

THE INTEGRATIVE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SPORT DEVELOPMENT

Abdelaziz Hentati^a, Driss Boudhiba^b, Ayman Guemri^c, Saber Nouira^d, Hamza Baati^e, Salmen Jdidi^f

^{a,b,c,d,e} Higher Institute of Sport and Physical Education of Sfax. Tunisia

^f Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Sfax. Tunisia

Abdelaziz Hentati : aziz.hentati@yahoo.fr

Abstract

Competitive sports are based on an elitist system which is built upon the autonomy of the subject (De Tocqueville, Weber, Boudon). This feature is deeply-rooted in the imagination of humankind with degrees varying from one society to another (Hofstede, 1994). This author has identified four cultural dimensions. We retain one dimension, namely distance with respect to power. Subjects tend to accept submission if authoritarian influence comes from a famous person. With reference to this dimension, the experimental protocol proposes to students a scenario where they are called to respond to this command mode. The obtained results showed no significant differences between the estimated performance and the actual performance. We propose to complete the model of Hofstede by introducing a dimension illustrating the specificity of the Arab-Muslim culture. It is a culture of dignity where respect for authority, is associated with an affirmation of the equality of humans (Zghal, 1994).

Keywords: Sport development, integration, culture, submission, paternalism, Tunisia

1. INTRODUCTION

By the time when sport seems to be a "religion of globalization" (De Brie, 1996, p. 96) supported by the rapid development of information and communication technologies, is it appropriate to talk about cultural differences for sport development?

The rationality of the results that invades the minds diverts attention from culture. The effect of culture is brushed aside to give way to universal management models of sports careers. This trend of global monoculture (Lévi-Strauss, 1955) is contested by such authors as Latouche (1999). Cultures resist, he says, because *"there are no values that transcend the plurality of cultures for the simple reason that a value exists as such only in a given cultural context."* This leads to the relativity of the models of this approach as conceived by Triki (1998). Indeed, any element, in this case sport, *"coming from another culture can become operative and understood as such only if it is reinterpreted and reinserted with concepts, ideas and ways of the receiving culture"*.

Based on the analysis of Hofstede (1994) and D'Iribarne (1998), Zghal (2008) considers that *"it is through culture that facts and acts are interpreted. It affects the leadership styles and helps in the understanding of the spirits of resistance and inertia of those being led"* [...]. These preliminary remarks introduce the object of the study: highlighting the integrative role of culture in the development of competitive sport in Tunisia.

COMPETITIVENESS OF SPORT IN TUNISIA

Tunisian sportsmen are not really competitive at the international level. Apart from the performances particularly achieved by the runner Mohamed Gammoudi at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, by the judoka Anis Lounifi, world champion in Munich 2001 and by the Olympic champion swimmer in 1500 m freestyle at 2008 Beijing Olympics Oussama Mellouli, who also became world champion for the same distance in Rome in August 2009, the international achievements remain rare.

Several reasons may explain the delay of sport development in Tunisia:

- A universal rather than endogenous model advocating instrumental rationality at the expense of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1973; Hentati, 1999).
- A model that includes structural deficiencies at the rationalization strategy which is believed to be adopted (Hentati, 2013).
- A model that takes on the quantitative and ignores the qualitative approach of development (Hentati, 2014).
- A model that ignores the power of culture as a potential that can induce change and creativity.

The crisis that sport is going through is not scientific, technological, financial or infrastructural. In fact, it is primarily a crisis of meaning and only culture could give meanings. How? We will respond by addressing the founding values of modern sport.

CORE VALUES OF SPORT: COMPETITION, INDIVIDUALISM AND AUTONOMY

Historian Ulmann (1977) showed that the competition in the "*modern sport cannot be disassociated from the idea of progress*" (p. 335). He argues that with the advent of capitalism, progress in scientific terms has been undeniable. But on the other hand, there is "*an integral and complementary corporal regression of such progress*": *the technique has indeed released the body and simultaneously unaccustomed the effort. To reach consummate progress, it must be scientific as well as physical. By addressing the body, sports have "contributed to the perfection of the notion of progress"* (Ulmann, p. 336).

Competition is associated with individualism. Following the steps of A. De Tocqueville and Weber, R. Boudon (2005) introduced the paradigm of methodological individualism, in which the project is to "*explain a social phenomenon by making the result of behavior understandable for the concerned individual*". Referring to the laws set forth by these founders, including Tocqueville, Boudon considers that there is one that is undoubtedly the most famous: "*equality promotes individualism .i.e. the withdrawal into oneself and the small inner circle*" (Boudon, p. 7).

The consequences of this sociological legacy are crucial so that, as Ehrenberg points out (1998, pp. 14) "*the extent of the ideal individual is not much docility but the initiative*". In sports, it is illustrated by the "worship of performance" (Ehrenberg, 1991), the strong desire to achieve victory expressed in the time-honored phrase: winning is not all what matters, but it is the only thing that counts.

However, there are two types of individualism to be identified: A "particularistic" individualism, which reflects the morality of "everyone for himself", and "universalist" individualism, based on the recognition of collective values by everyone. The latter principle implies freedom and equality of individuals" (Schweisguth, 1995, pp. 134-135).

Individualism is associated with autonomy, a value shared by all Western societies. It is reflected in "*the involvement of the individual and his ability to mobilize his resources to address a variety of situations and problems*" (Chauffaut et al., 2003, p. 15). But E. Morin sees that "the notion of autonomy can be conceived only in relation to the idea of dependence [...]" (Morin, 1981, p. 261).

Thus, competition, individualism and autonomy arise as illustrative values of Western cultures and soon affect all areas of social life, including sports. However, these values are deeply rooted in the imagination of humankind with degrees that vary from one society to another, as demonstrated by Bolinger & al. (1987) and Hofstede (1994).

2. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Culture is a "mental programming" which designates "*ways of thinking, potential feeling and action that are the outcome of a lifelong learning [...] It varies from one group and a class of persons to another, depending on rarely accepted and often misunderstood terms*" (Hofstede, 1994, in M.-C. Bernard). This author has focused on "*the limits of the validity of the theories about the organization and the management of intellectual capital of a single nation. The acknowledged aim [...] is to help unveil the role of culture in the management of humans. The purpose is to describe the main cultural dimensions that differentiate human groups and to show the consequences in the areas of the management of humans. That is to say, the focus is on the way to run and motivate them and to organize their activities*" (Bollinger et al. 1987, p. 17).

"*It is about adapting organizational behavior in multinational companies to local contexts. In this context, the societal culture arises as a potential that lends itself to operationalization. Acting as a source of resistance and dysfunction if ignored by the manager, the societal culture can turn into a factor of motivation, creativity and organizational innovation, if managed as a new reality of the organizational context*" (Zghal, 2008, p. 24).

This model includes four dimensions

- The power distance: The extent of the acceptance of the unequal distribution of power
- Collectivism vs. Individualism: Whether the interests of the group prevail over the interests of the individual or the other way round
- Masculinity vs. femininity: The social consequences of belonging to one sex or the other.
- Avoidance of uncertainty: The degree of anxiety of a given society facing uncertain future.

The management of sporting careers involves these dimensions. It should be understood within this value system with bipolar dimensions. There is a pole characterizing Western cultures such as Germany, Scandinavia, and Anglo-Saxon countries as opposed to another one characterizing cultures of developing nations such as Latin countries, Arab countries and some African countries (Bollinger et al., 1987).

Thus, the cultures whose dimensions are characterized by low hierarchical power distance, hence egalitarian, little individualism and control of uncertainty that tolerates risk-taking, are more likely to make high-level sports achievements.

3. METHOD

In this study, we take on the dimension regarding the distance from power or the extent of the acceptance of its unequal distribution. A non-hierarchical society offers the subjects independence and autonomy in relation to power, which bodes well for performing well in

sport. Thus, with reference to the classification of Hofstede, it seems that the Tunisian culture, being characterized by high power distance, is unlikely to enhance excellence in sport in comparison with low power distance cultures.

Nevertheless, it is important to make sure that the Tunisian culture is as hierarchical as the findings of Hofstede seem to suggest. We shall undertake such verification in the discussion section, after performing the experiment and presenting the results.

We stipulate that the independence of subjects from the authority is the principle of sport performance. A group of students receives a command mode from a youth leader with confirmed fame: the subjects tend to accept submission if the authoritarian influence comes from someone enjoying significant social capital.

The experimental procedure is inspired by the experimentation of Wilson (1968). Wilson measures the obedience to an educated person, thus to the statutory authority.

Our experience is to have students [N = 18; Age: 22 years (± 1.00)] perform an exercise in which the body is alternately raised from and lowered to the floor by the arms only, the trunk being kept straight with the toes and hands resting on the floor (press-ups). The number of repetitions relatively exceeds the actual capabilities of each subject.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results showed no significant differences between the estimated performance [$F = (30.2) 1.095$; $p = .42$] and the performance achieved [$F = (32.5)$; $p = .176$]. Such results do not confirm the hypothesis. Rather, they call for the assertion that the subjects are autonomous from the source of authority, which would be favorable for the achievement sports performance.

Then, how could we explain that this is not true in practice? The first explanation is: To verify these results on a larger sample and their confirmation with a common youth leader (anonymous).

Pending the confirmation or the refutation of such non significance with a larger sample and an anonymous source of command, let us see what these results mean and discuss them in light of the performed work. We will discuss the model of Hofstede (the dimension of power distance) by introducing a dimension which illustrates the specificity of the Arab-Muslim culture, as was done for the Far Eastern cultures (the introduction of the Confucian dynamism, a value that corresponds to an orientation towards the long term).

The analyses of Zghal (1994) regarding the Tunisian example make it possible to put these results into perspective. For this author, a great respect for the authority or the position goes hand in hand with a great affirmation of the equality of humans. Her researches offer a new useful concept to discuss our results, referred to as "the culture of dignity". Indeed, the new concept questions the two-pole Manichean tendency of power distance cultures that classifies cultures into autonomous cultures and heteronomous cultures.

The introduction of the equal-dignity dimension means the rejection of any submission to the authority of others. "*This has its foundation in the Sunni Muslim religions which does not recognize intermediation between Allah and Men [...] The Hadith recalls that all men are of the same nature and calls for humility and the equal treatment of Men, whether they are rich or the poor, weak or strong.*" (Zghal, 2008, p. 27). But, one is left to wonder how to solve the contradiction caused by the fact that human society is hierarchical? The author introduces an adjuvant dimension, paternalism. It "*is a [...] sort of resolving a dilemma which is created by the theoretically humiliating subordinate situation. Paternalism is based on the bias in favor of the head towards his subordinates and his support of their interests and the primacy of the emotional climate in social relations*" (Zghal, 2008, pp. 27-28 & et Zghal, 1994, pp 180-181).

Ultimately, the author concludes that "we are dealing with an original and coherent cultural configuration including these interrelated elements: the commitment to the values of equality-dignity and paternalism as a regulator of situations where inequality is inevitable [...]" (p. 29)

Have we come all this way only to find ourselves facing a dimension which is more controversial than paternalism? Nonetheless, it is through in this cultural configuration, in which paternalism is the central core, that Tunisians would address competitive sports. This is defined as "*a social relationship where inequality is deflected and transfigured by a social metaphor that likens the authority holder to a father, and the agents subjected to that authority to his children. This metaphor tends to transform the power and exploitation relations into ethical and emotional relations, and duty and feeling replace regulation and benefit [...]*" (Pinçon, 1985, p. 95). In this case, it is conceivable to think positively about paternalism. This would actually prevent social conflicts and maintain social peace.

5. CONCLUSION

Our approach to the consideration of the cultural factor initially is meant to prevent the occurrence of failures in the process leading to sport excellence due to the inconsistency between the adopted model of preparation and the seemingly unavoidable cultural dimensions. Nonetheless, it can be argued that paternalism can threaten the autonomy of the subjects. Morin replied that this is a "*simplified opposition between autonomy without dependence and determinism of dependence without autonomy*" (Morin, 1981, p. 261).

In fact, it is about creating an emotional climate of listening and caring, as well as confidence in one's ability to improve. It is a climate in which every athlete feels considered and supported through the management of his interests: the autonomy aspect of the relationship.

Yet, there is no autonomy without dependence. The supported athletes, themselves, are responsible for improving of their own productivity, developing their resources, and being sportingly more effective.

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