

Introduction

Sports and Physical Activity: Key Elements of Personal, Community, Social and Economic Life

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INTRODUCTION
SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:
KEY ELEMENTS OF PERSONAL,
COMMUNITY, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE

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Guest editors

This issue is different from the others. Departing from our usual editorial policy, the theme of this issue was not determined in advance nor was there any specific call for papers or requests for contributions from leading researchers in the field. The guest editors did not need to choose a particular orientation or outline the most pertinent leisure issues in different communities and societies. In a sense, this theme emerged naturally as a result of numerous articles submitted spontaneously by researchers. The articles presented in this issue reflect the interests of researchers in this area of leisure studies. Moreover, they clearly indicate the differences in orientation between *Leisure and Society* and other journals specifically devoted to sports and physical activity.

The importance of physical and sports activities in the life of the individual or even in families, communities and social groups as well as different cultures cannot be denied. In all these areas, physical and sports activities constitute behaviours and practices to which are attached values and specific significance peculiar to the players involved. The activities are motivated by current goals but are also the result of the history and specific traits of each group. They also respond to both personal and cultural needs and have an impact on the environment, the economy, management, culture and politics and affect psychological, educational, medical and professional aspects of the individual.

With regard to mass culture and resulting quasi-universal phenomena, attention focuses on Olympic games and world championships linked to sports disciplines. Professional sports, especially in developed countries, constitute a widespread phenomenon; they involve paid athletes who compete for the benefit of spectators and fans for whom they serve as models or idols. Besides these spectator and entertainment sports, there are also participation or recreation sports practised by amateurs for different reasons such as pleasure, excitement, development,

self actualization, socialization and social belonging, personal health and well-being or even self-esteem and prestige. Besides sports involving games and competition, there are other important phenomena which also involve physical activity. Among them are physical training, outdoor or adventure physical activity. These different practices entail very different behaviours, goals and values and also require interventions, organisations, facilities, infra-structures as well as policies and economic decisions which vary from one situation to situation and which are not always in sync with each other or with other aspects of social and community life.

Leisure sciences address all of these issues, and the areas of physical and sports activity are no exception. This broad category of activities is the most popular of free-time activities, whether they entail active participation, learning and training, competition or recreation or even performance or entertainment.

The articles submitted to us reflect this diversity of approaches and issues, but since they come from a rather limited number of countries and cultures they do not necessarily reflect the universality of the phenomenon. However, the studies and reflections presented here can be adapted to show fully how sports and physical activity blend in with lifestyles prevalent in the four corners of the globe. In this respect, this issue could serve as a starting point for several comparative studies on physical leisure activities and sports.

The first sub-theme deals with sports development policies. First of all, Dulac and Henry compare and examine urban sports development policies adopted from 1960 to the end of the 90s in Grenoble, France and Sheffield, England. In both cases, despite differing political, institutional and structural contexts, policies favoured the market rather than social interests. Next, Corneloup *et al.* focus on nature leisure sports and the social, economic and tourist activity they generate. They point to the existence of varied management models and logic for action specific to the different categories of players.

The second category of articles deals with sporting practices among the young and their significance. Lafabrègue presents sporting practices in youth as a compromise between school life and family cohesion. He underlines two major values associated with the love of sports: success through performance and personal growth through camaraderie. Ohl, on the other hand, looks at the social values that youth attach to sport. The adoption of a “sports look” or rather wearing sports apparel with prestigious brand names is a significant means for the young to claim their identity in the city. In the same vein, Zaffran highlights the distinction between leisure time and school time. He points two uses of free time: productive linked to needs of adolescents and requirements of school and unproductive which constitute a waste of time.

The final sub-theme deals with the impact of physical and sports activities on health and daily life. The first article in this section deals with leisure among the young. Iwasaki focuses on the role of leisure as a general strategy used by university students for adjusting to stress from different sources. Feuillet and Roncin throw some light on stress caused by physical and sports activities in people over 60. Although they are aware of risks presented by these activities, those who practice them are not deterred from doing so. For those who are not involved, sports activities are considered as “an additional risk”. Miquelon, Perreault and Abbondanza demonstrate the positive impact of a recreational activity on building team strength, cohesion and efficiency. Finally, Moles *et al.* examine the impact the development of televised retransmission technologies has had on spectators. These changes have affected sports culture and the spectator’s perception of ethics and fairness.

Two research notes conclude this issue. Law focuses on problems resulting from the development of recreational and tourist complexes in rural settings. Groves and Timothy propose an original method of identifying the attributes and impact of travel through an analysis of photographs considered meaningful by the tourists who took them.