

# ESA 2011 - Abstract Submission

*Social Theory And Sport*

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## AUTHENTICITY OF THE TOP-LEVEL SPORTS FIELD

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**Abstract:** The paper deals with the contemporary, top-level, mass-mediated sport. It is based on the social field theory of Pierre Bourdieu. The primary aim is to present a set of concepts defining the relative autonomy of the sports field.

According to P. Bourdieu the autonomy is one of significant features of this field which constructs and maintains it. The relativity of the autonomy is understandable through an analysis of relationships with other fields whose powerful actors struggle to establish themselves as dominant players of the sports field. Four sub-fields constitute the sports field. These are: economics, physical activities, political-normative and mass media and popular culture.

The autonomy of the sports field is based on various components – unique qualities that constitute symbolic boundaries of the field. Pierre Bourdieu refers to these qualities and calls them a political philosophy of sport. It consists of, for example, ideas of amateurism or fair-play. The unique role is played by the concept of authenticity which comprises the former characteristics of the political philosophy of sport. The authenticity of sports becomes an object of struggles between actors of different external fields and also of sport sub-fields. The reason of struggles for the possibility to define the authenticity is its uniqueness. The authenticity defines sports as a unique field with a symbolic overlap to the idealized past with less strict rules, classical values and heroes. In context of the paper the top-level sport and its representatives are ideal bearers of authentic values due to the massive media coverage of this field.

The paper is based on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu but it tries to point out its several inconsistencies as well. For example P. Bourdieu's usage of the concept of autonomy isn't consistent and clearly stated. He also underestimates or doesn't always express an importance of complex network between sports, athletes' bodies and external (medical or technological) interventions to the bodies which is one of the up-to-date topics of contemporary top-level sports. This area can possibly constitute another sub-field of sport.