

Sport, physical activities and quality of life at work

Giovanni Di Cola

International Labour Office (ILO) Special Adviser

The ILO Recommendation on Utilisation of Spare Time (1924)

The ILO's promotion of development through sport began in 1922, with a visionary partnership formed between the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) first President Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the then Director of the ILO, Albert Thomas. Their first joint venture was the adoption by the International Labour Conference in 1924 of the "Utilisation of Spare Time Recommendation".

The ILO Recommendation 21 (R.21) included all areas targeted today by sport stakeholders, private and public businesses and workers and employers' organizations and organizing committees of major sporting events.

In fact, spare time for workers, social hygiene (the equivalent of occupational safety and health), housing policy and local institutions involved in "the free use" of sport institutions and coordination of local stakeholders were highlighted by the Recommendation.

If not for the wording, the topics proposed were anticipating on what we call today sustainability and compliance with decent work standards.

The underlying matter was the promotion of equality of opportunities and free access to recreational and sport activities for workers and their families and the prevention against diseases including alcohol, tuberculosis and gambling.

Another important suggestion in the Recommendation was the role that local institutions should play in achieving spare time utilisation. This included "*Workers domestic economy and family life (...) which [combined] the benefits of recreation with the (...) development of the physical health and strength of the young workers to give free play to their energies in a manner which encourages initiative and spirit of emulation*".

"The Conference [recommended] that each Member [State] should consider the possibility of

promoting the formation of district or local committees, composed of representatives of public authorities, of employers' and workers' organizations and of co-operatives associations for co-ordinating and harmonising the activities of the various institutions [by] providing means of recreation".

The issue of workers freedom and independence was clearly highlighted in R. 21 in a way that would fully comply today with human and labour rights, as reported in previous communications on the subject¹.

Finally, the common denominator with the present reality was training and education be accessible to the workers in their "spare time", as a key feature of quality of life and work balance.

Present challenges and opportunities

The Recommendation on "Utilisation of Spare Time" is no longer in use today.

However, the ILO and the IOC have continued to work together and their partnership reverts today to the Olympic Agenda 2020 and to "Decent Work Agenda" (DWA), with focus on sustainable Games and holistic development of the youth.

The ILO is also working with its constituents, workers and employer's organizations and ministries of labour, sport entities, universities and training centres to promote innovative training initiatives by developing skills for employability through sport.

The above approach is based on a survey carried out in 260 EU sport funded projects from the 2004 European Year of Sport, and training activities implemented in countries across regions to develop: a) common framework for sport and development stakeholders; b) skills development in sports.

The European Commission is presently undertaking a study on Human Resources Development in Sport under which the contribution of "sport to employability of young people" is addressed. The study which should be ready by the end of 2016, follows the Slovak Presidency organized "Conference on Education in and through Sport", held in Bratislava in July 2016.

Such developments lead to innovative ideas of training initiatives that would focus on developing soft and employability skills and promote capacities to develop sustainable sporting events in line with global agendas recommendations (namely the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the already mentioned Olympic Agenda 2020), and relevant international standards.

The goal of such activities is to provide students from all background, coaches, athletes, sport ambassadors as well as sport managers, with practical skills and portable competencies necessary to enter the labour market and to apply international standards in planning and delivering sustainable sporting events.

However, there is another reason to go beyond the obvious and extend ourselves into quality of life and the future of work.

1- See *Sport and Citizenship* Think tank (2016), Special issue on "Sport and human rights", *Sport and Citizenship* journal n°36

The future of work and quality of life

Evidently, numbers of paradigm shifts are taking place from the time the R 21 on “Utilisation of Spare time” was adopted in 1924, yet there is common ground.

For example, holistic and sustainable approaches are required as they relate to young people and workers, for sport, recreation, and life-long learning.

Moreover, better working conditions, healthy lifestyle and quality of jobs are pointing at decent work and must be pursued as one.

Finally, innovative training initiatives will have to respond to labour market opportunities and contribute to reduce the actual skills mismatch.

In this regard, employability skills through sport should first be recognized as added value for the labour market beyond sport and for the society as a whole.

Sport can enhance employability skills which in turn may reduce the skills gap and achieve better understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented in the labour market

The World Economic Forum in his Davos Annual Meeting of 2016 highlighted a set of skills that will drive the changes ahead of the global economy and it also indicated that there is a growing skills gap. In fact, 60 per cent of businesses around the world cannot find on the market the right set of skills they are looking for: *“Developed countries are gradually turning to educational models that cultivate skills such as creativity and grit – but they are yet to crack the skills gap. Emerging economies, on the other hand, face more daunting challenges. High drop-out rates, meagre funds, a lack of access and inclusion, and acute teacher shortages continue to plague progress. At the same time, the skills needed to hold a job in the 21st century are a crucial asset for any individual growing up in these countries.”*

As from 2006, the ILO together with sport and academic partners has been working on employability skills from sports projects, compared with internationally recognized employability frameworks and used in training activities carried out in countries across regions².

The conclusion was that sport was effectively instrumental as a “skills multiplier” because the values of sport are universal and they aim at work life balance and point holistically at decent work.

Therefore, if in 1924 recreation was a means to achieve better working and living conditions and quality of life; today sport can enhance employability skills which in turn may reduce the skills

gap and achieve better understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented in the labour market.

As a result, we need to move ahead by: a) implementing such training programmes; b) evaluating their impact on the labour market and in sport value chains; c) assessing the effects on quality of life and the future of work.

Not the least, we can provide young people with skills and tools to overcome employment challenges, achieve work life balance and navigate through an ever changing labour market.

Disclaimer

“Sport, physical activities and quality of life at work”

Copyright © 2016 International Labour Organization

The responsibility for opinions expressed in the article rests solely with its author, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in it.

Sport, activités physiques et qualité de vie au travail

La prise en compte par l'OIT du sport comme outil de développement date de 1922 et du partenariat visionnaire établi entre le premier président du Comité International Olympique, le Baron Pierre de Coubertin, et le Directeur du Bureau International du Travail de l'époque, Albert Thomas. Leur première initiative commune fut, en 1924, l'adoption par la Conférence internationale du travail de la « Recommandation sur l'utilisation du temps libre ».

Cette Recommandation (R.21) incluait alors tous les domaines visés aujourd'hui par les parties prenantes publiques et privées du secteur sportif, les partenaires sociaux et les comités d'organisation des événements sportifs majeurs (répartition du temps de travail, sécurité et santé au travail, politique du logement, implication des institutions locales, accès libre aux institutions sportives, etc.).

La question sous-jacente était alors la promotion de l'égalité des chances et du libre accès aux activités récréatives et sportives pour les travailleurs et leurs familles, ainsi que la prévention de maladies telles que la tuberculose ou d'addictions, à l'alcool ou au jeu par exemple.

Si cette Recommandation n'est plus en vigueur aujourd'hui, l'OIT et le CIO ont continué de travailler ensemble et leur partenariat renvoie aujourd'hui à l'Agenda Olympique 2020 du CIO et à l'Agenda du Travail Décent de l'OIT, avec un accent mis sur la durabilité des Jeux et le développement (global) de la jeunesse.

L'OIT travaille aussi avec ses parties prenantes, les représentants sociaux, les ministères du travail, les entités sportives, les universités et les centres de formation afin de promouvoir des formations innovantes pouvant développer, à travers le sport, les compétences et donc l'employabilité.

Depuis 2006, l'OIT et ses partenaires sportifs et académiques travaillent, sur la base de cadres de référence internationaux, à la reconnaissance des compétences que l'on peut acquérir à travers des projets sportifs et à leur intégration dans le cadre de formations pour le marché du travail à travers le monde.

La conclusion de cette réflexion est que le sport joue un rôle déterminant en tant que « multiplicateur de compétences » en raison notamment de l'universalité des valeurs qu'il porte et qui visent à l'équilibre vie professionnelle-vie personnelle et au travail décent.

Compte-tenu de ces éléments, nous devons aller de l'avant a) en développant de tels programmes de formation b) en évaluant leur impact sur le marché du travail et dans les chaînes de valeur du sport et c) en évaluant les effets sur la qualité de vie et le travail.

Ce faisant, nous donnerons aux jeunes des compétences et outils pour surmonter les obstacles à l'entrée dans le monde du travail, apprendre à reconnaître leur employabilité, atteindre un équilibre vie professionnelle-vie personnelle vie et naviguer à travers un marché du travail en constante évolution.