

„The individual is not only an unmistakably unique one, but is also determined and personalized by social, ^{and} cultural, ~~and social~~ traits. Not even the body is purely organic or naturel; it too can be regarded as a social entity, since its appreciation and importance is different in every individual, as well as in every social stratum and cultural setting.“

(GRUPE)

Sport and society

As already mentioned before, sport of today has aquired a high value in the framework of our society(ies). It sometimes even assumes religious or quasi-religious importance.

The following shall try to deliver an explanation for the popularity and fascination of sport, particularly with regard to the aspect of its *motivating force* (WEISS).

Individual and society

HERDER states that man, unlike beast, does not inherit his motoricity. Man must learn and permanently adjust the way he moves his body, just like any other process of sozialisaton. Being a creature with the ability to learn, he depends on other humans for this process. That is the case in early childhood when the individual is more exposed to the influence of reference persons, who are usually his parents. Parents are responsible for *basic socialisation*. The term *Second socio-cultural birth* (CLAESSENS) impacts that the natural birth must be augmented by procedures and mechanisms of a second birth, the *initialization* into the respective culture or society. Although the genetic heritage of each individual is determined well before his birth, account must also be taken of the influence of the environment into which he was born. This process is characterized by an interrelation with a definite kind of environment. The individual member of a society *externalizes* his ego into society, and, conversaly, *internalizes* the reality of society (BERGER/LUCKMANN). The individual forms the society and society forms the individual. In this way, society also changes through permanent interaction among its members.

Attempting to establish a relationship between *body and society*, one finds that socialization always includes socialization of the body. Here, too, the processes of externalization and internalization follow the same patterns. Any experiences with regard to the body and its movements are formed and modelled on an individual scale, and at the same time they are predetermined by society and follow social patterns. There is, however, a level of physical baselines like the need or ability to eat and to drink, to laugh and to weep, even though these biological actions manifest themselves differently in each society. Concepts of beauty, strength, and shame, for example, are just as different as what is meant by sick or healthy. The way that emotions are either expressed or suppressed, and how the control of instincts is either tightened or relaxed, depends on the respective society. An individual's body language reflects the prevailing social system and the respective society. This aspect must be taken into account for a thorough understanding of sport, because the body language of sport does not emanate outside society.

Social aspects of sport

Sport is the expression of the socio-cultural system of a society. WEBER postulates that human actions are governed by *values* and *norms*. Therefore, in sport, too, patterns develop that reflect the sets of values and norms of society. The system of values and norms on which a certain society is based is also reflected in the sports of that society. So, for example, society in North America is highly competitive, thus competition is the ultimate in the field of sport in the USA. Amongst others, this is exemplified in statements of famous university coaches and can be gleaned from high-school graffiti like *Winning is not everything, it is the only thing; Every time you win, you are reborn, when you loose you die a little; The greatest aim in life is to succed*. The games of the Escimos in Alaska form a strong contrast to that kind of North American heritage. In their struggle for survival in a hostile environment the Escimos depend on one another and therefore have developed a very strong sense of teamwork that is reflected in their games, in which cooperation and dexterity are the prevailing elements rather than competition and victory.

A further sign of the affinity between sport and society are the *different roles* sport can assume in society. For large segments of society sport may assume very different roles for certain groups. This can be shown in a typical example of what has become known as *Alternative Sports*, from which the dominating sets of values of the *Greens* can be gleaned, as they are oriented towards a humane and ecologically structured society with playful events in the cities, dancing and folklore, and workouts in the open. In this way, sport is a manifestation of society.

Cultural changes, too, are epitomized symbolically in the field of sports. Thus, for example, Billie Jean KING and MOHAMMED ALI stand for the social protest movement of the sixties and early seventies. Embodying the anti-establishment movement, they reflect the then *zeitgeist*.

Social changes in western industrial nations, more and more pronounced as they are, are also widely reflected in a new approach to sport in which traditional sets of values interact with new ones. Thus, an empirical study on *The Image of Sport in Austria* proved that today sport is very often part of some sort of consumption behaviour, and the active engagement in sport has the same level of importance as going to the cinema, on a shopping spree, or going to a dance. Experiencing sport as a pleasure to indulge, in a rather hedonistic way, highlights the tendency of adapting sport to the habits of the consumer in modern society.

Within this framework, sport in our society can no longer be seen as representing a pyramid with top competitive sport at its peak over a base of mass sports. In the same way as society at large has become multi-faced, sport, too, has split into various sub-groups. For the individual, the sets of values that have been ingrained through socialization remain the driving force for ambitions and activities in sports. In this way, the system of values in society or in a stratum thereof imposes itself in the way sport is being conducted.

The role of communication in sport

Not only is the traditional concept of sport split into various sub-groups, there is also the aspect of communication to be considered. The emerging mass media in particular have transformed sport into a complex area of symbolic interaction, by far transcending the active sportsman as such, reaching out all those interested in sport in any conceivable way. This may explain the popularity of sport in our society. In this context the following anthropological and socio-psychological paradigms and assumptions are required.

In contrast to beast, which is governed by instinct and does not have the ability to intersperse any response between the instinctive drive and the resulting action, man has a conscience. Therefore, human action is not only governed by instinct to cause activities and reactions, man has the facility to reflect upon himself. He can speak and may listen to himself speaking, he plays and sees himself playing. Thus, man is able to observe and to evaluate his behaviour. He has developed a relationship with himself, having developed his self-consciousness in the course of his formative years.

A child develops his self-consciousness mainly from experience based on interaction with others. MEAD considers the ability of *role taking* to be the first step towards this facility. In play, a child pretends to be someone else (his mother, a doctor) and thus assumes the role of another person which causes him to take over the perspectives of that person as well. He furthermore learns that any human being in any social role is confronted with expectations from the others upon which he must react in a commensurate way. In doing so, he learns to see himself from another's person perspective and to recognize himself. In this way, he develops a level of self-consciousness through the ongoing context of interaction, first with immediate reference persons and then with others, too. The thus developed *self* can be looked upon as a *set of identities*. Any individual has a wide range of such identities (schoolboy, team member, officer, to mention just a few). In any social interaction that is taking place at a given point in time, one of these many identities becomes relevant. The largest part of human behaviour can be explained as the quest to confirm one's own identity. So, for example, the level of competence that can be expected from a military officer is largely defined by the

verification of his identity, expressed by the fact that others (superiors and subordinates) pay tribute to his personality. The thus gained experience and recognition of identity result in the feeling of one's own value. Self-consciousness always goes hand in hand with the recognition of one's own self. In this respect one must generally assume an active striving for social recognition, which is the recognition of one's self. This is the root of man in his role of a social being who enjoys an inalienable relationship with his fellow-men.

It is more or less evident that sport activities, too, are governed by this basic precondition. The sportsman measures his achievements above all by the level of social attention it brings him, be it through cheering or jeering. Even if success is self-evident in a physical sense, any self-evaluation is derived from an evaluation through someone else's eyes. Self-appreciation is impossible without the embedded recognition of appreciation by others.

This line of argument can be narrowed down by looking at the most anthropological trait of man, the concept of *achievement*, which is subject to the interplay between action and evaluation. This means something can be judged an achievement only if someone has performed an action in a certain way and if an observer has appreciated it, so that it may become an achievement. The factors of success or defeat form the yardstick to reflect that achievement with regard to that sub-set of society in which the respective individual acts. In many cases the actor must dramatize the criteria of his achievement, so that observer(s) pay attention and recognize his act. In doing so, a second achievement, the *achievement of presentation* is called for, causing recognition of an action to become an achievement. Thus, an achievement consists of an action as such and the presentation thereof. The individual must be able to set a proper scene for his action. It is only a successful presentation that results in social acceptance of an action and thus in recognition. In our society *prestige* is the basic element of confirmation of the achievements of an individual, causing a feedback into his conscience.

If one poses the general question of *opportunities for social recognition*, of prestige, and how the individual can bolster his ego, one will find that our society is largely governed by negative criteria. As far as presentation is concerned, work in an industrial setting is

performed without or, at best, with only very limited opportunity to be socially recognized. There are not many politicians, scientists, technicians, artists, or other specialists who *are masters of the game* as opposed to the anonymous masses. Only functions and their requirements, and not the persons connected with them, are used as a yardstick, because life is governed by the criteria of national economy. Social components are largely discounted because work as such does not entail elements of prestige. Human nature which, as a matter of fact, only exists in the context of social interaction, is thus denuded of its very essence. What happens is a loss of social reward, a progressive fact of modern society.

This is where sport comes into the fore, and it is with good reason that sport has become the most prominent social phenomenon in our present industrial society. Through sport the growing ambiguity of activity and the dissociation of action and assessment are fused together, forming an absolute entity. *Sport is characterized by the generally evident unity of action and presentation, a sort of unity that, with few exceptions, can be found nowhere else* (KROKOW). In this way, achievements in the field of sport are reduced to quantifiable dimensions; what counts are goals, points, and seconds only. Reducing such complex processes to unambiguous symbols amalgamates action with presentation, thus reaffirming the identity of the sportsman. Whereas achievements in other areas remain obscure for many people and can only be judged by experts, achievements in the field of sport lead to an immediate reward, since sport can be understood by everybody. The required standards are known to both, the sportsmen and the spectators at all levels of sport, and the prestige of the actors depends on how well they meet those standards.

Determining ranks is an unambiguous matter, as one sportsman competes against the other; in such a case results cannot be feigned. This means that a successful sportsman need not be an expert in presenting himself. In the field of sport the winner is the best, which means that prestige is conferred upon him almost automatically.

The resulting fact that characterizes sport as a social phenomenon is a decisive one. By the coincidence of action and presentation thereof, the social values and norms of sport are much more evident than in other fields. KROKOW says also that *sport is the symbolical and most*

concentrated representation of the basic principles of an industrial society. These are equal opportunities, competition, the fact that achievements are generally understood, objectivity, precision, comparability, measurability, ranking based on results, and the fact that differences can be easily recognized in sport.

The *social rewards* afforded by sport through the coincidence of action and prestige are a *particular advantage for young people.* The main problem of adolescence is to discover one's own identity and to consolidate it. Sport permits young people to test their body, since the results are immediately accessible, they can be weighed, and are visible. Comparing themselves with others permits young people to assure themselves of their own achievements and to find out their intrinsic value.

Summing up one can say:

- Man needs recognition and a confirmation of his identity by others.
- This process is based on the respective set of values and norms of a society.
- Such a system of values and norms is reflected in the sub-system of sport, which provides an excellent opportunity for recognition and self-assurance.
- This all the more because, through the intertwining of action and presentation in the field of sport, the values and behavioural patterns of society can be seen and experienced much more clearly than anywhere else.
- The artificial reduction of complex processes into *higher, faster, and stronger* makes sport a universal form of communication that everybody understands and that can be realistically conveyed by the mass media.