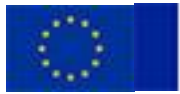




Diversity in Europe

iriv - *In varietate Concordia (EC, Brussels, 2000)*



issue 12 – diversity in Sport, 2024 Olympic year

a newsletter published by the Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (iriv)- www.iriv.net

*« These strangers in a foreign World
Protection asked of me-
Befriend them, lest yourself in Heaven
Be found a refugee »*

*« Ces Etrangères, en Monde inconnu
Asile m'ont demandé
Accueille-les, car Toi-même au Ciel
Pourrait être une Réfugiée »*

Emily Dickinson (Quatrains II-2, 1864-65, Amherst, Massachusetts, Etats-Unis)
translation in French by Claire Malroux (NRF, Poésie/Gallimard, Paris, 2000)

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Diversity in Sport

Since November 2018, the Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (Iriv) has published a newsletter entitled «Diversity in Europe». It is expressed in the motto chosen since 2000 by the European Union *In varietate Concordia* with the enlargement of the European Union from 15 to 25 members in 2004.

The first issue (November 2018) was dedicated to school with Rotterdam (Netherlands) whose inhabitants with foreign origins represent more than 70% of the total population. Paris also has students with very diverse profiles in its classrooms.

The second issue (March 2019) addressed religious and cultural diversity, and the Jewish community with a comparison between Paris and Thessaloniki, cities sharing a tragic history during the Second World War.

The third issue (November 2019) raised the issue of interreligious dialogue with articles on Switzerland and France. In secular countries, religious freedom is the right not to believe or to belong to any religion.

The fourth issue (March 2020) was dedicated to interfaith education and dialogue in multicultural countries. A first article analysed inclusion and diversity in the United States. A second article recalled the example of Sarajevo, a model of peaceful existence between religious communities.

The fifth issue (November 2020) addressed diversity in the Mediterranean. Its eastern part is a crossroads between Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Strategies are contradictory and the role of the EU is changing.

The sixth issue (March 2021) discussed artistic diversity and intercultural education with an article on Mexico and the great richness of its crafts; a second article addressed intercultural dialogue and education.

The seventh issue (November 2021) illustrated the francophone diversity that is at the heart of the Francophonie (first article) with multiple facets, including literary ones (second article).

The eighth issue (March 2022) was devoted to Ukraine at war by suggesting a reflection on the diversity of learning, competence, and analysis of unpleasant and conflicting experiences to make things happen.

The ninth issue (November 2022) addressed diplomatic diversity- war is an admission of failure. What is the role of the Francophonie and Intelligence service to move from war and consider a ceasefire, in the absence of a real peace?

The tenth issue (March 2023) was dedicated to the diversity of the South - the cooperation between the countries of the Global South by recalling the universal character of the struggle for democracy (Aimé Césaire).

The eleventh issue (November 2023) was devoted to the diversity and plurality of the media, a democratic principle put to the test with the rise of authoritarian regimes and extremism in the world.

The twelfth issue (March 2024) is dedicated to diversity in Sport that will be celebrated in 2024 with the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. May the best win – those who will defend diversity, respect for universalism and otherness...

iriv, Paris, 03 / 2024

Diversity in Sport and the Olympic spirit - the end of innocence...

Sport offers a beautiful illustration of diversity and its opposite, discrimination, and injustice. It is no longer an activity reserved for a «leisure class» (1). It was democratized in all Western countries, in France with the Popular Front in the 1930s. It is associated with the spirit of «fair play» this «sense of British sportsmanship» (2) that are supposed to respect the sportsmen, respecting the rules and their opponents.

Sport has pioneered the promotion of champions from less privileged backgrounds or minorities. It is a major asset: its language is universal, it is understood unequivocally regardless of age, gender, country of origin, cultural or religious affiliation. Excellence, and the pursuit of performance, know no boundaries, no cultures, no religion; they are shared and understood by all. Sports champions are known for their record, not for their profile.

Sport reflects society, with many cases of inequality and injustice, and violence (racist or homophobic), sexual harassment and abuse, or exclusion of some participants in international competitions because of their gender identity (3). It is both a place of confrontation and mediation - opposing parties meet respecting (at least in principle) common rules. In the fight against sexual harassment, homophobia, racism or xenophobia, sport has experienced several scandals.

Strategies have been implemented by clubs, States (sport ministries) and international organizations (IOC, IFBA or UCI) to defend the sports values of respect for the rules and one's opponent, the spirit of fair play. Some champions were "role models", for example when they achieved their "coming out" (4). Sports education can make a difference, for the confidence and competitive spirit that young girls can acquire through sport; it can allow learning about gender diversity (during adolescence).

Sports clubs, with the diversity of their teams as well as their supporters, have become the banners of the cities where they are located – the French Football club "Olympique de Marseille" or the Brazilian national football team have aroused the same enthusiasm in the world among various groupies. In both cases, diversity is the «flag» of the two formations, Marseille, or Brazil.

At the height of the Cold War, the Olympic Games were a strategic space where Western teams competed against teams from the Eastern Bloc (satellite countries of the USSR). The victories obtained were a way of gauging oneself, peacefully. All the blows were however allowed with the doping or the cheating on the material and the appearance of bionic men or women. International sporting events (Olympic Games or Football World Cups) are emblematic events of the strength of Nations with the emergence of Chinese sportsmen or athletes in many new disciplines for China.

The sports competitions present national teams from the diversity with the emblematic example of a France «Black Blanc Beur» (Black, White Arabic) which wins for the first time in its history the World Cup in 1998. Companies have used minority sports champions like Nike with Michael Jordan for basketball or Zlatan Ibrahimovic for football. This communication strategy is a way to promote the ideal of diversity with «customers» or «audience» for sports equipment manufacturers who are mostly made up of young people sensitive to this message. Another example of a "role model" in lifelong learning - young people from sensitive neighbourhoods or modest families are able to register at the University, in the United States, thanks to their sports performances. Sports champions in France and Europe have enjoyed privileged access to prestigious schools thanks to their sports awards (5); some competitions are also open to athletes registered on the official list (6).

Participating in international competitions is an opportunity to meet people from a wide variety of backgrounds - from other cultures, disciplines, industries, and countries where some would never have had the opportunity to go. Intercultural competence is inherent in a high-level sports career that they can enhance in their professional reconversion.

What messages did the Summer Olympic Games in the 21st century leave behind? The third millennium opened with fanfare with the first «Green Games» celebrated in Sydney, Australia (7), a country that displays an original example of diversity, a success welcomed by all and the best media audience of all time. The Games in Greece in 2004 should have revived the spirit of Olympism, they were a financial abyss that stigmatized the country in Europe. In 2008, the Games were held in Beijing, which is not a paragon for defending diversity; its Russian ally took the opportunity to attack Georgia in the middle of summer. The United Kingdom in 2012 succeeded «with flying colours» its games, forcing the admiration of all like the Brazil Games, also greeted by all, in 2016. In both cases, the budget exploded, and police security was both an ongoing issue and a never-ending uncertainty. (8) The Games in Japan in 2020 took place in times of Covid- the international environment became unstable and uncertain. The end of innocence.

The 2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games will take place in Paris, starting in July. They are placed under the sign of diversity, actors (athletes and volunteers committed to the organization) but also disciplines with the entry of Hip Hop and surfing as Olympic disciplines. Yet during a war in Europe, from Russia to Ukraine, started just after the Winter Olympics in Beijing in February 2022, Russian athletes will be able to compete but only under a neutral banner - how to be neutral in times of war ? The terrorist threat is maximum with growing tension in the Middle East and a rise of right-wing extremism in Europe - will athletes be really able to keep a spirit of neutrality and fair play?

During the Cold War, the Games orchestrated the East/West confrontation. In times of hybrid war, diversity is at the heart of conflicts between authoritarian regimes and movements and Western democracies in Europe and the Middle East.

As in the time of the ordeals in the Middle Ages, let us hope that the best win- those who will defend the spirit of fair play, respect for otherness and diversity. *Citius, altius, fortius* for democracy and universalism- an inspiring motto for the Games of the 21st century.

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- (1) Thorstein Veblen, 1899 “. « The Theory of the Leisure Class ». New York: Macmillan. Available at the Internet Archive and Project Gutenberg
- (2) Words used by the editor of “The best short stories”, 1997, Rudyard Kipling, Chatham (Kent): Wordsworth classics Editions
- (3) World Rugby case in 2020 excluding transgender women
- (4) Martina Navratilova (in 1981) or Amélie Mauresmo in 1999 in tennis
- (5) business schools such as the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris (SupdeCo Paris)
- (6) certain paramedical training (physiotherapy, ergonomics, pedicure-podology, psychomotor skills- <http://www.sports.gouv.fr/pratiques-sportives/sport-performance/sport-de-haut-niveau/Dispositifs-d-aides-aux-sportif-ve-s-de-haut-niveau>)
- (7) Games in Sydney- encyclopaedia Universalis- <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/sydney-jeux-olympiques-de-2000-contexte-organisation-bilan/>
- (8) a very real threat of attacks or insecurity linked to street gangs in Rio - “Unforgettable Olympic Games and a hefty bill, September 2016 - <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMAlyse/2075>

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