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WHICH SPORTING LEISURES FOR WHICH SOCIETY OF TOMORROW?

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ABSTRACT

Modern languages often use in an inappropriate way the term “traditional”, which comes from the Latin *traditio* “to transmit”. Traditional games transmitted to us from generation to generation are corporeal expressions which reflect particular cultures of different communities from all over the world. These games represent an element of cultural recognition, and through their internal logic they constitute a way to express our identity.

In 19th-century Britain most games of local communities had been standardised to become activities organised around the new rationalised model of industrialized British society, fully aware of the concept of leisure. This new concept imposed itself on the world – like the western industrial society itself – to the detriment of the diversity of regional corporal practices.

Condemned for a long time by the churches and viewed with suspicion by those in power, academic research on traditional games was either abandoned or completely marginalized. Today numerous traditional games are still played in spite of the institutionalised domination by modern global sports. As elements of recognition of regional communities, like their dances, music, and cuisine, traditional games are living laboratories of local democracy and different interpersonal and intercultural relations.

In 2001, the European network of traditional games consisting of dozens of organisations, decided to establish an official association whose main goal was to promote traditional games. One of its objectives was also to formulate questions about the future of our societies, in consideration of the role of sports in our life today. Sport indeed entails important questions. Some of our recent conferences have focused on the inheritances and transmissions that we have received by way of traditional games, and on the development and promotion that we agreed to pursue. These questions today are: What do we think we have received? What do we think is necessary to transmit to future generations, why and how? We must all engage in an open debate on these issues.

The most important question is: What forms our leisure should take, to reflect these moments of life and shared emotions the best way possible? Our leisure pursuits are linked directly to the society in which they were forged. It is necessary now to bring to fruition all the ideas contained in numerous exchanges of researchers over the last several years.

The word *tradition* or *traditional* has been used in many different meanings; it has also been criticized. Many presupposed meanings are attached to this word, often carried as cannonballs. I recall a recent meeting with an MEP who said that: “*All sports are traditional games by origin*”. He was right, like a historian with the sixth sense, but his explanation was too simplistic, nearly grotesque, like a hand gesture to push away an

embarrassing question, as if to show that it was not important to treat it in a serious way. In fact, in this short sentence, this MEP told me too much and, at the same time, too little.

Sports are all traditional games by origin. It is a correct statement but only at first glance. Traditional games and sports are like a dirt road and a motorway: human constructions used for human displacements, and in fact they serve to displace the pressure of every day life during leisure time. Soccer, Europe's best-known sport, has traditional ancestors almost everywhere, not only in English *foot-ball*. The word *ball* in German and English, *boll* in Swedish, *bold* in Danish, *bal* in Dutch, as well as the word *pelota* in Spanish, *palla* in Italian, *pila* in Latin, all designate a sphere deriving from Indo-European *bhel* symbolising the sun, the source of life revived every spring. Most of our games originated from funeral ceremonies or life "revival" ceremonies (births, weddings, May festivals) in ancient Greece, China or among the Incas. These ceremonies are still held in present-day Mongolia, Uzbekistan, or in Europe on holidays or during festivals devoted to various saints. We can notice a certain similarity between the games of the former Roman stadiums with their violence, and some soccer matches of today. There is a noticeable similarity between the ancient *pancrace* and the modern *pride* in the structure of the sport of soccer itself.

FROM FOOT-BALL TO THE SOCCER OF THE STADIUMS

Varieties of *foot-ball*, often thought to be exclusively English, are known to have been played almost around the world, with different regional and local rules. Some of these games allowed the use of both hands and feet, which means that even ancient Gaelic football can be regarded as one of ancestors of soccer. Nearly all peoples have had their own games of ball, as they have had their wrestling styles, similar at first glance, but in fact very distinct in their internal logic¹. Next to soccer

¹ According to Pierre Parlebas's concept, the internal logic is a system of constraints imposed by the rules of a game. The code of the game introduced by these rules predetermines athletes to participate in a particular type of corporal relations carrying the print of the culture that generated them. It is not linked in any way to psychological or sociological considerations.

we have Australian football, American football, and many others, hundreds of them undervalued. Who has heard today of the game of Melanesian ball where the ball is an empty coconut, or *Tsu-Chu*, a sport of the Chinese emperors for centuries? We know today the game *hurling*. Yet *hurling*, *la Soule* or *Choule*, *Chole*, *Velad*, *Cnappan*, *Shrove Tuesday Foot-ball*, etc., were played with the feet, hands (or both), with a stick, in different regions of Europe. Thus, the same name may represent different games, and different names may be given to the same game in various cultural areas. From northern England to southwestern France, these regional games differ in their internal logic and rules, but their external² logic and context display strong similarities. Thus, every year, for centuries, different rural or urban communities have organised recreational events during calendar festivals – with the authorities turning a blind eye to some excesses – as a social valve "to let off steam".

A new discussion about modern soccer is now necessary to dispel the myth of football existing from time immemorial. Joseph Strutt, the ultimate historical authority on English medieval games, described around 1790 a game called Goal at Foot-ball or Camp-Ball³: "When a match at foot-ball is made, two parties, each containing an equal number of competitors, take the field, and stand between two goals, placed at the distance of eighty or an hundred yards the one from the other. The goal is usually made with two sticks driven into the ground, about two or three feet apart. The ball, which is commonly made of a blown bladder, and cased with leather, is delivered in the midst of the ground, and the object of each party is to drive it through the goal of their antagonists, which being achieved the game is won. The abilities of the performers are best displayed in attacking and defending the goals; and hence the pastime was more frequently called a goal at foot-ball than a game at foot-ball. When the exercise becomes exceeding violent, the players kick each other's shins without the least ceremony, and some of them overthrown at the hazard of their limbs". The internal logic of the game resembles present-day soccer, but Strutt noted that if this game had been formerly very popular at the end of the Middle

² The external logic is the context, as a type of socio-cultural relationship lived by the protagonists in distinct geographical zones, at a certain time of period.

³ Joseph Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes of the people of England* (1801) (published posthumously).

Ages, it was completely abandoned by the time he was writing. Later, in 1826, William Hone, who had republished Strutt's work and was an expert on popular traditions of England, wrote that the game of Foot-Ball: "... is, and remains a game of Shrove Tuesday in England and in Scotland"⁴. The same year, a certain British gentleman reported, following a Shrove Tuesday festivity, that the term *Foot-Ball day*⁵ was unknown to him. These two examples confirm Strutt's conclusions concerning the game of *Camp-Ball*. The *Foot-Ball day* or *Foot-Ball of Shrove Tuesday* was indeed different from *Camp-Ball*, it was played in a similar way to *la soule* and one of its main goals was also to collect money to pay for the feast in the pubs. It appears therefore that modern soccer is a late 19th-century revival of a former practice whose ashes were still hot, similarly to the cases of judo and ju-jitsu in 1882.

As far as Australian football is concerned, it derived from Gaelic football played in Ireland and was modified by the Australians, who introduced an oval ball instead of a round one and an oval pitch instead of an oblong one. This proves once again that people, even in the most technologically developed societies, always seek activities in which their communities can be recognized. In the case of Australian football it was mainly due to the fact that

the Irish had suffered from prolonged English expansionism and wanted to develop their own sporting identity. Their idea was, until recently, that a sport develop in the cultural community that forged it, in which the game offers understandable cultural references to its members. Gaelic football is also a ball game descended from what is often mistakenly considered to be one and same game: hurling. An Irish text from 1527 informs us that about a hundred players took part in every hurling match; later another text describes a meeting between married and unmarried people at a saint's day festival. The game was considered brutal and was codified around 1880 by the Gaelic Athletic Association, at the time when it was fashionable to transform the internal logic of games to create what we have called global sport (the word *sport*, in England, originally meant "leisure, pastime and also competitive games").

American football also descended from modern English soccer. By 1870 the game had become popular in U.S. universities and then diverged in numerous directions to such an extent that in 1873-74 it was no longer possible to organise a match between different universities because each followed different rules. Later, under the influence of what we today call rugby, an association was created and it the game started to develop in its own way distinct from the corresponding European game.

Today, even if there are elements of soccer and rugby in American football, we can say that its internal logic looks more similar to a ball game of Central American Indians called *tlachtli* or *pokyah*. This game was organised during ceremonies to celebrate the sun and the stars, symbolised by the ball. It was played by two teams, whose structures reflected the dualisms used during religious ceremonies to represent good and evil, day and night or summer and winter. The game was so violent that the players had to wear leather protective pads on their shoulders, hips and elbows. The rules of the game were similar to American football, which carries its name... well. The similarities between the two can be noted in various paintings and bas-reliefs from Central America. Let us also note that during the 1905 American football season there were eighteen fatal injuries and one hundred fifty nine serious injuries⁶!

⁴ In *The Every day book and table book* written in the 1820s and published in London in 1841 William Hone, mentions a letter of a Scottish gentlemen from 1815 which describes "foot-ball" as an old traditional game still played in some towns in Scotland on Shrove Tuesday between married men and bachelors. The married men were to "hang" the ball by putting the ball three times in a moor. The bachelors had to "drown" the ball three times in a river. At the end of the game the ball was sliced like in the game of Ruzzolone (cheese throwing) in Italy where slices of cheese are offered to the participants...

⁵ A friend of M. Hone, who traveled by coach on Shrove Tuesday through several cities in the vicinity of London noticed that their inhabitants secured their windows on the street side. The players pushed a wooden ball, and begged money from door to door (bringing misfortune to the house windows of those who refused to give them any money). At noon, on "foot-ball day" matches took place in the streets, and after four hours all players retired to the pubs to spend the money they had collected. I participated in a similar game on February 4 and 5, 2008, called "Hurling Silver Ball" the day before and on Shrove Tuesday, in St Ives and St Columb in Cornwall.

⁶ Wojciech Lipoński, *World Sport Encyclopedia*, 2003, Poland.

The aforementioned examples point to the incontestable relationship between modern sports and traditional games. This relationship is often confused but real, and the internal logic of sports and traditional games has a number of common points, especially if some sports and games belong to the same category. If we take the family of ball games, the common point is the object which we have to run with or hit to score a goal. If we take a small ball, it is an object that we have to hit, throw or catch. In all wrestling sports the main objective is to defeat the opponent by throwing him down, pinning him to the ground or immobilising. We can see the universality of games, but we also know that all the games have been in fact constructed in a different way, with their different environments, languages, histories and cultures, i.e. with their different *habitus*⁷. Today's modern sports have not evolved from former traditional games. Basketball was invented in the United States in 1891, followed by volleyball in 1895. Table tennis was conceived in England in the 1880s, and popularised in the 1890s when an American built a factory to manufacture and sell supplies needed to play this game. All these sports could have possibly instituted continuity with existing games, e.g. with Chinese table tennis, Aztec volleyball or Dutch korfbal, however erasing local cultures and replacing them with new ones was a strategy that had already been proven effective during colonial times. For commercial companies, it is as always easier to penetrate an acculturated society than the so-called traditional society. It is therefore necessary to distinguish, on the one hand, the game itself and the actors of the game; and on the other hand other different external elements which make the game the central element of commercial activity, whose main purpose is not to continue playing the game but to win and earn money.

TRADITIONAL GAMES AND OLYMPIC GAMES

Modern sports, or rather the modern global sport system, are in fact very different from the

traditional games of today. In the 21st century we are not cherishing social activities from antiquity, the Middle Ages or even late 19th century. The process followed by the majority of modern sports in the 19th and especially the 20th century saw the bureaucratisation of sports and their internal logic, not of the game itself, but of controlling the system in accordance with the official state policy, elitist and productivist trends and the 'market'. The rupture of a corner flagpost is enough to interrupt a professional soccer match! The tendency to complicate the rules of the game with elements having nothing to do with the game itself is characteristic of all modern sports. Our example points to certain characteristics of the system of sportification: control of the game by the bureaucracy, the fundamental role of economy in application of materials calibrated to the millimetre, and social power of those who control the system. The big international sporting federations and their satellites, specialist newspapers, television, commercial markets, tend to become global companies of culture, aimed at gaining control, power and financial position, just like multinational corporations. The coverage of doping scandals involving big laboratories working with professional athletes is a meaningful example: details of scandals are very quickly removed from the press. Otherwise, how can one not claim that the Olympic Games are not concerned with politics, as Mr. Serandour, President of the French NOC and member of the IOC proclaimed in April 2008, at the time of the controversy surrounding the Beijing Olympics?

As far as this issue is concerned a reference should be made to the reinvention of the Olympic Games by Pierre de Coubertin and his Anglo-American friends at the end of the 19th century. Much earlier, in 1612, the *Cotswold Olympick Games* following the ancient tradition had been organised by a group of former Catholic dissidents during the reign of Queen Elisabeth I, some of whom were friends of William Shakespeare. The ethos of the games remained in opposition to the rising Puritan movement, which sought to control and destroy the old joyful traditions of England and impose their bleak views over society, which would then contribute to the English Civil War of 1642-1649. The Cotswold games included wrestling, sword fighting, cudgel-playing, leaping, horse-shoe throwing, hunting or hare coursing, dancing and various other activities in what was their natural environment in this region of England at that time.

⁷ The *habitus* is the social print left on the personality of any human being by the various structures at the very centre in which this person has lived: culture, language, social, legal, natural environment, personal experiences, etc. It is a social matrix of the community providing individual grids of interpretation.

Then in 1788 a similar project commenced in Harvard in the United States, followed by Germany in 1793, Rome in 1813 and Sweden in 1834. After gaining independence in 1829 also Greece wished to restore the games of ancient Olympia and especially its prestigious past, and held the Hellenic Games in 1859, 1870, 1875 and 1889. However, their so-called links with tradition were false and related solely to the myth. Indeed, when a practice dies out and then someone revives it, the transmission is broken, i.e. it is a pseudo-tradition. This is the case with the Olympic Games, whose myth of origin can be compared to the myth of origin of the United States.

The new Olympic Games used therefore the Olympic myth to provide the new practices with respectability, but at the same time with a code of western Anglo-Saxon ideas. Indeed, the development of modern sport in the United States, bound to the commercial system, needed the support of utopian Pierre de Coubertin and his English supporters to create a system of competitions at the top world level. This was created within the existing model of society developed by the New World settlers in accordance with their own *habitus*. This was a system whereby adventurers, the poor, ordinary workers or outlaws could gain a decision-maker's position, exploit and get rich, following the nearly religious concept of the right to succeed and be part of the elite. This concept developed partly due to frustrations experienced earlier by the same adventurers, the poor, ordinary workers and outlaws. The Olympic Games constructed by them were originally an event encompassing Anglo-Saxon games, but reserved for the upper classes and the aristocratic elite, because the professionalization of high-level working class athletes began in the middle of the 19th century. We are aware that games, like languages, are the outcome of different models of thinking and different environments. The 1896 Olympic Games were therefore, in fact, even involuntarily, great ethnocentric games, as they are still largely today. They inoculated, often without pain, an acculturation in all countries without sufficient economic strength to develop their own indigenous games. They were and are games of rich countries which dominate the global economy.

On the one hand we have modern sports which pretend to be the heirs of former physical activities or traditional games, affirming to be extensions or direct descendants of these practices

and aspiring to respectability. This aspect has been so much emphasised in official speeches that researchers for the last hundred years have not judged it necessary to be interested in the traditional games, as if they had merely evolved in a Darwinian way, throwing their old outfits aside just to put on new ones. Therefore the former games are thought to be extinct because they had been transferred. This misconception can be found in a statement of a French high sports ministry commissioner at the 1988 symposium on traditional games in Villa Real, Portugal, organised by the Council of Europe. He said that his country supported other countries working on this theme, but stated that France was not really concerned because there were no longer any surviving traditional games in France! He was and is utterly wrong, because there are several hundred thousands of players of hundreds of different games in France today!

ON THE IGNORANCE OF TRADITIONAL GAMES BY THE UNIVERSITIES

Apart from denoting the complex connections between traditional games and sports, the word *traditional* is often used to designate the evil grain of sand that embarrasses the well-lubricated machinery of the dominating sporting system. The image of traditional games is *animalised*⁸ in order to obtain the full right to destroy it, while concealing the real problems, like in a conjuring trick. Is it this motivation, masking the genocide of traditional games, which inspired Professor Stefano Cavazza of the University of Bologna, when he wrote in the preface of his book *Giochi tradizionali Valle in d'Aosta* financed by the Valdotan regional government to maintain traditional games that "Almost everywhere in Europe we notice nationalistic implications at the level of traditional games collection, as it is the case for the Serbian Karadzic (...), this interest for survival is bound to the refusal of industrialisation and modifications brought to society, that industry introduced (...). We find the proof of this (of the refusal) in the

⁸ The concept of a human disguised as an animal to justify treating him like a lower human. Descartes spoke of "animal-machine" opposed to the man of reason; Taine spoke of "a primitive animal who subsists indefinitely in the human being".

debate on the presumed decadence dragged by the development of the cultural industry and mass culture (...) the ideological combination between right-wing regimes and folklore is henceforth amply documented". He concluded that "fortunately the Valdota games showed a better spirit hiding themselves in the CONI, the Italian Olympic committee", which means that they are therefore absolved from any sin.

Here we touch the taboo of the Olympic Games, the taboo of sport. The OLYMPICS constitute a reflection of universal and egalitarian human values – values of democracy, friendship, etc. Modern sport is also a tool with exemplary social and human values. Thus, when a parent brings his child to the door of a training room, he or she leaves it completely reassured and absolutely convinced that it is a place where it is in good hands. The sporting activities are taking more and more space in our present world and this space has gained a great significance. There is no surveillance of the system, not even attempts to set interdisciplinary structures whose role would be to control the correct democratic and educational functioning of activities widely subsidised by the taxpayer. In the French sports federations, the agendas of council meetings only foresee points concerning the organisation of competitions, trainers' development, refereeing, and selections for the main competitions; there is nothing concerning the non elitist and educational role of sports, cultural training, or development of youth in general. Is it solely for these purposes that these official organisations get public money, and are fully conscious of their role in the formation of the society of tomorrow?

But perhaps the reflection on youth education is confined to the reproduction of an elitist sporting model. Whereas traditional games are accused of following the nationalist tarits, nothing is said about Olympic state nationalism or about big international sporting meetings. The bigger the lie, the more people believe in it, says the adage. It is saddening that Mr. Cavazza, who is not alone, was not capable of seeing the innovative, critical, and alternative work of the movement that gives life to traditional games. Scholarly texts about this movement can be found in many places, where plays and games are used for social education and education of future generations. However, Mr. Cavezza is right when he puts us on guard against the quest for origins, against false traditions, and

against rediscoveries. Why is he not critical then about the OLYMPICS? Like Don Quixote attacking his imaginary windmills, he abstracts a part of the reality. He does not want to see that for about thirty years federations of traditional games, in particular the one of the Val d'Aosta, have proposed egalitarian international exchanges, supported with interesting research results. These meetings propagate games of all protagonists, without standardisation of the rules, without a single and uniform language of exchange. Everybody must play the game of others as a sign of respect for the others' culture. There are also competitions, but they are merely a pretext for interpersonal encounters.

In this debate, however, we should ignore the false signification given to the term "traditional games" by Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning in their book "Quest for excitement, Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process" (entitled "Sport and civilisation" in the French version) and arguments used by these opponents of traditional games. Indeed, these authors obviously do not know what we currently call "traditional games". They only refer to sports existing in the 18th century such as foot-ball, wrestling and boxing and they call them *traditional games* instead of *games played formerly*. In fact, they refer to the external logic, or the context, of the 18th century games. Certainly the 18th-century reality in England is not that of the 20th century, even if the internal logic or the rules, are still more or less the same at present e.g. description of camp-ball by Strutt in the 18th century. This is true for all the games still played today. Moreover, the authors speak about only one society, England, which has greatly changed, and in which sport practices are only few elements to have modified it (the 18th-century society was probably more violent, but it has changed, and the games followed this change). We still await the same evidence about the evolution of games from other areas of the world, with complex analyses including surveys of the context. The conclusions could have been very different. The authors also refer to a text by Richard Carew written about 1590 and published in 1602, which describes two different practices of hurling⁹ in Cornwall at that time. The question remains why they make no reference to one of these games which is still practised every year, and why

⁹ One is the same as described by Hone (Shrove Tuesday ball game), and the other has its internal logic similar to present-day rugby.

they have not gone to Cornwall to witness it. Why did they not go to study the wrestling style described by Carew and still practised in England?

Elias and Dunning suggest that modern sport, invented in England, has the effect of releasing tensions caused by the very strong and increasing social constraints of our modern societies, to pacify the relations between the actors while causing tensions and emotions out of real time, and very much framed by regulations. They explain that in civilised societies where the states of tension and excitation are permanently curbed, sport releases emotions – in a very strict setting – which is necessary for mental health. Without contributing to the debate about the concept they defend, which could be also applied globally to current traditional games or any leisure practises with emotions, it is necessary to note that this is the general theme of states which seek control of individuals. States do more and more control everything, and generate rules that ordinary citizens are forced to respect. This could have been demonstrated using other themes such as work or trade rules, but there the critic is very vigilant.

Through the prism of the modern sports the two authors also depict the Olympic sports, which draw their mythology from antiquity, in which they condemn the violence. Here, we can find the same paradox as in Cavezza. Elias and Dunning certainly demonstrate an important and recognised academic thesis, but it is not their logical reasoning which demonstrates this theory. The tool “traditional games”, which did not exist when the articles were written, was a scapegoat, which would not answer them... When they promote sportification¹⁰ as a civilization process, a fundamental element in the creation of a *habitus* where the human being learns to control himself to re-inject this impulse of control into his own society, we are not convinced. Does sportification make the rules more complex or impose a uniform way to achieve this goal? Does it impose referees at all levels in all sports, at school for example, as a way to generate debate and negotiations between the players, and thus a way to reduce violence? If the objective is justifiable, it

seems that we must be very prudent of the means, if sport is, first of all, education. The violence has perhaps changed, but it is still there, only different.

We must be always very prudent with concepts which announce “an improvement of the civilisation process”. It is when Elias declares that it is more violent for a hunter to kill a fox with his own hands than to give this work to his dogs. Does it mean to him that it is less violent to delegate the act of violence to someone else, even to the state? One can pursue this line of reasoning saying that it is less violent to bomb a city rather than to go there and fight in the streets! It is an apologia of deresponsibilisation, of the scapegoat, and also of the expert’s right to think for the whole of civil society. It is the right to “animalise” those who do not think like you, to justify the necessity to destroy them. In Britain, the installation of millions of CCTV cameras to monitor the streets, motorways, roads in the countryside, is the logical continuation of this civilisation process whereby it is necessary to impose control on others, following the patterns from *Brave New World* by Huxley and *1984* by Orwell.

Norbert Elias, a well-known scholar who has studied in numerous Western universities, used his appraisal for demonstrations where we can see the logic of the religious environment, the culture and the language of his adopted country, England (after having fled Hitler’s Germany). This approach is, like the games, universal and local at the same time – replete with differences. Let us take the example of languages that are constructions of codes modelled by the *habitus* from which no one can completely escape. Languages are therefore spoken representations of situations limited geographically and temporally. The notion of Logic (the science of language, of clear and coherent expression of thought) expresses itself only through the elements of language, and is only valid for the human beings immersed in the cultural environment of this language. Thus, when we intend to install any societal logic in another country, following Elias’s “process of civilisation”, we can only talk about representation of our own logic, or of one mode of thought of a particular civilisation. There is therefore some ethnocentrism in this concept, and it is the same with sporting games. This system of thought can be subject to acculturation in societies on which it is imposed, as it is always accompanied and accentuated by the technological means of our time, much more influential, if we also possess economic power. It can be compared to the

¹⁰ The sportification process is a complex ensemble consisting of rationalising the practice, standardising the rules and dimensions of playing areas, creation of institutions and bureaucratic organisations, making regulatory decisions, laws, quantification, scientific statements and specialisation of roles.

phenomenon of globalization that we currently observe, where the dominant economic system tries to impose its concepts, and where everything can be merchandised.

We are aware that today numerous structural modifications of our societies are imposed on us by multinational corporations, and before we even consider whether we should adopt or reject them, another modification invades our lives. Moreover, we can notice that the sports system promotes activities that are extensively commercialized to increase the temporal space in which the citizens become merely consumers at matches, in training rooms and in fitness halls.

The following diagram presents three areas of societal physical education, with three different logics. The sporting system is at the top of the hierarchy. The second area, fitness, is considered lower because they it is noncompetitive, even though it includes many elements of sport. The third area, centered around regional festive and

unknown or infantilised¹¹. If we assume that sport follows the logic of the ‘market’, the fitness system follows the logic of the state, and the traditional games the logic of the so-called civil society, we approach the true problem, that of democracy, because the sports system tries in general to establish a decisional supranational level, whereas the traditional games remain at the level of local decision making. It is in this approach that we can find today the real difference between traditional games and mass modern sports.

RETURN TO THE WORLD OF OPEN

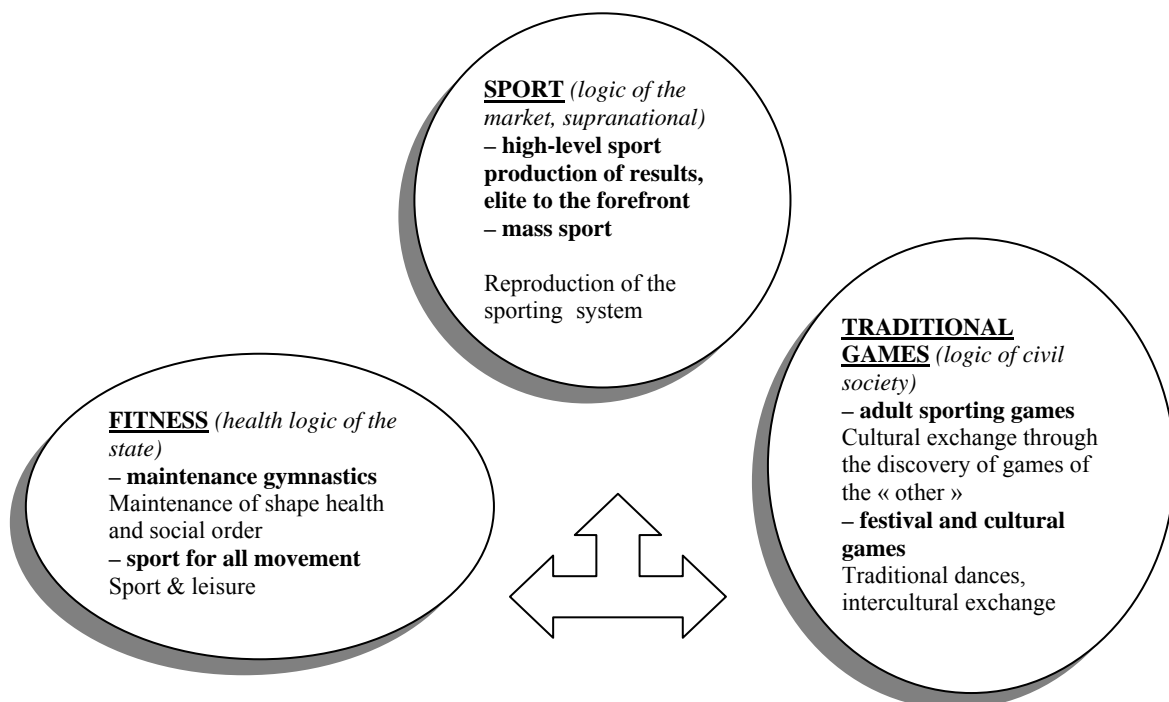


Figure 1. The body culture*. These three elements are to be considered social facts

* This trilogy is often used by Henning Eichberg, researcher at the Centre for Sport, Health and Civil Society, Syddansk Universitet (Denmark).

¹¹ “Infantilisation” is an attitude considering the other to be a child, incapable of managing oneself alone, to take good decisions or to judge by oneself what is good for him.

MINDS AND FREE EXCHANGES

The equitable exchange, balanced and respecting others' cultures, without domination or expansionism, once put in place through traditional games, is much more efficient for the progress of democracy in the world than the imposition of a dominant model and representation of democracy by way of strength and competition. There must be free exchanges involving open-minded participants who wish to learn from one another. This process involves voluntary cultural loans, noticeable in the great diversity of traditional games. The loans are also the transmission of what we think is right for our community, in order to give the governance of progress to the civil society. It is also necessary to seriously consider the impact of these loans on future generations, and on the habits created by interpersonal encounters called sports meetings, where the main objective is always to dominate the "other" through competition. The introduction of this antagonistic spirit in all sporting competitions may lead in the end to returning to the rituals of 13th-century South American Indians who followed the principle "my team is the good one, and the other the evil one".

However, let us remain humble and let us not reverse the absurdity, replacing modern sport as a miraculous solution to social problems with traditional games. Traditional games can then become alternative postmodern tools, in the domain of leisure and sports, but not becoming themselves sports of the modern type. On the contrary, they may serve as some kind of laboratory to help society to reform the system of leisure and sports competition. It is therefore necessary to re-awaken curiosity and knowledge through fundamental and experimental scientific research into the historical, ethnological, sociological and psychological domains. Let us never forget that to know where one goes, and why, it is first necessary to understand where one comes from.

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