Play the game is unique and irreplaceable in what it does to educate both sports journalists and media scholars alike. It was the best (and most fun) conference I have been to.

The panelists revealed outstanding information on current trends that are important to analysis of what we collectively call the “sports world”.

Iri Cermak, Sports Researcher, USA

Festival Journalism

By Marlene Jensen

When sport is festivity it implies some special challenges for a journalism that is trained to report what is measured and weighed. However, it is not an impossible task.

“Sport and festivity isn’t two separate parts. However, this is the way they are represented in the media. That is neither true to the history, reality or development,” says scientist, culture sociologist and historian, Henning Eichberg, situated at the Research Institute for Sport, Culture and Civil Society in Denmark.

He believes that sport journalism has a distorted priority in its focus on results, records and stars and in its deviation from covering events that don’t produce top performances and where techniques and tactics don’t come into play.

“While there doesn’t exist any specific festival journalism a whole professional world has arisen around sport journalism. However, based on a case study of the Landstævne (a Danish sport and culture festival, red.) I have some examples illustrating that it is possible to measure and weigh popular sport too,” he says.

The record: Great box on ears – Falling participation at DGI’s festival in Bornholm gives deficit of millions (Ekstra Bladet)

The stars: ‘Veterans: The Heroes of every day sports’ (Jyllands-Posten)

The spectacular – the event inside the event: ‘Water, water and water again’ (Bornholms Tidende)

The stage of cheers: ‘Pleasure of life at the festival – Rain showers, storm and festivity for the community’ (Ungdom & Idræt)

‘However, festival journalism is more than sport journalism. It is a historical and poetical genre containing a sensitive balance between the objectivity and subjectivity of the event and the cross roads of the cultural, political and emotional relations. This is why festival of popular sports not just shall be measured and weighed – it’s a cultural event and culture is a struggle – a struggle for giving each moment of life more meaning,” says Henning Eichberg.

Sport also has to be a break from business news and other mundane reporting. You have to respect that sports journalism is a slightly lighter genre,” Henrik Brandt says.

Who cares for somersaults?

In Olav Skaaning Andersen view, reportage on broadly based sports and athletics is downgraded because of its lack of appeal in print. The readers just aren’t interested.

Henrik Brandt strongly disagrees with this: «Many sports journalists probably feel that the readers don’t care for ordinary somersaults. But it is our duty to show that there are other aspects to those somersaults, and more aspects to the more broadly based sports and athletics,” he says, pointing out a recent commitment by Jyllands-Posten into investigating sports in relation to health and fitness. The newspaper wrote about prescribed physical exercise, about physical education in schools, and about the organisations of broadly based sports and athletics. “I have never seen such a strong response from the readers. My sources were called to the Danish Parliament for consultation. It really triggered a debate – it was very satisfying. Also, I got many letters from female readers who were happy to at last find something worth reading in the sports pages.”

“But it’s a bit of a struggle to write this type of story and fight for it to be included in the sports pages, and not moved to the health or domestic pages. Also, it is on areas you won’t gain any prestige for writing about,” Henrik Brandt says.

Both Brandt and Skaaning see a clear need to rethink and develop sports journalism, but neither have any manifestoes ready. «We know that 51 per cent of the adult Danish population partake in sports. When we look at the amount of readers who turn to the sports pages, the numbers don’t tally. Clearly, something is wrong,” Brandt says.

Media analyst Kirsten Frandsen finds it difficult to point to a single initiative that can reverse the trend, shifting sports journalism away from uncritical entertainment and domination by commercial interests. «I must admit that I am pessimistic. There is a tendency for parts of the sports world to become unreasonably greedy for money. Maybe it is the audience that will draw the line somewhere,” Kirsten Frandsen says.

But it’s a bit of a struggle to write this type of story and fight for it to be included in the sports pages, and not moved to the health or domestic pages. Also, it is on areas you won’t gain any prestige for writing about.”

Søren Schultz Jørgensen ssj@mm.dk

Iris Schultz Jørgensen ssj@mm.dk

The panelists revealed outstanding information on current trends that are important to analysis of what we collectively call the “sports world”.

Translation: Sune Watts