



The many different we's

Sport is not one, nor is nationalism. Dr. Phil Henning Eichberg drew an amazing picture of how our different sports cultures are always interwoven with nation building and politics

»We use to regard the market as the driving force of globalisation, but when you look closely at sport, you can see an alternative globalisation driven by people-to-people relations.« This was the message of Dr. Phil. Henning Eichberg, who as a start told three everyday sports stories illustrating his theories.

THE FIRST was about a Danish boy of twelve years who experiences the European soccer championship in 1992, which brought Danish football to the top.

"We travelled to Copenhagen some hours before the match should start, so we got some good places in front of the large screen which was erected on the place of the city hall. At first we sat down on the asphalt and regarded the singing roligans (fans), but later on we had to rise because more and more people arrived ... After 19 minutes, the first goal was shot. The mood raised extremely high, and the jubilation became wilder and wilder. (...) When 31 minutes of the second half-time were played and the second goal was shown on the screen, the mood really was up to the heat of cooking. A total chaos seemed to break out, and in the midst of the crowd one really had to take care in order not to fall and to be kicked down. (...). But even if it became dangerous at last, this was one of the greatest experiences I have had in my life."

The soccer victory and especially the fact that the final match was won against Germany, became a national event in

Denmark. Its significance transgressed by far the limits of sport. Some observers related this triumph in sports to the referendum the same year, when the majority of the Danish voted "No" against the Maastricht treaty of the European Union.

THE SECOND story is about quite another type of movement - the Danish tradition of gymnastics. In 1931, the Danish gymnastic leader Niels Bukh organized a tour around the world with his gymnastic team. This is what he experienced in Korea, which at that time was under Japanese military rule.

"Our good reminiscences from China and Korea are related to crowds of people and Danish flags at the reception at the railway stations of Mukden and Seoul and to childrens' choirs singing Danish songs there. When we demonstrated our gymnastics in the stadium of Seoul and let our flag down in front of 35 000 amazed people who were jubilating for Denmark, and when the large students' choir was singing 'King Christian' (the Danish national anthem), we all felt stronger than ever before how wonderful it was to be Danish and to serve Denmark."

The Niels Bukh gymnastics had its roots in the democratic farmers' folkelig gymnastics, but was in its new form met by an especially warm welcome in Japan as well in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Niels Bukh was himself- impressed by the Germany of 1933 which he, though not exactly a National Socialist himself, regarded as a model for Denmark.

THE THIRD situation differs fundamentally both from the sportive and the gymnastic pattern. The story is about a tug-of-war contest, which was the high-light of "Fagenes Fest", the workers' "festival of professions" in Copenhagen 1938. The Danish daily "Social Demokraten" described it like this:

"There were gigantic achievements. The blacksmiths quickly defeated the bakers, and the tailors could not stand long time against the coal-heavers who weighed at least twice as much. But there arose a gigantic competition between the dairy



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workers and the brewery men - and much to the distress of the agitators for abstinence, the beer won. The final was between the brewers and the coalmen, and here the brewery workers had 'to bite the dust'. 'This is not at all surprising', said the captain of the coal-heavers. 'You only carry the beer, but it is us who drink it.'

The "Festival of the Professions" started in 1938 as an annual sport festivity of the Danish workers' movement, stimulated by similar arrangements in France and Germany. It combined sports events with more carnivalistic competitions like running-matches of domestic servants with buckets and scrubbers, going-matches of pottery workers with piles of plates on their heads, hammer cast of blacksmiths and obstacle races of socialist scouts eating cream puffs on their way. During the Second World War when Nazi Germany held Denmark occupied, Fagenes Fest developed towards a demonstration of national togetherness. As this, the festival attracted the largest spectators-hip in its history.

In the three described situations of sport, very different patterns of identification (...) become visible, different ways of "we"-building and belonging.

ONE PATTERN IS CHARACTERIZED by competition and result, and what comes out of it is an identity of production. Sport of achievement produces "wares" in centi-metres, grams, seconds, points, goals, medal listing ranks or victorious names, which are taken as an indicator for "who we are". By linking identification to these results, the competitive encounter in sports is stirring up feelings of connection and togetherness. Out-comes and records of sport are regarded as representative, as collective results: "Two-zero for us." The

result can release strong emotions: "We have won" - or: "We were defeated." This model is hegemonial in the most of modern sport, especially in Olympic sport and consequently in the media reception of sports.

ANOTHER PATTERN stresses discipline and fitness for the purpose of an identity of integration. Gymnastics contrasts to sport by being independent of the measurement of results. Competition is not needed here either, and it can be one single team alone which arouses the impression of collective identity and the feeling of community. In this case the presentation and production of "we"-feeling is effected by discipline and a collective demonstration of fitness. A team of dynamic young people moves in rank and file, with flag and hymn, radiating by its joint force and precision, "who we are".

THE THIRD PATTERN centers around festivity and play, leading to popular identity. In popular festivity, dance, play and game, all people can participate, old and young, male and female, people from different ethnic origins and different languages, top athletes as well as handicapped persons. The feeling of "we" is produced by the encounter, the meeting in a temporary community of participation. In this situation, tradition and surprise are mixing, competition and laughter, drunkenness, role game and masking. Local associations may function as elements of continuity for popular sport, but the festive encounter is the important event - a moment of discontinuity, surprise and becoming "high" in the here-and-now. The differences inside the group are not treated by streamlining or uniforming them, but by displaying or even overstressing them, often in grotesque and carnivalistic forms. The excentricity of popular culture follows the logics of mutual communication: The truth is neither here nor there, it is in-between.

THE THREE CASES show that there is not only politics in sport and not only identity building in movement culture. But also the other way round: There is sport in politics - there is experience of movement in identity. And we find neither only one sport, nor only one type of national identity, but a structured multiplicity."

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WE NEED YOUR HELP

»Here in Kosovo, sport is only slowly recovering from the war. We have 23 sports associations, and tournaments are arranged in many disciplines. But we badly need facilities, equipment and international contacts. We need help from the international community.«

So says Driton Latifi, Sports Editor of the newspaper Koha Ditore from Pristina, Kosovo - one of the cities bombed by NATO in 1999. Addressing a fringe meeting of Play the Game, Latifi showed a video from soccer team FC Pristina's final first division game before the war - a game that was brought to a halt by Serbian police. The video shows police arresting a player in front of 30,000 fleeing fans.

»Some sports were forbidden, and many sportsmen and women were arrested« he says of the time under Serb domination. »Clubs were thrown out of their stadiums because they were of Albanian origin, and when they tried to play at another venue they were arrested. Among other things, a 12-year-old boy was arrested whilst playing football. We have been through some very hard times. I would not want anyone to suffer like we did - not even the Serbs.«

After the war of 1999, the picture has now changed. Whereas football was the most popular sport in the region, basketball has now taken over.

The need for better facilities is underlined by demographics, said Driton. Around 53% of Kosovo's inhabitants are under 19, an age in which sport is highly important to growth, social integration and well being. He expressed his hope that sport can play an important part in easing tension in the area.

