

TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES IN 21ST CENTURY EUROPE: FUTURE CHALLENGES

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1. INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES AS WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE

The conclusions on traditional sports and games drawn from each of the European regions considered under the Culture 2000 project and brought together in this book fully justifies the elevation of such practices to the status of cultural heritage.

This viewpoint has already been defended by many experts in the field, outstandingly the reflections contributed by Parlebas (2005:15) in recognising games as a symbol of culture.

“Games are the creation of a culture and the fruit of history. Literature and music, construction, ruins and food and drink are generally seen as community heritage; but we should not forget forms of enjoyment, of sharing the pleasure of acting together: we must not forget games! They, too, have emerged from the homeland: they reflect the deep social roots of different ways of behaving, of communicating with others and entering into contact with the environment. Linked to secular beliefs, performed according to traditional rites and ceremonies, inspired by practices from everyday life, physical games form part of cultural heritage, of cultural heritage generated by the body entering into play, generated by motor action. And this heritage is highly diverse and exuberant.

This ethnic motor play represents culture in actions, a culture that is brought to life in each movement of the body. As such, games incarnate a place of memory, often ignored, but full of evocative symbolic (...) Study of games can, therefore, offer interesting access to knowledge about societies”.

The status of games as a cultural phenomenon, their recognition as cultural heritage, closely linked to issues related to cultural diversity, are questions that many regional, state, European and international bodies have considered. Such institutions include most notably UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, which has been very active in this field. As examples of UNESCO’s principal actions, we should like to mention three important resolutions concerning traditional sports and games:

- 1989. Definition and recognition of popular and traditional culture
- 2001. Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, stating the measures that should be adopted
- 2006. Promotion and development of traditional sports and games (TSGs).

1.1 Popular and traditional games and culture

At its 25th meeting, held in Paris from 17 October to 16 November 1989, UNESCO discussed popular and traditional culture. Its definition encapsulates the ideas expressed above, recognising games as one of its forms of expression.¹ “Traditional and popular culture is the

¹ UNESCO (1990) *Actas de la Conferencia General. Volumen I. Resoluciones aprobadas por la Conferencia General*. Paris: Talleres UNESCO. (UNESCO (1990) *Records of the General Conference. Volume I. Resolutions Approved by the General Conference*. Paris: UNESCO workshops.)

totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognised as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, **games**, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts” (UNESCO, 1990:254).

1.2 Cultural diversity

In 2001, at the 31st session of its general conference in Paris on November 21, UNESCO adopted a universal declaration on cultural diversity. This marked the beginning of a new ethic promoted by UNESCO as we entered the 21st century. For the first time, the international community was provided with a far-reaching regulatory instrument to build on the conviction that respect for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are one of the best guarantees of development and peace. In this spirit, the UNESCO Constitution², signed as far back as 1945, sought to preserve the “fruitful diversity” of its Member States’ cultures, taking up as a priority the cause of a sustainable cultural diversity threatened by accelerating globalisation. The aforementioned Universal Declaration enshrined, amongst others, the following concepts:

1.2.1 Identity, Diversity and Pluralism:

- **Article 1. Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity.** As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognised and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.
- **Article 2 – From cultural diversity to cultural pluralism.** In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Inseparable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life.
- **Article 3 – Cultural diversity as a factor in development.** Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.

1.2.2 Cultural diversity and human rights

- **Article 4 – Human rights, as guarantees of cultural diversity.** The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity.
- **Article 5 – Cultural rights as an enabling environment for cultural diversity.** Cultural rights are an **integral** part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights as defined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Articles 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights... All persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- **Article 6 – Towards access for all to cultural diversity.** While ensuring the free flow of ideas by word and image care should be exercised that all cultures can express themselves and make themselves known. Freedom of expression, media pluralism, multilingualism, equal access to art and to scientific and technological knowledge, including in digital form, and the possibility for all cultures to have access to the means of expression and dissemination are the guarantees of cultural diversity.

1.2.3 Cultural diversity and Creativity.

- **Article 7 – Cultural heritage as the wellspring of creativity.** Creation draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures. For this reason, heritage in

² UNESCO (2006) Declaració Universal de la UNESCO sobre la diversitat cultural [en línia], <http://www.unescocat.org/ct/p6/diversitatcultural.pdf> [Consulta:27/05/2006]

all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures.

1.3 Promotion and Development of Traditional Sports and Games.

Finally, on 13 March 2006, UNESCO organised a collective consultation in Paris, attended by experts and representatives from different institutions, to create an international platform for the promotion and development traditional sports and games (TSGs). This consultation produced four different proposals for action:

- The principal task of cataloguing TSGs and their applications in different contexts (education, culture, environment, conservation, competition sports); understood as living culture.
- Fostering joint work by all possible organisations in order to achieve the recognition of TSGs as part of human cultural heritage.
- Promoting these practices at schools, particularly in physical education classes.
- Promoting the specific values projected by TSGs, including particularly solidarity, peace, conflict resolution, diversity, inclusion, respect and cultural recognition.

In order to achieve these goals, the following actions were proposed:

- Promoting research, cataloguing games diversity, promoting them within the cultural context, disseminating these practices (web Sites, publications...)
- Recognising TSGs as part of intangible world heritage.
- Organising regular meetings and international congresses, and establishing an international council as a formal organisation for TSGs.

At European level, we can mention particularly that, in May 1994, the European Parliament issued the following statement: “...referring to instruments for active policy by the European Union in the field of sport, the Parliament invites the Commission to establish a specific programme to promote traditional and regional sports”. Nonetheless, no specific action in this regard has been taken since. It is for this reason that the **European Traditional Sports and Games Association**, formed by 34 European organisations, **formally requested the European Union**, through different political representatives from European regions, to **implement a specific programme on traditional sports and games**.

2. THE CULTURE 2000 PROJECT “PLAY WITH YOUR HEART, SHARE YOUR CULTURE” AND THE INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES

This project is just the first stage in the long road we must travel in the field of traditional sports and games, both through local, regional and state intervention and from the European and international viewpoint. The coherence that informs the project “European culture in the light of traditional sports and games” is found in the different technical questions it approaches from a varied range of concerns, the institutions and individuals that have taken part (including universities, secondary schools, museums, regional traditional sports federations, centres devoted to promoting local traditional culture, teacher training colleges and teachers of physical education...) All the organisations and individuals that have taken part in this project share the satisfaction of having attempted to contribute to intercultural dialogue and to achieving academic, social and cultural recognition for this type of activity.

The importance of this project on European traditional sports and games is illustrated by the way it has taken up some of the basic principles for action proposed by such respected bodies as UNESCO; cataloguing traditional sports and games (using the same instrument in the different European regions), research (analysing the data obtained and publishing partial and overall results), socio-cultural sensitivity (production of a web site, publication of a CD containing representative images from participating regions, publication of results, organisation of a congress and a festival of traditional sports and games open to a wide public and range of institutions).

Although the first stage in this co-ordinated work to promote European traditional sports and games has been successfully completed, a closer look at the information and thoughts provided by the different European regions participating in this project enables us to identify some of its main limitations and problems and to put forward proposals for meeting future challenges in the Europe of the 21st century.

2.1. Recognition by local, regional and state institutions

The political institutions active in the different towns, counties, regions and even states have still not shown the necessary interest to guarantee the protection and promotion of traditional sports and games.

The action undertaken by such administrations could take various forms:

- Legislating to protect the cultural heritage represented by traditional sports and games. Protecting this heritage means providing grants, jointly financing with local authorities and institutions projects to revive and exhibit such activities, and providing institutional recognition, for instance by declaring festivals including the presence of local traditional sports and games as being of county or regional interest.
- Making it possible to organised co-ordinated intervention by different ministries or departments whose brief covers traditional sports and games. To this end, master plans and strategic plans should be drawn up to revive and promote such activities. By way of example, the departments or ministries of culture, tourism and sport, education, social welfare and the family, environment and youth should be able to promote co-ordinated action. In a second stage, such co-ordination should also include the involvement of local authorities, universities, local organisations, private enterprises, federations, cultural associations, sports clubs and even such bodies as parents' associations.

2.2 Models for the institutional organisation of traditional sports and games

It is essential to establish a balance between spontaneous involvement in these sports and games and organised practice aimed at guaranteeing their conservation. Nonetheless, an important limitation exists: players' age. These are often quite elderly people, generally unused to following the patterns laid down by stable models of organisation.

Amongst the different possible organisational models, there are two in particular that involve traditional sports and games:

- **Festivities** are the main occasion where traditional sports and games are played. Although there are still many places where these activities play an important role in festive events, they have fallen into disuse in many more. It is therefore necessary to promote the revival and restoration of traditional sports and games to the festive environment as a way of encouraging cultural dialogue between people of different generations, gender and place of origin. This is also an excellent way of promoting active tourism. Moreover, the festive context provides the best way of conserving and projecting features of local culture found alongside traditional games.
- The **conversion** of the traditional game into a **sport**. Although this formula provides a stable organisational structure, it should not be understood to be the only path that can be taken. Unifying rules, standardising playing conditions (facilities, calendar, player categories, administration, etc) may cause a problem by globalising the activity and eliminating the signs of local identity that characterise such games. It is important to find a balance between the two formulas. Amongst the different options, it is proposed that cultural sections should be set up within traditional sports federations to promote co-existence between competition sport and other activities centred more on local traditions.

2.3 Attracting new players

- **Women and traditional games.** The fact that women recently began to take up playing traditional sports and games invites us to think about how to ensure and increase their presence. Generally speaking, traditional games are very much integrating activities in which it is not necessary to establish categories or place restrictions on who can play. Nonetheless, these are very often practices that have been created through the thought processes of the hegemonic (male) gender and are more suited to the type of game that most interests men, that is to say, confrontation, strength or a mixture of strength and ability. This makes it necessary to take action, making conditions for playing these games more flexible and adapting them so that women, too, can find their own expression in such games, as well as introducing other forms in which female players can take part in larger numbers. We refer to dancing games, throwing games in which precision is required and strength is not a limiting factor (skittles and precision ball throwing games, for instance).
- **Interculturality.** Migratory flows are becoming more and more important in many European regions. The new inhabitants arriving from the four corners of the earth might find magnificent new opportunities to meet people and become integrated into Catalan culture by sharing in the relations and values nurtured by traditional games. To this end, we need to find a balance between knowledge of local traditional games and respect – and identification with – the values enshrined in traditional games that are popular in other cultures.

2.4 Traditional games and education

- **Teacher training.** At present, educators working at different academic levels still receive insufficient training in traditional games, both in official and leisure education. Primary school, secondary school and baccalaureate teachers, monitors at games centres and leisure facilities and, particularly teachers specialising in physical education... all need rigorous, specific training to become familiar with traditional sports and games and to understand their educational value. At some European physical education faculties, traditional sports and games are taught as part of optional subjects; at others initiatives exist such as summer courses offering an approximately 30-40-hour introduction to education through traditional games.
- **School-environmental projects.** The use of traditional games at schools should go beyond official classes of physical education and other subjects. Learning about the local area through games; visiting some natural space through games; taking part in local festivities; making and using the equipment needed to play a traditional game... these are just a few examples. Similarly, we should promote educational programmes involving local people, different members of the family, etc, to enable children to learn about games in their appropriate context. Here, too, it would be a good idea to link the school to initiatives organised by local facilities and organisations (museums, cultural associations, traditional sports federations, etc).
- **Exchanges.** In view of the integrating and “universal” nature of traditional games, we should encourage participation in educational projects and exchanges of experiences amongst schools. Such exchanges can take place amongst schools in the same region or country, or with those in other European regions, promoting intercultural dialogue through knowledge and experience of the different circumstances in which traditional games are found.

2.5 Traditional games and research

- **Promotion of studies.** The subject of traditional games continues to be one which receives little academic recognition, to which little importance is attached. Unlike other subjects of study, motor practices in general and traditional games in particular are anonymous

expressions that require research to produce more information about them and the values they embody.

- **Basic research.** The first stage we need to reach is to complete an inventory and catalogue of traditional games. We need to establish a master plan enabling us to catalogue the different groups of traditional games, according to the age of players (children's and adults sports and games), the period when they were popular, if not at present (games that older generations remember, games still played today, etc). In view of the huge universe embraced by the subject of traditional games, the Culture 2000 project focused on traditional sports and games still played by adults today. This was a useful project for showing the **advisability** of launching the work by using **the same criteria in the different European regions**; we refer to **unifying guidelines, methods and tools used in gathering, recording and analysing data**. In this way, the results obtained will be much more enriching than if each region used its own method and criteria.
- **Applied research.** The second stage is to promote research into the results obtained from using traditional sports and games for education, competition, recreation and tourism. Here, too, it would be useful to draw up plans for interdisciplinary action, carrying out studies from the different epistemological "branches/regions" (physiology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, pedagogy, motor praxiology, etc). In this, the involvement of the university is indispensable, as is the co-ordinated work of different ministries and departments forming part of regional, state and European administrations.

2.5 Promotion and dissemination of traditional sports and games

- **Establishment of museums.** As occurs with other areas of traditional culture, we need to establish permanent museums devoted specifically to traditional sports and games. These museums would also act as centres promoting educational and recreational activities based on knowledge of traditional leisure culture.
- **Travelling exhibitions.** A task still pending is the establishment of a travelling exhibition devoted to European traditional sports and games. Such an exhibition should be truly ambitious, covering the dominant features of the culture that characterises this type of cultural expression.
- **Use of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).** As far as possible, we should take advantage of all that today's "**online society**" has to offer. **Web Sites** launched by educational institutions, sporting organisations and associations offer a virtual forum enabling us to organise **exchanges of information and experiences** in the field. Similarly, we could share video and audio-visual products, in this way overcoming the problems people of a certain age can have to understand and express themselves in foreign languages. Probably the community spirit generated amongst groups from different European regions through the use of Internet and the new technologies would lead to the organisation of **international exhibitions and meetings** devoted to traditional sports and games, as already occurs in some European areas.
- **International congresses and debates.** Complementing some of the above mentioned promotion and research activities, national and international congresses should be organised with a view to encouraging exchanges of knowledge, research and experiences in the field of traditional sports and games. **Festivals and demonstrations of traditional sports and games** should also be organised parallel to these congresses, if possible timed to coincide with a local festivity in which they feature. A model that could be followed is that used by the **European Traditional Sports and Games Association**, which holds its annual general assembly to coincide with a festival, demonstration or championship final in some traditional sport or game in the area where the meeting takes place.

- **Publications.** Finally, we should mention the need to make the results of experiences and exchanges organised in the field of traditional sports and games more widely known. The most ambitious challenge facing us, once we have more information and research material available to us on the subject, may well be that of producing a **European encyclopaedia of traditional sports and games**. Subsequently, we should promote the publication of doctoral theses, studies, essays, etc, by editing **books, monographs, articles in specialist journals and promotional works**. On this point, it would be a good idea to create **educational materials based on unified criteria** for use in all European regions. Similarly, we should encourage the online publication of all materials relating to traditional sports and games on **Internet and web sites**.

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