

SPORT FOR ALL (SFA)

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Summary

Sport For All (SFA) is an umbrella term for recreation, sport development, mass participation programs and cultural recreation activities aiming to provide leisure opportunities and health promotion to all social groups. In modern societies the societal role of sport changed and physical activity became recognized as one of the most important tools in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. In accordance with this, in the 1960s, the idea of SFA emerged on the policy agenda of industrialized countries, and by the end of the 1990s, the movement reached over 100 countries on all continents. Although the SFA movement has successfully spread around the globe, there are still remarkable differences between countries in sport participation, which depends on the economic situation of the given country and its citizens, in the perception of sport on the individual and the organizational level, and in the orientations of sport policies. From the 1970s, a number of international policy documents were drafted which call attention to the potential contribution sport can make in creating more integrated societies. Since that time, the SFA movement has been advocated by a number of international organizations, which promote cooperation and communication between countries and organize events dedicated to SFA. As indicated by its name, the movement targets all social groups and all generations, however, there are certain groups that is, disadvantaged populations, women, seniors, immigrants and minorities, and persons living with disabilities, whose inclusion in sport requires more concentrated efforts. The situation of SFA shows great diversity around the globe, and the challenges faced by the movement also vary. Nevertheless, the recognition of recreational sport as a tool in

social integration projects indicates that SFA can be regarded as a key policy area for the 21st century.

1. Introduction

In pre-modern societies, physical exercise was an integral part of everyday life, primarily owing to the nature of agricultural labor. In these times, folk games at festivities provided the opportunity for the participants to engage in playful physical activity. However, with the birth of modern societies these traditional and communal activities were not available for the urban population anymore and by the second half of the 19th century, modern sport emerged as one of the most important leisure time activities, first exclusively for the young upper-class gentlemen, and later on, for other social groups as well. With the establishment of sports associations, the organization of official competitions, and especially, with the introduction of professionalism in sport, the competitive and selective edge of the formerly playful pastime activity gained stronger emphasis, while the participation of the wider population was given much less attention. In the 20th century, as the social functions of sport were increasingly recognized by the various political regimes (e.g. military training, nation building), in several countries the state took over the governance of sport, which had previously been under the control of civil organizations.

SFA as a concept was first used by Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic movement in 1919. By the term he referred to the necessity of making sport a pastime for not only the privileged youth, but to all social groups, including the working class. From World War II, and even more so from the 1960s onwards, the idea started to grow into a movement, which first emerged in Northern and Western Europe, by the end of the 1980s spread to more than 80 countries across all continents.

Today, SFA is an umbrella term for recreation, sport development, mass participation programs and cultural recreation activities aiming to provide leisure opportunities and health promotion to their adherents. It refers to any kind of sport practiced without the pressures of top sport; therefore, the selective character of sporting activities based on talent for competition is an aspect of secondary importance here. SFA as a term exists in several languages, such as English, Spanish (*Deporte para Todos*), German (*Sport für Alle*) and Russian (*Спорт для всех*), while in other countries, the names of SFA organizations reflect the use of other forms, for example leisure sport or mass sport, yet, these refer to the same phenomenon.

2. Historical Background

Although we can find certain campaigns and programs based on the idea of SFA as early as the first half of the 20th century in the countries of Northern Europe, the idea was more significantly revisited in the industrialized European countries after World War Two. In Western Europe, where sport was still more or less organized by civil organizations, participation in physical activity started to increase gradually, partly due to the growing amount of leisure time, and primarily on a voluntary basis. On the other hand, in the countries of the Soviet bloc, mass sport movements (the so called Spartakiads) were organized by the state and the ruling communist party as a means of

political mobilization, and participation was obligatory for the citizens. In these countries, the official statistical data were often over-estimated in order to underline the legitimacy of the regime.

In the 1960s, the idea of SFA slowly emerged on the policy agenda of Western Europe, due to a complex set of reasons and circumstances. First of all, it became evident in the developed countries that in spite of the revolutionary inventions of medical science and the improvements in the standard of living, the welfare state could only achieve the aim of a healthy society through prevention, in which sport was to play a crucial part. At this time, sport was regarded as a national issue, governed by national-level institutions, and it was given wide publicity. On the other hand, national and international sport organizations turned their attention to elite sport, which called for new national and international organizations dedicated to SFA. The first campaign based on the idea of SFA was launched in Norway in 1968 ('Trim' campaign). The novelty of the campaign was that it was based on a two-year study of examples throughout Europe and involved project planning, market research, VIP involvement, and professional advertising as well. The Norwegian model became an example to follow for several other countries, first in Europe, and later on, in all other continents.

After the emergence of SFA programs on national policy agendas in the 1970s, the leading countries of the movement, i.e. Nordic, Western European and North American countries started to initiate international cooperation (for more details see the section on TAFISA), and made systematic efforts to increase the number of countries involved in the movement. It was also an objective that the Third World countries join the consultations, and the International Olympic Committee offered financial help and patronage for this to be realized. In 1986, the IOC Sport For All Committee (for more details see below) and the German Sport Federation organized the first International Congress on Sport For All under the title "Fundamentals on Sport For All" in Frankfurt, FR Germany. Participants from 28 industrialized and 30 Third World countries were present at the congress, and they adopted the Frankfurt Resolution on SFA. Two years later, the second congress was held in Prague under the title "Solidarity in Sport For All".

By the 1990s SFA became a global movement, which was primarily based on the contribution of sport to a healthy lifestyle, and as such, mainly an individual issue. At the 1988 Olympic Congress, the question was raised whether the more adverse economic conditions in the developing countries would be a principal obstacle to the increase in the sport participation of their citizens. Based on this, a subsequent comparative research was conducted by German sport scientist Juergen Palm at the end of the 1980s, in order to observe whether there were differences between countries with high GNP and low GNP. The results of the survey show that there exists a relationship between GNP and sport participation, however, the sport participation of countries with a low economic output was only 4.2 times lower, while the GNP per capita figures showed about three times greater differences. This indicates that the countries with less favorable economic conditions can also enhance sport participation despite their limited budgets.

Nevertheless, it can be stated that although the SFA movement has reached many countries in the world, there are still remarkable differences between them in terms of sport participation, which, in addition to cultural factors, does depend on the economic situation of the given country and its citizens as well. The reasons behind it are to be found on both the supply and the demand side of SFA. Wealthier countries have a greater potential to build and develop sport facilities, and can also count on the assistance of the business sector. Furthermore, state programs and benefits related to sport are also more likely to be introduced in these countries. On the demand side, the citizens can also be expected to contribute to their own physical activity both in terms of time and money. On the other hand, countries under strained budgets have restricted opportunities to initiate and support SFA programs, and as the demand can also be presumed to be lower, due to the want of more fundamental goods, the market is also less likely to provide services, especially for the lowest status groups. In addition to the above mentioned facts, there may be differences concerning the range of sports available in wealthier and less wealthy countries, where only the low-cost sports can be expected to produce high participation rates.

At present, the SFA movement can be characterized by two major tendencies, one being the revival of the traditional types of sports and games, mainly due to the influence of NGOs and institutions. This is increasingly becoming recognized as part of the cultural heritage of a country, sometimes even of a particular region. On the other hand, the globalization of sport has brought about the worldwide spread of the most popular (typically western) sports, which process is labeled as sport colonization or cultural imperialism by conflict theorists. Those disagreeing with the idea claim that the process is not a unidirectional one and illustrate their argument with the increasing popularity of Far Eastern sports and martial arts in the west.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations of SFA were most comprehensively laid by Juergen Palm, who was also the president of TAFISA, the world's biggest SFA association (for more details see below). In his view, the concept of SFA in itself bears the assumption that it is an infinite development, as it is a modern utopia to believe that every individual can have the right and the intention to be physically active. The idea definitely calls for a more flexible definition of sport, which emphasizes its playfulness, and omits competitiveness from the main criteria. On the individual level, the obstacles of socialization into an unknown activity are numerous, including uncertainty about one's own abilities and about potential effects, conflicts about one's present and proclaimed lifestyle, discouragement due to failure, risk of injuries and the lack of instant gratification. Furthermore, the decision to give up the autonomy of organizing one's own leisure activities, and the adaptation to the rules of the sport and the group of fellow participants may also be difficult. On the organizational level, it is problematic that in all countries, the sport system is designed to improve performance and to provide opportunities to find the best and the most talented. In order to overcome this dilemma, Roland Renson, a Belgian sport historian suggested replacing the traditional and hierarchical sport model with a pluralist sport model, ensuring that SFA is not at the "bottom of the pyramid", and not only necessary to provide a social base for top sport. In relation to this, Palm also underlined that entrance to the sport system should be open

to newcomers of all ages. Having looked at the history of the SFA movement from the 1960s to the 1990s, Palm made the following observations:

- SFA is given a role in civilizational change.
- SFA is interdependent of economy and activity.
- SFA results in an intercultural process.
- SFA is based in a verbal and visual change of understanding sport.
- SFA requires new ways in sport socialization.
- SFA requires leveling performance demands.

4. International Policy Documents

SFA was adopted in 1966 as the major long-term objective for the sports program of the Council of Europe, and the first official document using the term was also issued by the same institution. The “European Sport For All Charter” was signed in 1975 by the European Sports Ministers in Brussels. It was officially adopted on 24th September 1976. From that date, sport policies in Europe were endowed with a common program based on the conviction that the values of sport would contribute to the fulfillment of the ideals of the Council of Europe that is, democracy and human rights. The most important ideas of the Charter were:

- Right to participate in sport;
- Appropriate support out of public funds;
- Relations at local, regional and national levels to other areas of policy-making and planning such as education, health, social service, town and country planning, conservation, the arts and leisure services;
- Co-operation between public authorities and voluntary organizations;
- Safeguarding sport and sportsmen from exploitation and from practices that are abusive and debasing, including the unfair use of drugs;
- Accessibility of facilities;
- Measures, including legislation to ensure access to open country and water for the purpose of recreation;
- The need for qualified personnel at all levels of administrative and technical management, leadership and coaching.

The idea of SFA also appears in UNESCO’s ‘International Charter of Physical Education and Sport’, which was issued in 1978. According to the document, one of the essential conditions for the effective exercise of human rights is that everyone should be free to develop and preserve his or her physical, intellectual and moral powers, and that access to physical education and sport should consequently be assured and guaranteed for all human beings. It is also stressed that physical education and sport should make a more effective contribution to the inculcation of fundamental human values underlying the full development of peoples, and that the responsibilities and obligations are incumbent upon all countries for reducing the disparity which continues to exist between them in respect of free and universal access to physical education and sport. The articles of the document related to SFA were the following:

- The practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all;
- Physical education and sport for an essential element of lifelong education in the overall education system;

- Physical education and sport programs must meet individual and social needs;
- Teaching, coaching and administration of physical education and sport should be performed by qualified personnel;
- Adequate facilities and equipment are essential to physical education and sport;
- Research and evaluation are indispensable components of the development of physical education and sport;
- Protection of the ethical and moral values of physical education and sport must be a constant concern for all;
- Information and documentation help to promote physical education and sport;
- The mass media should exert a positive influence on physical education and sport;
- National institutions play a major role in physical education and sport;
- International co-operation is a prerequisite for the universal and well-balanced promotion of physical education and sport.

In 1992, a more extensive document on sport, titled the 'European Sport Charter' was issued by the Council of Europe, which also included the main ideas of the European Sport For All Charter. The aim of the charter was to enable every individual to participate in sport, and to protect and develop the moral and ethical bases of sport and the human dignity and safety of those involved in sport. The Charter defines sport as "all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels". In the document it was claimed that the role of the public authorities was complementary to the action of the non-governmental sport organizations. Another important goal was to encourage the development of the voluntary ethos and movement in sport, particularly through support for the work of voluntary sports organizations. The Charter also marked the following objectives:

- Discrimination in the access to sports facilities or to sports activities should not be permitted;
- The overall planning of facilities shall be accepted as a matter for public authorities;
- The owners of sports facilities should enable disadvantaged persons to have access to such facilities;
- Appropriate steps shall be taken to develop physical fitness and the acquisition of basic sports skills and to encourage the practice of sport by young people;
- The practice of sport shall be promoted for all parts of the population through the provision of appropriate facilities and programs of all kinds and of qualified instructors;
- The provision of opportunities to participate in sport at work places shall be regarded as an integral part of a balanced sports policy;
- The co-ordination of the development and promotion of sport, both between the various public administrations and agencies concerned by sports questions, and between the public and voluntary sectors, shall be developed, taking account of other areas of policy making and planning such as education, health, social service, town and country planning, environment, the arts and other leisure services, and ensure that sport is an integral part of socio-cultural development.

In 1999, a total of 250 representatives from governments (including five ministers), non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, universities, schools and research centers attended at the World Summit on Physical Education, an action-oriented meeting. Participants representing over 80 nations world-wide accepted the Berlin Agenda for Action, which reinforced the importance of physical education in the development and lifelong education process. Although the document dealt with the physical activity of children and adolescents, it is closely related to the idea of SFA, as it recognized that quality physical education is the most effective and inclusive means of providing all children with the skills, attitudes, values, knowledge and understanding for lifelong participation in physical activity and sport.

Although sport and SFA have been important areas in the work of the Council of Europe, the European Union paid relatively little attention to sport, owing to the fact that it was considered as an independent and autonomous social subsystem. The first time the relevance of sport in shaping the European Union was discussed and summed up in a detailed way at top political level was in Nice, France in 2000. Although sport was not included in the Nice Treaty, there was a declaration accepted on the specific characteristics of sport and its social functions in Europe, while maintaining the view that it is to be organized by autonomous organizations. In the Declaration, sport was recognized as a human activity resting on fundamental social, educational and cultural values. It was regarded to be a factor making for integration, involvement in social life, tolerance, acceptance of differences and playing by the rules. Therefore, the development in the accessibility of SFA was urged, especially in the case of persons with disabilities. In addition to this, SFA was also recognized by the Declaration as an important area of volunteer activity.

In 2007, the European Commission issued a so called ‘White Paper on Sport’, which underlined the societal and economic roles of sport, and its contribution to enhance active citizenship. According to the document, sport is an area of human activity that greatly interests citizens of the European Union and has enormous potential for bringing them together, reaching out to all, regardless of age or social origin. In addition to improving the health of European citizens, sport was claimed to have an educational dimension and a social, cultural and recreational role.

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Biographical Sketch

Dr. Tamas Doczi is an assistant professor at the Semmelweis University, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Budapest, Hungary. He has a Master's Degree in English linguistics and literature, and in Sociology. His research areas include sport and national identity, sport and globalization, sport tourism, and social inclusion in and through sport, mainly in the case of socially disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities. He is the secretary of the Sport Sociological Committee of the Hungarian Association of Sport Sciences. His publications include two books in Hungarian (as co-author) and several articles in Hungarian and English.