

**Yuri Mazurov**  
*Moscow State Lomonosov University, Moscow, Russia*  
*E-mail: jmazurov@yandex.ru*

## **Sport as phenomenon of historical heritage**

*Paper for the 15th International Conference of National Trusts  
Entebbe, Uganda, September 30th 2013 - October 4th 2013*

In public consciousness sport is practically everywhere regarded as an independent and self-sufficient sphere of life of the modern society. Among social phenomena it has an important position along with such phenomena as culture and education. The meaning of this notion is so deeply rooted in the public consciousness that it is clearly realized in the modern society and as the notion of culture it does not need any definitions. As a result we are facing quite a paradoxical situation: socialized phenomena of the modern times – culture and sport – do not have generally accepted definitions, which reveal their ontological closeness.

Being an important global phenomenon, sport is becoming an independent object of study in history, geography, psychology, anthropology and social sciences. This approach is sound also from conceptual positions. However we suppose that it gets strict logics only in the understanding of sport as a phenomenon of culture, i.e. a phenomenon connected with culture genetically and historically.

### **Sport as phenomenon of culture**

In modern world sport is often considered as professional sport, as sport of records. But nobody would question the importance of amateur sport and such an enormous part of social life as physical culture in all its forms and manifestations. Moreover, in the soviet period of Russian history sport was clearly and definitely denoted as a part of physical culture, aimed at physical development of people and designed to encourage harmonious formation of individuality. In particular, it is determined this way in the Large Soviet Encyclopedia and other editions of that time, the time of great victories of Soviet athletes in the world.

The view on sport as a part of physical culture and consequently as a part of culture in general dates back to protosports manifestations of the remote past, including ancient Greece. Namely in Greece the civilized principle “A person is uncultured if he can not read and swim” was

formulated and it is still topical and up-to-date. This definition gives the idea of culture as the result of harmonious synthesis of spiritual and physical development of a person.

Traditions of Olympic Games in ancient times are justly considered to be the source of modern sport. And it is true, true at least owing to the scale of this event: 293 Olympiads from 776 BC. But account is not always taken of the fact that competitions of athletes were not the only type of events in programmes of great celebrations in honour of Zeus, which were Olympiads of that time. Different kinds of intellectual competitions, competitions in artistic skills and others were an integral part in the Games.

A famous combination of the spiritual and the physical was typical not only in ancient Olympia. It occurred in Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games. The correlation between spiritual and physical factors in their programmes was individual and was determined by space and time conditions of that period. For example, according to historical data, in Delphi, on Parnassus hillsides, special attention was given to artistic and intellectual competitions. However, judging from the quality of excellent stadium, gymnasium and other sport-oriented objects of this city, the Games were held not to the detriment of athletic competitions of the Delphic Games.

Symptomatically, Olympic, Delphic and other ancient games are depicted in a number of literary monuments, in particular in the works of Homer, Apollodorus, Herodot, Plato and other authors of the past. For us it is an undisputable fact that they gave a powerful stimulus to the development of ancient Greek poetry, architecture, sculpture, ethics and esthetics. And through the Greek culture - to cultures of other nations, up to the present moment.

The fact that sport belongs to culture is confirmed also by a number of other arguments. Here are just some of them:

- Sports is an accepted part of history in almost all countries and nations, it is legends, myths, traditions, other spiritual values of civilization;
- All sports are the result of creativeness of nations, their contribution to the world culture;
- Sports is historical vocabulary, which combines a lot of words understandable in the majority of languages without dictionaries: stadium, hippodrome, athletics, palaestra, gymnasium, .... Among them the word “sport” itself;
- The language of sport is universal and it doesn't require translation, which makes sport truly universal human culture.

Thus, sport in most respects is a phenomenon of culture and at the same time – its direct source both in ancient and our days. That's why sport in its nature is not just cult of strength, stamina, dexterity and other physical characteristics; it is culture of their harmony combined with spiritual merits of individuality. Sport is a part of human culture, but it is also a special type of culture initially directed to pacifist values.

### **Sport as culture of peace**

Certainly Olympic Games and other ancient games served many socially important functions. It may be assumed that one of the most important functions was to ensure favorable international (interstate, intertribal etc.) climate. It is a well-known fact that in ancient Greece during the Olympic Games there was announced "Ekecheiria" (truce) to stop fighting between constantly conflicting neighbors.

It seems not so easy to determine what role the periods of Olympic truce played in the Olympic Games. But on the whole we can state that they were an essential, effective and, probably, non-alternative peacekeeping instrument in Hellenic world. Great demand of this instrument for centuries enables us to believe that ancient Olympic and other games revealed the instinct of self-preservation at the population level. These games were significant for the development of Hellenic society.

Competitions of athletes in ancient Greek stadiums became a real alternative to fighting in battlefields. In both areas people could gain laurels of winner, but in the first case – bloodless and not less impressive. We know the names of ancient Olympic champions, they became truly national heroes. At that time a famous principle was born "One pulls off a victory, everybody wins".

No doubt, the recreator of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin fully realized the potential of peace making role of sport. And no wonder, in his well-known ode to sport, considering all advantages of sport, Coubertin focuses on the highest of them – its peacekeeping potential. The novella "Oh sport! You are peace" logically completes this generally accepted hymn to sport, sport as culture of peace [2].

It is obvious that at the turn of XIX and XX centuries the most important problem the mankind faced was the problem of keeping peace between nations. That's why the initiative of Pierre de Coubertin was quite logical at that moment as well as hopes of different nations to recreate the

Olympic Movement as a peace factor. We must admit that these hopes, although not to the full extent, have come true. What is more, in the cases when the tradition of Olympic truce was rigidly trampled, nations had even more reasons to condemn aggressors. So, in particular, it was the case of Georgia starting military action against South Ossetia in August 2008 – the day of beginning XXIX Olympic Games in Beijing.

Today, as it used to be in the past, sport not only directly but also implicitly promotes positive – from neutral to friendly – relations between nations. It is in high demand in the modern world as one of the most efficient measures of cross-cultural dialogue, including complicated intercultural and geopolitical situations. The bright example of it is the British Commonwealth Games. The Spartakiad in the USSR used to have similar role. And this list can be made much longer. But what is more important, we need to understand how the peacekeeping potential of the modern sport has been realized.

Answering this question we have to note that the importance of this potential is generally accepted, which is proven, in particular, by the International forum “Peace and sport” held successfully in Sochi in October-November 2012. The forthcoming Winter Olympic Games in Sochi 2014 can serve the important peacemaking purpose.

However at the moment we are facing a clear underestimation of improving international relations by means of sports events in many countries in the world, including Russia. The situation may take a turn for the better in case we recreate, for example, the analogues of Spartakiad of USSR nations in post-Soviet territory, and probably in the territory of the former socialistic commonwealth of states. Sport can do it! And it is morally wrong not to promote it.

### **Sport as phenomenon of historical heritage**

What is sport as a phenomenon of universal physical and spiritual culture, what is its social nature? Answering this question, we should note that sport is first of all the traditions of supporting in the society the best human qualities, such as persistence, determination, responsibility, justice. These traditions are thousands years of age, they accompany practically all the history of mankind. They weaken in the worst times of history and conversely. It is known that people all over the world highly appreciate them, consider them to be their own, protect from oblivion, support by all means available, strive to multiply them. All these enable us to identify the nature of sport, interpreting it as the phenomenon of heritage [4].

Our understanding of the nature and meaning of sport as a phenomenon of social life in the modern civilization let us maintain that:

- Sport is heritage, historical and cultural heritage, important part of the world cultural heritage;
- Sport is one of the brightest phenomena of world heritage, revealing at the global and national levels;
- Sport as heritage reveals in forms of tangible and nontangible cultural values.

Humankind de facto accepts sport as a phenomenon of world heritage in the forms of: monuments of sports history and their ensembles, memorial places connected with sports historical events, sports games and holidays, memorial races, outstanding achievements of some athletes and sports teams and others [1].

So, the ruins of ancient Olympia on Peloponnesus are rightly regarded as the site of World heritage. Greek sites of world heritage also include Delphi and Epidaurus with their numerous stadiums and other “sports” venues. Olympic stadiums in Athens are not considered as World heritage in form, but they really are in their nature. The situation is similar with Olympic stadiums in other cities in the world. Luzniki in Moscow is an undisputed heritage of this kind. Certainly the list of really valuable historical cultural sports objects in the Russian capital is not limited by this venue.

It is important to stress that not only tangible objects but nontangible phenomena as well are regarded as heritage. Half-remembered Russian “lapta” (bat), not very popular nowadays “gorodki” and other Russian national games could be examples of such heritage. Here we can include competitive in spirit fisticuffs in Ancient Russia at different festivals. There is no need to specify that such customs, games and festivals are intrinsic to all nations of Russia and other countries. They are known to ethnologists, historians, local historians. But quite often they, as well as different memorial competitions, are not understood in public consciousness as cultural heritage. Officially, at the moment neither in Russia nor in foreign countries many valuable sports venues and phenomena are not accepted as sites of heritage. This contradicts ideology and tendencies of development of world politics in the area of heritage.

Modern activity in the field of heritage at the global level is concentrated in UNESCO and its World Heritage Committee. UNESCO Convention on the protection of world cultural and natural heritage was adopted more than 40 years ago. The List of World cultural and natural heritage of UNESCO has been kept since 1977, where there are 982 properties up to the July 2013. The List of World nontangible cultural heritage (213 points) has been kept since 2001. Neither of them has really existing objects and phenomena of sports heritage.

For the years of development of world heritage ideas in the corresponding lists, along with such traditional categories as religious buildings and structures, outstanding architectural complexes, etc., there appeared new, less traditional categories, for example, industrial and memorial objects. Special field-related conventions were also put into practice, for example, Convention on the protection of underwater cultural heritage. And in this connection the absence of initiatives on world sports heritage of humankind or national sports heritage in different countries seems quite strange. Moreover, the aims of sports movement do not contradict, but in many respects, coincide with the aims of UNESCO activities.

Therefore, we suppose that it is high time to initiate the discussion of the question on preparing and accepting the relevant international regulation about world sports heritage, with the world Olympic heritage being the core of it. It seems logical that this regulation should be the convention of UNESCO or IOC or their joint convention. Other forms of such a regulation are possible. As palliative a new category in the structure of UNESCO World heritage list is also possible. Professionals could provide the drafts of such documents, drawing on the considerations of experts from relevant academic and special institutions. Anyway this work should be started with professional discussion of the problem conducted by experts from UNESCO, International Olympic Committee and other international sports structures.

The adoption of international convention on sports human heritage and the list of guarded properties and phenomena of this heritage will encourage sports as a phenomenon of global universal culture to get the right social status in the world community. In this case sport becomes even more fundamental factor of social development, the factor of sustainable development of mankind [4].

### **Sport and sustainable development**

In fact, sport as a part of physical culture is, as it was specified above, cultural heritage of humankind. As heritage, sport in fact is an important factor of sustainable development.

However the phenomenon of sport, ironically, is not officially accepted as a factor of sustainable development. In the final document of the United Nations Conference “Rio+20” sport is never mentioned, neither directly nor implicitly. In the materials of other UN conferences on sustainable development (Rio de Janeiro 1992, Johannesburg 2002) there is no sport, physical culture or their derivatives [3]. The situation is quite strange, to say the least of it.

It is the case when arguments for integrating sport into the ideology of sustainable development seem superfluous as these notions are definitely interconnected and interdependent. It appears, it’s time the representatives of sports sphere and ideologists of sustainable development made steps towards cooperation at the global level. It really corresponds to the mutual interests of both spheres. And the contrary situation: to procrastinate the acceptance of importance to integrate sport into sustainable development means to lose opportunities.

Russia seems to understand it earlier than others. The first pilot workshop “Mega-projects in sport: potential of space sustainable development ” prepared and carried out by Russian International Olympic University in conjunction with Moscow University and PricewaterhouseCoopers and with participation of leading world experts in pre-olympic Sochi in the autumn 2012 is really indicative of this tendency.

## **Conclusion**

Sport professionalization and commercialization are usually called the most characteristic trends in the development of modern sport. No doubt, these trends do not always encourage the growth of mass involvement, its manifestation as physical culture. The development of sport as an essential part of universal spiritual culture, as an integral part of historical cultural heritage can change the situation for the better for the benefit of people, countries and the world. It was the direction given at the end of the XIX century by Pierre de Coubertin.

Having accepted how significant and up-to-date the ideas of a great sports enthusiast were, we promote and encourage the development of sport as an integral phenomenon of physical and spiritual culture, as a factor of sustainable development of humankind.

## **References**

1. *Chesnok V.F.* A branch of the sacred olive tree. The gods and heroes of ancient stadiums in Russia. – Rostov on Don: Omega Publisher, 2007. 384 p. (in Russian).

2. *Pierre de Coubertin*. Olympic memoirs: translated from French, ed.A.Yu. Lester. – Moscow: Reed Group, 2011. 176 p. (in Russian).
3. Future we want. Outcome Document of the UN Conference "Rio +20". Rio de Janeiro, 2012.
4. *Mazurov Yu. L.* Sport as an universal culture // RIOU Herald. №4, 2012. P. 42-47 (in Russian).
5. *Mazurov Yu. L.* Sport and sustainable development // On the way to sustainable development of Russia. № 63, 2013. P. 14-18 (in Russian).