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Sport, media and the Gaelic Athletic Association: the Quest for the "Youth" of Ireland

John Connolly
Dublin City University

Paddy Dolan
Dublin Institute of Technology, Paddy.Dolan@dit.ie

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John Connolly
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Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

Abstract
Social developments and related dynamic relationships connected with the sports– media complex is a recurrent focus of sociological investigation. However, in explaining developments in the relationship between sports associations and media organizations the specific structure of power relations between them and other related organizations is often given primacy. We argue that this negates how changes in people's social habitus – how people think feel and act – are interconnected with and critical to such explanations. Consequently, in this article we apply the theoretical frame of figurational sociology to demonstrate how the gradual development and expansion of specialist communications and media functions in a national sports organization were impelled by several intertwined social processes, including changes in people's social habitus. Our empirical case study is based on one of the largest sporting and cultural organizations in Ireland, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). We explain how the GAA felt compelled to increasingly deploy a range of communications, media and marketing specialists in the struggle for media space and as a means to engage, understand and connect with the more nuanced tastes of Irish 'youth'.

In this article we explain the development, expansion and increasing specialization of media and communications functions within one of the largest sports and cultural organizations in Ireland, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). We contend, following Norbert Elias, that over the course of the last 125 years the GAA and media organizations in Ireland became more functionally interdependent; the competitive interdependencies enmeshing those comprising both sports and media organizations expanded and intensified; and increasing numbers of people in Ireland, particularly from the 1960s onwards, became more discerning, open and at the same time more capricious in their uptake of sports and leisure practices. This latter development reflected a more

individualised social habitus, which occurred within the context of expanding social interdependencies in Ireland as a whole. These processes and the compelling pressures generated by them led to gradual dissipation of 'nationalist' rhetoric as a mechanism for integrating the 'youth' of Ireland into the GAA, and instead resulted in an advance in the development and deployment of media functions to reach the 'new generation'. Thus, the paper demonstrates how media functions, and their further differentiation and specialization within the GAA, were in part driven by a process in which people began to feel more distant from others, less certain about knowing their own and others 'true' feelings, attitudes and how they might act. As mediated communications became more functionally important in the quest to reach this audience, functions to steer and craft communication strategies evolved and gradually became more specialized.

Theoretical framework

Our approach is based on the theoretical framework developed by Elias (1978; 2000) commonly referred to as figurational or process sociology. Elias developed the concept of figuration as a means for envisaging people in interdependence and process. As such, figurations can be defined as dynamic networks of interdependent people. Central in comprehending this conceptualisation of interdependence is Elias's meaning of power, which is never absolute but always in balance; though these balances may be highly asymmetrical; and the structure of any interdependency and power relation is always in process. Indeed, and in what is recognized as one of Elias's most important theoretical insights, changes in how people are bonded to one another – the structure of interdependency chains – are bound up with changes in the social habitus, or psychic make-up, of people. By social habitus Elias was referring to the general dispositions, ways of thinking, feeling and acting, that individuals share with others in their society: 'This make-up, the social habitus of individuals, forms, as it were, the soil from which grow the personal characteristics through which an individual differs from other members of society' (Elias, 1991: 182).

An integral part of social habitus is the 'We–I identity balance' (Elias, 1991). Elias developed this concept to demonstrate how individuals were bonded to others at different levels of intensity and integration such as families, towns, nations and organizations, and the processual nature of this balance. More significantly, Elias (2000) demonstrated how changes in social habitus – advances in self-control over the emotions – and, interrelated with this, shifts in the 'We–I' balance in the direction of the latter were connected to transformations in how people were bonded to one another within society more broadly. Under pressure of social competition the division of functions expands, and in tandem with this, more and more people from different social groups

become increasingly interdependent. As people become more dependent on one other for the provision of different social functions such as food, transport, work and education, they are compelled not only to exert greater and more even control over their behaviour, but also to take account of, and attune, their own behaviour with those upon whom they depend. The pressures generated in people by their position in expanding and increasingly complex webs of interdependencies forces them to develop and exercise a more calculating, longer-term orientation involving a more concise observation of themselves and others. Thus, the long-term, but non-linear, process of advances in the exercise of self-restraint occur alongside a related process of increasing foresight and what Elias terms a process of 'psychologization' – people become more calculating and their image of others 'becomes richer in nuances', while a person's feelings are furthered obscured from others and the perception of psychological distance is enhanced (Elias, 2000: 399–400).

We contend, that that the development and expansion of media functions in the GAA, and interrelated with this, changes in discourse deployed in mediated communications were connected with changes in the We–I balance of people in Ireland as the I-identity of people took on a greater emotional charge.

Case Study

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is one of the largest sporting organizations in Ireland. It governs the sports of Gaelic football, hurling, Irish handball and rounders and remains one of the largest voluntary and community based organizations in Ireland.

Our sources of data were primarily archival supplemented with qualitative interviews. We had access to the official minutes of various organizational units of the GAA, annual reports, strategy reports, officially recognized magazines and annuals, newspaper accounts, and manuscripts and journals authored by GAA activists covering periods between 1884 and 2010. This was supplemented by historical data on the media in Ireland and broader historical accounts of social change in Ireland. Three qualitative interviews were conducted including; a retired public relations officer of the GAA; a current communications/media functionary within the GAA and a former head of sport with the state broadcasting service in Ireland.

The functional interdependency of sports organizations and the media

The GAA was formed in 1884 in an effort to gain 'home rule'[1] for Irish Athletics and, more broadly, to resist the increasing Anglicization of Irish sport and culture (Mandle, 1987). The shifting power balance between the catholic Irish middle-class and the Anglo-Irish ascendency in favour of the former cultivated the desire for a revival of native Irish games and language. The tension and animosities between these opposing social groups were quickly reflected in the hostilities between the GAA and the English and Anglo-Irish directed athletics organizations formed to resist the GAA – the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) (Dolan and Connolly, 2009). The leadership of both sporting organizations comprised mainly middle-class men (and some members of the upper-class in the case of the IAAA) (Mandle, 1987). Although the level of mistrust and antipathy between these groups was high, their engagement with one another was generally performed in a relatively pacified manner, reflecting civilizing processes (Elias, 2000) that had occurred at that stage of social development. In this context, newspapers and periodicals provided an important function for the performance of adversarial relations between these groups (Cronin, et al., 2009: 184). Indeed, newspapers at the time, more generally in Irish and British society, were one of the primary channels through which individuals, and the social groups they represented, sought to mobilize support for their ideas and interests, as well as condemning and vilifying those of their opponents (Aspinall, 1946; Morash, 2010: 70–83, 94). Certainly, by the 1880s various different socio-political organizations or movements sought to present their views through the national and provincial media and/or through other publications in the form of pamphlets and periodicals (see McGee, 2005: 146, 161).

This functional import attached to the print media, particularly newspapers, is also evident from a common practice at that time whereby individuals, or the social units they represented, established a newspaper or periodical in reaction to an unfair characterization or the overlooking of their views by the established print media. An example of this was the *Celtic Times*, founded in 1887 by the former secretary of the GAA, Michael Cusack, which he used to propagate his opinions and vilify and condemn his opponents. Similarly, the *Gael* newspaper was launched by several members of the GAA central executive to further their interests and the wider interests of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) to which they were also affiliated (McGee, 2005: 164). Both of these publications were short lived; between 1885 and 1910 over 300 different newspapers titles appeared in Ireland, over half of which failed (Morash, 2010).

By the late 1890s sports reports were an increasing feature of both the national and provincial media (Duncan, 2009) demonstrating the fact that sport, and its representation, was becoming more important to many social groups. Indeed, tensions surrounding sports reporting generated considerable enmity amongst leading officials of the GAA towards some sections of the media. The 'nationalist' print media[2] in particular were considered by some leading GAA officers to be 'openly hostile or secretly indifferent' to the GAA (quoted in Duncan, 2009: 107). That the extent and form of press coverage generated such hostility illustrates the importance they attributed to the press in influencing opinion. These tensions must be understand within the competitive context in which representatives of the various sports organizations functioned; both cricket and Association football (soccer) remained popular throughout Ireland, and amongst the social classes from which GAA activists sought to recruit their membership. Between 1905 and 1910 the number of affiliated soccer clubs increased from 278 to 430 (Garnham, 2004: 7) – the GAA comprised 311 affiliated clubs in 1900 (Mandle, 1987: 116) – while cricket remained the most popular sport in several parts of the country (Hunt, 2008). It was within the context of these competitive interdependencies that the leadership of the GAA continually sought to establish an official print publication and, in turn, develop more innovative features within such publications. For example, *Gaelic News* was launched in 1897 trumpeting 'high-class illustrations and exclusive reports' (Duncan, 2009: 107). Moreover, it was this structure of tensions which sustained a belief in the importance of securing positive press coverage for Gaelic games and the GAA, and, where this was perceived as lacking, in fostering felt grievances and antipathy towards the press – the nationalist press, in particular:

> There are papers in Dublin which on Saturday's print a special football issue, giving the latest soccer news. The Dalymount [soccer stadium] and Lansdowne [rugby stadium] get lauded to the skies, column after column is filled with details of play and players, photographs are given of prominent (sometimes "very" prominent) exponents of the garrison games. But we seldom if ever get a photo or word of praise for any of the prominent Gaelic players. (*Gaelic Annual*, 1908–09: 30)

Contributors to the GAA's official media organ of the time, the *Gaelic Annual*, continued to applaud, or condemn, the media (national and provincial), depending on the perceived stance they adopted towards Gaelic games coverage (*Gaelic Annual*, 1907–08: 24; 1908–09: 36; 1910–11: 66). The competitive interdependencies permeating the figuration of sports organizations generated pressures and felt needs within the GAA for a medium for 'creating greater interest in the Association' (*Gaelic Annual*, 1910–11: 68). Equally, these tensions sustained the belief held by some GAA activists that the scale and content of

newspaper coverage could expand, or impede, the further diffusion of 'foreign games' (*Gaelic Annual*, 1910–11: 26).

The figuration comprised by sports organizations was also interdependent with a figuration comprising competing commercial print media organizations. Consequently, as newspaper functionaries sought to sustain or enhance the market presence of the organizations they represented innovative features such as photographic images and new styles were developed (Duncan, 2009; Morash, 2010) in a compelling, and spiralling, process of rivalry and emulation. Such developments were not confined to sports coverage and new printing methods were used to improve advertising features in an attempt to lure commercial enterprises to purchase advertising space (Oram, 1986: 32). This too reflected advertising's growing importance as a source of revenue for media outlets, which further increased the scrutiny attached to circulation figures (Morash, 2010). As sport was increasingly perceived as a circulation builder, the growing popularity of Gaelic games meant the scale, and form, of coverage surrounding them became more functionally important for newspaper functionaries – owners, editors, and journalists. For instance, one provincial newspaper, in an advertisement in a GAA match programme of 1913, claimed '...the best G.A.A. service in Ireland', and called on GAA followers to look out for coverage from its Gaelic games correspondent known as 'Vigilant', who was 'Better than a cinematograph' (in Cronin, et al., 2009: 190). It was also this multi-layered and interconnected structure of figurations that generated the social context in which editors and journalists increased the column inches and photographic content of Gaelic games (Corry, 2009; Duncan, 2009). In tandem with this, the cooperative interdependencies between GAA administrators/players and media functionaries advanced. Journalists and editors sought opportunities for enhanced pre and post match coverage, while GAA administrators sought to amplify the scale and tone of media reports relating to Gaelic games. As organizational and administrative functions, at national and regional levels, in the GAA were still primarily performed by the secretary of each unit this function now encompassed the role of intermediary through which media functionaries principally obtained official information on GAA affairs (GAA, 1914).

Expansion, radio and oscillating tensions: 1925 to the 1960s

Following the War of Independence and Civil War in Ireland (1919–23), the GAA expanded rapidly in terms of general membership, club affiliation and spectatorship; indeed soccer, the main competition to Gaelic games, also grew in popularity (McCabe, 2011). Interrelated with this, media coverage of non-GAA sport also expanded. For instance, the *Irish Independent*, then one of the largest selling newspapers, devoted two weekly columns to

soccer, while a weekly sports magazine primarily dedicated to soccer was also launched (McCabe, 2011). So, despite the cooperative relations and genuine affinity between many GAA activists and journalists there also existed resentment and hostility at the media's continued patronage of other sports.

These tensions were furthered fuelled by the emergence of new 'broadcast' media impelled by the interweaving of several social processes – rivalries between commercial organizations; between print media organizations; and the desire of political leaders in the Irish state to emulate or surpass developments in the former colonial power (Horgan, 2001: 14–17) – which provided the momentum for the development of the state radio broadcaster, 2RN, in the Irish Free State[3] in 1926 (Boyle, 1992: 625). The conflation of Gaelic games and the GAA with the nationalist movement prior to, and during, the War of Independence fostered a sense of entitlement among many GAA members, often articulated and cultivated by GAA activists and administrators, for a primary position as the national sporting and cultural body in the new Irish Free State. As a result, there was often open hostility towards Irish governments for their failure to institutionalize the primacy of the GAA and Gaelic games over other sports. These tensions were soon reflected in disagreements over media coverage of other sports in both the print media (see Cronin, et al., 2009: 192) and, increasingly, in the broadcast media. For instance, in 1936, soon after 2RN began the practice of broadcasting results from different sporting events and codes, the general secretary of the GAA countered:

> The most objectionable of these was the linking up of Gaelic results with the reports of foreign games. The Council considered this an insidious method of introducing non-Gaelic pastimes to the attention of the Irish public at large. It is a debatable question whether the advantages of Wireless publicity are not entirely neutralised by the manner in which it is provided at present. (GAA/AC, 1936)

While, implicitly at least, his latter point may have intimated withdrawal of cooperation with the state broadcaster, the double bind in which they were locked constrained such action; the GAA leadership, at national, provincial and local level, were dependent on both radio and newspapers for coverage of Gaelic games, which they believed was critical to help sustain and expand the popularity and membership of the GAA. On the other hand, Gaelic games, one of the most popular set of sports in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s, provided important, albeit different, functions for media owners, editors, photographers and journalists who were bound to one another through cooperative and competitive interdependencies.

Competitive tensions underpinned the increased media exposure given to Gaelic games, and sport generally, by the print media. Indeed, coverage expanded

further with the arrival in 1932 of a new national newspaper, the *Irish Press*. Seeking to differentiate its offering in the quest for readership, and its editors believing sport would act as a circulation builder, the *Irish Press* dedicated a greater percentage of total newspaper space to sport. A spiralling process of competition and emulation saw the total percentage of newspaper space given to sport by the three Irish national dailies increase significantly during the period 1932–62 (Boyle, 1992: 630–631). Demonstrating, too, the expanding media figuration, the competitive interdependencies between the broadcast and print media meant sports-related programming on radio also increased (Boyle, 1992: 633). Of course, the expansion in broadcast coverage was also enhanced by the increasing functional importance of broadcast media organizations. The technology of radio had changed the spatial dimensions and temporal boundaries in which sport, and the 'quest for excitement' (Elias and Dunning, 2008), was experienced by those who could not attend sports events. The capacity of live radio coverage to generate the tension and excitement of actual attendance increased its popularity, which in turn facilitated a tightening of the interdependency between the GAA and the national radio broadcaster, now known as Radio Éireann. For instance, in contrast with the late 1920s when some GAA officials feared live radio broadcasts would deter match attendances (Cronin, et al., 2009: 183), the 1940s saw representatives of regional GAA units seeking greater coverage of provincial fixtures (GAA/AC, 1945). As before, the principal conduit between the various units of the GAA and the media remained the function of GAA secretary.

Cooperative relations developed further as the perceived benefits of these interdependencies became more apparent to each side. In addition, the interdependencies between them also compelled the various GAA units to adopt a more planned and structured approach to the coordination of match fixtures with the requirements of Radio Éireann (GAA, 1946: 15). However, the extent of the cooperative bonds between the GAA and Radio Éireann were moderated by differences over the meaning of nationhood and Irishness, which were often explicitly personified in the actions taken by representatives of the respective organizations. For instance, in 1954 the GAA refused to allow the broadcast of a national final due to the fact that Radio Éireann intended to include coverage of an International soccer match between the Republic of Ireland[4] and Scotland during half-time in the GAA fixture (see Boyle, 1992: 629). The international dimension within which the competing sports of soccer and rugby were embedded, and the choreography around this, had for a considerable time been a source of insecurity, and a felt threat, for GAA activists seeking to expand the organization (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1914; Devlin, 1934). As a consequence, not only were other competing sports stigmatized as less Irish and located within a British imperialist sphere, so too, at times, was the internationalist facet of such sports. The insecurity generated by the 'international' element of competitor sports at one level fuelled a discourse of denigration towards the 'fetish of

"internationalism"' (Devlin, 1934: 80) and on the other, the amplification of Gaelic games as 'truly Irish':

> The games sponsored by our Association are the many native ones of our country, and they are second to none where athletic skill and prowess are concerned. Furthermore, they are entwined with true nationality, and this very fact entitles them to general support.
> Secretary of Ulster Council of the GAA (GAA, 1951)

Despite this, the structure and type of interdependencies between the GAA and Radio Éireann ensured a cooperative relationship was sustained. The popularity of Gaelic games meant that media organizations seeking to garner a wide audience and attract advertisers could ill afford to ignore Gaelic games. Indicative of this is the change in attention given by the *Irish Times* newspaper. The paper, which had a propensity in the past to publish editorials highly critical, even denigrating, of the GAA (see *Irish Times*, November 21, 1919: 4), a unionist history and a mainly upper middle-class readership (Morash, 2010) gradually increased coverage of Gaelic games. For instance, over a two month period in 1954 considerable print space was dedicated to specialist articles on how to play Gaelic games (see *Irish Times*, 1954, Jul 31: 18; Aug14: 18; Aug 21: 18; Aug 28: 18; Sept 11: 18) at a time when the paper's circulation was only 35,000 in comparison to around 200,000 for the other two national dailies (Horgan, 2001: 62).

From 'Nationalist' rhetoric to 'selling the games'
GAA and media relations

By the 1960s there were over 40 provincial papers functioning alongside the national dailies (Morash, 2010: 41) and the structure and dynamic of this figuration impelled innovation; the content of daily newspapers increased, averaging between 30 to 40 pages (Morash, 2010: 181). More significantly, though, was the shift in the axis of tension between sports and media organizations with the expansion of television as a medium from the 1960s in Ireland.

For both the GAA leadership and activists, television was initially perceived as both a danger and opportunity (see GAA, 1961; 1962; 1963), with fears expressed over a potential decline in spectator attendances and the resultant affect on revenues (GAA, 1962). In this regard the GAA were not unique, several other sporting organizations were equally reticent about 'live' broadcast coverage (Interview A, 2010). Despite this ambivalence, the structure of interdependencies between the GAA and other sports organizations ensured that those at the apex of the GAA were compelled to maintain an open mind

towards the medium. For example, the secretary general of the GAA declared: 'Television and Broadcasting are the media most likely to change the leisure habits of people and we cannot ignore their tremendous influence' (GAA, 1963: A21). The fear that the medium of television could convert Irish people to other sports was a compelling force in moderating any hostility towards possible television coverage. Furthermore, the existing cooperative interdependencies, the formation of Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE) incorporated the existing state radio service, which had over time fostered mutual identification and amiable personal relationships between representatives of the two organizations (Interview A, 2010), facilitated a broadcasting agreement between the GAA and RTE in the 1960s (Corry, 2009).

This expansion of the media figuration in Ireland involved an intensification and lengthening of competitive interdependencies between various media organizations both within and outside the state. Although RTE was the only licensed television broadcaster within the 26 counties, it was in competition with other television broadcasters. The partition of Ireland in 1922 and the subsequent formation of Northern Ireland led to situation in which British television services were developed in Northern Ireland and also transmitted from Britain to Ireland. Such signals were not 'border proof' and by the late 1950s British television broadcasts were available to approximately 40% of the population in the 26 counties (Horgan, 2001). Accordingly, RTE's sports coverage competed with that of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), particularly the very popular soccer programme 'Match of the Day' (Interview A, 2010). In this competitive context, RTE initiated the broadcast of global sports events such as the Soccer World Cup and Olympic Games; later they gained the rights to broadcast 'Match of the Day' (Interview A, 2010). Moreover, the tension balance between RTE and the GAA was tempered by 'symbolic' and emotional attachments and wider competitive interdependencies which framed both the GAA's and RTE's position. The GAA was a 32-county organization and the decision by RTE to restrict the broadcast of GAA coverage to the 26 counties[5] (Hassan, 2009) (where it was legally constituted to broadcast) often exacerbated tensions; various GAA administrators castigated RTE on this issue. On the other hand, as RTE sought to compete with British stations, and act as a state broadcaster in the 26 counties by covering various sports in Ireland, and international sports which would attract viewers, this further heightened tensions with the GAA. For example, commentators within officially recognized GAA magazines suggested: '... soccer, rugby, golf or boxing. All of them deserve their share of publicity. But they get it, and Gaelic games do not' (*Gaelic Sport*, 1969: 29). Similar sentiments were expressed at meetings of the GAA's central council (GAA/CC, 1967), charged with governance and coordination of the organization, and from within the wider membership at national congresses during the early 1970s (see GAA, 1973; 1974). Indicative of this was the claim by a delegate that:

... R.T.E are carrying out a deliberate policy of downgrading Gaelic games due to the inadequate coverage and unfair treatment meted out in the past few years, so blatant it is beyond belief, and yet soccer, rugby, racing, snooker and other sports command extensive coverage to the detriment of the national games of Ireland. (GAA, 1974: 24)

So, although fears of a reduction in match attendances owing to television coverage remained (see CLG, 1971)[6] criticism also began to coalesce around a perceived lack of coverage, and quality of presentation, of Gaelic games by RTE (see *Gaelic Sport*, 1971: 23).

With the numbers of people with a television in their homes in the 26 counties continuing to increase (Morash, 2010: 181), a compelling pressure for obtaining, maintaining and increasing television coverage of Gaelic games developed. As such, the structure of interdependency ties between the GAA and RTE strengthened rather than weakened – the double bind had become more solidified. RTE needed the rights to transmit the most popular set of sports in Ireland (Interview A, 2010) and this was reflected in changes in the scale of remuneration for transmission rights. For instance, in 1962, the GAA received a 'nominal' fee of £10 from RTE for the broadcast rights (Corry, 2009: 111), but by 1976 this had increased to £15,000 (Downey, 1976: 3). Equally, the GAA needed television coverage of its games at a time when the medium of television was growing in popularity – by 1979 90% of homes in the 26 counties had a television (Morash, 2010: 181). That RTE, as the only licensed television service in the 26 counties, could not be substituted for an alternative provider constrained the GAA and bound them tightly to RTE. So despite regular verbal attacks on RTE from some GAA administrators, and some heated exchanges during contract negotiations (Interview A, 2010), the GAA leadership were generally conciliatory towards RTE stressing the long history of cooperation between the two organizations (GAA, 1973). Thus, the type of mutual dependency that existed, and growing awareness of this, ensured cooperative relations were maintained and enhanced. For instance, in a speech to the GAA's annual congress of 1977 the president of the GAA stated:

A liaison group has been formed by the journalists in the press and R.T.E. which will operate on an ongoing basis with the Association on matters of mutual interest. ..The Association and the Media need one another and we must endeavour to use the media to the Association's best advantage. We must treat their representatives with respect (GAA/AC, 1977).

Reflecting this continuing cooperation, in 1978 and 1979 several GAA officials, players and referees took part in specialist media seminars organised

by RTE, in which they were trained in 'TV interview techniques', 'radio talks' and 'panel discussion'(GAA, 1979); this too demonstrated the increasing functional importance being attributed to media skills by leading GAA officials.

The expansion of the media figuration, and the related growth in media coverage of sport further intensified the contest over the form, scale and control of the coverage provided by the different media. In this context, efforts by GAA functionaries to systematically develop, control and expand media relations with RTE were replicated with the media more broadly. Consequently, a specialist public relations function at central level in the GAA was developed in the early 1970s (CLG, 1971; GAA/AC, 1973). However, while the GAA's integration into an expanding media figuration, and subsequent creation of more differentiated functions in the GAA, was impelled by competitive pressures, this process was intertwined with other social developments which accelerated specialization and fostered a change in how the GAA communicated and engaged with its audiences.

The competition for Irish youth

In our analysis of official GAA publications and of the wider discourse involving GAA activists a narrative conflating GAA membership and Gaelic games with 'true' nationhood and patriotism is a recurrent feature up to the mid 1960s (e.g. the GAA's annual *Our Games*, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1966). For instance, in one edition the then GAA president noted 'You may serve another nation's language, or games, or way of life for motives of your own, but you can not claim that such service is for Ireland's sake' (*Our Games*, 1966: 43). Through such discourses of nationhood many leading GAA administrators believed they could mobilize 'young people's' exclusive support for the GAA. By the end of the decade, concerns about the adoption of competitor sports by 'young people' remained and had, in fact, become more pronounced within various GAA publications and reports (CLG, 1971; *Gaelic Sport*, 1971). Soccer was identified as the main threat to the GAA, particularly the amplifying role of the media in promoting English and Scottish soccer (CLG, 1971). Commentators supportive of the GAA suggested more comprehensive and 'professional' publicity would be critical in securing the allegiances of Ireland's youth (see *Gaelic Sport*, 1971). Such feelings were also evident from the criticism now levelled at the GAA's standard of publicity, described as the 'Achilles heel' of the organization (*Our Games*, 1972). But even more perceptible in these publications are the changes in how the youth of Ireland were envisioned and considered:

> ...it [the GAA] has only tolerated youth, not encouraged and fostered their needs. It is no longer sufficient to say you must play Gaelic games because they are Irish. Today's youth seeks better reasons than that. They have alternative games to turn to and if they find in

these the things missing in the G.A.A., the haemorrhage will continue. (*Our Games*, 1972: 74)

This extract is indicative of a wider change reflecting several different, yet intertwined, social processes; a change in the distribution of power between different generations and a shift in the We–I balance (Elias, 1991) towards the latter. This shift reflected an advance in individualization as the I-identity of people became more strongly felt. One manifestation of this social process was that people were coming to be increasingly perceived as choosing individuals, with unique tastes and desires (Dolan, 2009). Expressions about how to engage with this new, younger generation were not merely rhetoric; they were accompanied by changes in policy and in the subsequent enactment of related strategies. For instance, in 1971 the GAA commissioned a review of its operations and organization, which recommended a series of actions in relation to its engagement with 'youth', and audiences more generally, through the media (CLG, 1971: 86–99). This period also saw the commissioning of market research reports by functionaries within the GAA in an effort to capture the attitudes and behaviours of young people in Ireland. For instance, in 1971 a report *Attitudes of Young People to Games and Pastimes* was produced for the GAA.

Leading GAA officials, with the advice of external 'experts', a reflection too that GAA officials were no longer confident of knowing their membership, felt compelled to develop media functions which could provide 'specialist advice… so that messages are conveyed clearly at all levels and through the various media' (CLG, 1971: 8). This also reflected an intensification of competitive pressures and the enhanced importance attached to media and communications in the contest for youth affiliation in particular. Thus, by the late 1970s the location of a public relations function at central level was no longer considered adequate; rather, it was now perceived as an indispensible requirement at all levels of administration and co-ordination within the GAA:

> The competition for space in the media is now intense. Daily decisions are made in newspapers about the news value of different items. All sports are in competition here…To provide a proper system of information each county should have its own active PRO [public relations officer] … and the main task is to provide information re county activities to national and provincial papers and to train clubs in the value and use of publicity re club activities. (GAA, 1979)

While the narrative aligning Gaelic games with Irishness, as a strategy through which the youth of Ireland could be recruited to the GAA, became, to an extent, less pronounced, the pace and extent of this transition was not universal across the GAA. In Northern Ireland, in particular, the GAA remained more strongly embedded within a cultural narrative which fused Irish nationalist

politics, Gaelic games and Irish music and language with Irish identity. Indeed, membership of the GAA was, and remains, for many, a means of symbolically and emotionally enacting one's Irishness. Yet, more widely in the GAA, the belief that narrative repertoires of 'Irish games and Irishness' would resonate with Irish youth was dissipating and being transcended by calls for greater efforts by the GAA to 'sell its games' (*Gaelic World*, 1980: Oct 2: 33). As processes of individualization in Ireland advanced further, the tensions and anxieties this generated within the GAA was manifest in growing uncertainty amongst GAA activists about how to understand and connect with the motivations and desires of young people, as illustrated by this extract from an operations manual distributed to GAA administrators in the mid 1980s:

> ... the increasing emergence of independent-minded people with sharply critical power of selection and rejection of a sports body, its games and its services. The G.A.A. must also accept the unpleasant implication that if it fails to identify with the motivation of its members, players and supporters; fails to seek out and solve their problems; fails to find out what they need and how they give it to them, the organization will quickly lose its pre-eminent position in Irish sport. (CLG, 1985: 1)

By the late 1980s the media figuration had grown denser and the chain of interdependencies longer; new commercial radio and terrestrial television stations emerged, several Irish media organizations were integrated into international companies, satellite broadcasting and other media providers sought to develop markets in Ireland increasing the competition in the contest for Irish readers, viewers, listeners and advertising revenues (Horgan, 2001: 142; Sweetman, 2008; Morash, 2010). Through to the 1990s and beyond, this provided the momentum for technological developments in the production, distribution and consumption of media leading to new forms of interdependence and still further levels of functional differentiation and specialization. The emphasis on sport as a circulation builder in the print media or for capturing television audience intensified within this structure. For instance, dedicated 'sports only' broadcasters entered the competitive landscape. Moreover, as British based newspapers sought to develop 'Irish editions' as a strategy to grow market share (Sweetman, 2008) Irish sports coverage, including that of Gaelic Games, provided a dual function – a response to the interests of Irish readers and a means for British newspapers to develop an Irish identity.

That Gaelic games' functional importance to media organizations generally had increased can be discerned from the attendance levels of journalists at GAA-related press events. For example, at GAA press conferences in the late 1970s six to seven journalists would be in attendance; by 2000 over 30 media representatives were attending such events (Interview B, 2010). A

further indication of a tightening of the functional bonds between the GAA and an expanding number of media organizations and the functionaries pertaining to them relates to changes in both the number and structure of media rights contracts – by 2007 the GAA earned €8m from broadcasting contracts (GAA, 2008) and were involved in nine separate media contracts (Interview C, 2010). At same time, the expansion in the media, and consequently in the number of journalists, increased competitive pressures on those functionaries; journalists required, and competed for, access to GAA players and officials to generate media content and build personal reputations. Of course media dependence was underpinned by the fact that Gaelic games still remained one of the most popular set of sports in Ireland with specific matches persistently ranked top of the Irish television ratings (*Irish Times*, 2011, Jan 22).

On other hand, GAA administrators were aware that Gaelic games were competing with other sports for a share of an expanding and more differentiated sports media space. Interconnected with this, an increasing slice of this media time and space was allocated to other sports, in particular, the main rivals to the GAA's games – soccer and rugby. It was in part these processes that provided the momentum for the further expansion and specialization of media and communications functions within the GAA. For instance, a report commissioned to review the GAA's structure and organization in 2002 advocated specialist departments and functions such as a 'communications/IT unit, and a 'media relations unit' encompassing PR (GAA, 2002). By 2010 the central administrative unit of the GAA contained the following communications and media functions; 'Brand manager'; 'Sponsorship Manager', 'Director of communications'; 'Communications manager'; and 'Director of commercial and marketing[sic]' (GAA, 2010a: 60). Such specialist functions, and the knowledge and techniques they encapsulated, were now perceived as vital in ensuring success – securing media space, 'knowing' their existing and potential membership, increasing participation and growing spectatorship. Indeed, the acquisition of 'consumer' and 'brand' research through external specialists also came to be deemed necessary for capturing the wants and needs of, and communicating with, young people in the new millennium:

> ...their [the GAA activists] feedback is pretty good. It is pretty accurate but there is a gap in that, if you look at the younger market – that is the one we need to be targeting and I mean most guys are my profile who are at that level. So, we need to be looking and find out for the future. So, we are starting to do that – we did some stuff on attendances recently – just to find out what people want in terms of saying 'What is it that will make them go? What will make them not go? (Interview C, 2010)

The requirement for such knowledge has not only fostered and expedited the creation of marketing communications and media functions within the GAA, but

also increased the dependence of the GAA on external specialists; 'marketing' and 'branding expertise' provided by cultural intermediaries (Interview, 3, 2010); and website design, mobile communications, social media development and management specialists (e.g. ebow, 2011).

These developments in functional differentiation within the GAA were, as we contend, also a response to a felt need to 'understand' and 'communicate' with what was a more distant and unknown audience to those charged with coordinating and governing the GAA. We argue, that this reflected a further shift in the We–I balance towards the latter and, in concert with this, an advance in the process of psychologization more broadly. Such advances in psychologization only emerge in conjunction with changes in how people are bonded to one another. As the network of interdependencies, alongside increasing functional differentiation, becomes more extensive, and the structure of these interdependencies more equal, larger numbers of people of different occupational, gender and social class positions, come under greater and more varied social pressures to exert more even and comprehensive levels of self-control. In keeping with this transformation there is a related advance in psychologization – a more precise observation of oneself and others (Elias, 2000). Processes of advancing industrialization, commercialization and urbanization evident in Ireland over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are examples of this transformation toward more expansive networks of social interdependencies (Dolan, 2009). Moreover, the integration of figurations of people in Ireland into global figurations, particularly from the 1960s onwards accelerated and fuelled advances in psychologization. Indeed, it is this process of psychologization, as Dolan demonstrates, that in part impelled the development of new functions such as marketing in Ireland more generally as commercial organizations sought to 'understand' consumers' needs and tastes:

> The growing social pressures towards more even self-control have produced the feeling that other individuals are psychologically distant and separate, and new social functions and occupations of marketing specialists emerge to bridge the gap. (Dolan, 2009: 137–8)

As well as the emergence of specialist functions seeking to 'understand' these more psychically distant consumers, new functions, as illustrated here, also appeared in the realm of communications to 'connect' with this audience. The combination of competitive pressures and the emergence of an increasingly detached and more unknown audience impelled the creation of these functions within the GAA and deployment of external specialists.

Conclusion

While studies within the realm of the sports–media nexus remain a popular focus of sociological investigation, many analyses have downplayed, or ignored, changes in social habitus or psychic make-up of people – those who view or 'consume' sports media (e.g. Maguire, 1988, 1990; Scherer, 2007; Scherer et al. 2008; Scherer and Jackson, 2008). Instead, the emphasis tends to be directed at existing, or changing, asymmetrical power relations involving various sports, media and commercial marketing organizations. As such, we contend, first, that there is a need to integrate changes in social habitus into studies concerning the sports–media complex and, second, to conceive of social habitus in process rather than self-contained and timeless. In this paper we have sought to demonstrate how changes in social habitus – involving a strengthening of the I in the We–I balance – in tandem with an escalation in the competitive interdependencies enveloping those comprising both sports and media organizations impelled ongoing expansion and specialization in media and communications functions in the GAA. In addition, we illustrate how these processes also led to changes in the narratives deployed by GAA activists in their efforts to sustain and enhance membership of the GAA. The mobilization of a we-image in which 'true' Irishness and the GAA were inseparable became less pronounced and gradually supplanted by an emphasis on understanding individual needs and motivations. As individualization processes continued to advance further over the following decades, this was reflected in increasing anxiety amongst GAA functionaries about how to understand and connect with new generations of young people. Consequently, specialists in media, communications and marketing became increasingly perceived as essential right up to the present as a means to engage, understand and connect with the more nuanced tastes of Irish 'youth'.

Notes

1. At that time Ireland was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Athletics was governed by the (English) Amateur Athletic Association (AAA).
2. The newspapers owned and controlled by broadly nationalist orientated Irishmen, who were stigmatised by GAA members as supporting 'British' sports.
3. Following the war of independence (1919–21) and the subsequent Anglo-Irish treaty in 1922 Ireland was partitioned. The Free State was the name given to the 26 counties of Ireland which obtained partial independence from Britain; six counties remained under British rule and this jurisdiction became known as

Northern Ireland. The GAA continued to function as a 32 county All-Ireland body and to the present day its constitution has as its basic aim the strengthening of 'National Identity in a 32 County Ireland' (GAA, 2010b: 5).

4. The 26 counties became officially recognized as the Republic of Ireland in 1948.

5. Although areas close to the border with the twenty counties were within range of an RTE signal the north-eastern parts of Northern Ireland in particular were unable to obtain RTE services.

6. CLG refers to Cumann Lúthchleas Gael which is the Irish language translation of Gaelic Athletic Association. In some publications CLG is the corporate author.

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