

Abstract

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) were founded in the 1880s and throughout the history have become more than mere sport organizations. Mainly because of the violent history of Northern Ireland during the Troubles, both associations became entrenched in the respective cultural memories of the two competing identities of Northern Ireland. The large-scale violence ended in 1998 with the signing of the Belfast Agreement that was meant to bring peace and inter-communal cooperation to the region. This paper analyses the development of the two associations after 1998 in the context of the theory of cultural memory created by Jan Assmann. It concludes that the IFA has changed profoundly since the end of the Troubles. It left its post in the unionist-protestant cultural identity and now represents part of the new Northern Irish identity which transcends the social division and is still in an early stage of development. The GAA, on the other hand, went the other way and decided to strengthen its position among nationalists and Catholics in spite of its anti-sectarian and anti-racist ethos and gestures. This difference stems mainly from different history and structure of both associations and the fear of the GAA of becoming marginalized by the British sports if it ever leaves its firm position among the nationalists. The post-conflict atmosphere of peace had the major influence on the development of both associations after 1998, although the newly created consociational regime and supranational institutions had an impact, too.