

## Athleticism, Politics and Media in Greece

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*This paper analyzes the relationship between athletes and politics and especially the case of athletes with active political life in Greece. The study, although begins from a general theoretical framework, focuses on athletes (well-known and/or for their Olympic Achievements) who have been promoted by the media, are well known and have been involved in the Greek political arena. The study begins from the hypothesis that sports, as a cultural factor and vector, participate in the procedure of constructing the collective and social representations and help in shaping the public opinion. In this context, we will investigate the role of the media for the promotion of sports and sports global events, their contribution in constructing sports idols (sports star system, 'Semi-Gods', according to Morin, 1972) and some stereotypical attitudes and behaviors. We will conclude by highlighting the political attention given to the sports via the above processes as a factor of exercising political power.*

**Key words:** Sports, Athletes, Idols, Star system, Politics, Greek Media, Advertising.

### Introduction

Sports and Antiquity (Ancient Greece) are two concepts tied to each other. The sports spirit, also known as the “ef agonizeste” (fair play) and “aien ypsipetein” (of going beyond the ordinary) represents the dominant ideology of Sports in Antiquity.

Sports have often become a field of political conflict in several cases worldwide.

Even the Olympic Games have been politicized from their beginning in the sense that ceasefire was imposed between cities at war during the Games.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several incidents prove that the Olympic Games were being intensively politicized: in 1936, in Berlin, Hitler abandoned the stadium, so as not to applaud the coloured American

athlete, Jesse Owens. In 1968, in Mexico, coloured American athletes that supported the Black Panthers, raised a fist in black glove, protesting in this way against racial discrimination. Because of Apartheid, Rhodesia and South Africa were excluded from the Olympic Games of 1970 and onwards, showing that sports can be used as a means to force pressure, wherever and whenever is necessary (Rhodes, 2007).

However, the academic research focusing on mass media and sports is considered a “new field of study” since it was around the 1970s that sociology theorists started publishing systematic research findings in the broader thematic (Wenner, 2003, p. 52). From the 1970s until today various studies were published in this field, although few of them focus on the situation in the South East Mediterranean.

Today globalization has ventured into sports the same way it has in the sector of economy and society in general. The basic characteristics of the Modern Olympic Games have nothing in common to the Games in ancient times apart from the same name. The eminent athletes have turned to become idols just like the artists in music, television, cinema, etc. Sponsors dominated the sports events in general. The life style of well-known athletes (as promoted by the media), is interesting for the public (Television or Internet). Apart from commercialization, violence, doping, hooliganism, corruption and the interweaving are concepts that took a prominent position in the most of articles referring to Sports. The modern perception of the ‘team fan’ concept was unknown in Ancient Greece (Filius prologue in Decker, 2004). The fans of the games in ancient Greece were teammates, trained fighters themselves, rather than pas-

sive spectators like they are today. In other words, athleticism is not a social factor indifferent or special in modern society of the 21st century but has its own effects in the Greek society of economic crisis (social, economic, ideological effects).

## **Goals, research questions and methodology**

This article examines the relationship between Politics, the Power of Sports and the Media by pinpointing this subject in the Greek society. More specifically, we will examine the role of the media concerning the projection of the athletes and the impacts / consequences of this publicity concerning their involvement in politics and the pursuit of power. Basic hypothesis of this research is that sports as a vector of culture, design and dissemination of social ideologies and representations through the operation of Media, can exert dominating influence in public and even in shaping perceptions. Specifically, this influence is strengthened and guided through the projection of some Athletes and Sport Events by the Media. Not only the spread and prevalence of social values and standards are achieved through Sport Promoting but selfish interests too. The popularity athletes gain in the modern society through media exposure, leads them to seek power through politics.

Within this context the research questions are the following:

1. What is the role of the media concerning the projection of well-known athletes?
2. What is the role of the media concerning athletes’ involvement into politics?

The method employed in this research is the study of sources (the webpages / posts on the internet) that offer information

about life, career, sport achievements and the involvement of athletes into politics in particular. However, our aim is to collect information focused only on those Athletes who accessed Politics. Moreover, we will assess the discrimination between the athletes who ‘exploited’ their athletic popularity to gain a political position in the Central or Local Government as well as the athletes who silenced their athletic capacity and carried out policy making.

The use of Internet and the World Wide Web is a survey method that is gaining popularity during recent years in the academic sector. Specifically, Mick Cooper and Peter Miller believe that despite the recent history of the online surveys, they have been profoundly affected the academic research. The first academic announcements and studies conducted via the Internet were published in 1996. Since then, the academic research has experienced a veritable explosion of interest in using Internet in general and the Web in particular as a tool for collecting sample data (Cooper & Miller, 2008, pp. 831). Using this method for the present research is considered crucial as it serves appropriately our search target. Furthermore, Internet provides us with a large quantity of information which is difficult to be found otherwise. After all, there are only few references throughout the Greek and foreign academic research concerning our research topic.

### **The Athletes as “Idols”**

The terms “Stars” and “Semi-Gods” (Morin, 1972) have been discussed and introduced in the academic literature during the last century. The star system is a specialized production of the capitalist mode of organization of the modern societies. It is not

just a consequence but also a special item of the media industry. In essence, it is just a construction (fabrication) as it is called by Morin (Morin, 1972, p. 99). The private lives of the “Stars” are prefabricated and strictly regulated by the media system. The “Star” is no longer a person but a “consumer’s product”, a piece of the market system, a market value. Stars may have been created by Hollywood cinema, during the ‘70s, in all social structures which are based on the principles of capitalism such as abundance and consumption. The “Stars” nowadays serve art forms that appeal to the general public (music – cinema), to the television (presenters – journalists) or to the internet public. Of course, some “Stars” bounce arts that appeal to more specialized public (i.e., dance, classical music, politics, etc.). Those “Stars” create a “myth” around their names and acquire the “immortality” (Thomas, 1975) by gaining popularity through the traditional and New Media.

The Olympians of antiquity can be said that they had the glamour that befits an athlete, they were “idols – standards” for younger people. Over the next centuries the “Sports” were an activity addressing to a specialized public. After the development of the media industry and the privatization of the Greek television (1989), the number of the ‘Idols-Stars’ was furthermore extended. The “Stars” became “products of prosperity” and “consumption”. The same happened with the Sports Stars (mostly with the football players). Such athletes acquired fame, glory and their name was sometimes associated with familiar names of Greek actors and singers (see Martha Karagiannis (famous Greek actress) – Mimis Stefanakos (famous football player), Vicky Mosholiou (famous Greek singer) – M. Domazos (fa-

mous Greek football player)). Another typical example is Nikos Galis<sup>1</sup>, who became a ‘Star’ with the above mentioned significance and involved into business activities.

Within the context of the power of the media regarding the creation of modern idols and civil myths, it is important to mention the role of news bulletins in this process. Actually, news reproduce constantly the same topics by promoting specific people, specific ideas and consumer goods. The repeated projection of the same people makes those people popular and favorable to the public. This is the procedure within which the media accredit readability to some people and help them gain political power by promoting their opinion for public issues to the public. In communication science, the theory of “Opinion Leaders” attempts to specify and analyze this procedure by reinforcing the role of well-known people who eventually affect the public opinion with their attitude (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

## Athleticism and Gender

Sports attract the attention of a great number of citizens, irrelevant to their gender, age, profession or educational background. Via sports very often groups of citizens with low grade of satisfaction for their every day life (such as unemployed and/or low income groups), find ways to escape from their everyday problems, since sports offer them a cheap means of entertainment and, also,

a field to easily distinct themselves (i.e., as coordinators of team supporters groups), in contradiction to other levels of social norms (i.e., professional career, educational platforms etc.). Additionally, in every game, inside the field co-exist people of different ages, as well as of different financial, social and educational background supporting the same or the opponent team.

Sports like politics were mainly male occupied in the contemporary political history of several Western states and especially in Greece. Both sport and politics were fields of action exercised mainly by men. In contrast, the involvement of women in those fields was quite limited. Particularly, regarding women interest for sport and their participation in athleticism both were limited to the amateur level. Moreover, the women’s participation in professional sport’s events was increased only during the 20th century. Similarly, the participation of women athletes in sport events of worldwide point of interest is a phenomenon related to the contemporary history.

The revival of the Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens eloquently highlighted the distinction between women and men regarding their participation in sports. Specifically, women athletes were excluded from the event and only during the next Olympics, held in Paris in 1900, women athletes were eligible for the first time in the history of the Games (ancient and contemporary). The Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin, visionary and organizer of the revival of the Olympic Games in 1896, stated characteristically for the revival of the institution that “*the Olympic Games are the highlight of the male sport, framed by art and paid by the female applause*” (Lampropoulou, 2007, pp. 97–106). However, as already

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolaos Georgalis, commonly known as either Nikos Galis or Nick Galis (born July 23, 1957), is a retired Greek-American professional basketball player. He was named one of FIBA’s 50 Greatest Players in 1991, is an inaugural member of the FIBA Hall of Fame and was named one of the 50 Greatest Euroleague Contributors, on February 3, 2008 (<http://www.sansimera.gr/biographies/279>, accessed on 5/9/2014).

mentioned, the participation of women in the next Olympics was a historical fact and Charlotte Cooper was the first female Olympic gold medal winner in tennis.

The Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 were particularly important concerning the representation and participation of women in them. It is significant that the 41% of the athletes were women. Therefore, the participation of women in almost all sports was equivalent to that of men. The only exceptions of sport without female representation were baseball and boxing. Those specific sports are considered until now to be dominated by men. However, during the last few years the participation of women in many forms of boxing events becomes more and more intensive. In particular, the Greek women's participation in the Olympic Games of Athens in 2004 was higher than the overall female participation, as Greek women athletes were covering the 43.3% of the Greek mission and participation in those Games. During the same Games, the participation of three women in the Olympic team of Afghanistan was considered as a conquest for women athletes, as well as the fact that for the very first time in the history of the Games, a woman athlete "holds" the flag of the Games. We notice, therefore, that over the years women have succeeded among other political and social rights that conquered, to successfully have claimed their participation in the world of sports.

However, today the situation for women athletes has changed. Indeed, their performance in international athletic events is very high and they rightly claim a place at the altar of the immortals, as they manage to achieve important distinctions in sports. There were several distinctions achieved by the Greek women athletes during the

Olympic Games in 2004. Indicatively, we mention the following:

- Chryssopigi Devetzi, Length – Silver Medal
- Anastasia Kelesidou, Discus Throw – Silver Medal
- Mirella Maniani, Javelin – Bronze Medal
- Ellie Mistakidou, Tae Kwon Do – Silver Medal
- Immortality Tzoumeleka, Walking – Gold Medal
- Emily and Sophia Tsoulfa Bekatorou, Sailing – Gold Medal
- Fani Halkia, 400 m. Hurdles – Gold Medal

Regardless the women medalists, the organization of the Olympic Games of Athens in 2004 was the opportunity for some Greek politicians to distinguish and become popular around the world. A great part of the successful implementation and completion of the Games was due to the political skills and acumen of three Greek women. These were Mrs. Theodora Bakoyanni, who was Mayor of Athens at that time and contributed in shaping the image of the city of Athens to a hospitable and prepared for such an event city; also important was the role of Mrs. Fani Palli Petralia, who was Deputy Minister of Culture at that time, with increased responsibilities concerning the conduct of the Games. Her contribution was particularly important regarding the promotion of the Greek civilization worldwide. Finally, the organization of the Olympic Games was a project designed and conquered by a woman, Mrs. Gianna Angelopoulou- Daskalaki. Mrs. Angelopoulou, as the President of the International Olympic Committee "Athens 2004", claimed and finally took the responsibility

of organizing the Greek Olympic Games. The participation of Mr. Angelopoulou in the International Olympic Committee as the Chairperson, is a particularly conquest of women in respective positions as the same period only the 10.5% of the members of the IOC were women. In absolute terms, women numbered 12 members in total of 114 members that make up the International Olympic Committee.

Concerning the role of the media in the process of promoting women's participation in sports events of global interest, academic research has shown that media help creating the image of "Sportswoman". Accordingly, it is particularly important the role of the media in constructing the image of Greek women politicians. In particular, a research of the Department of Journalism and Mass Media of Aristotle University-Thessaloniki, which was conducted in August 2004, studied the formation of the image of Greek women politicians during the period before and after the organization of the Olympic Games in Athens. The survey titled "View of Women in the daily press" was conducted by a specific research team taking as sample reports from the daily local and national Press (the sample included two newspapers published in Thessaloniki area and two newspapers published in the Athens area with nationwide circulation). An interesting finding of the survey is the fact that media appeared to be biased towards Greek women athletes. Specifically, as regards to the women champions it was mentioned that despite their excellent sports performance, the Press gave more emphasis on their female nature. The articles focused their analysis more on issues concerning their female appearance, than on their athletic achievements. Indica-

tively, the research proved that journalists tended to use the term "girl" and various other stereotypical adjectives and diminutives, in order to describe women champions and Olympians. In the same context, media tended to degrade the contribution of women in politics (Doulkeri, in Psylla, 2009, pp. 215–227).

In conclusion, media construct the image of the Woman – Athlete and Politician like constructing an idol and a "star" similar to the way they fabricate the image of the Men Athlete – Politician. Therefore, female athletes are promoted like idols similar to "stars" of the cinema or television and the world of fashion.

### **Athletes in Advertising**

It has been suggested that advertising has invaded our daily lives by creating standards of conduct, imposing values and lifestyles, and exploiting for this purpose the popularity of 'sports stars' (Doulkeri, 2003, p. 25). Moreover, advertising is a crucial factor of socializing in modern society. The social values promoted by the media determine the behavior of modern people in all western countries (Doulkeri, 2003, pp. 59–60). According to Debreu, television and advertising are economic mechanisms, as it was television the one medium who first imported the term "economism" in modern era of societies (Debreu, 1997, p. 429).

In this context, athletes were appeared and raised in the international market in order to promote daily products (Constantopoulou, 1995). Several athletes, both from abroad and Greece, starred in advertisements that had great success<sup>2</sup>. The purpose

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<sup>2</sup> There are many examples of athletes who were the main characters in advertisements. From the legend-



of their appearance was to gain money and further projection of their name. Through advertising, sports acquired additional commercial – economic value. Of course, there were athletes who participated in ads aiming at raising public awareness on various social issues (social visibility on medical issues).

It should be taken under consideration that one factor that serves the construction/creation and the promotion of Sports models is the concentration of the national media to few and larger media groups within the context of the domestic economy. The concentration of communication reflects the general attitude of the economy while meeting the requirements of neoliberalism and globalized economy. Especially in Greece the concentration of communication is multidisciplinary as entrepreneurs and venture capitalists of the Greek Media usually extend their activities to other sectors of the economy (Vryzas, 1997, p. 55, 56). Typical examples are those of George Vardinogiannis and John Alafouzos<sup>3</sup>, who

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ary Nikos Galis (Greek basketball Player), who promoted a milk company, the “magician” Rivaldo (Brazilian football player) who promoted a mobile telephone company, Nikos Anastopoulos (Greek football player) who starred in a soap commercial, Giorgos Samaras (Greek football player) who was starring in a shampoo commercial, to Antonis Nikopolidis (Greek football player) and Fanny Chalkia (Greek athlete of Track) that were involved in an aluminum systems advertisement (<http://www.contra.gr/Columns/flash-back/otan-oi-athlhtes-eginan-montela.2222961.html>, accessed on 3/9/2014).

<sup>3</sup> John Alafouzos is the founder and the president of the Media group *SKAI*, which includes the Greek television station Skai and 3 radio stations, the Skai 100.3, the Melody 99.2 and Red FM 96.3. In May 2012, he founded together with other participants and fans of football team Panathinaikos and the club Panathenaic Alliance 2012, which holds a majority stake of the football sports club in football industry. In September 2012 he became the President of Panathinaikos Football Club (<http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%93%CE%B9%CE%AC%CE%BD%CE%BD%CE%B7%CF%>

are the major shareholders of the television stations Mega Channel and Star Channel the first, and Skai the second. These entrepreneurs are involved in various businesses in several economic sectors, such as shipping, construction and insurance. It is interesting that the same people have occasionally bestirred themselves in the field of sports. Minoas Kyriakou<sup>4</sup> is the President of the Media Group Antenna and also the president of the athletic association “Hellenic”, which hosts the Tsiklitiria Sports Events<sup>5</sup>, while Mr. Vardinogiannis and Mr. Alafouzos have participated in the management of various football teams.

## Politics and Athleticism

The prevailing interpretation of the creation of virtual - reality constructed by the media, is Frame Analysis. According to Goffman every human experience is associated with a frame shared by all present people (Goffman, 1974). This framework provides guidance for public perceptions of reality and the behaviors that make up the reality. The events take on meaning when incorporated into a framework that organizes them and gives them cohesion by highlighting some

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82\_%CE%91%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%B6%CE%BF%CF%82, accessed on 3/9/2014).

<sup>4</sup> Minoas Kyriakou is also the owner of the Panhellenic Gymnastics Association and former President of the Greek Olympic Committee (2004-2009) ([http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=66&catid=35&Itemid=56&lang=el](http://www.hoc.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66&catid=35&Itemid=56&lang=el), accessed on 29/8/2014).

<sup>5</sup> The Athens Grand Prix Tsiklitiria is an annual sport event that takes place in the Olympic Stadium in Athens as part of the IAAF World Challenge Meetings. For the first time Tsiklitiria were organized in 1963 at the Panathenaic Stadium. The name of the event was in honor of Kostas Tsikliritas, who in 1908 and 1912 won four Olympic medals in the long (jump [www.tsiklitiria.org](http://www.tsiklitiria.org)., accessed on 28/9/2014).

points of the reality while ignoring others (Konstantopoulou, 2009, pp. 64–71). This finding is particularly important regarding the sport events highlighted and viewed simultaneously by thousands of people. Viewers participate in a common frame of reference – the sport event - by sharing similar feelings and experiences. Within this context and because of the relative identity of individuals who compose it, specific ideologies derive from various individuals.

During the period of the Greek junta of Colonels (1967–1974), the rulers tried to push young people to the stadiums or athletic fields in order to gain publicity themselves (i.e., at opening ceremonies and greetings) and propagandize the system itself. The process of propagandizing the ideas of dictatorship was based on the logic of framing the same messages and communicating them to the viewers and thus to the public (Lamprinos, 2013). The process of consolidation and adopting specific representations is similar to the procedure of ritual and ceremonial practices used by faith and religion. As faith helps encoding meanings and values through specific ritual practices, the sport of football is another form of religion with similar practices that helps in spreading ideas and political ideologies among its members. Moreover, faith is a symbol of identity that creates specific cultural identifications between members that espouse it. For this reason, faith (within the general concept) is the literal way of deepening the ideas of nationalism. Within this context, Sports intensify national unity when it comes to “national team clubs”, and help strengthening the nationalist doctrines among fans. A typical example is the former football player of AEK, George Katidis<sup>6</sup>,

who performed Nazi salute as a sign of joy for the victory of his team while trying to rally in order to gain more fans and supporters for his team.

The context of a sociological approach in the sports fields is assessed by theories referring to social conflicts, although several dimensions of them have been deployed. Those of them deriving from the Marxist theorists, underline that sports are used as a basic means of deteriorating masses from the essential problems of everyday life by emphasizing on social conflicts and mechanisms of controlling them (Young, 2006). In other cases, the same theorists argue that sports sometimes function as a means of substituting “essential riots”, as i.e., when the supporters of a team face their identification as a form of “classification” emotion. Different schools of theorists tend to see sports as a kind of “arena”, which is used as a space for allocating ethnic, community or other conflicts in terms of societal identity norms. According to Cashmore, sports encourage self values, like aggressiveness, competitiveness, elitism and sexism. The bureaucratic administration of sports, he argues, is identical to the bureaucratic administration of the capitalist economical system (Cashmore, 1990).

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ball team of VERIA (local football team of the Greek city “Veria”), the athlete George Katidis managed to reach the goal of a 2–1 victory for his team (AEK) in the 84'. The way he celebrated this event caused huge reactions even across borders, since he addressed a Nazi salute to the team fans. Immediately after the end of the match and within 24 hours, he tried to justify his action by claiming that he did not know exactly what his salute symbolized and he is in no way racist or pro-Nazi. On March 19, 2013, the interruption of his contract with AEK was decided until the end of season 2012/13 and the review of his case, before the start of the next season. (see [www.kathimerini.gr](http://www.kathimerini.gr), March 16, 2013, [www.contra.gr](http://www.contra.gr), March 19, 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> On March 16, 2013, in a match against the foot-



Roland Barthes, Herbert Marcuse and the theorists of the school of Frankfurt, referring to the subjective manifestation of own's alienation (loss of identity, feeling of weakness, sovereignty of the feeling that everything is meaningless), argued about entertaining substitutes, underlining that people are called to invest in their suppressed expectations (Garnier, 1987). Of course, those people that experience these situations do not comprehend perceive them as alienation, since these include pleasure and entertainment and they can easily make people forget any financial, political or other interests hidden behind them (Caillat, 1997). At the same time, as a member of a group supporting a sports team, these people gain a sense of group identity and social recognition, since their actions – within the actions of the group – are assessed in accordance to their faithfulness to the group. In this way, any atrocities are “forgiven” and “forgotten”.

In several cases, the devotion to the team replaces the sense of “nation-belonging” (belief, sense of “belonging” in a community, self-sacrifice, sense of duty), offering the chance to the team's supporters to express the same cultural denominator. All these virtues are represented by the team's players (Ramonet, 1997). In case of victory, the title does not only belong to the team but also to the “society” this team comes from, its supporters and fans. The “victories” of the team are – for a long time – being discussed within the public sphere of its supporters and within the public sphere of football fans, in general.

In the history of nations, there are hundreds of examples, in which sports were deployed in this way (Maniou & Seitanidis, 2008). In 1970, occurred the “football war”

between Ondoura and El Salvador, with the excuse of a football match. The same happened in Ireland, with the conflict between Catholics and Protestants often appearing within the football fields, in accordance to relevant urban riots. In May 1990, in Zagreb – Croachia, urban/national riots occurred in the match between Dynamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade, resulting in more than 60 people injured. The list with relevant incidents goes on until today (Maniou & Kontou, 2012).

In May 2012, the German newspaper *Bild* is referring to the match between Germany and Greece, within the frame of semi-finals for the EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP, under the title “*Poor Greeks, the next bankruptcy will be a gift from us*”<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, several Greek newspapers, at the same time, had in fact upgraded the match in terms of a “national matter”, since – generally talking – the Greek public opinion was overwhelmed by the idea that any Greek victory would have the meaning of “compensation” for Germany, regarding the economic measures imposed to Greece by the Eurogroup<sup>8</sup>. In fact, several Greek newspapers had underlined these titles (Kontos, 2012).

Adding to all these, the exploitation of sports by governments and regimes in order to control the masses and impose certain attitudes was highly deployed: Italy organised, in 1934, the Second World Football Cup, an event that offered it the chance to unleash a tremendous propaganda for the world wide opinion. As H. Kissinger has

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<sup>7</sup> See analysis at Anon. (2012), “Poor Greeks, the next bankruptcy will come from us”. *Bild*. 19 June

<sup>8</sup> Germany is the largest economy in the EU zone and as such, Greeks perceive it as the most “persuasive” one within the Eurogroup.

argued, the fascist regime of Mousolini believed that football could help in the process of gathering a large number of people within a restricted area (Kissinger, 1990). In this way, pressure could be exercised upon all these people, in order to preserve the mass ethnic fever! The Homeini regime in Iran had forbidden football games and later on allowed them to take place, retreating in these way due to the massive demand expressed through the public opinion. However, the regime did not allow women within the football fields while there was pressure exercised upon the players in order to wear long trousers inside the field. Even in 1985 the Australian Minister of Sports supported in public that sports in general have a prevailing role to play in the country's development as a national state (Brown, 1985; v).

As Gramsci argued, the state or another administration with power, are not only characterized by violent measures of pressure but also their relation to society is depending on cultural, ideological and ethical values (Gramsci, 1971). According to Gramsci's theory, there are different species of hegemony; in the first case, hegemony of a class prevails society and exercises pressure upon the state; in the second case, hegemony is social and political, at the extend that becomes prevailing and includes the state; in this case, there can be no discrimination between the state and society. Hargreaves placed sports within this context of Gramsci's theory (Hargreaves, 1998); in other words, sports can be exploited in order to preserve power and hegemony within a society on behalf of several institutions, unions or/and bodies of administration.

## Athletes and Politics

The exercise of politics in Greece nowadays is an activity that does not require specialized studies, professional experience or special talents – innate or acquired such determination, ability to solve issues, discipline, leadership profile, organization, rhetorical flair, perceptions, etc. Conversely, engaging with Politics requires a 'politically strong' family name and several other skills that are not assessed. However, there is only one skill that opens the doors of policy making (either for the Central or Local Government) and this is recognition and popularity. Taking this as a fact, the political parties or local officials include to their political combinations well-known athletes who have gained the nation or world recognition. Citizens tend to honor them with their vote while their effectiveness in the political arena is a controversial topic that acquires further research.

Athletes like Anna Verouli<sup>9</sup> and Sophia Sakorafa<sup>10</sup> and Olympic Champions such

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Verouli is a former javelin champion and currently a member of Local Authorities. She was one of the world's leading gymnasts competed in the javelin at the beginning of the 80s, and was alongside the first postwar recovery example of Greek women's Sports at a high level of discrimination ([http://www.biblionet.gr/author/64915/%CE%86%CE%BD%CE%BD%CE%B1\\_%CE%92%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%B7](http://www.biblionet.gr/author/64915/%CE%86%CE%BD%CE%BD%CE%B1_%CE%92%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%B7), accessed on 29/8/2014).

<sup>10</sup> Sophia Sakorafa is a javelin champion and politician. She began dealing with sports at the age of 15, struggling with the colors of the GA Trikala (local team of the Greek city "Trikala"). On September 26, 1982, during the international meeting of "Vardinoyiannia" in Chania (Greek city), she achieved a world record performance of 74.20 meters. This performance remained national record until the introduction of the new type of javelin, when all records were reset. Sakorafa remained the world record holder until the 13<sup>th</sup> June of 1983 when, in Tampere in Finland, Tiina Lillak achieved a performance of 74.76 meters. Sakorafa repeatedly succeeded for 17 times a national record (<http://sakorafa.gr/pages/>, accessed on 3/9/2014).

Table 1. *Prospective MPs of the national elections of 2012*

<i>Athlete</i>	<i>Sport</i>	<i>Political Party</i>
Sophia Sakorafa	Javelin	SY.RIZ.A*
Pyrrhus Dimas	Weightlifting	PA.SO.K.**
Anna Verouli	Javelin	PA.SO.K.
Giannis Gounaris	Football	PA.SO.K
Costas Patavoukas	Basketball	PA.SO.K.
Pericles Vassilakis	Referee	PA.SO.K.
Giannis Ioannidis	Basketball	New Democracy***
Costas Koukodimos	Long jump	New Democracy
Kyriakos Gerontopoulos	Tennis	New Democracy
Tasos Mitropoulos	Football	New Democracy
Antonis Antoniadis	Football	New Democracy
George Orfanos	Football	New Democracy
Vasilis Kikilias	Basketball	New Democracy
Vasilis Nikakis	Referee	KKE* <sup>4</sup>
Chrysanthos Kiriazis	Volleyball	KKE
Constantine Giovanopoulos	Handball	Independent Greeks* <sup>5</sup>
George Anatolakis	Football	LA.O.S.* <sup>6</sup>
Peter Karavitis	Football	LA.O.S.
Jotis Tsalouchidis	Football	Democratic Alliance* <sup>7</sup>
Daniel Batista	Football	Democratic Alliance
Stavroula Antonakos	Cricket	Social Agreement* <sup>8</sup>
Athanasios Barakas	Paralympic Jump	Social Agreement
Stavroula Tsilivarakos	Wrestling	Social Agreement

Source: [www.ethnos.gr](http://www.ethnos.gr), Posted on 25/4/2012, last visit to the page on 06/03/2014.

\* SYRIZA is a Greek political party. It was founded in 2004 as an electoral alliance of the left Greek parties and organizations. President of SYRIZA is Alexis Tsipras (<http://www.syriza.gr/>, accessed on 28/8/2014).

<sup>2</sup> The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (known as PASOK) is a Greek social democratic political party and one of the two dominant parties after the Greek junta era (1967-1974). The party was established on September 3, 1974 by Andreas Papandreu and the President on the party nowadays is Evangelos Venizelos (<http://www.pasok.gr/>, accessed on the page on 3/9/2014).

<sup>3</sup> New Democracy (“Nea Dimokratia” in Greek) is a liberal conservative political party, one of the two dominant parties in the political scene in Greece, after the change of regime in 1974. It was founded in October 4, 1974 by Konstantinos Karamanlis and the President of the party nowadays is Antonis Samaras (<http://nd.gr/static/home.html>, accessed on 3/9/2014).

<sup>4</sup> The Greek Communist Party (KKE) is the Greek Marxist-Leninist party. It was founded in 1918 as the Socialist Labour Party of Greece and it is the oldest political party in Greece (<http://www.kke.gr/>, Accessed on 3/9/2014).

<sup>5</sup> The ‘Independent Greeks’ is a Greek political party. According to the statements of its President (Panos Kammenos) the party overcomes the divisions of the political spectrum left and right and it is characterized by patriotism and versatility (<http://anexartitoiellines.gr/>, accessed on 3/9/2014).

<sup>6</sup> LAOS (Laikos Orthodoxos Sinagermos – Popular Orthodox Rally) is a Greek political party that is classified to the Right political side. It was founded by the journalist and former Member of New Democracy, George Karatzaferis in September 14, 2000 (<http://www.laos.gr/>, accessed on 28/9/2014).

<sup>7</sup> Democratic Alliance is a Greek liberal political party. Based on the ideological manifesto of the party, the party moves from the liberal Right to the liberal Left and covers both the political center-right and the center-right political side. In May 21, 2012 the party suspended its operation and it was decided the partnership of the party with New Democracy for the national elections. The President of the Party was Theodora Bakoyanni (<http://www.dimsim.gr/>, accessed on 2/2/2014).

<sup>8</sup> Social Agreement is a center-left political party, which was founded in 14 March 2012 by the independent former Members of Parliament Louka Katseli and Haris Kastanidis (<http://www.koinonikisympnonia.gr/> accessed on 27/8/2014).

Table 2. *Elected Members of Greek Parliament, national elections 2012*

<i>Athlete</i>	<i>Sport</i>	<i>Political Party</i>
Sophia Sakorafa	Javelin	SY.RIZ.A
Pyrrhus Dimas	Weightlifting	PA.SO.K.
Giannis Ioannidis	Basketball	New Democracy
Costas Koukodimos	Long jump	New Democracy
Kyriakos Gerontopoulos	Tennis	New Democracy
George Orfanos	Football	New Democracy
Vasilis Kikilias	Basketball	New Democracy
Constantine Giovanopoulos	Handball	Independent Greeks

Source: [www.ethnos.gr](http://www.ethnos.gr), Posted on 25/4/2012, last visit to the page on 06/03/2014.

as Voula Patoulidou<sup>11</sup> and Pyrrhus Dimas<sup>12</sup>, gained medals for Greece and were presented and promoted by the Greek media acquiring at the same time equivalent recognition, fame and prices. In other words, athletes in the late 20th century lead as movie or music industry people on the podium of idols paving the way for exercising political power.

Below we mention the athletes who have used their stature in order to develop political activity and those who stood as candidates in the national elections of 2012. These figures derive from a web search in the political parties' ballots for the elections of 2012. Except from the athletes – candidates for the elections of 2012, the web research indicated another useful point. By using the key word “athlete, a politician”, the result of the research came with approxi-

mately 24 names of well-known athletes who engaged with politics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first athlete – politician mentioned in the internet is Costas Kotzias, who had been the Mayor of Athens from 1934 till 1936. The national Elections of 2012 indicated another interesting clue. More and more political parties include athletes in their candidate lists for the elections, despite their ideological identities and views. Table 1 shows the athletes who were candidates for Members of the Parliament during the elections of 2012 (MP). Table 2 presents the candidates who got elected as Member of the Parliament (Table 2).

The phenomenon of engagement of athletes with Politics seems to be directly connected to the growing power of the Television (70s) and the media in general. It is known that Karolos Papoulias (President of the Greek Republic), who represents an older generation of politicians, is also a former champion in the pole vault, a fact which the majority of Greek voters ignore. Another important finding of the analysis of the tables is the fact that the “exploitation” of the popularity of sport idols is predominantly a feature of the two main political parties in Greece. Possibly this result is due to the fact that both the political and the ideological orientation of these two parties

<sup>11</sup> Voula Patoulidou was a member of the Olympic team (in the years 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). As an athlete she was a member of the teams of Heracles and PAOK. In the summer of 1992 she won the Olympic gold medal during the Barcelona Olympics in the 100m hurdles with a 12.64 performance (<http://www.hprt-archives.gr/V3/public/main/page-assetview.aspx?tid=000004883&tsiz=0&autostart=0>, accessed on 3/9/2014).

<sup>12</sup> Pyrrhus Dimas is the Olympic Champion of weightlifting and a Member of the Parliament with the political party of PASOK after the elections in 2012. He was a three times gold medal winner (Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000) and once a bronze medalist during the Athens Olympics in 2004 (<http://pyrros-dimas.gr/>, accessed on 28/8/2014).

are more generalized. Consequently, the choice of political candidates coming from Sports with mass appeal and admiration is mainly a policy exercised by the two main political parties with the largest electoral base. Another important finding of the research is the fact that most of the political parties that have chosen well known and popular athletes to complete their ballots, preserve a conservative ideological perspective. Indeed, the findings indicate that the political parties of New Democracy, LA.OS and Democratic Alliance have chosen as parliamentary candidates, athletes coming from football and basketball – both sports are very popular throughout the Greek society. The conservative and ethnocentric political approaches of these parties seem to be combined with the religious philosophy of football and basketball as well as with the conversion of the fans in the respective groups.

Vagelis Marinakis, president of Olympiakos Football Club and entrepreneur, was a candidate for the municipality of Piraeus and was elected. Vangelis Marinakis has been owner of a shipping group and president of the Olympiakos FC since 2010. Marinakis supported the candidate of Giannis Moralis for being the Mayor of Piraeus. Giannis Moralis is also the vice president of Olympiacos FC and president of Super League (the Greek league). The Moralis' political party won the elections for the municipality of Piraeus taking the 55.23% of the votes. Particularly, it is important to mention that Piraeus area is considered the 'home city' of Olympiakos FC. After the announcement of the Moralis' victory, the fans of Olympiacos inundated the streets of the area and turned the elections result to a victory of the Olympiakos team.

On the same day, the 25th of May, Thodoris Zagorakis – former captain of the national football team and president of PAOK FC – was elected as a Member of the European Parliament supported by the political party of New Democracy. Zagorakis is the only characteristic example of athlete who became member of the European Parliament.

## Conclusions

Athletes, as mentioned above, are patterns of life and behavior for the society they belong to. They seem to act as 'cultural institutions' and channels of social representations and consciences. Very often they tend to create their own social values and cultivate the ethos of the crowd for various social issues. The difference between the past and the contemporary years is the substance of the content of the values and standards the Athletes represent. Thus, in the 20th and 21st century athletes became idols that cult symbols, as the stars of Hollywood cinema. For this procedure it is instrumentally essential the overexposure of Athletes by the media while the expansion of television and the development of Internet technologies are very popular among the public. The contribution of advertising – a field with several popular athletes are protagonists – is equally important to the above procedure. However, in contrast to the movie stars who are, according to Morin (1972), both marketable and gods, idols and consumables, athletes conquer virtually immortality through their superhuman athletic performance. For this reason, their influence to the public is essentially dominating.

The power of sports for ideologically proselytizing, both the athletic and political supporters, often becomes an instrument of

exploitation by the political factors. Apart from the popularity for sports personalities themselves, the practices of mass sports and Sport Supporting serves in handling selfish economic and political ideas and interests. As mentioned before, like religion, massive football fanaticism is a common reference framework for the identification of the members. The sport fanaticism therefore, as seen in football and basketball, is another form of cult belief. The person alienated from the modern lifestyle looking through idolatry and sport fanaticism for finding identification, while fanaticism becomes simultaneously a vehicle of exercising policy by various economic and social interests. Additionally more and more political candidates come from the world of Sports (taking advantage of their popularity) and enlist successfully to pro-conservative political parties. Sports, politics and media are intertwined nowadays in a maypole of power.

More specifically, taking under consideration the research questions mentioned above, this study points out the following:

- The selection of athletes as candidates for the national and local elections is mainly a practice of the two major political parties in power in Greece. Out of the 23 candidates, the 12 come from both parties in power. In this way, the parties try to reach their electoral base which is extremely enlarged, and represent the largest possible part of the public.
- The selection of political candidates, 'deriving' from sports, which are popular to the general public is mostly a feature of the parties with conservative

ideological orientation. Precisely, out of the total 12 candidates declared candidates for the parties of "New Democracy", "LAOS", "Independent Greeks" and "Democratic Alliance", nine athletes were football and basketball players. Only "PASOK" had two parliamentary candidates for the national elections of 2012, coming from the same sports venues. As we explained above, this is primarily due to the ideological nature of those parties.

- Sports eventually turn to a symbol of discipline and ability through achieving „immortality“. The distinguished athletes become a model of behavior and are identified as symbols of faith and effort for something higher and ideal. For this reason, they are also voted by the public.
- Media help to create popularity for athletes by highlighting their achievements through the repetition. In fact, media are the factor that mediates the exploits of athletes in order to become well known to the public and therefore the latter be introduced as ‚idols‘.

Concerning further research on this topic, it would be interesting to conduct a more thorough research on the electoral lists of political parties both for national and local elections. This seems crucial, as there are many candidates and elected MPs and local councilors who are involved in Sports but their involvement is not widely known. The next level in this context will be a survey concerning public opinion and its selection criteria regarding the policy of the political parties to include athletes as candidates in their ballots.



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## ATLETIKA, POLITIKA IR ŽINIASKLAIDA GRAIKIJOJE

**Tessa Doulkeri, Theodora Maniou, Anastasia Tsiolcha**

### S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje analizuojamas santykis tarp atletų ir politikos, o ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas atletams, aktyviai dalyvaujantiems Graikijos politiniame gyvenime. Nors straipsnis prasideda nuo bendrų teorinių pagrindų, dėmesys sutelkiamas į atletus (gerai žinomus ir dėl jų olimpinių laimėjimų), kurie yra žiniasklaidos reklamuojami ir dalyvauja Graikijos politiniame gyvenime. Tyrimas prasideda nuo hipotezės, kad sportas, kaip kultūros veiksnys

ir vektorius, dalyvauja konstruojant kolektyvinį ir socialinį reprezentavimą, taip prisidedamas prie visuomenės nuomonės formavimo. Šiame kontekste straipsnio autoriai nagrinėja žiniasklaidos vaidmenį reklamuojant sportą ir pasaulinius sporto renginius, kartu ir žiniasklaidos indėlį formuojant sporto status (sporto žvaigždės sistema, „pusdieviai“, anot Morin (1972) ir kai kuriuos stereotipinius požiūrius bei elgseną.