

The future of sport: what sport in a world of degrowth?

General issue

It is not possible to think about the future of sport without thinking globally about a new social project. Indeed, the current dominant economic model has reached a dead end and there is still no consensus on an alternative. Perhaps the global pandemic of COVID-19 will accelerate the realisation that its origin lies in the destruction of natural resources by an economic system dominated by the search for maximum short-term financial profitability. All recent global pandemics (AIDS, Zika, Ebola, SARS, H1N1, etc.) have originated in the animal kingdom due to the disappearance of ecosystems that bring us closer to animal reservoirs and, to widespread mobility - which facilitates epidemics. The main factors at the origin of zoonoses are therefore well known: the destruction of nature, intensification of agriculture, industrial meat production, and trade in wild species. This systematic destruction of life is not sustainable and we must break with this capitalist system dominated by a logic of short-term profitability.

Beyond this crisis of life, there is also the denial of the question of planetary limits. As Kenneth Boulding pointed out, "anyone who thinks that infinite exponential growth is possible in a finite world is either a fool or an economist". The planet is reaching thresholds of irreversibility with global warming or the collapse of biodiversity, which calls into question its habitability for the human species.

The whole issue of social choices is therefore raised in a new way. In a world of growth, it was possible to satisfy all the demands in terms of transport, education, health, housing, leisure, etc. In a limited world, it is a zero-sum game that is required, hence the question: how to make trade-offs? This question is all the more difficult to resolve because it is necessary to take into account the will of public opinion and decision-makers to implement, or not, a sustainable economic model. If we refuse to change our lifestyles, we come back to Cournot's conclusion in 1830 in his work on the coal question: either we burn everything, which is the end of civilisation and colossal; or we manage the coal stock as a good parent to ensure that future generations benefit as much as possible. If we accept a new model of sustainability, we will clearly have to accept the consequences. The world's resources are shrinking, with a number of peaks that cannot be resolved (oil, fossil resources, metals, arable land). We will therefore have to give up certain types of consumption and ask ourselves how to organise this degrowth:

- Some choices will be relatively easy to make and they will be possible at an individual level (reducing the consumption of meat, fish, milk, eggs or food waste).
- Other constraints will be much more difficult to accept, such as the reduction in long-distance mobility (air travel, sea cruises) or the purchase of a large car (SUV).
- Beyond individual choices, social choices will also be fairly easy to make by populations, countries, institutions and companies whose interests are threatened.

In the end, degrowth risks being partly liberticidal compared to our current world of unlimited growth, i.e., without constraints. From this, two questions arise: what global project for society? What consequences for sport?

A new global project for society

In the years to come, three elements will be at the heart of the reconstruction of our societies: consideration, sobriety and relocation.

- **Consideration**

This first principle consists in recognising the planetary limits and the need to finally stop the destruction of nature. We must reconnect with nature and respect it. This question of the limits to growth is not new in economic thinking, but it was certainly the Meadows report of 1972 that gave the first warning. It clearly stated that the planet's carrying capacity would be exceeded, but the tone of the report remained resolutely optimistic. In 1972, there was still no awareness of the urgency of the situation and the catastrophe was thought to be in the long term.

In 1992, these forecasts were updated at the Rio World Conference, the second Earth Summit, following Stockholm in 1972. Even then, it appeared that the planet's carrying capacity had been exceeded due to deforestation, climate change, loss of biodiversity, etc. However, the authors of the 1992 report were also optimistic that the world economy would be able to be kept within the limits of sustainability. This hope was deflated with the insufficient results of Agenda 21 set up after Rio, followed by the failure of the Johannesburg conference in 2002. Today, the authors are more pessimistic and regret that we have wasted about thirty years. This is also the meaning of the warning issued in 2017 by the international scientific community. No one today can say that we did not know. Nor can it be said that the decision-makers did everything in their power to avoid the catastrophe. The active denial of the environmental issue on the part of decision-makers is impressive and the way out of the crisis will require a public debate on two essential points: the determination of a hierarchy of needs according to the limits of the planet

and the modalities of implementation of a resilient territorialised economy.

- **Sobriety**

The notion of need is central to economic analysis, even though there is no in-depth study of this concept. It is a simple fact that human needs are unlimited in the face of scarce resources to satisfy them. It is, therefore, necessary to make choices where rationality is ensured by the economic calculation of maximisation under constraint.

At the social level, this gap between unlimited needs and scarce resources poses the problem of setting priorities and the hierarchisation of needs. How can we draw the line between the useful and the futile? We always come back to the problem of the finality of economic activity. We must recognise that the driving force of capitalist society is not the need to be satisfied - but profit. As a result, a minority decides for the majority which needs to satisfy according to the logic of profit. Therefore, it is necessary to dispose of a production oriented not towards what is useful but towards what is profitable. Once again, we find the paradox of value shown by the gap between use value and exchange value. Jacques Ellul had thus denounced the multiplication of gadgets, that is to say, goods that have a high exchange value despite a use value close to zero.

However, we must not remain solely at the level of supply and ask ourselves what the demand is for the productive sector. The important thing, in the context of scarce resources, is to determine what our essential needs are. Three organisational principles can underpin a new social construction: sobriety, i.e., limiting our needs; productive efficiency, i.e., savings in production; and the use of renewable resources while respecting their renewal rate. It is the first point on sobriety that is being debated. The objective is to reduce our ecological footprint to less than one planet, which means sorting out our consumption. This brings us back to the problem of the democratic determination of needs to decide what is superfluous and what is necessary.

- **Relocation**

Our economies now operate on a just-in-time basis, tens of thousands of kilometres away. Stocks have not disappeared, but they are constantly circulating in planes, boats, trucks and trains. This widespread mobility is no longer sustainable in an era of dwindling energy resources and accelerating global warming. Moreover, this functioning of the global economy has led to a very great interdependence of national economies relative to each other. This is always a consequence of Ricardo's theory of comparative advantages, which justifies globalisation. Such interdependence can

be very dangerous if one part of the sector supply chain fails. Accordingly, all our economies have become very vulnerable.

It would be desirable to set up a new productive system that is both resilient and sustainable, which implies a relocation of the global economy. Such a change is difficult to envisage in the context of a liberal economy of generalised competition between countries and with fiscal, social and environmental dumping. Rather than seeking maximum competitiveness at all costs, it will be necessary to build resilient and autonomous territories that allow basic needs to be met. This restructuring will not happen instantly and small-scale experiments are desirable. In France, for instance, they could be part of a radical reform of regional planning. Instead of large metropolitan areas, which are increasingly unviable in a time of global warming, we could imagine a network of small, dense cities linked by a public transport system. On this territorial scale, it is possible to organise short supply circuits with agro-ecological production. Other basic needs can also be equally satisfied at the local area level: education, health, leisure, housing, and above all, social ties.

Consequences for sport

Three dimensions will heavily impact the organisation of sport using this new model: mobility, competition and practice.

- **Mobility**

Primarily, amongst the numerous problems, is the carbon footprint of mega-sporting events, which depends largely on mobility. For example, for the 2010 football World Cup in South Africa, international transport alone accounted for 67.4% of the total carbon footprint used in the mobility of players and spectators. It is in such a context of questioning generalised mobility that it is interesting to analyse prospective work on the evolution of lifestyles in France in 2050, in relation to global warming [IDDRI, 2012]. Five scenarios have been constructed and can be grouped into three sets:

1 - The headlong rush. These first two scenarios are those in which we do not want to give up consumption and comfort. The sporting spectacle is maintained. There are no restrictions on mobility through supra-national regulations to combat global warming. Moreover, performance remains at the heart of the system, especially in the second scenario, which could see competitions open to cyborgs. Nevertheless, mobility is becoming increasingly expensive and is reserved for the elite, who do not necessarily want a sporting spectacle. Under these conditions, the profitability of such an event is questionable.

2 - The transition. Here, we have a plural society in which a part of the population leaves the productivist way of life to adopt a

degrowth lifestyle in rural areas. The other section of the population lives in urban areas. The global sporting spectacle is no longer possible because of the high cost of long-distance mobility. We could, logically, see the disappearance of competitive sport, either out of necessity because of the energy shortage, or out of a change in values brought about by the alternativists and in particular the questioning of performance at all costs.

3 - The paradigm shift. By the 2030s, there will be a growing awareness of the need to regulate all common goods. It is the implementation of environmentally friendly lifestyles with the abandonment of air transport, the individual car and the adoption of reasonable consumption and reduced mobility. In all cases, travel becomes rarer, slower and longer. The ethic of voluntary simplicity is becoming more widespread - by necessity. The search for performance is no longer at the heart of society. In such a context, the sporting spectacle is bound to disappear.

- **Competition**

We must invent a new economic system based on values other than those of productivism. In particular, cooperation must replace competition. This means putting an end to the quest for competitiveness at any price with fiscal, social and environmental dumping in the context of a merciless economic war between nations. This idea of cooperation was introduced by Pierre Kropotkin (1938), who reformed Charles Darwin's thinking on the survival of the fittest. Indeed, mutual aid is much more widespread in nature than competition. The species that are able to cooperate survive best in a crisis or shortage. Competition is deadly, and conversely, cooperation allows everyone to survive. The liberal ideology based on competition is, therefore, based on an erroneous idea.

Faced with the current civilisational crisis, to rebuild society, researchers grouped in the doctrine of conviviality have proposed a second Manifesto of convivialism entitled "for a post-neoliberal world". It proposes building a new world around five primary objectives: the fight against hubris and the reduction of inequalities; the relocation of the world economy; the preservation of the environment centred around new lifestyles; the reintegration of those excluded from the labour market; the mastery of technology, especially artificial intelligence.

In such a society built on the principle of cooperation, sporting competition could disappear and be replaced by 'playing'. This would be a return to 'the game' after its disappearance at the time of the industrial revolution of the 19th century in England and its replacement by 'sport'. Unlike the game, in which the aim is the simple

pleasure of participating, sport and especially the sporting spectacle imposes the need to win or to maximise performance. It could therefore impose a new concept of sporting practice.

- **Sporting practice**

We must hope for the advent of a new model of social organisation based on the ideas of sobriety, conviviality and cooperation, and move away from the current model of the 'war of all against all'. In this perspective, the practice of sport and the values it conveys can contribute to the establishment of such a model, which requires a fundamental change in individual behaviour.

One of the greatest obstacles to these behavioural changes is the fear of the defenders of Progress who are scared of returning to the dark ages. Many people are not prepared to give up their cars, televisions and telephones to adopt a more frugal lifestyle for the sake of future generations. We must therefore insist on the fact that the renunciation of gadget consumption can be largely compensated for by eco-compatible relational activities. In part, it would be sufficient to encourage a shift in demand from traditional goods with a high negative ecological impact to environmentally friendly relational goods to maintain a high level of well-being while at the same time assisting in the reduction of GDP.

The just and sober society to be built is not a return to the past but the implementation of an alternative, vibrant and enriching model. It is only in this way that meaning can be restored to the many lives that are solely focused on consumption. From this perspective, the consequences for the sporting spectacle are considerable. Today, we need popular education movements to transmit other values necessary for harmonious good living together, rather than the spectacle of a few indecently overpaid stars. The great sporting events would then give way to disinterested sport simply for pleasure, health, conviviality and self-fulfilment and no longer for gain, records or victory at all costs.

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