

Second keynote speech

Participating in Change

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What is change and what do we mean by participating in change?

Women are and were actively involved in the changes that took place within the world of sports.

Exploring options for change in the future, we should learn first from the changes in the past, and specifically how women participated globally within this process.

To come to a better understanding we need first a clarification of the term *sport*.

Value of Sport

The life skills learned through sport are fundamental to the development of personal skills that all women and girls can use to create a stronger position in society in general. By the principle of fair play and trusting our team-mate(s) we learn to cooperate; by sharing we communicate, the respect for rules creates problem-solving capacities. In connecting with others in sport you create self-esteem. Wanting to win is teaching you discipline, as learning to lose builds resilience. But also time and energy management are essential parts of building a sport career. I can add to this from my personal experience to never put negative energy in the hurdles you imagine before, but deal with the obstacles if you are confronted with them. One can anticipate so many obstacles in life, but will never be able to find the same amount of creativity beforehand. Here we can learn a lot from our sisters from the developing world, from our disabled sports sisters and other women who are challenged through life itself.

Changes in the past

Women have probably never been as involved in sports (either as participants, spectators or organisers) as men; however, they have always played a role. Throughout history, in places and cultures around the globe, women have pursued physical activities from ball games to competitive running, from archery to dancing.

Despite the generally discouraging atmosphere for the development of girls' and women's participation in physical activities and sport in the past, some positive niches have to be identified to recognise the positive changes that are part of women's sports history.

Influences on women and sport

Gender stereotypes

Women's participation in the traditionally all-male competitive sports was seen as symbolic of their competition with men, and made them face harsh ridicule about their de-sexing characteristics. It was imperative, therefore, for women sporters to be in every way 'ladylike' in their behaviour both on and off the sports grounds. The modern insights of human diversity and gender balance will change these fixed ideas.

Changes in the organisation of sport

Female sport developed on the fringes of male sport. Data on the participation of girls and women into physical activities and sport are scarcely available or their quality should be questioned. There appears to be a correlation between the availability of data on participation and the state's or sport system's interest in the inclusion of people, i.e. women and girls. Also economic reasons play an important role for the participation of women and girls. Membership rates vary from country to country but the overall membership of girls and women used to be lower than boys and men, as women have fewer resources to spend on such membership, and a big global difference appears between the rich and the poor. This is even more essential for girls and women with a desire to become a top-athlete or in some continents (disabled) women and girls who desire equal access to rehabilitation sport programmes.

Healthy changes – Changing health

Awareness of the benefits of regular physical activity and sport for the population is closely connected with the amount of interest to increase knowledge about health and social welfare of people, which in turn very often seems to lead to some sort of social policy intending to increase the number of people involved in physical activity and sport.

When looking to the various continents and countries, we have to realise that sport as a way to increase health and prolong our lives should be regarded as a luxury for some, a reality for others and a unrealistic aspect for many women in the world, whose activities are linked with daily survival.

Changing the gender order in sport

The aspect of protecting femininity, regarding a woman's body as fragile, as only meant for reproduction etc. is a contradiction if we take the physical and psychological demands women and their bodies into consideration. Women work the land, have double jobs, walk for miles with heavy loads on their heads and shoulders, give birth to numerous children, are responsible for the enlarged family, have often to be submissive to (cruel) husbands or partners, have a higher risk to become disabled and are subjected to structural societal discrimination.

Female political leaders, however, like female athletes have proven to have similar strength and competencies: maybe even more so to even reach that top, and should be the guiding examples for changing the world of sport.

Quotas can be a useful means to make up for the lack of representation of a certain category, but let us look at the fundamental conceptual difference for instance with parity. Quotas can be regarded as a 'ceiling' to protect the rights of a minority and to ensure its participation in the decision-making.

But women are not a minority, nor a specific category: they represent more than half of humanity –a quantitative dimension- and one of its two components – a qualitative

dimension. Therefore parity goes a step further. Parity concerns our societies as whole and not just women. It is also about more than just participation. It is about power sharing and participation on an equal basis (50/50) or from 40/60 to 60/40.

In other words, Parity is the claim that men and women must be equally represented in decision-making positions whereas quotas are only a means to achieve fair representation..

Tools for change

Solidarity and diversity should be the new credo when we work towards a strategic change in women and sport and their organisations. The individual is the centre of it all. Individual talents and qualities i.e. *Individual Mastership* should dominate the achievements and results of organisations. Aspiration is one of the key elements. The ability to focus individually and collectively to women and girl's real demands and intentions instead of reacting on the (changing) circumstances is essential. This diversity and the focus on the individual will require a good equilibrium between sport, employment and private domain. Thinking in terms like positional power and oligarchic structures should be abolished. More emphasis on relevant contributions such as: making new alliances, obtaining a good reputation as well as on interesting, diverse and stimulating activities are important.

Find and respect women leaders who are willing to *take a lead*: with a real commitment to fundamental changes within themselves and within the organisation. They can influence others through their credibility, their skills and commitment in a natural way. These women leaders should be a direct reflection of the membership and its diversity and be able to count on solidarity. This diversity should include women whose participation is still controversial.

Participation in positive change

More and more women enjoy doing sport for many reasons. Some projects are initiated by women for women.

Various projects show us that recreational sport can be done in many different ways. The closer to a woman's community, the more successful it becomes. Maybe it is time to create Community Based Sport programmes. Such a program entails the mobilisation of women in their community to perform sport or physical activities together (e.g. running together, creating basketball, volleyball, soccer team); educate and train each other in doing sport and/or organising sport and invite others to join for further education/training. Communities can then have tournaments with other neighbouring communities. Creating your own CBS program is enhancing your empowerment.

Women should do it for themselves and put their energy in other women and girls like they do as mothers to their children.

Conclusions

It seems that over the years we have drifted away from the true meaning of sport. New ideologies have pushed away the basic principle *Homo Ludens*, the person in whose life games and sport play an important role. Within many, especially industrialised countries, a new ideology of sport has emerged which focuses on health, fitness and gender stereotypes such as beauty and femininity or strength and masculinity.

Where for a long time sport was seen as pleasure, filling leisure time, it has grown into a must, a health cult and to be incorporated into our life-style. Sport is no longer regarded as effecting the entire human being, the woman who wants to enjoy, work together with others in a relaxed and exiting atmosphere.

The true essence of sport or the *Homo Ludens* is apparent in the projects mentioned where young girls in refugee camps in Rwanda, for instance, learn to overcome the atrocities they witnessed by doing sport together. Than sport is a seed and can grow into the girls' lives as something valuable and pleasant.

We should prioritise our desires. Start at local level first. We can incorporate women quickest on small-scale projects, close to home, close to our hearts. From there build national and international alliances. When doing this we have to be aware not to alienate women from the basic concept (performing sport, coaching sport, taking part in their community, etc.). A good way could be the proposed setting of Community Based Sport programmes (CBS).

The political will may be there to have balanced participation of women and men in decision-making structures, whether this is in the world of sport or in the political arena, but when it is not substantiated with legal provisions to ensure parity democracy within every decision-making structure it will take many more decades before women are really taking fully part in society and moving to the top. But this means first and foremost that we as women should elect other women and trust women in leadership positions.

We have to realise with every step we take within our local, national or international movements the direct and clear link with where sport is about in the first place. It is about fair play; about hard work; about enjoying every moment, even the harsh moments. But we also have to realise that no female athlete gives up her first place, neither do men in giving away their gained positions for the sake of gender equality.

We have to put similar effort in getting these places as in going for the Gold medal and drawing women unable to go for gold in our slipstream. Overall the challenge remains to accelerate the process of change to a more inclusive culture of sport.

Participate in change means participating in solidarity with others!

Even the greatest athletes in time never walked alone, there were always family members, coaches, and trainers to support her. The feeling of sharing with others whatever colour of our skin, the ability of our bodies, the religion or culture we believe in, whether we are rich or poor, heterosexual or lesbian, a mother, grandmother or daughter, a coach or athlete, top sporter or recreational sporter, should be our guiding principle.

At the end of the day, the most important thing is to give all women opportunities to be involved in all aspects of sport and to change sport's culture. This can only be achieved if the social, cultural and economic context wherein women live change and the overall patriarchal boundaries are broken down. This requires also a change in

women's attitudes and solidarity among us. Women can and should play a bigger role by supporting each other in organising sport to meet our requirements.

The process of change needs our participation