

EDUCATION VALUES OF SPORTS IN THE UNIVERSITY

1. My first message to the FISU FORUM 2004 is to greet all the participants and to welcome you to Portugal. I wish also to congratulate the Organizing Committee, for two reasons: firstly, for attracting to Lisbon so many qualified representatives of University Sports from all over the world; but also for the selection of the main topic put to the discussions – *Education through University Sports* – which I believe to be of the utmost relevance for higher education policies nowadays.

It is for me a privilege to have the opportunity to address such an expert audience and be able to exchange views on an import dimension of life on campus.

2. To establish the link between university sports and higher education policies we must first have a look at the international dimension of higher education and the big changes that are taking place regarding the mission and goals of higher education institutions as seen from a Knowledge Based Society in which they are integrated and play an essential role.

Globalisation is changing the higher education landscape across the world. Educational services are seen more and more as tradable services, coming under the GATS agreements. New forms of delivery of educational services, often associated to the breathtaking advances in the information and communication technologies, originated an explosive development of new providers of higher education programmes, ranging from remote-site branch campus and franchising agreements to education enterprises produced by big industry groups, to virtual universities or even to other providers which are no more than the “brokers of choice for the flood of courseware hitting the web”¹.

Governments are striving to bring some order into this increasingly diversified global system, where many of the alternative providers operate outside the official national higher education systems, raising concerns related to adequate regulation and

¹ - Marchese, T. (1998) Not-so-distant competitors: How many providers are remaking the postsecondary marketplace. *American Association for Higher Education Bulletin*, May 1998.

transparency, and therefore originating problems of quality assurance and of recognition of qualifications².

In its turn, universities are very much afraid of the serious conflicts that the wild competitiveness and the marketisation of higher education raise with the traditional university *ethos* of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and that *life on campus* as we know it may be in great danger.

To safeguard university values and enhance awareness regarding the need for consumer protection in relation to educational services, both governments and higher education institutions are promoting the international dimension of higher education, looking around for co-operation at the regional and global levels, aiming at collaborative projects, and exchange of information and diffusion of good practices. Some effective instruments for co-operation are being developed, like mobility and networking.

This is clearly the case in Europe, where the Ministers for Education of 29 countries met in Bologna in June 1999 and signed a Declaration³ in which they lined up their national policies aiming at the construction of a cohesive, competitive and attractive European Higher Education Area, with the objective of promoting the mobility of students and the employability of graduates. The Bologna Declaration launched a very dynamic process of restructuring higher education in the signatory countries, in which all relevant actors – governments, higher education institutions and their national and European representative associations, students, academics, stakeholders and even society at large – are very much involved and interlinked within networks some of which extend beyond Europe. The Bologna Process, subscribed at present by 42 European Countries, is determining the agenda for higher education policies in Europe in a very strong way⁴.

3. In this context, the activities of networks of higher education institutions or other agents are highly valued for their potential impact on higher education policies and activities through their contribution for mutual knowledge, support and co-operation. Having this in mind, I would like to make a statement and raise a question to the Forum:

² - Santos, S.M. (2002) Regulation and Quality Assurance in Transnational Education. *Tertiary Education and Management* **8**, 97-112.

³ - Bologna Declaration (1999) Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19th June 1999.

⁴ - Berlim Communiqué (2003) *Realising the European Higher Education Area*, Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlim on 19 September 2003.

- Statement: *La Fédération Internationale du Sport Universitaire – FISU* has all the ingredients to act as a thematic network with a high potential to influence higher education policies in connection to the establishment of proper active learning environments within higher education institutions;
- Question: are FISU members, as national leaders on University Sports, willing to take such a responsibility and act in accordance?

4. As I said earlier, to establish the relation between sports and higher education policies it is necessary to address also the changing role of Universities. In reality, the expectations from Society on universities are changing fast and are presently much more demanding. The traditional mission of the University, as seen by many academics, of creating and keeping a pool of knowledge and transmitting it via education and training, complemented with the provision of some specialised services, is not challenged, but it is no longer enough. In the context of democratisation of higher education, Society sees higher education as an important contribution to economic development, particularly local and regional, and as an element for social inclusion, in the sense to prepare citizens to integrate fully in the knowledge Society.

Under these concerns from Society, the expectations on graduate skills are much more concerned with questions of employability and are therefore different. Nowadays, students must acquire not only (or not so much) specialised knowledge, which becomes outdated very fast, but also personal and interpersonal transferable skills, such as: the capacity for self-learning (learning to learn, as a key methodological instrument for life long learning); flexibility and adaptability, to learn how to face change; auto-regulatory competences, like self-discipline, keeping schedules, learning to deal with stress, self-motivation, resilience, tenacity, determination, self-confidence; and interactive attributes, like to communicate, to co-operate, to integrate in team work or to develop leadership capabilities.

It is not possible to teach many of these skills, but the universities can provide a proper environment where skills can be developed. This objective can be achieved in two complementary ways: first, creating an adequate learning environment, in the classroom, by using active pedagogical methods centred on the student; and, secondly, through an overall environment on campus, making students active and co-operative.

Indeed, the true added value of life on campus, in comparison with e-learning and other alternative delivery methodologies, lies in the creation of the proper environment for students' personal development, socialisation and character building. To take good advantage of the full potential of life on campus, the University must aim at preparing not only qualified experts but also full citizens ready to address the society's new and wider expectations.

This is where sports do come in. Indeed, in the personal and interpersonal capacities I have referred, you have recognised many attributes for a good sports person, like the development of self-discipline, endurance, resilience, team work, co-operation, group strategy, etc. Sports can therefore constitute active methodologies to develop valuable skills for graduates.

The social and educational values of sports were recently highlighted at the European political level, under the European Union initiatives of bringing sports into its education, training and youth programmes and of proclaiming 2004 as the *European Year of Education Through Sports*. The European Council passed a ten points Joint Declaration, in May 2003, on "the social value of sport for young people"⁵, where it is emphasised, in particular, that "it is possible to make the educational systems more attractive by using sport as an educational instrument to improve the involvement of young people both in formal education and non-formal learning", and that "the values and virtues of self-discipline, self-esteem and hard effort by sport (help) young people to identify their skills and limitations and to overcome the difficulties they may face in their everyday life, and as a result permitting them to achieved their objectives and to gain their autonomy". The declaration also points out that "through the values of solidarity, respect for others, participation and fair play sport contributes to the socialization of young people, fosters their participation in public life, and promotes democratic values and citizenship among the young". In summary, sports are seen as a key element to develop citizenship values.

So, if had to select one single phrase to address the university sports representatives who are present here, the message would be: in your strategic planning and action concerning sports in the universities, think about sports not only as

⁵ - European Council (2003) Joint Declaration by the Council and Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting with the Council of 5 May 2003 on "the social value of sport for young people", *Official Journal of the European Union* C 134/5, 7.6.2003.

competition but also, and mainly, on this terms, as an element of personal development and citizenship.

5. From my experience as former President of the Portuguese Rectors Conference (CRUP), I would like to share with you some reflections we did some time ago, which may be considered as a case study on the theme we are discussing.

Back in 1997, CRUP produced a policy document, entitled “Sports in the University”, as a contribution to the identification of good practices on the field. The basic idea behind the document was to consider sports as an element of a global education, in a cultural and social perspective that should allow for a full achievement of the student’s capabilities.

It was proposed that there should be an institutional policy for sports in each university, taking into consideration four basic aspects:

- (i) the main objective must be to provide sports for all – students and staff – in order to contribute to good physical and health conditions and also as an element of personal character building;
- (ii) a second scope, in complement to sports for all, is to support those few who dedicate themselves to high competition;
- (iii) the university must assume responsibilities to promote and finance such a policy;
- (iv) students’ associations are to be involved in the process.

The paper adopted by CRUP identified different institutional frameworks for the promotion of sports, ranging from associative structures (Sports Centres) to the integration into the university, as a sports service in articulation with the student’s unions. The experience in Portugal shows better results for the second approach, since Sports Centres seem to favour participation in leagues (involving a small number of students) rather than sports for masses. It was argued, anyway, that the most important is to allow for a diversity of organisational structures, often based on former experiences and traditions, putting the emphasis on the goals and objectives to be achieved.

Finally, five recommendations were advanced to universities and to the Government:

- university sports are to be seen as an important component of the education and

training process, open to the voluntary, healthy, active participation of the academic community;

- each university should organise a proper structure for sports, using the organisational approach more appropriate to its specificities;
- the State must guarantee enough financing to allow for the proper maintenance and upgrading of the sports infrastructures; part of the financing should be on an open competition basis, to stimulate innovative proposals and solutions;
- priority must be given to infrastructures open for all;
- universities must be autonomous in the definition of their policies for sports, but in dialogue and partnership with the students associations.

6. I would like to refer also to my experience at institutional level. As former Rector of University of Minho, in the Northern region of Portugal, I had personal responsibilities in the institutional policy we have adopted and implemented. I am glad to refer that in my University we have anticipated and, indeed, influenced the recommendations from the Rectors Conference. The Sports Service of University of Minho, under the responsibility of the University Social Services, counting on top quality and enthusiastic staff, have developed a tremendous job in involving the academic community in an active way, although everyone is conscious that there is always still a lot to do.

7. Concluding my presentation, I want to express again my appreciation for FISU and to wish the continuation of a fruitful Forum, aware of the impact that this Federation can have on the global quality of university systems in the world, keeping in mind the contribution of sports to the mission of the modern University which, like the ancient Greek Academies, must value very high the question of what sort of citizens it wants its graduates to become.

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