

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN UNIVERSITY SPORT AND ACADEMIC CULTURE

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SUMMARY

The purpose of the article is to discuss the role of university sport in the period of greater changes of European universities. The tasks of universities have changed considerably compared with the past. The University is still the carrier of knowledge, but it has to change its philosophy to stay recognisable and embedded in its surroundings. Concepts of the human, social and culture capital have joined discussions about quality assessment of study programmes and that of equally accessible education. The main aim of the article is to disclose the connection between all these concepts, academic culture and university sport. It will be tried to show that university sport is one of the biggest generators of academic culture.

Key words: University sport, academic culture, human capital, social capital, cultural capital, Slovenia

ÖZET

ÜNİVERSİTE SPORLARI VE AKADEMİK KÜLTÜR BAĞLANTISI

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Avrupa üniversitelerindeki büyük değişim süreci içinde üniversite sporlarının rolünü tartışmaktır. Üniversitelerin görevleri geçmişe oranla önemli ölçüde değişmiştir. Üniversite hala bilginin taşıyıcısıdır, ancak varlığını fark ettirmek ve çevresiyle etkileşebilmek için felsefesini değiştirmek zorundadır. Beşeri, sosyal ve kültürel sermaye kavramları, eğitim programlarının kalite değerlendirmesi ve eğitime erişim eşitliği tartışmalarına eşlik etmektedir. Makalenin ana hedefi tüm bu kavramlar, akademik kültür ve üniversite sporları arasındaki bağlantıyı ortaya koymaktır. Üniversite sporlarının akademik kültürü yaratmadaki büyük rolü açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Üniversite sporları, akademik kültür, beşeri-sosyal ve kültürel sermaye, Slovenya

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Mission of universities

The meaning and tasks of universities have changed considerably compared with the first established universities. University has become one of the pillars of public educational community. That is why it has a large influence on the forming of the learning society, based on humanistic values. Delors (1) points out that universities should be aware and take care of national well-being, “exercising a kind of intellectual authority that society needs to help it to reflect, understand and act”. Therefore universities should take a responsibility as one of the generators of society’s development.

Producing a massive number of graduates, a distinctive trend nowadays, leads to a lower average, making hard to maintain a critical mass of highly educated intellectuals, which are needed for the development of science and national well-being. With the Bologna Process, universities have had the opportunity to present themselves on a market with wider surroundings in a new outlook, but they have to be careful with the curriculum reformation.

In other words, contemporary university education is criticized for being simplified mostly to transferring “factographic” knowledge. Critics (2,5) point out that educational objects mostly include professional development and too little focus on values, critical thinking, open mind, etc. Education in a narrow sense yields only short-term results. University graduates take the most leading roles in the society; so the university is responsible for educating well versed graduates – experts with universal cultural values and proud of their own university (5).

Academic culture

The consequence of university’s orientation only toward vocational training is its fragmentation: faculties are forming narrow-minded specialists, which increases differences between students from different faculties and hinders understanding. One of the important phases in the development of science is a horizontal connection that needs to be imparted to students.

Academic culture is an idea, which can successfully connect different disciplines and studies at the university. The organization structure and processes within it influence its own culture. It could be defined as a special set of norms and rules of behaviour, values and

forms of thinking, which are common to all the members. Academic culture is preserved, continued and developed in the process of academic socialisation (2). It is present in any university, only the level of its awareness differs. When different members of an academic community socialize; values, knowledge and different forms of thinking of the whole university and students' personality assimilate together. That occurs in lectures and seminars, but above all in extracurricular activities, where students and professors participate together.

Investing in the cultural, social and human capitals

Extracurricular activities are instruments in the hands of the university to make additional positive influence on students. Three most important aspects within it are the human, social and cultural capitals. That is why it is important for the university to take responsibility for organizing interesting and quality activities in this respect.

The importance of the human capital (knowledge, skills and competences) is increasing every day. However, students within a formal curriculum acquire most of the necessary competences for professional and personal development later in life, but not all. Therefore guided extracurricular activities are recommended. We should encourage students to be active in such activities by explaining the importance and advantages of the "soft skills" in professional and personal life.

For the future graduate, it is also very important to build a wide social network (social capital). The quality of relations is more important than its quantity. Doing a particular activity together deepens relationships between people; that is why extracurricular activities do matter. On the other hand, inviting alumni into the system of extracurricular activities helps students gain better opportunities while searching for a job or deciding about a carrier path, by creating a social network environment in which students and future employers take part.

As stated above, the university is co-responsible for building the society we want. The students' system of values, interests and readiness for helping others can also be formed during extracurricular activities. To build the cultural capital, without which human and personal capitals can not be used wisely, the university has to offer a wide range of activities such as arts, philosophy, anthropology, sports, rhetoric, social help, volunteering, etc.

It is important that the whole university participates in the system. Each faculty can offer some activities, while some can be organized by cooperation between two or more faculties. With that kind of cooperation, we can reach a university acting as a whole.

University sport as a powerful generator of academic culture

Sport is one of the most popular extracurricular activities (3). One must not look at it only as an instrument for maintaining the psychophysical status, promoting healthy lifestyle and socialization, but has to understand it as one of the most powerful tools for implementing academic culture.

The most important aspects of education through sport can be seen only in its latent levels. For example, a healthy and invigorating academic environment is a motivation for studying, research and creativity, and it influences value system building. Competences, social skills and team work are also being developed, what makes a graduate more competitive in the work market, and successful in the society. New developed networks through sport and positive experiences are the bases for cooperation later in professional life.

Sport culture at the university is a social-cultural contact point, where the academic culture is conceptualized and grown. Nevertheless, one of the important aspects of university sport is also its role in forming the university's profile, the image in its environment. Universities are going to fight for excellent students, especially after the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Aspects of university sport

Quality is the most important factor in forming the curriculum for sport programmes. This is important not only to achieve the desired goals, but also because the students are critical customers, who quickly discover what has quality and what has not. If not satisfied, they will find something elsewhere. If that happens, we lose an opportunity for academic socialization.

In Slovenia, there is a tradition of three types of university sport activities: physical education, sport recreation and competitive sports. When designing the curriculum, one has to respect the tradition, but at the same time consider students' differences in attitude, needs and

interest, and respect quality and variability of the content and its adjustment to the student population.

In the context of sport educational activities, students would master different sports to the level they want. That means organization of different levels of sport educational programs: from the beginner to the master level (acquiring a licence), including lectures and round tables about different problems in sport (for example, health and nutrition, safety, training methods...). The priority of this level is to develop knowledge, skills and other competences (human capital).

Sport recreational activities are important from two aspects. First they fulfil students' inner need for movement, relaxation, adventure, etc. Second, socialization and networking with students from different fields enables better understanding in team work later in professional life. Nevertheless, this is a melting point of generating new ideas. The priority of this level is to develop the social capital.

In the context of competitive sport, the students meet the need for competitiveness and challenge, to search their limits. On the other hand, sport competitions are the way for universities to promote themselves also at the international level.

The example of University of Ljubljana

Majerič (4) wrote that different Slovenian researchers had constantly reported that the number of sport active students was decreasing, especially the number of students participating in physical education (PE), obligatory in 2-3 years of study, but opened to all students. The analyses revealed that this could be the consequence of the decreasing satisfaction with university sport, because the quality of conditions for organised sport activities had been falling. Therefore, student sport organizations decided to offer low-budget programmes and a few student sport clubs have been established. In the last years, different surveys have been conducted to screen the actual state of university sport and few possible solutions have been proposed to the university.

A survey (3) was conducted among Ljubljana University students to screen their opinion, sport activity and participation in different sport programmes. The results showed their huge interest for university sport: more than 80% were sport active at least 2-3 times per week, and

for more than 60% sport was an important/very important activity in their lives.

Data also show that students regularly participate in sport mainly in an unorganised way (65% alone and 54% with friends). Among organized activities, the percentage is high only for PE (64%), while participation in student sport clubs or student sport organization programmes is very low (5-10%). The majority (72%) participate in recreational programmes, around 50% in one-day or one-week long sport camps, more than 1/3 visit sport shows, around 30% frequent sport courses, and less than 1/4 compete for the university or try to obtain a licence in a sport.

Those data show that students' interests for sport is stronger the more there are possibilities to participate in programmes of desired quality. Students rated with grades from 1 to 5 all three sport programmes (PE, student sport clubs and student sport organizations) between 3 and 3.5 in the average. Students (25-30%) were unsatisfied with the conditions of sport facilities and sport gear, PE schedule, its quality and programme variety. Around 1/4 were also dissatisfied with the prices of programmes organized by the student sport organization.

The University of Ljubljana had decided to centralize sport organisation (6), and launched trial joint PE programmes for all faculties. PE is obligatory for students once per week in years 1-3 of study (autonomy of faculties). As the development of Bologna Process study programmes is in progress, it is strongly discussed whether PE has to stay an obligatory subject included in the ECTS system or it has to change its status to extracurricular activity.

The opinion of university PE teachers, other professionals and university managers is divided. In the above mentioned survey, students' opinion was also asked about the future status and organization of university sport. The majority (85%) felt that all service providers should offer joint programmes, and not the same programme in triplicate. More than 50% felt that sport should be an obligatory subject in the ECTS system in at least one year of the study. Around 40% felt that it should be an optional subject in the ECTS system in at least one year of the study, whereas only 7% felt that sport should not be part of the curriculum, but of the extracurricular activity. Around

90% of the students said that they would choose sport as an optional subject. Around 75% of students agreed with the University of Ljubljana strategic plan (7) proposal stating that students would have to collect up to 3 ECTS points within different extracurricular activities (sport or cultural programmes, voluntary work or life-long education). Only 5% disagreed with it, as the remaining 20% did not want to give an opinion.

CONCLUSION

Human and social capitals are popular concepts that are often mentioned in different national and European policies in order to achieve better economical growth. But to reach the goal without sacrificing the human dimension, one has to nurture cultural and universal human values. Universities are co-responsible for forming the society we want; therefore they have to invest into academic culture. Human values can be preserved through the academic process.

Sport is one of the important means to reach the desired goals, because it is very popular among students, as the survey showed. For them sport represents fun, socializing, health, relax, etc. In further research it would be interesting to explore if some other motives for sport activity exist, such as building the human and social capitals.

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