Chapter 8

School Sport Education and Sustainability

Towards Ecological and Inclusive Student-Athletes?

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Introduction

In discussing the role of sport in achieving the 17 sustainable development goals (SDG), Lemke (2016) claims that ‘children and young people benefit tremendously from physical activity. Combined with a school curriculum, physical activities and sport are necessary for a comprehensive education’ (p. 7). Sport in school is explained as an important vehicle to empower young people at a global scale. According to the United Nations, education is essential to the advancement of sustainable development (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014). Further, the United Nations outline how sport contributes to the SDGs (United Nations [UN], n.d.). In relation to SDG 4 on Quality education, it is suggested that sport offers alternative physical education and physical activities that support the full learning process, deliver holistic education, offer life skills, and motivate young people to attend and stay in school. In relation to SDG 5 Gender equality, sport can raise awareness for gender equality, contribute to abolish discrimination against women and girls, promote inclusion and empowerment, address constricting gender norms, and engage men and boys in achieving gender equality in and through sport (UN, n.d.). Sport and physical activity can be practised in various ways in school: the subject physical education; extra-curricular activities; part of daily physical activity; and different forms of school sport. Lundvall and Fröberg (2022) see a huge potential of adopting educative aspects of sustainable development in physical education. They suggest that a revision of curricula, a reorientation of the learning perspective, and rethinking perspective on health and well-being can challenge and enable a new point of departure. In this chapter, school sport is used as an example to discuss aspects of sportification and sustainability. School sport is here described as training and learning (organised) sport as a part of the school curriculum.

Education and sport merge in school sport. In the Scandinavian countries Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, school sport is offered as a subject or a school programme (Kårhus, 2017; Larneby, 2020; Skrubbeltrang, 2018) but is not offered at all schools. In Sweden, which this chapter focuses, school sport is a popular choice. It is not to be confused with physical education. In relation to the
arguments by Lemke (2016) and UN (n.d.) above, school sport could be understood as a contribution to a comprehensive education and sustainable development. Skills taught in sport are described as essential for future participation that can stimulate social cohesion with communities and societies (Lemke, 2016). Ballet et al. (2020) describe social cohesion as a social aspect of sustainability. Nevertheless, no relation between sport, physical activity, and sustainable development is explicitly formulated in the Swedish school curriculum. Education in sustainable development is offered in many countries (Wals & Benavot, 2017). In Sweden, education in sustainable development is a learning content within one of four overall perspectives from primary school to upper secondary school. In the environmental perspective, students learn to be responsible for the environment and get a personal approach to global environmental issues. Further, education in sustainability is a specific content in subjects such as biology, geography, and home economics (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2022a, 2022b). As Isgren Karlsson and Backman discuss in this volume, education in sustainability is not specified in Swedish physical education. The potential that sport in school might have to contribute to sustainable development is not found in any Swedish syllabus. Nevertheless, school sport students (further on student-athletes) can bring their general knowledge of sustainability into their sport participation in schools and their clubs.

In contrast to sport’s positive power, Lemke (2016) admits that sport ‘still faces many challenges to the fulfilment of its true potential’ (p. 9). Within sport, we still witness intolerance, racism, hatred, and violence, all of which can be placed within social aspects of sustainability. Direct or indirect coerced exclusion from sport is not sustainable, whether it is based on gender, ethnicity, age, ability, or socioeconomic background. In addition to these social challenges, the sport industry affects the environment through building and operating facilities; hosting small and big events; and transporting athletes, coaches and staff, and spectators – all of which have a detrimental impact on natural resources, animal habitats, and the climate (McCullough & Kellison, 2018). The SDG 5 and that sport can raise awareness for gender equality are of relevance for social aspects of sustainability, and can be relevant also for environmental aspects. It is well known that sport has been, and still is to some extent, perceived as a male preserve, as sport in various forms was created by men – for male athletes and male spectators. Matthews and Channon (2019) discuss how sport has constituted male power in structural and symbolic ways. This gender discourse is not only a part of sport, but it is also recognised by Hultman and Pulé (2018) and Connell (2017) as a normalisation of male domination and malestream norms in society. It is mostly men, malestream norms and Western (white) hegemonic masculinities in the Global North, who are the main perpetrators of violence against the planet and people (Connell, 2017; Hultman & Pulé, 2018). The contrast to this is ecological masculinities. Briefly described, ecological masculinities are a new expression of manhood and towards caring masculinities for Earth, humans, and animals. ‘We all need to walk the talk of broader, deeper and wider care more so
than ever’ (Hultman & Pulé, 2018, p. 241). In this chapter, the construction of masculinities and male norms in school sport and its link to society are discussed.

School sport is part of the sport industry not only as an important factor for physical activity and sport in school but also as talent development in several countries. Therefore, this chapter aims to reflect on and discuss how the merge of education and sport in school sport can have consequences for gender norms and social and environmental sustainability. The next section provides a background on school sport. Thereafter, a framework of sport logics, gender, and some aspects of sportification is presented. This is followed by an analysis based on examples of how sport logics and gender relations are intertwined in school sport. A critical reflection on school sport’s relation to sustainable development concludes the chapter.

**School sport – A background**

School sport has no formal or joint global definition. It is not organised in the same way or with the same purpose, although similarities exist. In summary, school sport is practised within the school curriculum or is organised by schools as an extra-curricular activity. It focuses on doing sport and can be organised with or without competition. While school sport is mostly not the same as physical education, they often share similarities. In South Africa, physical education and school sport are described as a means to learn explicitly about sport-specific skills and to participate in interschool leagues (Burnett, 2020). In the United States and Canada, school sport is related to training sport and competing within and between schools, promoting sportsmanship, and leading an active healthy lifestyle. It is separated from club sports (Overman, 2019; Sulz et al., 2021). According to Overman (2019), 98% of high schools in the United States sponsor interscholastic sports programmes. However, just as the objectives and content of physical education may differ between countries, we need to be careful not to compare school sport subjects or programmes in different countries without deeper insight.

In Scandinavian countries, school sport is an optional, formalised school subject or programme. It is not offered at all schools. As a subject in Swedish secondary schools (ages 12–16), it is not to be confused with physical education, which is mandatory. At the secondary school level, school sport is organised by each school to offer a possibility to do more sport and physical activity during school hours (Ferry et al., 2013; Larneby, 2020). At the upper secondary level (ages 16–19), Swedish school sport is curriculum regulated in the subject Special Sport (Specialidrott; SNAE, 2022c), which is organised at a national basis and in collaboration with national sport federations.

In general, school sport in Scandinavia can have an explicit sport direction, where students often choose one sport, but it also has a more sport-friendly recreational direction (Larneby, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020). In upper secondary school, an elite orientation is most common. School sport is often organised in collaboration with sport clubs and is similar to standardised sport (rules, tactics,
techniques), but without intramural or interschool competitions, which take place in sport clubs outside schools. According to research, Scandinavian upper secondary school sport programmes are fruitful in producing successful athletes (Kårhus, 2017; Nielsen et al., 2020; Svensson, 2021). The elite level of school sport is increasingly gaining popularity in younger ages. In Denmark, Sports Classes (Idrætsklasser) allow talent development also in secondary school (Nielsen et al., 2020). The Swedish school studied in Larneby (2020) had an elite orientation, and this development is also seen in Norway (Norges Toppidrettgymnas, 2022; Wang, 2022). Importantly, in all three Scandinavian countries, school sport increasingly focuses on enabling the development of student-athletes from the age of 12. Therefore, school sport is in this chapter delimited to refer to student-athletes who choose one sport to specialise, train, and improve in, often for a future elite investment.

Analytical framework: Performance and gender

Various logics and perspectives can be used to explain how sport is organised, valued, expressed, and perceived. For instance, logics of sport are used to describe and analyse how school sport is part of a sportification process. This section presents the logic of performance and a gender perspective, which relate to two of Guttmann’s (2004) characteristics of modern sport: specialisation and equality.

Logic of performance and specialisation

Movement practices can be understood based on how people with different dispositions participate in movement culture. Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, Engström et al. (2018) formulated three overarching logics of practice in movement culture: performing, improving, and experiencing. Each of these logics of practice also has sub-logics. Performing and its sub-logic competing are of certain interest for this chapter. The logic of performance means that winning is important, or conquering something and achieving a task. In its sub-logic competing, ranking is significant. Thus, in order to compare with others, an achievement needs to be measurable or assessable against pre-established criteria. Further, the logic of performance is here understood as a part of the modern sport characteristic specialisation (Guttmann, 2004). Specialisation means that time is devoted to the achievement of athletic excellence in a sport.

Gender and equality in sport

In her theory of gender as a social institution, Lorber (1994) argues that gender is an overarching social category that organises almost all areas of social life, such as the family, work, state, sexuality, language, and culture. Gender structures every aspect of our lives, and gender precedes an individual’s actions and interactions. Gender is a system of social stratification that classifies individuals based on sex
This stratification leads to a differentiation between men and women, where men are classified above women based on a perception that ‘what men do is usually valued more highly than what women do because men do it’ (Lorber, 1994, p. 33). However, Lorber claims that men as well as women need to live up to gendered expectations and that men’s seemingly privileged position is not necessarily so privileged.

As in other parts of society, gender is present and visible in sport. According to Guttmann (2004), equality is one characteristic of modern sport. Everyone should have the opportunity to compete, and the conditions should be the same for all. From a gender perspective, Guttmann argues that excluding athletes from sport based on their sex prevents the emergence of gender-equal modern sport, here referring to the exclusion of women. We need to keep in mind that there has largely (albeit not fully) been a positive change regarding women’s access to sport since Guttmann’s book was first published in 1978. Matthews and Channon (2019) claim that sport is no longer a purely male preserve or masculine endeavour. Nevertheless, there are ways in which sport can operate as a male preserve that need to be critically explored. The gap between the vision of equal terms and real terms needs to be considered and problematised from a contemporary lens. McDonagh and Pappano (2008) argue that dividing sport into ‘male’ and ‘female’ enforces the notion that men’s sport and power are the real thing, whereas women’s sport and power are second class. Furthermore, reducing gender equality into two groups of athletes is to simplify gender equality (Matthews & Channon, 2019); transgender athletes struggle for recognition (Imbrišević, 2022). Nevertheless, the binary categorisation of gender (male/female, masculinity/femininity) is strong within society at large, and it is reflected in sport (Lorber, 1994). Therefore, in this chapter, ‘male/men’ and ‘female/women’ is used as group categories, as this is how sport is most often divided and how it is linguistically categorised in the research presented.

The specialised and gendered student-athlete

The way in which performance, specialisation, and gender are intertwined in school sport and in the sportification process is illustrated in this section with support in previous research. The analysis provides a base to understand school sport before a sustainability perspective is applied. The following subsections present empirical examples based on my ethnographic study of a sport-profiled secondary school in Sweden (Larneby, 2020). Only student-athletes aged 12–16 were enrolled in this school, and school sport lessons were taught by coaches from sport clubs (teacher-coaches). The admission process involved a selection among the applicants based on their athletic ability. The student-athletes I met were ambitious, skilled (according to their teacher-coaches), and motivated. The key findings show that logics of performance (valuing ranking and competition), together with a gender norm stating that boys are better than girls, are dominant and intertwined patterns. The examples below are also presented in relation to other school sport research.
‘I want to be the best’ – The specialised student-athlete

I asked all 29 interviewed student-athletes why they chose school sport and what their thoughts were on choosing one sport to specialise in. Many answers were the same, Kasper, a 15-year-old basketball student-athlete, replied

I think it’s fun. I don’t see any problems with a school that focus on athletic ability in one sport. I have always loved to play and strive for the elite level, with a lot of training

(Larneby, 2020, p. 122).

Kasper also trained and played games in a basketball club several days a week, and he aimed to be a professional European league player. This experience is similarly expressed by Norwegian and Danish student football players (Sæther et al., 2021; Skrubbeltrang, 2018) and Norwegian student alpine skiers (Sisjord & Sørensen, 2018). The recurring narrative in Scandinavian school sport research is that student-athletes appreciate it. School sport’s close relation to training in their clubs is a reason why student-athletes frequently describe positive experiences of school sport.

In school sport studies, student-athletes often explain the choice of school sport in personal terms: I wanted to do this; I chose this to be a part of my education (Larneby, 2020; Sisjord & Sørensen, 2018; Skrubbeltrang, 2018). One of the female football students in Larneby (2020) emphasised that ‘I really want to invest in this… To be able to train every day’ (p. 75). Similarly, in a Norwegian study, a young girl explained that ‘we choose not to be with our former friends to pursue this dream. In order to make it to the top, we need to start now’ (Kristiansen & Stensrud, 2020, p. 60). According to the student-athletes I met, the focus on individual development (not results or records) in the school sport lessons enhanced the feeling of being seen and important. Nevertheless, comparison and informal competitions with peers was important, as this spurred them to train and improve. Parallel to the individual focus was also the importance to position oneself as skilled within the student-athlete collective (Larneby, 2020). The link between the logic of performing and ranking, the focus on the individual student-athlete, and specialisation was strong. As Guttmann (2004) argues, specialisation is an important feature of modern sport. The athlete invests in one sport, spends a vast amount of time during an extended period, and has access to coaches and sport-specific facilities and equipment. In addition to the time devoted to training and support from clubs, specialisation is often also facilitated by many sport schools (Larneby, 2020; Sisjord & Sørensen, 2018; Skrubbeltrang, 2018). Student-athletes in Scandinavia rarely replace club training with school sport lessons. Instead, the amount of total training hours increases, and specialisation is enhanced. In 1978, Guttmann (2004) stated that specialisation tends to be narrower and narrower. The fact that children today, in 2022, choose to practice one sport – not only during club training but also in school sport from
the age of 12 – exemplifies a narrowed and earlier specialisation (Larneby, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020).

In line with Svensson (2021), the narratives above show how school sport relates to the sportification process, and put the individual student-athlete in focus. Further, Svensson (2021) argues that the effects of sportification historically have ‘applied an external pressure on the Swedish education system’ (p. 8) to contribute to educating athletes in sport and in academic studies. Needless to say, not all student-athletes in my study thought that school sport was the optimal choice, for various reasons. Neither can all student-athletes be among the best in their sport either. However, the educational dimension of school sport – school as a site for development in sport and regulated by curriculums – contributes to legitimising early specialisation in sport (cf. Svensson, 2021). Therefore, we need to take school sport into account when discussing the role of sport society.

‘Play like a boy, don’t throw like a girl’
The gendered student-athlete

Actions dominated by performing, competing, and ranking among peers appeared to be taken-for-granted ways to behave as an athlete. This was often performed in a joyful and respectful way, but it also involved overt ranking and hierarchisation with patronising intentions, both between sports and within sport groups (Larneby, 2020). Gender played a significant role in this hierarchisation. At the studied school, the ideal way of doing sport was ‘like a boy’: strong, technically skilled, and fast. These characteristics were explained by the student-athletes as typically male. This discourse dominated even though – in many sports – other characteristics, like stamina and agility, were needed as well. However, playing like a boy did not mean that only boys could and were expected to play like boys. On the contrary, girls were expected to play like boys, with the implicit anticipation that they could do so as long as they were not better than boys. Furthermore, no one should ‘throw like a girl’ or do sports ‘like a girl’. These epithets were used derogatorily among boys. McDonagh and Pappano (2008) argue that as long as the epithet ‘play like a girl’ is used as an insult, women’s and girls’ skills will be underestimated and subordinated. Thus, girls who were perceived to ‘play like girls’ were trivialised by some boys. This can be interpreted as a form of misogyny, which Anderson (2009) claims is part of an orthodox masculinity not unusual in sport. In contrast, playing like a boy was highly valued at this school. When girls were told they played like boys, it was an approval of their athletic skills. It points to an acceptance of girls, but only if their skills and behaviour lived up to the male standard.

Although boys generally acknowledged (skilled) girls, there was an obvious need for several boys to compare and rank themselves and others in some way based on a notion of girls’ inferiority. The female student-athletes were acutely aware that the ‘female way’ of doing sport was the wrong way if they wanted to be (perceived as) good athletes. In addition, many boys seemed to constantly
reassure themselves that they upheld what was expected of them. In this context, to 'play like a boy' can be described as a reverence of a masculine sport characteristic. This power relation was more or less incorporated into and embodied in the way a sport group functioned, as student-athletes and teacher-coaches enforced it.

A study of school sport sailing in the United States and France shows similar results (Schmitt et al., 2021), arguing that the young male sailors ‘easily aligned with sailing's broader social codes’ which were also reproduced at the school sport level, and that ‘masculine domination was supported by everyday micro-practices and power relationships which positioned women as inferior sailors’ (p. 127). According to Overman (2019), US high school's image can depend on its male athletes, as they ‘may be treated as celebrities, even demigods, deemed untouchable’ (p. 94). This was explicitly expressed among the student-athletes in the study (Larneby, 2020, p. 267) and illustrated in this quote by the principal:

Football is ranked over all other sports, then comes nothing… nothing… Next sport is in fourth or fifth place… Boys' football, only. If you play in the football club, it is crazy what ranking one may get! And if you are the popular boy, from the football club, you are perceived as almost sent by god, almost!

Male norms operated in many directions: in addition to the pressure it put on male student-athletes to (re)produce a certain norm and masculinity, it functioned as a marginalising instrument when used by boys towards girls in some situations and as an empowering tool for girls' development and status ranking in other situations (Larneby, 2020). Sport and gender constituted a symbolic power at this school. Such reverence of the male norm is embodied male power (cf. Anderson, 2009). It was loaned to skilled girls, and at best, they could balance the power relations but never tip them over.

Matthews and Channon (2019) discuss how sport has constituted male power in structural and symbolic ways, which is visible in the examples. School sport is not exempted from male norms and gendered regimes (McSharry, 2017; Schmitt et al., 2021; Skrubbeltrang, 2018). Male student-athletes have many ideals and expectations to live up to, and female student-athletes need to adhere to male norms to be accepted and perceived as skilled athletes. There are positive glimpses, though. In my study (Larneby, 2020), specifically the floorball and basketball boys also demonstrated that they appreciated skilled female athletes and liked doing sport together with them. This parallel behaviour is in line with an inclusive masculinity. Anderson's (2009) theory of inclusive masculinities explains how several masculinities can exist simultaneously. There has been a shift in men's construction of masculinities in sport settings. This has resulted in the availability of more and varying masculinities opposed to merely one hegemonic orthodox masculinity. This masculinity emphasises heterosexuality, opposes softness related to femininity and homosexuality, and elevates the male body as superior to that of women manifested through strength and violence (Anderson, 2009). For instance, in inclusive masculinities, men can show emotional and physical
homosocial intimacy towards one another without sexualising these interactions. In addition, boundaries between femininity and masculinity have become more diffused and are approaching each other. Men are also showing an improved attitude towards women.

The examples above are related to equality, which according to Guttmann (2004) is a characteristic of modern sport. Gender equality can be achieved at (Swedish) schools that offer boys and girls to choose and apply for school sport and that ensure sport groups get equivalent training contents in lessons regardless of sport and regardless of whether they are gender separated or co-educated. This is in line with the Swedish national curriculum, which states that school shall actively and deliberately promote equal rights and opportunities of students, regardless of gender (SNAE, 2022a). However, the responsibility for schools to counteract gender patterns that constrain students’ learning, choices, and development, is not always met. Constraining gendered patterns were highly visible in Larneby (2020), Skrubbeltrang (2018), Schmitt et al. (2021), and McSharry (2017). As Guttmann (2004) discusses, ‘in actual practice there are numerous inequalities, which will occupy us at some length when we consider not the conceptual model but the contemporary state of affairs’ (p. 26). Several prerequisites and norms seemed to be set in the boys’ favour for girls to follow.

The specialised, performance-focused, comparison-driven, and sportified milieu paved the way for gendered regimes that progressively narrowed down the ideal (elite) athlete: a skilled, masculinised male or female student who plays like a boy. A critical and relevant question to pose is if this is the athlete that nations, federations, and clubs want to produce?

Specialisation, gender, and sustainable development

The following reflection and conclusion discusses how school sport and specifically specialisation and gender relate to sustainable development. Two themes are presented: (1) an environmental approach based on practical conditions for school sport related to specialisation and (2) a social and environmental approach based on gender.

The environment, specialisation, and practical conditions for school sport

In many countries, school sport has an established place and role in education offering and promoting physical activity and sport. In Sweden, as in Denmark and Norway, school sport is an established talent-development and dual-career system. Early specialisation in collaboration with the educational system results in increasingly younger student-athletes, and presumably also an increase in the number of student-athletes. The specialised student-athletes (most often) invest in their future sport career and are aware that peers in other countries often undergo some kind of training or programme to increase their chances of reaching the top.
Facilities

If school sport programmes in Sweden and elsewhere want to attract young athletes and play a significant part in elite sport development, these schools need a well-developed infrastructure of sport facilities. Adequate facilities need to be within a close geographical range from the school to enable sport lessons on the curriculum. Building and operating sport facilities produce a lot of waste and require energy sources and water supply, but the sport industry has to work towards a climate-neutral position and decrease the environmental impact (Nguyen, 2018). Heinze and Söderstrom (2018) argue that it is of utter importance to consider environmental sustainability of sport stadia, due to the potentially large environmental cost of not only constructing such facilities, but also operating them. Further, they argue that ‘there is an opportunity for sport venues to reduce their negative impact on the environment’ (p. 267). Many well-equipped and flexible sport halls can accommodate several sports in the same arena, which would allow sport schools to offer many sports. Some sports require specific venues. For instance, some Swedish school sport programmes offer golf or equestrian sport. Both sports are strictly regulated in relation to the environment. Thirteen Swedish upper secondary schools offer equestrian sport, and evidently these schools – as with all riding establishments – need to be close to stables and adequate outdoor and indoor riding facilities. These facilities need to follow the Swedish Equestrian Federation’s (2022) sustainability policy and regulations regarding manure management, water supply for horses, and good pastures. Another facility issue is related to snow sports, which increasingly need to use artificially produced snow when winters get warmer and shorter, which requires a lot of energy and economical means. Furthermore, not all existing sport facilities are located where sport schools are. This might be a challenge to federations and communities who want to start sport schools – they need to build more schools or sport facilities (or both) to support the sport school model. A well-functioning school sport infrastructure clearly faces environmental challenges. With an education for sustainability embedded in the Swedish curriculum, student-athletes presumably get basic knowledge to understand the impact sport can have on the environment (SNAE, 2022a, 2022b). Knowledge and insights of the climate crisis have increased young Swedish people’s interest for the issue, and a request for action to take place (Swedish Youth Barometer, 2022). In the future, the call for an environmental-friendly sport industry might be stronger from the athletes themselves.

Transportation

Athletes are fostered within a web of competitions, cups, and leagues already at a young age, in sport club organisation or in interscholastic sport. When the distance to facilities is too far for a walk or bicycle ride, transportation is needed
for training sessions, training camps, and competitions. This especially applies for national and international competitions and has an immense impact on the environment due to emissions. A study on 16 of the 71 Swedish sport federations’ work with environmental sustainability shows that transportation is a main challenge, especially since environmental sustainability work is not always prioritised on the federations’ agendas. The authors suggest that sport’s structure of travelling to train, win, and always improve may be the main obstacle to a successful work and victory for environmental sustainability (Larneby et al., 2022). On the other hand, voices have been raised by athletes that worldwide travelling is problematic, and they hope that their federations can contribute to solutions (Larneby et al., 2022). But what can young athletes do? The Swedish Youth Barometer’s (2022) annual survey on young people (aged 15–25) shows that this generation is more anxious and has a bleak outlook compared to previous generations. One reason is the climate crisis. Among the respondents, the second most important societal issue is the environment and climate change (49%), after issues pertaining health care (57%). It is more important for young people to make sustainable and climate-smart choices in their everyday life. For instance, alpine and cross-country skiers face direct consequences of melting glaciers and shorter winter seasons and have made the request to stay in one competition resort for a longer period. The International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS, 2022) has signed the Sports for Climate Action Framework. Here, however, the skiers are in the hands of the FIS and national federations, who set policies and regulations for travelling (Larneby et al., 2022). In accordance with other chapters of this book, I argue that school sport today confirms and reproduces a competitive spirit as student-athletes are further educated within (and towards) organised competitions, enhanced performance, and winning – (often) on behalf of values such as exercise and a lifelong healthy activity.

The environment and gender – Power relations in play

Gender constructions does not exist in a vacuum. They are socialised into our identities and lives from birth (Lorber, 1994). Some of the 14-year-old floorball boys in the study said that ‘some boys think they are better than girls, just because [they] a boy’ and that boys are supposed to do sport. Further, they said they remembered from a young age that ‘all boys were at the football pitch, girls sat on the playground and talked. You have always grown up with that’ (Larneby, 2020, p. 178). This last phrase, ‘always grown up with that’, plays a significant role. If what you learn, see, and hear, is implicitly or explicitly expected of you to do or behave like is gendered, it will form and contribute to a gendered identity. It also adds up to valuing men and women (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1995; Lorber, 1994). Already at a young age, gendered power relations are embedded in children’s consciousness and embodied in actions.

Turning the lens towards the environment before I get back to sport, Connell (2017) argues, ‘We do not live in an Anthropocene so much as a
Sociocene. Corporations, states, and structures of power and inequality, rather than individual humans, are generating the large-scale environmental effects’ (p. 5). Gender is one of those powerful structures (Connell, 2017). Here, social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainability merge. In line with Connell (2017), Hultman and Pulé (2018) argue that (mostly) men, malestream norms, and Western (white) masculinities in the Global North, are the main perpetrators of violence against the planet and people. Hultman and Pulé (2018) use the term *industrial/breadwinner* masculinities interchangeably with malestream, patriarchal, hegemonic, and normative masculinities. The term ‘industrial’ refer primarily to men and women who ‘possess and manage the means of production and support service corporations who are handsomely rewarded by wealth-creating practices that rely on extraction of Earth’s natural resources’ (Hultman & Pulé, 2018, p. 41). The vast majority of individuals who are fossil fuel and mining executives, financial managers, bankers, and corporate managers are Western, white, and male (Connell, 2017). The term ‘breadwinner’ is explained as primarily working-class men who work in mines, at manufacturing assembly lines, move goods, and grow crops (Hultman & Pulé, 2018). Needless to say, this malestream norm does not encompass all men, nor do all women support environmental engagement. Nonetheless, as Connell (2017) emphasises, while top managers of corporations probably do not contribute to emission of greenhouse gas or pollution by inner evil, they are ‘working in an insane elite world that institutionalises competitive, power-oriented masculinity, and they are doing whatever it takes’ (p. 6). In a way for men to try and reassert their assumed ‘greatness’, Hultman and Pulé (2018) claim that we now face a malestream revival by a global authority that reifies kinds of toxic/ extreme masculinities.

**Power relations in play**

What then, does this have to do with sportification, school sport, and the specialised gendered student-athlete? To illustrate this, some terms are worth to pick up from Connell’s (2017) quote above on top managers: competitive and power-oriented masculinity, doing whatever it takes. This could might as well be a description of (some) male athletes, who are ‘taking one for the team’ (Anderson, 2009); use aggressiveness and warrior narratives on the playing field (Adams et al., 2010); resist female athletes in sex-integrated arenas such as surfing (Comley, 2016); or young male student-athletes who consciously marginalise female peers in co-educated lessons because their male position might be challenged (Larneby, 2020). In this context, the ‘play like a boy’ discourse that prevails on the studied school in Larneby (2020) signals more than a way to play sport. It is signalled as a way to be and to behave. It is not neutral or innocent, it is not restricted to boys. It symbolises a deeply structured and legitimised way (although it might be contested and re-constructed) to put male norms and masculinity in a superior position over femininity, over female athletes who
do not adapt to a male norm, and over male athletes who in some way deviate from this gendered play. In the study discussed in this chapter (Larneby, 2020), as well as in other research on sport and school sport presented above, this is (perhaps unconsciously) enforced by athletes of all ages, coaches, parents, clubs, federations, and school staff.

I argue that gendered regimes in (school) sport potentially do relate to environmental sustainability and masculinities. Although not all school sport is organised based on male norms, this practice does exist. Sport research has presented numerous case studies and analyses of how masculinities are fostered and reproduced in sport. Matthews and Channon (2019) summarise this as that ‘sport provided men a site where the formal exclusion of women, and the overt celebration of powerful and aggressive visions of masculinity, enabled them to continue to construct idealised versions of themselves as rightfully dominant’ (p. 374). The real man is (naturally) strong and muscular, and competitive, and aggressive. Sport as a male preserve tells us how notions of masculinity could be preserved and used to support the continuation of male supremacy. This type of masculinity – with the attitude that boys and men are privileged, strong(er), expected not to show feelings, and expected to be superior to girls and women – is imprinted in society (Lorber, 1994). The industrial/breadwinner masculinity (Hultman & Pulé, 2018) and masculine culture in sport (Anderson, 2009) portray a certain kind of man and masculinity. Hultman and Pulé (2018) argue that the industrial/breadwinner masculinity is detrimental for the environment at a global scale, as industrial values are prioritised over environmental values. They claim that a masculine socialisation results in patterns of internalised superiorisation, which is destructive for the Earth, for others, and for themselves. Further, they see a link between an industrial/breadwinner masculinity and climate change denial which contrasts Earthcare. For instance, the ones who gain the most from an unfettered industrialisation are those who strongly protest against the suggestion that our planet is harmed by carbon emissions. Everyone who work in industries, organisations, or corporations that contribute to environmental impact are not climate change deniers. For instance, sustainability policies formulated for Swedish sport federations are perceived as important and are progressively used to reduce transportation and to rethink the organisation of events and competitions (Larneby et al., 2022).

As mentioned above, the Swedish Youth Barometer (2022) asked young people aged 15–25 which societal issues they think are the most important. After medical care and healthcare, environment was the second most important issue, and gender equality the third. This is promising. However, there were differences between girls’ and boys’ response rates. While 58% of the female respondents replied environment and climate, the male response was 38%. Further, 64% of the female respondents and 21% of the male think increased gender equality was important. In both issues, female respondents are of clear majority. It signals that men, to a lower extent than women, think that the environment and climate is important, which also is in line with Connell (2017) and Hultman and Pulé.
(2018) above. In addition, gender equality still remains a bigger societal issue to women than to men (cf. Lorber, 1994).

If school sport, and sport in general, continues to reproduce (or at least does not challenge) hegemonic masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 1995), male and female student-athletes will learn that this is not only the way to do sport, but this is also a way to be and behave in society at large. Sport needs to be scrutinised to uncover how this centuries-old male preserve and the negative effects of masculine hegemony relate to society at large (for instance, violence, lack of emotional competence, and breadwinner mentality), and to environmental sustainability specifically. Schools have a considerable responsibility to counteract gender inequalities and gendered patterns that lie within society's traditional structures (SNAE, 2022a, 2022b). Since school sport is part of school education, gender norms in school sport also need to be taken into consideration.

Conclusions

The objective of school sport is to contribute to a lifelong physical activity and future performance. Sportification is visible through a focus on specialisation and gendered way to do sport (cf. Guttmann, 2004). Logics and norms are reproduced rather than challenged and transformed. The characteristics of modern sport construct a performance-oriented athlete aiming to win. In this regard, school sport education teaches its student-athletes well. As shown above, school sport also contributes to environmental impact when using and building sport facilities, and transportation to training and competitions, just as other sport do. Importantly, and what this chapter specifically discusses, is that gender cannot be ruled out in explaining the ways sportification contribute to – and inflict negatively on – sustainable development. This form of school sport reproduces a type of male norm and masculinity that potentially may be socially negative for athletes (Larneby, 2020). I argue that it is also potentially negative for the environment, as dominating masculinities in the industrialised and corporate world are similar to dominating masculinities in the world of sport. The idea of sportification and strive to be faster, higher, and stronger might be problematic due to its gendered way to perform, and can be related to leadership characteristics in the industrial sector (Connell, 2017; Hultman & Pulé, 2018).

School sport is popular, and student-athletes are appreciated as ambitious individuals being used to competition (cf. Larneby, 2020; Skrubbeltrang, 2018). They are our future leaders, executives, managers, teachers, and workers. As school sport is located within the educational context, and school has a responsibility to educate and prepare students to be active citizens that also care for the planet, school sport has a potential to address environmental issues. In school, students get equal learning objectives on sustainability in contrast to clubs who more freely can choose how they organise their practice. Some clubs focus explicitly on sustainability, others focus to keep their voluntary leaders.
Hence, school sport is a way to educate young athletes beyond what clubs today can provide. I argue that student-athletes could and should be part of the work towards the sport industry’s reduced impact on the environment – not only regarding facilities and transportation but also in attitudes and norms linked to gender. Student-athletes’ opinions, influence, and participation can be used as a positive force to further demand for powerful action and actual results from stakeholders, corporations, and industries at a global scale; this also applies to stakeholders hosting big-scale events, such as international sport federations and the International Olympic Committee, as well as local clubs and hosts for small events.

Student-athletes can lead the way in challenging existing norms and structures and decreasing gendered power relations. It is the school’s responsibility to counteract constraining gender patterns (SNAE, 2022a, 2022b). This is also mentioned as one of the objectives for school sport in upper secondary school (SNAE, 2022c). If teacher-coaches are aware of the potential consequences that male norms, masculine domination, and gendered power relations might have not only for athletes within sport but also outside of sport and in relation to the environment, this issue can be raised already in school. Boys can adhere to more inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009), acknowledging and appreciating not only female athletes but also all athletes as equal (and equally valuable) peers in sport. This inclusive approach goes hand in hand with Hultman and Pulé’s (2018) ecological masculinities which prioritise concurrent systematic and personal transformations that embraces and enhances care for Earth, humans, and other than humans. Masculine ecologisation is a hope for our common future, as inclusive masculinities in sport give hope for a more inclusive sport (Anderson, 2009). Student-athletes today are our future citizens. A transformation towards more ecological and inclusive attitudes, choices, and actions within sport and in society is needed. This can be provided by using sport’s positive and powerful potential to contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals and education on sustainability.

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