
Research Articles

Institutional foundation of physical education and sporting contests

D.P. Panagiotopoulos (Athens, Greece)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | <i>The Institutional Dimension of Physical Activity</i> |
| | 1.1 <i>Initial thoughts - definitions</i> |
| | 1.2 <i>The institution of sporting contests for the Greeks</i> |
| 2 | <i>On the Body and Sporting Contests</i> |
| | 2.1 <i>Greek enlightenment</i> |
| | 2.1.1 <i>The measure of a man</i> |
| | 2.1.2 <i>Virtue - contest of daring and wisdom</i> |
| | 2.1.3 <i>Victory - fair victory in the stadium</i> |
| | 2.2 <i>Contest in the city</i> |
| | 2.2.1 <i>Law – contest, the good and righteous human</i> |
| | 2.2.2 <i>The sporting contest: As a cause generating rules of law</i> |
| | 2.2.2.1 <i>Generating cause</i> |
| | 2.2.2.2 <i>Modern sporting contest as anti-agon</i> |
| 3 | <i>Conclusion</i> |

1 The Institutional Dimension of Physical Activity

1.1 Initial thoughts - definitions

The etymology of the Greek word *thesmos* (institution), just like the words *thesis* (position), *thetikos* (positive) etc., derives from the ancient Greek verb *tithimi*, which means “to position something, to put it in place”. In the Homeric poems the notion of *themis* refers to justice for the first time and this specific term derives from the etymological root *the-*, which means the establishment of rules which are mandatory to other people, under the form of a generally accepted objective rule, reflecting “the dominant collective, namely the dominant social perception of the law” (Pantazopoulos & Aravantinos, 1978). Practiced by means of competitions, sport falls within the institutions’ category (Panagiotopoulos 2009). Ever since antiquity, physical competitions were considered to be a well-established, not only social, institution, but also a state institution, manifested in the form of sport; they are a competitive activity and a workout presenting a pedagogic aspect, as well as a physical exercise aiming to achieve physical well-being and fitness. This is what Plato referred to when he said that: “it is not the many exercises but just the ones attending to each person’s needs that provide people with well-being,” (Plato, *Anterastai*, 134c.). It is, therefore, by means of understanding the essence of sport and of physical exercise, as institutions, that one can also understand the law, as an element that gives life to an institution and brings to light its characteristics.

Taking into account what precedes, one understands that both sport and physical training – physical education – combines all three conditions, which allow an institution to exist, namely the functional-biological element, the symbolic one, as well as the regulating element, which governs the functioning of an institution and guarantees its institutional existence. This last element may also appear in the form of a custom, in the case of other institutions, especially social ones (Panagiotopoulos, 2006).