

The Basketball Show in the North of France: When the NBA Globalized Culture Meets the Local Carnival Culture

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Abstract : Today, the National Basketball Association (NBA) is the cultural model of reference for most of the French basketball community stakeholders (players, coaches, team and league managers). In addition to the strong impact it has on how this sport is played and perceived, the NBA also influences the ways professional basketball shows are organized in France (within the Jeep Elite league). The objective of this research is to see how and to what extent the NBA show, as a globalized cultural product, disrupts Jeep Elite's professional basketball cultural codes in the organization of its shows. The article will aim at questioning the intercultural phenomenon at stake in sports cultures in France through the prism of the basketball match. This angle will shed some light on the underlying relationships between local and global elements. The results of this research come from a one-year survey conducted in a small town in northern France, Le Portel, where the Etoile Sportive Saint Michel (ESSM), a Jeep Elite's club, operates. An ethnographic approach was favored. It entailed many participating observations and semi-directive interviews with supporters of the ESSM Le Portel. Through this ethnographic work with the team's fan groups (before the games, during the games and after the games), it was possible for the researchers to understand better all the cultural and identity issues that play out in the "Cauldron," the basketball arena of the ESSM Le Portel. The results demonstrate, at first glance, that many basketball events organized in France are copied from the American model. It seems difficult not to try to imitate the American reference that the NBA represents, whether it be at the French All-Star Game or a Jeep Elite Game at Le Portel. In this case, an acculturation process seems to occur, not only in the way people play but also in the creation of the show (cheerleaders, animations, etc.). However, this American culture of globalized basketball, although re-appropriated, is also being modified by the members of ESSM Le Portel within their locality. Indeed, they juggle between their culture of origin and their culture of reference to build their basketball show within their sociocultural environment. In this way, Le Portel managers and supporters introduce elements that are characteristic of their local culture into the show, such as carnival customs and celebrations, two ingredients that fully contribute to the creation of their identity. Ultimately, in this context of "glocalization," this research will ascertain, on the one hand, that the identity of French basketball becomes harder to outline, and, on the other hand, that the "Cauldron" turns out to be a place to preserve (fantasized) local identities, or even a place of (unconscious) resistance to the dominant model of American basketball culture.

Keywords : basketball, carnival, culture, globalization, identity, show, sport, supporters.

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