The french sporting practices in 2000 : a question of definition

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THE FRENCH SPORTING PRACTISES IN 2000: A QUESTION OF DEFINITION

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SUMMARY

The question of the definition of sport is a matter of controversy and the word sport is polysemous, the more so as the sporting phenomenon is growing. The national survey on the French sporting practises realised in 2000 by French Ministry of Sports stresses how difficult it is to measure the meaning of "being a sportsman in the year 2000 in France". The diversity of the practises named and the real levels of commitment in the activity, the variety of the contexts of practise more or less institutionalised and the multi – practise are pertinent criteria to get the different meanings to which this definition refers.

Key words: sociology, demography, quantitative, sport, France

INTRODUCTION

French interest in sport is very strong. As sport is at the same time an identity stake, a well being factor, an ideological state device... one can not help out questioning its functions. One may consider it as a total social fact (Mauss, 1925; Pociello, 1999) so much as the phenomenon grows and crosses the different components of French society. However, despite this interest or because of it, the question of its definition remains controversial and is confronted to the polysemic meanings of the word sport. "To do sport is to compete" say some, "To do sport is to walk along the canal", says a retired person. The controversies to define what sport should be about are important. Those controversies being the more so sustained as the field area of sports practises is encountering multiple contemporary transformations: massification phenomenon, diversification of the practise modalities, emergence of new activities, importance of self organised sport and above all the accession to sport as a true social norm. Getting an idea of the different types of sport practises in France is at stake.

When the sociologist is interrogated on the French sporting practises in the aspects of a demographic problem involving a measurement of the practise, one has no choice but to accept that he is confronted to this controversy and to the polysemic meaning of the term. What types of practise and what types of practising persons he may choose? Should he include the practises of keeping physically fit? Should he only take into consideration the institutionalised practises? And how should he consider the practises of the retired people?

In 1985, with the sports phenomenon complexity in mind, the sociology laboratory of the INSEP has innovated about this problem (Errais, Irlinger, Louveau, Métoudi and Pociello, 1984).

Instead of imposing a definition a first sight, they let those surveyed give their own definition of "doing sport" and opted for a broader definition: "sport is what people do when they believe they are doing sport" (Irlinger, Louveau and Métoudi, 1987). The strategy was thus to gather information about all the practises referring to the idea of "doing sport" in order to better make out the depth of those statements, the practice modalities, the intensities, the locations, the moments, the institutional frames or none, to which the actors refer when they consider themselves sportsmen.

This survey was a real innovation in order to measure the sports practises of the French. Indeed before this date, the surveys often opted for some restrictive definitions mainly institutional ones (Louveau, 2002). Thus, immediately after the end of the Second World War, licencees are the only references to measure the level of sportsmanship in France. One has to wait for the survey realised in 1967 by the National Institute of Statistics and Economical Studies to finally see the measurement of the level of French sporting activities supported on a less restricted definition which was until then often synonymous with being licensed and therefore of public utilities. But the results are noticeably disparate since they are based against pre-established hypotheses about sport. Those different surveys refer to historically marked sporting perceptions (Defrance, 1995). To do some sport was often considered as a practise referring to English sport and in consequence to competition. The social transformations that came in the seventies have profoundly modified those representations. The term sport has progressively been diverted. One has accepted the idea of a sporting practise with no competitive goal and realised in the prospect of leisure. The new relationships to the body with the practises of fitness, the relationships to nature and the outdoor practises, the relationship to the city and the new forms of urban practises, have all accelerated this mutation. Studies realised in Canada by Suzanne Laberge (Laberge, 2002) based on post natal sporting practises have showed that many women define the use a push chair as a fitness sporting activity. Their time being scarce, they renounce to car travels to privilege travels on foot with a push car in order to keep fit. In France many rollerblading rallies demonstrate that they are more and more numerous to come with rollers and push cars.

Defining sport remains a problem. It refers to stakes and relationships in relation to many different ways of practising and which bases also rest on contrasted realities: licence in a football club with its training and competitions; the daily practise of fitness at work, the weekly walk... Thus instead of excluding or including certain ways of practise, the question above all is to recognise the technical and symbolical conditions of these practises. Is running everyday less of a sporting activity than to be licensed to a rowing club and then to give up after two months of participation? (Burlot and Lefevre, 2002). The measurement of the definition of the sportsman on the basis of a licence to a club would come to consider the rower, as a sportsman. On the other hand the measurement of the definition on the basis of his involvement would on contrary define the runner as a sportsman per excellence. A study which aim is to measure in a demographic point of view the volumes of practice and of people practising at the national level, cannot omit these different types of information and cannot be based on one definition.

The 2000 survey on the French sporting activities commissioned by the French Ministry of Sports is placed within this opening continuity in order to make a better distinction. It is defined as an inventory of practises and its aim is to measure the whole sports phenomenon in France. The step taken is purely a description and goes by a wide definition of sports.

To technically meet this objective, the two selected questions were:

Q1: During the last 12 months, have you, either from time to time or during your holidays, done some physical and sporting activities, or any other activities of this type outside school physical activities?

Q2: Could you name the more precisely possible all the physical and sporting activities that you practised during the last 12 months?

Following these two questions, a boost was held on the basis of a list of activities in order to check that nothing had been omitted.

Q2bis: "In order to precise and to be assured that nothing has been omitted, I will name a list of activities. Are there some activities you practised in the last 12 months and that you did not previously named?"

This point of view allows a varied geometrical approach. In gathering the whole information linked to the French physical and sporting activities, the researcher may then get back to more restrictive definition and thus discuss the controversies.

Therefore he may analyse the competitors, the holidays' sporting activities, the fitness physical activities. One notices here the importance of the semantics in the questioning. The choice of the words "physical activities and sporting activities" allow including the whole practises. On the other hand because of their mandatory nature, physical and sporting activities at school have been excluded of this survey.

We will explore the question of what it means to be a sportsman in France using the collected database in France during the year 2000. To what types of involvement this property of sportsman refers? What types of intensity and which types of practices? And what about multiple-activity? What is the part held by institutionalisation of the practice in the definition of sport? The study of the principal activities stated by the French shows how the polysemic problem as to the definition of sport is justified.

METHODS

The mean of gathering the data selecting is a survey by way of a list of questions at a national level. A sample of 6526 people, representative of the French population aged between 15 and 75 was drawn in July 2000. Each individual answered a list of questions on phone, referring to the questionnaire presented in the introduction.

By taking into consideration the data of the national census, the 15–75 age ratio is in France in the number of 44.1 millions, thus an individual of the sample corresponds to 6761 individuals in this age ratio. The calculation of this equivalence allows to presenting an extrapolation of the volumes of practises and those practising.

On a statistical level, it is also useful to present the principal results with some confidence intervals of 95% in report to the sample (Wonacott and Wonacott, 1985). For the crossing of two key variables, the percentage in line and the results of the chi-squared

test are given with a 1% level of significance. The software used for the data base analysis is Stabox 6.3 – Grimmer Software.

RESULTS

In the widest definition of the physical and sporting practice, the survey allows the estimation of the French sporting population to 36.6 million individuals, about 4 French out of five (table 1). Such results demonstrate the degree of penetration of physical and sporting activities within the French society. Those figures are worth examining in details since they refer to varied practice modalities and in consequence to different ways to define one self as a sportsman.

Table 1. Declared physical and sporting practise

	Weight	Confidence Interval	Editorial extrapolation
non practising	1107	[16%; 18%]	7 482 463
practising	5419	[82%; 84%]	36 638 517
Total	6526	100 %	44 127 742

The difference of activities declared before and after the boosting is particularly interesting (table 2). One may question the value of the statement when the activity is not spontaneously named before the boosting. The levels of 22% French and of 27% sportsmen declaring themselves after the boosting do point out to the legitimate definition of sport, getting back to an institutionalised definition of sport.

Table 2. Physical and sporting practise before and after the boosting

Modalities	Weight	Confidence interval	Editorial extrapolation
after the boosting	1437	[21%; 23%]	9 713 176
before the boosting	3982	[60%; 62%]	26 925 342
non practising	1107	[16%; 18%]	7 482 463
Total	6526	100%	44 127 742

Table 3 states the practises exceeding the threshold value of 2 million people. 284 different practises have been declared in the survey. The more spread out activities within the French population are in order walking with 16 million people practising, petanque (with over 5 million people practising), and soccer (with over 4 million people practising). The diversity of the declared practises clearly shows how important it is to leave a question open in order not to exclude anything at all. New practises and new means of practise appear but above all different designations are used to define what one considers a physical or sporting activity. This is the case with swimming, swimming as leisure, swimming and the swimming pool, all four referring to the idea of swimming. How can one analyse the meaning to give to these 4 "word", activities being more often regrouped on uniquely technical criteria with the "swimming" category? The answer to this question refers to a better comprehension of what is really described behind these four activities. This is what we will see with the frequency criterion and with the institutionalisation level.

Table 3. The most spread out activities within the French (from 2 million people)

Sporting and physical activities	Weight	Confidence interval	Editorial extrapolation
Walking	2376	[35%; 38%]	16 065 015
Petanque	828	[12%; 13%]	5 598 273
Soccer	685	[10%; 11%]	4 633 274
Leisure cycling	563	[8%; 9%]	3 808 345
eisure swimming	540	[8%; 9%]	3 650 313
Tennis	530	[8%; 9%]	3 585 336
Swimming in a pool	492	[7%; 8%]	3 332 980
Skiing	465	[7%; 8%]	3 146 690
Swimming place	459	[7%; 8%]	3 101 754
Angling	412	[6%; 7%]	2 787 229
Swimming	385	[5%; 6%]	2 602 995
Body building	376	[5%; 6%]	2 545 230
Footing	376	[5%; 6%]	2 543 457
Mountain Biking	371	[5%; 6%]	2 510 139
Bicycling	306	[4%; 5%]	2 069 416
Running	297	[4%; 5%]	2 005 745

The level of institutionalisation of the physical and sporting activities is an important criterion in order to understand the activities' frame (table 4). It reveals a rather high level of activities done outside all institutionalised frames. In this meaning, reducing the definition of sport to the practices of licences would be profoundly impoverishing in describing the sporting field area. Only 10 million people are licensed to a sporting association or a club, while only 8.5 million own a licence or have participated to a competition, while some 28 million people practise outside an organised structure.

On the other hand the level of institutionalisation of these different physical and sporting practices shows that those most voted for are strongly autonomous practices (table 5). Of 84% of those practicing the 16 first activities do practice outside all institutional frames, while 63% of sportsmen practise in a group. Soccer and tennis remaining the most institutionalised within this group of practice. Nevertheless the important part of soccer players (63%) and tennis players (65%) practicing on an independent level, demonstrates the interest of such an open questioning about sport. Resorting to clubs and federations' lists of licencees would conceal a rather not negligible part of participants.

Table 4. Institutionalisation level of the physical and sporting

Level of institutionalisation	Weight	Confidence interval	Editorial extrapolation
Autonomous	4193	[63%; 65%]	28 348 092
Club or Association	1480	[22%; 24%]	10 005 920
One licence at least	1268	[18%; 20%]	8 569 720
Competition or unformed meeting or sporting meeting	1226	[18%; 20%]	8 290 425

Table 5. Declared practices and level of institutionalisation (on line percentage and chi-squared test)

Sporting and physical	Autonomous	Club or association	Licencee
Walking	97 (+)	3 (–)	1 (–)
Pétanque	91 (+)	8 (–)	7 (–)
Soccer	63 (–)	33 (+)	33 (+)
Leisure cycling	98 (+)	2 (–)	1 (–)
Leisure swimming	95 (+)	5 (–)	2 (–)
Tennis	65 (–)	30 (+)	28 (+)
Swimming in a pool	94 (+)	5 (–)	3 (–)
Skiing	92 (+)	4 (–)	5 (–)
Swimming place	96 (+)	3 (–)	1 (–)
Angling	79	8 (–)	17 (+)
Swimming	91 (+)	8 (–)	3 (–)
Body building	63 (–)	35 (+)	7 (–)
Footing	92 (+)	8 (–)	3 (–)
Mountain bike	97 (+)	3 (–)	2 (–)
Bicycling	97 (+)	3 (–)	1 (–)
Running	97 (+)	3 (–)	1 (–)
Total	84	14	10

Reading: 97% people declaring walking practise as an autonomous activity. (+) indicates when there is an attraction between walking and the fact to practise autonomously (khi-squared test with a level of 1%). (–) indicates a repulsion between a practise and a level of institutionalisation.

The frequency of the declared practice (Table 6) defines a level of involvement to the practice which provides the definition of sport, a criterion the more so important as sport has reached more people, is diversified and that the possibilities of trying a physical or sporting activity have increased. One of course cannot make a confusion with the over 16 million people who practice sport at least twice a week and with those 10 million and more people who practice a sport twice a month.

The difference in the involvement between those two types of people practicing sport refers to differences that are not necessarily linked to the institutionalisation of the practice. (Table 7).

Thus walking and bodybuilding are the most committed practices with a rhythm of practice of at least one or twice a week for most of the people practicing. This places these practices in term of involvement far ahead of tennis (only 12%) and even soccer (31%). The competing sporting performance is not the only indicator of the French's sportivity. Walking, swimming, pedalling remain the physical and sporting activities par excellence. Cycling and running are practiced on a relative involvement and refer to practices of physical keeping while the swimming activities seem to be more punctual and to be realised during the time of the holidays. At the same time the pluridisciplinary character of these statements, in which almost 60% French people declare to practice at least two activities does generate some confusion in regards to the involvement of these sportsmen (Table 8). What can one say about sportsmen who multiply different practices but limit their involvement to each one to either once or twice a month or only at the time of their holidays?

The question of the definition of what "to be a sportsman in France of 2000" is not so simple, it refers to precise analysis of the practices' institutional levels and of the involvement's levels of the participants. It also refers to the symbolical analyse throughout the relationships the practicing people establish with their practices.

Table 6. The frequency of the declared practices

Modalities	Weight	Confidence interval	extrapolation
Never	1107	[16%; 18%]	7 482 463
Less than once a month	533	[8%; 9%]	3 602 305
One to two times a month	969	[14%; 16%]	6 548 364
Once a week	1451	[21%; 23%]	9 812 673
Two to three times a week	1472	[22%; 24%]	9 948 518
Over three times a week	995	[14%; 16%]	6 726 657
Total	6526	100%	44 120 980

Table 7. Declared practises and practises' frequencies (Percentage in line and Chi-squared test)

	Given time or holidays	Less than once / month	1 to 2 times / month	Once / week	2 to 3 times / week	Over 3 times / week	Total
Walking	14 (–)	5 (–)	14 .	19 .	18 (+)	30 (+)	100
Pétanque	56 (+)	10 (+)	17 .	9 (–)	7 (–)	2 (–)	100
Soccer	21 (–)	7 .	17 .	23 .	21 (+)	10 .	100
Leisure cycling	22 (–)	9 .	18 (+)	24 .	18 .	8 .	100
Leisure swiming	47 (+)	9 .	14 .	21 .	6 (–)	4 (–)	100

	Given time or holidays	Less than once / month	1 to 2 times / month	Once / week	2 to 3 times / week	Over 3 times / week	Total
Tennis	38 .	11 . (+)	17 .	23 .	10 (–)	2 (–)	100
Swimming in a pool	33 .	13 (+)	21 (+)	24 .	7 (–)	3 (–)	100
Skiing	78 (+)	3 (–)	7 (–)	4 (–)	2 (–)	4 (–)	100
Swimming place	66 (+)	8 .	12 (–)	6 (–)	5 (–)	3 (–)	100
Angling	33 .	8 .	23 (+)	17 .	14 .	4 (–)	100
Swimming	42 (+)	6 .	21 (+)	20 .	10 (–)	2 (–)	100
Body building	12 (–)	5 (–)	12 (–)	19 .	33 (+)	18 (+)	100
Footing	16 (–)	4 .	15 .	36 (+)	21 (+)	8 .	100
Mountain bike	23 (–)	10 .	24 (+)	21 .	15 .	7 .	100
Bicycling	20 (–)	4 .	17 .	26 .	16 .	16 .	100
Jogging	20 (–)	7 .	16 .	28 (+)	17 (+)	12 .	100
Total	31	8	16	20	15	11	100

Reading: 14% people declaring walking practise this activity at a given time or during holidays;

(–) Indicates an opposition with walking and the fact to practise during a given time or during holidays (khi squared test with a level of 1%). When there is (+), it is an attraction a practise and a frequency.

Table 8. The number of activities practiced

Modalities	Weight	Confidence interval	Editorial extrapolation
Never	1107	[16%; 18%]	7 482 463
0 practice	1107	[16%; 18%]	7 482 463
1 practice	1598	[23%; 26%]	10 805 067
2 practices	1297	[19%; 21%]	8 768 379
3 practices	948	[14%; 15%]	6 408 422
4 practices	658	[9%; 11%]	4 446 498
5 practices and over	919	[13%; 15%]	6 210 152
Total	6526	100%	44 120 980

ARGUMENT

1. Sport: a practice of the masses and a variety of ways to practise

The broad definition adopted by the 2000 survey on French people sporting activities presents a massive practice, reaching four French out of five, but also presents a practice involving intensity and variety. Three French out of five practiced weekly and as many are touched by at least two activities in a year.

Besides whatever the practices considered, the modalities of practices greatly vary. They refer to intensities strongly differentiated and to ways of handy "zapping" that may be linked to contexts such as those of the holidays or still to some symbolism with for example sliding sports: snowboarding in winter, surfing in summer and rollerblading the rest of the year. (Burlot, Paupardin, 2001). The multidisciplinarity is a particularly important dimension and refers to a plural sportsman.

This variety and this difference of intensity in the practices opens a discussion on the often accepted idea of a causality link with the fact of holding a licence to a sports club and to the level of sportivity. The study of the principal activities which the French survey declared, shows how this controversy is founded. The reality of the sporting activities of the French is complex and varied and demonstrates a strong practice outside any institutions. Such a reality could only involve well-fed controversies but above all leads to an analysis of these practices on the basis of a broader definition of sport.

2. The limitations of a national survey with a question list

The type of questioning adopted by the 2000 survey is today partly accepted. The 22% people declaring themselves after the boosting refer though to a true question about the gathering of data with questions list or interviews: What is the confidence level and the authenticity of the memory of interviewee? And in consequence what is the value of the gathered reality? Nevertheless beyond all this, the report demonstrates in our case the interest of using a double level questioning to gather the whole of the sporting phenomenon.

3. Future works

The variety of the activities and the different ways of practices declared by the French reveal the existence of a "plural sportsman" (Duret, 2001). The uni-varied and bi-varied analysis used, reveal the outlines but do not define it with more accuracy. The perspective of research is now to go deeper into the question of plural sports from explanatory multi-varied statistical methods (factorial analysis and logistical regressions). This work could be the more so interesting since the first results of the 2000 survey (Mignon and Truchot, 2000) already described on one hand some important socio-demographic differentiation between the practices and on the other hand some very different relations to the activity according to the individuals.

SPORTUJÍCÍ VE FRANCII V ROCE 2000: OTÁZKA VYMEZENÍ

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SOUHRN

Otázka vymezení sportu je kontroverzní věcí, světový sport je velmi různorodý, málokterý fenomén vykazuje takový rozmach jako sport. Národní přehled o sportujících ve Francii v roce 2000 realizovaný Francouzským ministerstvem sportu zdůrazňuje, jak obtížné je měřit smysl slova „být sportovcem ve Francii v roce 2000". Různorodost účastníků ve sportu a reálná úroveň jejich účasti v aktivitě, rozmanitost kontextů sportování více či méně institucializovaného a mnohonásobná účast jsou případnými kritérii k vymezení různých významů daného jevu, o kterém stať pojednává.

Klíčová slova: sociologie, demografie, sport, France

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EVALUATION OF SPORTS DISCIPLINES FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S POINT OF VIEW

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SUMMARY

The multiplying effects of an elite sports result have significant impacts on society as a whole in the context of ongoing discussions about the value of sports results and hence which sports disciplines should receive more public funds. Sports disciplines in the Republic of Slovenia were evaluated on the basis of a general survey of 853 Slovenian adults. In the research Slovenians evaluated sports disciplines which, in February 2004, included sportsmen categorised according to the criteria of the SOC – SUSA. The evaluation of sports disciplines and sports results was based on answers collected from eight questionnaires (Kovač et al., 2004), which were then analysed with the use of a rank analysis method. It may be concluded that in particular the general public highly values elite results in sports disciplines included in the programme of the Olympic Games.

Key words: sports disciplines, evaluation, adults

INTRODUCTION

Particularly in the last few years both the media and general public have started to ask questions about the significance of elite sport, its external effects on society as a whole and the justification for financing it from public funds. Funds from central and local governments' budgets and finances from concessionary taxation should only be available to fund those activities with positive impacts on the wider public and which thus represent a public good, meaning there is a public interest in these activities.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote that the basic task of comprehension is to understand the essence of the matter (Musek, 1997), whereas the English philosopher Francis Bacon said that essence can be recognised by its causes. Therefore, events can be understood when the causes of them are understood. In 1843 John Stuart Mill set out five rules which enable the logical assumption of causes, the so-called rules of causal deduction and which Wilhelm Wundt managed to join with in a single definition of a cause, stating that: *"Out of circumstances accompanying an event, a cause for this event are those circumstances, which by their elimination result in the elimination of the event itself and which quantified changes result in quantified changes of the event"* (in Musek,