

Sports museums throughout the world

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As you know, Mrs. Maria MORAWINSKA-BRZEZICKA has been asked by the International Olympic Committee to make an inventory of the Olympic Museum and draw up plans for the reorganization of this Museum at Mon Repos. Before telling you about the suggestions that have been made and are at present under study, we would like to give you some idea of what the various sports museums in different parts of the world are like.

In the world today there are about ten museums devoted wholly or in part to sport. This vast topic deserves special study in view of the great differences in themes, the diversity of the types of organisation, the fragmentary state of the information collected so far and the uniformity of the standards of appreciation.

From the points of view of both structure and method, we shall describe the general trends that influenced the foundation of these museums, the increase in their numbers, their development and the growth of their activities.

The museums of antiquity - which can be likened to temples of the Muses - enjoyed a much wider sphere of activity than those of today; they were institutions comparable in a way to academies of science with their own research laboratories and collections. They served a limited number of learned men. The disappearance of ancient civilization put an end for centuries to all progress in the field of collections and museums.

It was not until the Renaissance that the idea of museums began to be revived. Collections then started to be systematically built up. First came the Italian collections of the XVth Century, which can be considered as the embryos of modern museums. Even at this early date, different ideas could be detected. There were the "collections of curiosities", comprising natural history exhibits, ores and objects endowed with magical properties. Art galleries were also formed, quite independently.

The idea of a "public museum" occurred much later, in the Century of Enlightenment - the XVIIIth - and was put into effect for the first time in England. The British Museum was inaugurated in London in 1763.

From the middle of the XIXth Century on, the growing interest in history, as well as the remarkable progress in the historical and technological sciences and natural history, led to extremely rapid progress and an increase in the number of

museums. This period also marked a step forward in the very intense specialization of museums. Using the methods adopted by the museums, attempts were made to present more and more different fields of science and life.

Fine arts museums form a separate group specialising in various branches. Another group comprises the museums of history and culture, such as: archaeological museums (according to periods), historical and military museums, ethnographic and ethnological museums. Next comes the group of museums devoted to natural history, technology, agronomy, criminology, biography, philately, hygiene, medicine, etc. ...

With human activities becoming more and more diversified, it becomes increasingly important to document them properly; and a phenomenon as universal as sport cannot be excluded.

The foundation of sports museums in this group or even only of sports sections in already existing museums occurs as a general rule in somewhat similar fashion. Generally, private collections form the basis of such museums. Later this role was fulfilled by organisations, associations or clubs devoted to certain sports, possessing archives and objects connected with their activities. The premises of these organisations became cluttered with souvenirs and documents. From year to year, the historical value of these archives increased. At the same time, the rapid spread of sport and evolution of sports equipment encouraged people to collect conscientiously and systematically all the documentation relating to this branch of culture.

In spite of the need for an historical classification of sport, physical education museums experienced great difficulties to start with. They had to fight to conquer the right to exist and to prove their utility. Sport, generally believed to be a new form of human activity, was thought to have nothing to do with museums. I think I am not exaggerating if I say that the irruption of sport into the field of museums was a shock to artistic circles. Even today, when learning of the existence of such museums, people are surprised. The question is usually the same: *"But what on earth do they collect?"* However, the reactions of visitors show the interest that sports museums are able to arouse.

I agree very strongly with the opinion of Mr. F.K. MATHYS, the curator of the Swiss Museum of Gymnastics and Sport in Basle, who noted that these museums have filled the gap existing between ethnographical museums, where sport was not represented at all, and museums of technology, where it was treated merely as a marginal activity.

Gradually, sports museums gained the right to exist but only after very hard struggles. Pioneers in a new field, they were able to profit from the experience of other museums only to a limited extent. In every case the nature of the collections and their aims demanded a different organisation, special methods for the acquisition of exhibits, their description and display.

At present, we have a certain experience in the field of sports museums to go on, and the time has now come to compare the results achieved by each museum, to carry out exchanges of information, start collaborating and establishing direct contacts.

According to the information in our possession, there are at present 39 sports museums on almost all continents. We have obtained their addresses and details concerning their activities in various ways.

Sometimes we learned of their existence from a newspaper article read quite by chance; this discovery being followed up by an exchange of correspondence, and subsequently a close co-operation. The figure 39 is probably no longer correct, for we have already been informed of the foundation of new museums.

Most sports museums seem to be located in central Europe, the Scandinavian countries and North America. Their foundation dates back mainly to the second half of the XIXth Century, when the first sports associations, also created in these countries, began to make headway. It was in these countries that sport, in the sense we use the term today, was born and it was there too that the most exhibits were collected.

Historically, the oldest sports museum in Europe is the Alpine Museum in Berne, founded in 1902. Switzerland's geographical position, her inhabitants' struggles to overcome the rigours of nature in the high mountains, the hardships faced by explorers and their victories - all these factors tended to favour the growth of tourism and alpinism. This trend is reflected in the interest taken in alpinism by the first curators and in the collections they formed to illustrate the history of the conquest of the Alps.

It is no mere matter of chance that collections of winter sports equipment came to be made, especially in the Scandinavian countries. Collectors' interest in skiing was aroused by the growth of skiing as a sport, the production of whose equip-

mant was continually developed by the big firms. Many exhibitions of skis, held in Norway, Sweden and Finland, encouraged this production. The first was held at Kristiansand, in Norway, in 1862.

In the Scandinavian museums, the collections of sports equipment have been enriched by skis from antiquity, used for everyday purposes by the population of that time, for - as everyone knows - skiing in Scandinavia is one of the earliest forms of human activity of which traces have been found. The great difference in shapes and the various stages of progress in the production of this equipment formed the basis of the rich collections possessed by sports museums in Sweden, Norway and Finland.

A special category of the oldest collections of objects connected with sport derives its origin, in Europe, from the traditions of exclusive clubs in England. To give an example, one may mention the IMPERIAL MEMORIAL GALLERY in London, founded in 1786. The collections are housed in an historic building, still occupied by the MARYLEBONE CRICKET CLUB.

All the collections mentioned above are the results of the tendency to collect objects and documents relating to tourism and chorography, and to pursue sporting and educational aims. But about the middle of the XIXth Century, this trend assumed a paramilitary character. The ideas of JAHN and SPIESS, conceived at the time of the 1848 revolutions, by favouring the growth of gymnastics as a form of initiation for the defence of the country, led to the foundation of many gymnastics associations in the countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The activity of the Czech SOKOL and its influence on the gymnastic movement is a classic example of this. The dynamism of this organisation, the forms and scope of its activity, as well as its political and patriotic role on the eve of the first World War, are clearly shown in the Czechoslovakian Museum of Physical Education and Sport in Prague. The collections of this museum consist almost entirely of exhibits originally belonging to the SOKOL organisation.

In North America, the situation was similar. The sports clubs and organisations built up collections. Founded for the most part at the beginning of the XIXth Century, they consist mainly of prizes and medals and sports equipment of a commemorative nature. There are 18 of these collections, which consequently represent roughly half the total number of sports museums in the world today. One of the best known is the HELMS ATHLETIC FOUNDATION collection in Los Angeles. Let us also mention, on the American continent, the "DE EDUCADAO FISICA" museum founded quite recently in Rio de Janeiro.

From the point of view of the wealth of their collections, their organisation and activities, existing museums can be divided into four groups.

1. Those in the first group display objects connected with sport but cannot be called museums in the strict sense of the word. They tend rather to be collections of various types like most American collections. They are collections built up by sports associations and privately sponsored foundations; they are limited as a general rule to a narrow speciality and resemble collections of prizes won by a group or an individual. Even the names of these institutions show their character:

- HALL OF CHAMPIONS, San Diego, California
- NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME, Cooperstown, New York
- SPORT HALL OF FAME, Toronto, Canada

In spite of the fame they have sometimes gained, these institutions do not meet the scientific rules governing museums. One may be permitted to hope however that, in the future, collections of this type will tend to widen their programmes and become museums in the strict sense of the word, for the growing number of objects collected will call for a selection and an historical interpretation.

There are however certain exceptions within this group. They are the museums that collect and exhibit sports equipment alone, such as, for example, the Dutch BATAVUS MUSEUM, which possesses a unique collection of bicycles and automobiles. Another example is the Cycle Museum in France.

2. The second group comprises museums devoted to objects connected with one or more related sports, and run on well-defined scientific lines, with serious educational and didactic aims; the majority of these institutions can boast excellent scientific results. The quality of the specimens collected and the work of these institutions enable them to fulfil all the conditions demanded of a modern museum. To mention but a few:

- the SKI MUSEUM, Fiskartorpet, Sweden
- the SKI MUSEUM, Holmenkollen, Finland
- the SWISS ALPINE MUSEUMS in Berne and Zermatt
- the WINTER SPORTS MUSEUM, Murzzuschlag, Austria

In this category should be included the museums devoted to eminent theorists or physical education and sports leaders. As an example, we would mention the JAHN MUSEUM in Freyburg, East Germany.

3. The third group comprises museums covering the whole of the history of physical training and sport. Aiming to present all the historical problems of physical education and sport, these museums have undertaken an extremely difficult task. Some of them have already achieved their aims to a large extent. From every point of view, their collections are rich and well worth putting on display; in addition, these museums are centres of historical documentation in the field of physical training and sport, and make considerable contributions to scientific research in their pursuit of educational and didactic aims. As examples of this category of museum we would quote:

- the TURN - UND SPORTMUSEUM in Basle (1)
- the MUSEUM OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND TOURISM in Warsaw

4. In the last group are the historical and technological museums which have sections devoted to sport in their collections. Here are two typical examples:

- the VERKERSHAUS in Lucerne (2)
- the CARLO DISCARETTI DI RUFFIA AUTOMOBILE MUSEUM in Turin

A detailed description of this type of museum from the point of view of the value of their collections in relation to sport is extremely difficult. Either the sports exhibits are inserted in other sections of cultural history, thus losing their autonomy, or they form small isolated sections in specialized collections.

In our survey, we must therefore also consider these big museums which possess exhibits connected with sport and are run according to all the scientific rules; for a long time now, these museums have recognised the need for documenting man's activity in the field of physical education and sport.

Our brief survey of existing museums confirms the fact that they vary greatly in importance, that their social significance is very dissimilar, that their role in the international sports movement and their scientific standards are not comparable. A certain number however fulfil conditions that have enabled them to reach a higher level.

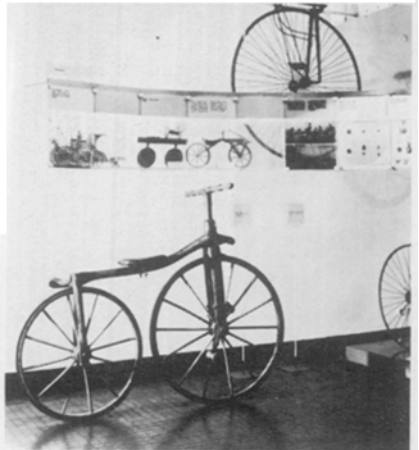
Translations:

- (1) The Museum of Gymnastics and Sport
- (2) The Transport Museum



△ Basle

Warsaw ▷



▽ Lausanne



We now possess a certain experience based on the activities of existing museums; we can therefore draw conclusions as to how a sports museum should be established and organised.

The time has come to organise an Olympic Museum of international scope. It will be a model museum displaying everything ever achieved in this field: the Olympic idea - what it is and what it should be, from ancient times to the modern Olympic Games, a museum in which not only is the past recounted and the present displayed, but where one learns and teaches.

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N.B.

We have used as sources of information the booklets and brochures received.