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Sport and International Understanding.

Lecture, held as a delegate of the German University Sports Association (ADH) on 10 July 1987 at the FISU/CESU conference on the occasion of the Universiad 1987 in Zagreb (Yugoslavia), presented in this (revised) English version; cf. the German version <.../VortragZagreb1987Deutsch.pdf>.

An English version has been published - unfortunately very much shortened and edited - in: Proceedings of FISU/CESU Conference Universiade '87 Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Ed.: Organizing Committee for the Universiade 1987 in Zagreb (CESU). Zagreb: Selfpublishing 1988. pp. 56 - 57.

(The [web-links](#) refer to the addresses <www.claustiedemann.de/> <www.sport-geschichte.de/> and <www.kulturwiss.info/>; the documents to be found in the respective directory <.../tiedemann/documents/>.)

We are gathered here from many countries. A major sporting event is the reason for this gathering: the Universiad, probably the most important international sporting event after the Olympic Games.

We, or rather the people and organisations we represent, are already making a practical, albeit modest, contribution to international understanding.

This is happening at a time when international understanding is more necessary than ever. It is more necessary than ever, because without it the danger grows that people, nations and alliances will wage war against each other. A nuclear war, however, which is possible and to be feared today, would destroy the existence of mankind.

Even having to live in this constant danger limits the value of life. Not only the fear of a nuclear holocaust depresses us psychologically, not only are mistrust and enemy images, according to the will of some rulers, supposed to suppress spontaneous curiosity and sympathy for people of other nations, we also suffer materially from the insane production of weapons. A considerable part of the social wealth is wasted for destructive purposes and is thus taken away from culturally useful areas such as sport.

So we have many good reasons to reinforce each other in our efforts to prevent a nuclear war - ultimately, of course, any war, including so-called conventional wars! - and to make peace safer through radical disarmament.

This is also the motivation for me to share my thoughts on the topic of "Sport and International Understanding" with you, although I can safely assume that you have already thought about this thoroughly yourself. However, it is hardly possible to say too much about this topic, because its realisation is so important and so urgent.

From my point of view - I am a sport-scientist, a sports official and a competitor in international sailing activities - I want to show which relations between sport and international understanding have existed and should exist in the future.

By international understanding I understand political acting which is suited to mutually improve the knowledge of people of different nations about each other, to observe their respect-

ive rights to territorial integrity and peaceful economic and cultural development as well as to work against the dangers of armed conflicts.

Sport is one of many areas of cultural activity in and by which international understanding can be promoted, but in which the opposite can also be provoked and effected. In both aspects it is evident that sport is a social field that can be used for external purposes. This shows a fundamental weakness that sport shares with other areas of cultural activity.

By sport I mean "a field of movement culture that has been particularly shaped in the socio-historical development of movement"¹. I speak of "sport" in the strict sense only since the development of capitalist societies.² It was during this period that the basis for its defining characteristic, its universality, was formed.

This universality of sport is not an ideal, but an essential characteristic. This means that without universality sport cannot flourish. This will become clear in a moment with some examples from the history of sport.

To enable the development of sport, which has become universal for almost 100 years, a political climate of international understanding was needed. Especially the great international sports events such as the Olympic Games, World Championships, Workers' Olympics, Spartakiades, Universiades, etc. could and can only flourish if international understanding determined and determines the culture and politics of individuals, groups and nations.

Before I show in a short historical review that this prerequisite for sport was unfortunately not always given and therefore has to be constantly fought for, I would like to mention an aspect that happens, so to speak, spontaneously in international sporting encounters.

As a sailor at international regattas it happens to me again and again that quite spontaneously human relationships of a friendly nature develop, sometimes even during the competition, but mostly on the periphery. When my partner and I, on a windless day, after hours on the waters, strive to get back to the harbour, drifting more than sailing due to lack of wind, and a motorboat with foreign, non-German sailors in tow passes us, then in most cases they take us also in tow. Rarely this small gesture of understanding, solidarity and friendship is denied, even if the sailors are sportsmen of a different boat class.

Or when ashore we³ pass competitors from other nations and try to get advice from them on how to trim our boat or something similar, in most cases the dialogue is taken up without problems other than those of language ability.

Generally speaking, it can be said that in sport spontaneous communication can take place, even between people who do not understand each other in language and do not know each

¹ Weinberg 1985, p. 204. Cf. my own, since 2001 developed definition (with explanations): <.../sportdefinition.html> and <.../DefinitionSport.pdf>, also in English language <.../sportdefinitionEnglish.html> and <.../DefinitionSportEnglish.pdf>.

² Wohl 1981, p. 101, note 28. I do not longer share this opinion anymore; cf. my lecture "What is the subject of sports science?", held in 2005 at the ISHPES congress in Cologne <.../lectureISHPES2005.pdf>.

³ I sail(ed) - mostly as bowman / crew - in the international 505 dinghy class.

other's origin. A ball or frisbee or other sports equipment addresses such fundamental needs and readiness for communication in all of us that we can only resist them with great effort of will.

But why should we at all?! This spontaneous level of communication between previously unknown people is much too wonderful a general human characteristic to be suppressed! And the fact that it is so often found in the field of sport proves the humane nature of this modern movement culture.

But: If two people communicate or even make friends across borders in sports or by means of sports, that is great, but not enough. Our sports organisations must not be satisfied with the fact that international understanding "happens" in a few cases, either incidentally or by chance. We must try to make this fundamental possibility, which is inherent in sport, a regular reality.

This is difficult to achieve. Unfortunately, there are still some political trends that are opposed to international understanding and want to put all sportsmen and sportswomen who are active for peace and international understanding into the political offside. I would like to remind you of the recent activities of the Ministry of the Interior of my country, whose agency "Office for the Protection of the Constitution" accused the "Initiative Sportsmen and Sportswomen for Peace - Against Nuclear Missiles" of "communist infiltration" in order to achieve their isolation and ineffectiveness in sport politics. Well, you may know that this attempt failed thoroughly after a sensitive public sharply attacked this incredible action of the minister.

Even today, international understanding in or through sport cannot be taken for granted; it must be constantly "worked on" and defended against current political attacks.

Using five examples of sport history, I would like to explain how different the importance of sport for international understanding was and is, depending on the historical and political situation. I choose these examples according to my origins in European or German sport history, but I am sure that similar historical examples can also be found in other cultures and contexts.

1) When the first olympic games of modern times were held in Athens in 1896 on the initiative of the Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, there had already been tensions in the run-up to the games about German participation in the olympic movement. The "Deutsche Turnerschaft", at that time objectively the biggest "sport" organisation in the world, felt hurt in its pride not to have been asked before. In addition, this German Gymnasts' Association - at least its representatives - had nationalistic or chauvinistic attitudes. They did not want to participate in such an international sports (!) event. Germany's main competitors in the imperialist race for the colonial "division of the world", France and Great Britain, threatened, in the opinion of the German gymnastics leaders, to put their stamp on this new event; German gymnasts should not celebrate an international sports festival together with them. So it

happened that in 1896 in Athens no "official" delegation of the "Deutsche Turnerschaft" took part, but only a small group of courageous gymnasts, mainly from Berlin, who after their return had to accept reproaches and disciplinary punishments despite many great sporting successes.

2.) In the twenties of our century it became particularly clear how differently athletes and sports organisations were able to deal with the international conflicts that broke out in the First World War. On the side of the bourgeois sportsmen and -women, the moral courage of the victorious powers of the First World War (especially France) was not yet sufficient in 1920 and 1924 to invite German athletes to the 7th and 8th Olympic Games in Antwerpen and Paris - for understandable reasons. After the war started by Austria and Germany, international understanding was still so weakened after the 1919 peace treaties of Versailles and the suburbs of Paris that international sporting events with the formerly hostile nations still seemed impossible.

In this matter - and not only in this - the international workers' sporting movement has been a shining idol, which has unfortunately been honoured very late in the sport historiography of my country: In the spirit of international understanding, in 1922, 1925, 1928 and 1931 major international sports events (Workers' Olympics and Spartakiades) were celebrated by workers' sportsmen and -women from many countries, regardless of the side on which they had been forced to fight in World War I.

3.) On the occasion of the 1936 olympic games, the idea of international understanding by sport, which in spite of the aforementioned setbacks in 1920 and 1924 gradually emerged as a basic idea of the olympic movement, was used by the German fascists, the Nazis, to deceive the rest of the world and also their own population into an illusion of a peaceful Germany by the apparently brilliant and for the Germans very successful olympic games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen as well as in Berlin and Kiel. The "olympic village" in Döberitz (west of Berlin) - to give only one example - had served until immediately before the athletes entered the village as quarters for the German troops, who went to Spain during the Olympic Games to fight there on the side of the fascist Frankists against the republic.

Again, here is a short counter-example: Many of the workers' athletes of various countries who gathered in Barcelona in 1936 to celebrate their third major workers' Olympiad there as a counter-Olympiad to the fascist festival in Berlin and were surprised by the Franco coup joined the fighting Republicans in the famous "international brigades".

4.) After the Second World War, which was again unleashed by Germany with its terrible consequences, the victorious and occupying powers had initially forbidden the Germans any international sporting activity. Thus, no German delegation was able to participate in the 1948 olympic games in St. Moritz and London. It was a coincidence that resulted in a breakthrough here - and in the field of university sports of all things. The invitation addressed to Monaco for the first international summer sports week of the FISU 1949 in Merano (Italy)

was sent to München (in Italian: Monaco) by mistake by the Italian postal service. There, the office of a "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Hochschulsportreferenten" (ADH) had existed for only one year. The invitation letter was delivered to this office, and shortly afterwards these persons organised that some (West) German athletes took part in Merano. This was the beginning of the participation of my organisation, the General German University Sports Association (ADH), in the activities of FISU. And it was, albeit by chance, the beginning of further international sporting contacts of West German sportsmen and -women.

History is also determined by coincidences. In this case, the West German student sporting movement can be thankful for this coincidence, without which it would at least not have been (re-)accepted so quickly into the circle of the international student sporting movement.

5.) Recently, olympic games and other major sporting events have been severely affected and endangered by international conflicts. Here I would like to mention the two boycotts of the olympic games 1980 in Moscow and Tallinn as well as 1984 in Los Angeles. I know that different reasons were given for the boycotts in each case, and I will not hide the fact that the reasons for the 1980 boycott were based on non-sporting contexts, whereas in 1984, at least ostensibly, sport-immanent reasons were invoked; nevertheless, I think that the lesson to be learned from both events is the same, namely that boycotts in the field of sporting policy are fundamentally not a good tool. This statement is especially true when the boycott of sporting events is aimed at non-sporting purposes (as in 1980).

I would like to emphasise once again that I do not consider sport-boycotts to be a good policy. There have been (in 1936) and there still are situations in which I, too, consider sport-boycotts as the "ultima ratio" of sports policy to be appropriate, for example in the case of the racist Republic of South Africa. Here the entire world of sport is placed under the doctrine of racial segregation by the ruling white minority. For this reason, the white-dominated sports organisations of the Republic of South Africa have rightly been excluded from the international sports movement. This boycott, by the way, unfortunately does not work completely, as I have to experience repeatedly in my sport of sailing. A lot of hard work is still needed to convince people of this, until the reason for the sporting boycott will finally disappear: the unequal treatment of athletes based on their race (or other criteria such as ideology).

With this short sport-historical view I wanted to show that this historically particularly formed area of movement culture, which we call sport, needs a general climate of international understanding for its development. In the past, sport has often been turned into a field on which conflicts of other origins were fought out. Even in the present times, this instrumentalisation of sport against international understanding is threatening time and time again. However, I do see increasing signs in the present - at least in my own country, the Federal Republic of Germany - that social forces are growing which understand and want to use sport as a medium for international understanding.

These social forces include in particular organisations in the field of universities and colleges, both national and international. Universities, scientists and students, as socially highly privileged institutions or people, not only have special opportunities to think about peaceful solutions to humanity's problems, they also have a special social responsibility to promote international understanding. Just like athletes and their organisations, they need international understanding as a prerequisite for their activities, and they also have special opportunities to promote it. How much more does this apply to associations of academics who practice sports!

FISU has not remained passive in this regard. In 1982 through its Executive Committee and in 1983 through its General Assembly, both in Edmonton/Canada, FISU approved a resolution on peace and sport, in the spirit of which I also understand my statement.

It is a historical experience that, despite all the effort, it is relatively easy to put one's intentions on paper in well-formulated resolutions and hopefully through the mass media into the minds of many people. It is always much more difficult to transform the high ideals into concrete practice. Here I would like to conclude my contribution by asking in a general and self-critical way whether we are doing enough in the field of university sport to make sport fruitful for international understanding.

My association, the German University Sports Association (ADH), some time ago developed ideas on how international understanding could be promoted in concrete terms at major international events such as Universiads. This happened mainly in the years 1976 and 1977, when the ADH planned to apply for hosting the Universiad in 1979, later: in 1981. One of the goals, which were always explicitly stated, was to make this important international sports event a celebration of international understanding, mutual acquaintance and friendship. But how did we want to achieve this in concrete terms, or at least to promote it?

The keyword under which these efforts were subsumed was "integrated cultural program". This was the subject of intensive and heated discussion in the ADH. In addition to the technically and organisationally correct execution of the programme, which was taken for granted, the participants from one country, for example, were not to be accommodated all together, but in larger groups distributed over the various accommodations. This should create the necessity, at least the opportunity for more intensive contacts, which should then also lead to international understanding. The national groups should be asked to present themselves and their country of origin. On the other hand, various groups from German universities should participate in the Universiad as guests in order to establish contacts for future partnerships and exchange programmes. In general, many information and discussion events should be offered in order to promote getting to know each other. The social and individual problems of high-performance sports should also be a special topic.

You may know that the ADH has encountered such strong resistance in its own country with these ideas about the not only purely sporting orientation of the Universiad that it did not

come to a formal application to host the event in 1981 after all. I have called these ideas and plans back to mind because I still think they are worth considering.

Universiads should be more than a couple of student world championships in selected sports. Their entire planning and implementation should aim to be a celebration of international understanding in which sport is the medium. Universiads should implement both main elements of international understanding: Improving knowledge of one another and increasing mutual respect. If friendship is even born out of this, then international understanding takes on a new quality. And if this happens en masse, it can also have a political impact. Universiads can then become international sporting peace festivals for the academic youth.

Literature references:

(Preliminary remark: This contribution was written for the oral presentation. Therefore I have placed almost no notes or remarks in the text. Nevertheless and of course, I based myself on various publications, the most important of which I would like to list here. I hope that interested readers can find out where I referred to which publication).

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