


This edited book considers the background to the sporting cultures of ten European states mainly from a historical perspective, sometimes stretching back to the early nineteenth century. The range of countries produces some good contrasts with historical comparisons possible between the influences of fascism, communism and democracy as well as important material on newly formed states in eastern Europe. The countries covered are: Germany, Russia, UK, Spain, Denmark, France, Italy, Belgium, Lithuania and Slovenia.

The insights into how recent decades can be understood are particularly valuable with indications of national approaches to elite sports and the organisation of sport, including its structure and financing. It is left to the reader to attempt to make comparisons between nations but the real strength of the work is that it is relatively up-to-date and concentrates on social, political and cultural change. This book examines these links to give a unique insight into modern European perceptions of status, success and national identity through sport.


This fairly specialist but affordable book from a large German sports club draws on the strong position of sports clubs in Germany. However, it is an edited book that considers the different historical roots of sport in other countries and how each has developed different conceptions of sports clubs. Since clubs form the basis of any sporting ‘system’ it is a useful addition to the literature and provides a range of perspectives to sports clubs in eleven European countries: Finland, Norway, Denmark, England, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, France, Italy and Spain.

This text, although becoming rather dated, covers sport as a sub-set of leisure policy. It would therefore be a useful part of course reading that also have a leisure focus.


This is a specialist source but may be useful at level 3 undergraduate or postgraduate levels in helping provide more details as to how governments intervene using their legislative powers. The book touches upon such questions as physical education, sport for all, spectator violence, doping, dispute settlement, media and sport financing. Conclusions of the study reveal the existence of two main sports legislation models in Europe: the interventionist model in the south (eg. France) and in the east, and the non-interventionist model in the north and west of Europe (eg. UK).

Specific Countries


It has been relatively difficult to obtain good information on contemporary German sport due to most attention being focussed on the reunification issue; this book is therefore valuable in providing a comprehensive collection of material. It examines the role of sport and PE in Germany from a range of historical and contemporary perspectives including sport and PE in schools, coach education, elite sport and sport science, along with consideration of sports provision and recreation facilities.


Information on China has also been very difficult to obtain but this book is the definitive source for relatively up-to-date material that gives an insight into the PE and sporting experiences of Chinese citizens both in historical and contemporary society.


A review copy of this text was not available at the time of writing, but this text will continue the Routledge tradition in the area of national sport policy and comparative themes. The publisher suggests the content will review and critique the development of elite and community sport policy in Australia from the 1920s to the present day. Particular attention has been focused on Australian approaches to sport due to their early development of an elite sport system and medal winning culture; this book should provide an insight into such advances.


This book is useful in a comparative sense since two chapters in particular provide interesting insights into French sport and its organisation. The chapter by James Eastham titled ‘The
Organisation of French Football Today’ discusses sport in France being viewed very much as a public service; it outlines the strong municipal involvement and goes onto consider some of the economic comparisons of French footballers’ wages compared to players in other larger markets. A further chapter by Hugh Dauncey ‘Building the Finals: Facilities and Infrastructure’ provides a useful insight into the politics and finances surrounding the development of the Stade de France. This is particularly interesting to compare with the re-development of Wembley in London.

Note: The resources highlighted above are invariably Western orient ed (the main exception being China). However, there are some j ournal references emerging which provide examples of additional resources – see the journal section that follows for an example based on sport in the Middle East.

Elite Sport


This monograph (72 pages) comprises the edited papers presented at a workshop in Kuwait in 1995. The first three chapters consider elite sports systems, first from general organisational principles then to specific developments in Canada and Australia. These are probably the most useful papers in the monograph since material in this field is limited. Other chapters consider issues such as the coach preparation for paralympic athletes and women in sport (USA, Germany and Australia/New Zealand).


This 64-page publication contains three useful sections, particularly for those interested in school sport programmes and PE. An opening few pages on frameworks for comparative studies provides a good introduction to some approaches taken in this field. The next two chapters focus on the development and approach to physical education in France and the USA. The detail on France also goes on to consider the structure of French sport in some detail. A final chapter on the former Soviet Union may be useful to those considering this, by now, rather specialist historical field.

Organisation of Professional Sport Leagues


This books collects nine contributions on the economics of sport which attempt to highlight both the similarities and differences in North American and European models of sport, as well
as their implications for a number of economic, policy and social issues. The papers come from a conference held in Lisbon in November 2000 that brought together a group of North American and European economists who share an interest in the comparative economics of sports. The first three chapters are of most use for those studying sports studies since they are in the area of public policy. Three contributions are concerned with the dichotomy between the US profit-maximising model and the European ‘utility’ model largely based on an amateur tradition, and with the present and future of regulation of team sports in Europe. This is done in an accessible form, even to non-economists, and would provide valuable material to underpin any investigation into the comparative organisation of professional sport in different countries.

**Mega Events**


This book reviews the different approaches countries take to assembling a mega event ie. summer Olympic Games. By analysing such approaches it can reveal data about a country’s political approach to sport. With chapters on the financing of the Games, British bids and the Games in Moscow (1980), Los Angeles (1984), Seoul (1988), Barcelona (1992) and Atlanta (1996) the text provides a valuable source of data and illuminates issues connected with the latest British bid for 2012.


**Gender**


This book provides a valuable insight into the social and political issues surrounding women in sport in the international arena. It considers approaches to the funding of women’s sport and the difficulties faced by women and girls in different countries. It seeks to investigate the links between gender structures and participation rates and women’s inclusion in sport as a whole. It compares the sporting experiences of women from different countries around the world and offers a cross-cultural analysis of the topic of women in sport. It includes data from Norway, UK, Germany, France, Spain, Czech Republic, Tanzania, South Africa, USA, Canada, Brazil, Columbia, Iran, China, Japan and New Zealand. It discusses such issues as the opportunities that women have to participate in decision-making processes in sport and cultural barriers to participation and the efficacy of political action.

The book is primarily a gender text but it is useful in giving an alternative view of the ways in which different countries organise physical education (mainly UK, Australia and the USA) and the kinds of funding issues that come up, depending on the political environment that coaches and teachers work within. The text is good for understanding the ways in which gender and religion are used to construct and define appropriate behaviours for both PE students and their teachers. The historical discussions on Scotland and the USA, and the social considerations of PE experiences in English schools, give an interesting insight into the ways in which women's sport is subordinated at both a policy and practical level.


See entry under Elite Sport since this monograph also contains perspectives on gender.
Specific Countries

This short accessible paper published by the Australian Institute of Political Science considers the metamorphosis in Australian government policy towards sport from the 1950s minimalist approach of essentially leaving sport alone, to the contemporary scene in which federal and state governments fund, guard, reform and regulate sport. The two questions it seeks to answer are first, what are the objectives of government sports policy and second, what caused the shift in sports policy.

This is probably the best short summary of the evolution of the French state's involvement in sport. It identifies four distinct periods of development of the relationship between sport and the state from 1940 up to the present day. The French team’s success at the 1996 Olympic Games provides the background for a discussion into how the state’s organisational and funding arrangements (eg. INSEP and the education system) contributed to the current strong sporting culture. It is recommended, along with other contributions in the same issue.

This short article, written in the first person by a swimming pool manager on exchange to his French twin town’s facility, draws direct comparisons between the two countries’ swimming provision. It would be useful for those seeking a ‘sports provision’ example and would make good seminar material although the article gives no background into French national initiatives or context.

This paper, from a leading academic in the field, reviews sports policy in Lyon from the early 1980s to mid 1990s. It is a valuable contribution to understanding the development of French sport at a time when decentralisation gave increasing power and budgets to communes, departments and regions. It seeks to identify whether significant differences are evident in the sports policy programmes followed by local authorities with different political allegiances and concludes that there is little variation across the political spectrum in terms of the approaches adopted. The paper also highlights that French local sports provision has been relatively well funded as a significant area of urban policy. The paper concludes that this is largely due to sport’s rich symbolic potential. It is an interesting paper on a number of levels and would be best suited to second or third year usage.

The paper directly compares Salford with St Ouen (a northern suburb of Paris). Only a part of this paper (pp 74-77) is of interest to sports, as opposed to leisure, students. It clearly outlines the differences in the provision of parks and school sports facilities between the two countries. The greater role of the French municipality in providing sport for young people using shared community/club facilities and coaches, rather than in the UK where most provision is through school structures. This is useful material for those who have not seen this clear distinction for themselves and is useful if a group were to visit France.


This special issue edited by Dauncey and Hare examines a number of themes, giving an overview of the relationship between sport, society, politics, economics and culture in France from the late nineteenth century, and culminating in an analysis (by the editors) of the soccer World Cup – France ‘98. A number of academics, who have previously written about the history of French sport, contribute articles. For example, Richard Holt presents a survey of attitudes towards sport in general in the period 1870-1940, whilst Philip Dine’s paper that is recommended individually in this bibliography, is from this collection. There are also contributions on the development of professional football in the 1920s and 1930s and perspectives on boxing in the same period.


In this paper the authors examine the strategies employed by French and UK professional bodies for fitness managers and instructors in their respective national contexts. This work shows the clear distinctions between France and the UK: in France where sport is regarded as a public service, the Ministry of Youth and Sport (MJS) has been the regulator of training and employment; however, in the UK, where sport is considered a private activity, fitness operators and commercial companies have thrived. Non-government organisations such as the Fitness Industry Association (FIA) attempt to maintain quality standards in this fiercely competitive industry. The paper also explores how a new profession such as this develops at a European level of organisation and how professional standards will have to be negotiated against competing national influences. This is a useful contribution to both the comparative literature on UK/FRance, but also the dynamics of a newly emerging profession.


This article outlines the manner in which the Pan-Arab Games reflect the tensions within the pan-Arab project of political and cultural unity. The article therefore gives an insight to a non-Western form of sports event (established in 1953), which is founded on an ethno-cultural group identity philosophy (based on race and language), rather than on territorial divisions.
(such as continental games) or philosophies of multiculturalism (as is the case for the Olympic Games). The history of the Pan-Arab games has been fraught with difficulties founded in the Israel/Arab conflict, as well as the more recent wars in the Gulf and in Afghanistan. The article provides an historical analysis, identifying the implications of these conflicts and highlights the complexities of international sport in this volatile region.

**Elite Sport**


This article, written in fairly good English by a German academic, attempts to develop an outline framework for considering the variables that affect the success of different national sports systems. He uses simple tables to discuss macro scale differences in the approaches of Australia, China, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Russia and USA to what he terms ‘top level’ sport. It is a useful introduction to this area which uses some broad macro-level comparisons that will get the reader to think further about what it is that causes different national elite sporting outcomes in events such as the Olympic Games.


In this article the authors consider national elite sport development systems in Europe (UK, France, Spain), North America (Canada, USA) and Australia and discuss the move towards, and the applicability of, a homogeneous elite sport development model. The model identifies ten items as being common characteristics of elite systems, the efficiency of the six selected countries in producing medals is investigated and significant focusing events for each country identified. This is an accessible paper that gives a good overview of the situation in more developed countries. This was the last issue of this journal, which has now re-emerged as *European Sport Management Quarterly*.

**Organisation of Professional Sport Leagues**


A good overview of the financial aspects of North American professional sport is provided. It identifies that they face similar challenges to those confronting professional soccer teams in England, particularly with rising wage costs: most teams report annual operating losses. Strategies used by leagues to control player costs are described. This article has limited comparisons embedded within it but provides excellent background material for those seeking to understand the nature of professional American football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey in North America.

This fairly specialist paper adds to the growing body of literature in this field but is particularly interesting in the links it makes with English professional football. It explores the lessons learnt from US major sports leagues where facility naming rights are standard practice. Note is made that shirt naming rights are non-existent in the USA but commonplace in the UK. This paper describes the evolution of facility naming rights in the US, examines their financial structure and what benefits companies accrue from them, describes the key contractual elements in naming rights contracts and suggests implications for English soccer teams.


This paper offers a good insight into the tensions amongst stakeholders, particularly the club/country conflicts, in an emerging professional sport. It has been included here since it contains an excellent review starting on page 59 of four different international models for the governance of professional sport: the traditional national governing body 'hierarchy', the 'cartel' (USA), the 'oligarchy' (English Premiership) and the 'promoter-led' model (eg. boxing, Kerry Packer in cricket). This section is a particularly lucid introduction to the different types of international governance and many links are made to the UK situation in professional rugby and football. It can be used to set up a range of seminar discussions.

Mega Events


This is one of the best reviews of the different approaches countries take to assembling mega events. By analysing such approaches it can reveal data about a country's political approach to sport. The paper, which reviews the effects of the Olympic Games on the built environment of the various cities that have acted as hosts in the modern Olympic period (1896-1996) and assesses the preparations for Sydney (2000), is a work of considerable précis. The review indicates that the Games have been increasingly used as a trigger for a wide range of urban improvements, although there have been considerable variations in the scale of infrastructure investment and in the public-private sector mix. A good introduction for students studying international comparative dimensions of the Olympic Games.


This special issue of eight papers is useful for material that covers national themes connected with mega events. In particular, the approach to two recent mega events in different countries is well covered: Lillehammer 1994 ('Planning, Figurations and the Green Winter Games') and the World Cup in France 1998 ('Metaphors, Meanings and Values'). A further paper on 'Sport Venues and the Spectacularization of Urban Spaces in North America' considers the Molson
centre in Montreal and gives a useful example of the role of commercialised sport in North American cities.
Guide to Internet Resources

Specific Countries (significant government sites in English)

This excellent site contains information on the Australian Sports commission, the Australian Institute of Sport and a range of programmes and initiatives. This should be the first place to check for any information on Australian sport.

http://www.pch.gc.ca/sportcanada/index_e.cfm
This comprehensive federal government site is devoted to the Sport Canada organisation and contains complete information and papers on a wide variety of Canadian sports policy issues.

http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/sport.html
http://www.minedu.fi/minedu/sports/index.html
These two sites give a good overview of sport in Finland and contain a number of good links that develop further information about physical activity in this country. Finland was frequently quoted in Game Plan as a country whose sporting culture the UK should aspire to and these websites show why it has been held in such high regard.

General

An absolutely first class site which is a sub section of the Australian Sports Commission site. This address is the ‘Topics’ list of the Australian Sports Commissions Sport Information section which lists a range of topics on almost everything to do with sport, with some excellent links.

http://www.ccpr.org.uk/dyncat.cfm?catid=5354
The CCPR site contains an interesting piece of data showing a national league table of exchequer funding to sport in 2000. The UK does not come out favourably although note should be taken of the statistical health warning issued on the page.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/sport/info/structures/a_struct_en.html
This European Commission site offers brief basic outline sketches of the sport structures to be found in each European member country.

The main value of this site of the International Society of Comparative Sport and Physical Education is the updates on the latest conferences in this area.
This section of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education has downloadable summaries of recent research projects which include: The Experience and Meaning of Sport and Exercise in the Lives of Women in Some European Countries and another interesting project titled A World-wide Survey of the State and Status of School Physical Education.

Global Games, that explores why certain sports have grown and spread rather than others. He asserts that it is the ‘hidden competition’ of social and international relations, rather than the particular qualities of a given sport, that explains who plays what sport and why. People's different and changing preferences for sports are based on the social and cultural meanings they attribute to each sport, meanings that alter in response to changing relations among groups of people, social classes and nations. Looking at Britain, Germany, the United States and Japan - the four centres from which the sports practiced by most people worldwide originate - Van Bottenburg discusses how individual sports developed, what institutions and groups spread them, and why certain sports and not others found a ready audience elsewhere. The appendix contains useful tables that rank the popularity of different sports in a wide range of countries, although in some cases the data is a little dated.

This part of the UK Sport website clearly explains the different European Institutions (with useful web links) that have an influence on sport in Europe.

The World Sports forum are a Swiss based organisation, aiming to create dialogue about international sport, social and economic issues. For example, the links on this site lead to the report on their latest conference in 2002 in which the following topics were discussed; Perspectives on Sport in China, a SWOT analysis of Professional Leagues, ‘New’ Sport, and the Global Impact of Mega Events.

Elite Sport

The International Forum on Elite Sport held its first meeting at Sydney in 1999. It is composed of elite sports institutes and organisations such as the UKSI, INSEP (France) and AIS (Australia). The general aim of the Forum is to establish routes of
communication and mutual collaboration between the different High Performance Centres around the world and the people and organisations interested in elite sports. The real value of the little known site is that the notes and some Powerpoint presentations from the three forum meetings (conferences) held in 1999, 2001 and 2003 are available on the site, mainly in English. This allows valuable access to information on the organisation of elite sport in the UK, Ireland, Spain, France, USA and Australia amongst others and a range of interesting perspectives.

http://www.uksport.gov.uk/images/uploaded/ESS_Exec_Summary_Sep03.pdf
This is the executive summary of a UK Sport research paper titled ‘European Sporting Success - A Study of the Development of Medal Winning Elites in Five European Countries’ that will be of value to those investigating different national perspectives on elite success.

The Coaching Task Force report was published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in July 2002 and made a number of recommendations about the future strategic direction of coaching and coach education. Appendix 2 of the report (pp 26-44) contains a benchmarking study of coaching in the UK against best international practice in Australia, France, Germany and Sweden. A very useful resource for those wishing to investigate what lessons can be learnt from abroad.

http://www.sportscotland.org.uk/contents/publications/research/researchsummaries.htm#finland
Specialist sports schools are part of the current debate on the importance of sport within education. They are being widely introduced in England. A study group from Scotland visited Finland in 1999 to investigate the well-established network of twelve sports schools there and this report from the visit provides a detailed perspective on their role and impact.

Mega Events

This is a very useful Olympic related resource from the education legacy project linked to the Barcelona Olympic Games. These university lectures on the Olympics are part of the education project of the Centre d'Estudis Olímpics (UAB) aiming to provide open access through its website to material aimed at university students and professors about major Olympic-related themes, written by experts in the field. Lessons contain a main text, related bibliography and a selection of internet resources for each theme.

In addition to the lectures already available on this website, the project will include lectures dealing with Olympic symbols, bid cities, marketing, education, volunteers, doping, gender and the Paralympic Games.
Teaching Approaches

Three approaches can be taken to the teaching of Comparative Sport Studies. First, is the approach that essentially has an area focus; typically, this would involve the study of a range of nation-state’s approaches to sport. The body of comparative literature has typically focused on English speaking countries, where data is plentiful. More recently, as more information has become available, it has become feasible to make some meaningful comparisons with European nations such as France, Spain, Germany and Scandinavian countries. The texts by Riordan and Kruger (2003), and Chalip et al (1996) follow this approach.

Below, are sets of national contrasts that offer a sound basis for study in this way:

- There are some strong contrasts between the way sport is organised in Canada (including the ramifications of the Ben Johnson affair) and the USA;
- There are similar differences between France, the UK and Scandinavian countries in Europe;
- The Australia organisational model is similar to European provision but its astounding elite success and strong sporting culture also sets it apart.

The second approach is to tackle topics or themes in international settings. This could provide a comparative awareness of situations and developments in an array of countries with opportunity for an analytical dimension. There is for example, information from at least two sources on the following topics/themes within this resource guide:

- Types of Public Sector Sports Organisation and Funding
- The Organisation of Professional Sports Leagues
- Approaches to Mega Events
- Elite Sport Development Systems
- Sports Participation
- PE and School Sport
- Comparative Perspectives on Gender and Sport

Therefore, once the comparative or international sporting scene has been set, a unit may go on to examine some of the above issues within an international context.

These approaches are frequently mixed in many texts and this often provides a sound third approach to structuring teaching delivery. Houlihan’s (1997) text is a classic example of this approach and should be consulted for ideas about course content. Three or four countries could be studied in some detail before moving on to consideration of two/three relevant international themes.
In general though, the sequence of teaching needs to build from aspects that students can connect to from their existing knowledge about their own country before moving on to more complex concepts. Therefore, it is advisable to start with subjects such as the different types of public sector organisation or and differences in participation characteristics in the earlier weeks of a programme.

**Comparative Methods**

It is also appropriate at a fairly early stage to outline some of the challenges faced when comparing between countries. At undergraduate level the basic method of comparison is often ‘description’ of the different aspects of sports provision in different countries. However, if we are to develop a greater comparative understanding between countries we need to develop interpretation of data in order to examine the range of determining features and establish causes and connections; this therefore moves from merely describing the ‘what’, to more rigorous analyses that attempt to answer the questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’.

The data used can come from statistical and/or qualitative sources. Some examples will be used to illustrate this point. A fascinating attempt has been made by the COMPASS project (http://w3.uniroma1.it/compass/index.htm) to compare the nature of sports participation, using statistics, across Europe. Indeed, much of the data derived from this work has been used in the Game Plan document to show how participation in sport and physical activity in the UK is of lower quantity and quality than that in Scandinavian countries (Finland in particular). However, one of the main conclusions of COMPASS has been that it has been very difficult to harmonise the questions asked; thus comparisons of the resultant data are problematic as we are not comparing like with like. Using statistics between countries is, therefore, fraught with difficulties, as anyone will know when they attempt to compare government spending on sport. For example, when a government agency quotes national spending on sport, does that include the costs of all PE provision and swimming pool maintenance?; if it does, how can you ensure that you will get the same methodology applied to a figure from another country?

With this in mind, many researchers in this field have moved more towards in-depth interpretative studies that give priority to qualitative methods with fairly focused single objectives eg. elite sport or secondary school sport etc. From these types of studies, in which in-depth interviews and close examination of official policy documents are used, the differences between countries are drawn out. However, even this approach has some difficulties with language, as, even in translation, some words lose their meaning, suggesting they are culture bound (Hardman, 1996). For example, in the UK, the term physical education features on the school curriculum whilst in Germany the term sport is used.

In conclusion, then, it should be remembered that there is no one ‘best way’ to
design comparative methodologies when setting up research protocols for investigating different aspects of sport and leisure activity across different countries. It may be the case, for example, that combining statistical analyses with a more in-depth qualitative approach is the optimum way of producing a richer final analysis. It is recommended that these issues need to be highlighted to students, and the first chapters in both the Houlihan (1997) and Chalip et. al. (1996) texts are useful introductions in this respect.

Assessment

Assessment will typically investigate either a country or an international issue in greater detail than has been covered in the teaching. Written work or presentations on countries can be extremely descriptive unless they are set in a way that encourages direct comparisons and contrasts to the UK.

If a range of countries are to be delivered in outline detail along the lines of the first approach (above), then students could be asked to select two countries to compare and contrast with the UK. A difficulty with student self-selection of the country to be studied is that certain countries receive all the attention.

Literature reviews or annotated bibliographies may also be another form of assessment, as long as there is recognition of the varying amount of material on some issues and/or countries.

About the Author

Ben Oakley is a senior lecturer in Sport Development at the University of Portsmouth; he is the course leader of a new BSc (Hons) Water Sports Science course. His interest in comparative Sport is underpinned by attendance as a coach at the Olympic Games in Seoul (1988) and Barcelona (1992). He has written and presented material in the field of UK sports policy and comparative aspects of international elite sport systems.