



IN SEARCH OF CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH COMPETITIONS BETWEEN CITIES KEYNOTE SPEECH IN

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ABSTRACT

Challenge day is a recreational and leisure sport promotion taking place in many countries as proposed by "Trim and Fitness Sport for All International Association" which aggregates cities of similar size for international competitions. This event involves only participants in final results instead of performances, contrarywise to traditional sport. For sport for all movement concerns, this successful enterprise has not a theoretical basis, but marketing rationales for seeking a bottom line of knowledge to avoid risky business. Actually this trend also includes the need of partnership joining business with sport and local culture. Both interests finally connect positioning (a marketing device) to the search of identity (a cultural need and aspiration). In this perspective the knowledge of sport for all is discussed in terms of international development as well as the city imagery as the locus of sport and cultural promotion.

Key Words: CHALLENGE DAY, SPORT FOR ALL, SPORT AND CULTURE, CITY AND SPORT

My contribution deals to knowledge building and search of meanings in the issue of "Sport for All", since this movement is now ahead of our academic capability of making interpretations out of past experiences.

In other words, the facts reveal themselves so fast in our area of interest, that we had lost the sense of values and even the original principles brought about by Per Hoge Moe in Norway, Jurgen Dieckert in Germany or Frederico Gaelzer in Brazil, when they dreamed of a sport which could be shared by everyone.

Should we be able to summarize appropriately three decades of the Sport for All movement, it would become obvious the predominance of pragmatism: leaders did not and do not yet hesitate to give priority to practice and much less attention to theory in any ground, despite the efforts of Trim and Fitness Sport for All International Association - TAFISA.

But nowadays it seems that the challenges of pioneers are growing with more complexity. To be practical is not anymore sufficient. "Pragmatic" solutions, or "solid" results, as frequently mentioned,

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cannot be taken for granted. Actually, we need to develop theoretical fundamentals to support our decisions and actions, mainly because a business approach without a knowledge bottom line is a risky business and often irresponsible in social and political concerns as I had learned from Foldesi in a 1991 overview (1).

In my perspective, "The Challenge Day" as a competition between cities is a major example of these needs. As a promotion of large target groups, this program has now a marketing approach which improves continuously the answers to what, who, where and how. But to a certain extension, we will be soon moving to a more sophisticated marketing concept, either in Sport for All or in cities involvement. What I mean is positioning as basis to our present and future.

Positioning is a key marketing concept, if I may recall, in which the share of mind is so much considered as the share of market. As a presupposition of this report, Sport for All promotions, as well as cities and towns with their need of image building, are increasingly attached to the share of mind of national and international public opinion.

After the phase of programs and calendar of promotions, which can be seen as shares of activities or promotions market in professional jargon, both Sport for All and cities leaders should naturally consolidate the imagery connected with their achievements. And to perform this task we will surely need knowledge and meaning approaches.

Hopefully, we, from Trim and Fitness/Sport for All family and from cities and towns leadership, are entitled to come up to a common understanding. In the last three years an atmosphere of close cooperation was created by the Challenge Day. And we all know that cooperation is the name of the game in the global society we are living in now.

Having the partnership factor as a starting point we may move in terms of knowledge to culture, a concept related to several definitions but now becoming more vivid with the challenges of global trends and multiculturalism. And if we are talking about culture-which is fundamentally a cooperative enterprise-we shall approach to identity, sooner or later, when facing the practical problems of positioning our promotions, especially the Challenge Day, the World Walking Day and above all the Traditional Games, our main initiatives in TAFISA.

Just look around in many international events and you will certainly be able to catch on the conception of cultural identity: we are a very diversified group of people trying to cope with different interests but simultaneously maintaining individualities as integrated unities. Here, if the final product of our negotiations is an imbalance with the human



environment, we will lose part of this group identity.

Actually, one significative example of a search of identity is the Sport for All movement in itself. As I recall, 20 years ago the international leaders of Trim and Fitness were emphasizing activities. At that time, we were looking forward a central conception, perhaps a paradigm to our campaigns, programs and promotions.

Rather we envisaged physical activity more as recreation than competition as well as health and fitness were our main targets. namely, the opportunity presented in those early 70s refers to reshape sports, to put physical activity in a new frame of comprehension.

Nevertheless, there was a less explicit idea among Sport for All theorists: to build a new identity to sports. In other words, that opportunity was an attempt to improve cooperation, reallocating this category to a central approach to sports theory and practice instead of competition. Of course, cooperation here might be seen from the standpoint of low to higher levels, from participants to leadership roles, including international exchange.

The next step of Sport for All movement confirms the latter interpretation: in early 80s the emphasis was over leadership, even though activities continue to play a fundamental function, mainly in reason of marketing rationales.

Unlike common sports leadership, trim and fitness activists from those days were necessarily positioning since their innovations do not imply in conflicts with sport traditions. And more: the search of share mind in sport imagery were merely implicit just because there never was a competition to take over shares of market of traditional sports practices or leadership.

Anyway, yet in the last decade Sport For All started to emphasize target groups. As a natural tendency, targeting made appearance in different countries and it is now one or even the main central focus in present days. Worth to note in this period is the emergence of the following evidences:

FIRST: The evolution of Sport For All shows the increasingly importance of research, particularly as a result of targeting, in order to obtain a stable progress;

SECOND: Sport for all have been a moving target to leadership, a condition which recommends positioning not only for management needs but also for scientific and philosophical requirements.

In my view, the recent creation of TARIFA as the leading Sport For All international organization and the new partnership with sponsors represent what we may call a mix of past and present experiences of

Sport For All. In summary, identity is a point of convergence of the different categories I have briefly referred in this report.

Furthermore chances are that the Challenge Day is a kind of synthesis of what we have been looking for the last three decades, that is, an identity to Sport For All. On the other hand, the Challenge Day is one significative contribution to similar search now being performed by many marketing-oriented cities all over the world.

Let me now present some general facts apart from Sport for All issue in order to support this latest suggestion:

FIRST: The "global togetherness", as Jurgen Palm prefer to call, has a real existence already when global communication and trade make a link with some peculiar event of a particular region anywhere in the world.

SECOND: The proposition of identity in diversity now brought into light by the Council of Europe for cultural purposes, seems to be gaining an universal value.

THIRD: This desirable identity in diversified conditions is primarily a regional, local and community based commitment, specially when the whole of these cultural units emerges in its characteristic meanings.

Now, it is not surprisingly that in different walks of life the city of nowadays is becoming more important in comparison with nation-states. In brief, there is an ongoing process of restoration of cities, making them sources and centers of cultural developments, with distinguished repercussions over economy and politics (2).

"Restoration" seems to be the appropriate expression to define this so called megatrend that essentially means the association of global links in commerce and communication with citys resources and cultural empowerment (3).

May I say in this context that the city that hosts our meeting, Budapest, is a symbol of this identity building, once it was a previous experience of a broad Western European influence associated to a unique cultural expression.

Likewise Viena or Prague positioning, Budapest remains an example of excelence in cultural grounds in a number of events in history. In addition to these "gate cities" it is always significant to mention a city or a town playing the role of cross roads when we want to make sure that style, standards, quality and even trade mark are on the right focus. Naturally any country or regions have their own examples, and many of them have been improving their marketing capabilities in recent years.

Back to sports overiewing, I keep in mind that Western European



version of sport was born in Ancient Greek cities. And the modern Olympic Games maintain this tradition. At present, each four years, one selected city turns out to be the center of the world for two weeks.

But this overexposure has negative effects already: the competition among candidate cities to host the Olympic games became so hard that the sense of cooperation almost disappeared. This fact poses the question whether these cities are choosing the right positioning to themselves.

Again, the problem of identity in diversity is not new and not always well observed by intellectuals, professionals and public opinion. Considering Sport for All alone, we discussed this issue in a meeting which took place in the city of Anaheim, in the United States, in 1984 (4).

At that time we concluded that regional venues of Sport for All were distinguished examples of cultural uniqueness, mainly in perspective of Third World countries.

Today we are moving towards a similar concept on behalf of Challenge Day - and by replacing the former "uniqueness" by "identity". Moreover cities are now the central focus not activities. As Wolfgang Bauman has stressed, the Challenge Day is a unique competition because it is able to adapt to any country.

To this interpretation I should like to reinforce cooperation as the catch word to explain the success of competition provided by Challenge Day. Further, let me remind you that excellence and quality as we are learning from Eastern civilization are a balanced combination of competition and cooperation.

Last but not least, it is very important to mention the paradox of identity in diversity in view of cities marketing needs. Often this identity search represents isolation, prejudice and even wars.

Examples of this turn-of-the century phenomenon are found everywhere in this world of present days. If we are supposed to think globally and act locally, then our ultimate goals are likely to be:

FIRST: To continue to reinvent traditional sports which emphasize naturally cooperation;

SECOND: To provide identity to our cities through competition but avoiding direct confrontations.

Of course, these goals are paradoxical, being anyway our real challenges and hopes. So far, these are the challenges of Challenge Day.

REFERENCE



Foldesi, G. S. (1991). "From Mass Sport to the Sport for All. Movement in Socialist Countries in Eastern Europe". *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 26(4): 239-58.