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The Civilizational Dimensions of Elite Sports and Their Role in Promoting Shared Human Values - Environmental Values as a Model

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Abstract:

The environment is considered one of the most important civilizational and humanitarian issues of shared concern in the modern era by states, institutions, and international organizations, regardless of their orientations and fields of activity. Sport, as one aspect of human activity, enjoys wide interest and great popularity among various age groups, categories, and levels. It is therefore one of the most significant domains focusing on promoting and exporting environmental values and encouraging their preservation as a shared living environment. Sport also has a considerable impact on local activities as well as on continental and international events and championships. Through this theoretical study, we aim to shed light on the role that sport plays at different levels, in various activities, gatherings, championships, and sports federations in promoting shared environmental values.

BOUCHHER Houari

Introduction and Research Problem

The contemporary world is witnessing numerous cultural and civilizational challenges, as well as various threats to its existence and safety, such as wars and conflicts, food crises, and environmental problems affecting the Earth — the shared living environment. These challenges are exacerbated by the depletion of natural resources and the pursuit of production and industry without due consideration for environmental issues, in addition to other problems with far-reaching impacts on humanity as a whole. This situation compels us to seriously consider finding solutions to these problems and limiting their spread.

A closer examination of these issues reveals that the primary cause behind their emergence and escalation is the absence of human values among large segments of the population. This absence has allowed such issues to grow into a clear threat not only to humans but also to all other living beings. Thus, the dissemination and elevation of fundamental human values across all societies becomes the only guarantee for uplifting our world, resolving these accumulating problems, and saving future generations from numerous dangerous consequences.

The environment stands out as one of the most important issues of shared human concern, as it constitutes the medium for common living. The threats it faces in the modern era arise from various factors such as industrial expansion, depletion of natural resources, and unregulated consumption. In reality, the main common factor directly causing these problems is the human element itself. Therefore, it is necessary to promote environmental awareness and values, and to take every measure to preserve this natural and human treasure.

Environmental values are essentially individuals' beliefs, perspectives, and feelings toward the environment — values that they cherish and choose after reflection and comparison with other alternatives. An individual tends to hold firmly to these values when they are attacked or threatened. In this sense, such values serve as a guide for behavior toward the environment, functioning as a true standard for environmental conduct.

Sport is one of the fields that contribute to sustainable development and the reduction of these problems, as it plays a significant role in spreading awareness and values through competitions and sporting events, alongside its growing civilizational role in modern times. In this regard, sport has become a complex phenomenon with a civilizational mission — one that is too significant to be confined within the budgets of economists or the programs of politicians (Djellali

Kaloun & Amer Haj Dahou, 2018, p. 3). This imposes a range of commitments in the sports sector to engage in sustainable development and participate in programs and policies aimed at combating negative phenomena in the human environment, while working to raise awareness across its various dimensions.

Furthermore, sport can play an active role in awareness campaigns, in rejecting harmful values, and in adopting and strengthening shared human values. In its modern concept, sport has surpassed its traditional meaning to become an economic, civilizational, cultural, and even political tool — a true indicator of power and development within societies.

An attempt to find a harmonious relationship between the environment and sport, and to integrate the environmental dimension into sports, involves taking environmental considerations into account when developing national sports strategies, policies, and executive plans for clubs; when organizing events and activities; and when designing, constructing, and equipping sports facilities.

Based on this perspective, the present study aims to answer the following research question:

What are the civilizational dimensions of sport that can contribute to the promotion of shared human values, particularly environmental values?

Research Hypothesis

Sport plays an important role in promoting human values, particularly environmental values, as a driver of sustainable development and through what can be achieved in the field of environmental values via sporting events and school sports.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to shed light on the importance of the civilizational dimensions of sport in the modern era, given its status as one of the most powerful public platforms. Sport also strengthens bridges of communication and cultural exchange between different peoples and cultures. It has become a means of rejecting violence, racism, and extremism, while raising awareness about shared humanitarian issues.

Moreover, the study highlights the role of sport across various disciplines and events in promoting and reinforcing contemporary civilizational values within society. This, in turn, fosters coexistence and strengthens mechanisms of defense against the risks and negative phenomena that threaten communities. Among the most important shared human values today are environmental values,

as the environment constitutes the shared living space. This study explores the threats to this space and what sport can contribute in this field.

Objectives of the Study

- To clarify the importance of shared awareness in addressing environmental crises.
- To highlight the significance of sport as a civilizational indicator in societies.
- To emphasize the importance of modern educational implications within the university education system.
- To explain the effects of sport on human and civilizational values.
- To develop a vision and set of proposals for promoting environmental values and integrating them into local championships and events.

Terms and Concepts

Civilizational Dimensions

Defined by the researcher as values, standards, and criteria that can be used to infer human behavior, as well as the extent of one's awareness and understanding of cultural and moral influences, the ability to adapt to them, and the individual and collective responses to new factors, diverse impacts, and various cultures.

Sport

Matveyev defines sport as “a special form of activity, the essence of which lies in organized competition aimed at measuring abilities and ensuring their maximum expression.” From his perspective, the defining characteristic of sport is the concept of competitive activity.

Kosola defines sport as “physical training aimed at achieving the best possible result in competition, not only for the benefit of the athlete but also for the sake of sport itself.” She considers competition the fundamental feature that gives sport its necessary social character, as it is a cultural product of the competitive nature of human beings as social and cultural entities (Amir Anwar Al-Khouli, 1990, p. 25).

The researcher defines sport as all individual and collective activities in which individuals and teams compete through physical effort, bodily movements, and skills, practiced according to agreed-upon rules and regulations, in both formal and informal competitions. Sport is practiced by all segments of society across different ages and levels, attracting wide attention from individuals and

groups, and has become an indicator of the advancement and civilization of nations.

Human Values

Defined by the researcher as the foundational principles of an integrated moral system, universally recognized by sound human nature and reinforced by religions, reformist ideas, and great artistic and literary works. Human values manifest in real life through daily interactions between people and encompass a broad range of virtues and moral principles.

Environmental Values

Defined by the researcher as the various judgments and beliefs related to issues of the natural environment, considering it the shared living space of humanity. These values are directly connected to elements of the natural environment as the arena of shared interaction, and they serve as standards for individual and collective behavior toward the environment.

1 — Clarifying the Relationship between Sustainable Development and the Environment

According to UNESCO, sustainable development requires that each generation enjoy the natural resources while leaving them clean and unpolluted, just as they were found on Earth (Mohamed Saleh Torkia Al-Quraishi, 1971, p. 35).

The World Commission on Environment and Development, established by the United Nations to study this issue, provided a general definition in 1987 in its report *Our Common Future*. This concise and comprehensive definition describes sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Mohamed Abdel-Badie, 2017, p. 376).

2 — Sport as a Field of Sustainable Development

The former Vice President of the International Olympic Committee noted that “a healthy and sound environment” naturally produces high-level champions, whereas a degraded environment has negative repercussions on sport and an even greater impact on athletes.

The added value in relation to environmental issues lies in the full engagement of athletes, clubs, and sports federations in upholding the principles of sustainable development by adopting environmentally respectful approaches, particularly concerning water, air, waste recycling management, heritage

preservation, and natural restoration. This also involves encouraging decision-makers to create new green spaces, while taking into account the importance of education and commitment to the ecological dimension.

Environmental messages, values, and initiatives can be integrated into major events organized by sports federations and organizations — such as world championships, the Olympic Games, and others — allowing for a greater impact in the current context.

The involvement of athletes across all disciplines in disseminating these messages is undoubtedly a powerful means of raising public awareness and educating citizens about environmental issues.

Based on these considerations, athletes find themselves inherently concerned with environmental challenges, as they are already aware of the values promoted by sport, such as the culture of respect. Therefore, all athletes, especially high-profile ones, have a responsibility to spread these messages, as their reputation and influence enable them to do so. What remains is the political will, the engagement of media, and the search for suitable ideas. An environmental preservation message delivered by a prominent sports champion through educational and awareness campaigns can have a swift and significant impact across various segments of society in Morocco — including citizens, organizations (clubs, national federations, national Olympic committees), and local authorities.

Characteristics of Sport

Sport is distinguished by several characteristics, including the following (Awissi Iman, 2009, p.14):

- It is characterized by fair competition, aimed at determining performance levels and identifying the winner(s).
- It distinctly determines victors and the defeated, a situation that produces valuable experiences and lessons that cannot be attained with the same clarity in any other human activity.
- Sport requires significant psychological, mental, and physical effort, demanding a high degree of training, concentration, and attention.
- It represents a civilizational phenomenon, practiced according to scientific and moral principles.
- Participation in sport is voluntary, engaged in by individuals of their own free will and desire, without coercion or pressure.

3 — The Role of Sport in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Wilfried Lemke, former Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, noted that after 15 years of unprecedented progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the world turned its attention to the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the transition to the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under the leadership of the United Nations, the international community engaged in a comprehensive consultation process with stakeholders from all sectors of society, reviewing both the achievements and the unfinished work of the MDGs, and agreed on 17 SDGs to be pursued over the next fifteen years. The 2030 Agenda, with its inclusive vision of bringing people and the planet closer together and leaving no one behind, represents a unique opportunity to inspire global action for development — including in the field of sport for development and peace.

Sport has proven to be a cost-effective and flexible tool for advancing peace and development goals. Since the adoption of the MDGs in 2000, sport has played a vital role in numerous resolutions of the UN General Assembly. In Resolution 70/1, entitled “*Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” (adopted in 2015), the role of sport in promoting social progress was reaffirmed. Sport often contributes to peace by creating environments at both the grassroots and community levels that bring participants together to pursue shared goals and interests, while fostering values of respect, tolerance, and fair play, and developing social skills.

As a common denominator and a shared passion, sport can build bridges between communities regardless of cultural differences or political divisions. In times of conflict or instability, sporting activities can provide participants with a sense of normalcy. A notable example of such partnerships is the collaboration between the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), an entity with observer status in the UN General Assembly and a key partner of the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace. Together, they have launched multiple joint initiatives in this field.

For instance, the General Assembly has adopted several resolutions on the Olympic Truce. Every four years, the UN calls on Member States, parties to conflicts, and other stakeholders to observe a truce during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, with the hope that one day of truce might lead to a week of

peace, a month of peace, and ultimately, an end to war. The Olympic values have thus become an important component of sport and education, with a long history of promoting peace.

General Assembly Resolution 70/4, entitled “*Building a Peaceful and Better World through Sport and the Olympic Ideal*”, was co-sponsored by 180 UN Member States and adopted by consensus in 2015. In this resolution, countries agreed to uphold the Olympic Truce from seven days before the opening ceremony of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games in August until seven days after the closing ceremony of the Rio Paralympic Games in September. These Games were expected to inspire and unite people worldwide.

Brazil hosted the first Olympic and Paralympic Games ever held in South America, and for the first time, a Refugee Olympic Team participated — both unprecedented features that demonstrated the Games were not merely fierce competitions, but unique opportunities to build a more inclusive society and to send messages of peace, inclusion, and respect.

Major sporting events can also help promote social development, economic growth, health, education, and environmental protection, especially when they are part of coherent, sustainable, and long-term policies at municipal, regional, and national levels.

Wilfried Lemke, "The Role of Sport in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals", United Nations Chronicle,

<https://www.un.org/ar/chronicle/article/20132>

4 – The Role of Sport in Developing Moral Values:

Sport plays a major role in fostering moral values, as it is one of the fields where moral development can take place. This development occurs through imitation and initiation; for example, a child learns how to play football by imitating those who excel in the sport. Likewise, a child can learn to be virtuous by imitating those who are morally virtuous. Initiation is important, as an experienced practitioner—whether in sport or in ethics—serves as a model for what excellence means, and guides youth in building the right habits for such practice. Children should be encouraged to commit to sport as a moral practice, meaning they will play it as it ought to be played, rather than in inappropriate ways.

Those who play well demonstrate the role of sport in bringing peoples together, embodying values such as sportsmanship, fairness, respect for rules, and

cooperation. These virtues often become an integral part of the traditions of a specific sport, which promotes their formation and display by those who practice it.

5 – How Sport Influences Social Values:

- **Sport Promotes a Culture of Physical Fitness:**

Sport plays a powerful role in influencing people's lives by contributing to the strengthening of a culture of physical fitness. People who participate in sporting events enjoy good health and physical strength, enabling them to perform well—motivating others to adopt a physically active lifestyle. Sport therefore encourages an active and healthy way of life.

- **Sport Eliminates Social Differences:**

Sport is a great tool for erasing social differences, as people from all walks of life are treated equally. Regardless of whether an athlete is rich or poor, everyone receives fair treatment and equal opportunities to play, irrespective of social distinctions. Spectators also sit together to watch and enjoy matches.

- **Sport Strengthens Community Relationships:**

Sport is an amazing way to build stronger community bonds. Professional athletes play a role in community relations, often performing services for the welfare of society, such as raising funds and donations to support those in need.

- **Sport Encourages Healthy Socialization:**

Sport fosters healthy socialization, which is beneficial for mental health. When individuals participate in sports activities, they tend to be more open-minded, giving them greater opportunities to develop healthy social interactions with others.

- **Community Prosperity:**

Playing sport is a crucial part of everyone's life, which explains its profound impact on human society. Sport can help improve society by creating meaningful opportunities for the prosperity of communities.

- **6 – Human and Civilizational Values and Global Influences:**

It is widely recognized today that the progress of nations and the achievement of development goals are closely linked, to a large extent, to the availability within these nations of higher education and research institutions in the fields of science and technology on the one hand, and to

the functional relationship between these institutions and production sites on the other.

In the realm of social and cultural characteristics, it is often stated that the new world order is based on ensuring freedoms, applying democracy, and providing a range of services and public interests that concern humanity as a whole, thereby achieving global stability. Among the promises proclaimed by the new world order are: the provision of global peace and security, the protection of the environment, the achievement of human development, and the protection of individuals' fundamental rights. (*Lamia Mohamed Ahmed El-Sayed, 2002, p. 39*)

- **7 – Common Environmental Problems:**

The environment is the surrounding in which humans live and carry out production activities; it contains living and non-living materials and is shaped by social and economic factors. It consists of the natural and social surroundings, or, in other words, it is everything surrounding humans, animals, or plants in terms of features and factors that influence their formation, development, and various aspects of life. (*Jamal Bourbia, 2010, p. 28*)

- Since humans are part of the ecosystem, they were not initially the cause of the environmental problems that now threaten their existence. In ancient times, human activities left no significant impact on nature, similar to other living creatures. For centuries, the waste disposed of into nature remained within its capacity to absorb—if not well below it—allowing nature to recycle it naturally in a way that preserved its balance.

However, by the 19th century, with the advent of industry and its widespread use, the waste humans discharged into the environment began to far exceed its capacity, placing a heavy burden upon it. This led to the emergence of numerous environmental problems due to imbalances within its systems, making it necessary for humans to intervene swiftly to limit, halt, and, if possible, eliminate these problems. This underscores the critical role of awareness in this field—namely, awareness of environmental problems and the means to reduce them and preserve the environment as a shared living space. It also reinforces the idea of integrating the concept of environmental education into educational systems, especially higher education.

The main causes of environmental problems can be classified as follows:
(Bousalem Zina, 2016, p. 69)

- **Lack of knowledge about the environment:** This leads to difficulty in finding appropriate solutions due to the unclear reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment.
- **Unsustainable use of technology in the environment:** This results in the depletion of more natural resources used in industry, in addition to the pollution of water, air, soil, food, and the creation of noise pollution caused by manufacturing processes.
- **Industrial advancement:** Which has led to the production of many substances that are foreign to the natural environment.
- **The imbalance of values and attitudes, which is the essence of environmental problems:** Since values and attitudes acquire a social dimension that guides people's behavior toward their environment.

In line with the focus on the educational system and the role it can play in increasing individuals' awareness of their environment and in developing sound environmental attitudes accompanied by positive behaviors and practices toward the environment, numerous international conferences and educational workshops have emphasized the necessity of integrating environmental education into teacher-training programs in institutes, universities, and various educational institutions. This is due to the pivotal role teachers can play in developing positive attitudes and environmental awareness among their students, equipping them with the skills and appropriate behaviors for interacting with their surrounding environment.

(Hammadna Abdelraouf, 2016, p. 308)

8 – Environmental Values through School Sports:

Environmental education is an educational process aimed at developing human awareness and fostering interest in the environment by providing knowledge, information, skills, and attitudes to solve current environmental problems and prevent the emergence of new ones. (Asma Radi Khanfar & Aed Radi Khanfar, 2016, p. 54)

UNESCO defines it as:

“The process of forming the values, attitudes, skills, and perceptions necessary to understand and appreciate the complex relationships linking humans and their civilization to their biophysical environment, demonstrating the

necessity of conserving natural environmental resources and the rational use of these resources for the benefit of humans, ensuring a decent life, and raising their standard of living.”

(Asma Radi Khanfar & Aed Radi Khanfar, *op. cit.*, p. 55)

The researcher views it as an educational process aimed at developing learners' awareness, arousing their interest in the environment in its broadest sense, and promoting participation in environmental matters by providing them with knowledge and skills, fostering their inclinations and attitudes toward both individual and collective work to address environmental problems, raising their sensitivity toward these issues, and encouraging them to participate in prevention efforts.

This is one of the factors that led the Algerian state to place importance on sports in educational and other settings, in the context of what it contributes to sustainable development. (*Law No. 13-05 dated 14 Ramadan 1434 corresponding to 23 July 2013*)

The Importance of Environmental Education:

The Belgrade Charter (1975) defined the objectives and purposes of environmental education as follows: (*Ramadan Abdel-Hamid Al-Tantawi, 2012, p. 18*)

- **Defining the concept of environmental action in improving environmental relationships:** This includes human relationships with nature and with each other, leaving each nation—according to its culture—to clarify the meaning of fundamental concepts such as quality of life and human happiness within the broader environmental context.
- **Objective of environmental education:** To prepare citizens who are concerned about their environment and aware of its problems, equipped with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to engage in individual and social action to find solutions to current environmental problems and to reduce them in the future.
- **Identifying the aims of environmental education:** In general, environmental education seeks to achieve the following goals: awareness – knowledge – attitudes – skills – evaluation of abilities – participation.

Rationale for Adopting Environmental Education in Educational Institutions

The reasons for studying environmental education in educational institutions can be summarized as follows: *(Ramzi Ahmed Abdel-Hay, 2013, p. 97)*

Education scholars stress the necessity of environmental education due to the growing impact of humans on their environment during the technological advancement era, which has led to the emergence of many environmental problems. Conferences in this field have unanimously agreed that the most effective way to develop environmental awareness among students and instill environmental values and sound environmental behavior is to integrate environmental education into general education curricula. They have also agreed on the necessity of continuous environmental awareness-raising among all members of society of all ages, as well as a general review of curricula.

Conclusions:

- Sport is one of the fields of sustainable development.
- Sport is a civilizational indicator.
- Sport enhances human values in general and environmental values in particular.
- Sport is an effective tool for promoting environmental values.
- Sports events, gatherings, and championships are among the most important public platforms worldwide for disseminating civilizational messages.
- Sport is a means of global influence.
- School sports are a means of environmental education and awareness.

Recommendations and Suggestions:

- Environmental considerations should be taken into account by reducing energy and water consumption, minimizing waste generation, and ensuring that materials used in sports clubs, sports federations, and sports events are environmentally friendly.
- Continuously raising environmental awareness and promoting environmental preservation in sports settings.
- Rationalizing the use of water and electricity in sports environments, recycling waste, using environmentally friendly equipment and tools, and recycling damaged items.
- Adopting policies to promote environmental culture through sport and sporting events.

- Recycling stadium waste and utilizing it as a source of income for sports clubs.
- Conducting awareness campaigns in sports facilities.
- Expanding media programs to highlight the relationship between sport and the environment.
- Awarding merit medals to athletes, managers, and organizations that develop policies and contribute to promoting environmental values in society.
- Implementing environmental education at all school levels through environmental activities and school sports.

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