



IS COMPETITIVE SPORT STILL APPEALING?

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ORIGINAL TEXT IN FRENCH

Mr Sérandour was scheduled to speak at the Congress, but unfortunately was unable to attend. His speech, made available to the Congress Secretariat, can be found [here](#).

Having closely followed the behaviour of young people through my personal experience as a teacher then as a leader, and also through various observations and opinion polls, I have noticed that the practice of sport among young people is always driven by a desire for entertainment, to acquire and develop new skills, feel healthy and in good physical shape, and enjoy the experience of competition.

Young people continue to enjoy expressing themselves in the company of their friends, and still set great store by the team spirit and human values associated with sport.

Of course, behaviour patterns have changed with new developments in social life, globalisation, media coverage, mass access to competitive sport and, above all, the rise of new forms of physical activity, in both the countryside and the urban environment.

Many of these new activities, at first virtually uncodified, seemed likely to compete with or even replace more traditional sports among young people. The aim was to discover new physical skills in harmony with the environment, with or without equipment, in the best spirit of sport, which encourages creativity and the quest for and mastery of new situations.

These new activities have enriched the world of sport. They have helped us to think about how we organise and present events, and sometimes adjust the rules to make them easier for the public to understand and facilitate access.

Some disciplines have quickly succeeded in winning a large audience among young people (and adults), and have offered attractive forms of competition by organising themselves along federal lines based on activity centres in the form of social hubs, before becoming actual clubs.

“Recreational” activities, which seemed different from traditional sports activities, have thus helped to diversify the range of sports available. They have gradually developed standardised rules and criteria, in terms of the skills involved and playing conditions. The idea is therefore to assess performance either by comparison with objective criteria (time, distance, etc.) or in relative terms through an appreciation or judgement, as in all competitions.

When they practise their particular activity, the young and the not-so-young alike are looking for an “evaluation”, which affirms their self-esteem and self-respect and, as they engage in competition, their esteem and respect for their opponents.

Competition mobilises “egos”, which paradoxically promotes altruism, as the quality of what you win in an event is worth only that of the competition or of benchmarks such as records or successes.

Competitive sport remains attractive to young people because it offers the chance to experience and share, through the skills demonstrated or aspired to, human values like friendship, solidarity and respect. Young people want values, and in this regard, competitive sport continues to be attractive.

What is changing far more is expectations in terms of access, education and sharing of sports practice. I feel that young people want to be heard more, understood in terms of what drives their particular taste for an activity and their commitment to improve their skills.

I believe that one of sport’s current successes is more responsible participation on the part of young people, who are committing themselves for the long term, not on the basis of a pleasing vision or the financial prospects of playing a sport professionally, even if this attracts them initially.

The “zapping” characteristic of some of their activities seems to me to reflect more the difficulty of finding good reasons to commit, and hence remain loyal, to a particular sport than a lack of interest or inability to choose.

Choices are not made because of advice or guidance, or because they convey a particular status, but are based rather on a complex combination of qualities and skills, which shape the performance in which they want to be fully involved.

Young people around the world are not, by definition, a homogeneous unit. They are not all growing up in the same way, at the same age, in all places and in all cultures.

It is important that we offer them sound arguments on which they can base their commitment. We have a duty to understand the things which all young people, as they develop with the benefits of human history, tend to call into question. They are at least seeking to take them on board and enrich them.

The development of sport has itself called into question a number of certainties about the separation of body and mind, and we are pleased to see this. I believe that competition sport is still attractive to young people, as it is for us. But as it develops, new questions are being asked about its meaning, in response to excesses and aberrations, and about access to it.



These questions are positive. I cannot claim to answer them in just a few sentences but, like many young people, I remain convinced that competitive sport is still a fantastic setting in which to express human values.

It is up to us to steer a consistent course between these values and the quest for personal excellence.