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**„Sport (and culture of human motion) for historians,
an approach to make the central term(s) more precise.“**

Lecture held at the IX. International CESH-Congress, 25. Sept. 2004 in Crotona (Italy)
cf. the German version: <.../VortragCrotona2004Deutsch.pdf>

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

Dear colleagues!

I scetched and announced my lecture in German.¹ When I saw the working programme of this congress, I noticed, that I was the only one to read in German. Since the terminological problems I want to deal with are international, I decided to take the risk of translating my paper to English.

Let us start at the very beginning, translating the German word „Sport“ into English: „sport“ or „sports“, that is the question. I decided to use „sport“ in the more general sense. But much greater a problem is the translation of the German word „Bewegungskultur“: the dictionary suggested „movement culture“, but I felt this term too near to social and other „movements“; I decided to put „culture of human motion“. This foreword was leading „medias in res“.

Historians, who in all periods of history want to deal with the cultural phenomenon, which I name with the terms „culture of human motion“ and „sport“, need an exact understanding of their object. There are some attempts in international sport science to solve this problem, but many are only little helpful. In the German scientific literature the practice has gained acceptance largely to declare the definition problem unresolvable.² A great arbitrariness of the respectively underlying concept of understanding is the consequence. I think that, although the definition problem is difficult, it is solvable, and I will introduce my suggestions to you.

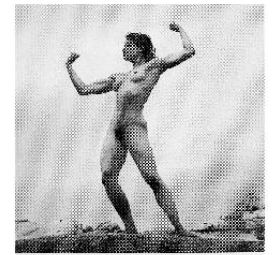
1 cf. the steadily <.../VortragCrotona2004Deutsch.pdf>

2 Röhlig/Prohl (2003); recently in Great Britain, too: McFee (2004) philosophically argues in the same direction; cf. my criticism of the development in Germany: Tiedemann (2003a).

I am sure You have already seen this mosaic; it is contained in almost every book on history of sport in antiquity. I ask you now: Is this a picture representing "sport" as content? 1992, Dolch published the thesis - in my opinion well justified - that this is the illustration of dietetic exercises and not of sport.³ Nevertheless even after his convincing interpretation sport historians classified this illustration as "sport".⁴ What may be the reasons for it?⁵



It seems even more doubtful to me - to choose a modern example - if in a book "Sport. A cultural history in the mirror of art" Mapplethorpes photo of Lisa Lyon is seriously shown as an example of "pop sports".⁶ Do you think, this is sport?



395 P. v. Mapplethorpe: Lisa Lyon, Jutra Her. 981. Fotogram.

It seems to be very unclear, what sport historians understand by sport.

Even in more recent publications I found few trials to clarify the central object of our science. Most colleagues seem to act according to the motto "anything goes".

For me, this is scientifically not satisfying. In research and teaching I regard it necessary to make clear, what has to be understood by "sport". Christiane Eisenberg recently described a "lack of readiness to let oneself in just 'for the sake of argument' for a different one than the usual concept of sport", which she had experienced in discussions again and again.⁷ This is also my experience.

Which one is the "usual concept of sport"? It is the language of the present day, in which jogging and aerobics are classified as sports, even "health sports". In Germany, the leading authors in the discourse of sport science seriously use the term "sport" in its colloquial meaning, and so they do already for over 20 years.⁸

In the newly revised "dictionary of sport science" the keyword "sport" starts - I quote in my translation: "Since the beginning of the 20th century s[port]. has developed into a colloquial,

3 Dolch (1992).

4 E.g. Thuillier (1999), p. 89 und 144/145.

5 Recently, I discussed some aspects in a lecture; cf. Tiedemann (2003b).

6 Kühnst (1996), p. 354.

7 Eisenberg (2004b), p. 93; Eisenberg here argues against Michael Krüger (2004), whom her first contribution (2004a) had provoked to polemical annotations.

8 cf. Wissenschaftlicher Beirat des DSB (1980).

worldwide used concept. Therefore a precise or really clear conceptual delimitation cannot be carried out."⁹

I regard it as possible, appropriate, and necessary to delimit sport conceptually, in other words: to define it. Here is my suggestion, which I have published and permanently revised on the internet for almost three years:¹⁰

"Sport" is a cultural field of activity, in which human beings voluntarily go into a real or only imagined relation to other people with the conscious intention to develop their abilities and accomplishments particularly in the area of skilled motion and to compare themselves with these other people according to rules put self or adopted without intending to damage them or themselves deliberately.

Before I explain to you, how I have come onto this wording, I would like to describe the limits and possibilities which I see in this definition.

My definition is considerably narrower than the "usual concept of sport"¹¹. Since I regard other areas than the so defined sport also as objects of sport science worth discussing, however, I have looked for another concept, which includes such areas like jogging, aerobics etc., and have come onto „culture of human motion“. This concept also should be clearly delimited, and I try this with the following definition¹²:

"Culture of human motion" is a field of activity, in which people come to terms with their nature and environment and consciously develop, form and represent their particularly physical abilities and accomplishments for to experience a meaningful individual or also common benefit and pleasure.

I think, that the whole field of sport history can scientifically be examined and represented with these two ideas, concepts, terms. Particularly the feelings of guilt, with which many sport historians have fended off the anachronism reproach¹³, if they used the term sport in earlier epochs, in which this word didn't exist yet, will be unnecessary with these concepts. If one sees the essence of sport in comparing each other, in competing between each other,

9 Röhlig/Prohl (2003), p. 493. The authors continue: „What is generally understood by s[port]., is less a question of scientific analyses of dimension, but is far the more determined by the use of everyday theory as well as by the historically grown and handed down integrations in social, economic, political, and legal conditions.“

10 cf. <.../sportdefinition.html> After my lecture 2004, I put the words „real or only imagined“ before „relation“.

11 In this I agree with some authors, among others Güldenpfennig, Eisenberg, from the Anglo-Saxon area for example Poliakoff.

12 cf. <.../bewegungskulturdefinition.html>

13 cf. e.g. Weiler (1981 und 1988), p. XI and Decker (1987), p. 10.

then there is no problem to discover and to name this cultural phenomenon even in early epochs as "sport". And those cultural phenomena, which essentially have to do also with physical abilities and skills, but are not sport, such as dancing for example, one can understand and name in all historical epochs as part of "culture of human motion".

The elements of my definition are all necessary and only jointly sufficient. Some of them I would like to explain briefly.

As opposed to many, who call running, swimming and other activities sport, I call sport the "**field**" of such activities. Sport for me is abstract facts, no activity.

The **voluntariness** of acting in this field of activity is an other indispensable criterion for me. Therefore the gladiatura in ancient Rome is not sport, even if there are sport historians, who add it to sport.¹⁴

To go into a **relation** to other people is a necessary precondition for a comparison. This relation can be made over temporal and local limits also in imagination, for example with a dead person as a model or with other people at a completely different place or in the future. If people think, they were in competition with "the sea" or "the mountain" as the "competitor", I consider that to be a displacement; I would assign such an activity to the field "culture of human motion". For me, competition needs a human relation to an other person; such a relation is impossible to a thing or to nature.

Being related to (at least) one other person is connected with the **intention**, on which a sporting behaviour is based: **to compare with each other**. This element isn't constitutive for culture of human motion. So the jogger, who only wants to increase his physical fitness without wanting to let himself in for an agreed, regulated comparison with an other person ever, does not act in the field of sport but in that of culture of human motion. The transition to sport can immediately take place if his intention changes and he now really wants to compare with an other person.

The central matter for my definition is, **what is done** in the field of sport, the **contents of action**. Many have introduced the element "körperliche Bewegung". I prefer not to combine "**motion**" (or „movement“) with „body“, for I don't part between body? mind? soul? spirit? For anthropological / philosophical reasons there exists only motion of the whole person for me.

14 e.g. Ramba (1985) and Decker (1987), p. 10; on the other hand cf. Thuillier (1999).

Each acting includes an amount of motion - even if very small and externally hardly to realize; that's why the term "motion" alone is too little separating. Adding "**particularly**" I want to express, that in my definition "motion" has a grading, but a thoroughly defining meaning.

With "**area of skilled motion**" I want to point to an analysis of the quality of the motion also grading, by which a delimitation of everyday motions gets clear. The point, at which the way, extent and meaning of the motion are sufficient to describe an activity as part of sport, remains open in this definition; about this one can further discuss and argue.

The intended comparison with (at least) one other person requires **rules** agreed to or adopted, to belong to the cultural field of activity called sport. Spontaneous comparisons like a race on the way to school or a vying for throwing stones on the beach don't belong to sport for me; such activities remain at best early forms, from which sport can develop by agreement to rules.

Concerning sport I exclude, that the acting persons want to **damage** the other person(s) or themselves deliberately. This is considerably a profit of civilization, which must be gained again and again, as to be exemplified by the doping problem. To this day, problematic areas for me are boxing, mountaineering, Kite surfing and likely dangerous activities.

With the so defined concepts, in sport history you can disassociate more exactly, what you can already or still describe as "sport" and what should better be named with the more general concept "culture of human motion". Let me finally show this by some problematic examples of sport history.

First I refer to Wolfgang Decker, who has presented many commendable examinations for the history of sport and culture of human motion in the antiquity. In his book "Sport and game in old Egypt" (1987) he uses the sport concept so openly and arbitrarily, as this allegedly - I quote in my translation - "has got internationally usual in the sport history"¹⁵. In his foreword Decker immediately points out the consequences with professed regret, that for example "the gladiatura is contained in the 'sport in Rome'". Later in his text Decker proudly marks the running track proved archaeologically next to the Djoser pyramid in Saqqara (approx. 2600 BC) as "oldest sports facilities of world history"¹⁶.

With my definitions, however, the gladiatura neither belongs to sport, because of the voluntariness being missing mostly and because the damaging of the other person(s) acting must

15 Decker (1987), p. 10.

16 Decker (1987), p. 37 and likely already p. 23.

be intended or at least accepted, nor belongs to the culture of human motion. And the track for the ritual Sed race of Pharaoh near the Djoser pyramid is not a place for sport according to my suggestions but for culture of human motion. For sport the necessary elements voluntariness and comparison with another person are missing at Pharaoh's Sed race. But all elements are given for culture of human motion: ritually running Pharaoh comes to terms with his nature (as an aged person) and environment (on a way marked out) and by doing this consciously represents (in front of an audience) his physical abilities (running), to experience through this a meaningful benefit (prolongation of his regency) for himself (as sovereign).¹⁷

Secondly, an example from the newer sport history: Hajo Bennett wrote in a statement on an investigation of Hermann Bach on the "paramilitary sport" in the Weimar republic - I quote in my translation: "As a constrained service, paramilitary sport stands outside, what one can call sport with a good conscience."¹⁸ Bennett's discussion as regards content, methodology and terminology is still worth reading. Bennett calls the "paramilitary sport" a "Pseudosport", which cannot be described as "sport". He names clearly the defects sticking to examinations on sport history without a clear concept of sport. Such "lack of point of view" leaves missing - I quote in my translation -, "what represents the 'functioning as a compass' (Schieder) of historiography: validity of scales, clarity of the point of view, orientation for acting."¹⁹

I also have similar criticism at many sport historical contributions, in which all possible is marked undifferentiatedly as "sport". Remember the pictures shown at the beginning, of the mosaic in the villa Casale in Sicily or of the female world champion in bodybuilding 1979. I understand the content shown in the mosaic as a part of culture of human motion. The photograph of Lisa Lyon, however, for me has nothing to do at all with sport, neither with culture of human motion: in bodybuilding competitions it's not motion, what matters fundamentally, but the representation of well defined muscles.

If sport historians consider the fact, that in bodybuilding there are competitions organized according to rules, and that the human body is in the centre, to be sufficient to call this sport, this is based on the mistake of formal similarity to equality. There may be similar or even some equal elements. This, however, isn't enough to establish equality.

17 cf. TIEDEMANN (2003a).

18 BERNETT (1981), p. 304.

19 BERNETT (1981), p. 307.

I have said just now: All elements of my definition(s) are necessary, and only jointly they are sufficient. All of us sport historians should make efforts conceptually again and again. I think, that such effort is worthwhile, especially in the scientific realm.

On the internet You can see the results of my efforts permanently revised at the mentioned addresses in the internet.

Thank You for Your attention! I would be pleased to have a vivid discussion.

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