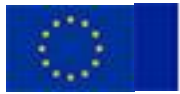




Diversity in Europe

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– *In varietate Concordia (EC, Brussels, 2000)*



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*« 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...

The thirteenth issue (November 2024) is dedicated to Olympic diversity with the Paralympic Games in Paris in August-September 2024- they illustrate the great complexity of diversity and acceptance of difference.

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## Olympic Diversity – Paralympians, unordinary superheroes

When you fall off a horse, it is recommended to immediately get back in the saddle. But when your legs are paralyzed or your arms have lost their use, it is no longer possible. They must change their sport or abandon sport. Paralympians refuse to be considered as superheroes, avengers. Yet they embody, whether they like it or not, an incredible life force, an extraordinary form of resilience and resistance, and a formidable capacity to adapt in the face of a tragic fate that they refuse to consider as a fatality. They decided that their handicap would be a springboard, an exceptional asset. Some Paralympic athletes may not have been Olympic champions; their failure to capitulate in the face of a stroke of luck has allowed them to become Paralympic champions. The gift of surpassing oneself, often referred to in high-level sport, is to be taken in the most literal and radical sense of the term for disabled sport people

Physical disability may be born but it is often the result of an accident or a tragic story, always a personal drama. The stories of the lives of Paralympic athletes are all different. French tennis champion Pauline Deroudele lost her leg after being hit by a car. French swimming champion Laurent Chardard lost an arm and a leg to a shark while surfing in Reunion. The saddest stories are those of war victims, military but above all civilians who must overcome a double trauma, physical and psychological. More than other Paralympic athletes, they are aware of being survivors, with the guilt felt for those who did not survive. Jean-Baptiste Alaize was a victim of the civil war in Burundi - his mother was killed before his eyes; he was amputated of the right leg after being hit several times with a machete. Quadruple World Champion junior and 3rd at the 2024 European Championships, he represents Burundi at the Olympics in Paris 2024. French volleyball player Cyrille Chahboune was a member of the air force parachute commandos, then in the conventional forces and then in the special forces before becoming the free rider of the France team of sitting volleyball after an amputation.

Mental disability is also represented at the Olympics Paris 2024, with adapted sport. The example it gives emphasizes the importance of the accompaniment and the very personal bond forged with the coach who must build a privileged partnership with the Paralympic athlete they accompany. Vincent Clarico, who trains the 400 m runner Charles-Antoine Kouakou (category T20, intellectual disabilities), talks about priesthood. “You have to be vigilant for any change of habit, a different look, signs of fatigue”. The coach must guess what the athlete cannot express, they must feel their emotions and sometimes make decisions for them. For instance when the coach discovers that Charles Antoine Kouakou said nothing when he strongly hit a finger with a hammer or did not complain when he had a painful fatigue fracture on the foot.

The opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games on Wednesday, 28 August 2024, in Place de la Concorde, was very symbolic of this necessary collaboration between “valid” artists and those with disabilities who danced and sang together. South African dancer Musa Motha, amputated at his left leg at 11 years old after a bone cancer, and moved from football to dance, gave a striking performance, brilliantly using both crutches. His elegance and dexterity made him forget his handicap, which had become an original asset, a number that would not have been performed by a valid dancer. Some artists were in wheelchairs. The singer Lucky Love, born in 1993 without a left arm appeared topless at the end of his song «Masculinity». Luan Pommier, a French pianist and singer born in Guadeloupe in 1999, suffering from a rare genetic disease of the retina, performed the Paralympic anthem composed by Thierry Darnis with a very special emotion on piano first played at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

The coverage of the Paralympic Games by the public broadcasting company France Télévisions was equivalent to that of the Olympic Games. The Paralympians were the first to be surprised by such recognition and for the first time an equal treatment of their disciplines that may seem very strange or incomprehensible to non-initiates. The first difficulty is to understand the category of disability. The rules of the game also change compared to equivalent Olympic disciplines – balls that would have been taken out are accepted, the footballers of the Blind foot are helped by the indications of their coaches placed behind the goals. The most surprising was the adaptation of the public, accustomed to «ordinary» sport, who for example performed a silent holà for the blind foot players who must rely on their hearing and not on sight to follow the ball with a bell.

Victorious diversity and a handicap turned into an asset are the messages carried out by the Paralympic Games. A lesson for many ordinary athletes or spectators who did not expect to be so impressed. We no longer see Paralympic athletes, Paralympians, but outliers who don't want to be treated like heroes.

Diversity is a strength. “Humility is the virtue of the strong,” teach us the Jesuits. The most inspiring and original lesson of these Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

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