Diversity and Discrimination in Sports

Since the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, our societies have undergone tremendous changes. In the context of globalization, democratization, technological progress, economic and social change they have become more and more confronted with social and cultural diversity. Attitudes and policies towards diversity have changed contributing to reduce inequalities and discrimination. Today, in most parts of the world respect and equal treatment of diversity is considered to be an indicator of moral progress.

As social and cultural practice sport is not exempt from these general societal changes and should adapt to them. The Olympic Charter explicitly stipulates that sport should be practiced without any kind of discrimination. However, within the Olympic movement and even more in the general sports system there are still individuals and groups who suffer from disrespect, marginalization, and discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability, class/wealth, religion/belief, age, and/or sexual orientation.

If we want to promote and preserve the educational potential of sport which should be, like it is stipulated in the Olympic Charter (2014, 11), "at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity", we first of all have to find ways of fair and equal treatment of diversity and eradicate discriminations within the sports movement itself.

In my talk I will expose and analyze the concept of diversity drawing on theories of political and moral philosophy, of sociology, and of anthropology, including aspects of the universal declaration of human rights and different declarations of the UNESCO. Then, based on some concrete examples I will discuss discrimination and disrespect within sports. Sport as a worldwide phenomenon practiced in form of competition by people of all kinds of social and cultural backgrounds raises a multitude of problems concerning the issues of diversity: like for example the problems of categorization, of equal chances, or the antagonism between relativism and universalism.

Discussing these problems I will present some thought provoking ideas in order to reduce discrimination in sports. Finally I will open some perspectives concerning the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo: these games will probably have an impact on diversity in Japan, but on the other hand the extremely rich cultural tradition of Japan could contribute to the diversity and to the enrichment of the Olympic movement and the Olympic ideas which are still too much the children of western thought.