

THE CULTURAL OLYMPIAD: LINKING SPORT WITH CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Introduction

As far back as Geometric times, athletic exercise, music and dance constituted the three basic elements in the education of the young Athenians.

In modern societies, establishing a harmonious interaction between the physical and intellectual functions is considered a major challenge. The effort for developing such an interaction needs to be continuous and methodological. It needs to address the distinct characteristics of sports and culture and at the same time attempt to blend them. It needs to take advantage of the Information society which introduces new prospects in culture and education. It needs to address issues related to globalisation and resist the trends of the global market. And finally it needs to be linked with important events of global interest and significance. Events which are in line with Olympism.

The Cultural Olympiad can effectively support the harmonious interaction between the physical and intellectual functions, provided that a number of preconditions are met and that its forces resist commercialisation and drive towards the reduction of cultural and educational inequities as well as towards the convergence of sport with culture and education.

A brief historic outlook

The education of young people in ancient Greece had one central goal:

by Constantinos Cartalis*



to train them to grasp a sense of rhythm and control of harmony which would enable them to achieve the harmonious development of body and mind. Physical exercise in sports, was accompanied by music; many Attic vases show scenes from the palaestra, in which the athletes that are portrayed demonstrate that there was no difference in content between physical education and musical training. This is the education described by Pericles as a “free way of living”.

At that time, sport was an integral part of both education and social life, which explains the cultural value of sport. *For Socrates physical perfection could not be dissociated from moral excellence.*

The Olympic Games were an expression of this cultivation and co-existence of physical and mental exercise. In these Games, which included not only athletic competition, but also music and drama, the dignity of man, the belief in his freedom and worth, and the acceptance of equal participation were fundamental assumptions of the Olympic idea.

It is difficult for us today to appreciate the beauty and charm of this education, after so many centuries of a divided existence that in most cases has led us to separate the exercise of the body from culture.

The basic questions

- The starting point

What is culture?

“Is culture the creation of or participation in artistic and literary works?” or/and

“Is culture the envelope in which we journey through life and to ignore it is to ignore the way in which the journey is progressing”?

It may be said that culture is now the summation of the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social grouping. It not only includes art and letters, but also systems of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, the value systems, the traditions and the beliefs.

Is sports a form of culture?

Sport, always considered as part of good education, has become an expression of culture. Today, through the Olympic Games, sport has become a universal culture.

Some facts

sport

Although more and more people interact with sport, a fact which by itself can only be regarded positively, commercialization has reached such proportions and has become so vulgarised, that sport is in several cases, non supportive of the Olympic ideals.

Art and Sport

There is no doubt that sport is still considered sacred or religious in origin, noble in nature, but that in many cases abused and misunderstood in the modern world.

Culture

In the last decade, a significant increase of the number of European citizens following cultural events or involved with culture is observed. Independent of the type of cultural event or the precise definition of culture, such an increase is a clear indication of a positively changing attitude of the society towards culture. In Europe alone, five hundred million people visit the 15,000 museums on an annual basis, whereas the visiting rate of cultural sites has doubled from the 1980s in all European countries.

Education

Education has been abandoning its traditional patterns through the use of such technological provisions as the Internet. At the present day, over 500 million people, the majority of which of

are less than 25 years old, use the global network. Time (to acquire information) and distance (to the source of information) now have different meanings. However the majority of the users of the global network stem from developed countries, whereas frequently the overload of available information lead to the "pollution" of information.

At the same time, education is changing, in the sense that it is driven by the demands of modern society which is in turn controlled by the requirements of a competitive market. With unemployment reaching 20% for young people, students today invest in the acquisition of knowledge which is needed for advancing their studies at the University level, or for obtaining increased chances for employment. This market-driven education reduces the space for education in line with Olympism.

Globalization

On the one hand globalization enhances the rule of economics, at

the expense of the rules of culture or education. An obvious result is that priority is given to the preservation of economic values, rather than social ones. On the other hand, by overcoming barriers and diminishing distances, globalization provides the platform for a widespread dissemination of Olympic ideals as well as for a universal approach for blending sports with culture and education.

Cultural activities during the Olympic Games

Cultural activities during the Olympic Games seem to obtain insufficient publicity and limited participation. This may be attributed to the concentration of the spectators to the sport events or to the limited promotion of the cultural activities.

The three fold challenge

"The Olympic ideal strives towards the harmonious development of the body and the mental faculties, but also of the cultural and artistic quantities of man with goal of encouraging understanding and friendship through the union of sport, art and culture" (Pierre de Coubertin). *"Sport must be considered as an originator of art and as an opportunity for art"* (Pierre de Coubertin)

"When Aristotle was educating Alexander the Great, he was not just passing the knowledge, but he was developing the man who would be able to implement it".

The essential characteristics of the Cultural Olympiad - can the link of sport with culture and education be supported?

Duration

The Cultural Olympiad has the comparative advantage of extended *duration*. By bridging two successive Olympic Games, it offers a period of four years for cultural and educational events and initiatives in line with



Training scene in the palaestra in ancient Greece.

Art and Sport

Olympism. From an educational point of view, this is of critical importance, in the sense that educational programmes are provided with the time needed to flourish.

Continuity

The thrust of the Cultural Olympiad lies in the introduction of events which do not last for one year or for one Olympiad, but by acquiring a “semi-permanent” nature they turn into constant elements of successive Olympiads. *In this way, the continuity achieved provides the needed “luxury” of time.*

Commercialization with a limit

Although cultural events do experience commercialization, the Cultural Olympiad aims at setting commercial aspects aside, to the extent possible. For this to be accomplished, substantial financial support needs to be provided by governmental sources. In Greece alone, the Cultural Olympiad will reach a cost of approximately 120 million US dollars for the period of four years (2001-2004).

Capitalize on the “thirst” for culture

The Cultural Olympiad is, in a sense, “new”. Hence it provides the forum for attracting the hundred of thousands of culture enthusiasts, who at the same time adore and follow sports. To accomplish this, new cultural practices need to be developed in line with the culture of sports.

The new “education”

The Cultural Olympiad, has the comparative advantage of being directly linked to Olympism and the Olympic Games. It offers the needed framework for the introduction of educational programmes centred on Olympism, which cannot be easily integrated in the regular educational system.

New technologies

Multimedia, the Internet, the Intranet, virtual reality, all blend a magnificent set of new options for education, in support of the Cultural Olympiad and the widest possible dissemination of its contents. Experts in this field, in an obvious effort to promote innovation, claim that distance is not a problem anymore; “tele” (tele-education, tele-conference) is now the “fashion” word. The same experts also claim that a virtual depiction of ancient Olympia in the network may satisfy the educational needs. This may be only partially correct; we can not expect that a school from India will fly to Greece to visit ancient Olympia. Yet a critical balance needs to be maintained between traditional and new modes of education. In situ visits are still valuable, they glorify perceptions of the past, they provide direct contact with the place, the ideal, and the spirit.

Culture of youth

The Cultural Olympiad provides an extended - temporally wise - framework for competitions for youth, in painting, cinema, dance, sciences, new technologies. Such competitions, centred on Olympism, may be linked to important domestic, regional and international athletic events, in the course between two successive Olympic Games.

A boundary free effort

Important events which succeed in linking culture and sport, need to be communicated worldwide even though they may be hosted in the country organizing the Olympic Games. Besides the obvious potential of new information technologies in this direction, such a target may be also achieved through international cooperation and contests, international networks (of schools, artists, associations, etc.), exhibitions travel-

ling around the world, and major events attracting the attention of the world’s public (such as the torch relay in Ancient Olympia). The Cultural Olympiad, by reflecting a global event of major reputation, can support such initiatives. It is by no chance that Greece, following the successful cooperation with Sydney in terms of the exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum on the 1000 year anniversary of the ancient Olympics, promotes the view that respective exhibitions on this subject need to be hosted in every Olympic city.

Sport and culture in the Cultural Olympiad: is convergence achievable?

Linking sport with culture in the Cultural Olympiad may be accomplished in a multi-fold manner.

Firstly through the organization of youth camps, in which young people are exposed to the Olympic ideals, observe or take part in cultural events and at the same time practice or compete in sports. The *Olympic Youth Festival*, a suggested element of the Cultural Olympiad 2001-2004 clearly reflects such an approach.

Secondly through the design and implementation in primary and secondary education, of specific educational modules centred on Olympism, the evolution of Olympic ideals with time, their significance in today’s world, their pertinence in terms of the harmonious development of body and mind.

Thirdly to link culture to the operational programmes of athletic Federations, not aiming at athletes to practice or compete under music, but for excelling their minds. Finally, convergence to be facilitated, educational activities need to initiate at small ages.

Preconditions to be met

A number of preconditions need to be met, in order to effectively link culture and education to sports in the framework of the Cultural Olympiad:

- Develop communication channels and improve synergy.
- Develop a network of multipliers.
- Diffuse information and results.
- Demonstrate the demonstration projects
- Network the networks.
- Limit duplications.
- Take advantage of new technologies to attract youth.
- Take advantage of existing institutions, such as the IOA.

Conclusions

In modern societies, establishing a harmonious interaction between the physical and intellectual functions is

considered a major challenge. The effort for developing such an interaction needs to be continuous and methodological. It needs to address the distinct characteristics of sports and culture and at the same time attempt to blend them. The Cultural Olympiad can provide the essential means for an effective and pertinent link of sport with culture and education, taken that a number of preconditions are met. The relationship is mutual taken that the success of the Cultural Olympiads depends on the effectiveness of this link.

References

- “The Mind and the Body”, Ministry of Culture, Hellenic Republic, 1989.
- “Greece, Sports and Culture”, Ministry of Culture, Hellenic Republic, 1988.

Report on the Sport - Culture Forum, Lausanne, 1997.

“100 Hundred Years Greek Olympic History”, “Ta Nea”, Athens 1996.

“Olympia and Olympic Games”, Anna Maranti, Athens 1999.

“The Sacred Origin and Nature of Sports and Nature”, Ghazi Muhammad, 1998.

“The Cultural Olympiad 2001-2004: Basic principles”, Ministry of Culture, Hellenic Republic, 1999.

Several articles in *Olympic Review*.

Various websites (IOC, Olympic Museum, Tufts University, etc.)

*Special Secretary for the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens in 2004, Hellenic Ministry of Culture.



Two young participants of the youth camp in Nagano in 1998.