



REVIVING TRADITIONAL SPORTS

THE FINAL DECLARATION OF THE 4th ETHNOSPORT FORUM ONLINE, 2021

The 4th Ethnosport Forum was successfully held on 10 April 2021. The Forum was honored by His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Turkey, who sent a video message to the opening ceremony of the Forum. The Forum, which was held online due to the pandemic, had participants from over 60 countries. Among the participants that honored the Forum were esteemed Ministers of Youth, Culture and Sports from six countries.

In his video message, H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan noted that the COVID pandemic reminded us the importance of solidarity, cooperation, and other traditional values. Therefore, H.E. Erdoğan emphasized the importance of reviving traditional sports and welcomed increasing interest in traditional sports that has been observed during the past year.

In his opening speech, Mr. Necmeddin Bilal Erdoğan, President of the WEC, welcomed all participants and noted the important functions served by the Forum, most importantly reviving cultures and preserving cultural diversity. Mr. Erdoğan also emphasized the need to use technology in order to reach youth and familiarize them with traditional sports and games. Dr. Mehmet Kasapoğlu, Minister of Youth and Sports of Turkey, emphasized his ministry's support for traditional sports in Turkey and invited all participants to the 4th World Nomad Games to be held next year in İznik, Bursa.

The forum hosted two online roundtable discussions, whose theme was the role of digitalization in promoting and popularizing traditional sports and games. Digitalization is currently a hot topic in sports and many sports organizations and governing bodies are involved in a process of digital transformation. Digitalization provides opportunities for reaching out to a broader audience, enriching audience experience, and generating more revenue. Thus, digitalization is seen as the primary means through which modern sports will grow in the future. Roundtable discussions were planned in order to help traditional sports to reap the benefits of digitalization, as well. As such, participants were asked to come up with ideas about meaning and significance of digitalization for traditional sports, as well as strategies for capturing its potential and overcoming difficulties.

The roundtable discussions generated useful ideas and suggestions regarding digitalization and the future of traditional sports.

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Digitalization of Traditional Sports

As Mr. Necmeddin Bilal Erdoğan noted in his closing speech, the pandemic made digitalization of traditional sports an imminent task. Digitalization is also necessary for reaching out to youth, who are avid users of technology, especially the internet and social media. Participants also expressed their support for digitalization attempts and some described their achievements in their own countries with respect to digitalization.

As is the case for modern sports, hybrid live-virtual events are foreseen to become the dominant format for traditional sports and games. In the hybrid live-virtual event model, organizers and advertisers are going to compete not for event place, but for event space. In order to attract audiences, organizers and advertisers have to create innovative ways to stand out in the crowded space.

Technology is expected to evolve more to support performance of traditional sports and games in digital form. Technology will likely create a more interactive environment that pulls the audience into the experience.

Participants emphasized the use of social media, especially in current pandemic conditions that limit practicing traditional sports and games activities. Many participants advised using the pandemic conditions as an opportunity to generate awareness among youth concerning traditional sports. Issues that need to be considered as part of this endeavor are how to present traditional sports and games on social media and whether their presentation is generating the desired effect on target audiences.

Some participants also advised generating new digital platforms or enriching already existing ones with short videos, movies, serials, or games and luring audiences with them. A related task is to create a digital ecosystem, supported by relationships between content providers, content managers, and consumers of content.

Digitalization is important as it is probably the primary means to reach a broader traditional sports and games audience and enrich audience experience. It also enables generation of databases, digitalized encyclopedias, and research output. Although traditional sports and games are not about generating profits, digitalization can also help generate income, which may be important for sustainability and easing the burden on governments. In order to capitalize on these opportunities, effective leadership is necessary. Participants recognize the role played by the WEC and Forums in this respect. What is also necessary is investing in technology and human resources, most importantly, training organizers and practitioners of traditional sports and games. National authorities should also invest greater effort in promotion of its ongoing projects and undertakings.

Digitalization will be key to producing a common world heritage of traditional sports and games. Technology can help train the youth, support teacher development, eliminate divides between nations, promote inclusion, and strengthen global governance of traditional sports and games.

Greater Involvement in Scientific Research

A theme closely related to digitalization is encouraging scientific research on traditional sports and games. Systematic knowledge creation has already been under way for some time, with involvement of academics from multiple countries in the creation of a comprehensive encyclopedia. A PhD scholarship program has also been put in place, already supporting multiple PhD students studying traditional sports and games.

The future of traditional sports and games also depends upon whether they are taken up in an academic framework. No doubt, one of the most effective way of the protection as well as promotion of traditional sports and games knowledge is through the contributions of scientific research. In this respect, establishing national centers of research and excellence has utmost importance. These centers should make use of theories and methods developed in multiple fields of social sciences, such as history, sociology, management, and international relations as they research traditional sports and games.

A fruitful output of scientific research endeavors would be a handbook of traditional sports and games. This handbook could present a comprehensive framework for future studies of traditional sports and games, as well as comparative descriptions of traditional sports across countries, emphasizing nationally unique understandings and practices. Also, books that provide detailed descriptions of particular traditional sports and games may be written and translated into multiple languages and posted online for use by a diverse audience. In the meantime, online reference tools such as Wikipedia could be enriched with entries concerning traditional sports and games.

A related output would be a digital dictionary of traditional sports and games. While encyclopedia can present broad information about traditional sports and games across countries, this digital dictionary would be more focused on listing and defining traditional sports and games terms used across the world. The dictionary would make it a lot easier to comprehend what participants from diverse cultures mean when they use specific terms and also make them feel more comfortable in presenting their cultural artifacts as they are called in their own culture.

Nowadays, scientific progress in any field is measured as the number of scientific articles produced by experts of the field. Making traditional sports and games known in the scientific community requires publishing a greater number of articles, especially in the related fields of social sciences, such as history, sociology, management, and international relations. Scientific progress is likely to lend further credibility to ongoing efforts at promoting traditional sports and games. That effect will especially strong if scientific research demonstrates positive impact of traditional sports and games on health and community wellbeing.

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Internationalization

Participants of the Forum made a strong call for internationalization and international collaboration. With the support of digital technologies, traditional sports and games which are ordinarily locally-performed may draw wider attention from all over the world without incurring the costs associated with travel.

Participants recognize World Ethnosport Confederation as a bridge between different regions, countries, and cultures. Traditional sports and games have the potential to enhance international cooperation and collaboration. Thus, promotion of traditional sports and games should not be understood simply as a sports event. Participants noted the potential of traditional sports and games to contribute to international relations, tourism, and inter-cultural communication and exchange. The potential of traditional sports and games should be considered beyond its visible or immediate outputs.

An endeavor to be undertaken at the international level is to create mechanisms, systems and processes to encourage sharing of best practices and experiences across cultures. Participants from different countries also call for national authorities to sign MOUs with WEC in order to recognize traditional sports and games at the national level and commit to reviving traditional sports and games.

Professionalization

Participants made calls for not focusing exclusively on some elite sports but giving support to and promoting all kind of sports, including traditional sports and games. Some participants have accentuated the fact that that the mother of several well-known modern sports are traditional sports and games.

Nevertheless, participants consider modernizing traditional sports and games an important task, as well. This entails making traditional sports and games activities major events. Developing facilities and training practitioners and organizers are important, too. Thus, efforts geared towards professionalization are needed. Professionalization would be achieved to the extent governments and supra-governmental bodies support and recognize traditional sports and games, and develop the necessary infrastructures, institutions, legislation, standards, procedures, professions, and education and training programs.

Participants of the Forum suggest that we should not consider traditional sports and games as static. We should be aware of the fact that they are dynamic. We need to develop them further in ways that make them a stronger part of our contemporary life. That way, we can unleash the potential of traditional sports and games to strengthen our identity, as well as solidarity and cooperation.



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Traditional Sports and Post-COVID Revitalization of Society

Restrictions caused by the pandemic have limited physical activity of all sorts. Participants also see great potential in traditional sports and games to help individuals and societies refocus on exercise, as well as physical and mental health. Combining digital technologies and scientific evidence can help traditional sports and games to occupy a privileged position in people's understanding as to how to remain healthy and help societies to recover from the hardships caused by the pandemic.

The WEC and participants hope to meet again next year, in the 5th Ethnosport Forum, which is to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, hopefully in COVID-free times.

