

Learning to “Play Well” while Swimming Outdoors:

Embracing Competitive Values, Playful Encounters, and Changing Fields

The Research Group for Sport and Society (RESPONSE) is hosting a guest lecture with Sean Heath from KU Leuven (Belgium). The guest lecture is open to everyone!

Date: Thursday the 29th of August // Time: 14.00 - 15.00

Location: Room BODCAE313, Nord university (FSV/Nordlandsforskning, 3 et.).

Digital participation: Do you want to follow the lecture on teams?

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ABOUT THE LECTURE:

What can we learn by focusing our attention on changing fields of play? By accounting for the transitions between elite sport and recreational sporting activities? Of the residues which seep across these ‘boundaries’ of practice? How does movement indoors and out shape the subjectivities of sporting practitioners? This talk explores these questions through recounting of ethnographic fieldwork and an apprenticeship in competitive swimming in England and Canada. Competition is not anathema to recreational or leisure sport but rather a productive form through which to understand playful practices, the precipitation of contingency, and the generation of sporting subjectivities. Amongst the Masters swimmers I swam with, an engagement in playful competition assisted in the development of good skills, which include bodily techniques to swim fast and to sight well. I argue that approaching the practices of swimming with a playful disposition, and through the cultivation of ‘good skills,’ assists swimmers’ improvisation within both the contingency created by changing fields and the possibilities of chance, change, and luck introduced through playful competition itself. Within changing fields, there is not one way in which to play but multiple playings, play in the plural. It is in the interpretation and interaction between swimmers, watery environments, and competitive structures, that swimmers can demonstrate their skills and capacities to play well in an uncertain world.

ABOUT SEAN HEATH:

Sean Heath is an anthropologist of sport currently working as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at KU Leuven. His research is characterized by a critical look at contemporary society, in which discussions on thinking through, living with, and playing on water in a rapidly changing climate take centre stage. His current EU funded project EcoSENSES examines human-water relations in arctic cold-water swimming practices where the senses, embodiment and movement, and wellbeing are foregrounded in our intimate connections with material substances and other living beings. He has published on youth competitive swimming, recreational outdoor swimming and dipping, humour, the anthropology of play, and water management. Sean serves as Director of the International Network of Sport Anthropology (INSA) and a research consultant with Football4Peace International (F4P). He is the lead co-editor of *Doing Anthropology in a Sporting World: Knowledge, Collaboration, and Representation in the Digital Age* (Vernon Press forthcoming 2024).



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