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Environment and Sports

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Abstract

The state of the environment can have significant impacts on sport. Sportsmen and women can be affected by environmental conditions such as air and water quality and exposure to harmful substances. Changes in climate and the loss of natural spaces may make participating in sport more difficult. The impact of the environment and especially of climate change becomes most obvious when looking at winter sports. If global warming affects the mountain snow cover, skiing or snowboarding and other winter sports will no longer be possible. There is growing consideration for the environment in the world of sports. The Olympic Movement, for instance, has incorporated the environment into its charter, alongside sport and culture.

It has a Sport and Environment Commission to advise it on environment-related policy and has developed an Agenda 21 for sport and the environment to encourage its members to play an active part in sustainable development.

Among the fruits of these initiatives was the first ever 'green' Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000, which showed clearly how development opportunities provided by the Games can be used to benefit the community and the environment. Since then UNEP has worked on both the Beijing and Vancouver Games and is planning with the most significant way sport can benefit the environment and sustainable development is through its popularity. Sports stars are among the world's most famous and revered people. They display qualities we all need: courage, application, refusal to submit to adversity, leadership. Their potential as ambassadors, as promoters of sustainable ways of living, is enormous.

Keywords: Environment, Sports

1. Introduction

In our society sport fulfils important functions and is indeed indispensable. It offers opportunities for physical activity in a world where physical activity is increasingly diminishing; it promotes good health and well-being (when pursued in moderation); and it provides a means of social contact and ample opportunity for intensive experiences. At the same time, however, sport can be a considerable cause of damage to nature and the environment. Damage can occur directly as a result of the pursuit of sports activities or the building and operation of the requisite infrastructure, or it can be caused by indirect factors such as the use of cars to travel to and from sports activities. The causes of the conflict between sport and the environment are inherent in sport itself and are also a consequence of deep-rooted social changes; they may be understood only from this perspective. Since the 1970s, higher income, more leisure, greater mobility and increasing individualization have formed the basis for major and continuing changes in sport. These changes include the following:

- A rise in the number of people who pursue sports activities.
- A higher degree of differentiation between types of sport and sports equipment as well as motives and reasons.
- The use of areas hitherto unused or seldom used and areas already in use being opened up for new purposes.
- Spread of activities to periods previously not or seldom made use of fewer ties with sports clubs and their traditions.
- Increase in individual, spontaneous activities without proper training.
- Increase in activities offered commercially and to a certain extent associated with aggressive advertising.

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Sports Facilities

Sports facilities affect the environment in a variety of different ways. When describing and assessing them, a distinction can be made between indoor and outdoor facilities. Compared to sports halls, outdoor facilities require much more space. How this space is treated is of considerable significance to the environment. On the one hand, the wrong choice of location, improper care (over-fertilization, irrigation using drinking water, etc.) and unnecessary soil sealing can cause the loss of valuable habitats and affect the soil and the water balance. On the other hand, if environmental criteria are taken into account during the planning, building and maintenance of an outdoor sports facility, especially in conurbations, this can upgrade the area ecologically (biodiversity, microclimatic.) and thus increase the attractiveness of the residential environment. Sports halls require only about 5% of the area taken up by outdoor facilities. Excessive energy consumption and water use are the prime causes of environmental damage in the case of sports halls. At present, an average of about 400,000kWh of energy per year are required for operating one hall in Germany, for instance. Today, reduction of energy consumption in sports halls is mainly concentrated on heating/hot water supply systems, heat insulation and lighting. Practical examples show that there is considerable potential in sports facilities for saving energy and water. In order to exhaust this potential, modern, resource saving technology must be installed and user habits must be changed. Due to the large savings made as a result, investments in energy and water often pay off within relatively short periods. Building renovation, necessary in any case and new building plans provide ideal opportunities for installing environment-friendly technology. If environmental aspects are to be considered regularly and not just sporadically, operators of sports facilities need systematic environmental management. Essential elements of such management include the appointment of an environmental officer, mandatory consideration of environmental aspects when any decision is made, the introduction of eco-controlling, as well as regular environmental training courses for staff. By saving valuable resources, sports facilities designed and run on an environmentally compatible basis can contribute enormously towards sustainable development and thus also to the implementation of Agenda 21. This applies in particular to climate protection through reduction of CO₂ emissions.

Sport and Mobility

Just as in other social sub-systems, mobility requirements in sport have increased significantly over the past years. The reasons are manifold. Sport has not only grown in general – another important development is the constant growth in diversity. New types of sport frequently generate the need for a greater range of different facilities. Reaching new locations (sports facilities or country areas) demands greater mobility. This is particularly true in the case of activities pursued in nature and the countryside, to which soaring numbers of people have been drawn over many years. Since most people have to travel short or long distances in order to pursue these kinds of activities, sports and tourism are today more closely linked than ever before. Nowadays, sport is often even the principal reason for travel (e.g. skiing holidays), and in other cases the activities offered are at least an important factor in the choice of travel destination. Even in built-up areas, people pursuing sports activities are required to be more mobile. This is mainly due to the geographical separation of working,

living and leisure. In particular, the fact that sports and leisure centers are increasingly built on the periphery of towns (in green suburbs) has increased the distance to and from sports activities. However, sports not only to be found in sports facilities, but, particularly in the towns, in public areas too (parks, play areas in streets, cycle paths etc.) Due to other priorities in town planning over the past decades, there is now a shortage of such options. Opportunities for physical activity, games and sports have been pushed out of town life by new roads and streets, land sealing etc, and this has resulted in people looking more than ever beyond the towns for the recreational facilities they need. The sustainable development of sport requires not only the avoidance of unnecessary traffic, but also provision and use of means of transport that are the least harmful to the environment. The goal and the reality are still very far apart. Mobility in sport today is primarily “auto mobility”. Sport thus contributes considerably to traffic volumes and thus also to climate change. Already, more than half of total distances travelled by cars are travelled during leisure time, of which in turn, according to a Swiss study, 25% are linked to sport. With respect to sports activities pursued in the country, two of the main reasons for the high level of private car use are the considerable requirements regarding equipment and transport and the difficulties when using public transport, particularly the limited possibilities for taking along sports equipment, the lack of transfer facilities between stations and actual destinations, and the fact that routes and frequency of buses and trains are inadequate considering the leisure time demand. Amazingly, however, even in the case of sports activities pursued in built-up areas, private cars seem to be the absolute number-one means of transport. According to a study carried out at the University of Bayreuth (Germany), three quarters of organized adult volleyball players’ travel to their training sessions and home matches by car or motorbike. 55% of the distances in question, however, are 5 km at the most. Sports associations and clubs are thus called upon to create the necessary structures for more environment-friendly mobility on the part of their members and to encourage their members accordingly to change their habits.

Sports Equipment

The growth of sport and its continuing diversification into new kinds of activity, particularly in the 1980s, led to an explosion in the market for sports articles. Sports articles today consist of mass products. Environmental damage can occur at any stage of the life cycle of a sports article, namely during the acquisition of raw materials, preproduction, actual production of the article, sales, use and disposal. Until now, so-called end-of-pipe strategies have been predominant in the sports article industry: these strategies focus on the subsequent reduction of pollution that has already occurred. The development of new sports equipment revolves almost solely around aspects of function and fashion. Environmental aspects play a role only in exceptional cases. For the sake of greater functionality in sports articles, materials are often used which cause substantial ecological damage even at the time of Manufacture, or which cause problems at the latest when they are disposed of. The latter applies particularly to so-called composite materials, which as a rule cannot be recycled back into the original materials. Supply and demand influence each other in the sports article industry too. On the one hand, the industry has adapted its products to the serious changes in sports and leisure and responded to the consumer’s changed preferences. On the other hand, the industry has helped to

shape sports trends and consumer behavior by means of new and ever more spectacular products. Against this background, marketing sports equipment without paying heed to the environmental damage it causes and advertisements showing behavior that is damaging to nature and even, in some cases, unlawful are particularly problematic more environmentally aware approach in the sports article industry should centre on preventative rather than simply corrective environmental protection measures. Above all, this means giving (in the future) ecological aspects high priority even at the product development stage. The main aims should be to minimize negative environmental effects in the life cycles of all products and to promote substance cycles. Here, the use of recyclable materials is especially important as is unmixed production and the easy reparability of materials used. It is not possible to create substance cycles simply through the activities of sports equipment manufacturers. Instead, there must be very close cooperation between manufacturers, suppliers and dealers. Such cooperation is an absolute prerequisite for the production of recyclable products and the development of a functional collection and recycling system.

Summary and Outlook

Sport can make its own important contribution towards bringing about the model of sustainable development and thus to the implementation of Agenda 21 in all countries. To achieve this, sports organizations and others involved in sport must discuss this model intensively and anchor it firmly in their work. Rising numbers of users and the greater and more intense use of nature and resources (land, energy, water etc.) have undeniably increased the damage to nature and the environment by sport. At the same time, however, the range of strategies and measures for avoiding and resolving conflicts between sport and nature conservation and environmental protection, is broader than often recognized. The coordinated combination of planning, educational and legal measures promises to be particularly successful. In the case of nature-based sports, emphasis should be placed in the future on developing differentiated concepts for conservation and utilization with regard to nature and landscape; these concepts should involve the adaptation of the type of sport to the features of the natural area. Vulnerable areas should be kept free of harmful activities and sports activities should be shifted to less vulnerable but nonetheless attractive landscape. Legal measures should only be taken if the protection objective so requires and other mechanisms do not function.

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