Abstract

Changes in societies from all around the world are observed during the passage of the time, are a global phenomenon. Cyprus is following the flow and regarding its small size these changes are easily apparent in many different areas of its society. These same changes have an impact on the sporting content of the country since the bond between the society and the sport context is interacted. The main objective of this paper is to discuss how the social changes in Cyprus have caused changes in the sport of the country as a result of the rapid modulation that the society has undergone and how the different turning points of the history of Cyprus have influenced the Cypriot sporting life. The paper is based on the analysis of the documents related to Cypriot and international sport. In order to achieve a better understanding in-depth interviews were used with key persons in Cypriot sport (N=9). The results show that values concerning the classical or traditional sport are preserved, however a wide range of new meanings have also emerged in sport. Cypriots are recognizing different characteristics of sport and the Cyprus Sports Organization responded positively to the population's changing expectations.

Key words: global phenomenon, sporting content, social changes, turning points, classical sport, changing expectations

Introduction

Like societies all around the world Cypriot society is changing constantly. Taking a brief overview just to the modern history of Cyprus we can see the contradictory nature of these changes. On the one hand, similarly to other societies, Cypriot society became more urbanized, yet mostly avoided the ill effects of a too rapid transition to city life. Ties to the countryside remained strong. In general the Republic of Cyprus has been modernized and social relations changed, but not as quickly as in Western Europe. On the other hand, Cyprus has undergone large changes during a relatively short amount of time, a feudal system which maybe can be characterized as a kind of a caste system switched to a class system which lasted under different regimes and political changes (Solsten, 1991).

In contemporary Cypriot society most people have been living under good economic circumstances and there has been a relatively acceptable social equality. In 1998 Cyprus was listed as a potential member of European Union and became a part of it officially on 2004. Since that time the standard of living has started decreasing just as a result of growing migration to the country. This process became faster due to the
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worldwide economic crises. The question is for how long the small Cypriot society will be able to share the sources and the privileges in the same manner.

Cypriot society preserved traditional positive values until recently. Social phenomena such as prejudice or even discrimination started appearing in a larger degree during the last years and probably because of the large migration waves from Eastern countries. The most radical transformation occurred in the families. A few decades ago women had not jobs; the Cypriot families could be characterized as patriarchic. Gender roles in families have been changed just recently, the younger generation of women are employed many families are nuclear or less extended.

Sport is considered to be a microcosmos of the society (Lappas, 2006), therefore the changes that occur in society and in its value system are generating changes also in sport.

From traditional games to “Sports for All”

Parallel with the changes in Cypriot society traditional games were transformed into sports and they started to play more and more important role. For instance in Nicosia the capital of the island, there were always organized events for children and adults during Eastern or national holidays. These events take place also nowadays next to the Venetian walls of the city in a renewed form. In coastal cities, holidays such as “Kataklismos” offer opportunity for celebrations and traditional games which nowadays are complemented by various physical activities at the sea. People of all ages participate in these games and sports. During Eastern in certain villages in the mountain regions people are not missing the chance to revive traditional games and sports attributing to their continuity. The playful atmosphere during these festivals led to the first step of Sport for All movement in Cyprus (Christodoulides, 2006a) That was the first non-institutionalized Sport for All movement which later on became an official program (Kartakoullis, 2002). After 1975 when the Council of Europe recognized the Sport for All movement, the Cyprus Sport Organization brought the program in operation on 1985. Nowadays the increased need for physical activity and the awareness of health benefits by Cypriot people is a factor that should be consider by sport institutions and by individuals. (Christodoulides, 2006b)

Objectives and Methods

The main objective of this paper is to discuss how the social changes in Cyprus have an impact on the changes in the sport of the country and how the different turning points of the history of Cyprus have influenced the Cypriot sporting life.

The paper is based on analysis of documents related to the documents connected to the Cypriot and international sport. Besides, in-depth interviews were used with key persons in Cypriot sport (N=9).

Results

Changes in Cypriot sport

Similarly to most societies sport in Cyprus nowadays overflows onto the front pages of newspapers, shed onto the dinner table being the main topic of a discussion, runs
through pubs and cafes and sometimes with baneful consequences into the streets of
the cities. Sport was present in Cypriot society also half a century ago but in a different
form.

Sport from a larger perspective is a complex social practice in which several social
values are manifested. Due to the modification in the society' value system in Cypriot
sport significant changes can be observed in several areas.

Whereas the time for leisure has been reduced during the last decades also in
Cyprus, is can be stated that the influence of sport and generally the quest for physical
fitness has grown tremendously

As a result of the changes in the occupational structure and the improvement of the
economic situation sport became open in Cypriot society and most people had access to
sport. Due to the changing role concept gender differences in sport decreased
significantly, but only with younger generation. Besides there are more women mostly in
sporting activity and hardly in decision making position. Regional differences in sport
participation also decreased, but they are still remarkable.

Generally speaking the economic crises had not yet an unfavorable impact on the
population's involvement in sport.

As a consequence of the changing nature of sport internationally, a few decades ago
the term sport was ambiguous also in Cyprus; it meant school sport, elite sport, military
sport or recreational sport. Comparing that meaning of sport with the term of today’s
sport we can see that it has developed considerably larger and still growing variety of
meaning. In connection with this there is an important change in the need for and
expectations of people towards sport which are influenced by information they get
constantly from global environment. It became obvious that the traditional sports fail to
meet the different needs of individuals, or at least the young generation.

Many Cypriot people, especially the youth recognized the contradictory character of
today’s sport. They are aware of the fact that on the one hand sport promotes healthy,
good life style. On the other hand there is no field where health can be put at risk so
explicitly and voluntarily as is the case of sport.

Young people in general view sport as an institution and a component of culture
which has become a powerful and significant industry among national industries. The
new tendency according to which private universities put more emphasis on the sport
sciences in their program may have contributed to the better understanding of the
phenomena of sport.

Some alterations in values related to sport and movement culture can be identified
which had an impact on the population’s sporting behavior. When modern sport spread
in the country, it meant basically competitive sports and victory over the other athletes
motivated the participation in sport in the first place. Certain values were attributed to
sport such as achievement, honesty sportsmanship caring, companionship, equity,
health, showing skill and winning. Value like “a sound mind in sound body” was
important and it was highly appreciated. Sport nowadays has become a “variously
shaped reality” in which new concepts of sport can be recognized. However the classical
sport values seem to survive longer in Cyprus than in many societies focusing on elite
sport.

Nowadays competitive sport is no longer the most frequent form of sport participation
in Cyprus. Other forms of sport and recreation such as fitness and adventure sports
have also been developed remarkably and are now popular and alternative forms of
sport.
The national media are concerned more and more with sporting issues. Its popularity and development and especially the televised sport events has raised the interest and up staged the importance of exercise and fitness. Media has gain tremendous power during the last decades and their touch on social life is influential on sports also in Cyprus.

Conclusions

Sporting customs are changing globally and Cyprus has no other option than to follow these changes. However, Cyprus is a small country with relatively stable value system, thus the result of the industrial and informative revolution as well as of the urbanization affected sport partly in different ways than in many other societies. The economic and social development or modernization did not lead the country to a homogenized culture which derives from globalization. The population concept on and attitudes towards sport were modified but the classical sport related values were preserved. The Cyprus Sports Organization responded positively to the population’s changing expectations. The importance and support of elite sport was not dominant. Both plans for mass sports and infrastructures with new facilities also were developed.

The results of my investigation reinforce the findings of a survey about Cypriot sport and the European sport policy according to which sport in Cyprus tends to change partly according to national traditions and to the appreciation of traditional sporting values, and partly due to international changes and policies (Alexopoulos, 2005)

Taking into consideration that Cyprus has become a stirring society during the last decades, there is little scientific evidence about the recent changes in the Cypriot population’s sporting habits. Therefore further research focusing on the differences in sporting behavior between the generations it is not just recommended but strongly needed.

References


