

## **Towards a new shared European sport culture**

William Gasparini

Dean of the Faculty of Sport Sciences of Strasbourg and member of the University of Strasbourg  
Institute for Advanced Studies (USIAS)

All European surveys on sport indicate comparable phenomenon in the different member countries (a progressive decline of the practice of a physical activity, and a physical activity mainly non-competitive) but also some differences (a diversity of « body cultures » and sport models in the EU).

Conducted in 2013, the Eurobarometer on sport and physical activities states that 58% of the EU citizens practice a sport or physical activity (41% at least once per week and only 8% very regularly). The number of people declaring that they never practice sport or any other form of physical activity is of 42% (3 points increase since the 2009 survey).

In the European Union, men practice sport more than women, this difference being particularly pronounced among the 15-24 years old.

In all European countries, women form a majority of the inactive population, except in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Furthermore, the survey found out that there is a link between a low cultural and economic capital and physical inactivity, this trend is even stronger among women. Sedentary lifestyle is growing in Europe primarily affecting lower classes and women, but also affecting young people fascinated by « screens »: playing video games and communicating through social networks (smartphones, computers...) is getting the 18-24 years old to walk less than the average of other age groups. In 40 years (1970-2010), meaning two generations, some physical performances have declined such as the ability for young people to perform in a mild endurance race (e.g. 800m). Finally it is now acknowledged that the practice of a regular moderate-level physical activity contributes to the reduction of various risk factors and numerous pathologies. As such, physical activity is now an essential part of the treatment of many chronic diseases in the patient education.

However, sport activity is not to be seen only through its health dimension. For European citizens, sport is also perceived as a way to develop intercultural dialogue in Europe. In many surveys from the Eurobarometer, 3 out of 4 Europeans consider sport as a tool to promote social inclusion, whereas 64% of European citizens think that sport can help fight against discrimination. 81% of them consider sport as an occasion for dialogue between different cultures.

When practiced by marginalised populations living in urban district or disadvantaged rural areas, sport activities often recreates social links as well as gender and social diversity. Despite successful experiments with socio-sports projects on social cohesion, sport in the suburbs has been more used to pacify territories from exclusion than to create a genuine sport and body culture built on diversity and solidarity. Thus, in France, in "Priority Education Zones", only 32 % of girls practice in a sport club against 51% on average and more than 80% of the middle and upper classes. Generally speaking, the gap in physical activity between girls and boys is bigger in disadvantaged areas. In popular districts, sports facilities and sports areas are free of access but used almost only by boys when sport exemptions (for swimming in particular) are increasingly frequent for girls. Depending on the sex, the occupancy of the street or of the leisure facilities is different. Planning policies on sport have also reinforced this gendered geography of the city with the leisure areas mainly masculine (cf. pétanque strips, city stadiums, skateparks, soccer pitches...)

In this new context of increasingly sedentary lifestyles and the emergence of new social, gendered and "communitarian" gaps, how can sport (or physical activity) be developed for everyone? Sport and physical activities also being recognized in primary and secondary prevention of some pathologies, under which conditions can medical doctors prescribe physical activities? How, in a collective framework, bearer of citizenship values, can we make

sport worth experiencing again? How can we fight against social and territorial inequalities in enabling access to sport and physical activities?

How can sport be practiced at all ages, from early childhood to the elderly people? Which methods can guarantee a sport based on social, gender and generation diversity? How can public sport areas make women and girls feel welcome again? Which sport and physical activities are the most appropriate to develop well-being and living together in peace? How can the principles of *laïcité* [humanitarian and secular philosophy] and diversity be concretely implemented in the sport areas and facilities? How can a new sport culture shared by the European citizens and stakeholders in sport and citizenship be built?

So many questions on the different issues of recreational sport and living together through sport that will be addressed and discussed extensively by European sport stakeholders, academics in the European Sport Convention 2015. Held in Strasbourg, a University and European city by excellence that is also a place of experiments for a new urban sport culture, this first event will allow the launch of a European platform for exchanges and experimentations that will be closely followed by a European scientific committee. This event and the ones that will follow will be fed by local meetings and experiments on education through sport and recreational sports.

The general theme “a new European sport culture” will be broken down in three subjects - children and sport, health and well-being, sport and territories- with four different workshops for each subject.

#### **Bibliographic references:**

- GASPARINI W., KNOBE S., DIDIERJEAN R. (2014), “Physical activity on medical prescription: social factors affecting chronically ill patients. A qualitative case study in Strasbourg (France)”, *Health Education Journal*, 74 (6), p. 1-12.
- GASPARINI, W. (Coord.) (2013), France et Allemagne : le sport à l'épreuve des identités, *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, #4, Tome 44, 2013
- DIGENNARO S., GASPARINI, W. (2013), « La costruzione di una Europa sociale dello sport », *Rivista di Scienze dell'Amministrazione*, 1, Italie, p. 27-44.
- GASPARINI W. (2013), « Le sport et la diversité : construction et circulation d'une catégorie de pensée », revue *Diversité*, # 171, January 2013, p. 25-33.
- GASPARINI W., NOIRIEL G. (2013), « S'intégrer dans la communauté nationale par le sport : sociogenèse d'une catégorie de pensée », *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, #4, p. 411-423
- GASPARINI, W. & POLO J-F. (Coord.) (2012), L'espace européen du football : dynamiques institutionnelles et constructions sociales, revue *Politique européenne*, #36, June 2012
- GASPARINI W., COMETTI A. (Ed.) (2010), *Sport facing the test of cultural diversity. Integration and intercultural dialogue in Europe*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing.
- GASPARINI W., TALLEU C. (Ed.) (2010), *Sport and Discrimination in Europe*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing.
- GASPARINI W., VIEILLE-MARCHISET G. (2008), *Le sport dans les quartiers. Pratiques sociales et politiques publiques*, Paris, PUF, 2008
- GASPARINI, W. (Coord.) (2008), L'intégration par le sport ?, *Revue Sociétés contemporaines* (Presses de Sciences Po), # 69, March 2008