



SPORTSWOMEN !



Erasmus+



MOVING2 HEALTH



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Panel 1 - Introduction :

The access to sports for all has been a long process to ensure that the maximum number of people can freely practice sports or even take part in competitions. Females in sports have faced a lot of struggles and obstacles to participate in sports even in games and activities which have existed for centuries.

The story told in this exhibition is of increasing access to women on sports starting from the late 19th century to today.

The participation on women in sports has been debated for centuries. The most frequently asked question is: Is the competition dangerous for women, but more importantly is it dangerous for the existing social order?

The exhibition also talks about how the society views the participants. A perception which is sometimes critical, sometimes mocking, sometimes seductive and sometimes full of admiration. The perception which depends on publicity, art, the view of the female body and most importantly on the place of the women in society.

Finally, it is the story of sportswomen in face of actual difficulties and the realization of the principle of sports, i.e. "One Right for All"

Panel 2 - Women's Sports in the late 19th Century

Distinctive practice of "English Sports" by the bourgeois, exploits of pioneers and the introduction of gymnastics in the schools(1882) were the factors which led to the expansion of sports in the "Belle Epoque". The first female sports clubs like Ondines, Academia and Femina-sport were also created during this time.

1°) and 2°) From 1898, some fearless sportswomen were known for their extraordinary exploits. In addition to these the development of women's sports also depended largely on the pioneers who remain anonymous, for example around 2000 women participated in the "March for Girls" in 1903

3°) As a result, women had access to many sports in the winter even before the First World War.

Panel 3 - The 'crazy' years of women's sports

It was during the First World War that women really participated in competitive sports. They practiced high level of athleticism, basketball, swimming or rowing based on the models of men's sports. Female sports became international with the creation of Federations for sportswomen and early international sports meet.

1°) The Federation of Society Sportswomen of France, created during the war in 1917 never stopped defending the independence of women's sports and its competitive dimension in international sports.

2°) The first Championship of female athleticism was organized in 1917, the one for football was organized in 1919. The competition also concerned the players of hockey, barette or basketball in spite of resistance from people who defended the idea of moderate and aesthetic sports practice for females.

3°) Accepted sparingly by the Olympic movement, the sportswomen created a new International Sportswomen federation (FSFI) to organize the first "Female Olympic Games" in Paris in 1922. These games which brought together athleticism, basketball and handball would be organized till 1934.

4°) Thanks to clubs, competition and dedicated coverage by press female sports spread throughout the planet. The FSFI would bring together 31 countries. But in 1936 the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) succeeded in banning "female games"

Panel 4 - Growth and democratization in the period between the two world wars

After the First World War, the status of women was very fragile. They had been emancipated professionally during the conflict and they aspired for a greater autonomy which comprised sports. But the development of women's sports in the period between the two wars was limited, mainly because of the reason of 'return of social order' which required women to take up their traditional roles. We would have to wait till the 1970s for the renewal of female sports.

1°) Women would have access to competitive sports only in the beginning of the 1920s. Based on models on men's sports, they acquired much more liberty in sports which could be seen by the growth of female sports societies.

2°) The case of female football is exemplary, immediately after war women engaged in football but this 'feminization' of football was challenged by the coming back of a conservative morality in the 1920s.

3°) The Vichy regime extended the action of the popular front in the field of sport. For nation building the training of youth seemed like an emergency. The creation of national sports certificates and propaganda by means of posters led to a popularization of physical activities for young girls

4°) Although, still considered the guardians of home and race, the women benefited from the development of women's sports at school. The practised sports in university or federal framework: athletic federations, basketball and swimming.

5°) The feminist movement had never really been active in France in favour of access to females to practice sports. Female sport nevertheless took advantage of the feminist climate of demand in the 1960s and 1970s in favour of liberty to win new followers

Panel 5 - Women's sports practice today

In a period of around 20 years the number of practitioners of physical activities or sports has considerably increased. In addition, women have conquered new territories in sports even though

they remain minorities in certain sports like football, rugby etc. but only a few such sports remain which are still closed to females.

1°) The Law "Sports" of 6 July 2000 bans all kind of discrimination against women by giving equal access to women and men in sports practice in all associations. Since then the increase in financial means, 'feminization' of sports juries, national level meetings have helped to sensitize the involved people to "sports for women"

2°) In a more autonomous and less competitive fashion than men, an increasing number of women have started practicing physical and sports activities. More than 87% women today do sports as compared to the 9% in 1968. Women opt mostly for individual sports like walking, horseback riding, gymnastics or figure skating as compared to team sports.

3°) The number of women licensed by a sporting organization is ever increasing. Their numbers have increased from 20% at the beginning of the 1960's to more than a third today. They represent more than 80% of the French Federation of gymnastics and the French Federation of horseback riding.

Panel 6 - Stars and Role-Models

Women who are exceptional in their style, determination and success have made an impact not only on the history of female sports but on a greater scale on the history of sports. They include a lot of role-models for the young sportswomen of today.

1°) Suzanne Lenglen (1899-1938) was the first 'Diva' of International women's sports. She won the Rolland Garros and Wimbledon tournaments eight times and also won two gold medals in the 1920 Olympic games.

2°) Micheline Ostermeyer (1922-2001) was an international piano concert artist and double Olympic champion (shot put and discus throw at the 1948 games). She held 18 national records in disciplines as diverse as sprints, high jump and pentathlon.

3°) Dubbed as "The little fiancée of the Atlantic", the navigator Florence Arthaud became famous for breaking the record for crossing the North Atlantic. Just like Ellen Mac Arthur (Route du Rhum), she entered the elite circle of "Great sailors"

4°) The achievements of the French women's handball team are an important part of the growth of the female participation in team sports.

Panel 7 - The slow acceptance of women in sports

The fear of seeing female athletes "exhibiting" themselves in public, need to reduce the Olympic program, refusal of any form of "masculinisation" of female champions: there was no lack of reasons to stop women from participating in the Olympics. With the exception of some disciplines seen as feminine (tennis, swimming, fencing), we would have to wait till the 1990s for the women's events to align themselves with those of men.

1°) No events for women were planned in the Athens Olympics in 1896. Four years later, the games in Paris introduced female women's events in tennis, golf and sailing. Before the coming of athletics and gymnastics in 1928 only archery, tennis, swimming and female fencing had a legitimate place in the Olympics.

2°) Pierre de Coubertin, considered the father of the modern Olympic Games always opposed the equal participation of men and women in the games. According to him, "Olympic Games must be reserved for men, the primary role of women is to crown the winners. A female Olympic is unthinkable, it is impractical, unaesthetic and incorrect."

3°) The number of female athletes represented a very small proportion of the total number of athletes for a long time because of the refusal to integrate women in many sports: 1500m was accepted in 1972 and the marathon in 1984. In addition many women's events were practiced in the Olympics for the first time: 1996 for football, 2004 for wrestling and 2012 for boxing

4°) The number of female competitors has gone up to 40% of the total participants as compared to 4.4% in Paris games of 1924 and 28.8% in Barecolna games of 1992.

Panel 8 - The Female Body: Between Strength and Grace

As soon as a sporting competition is organized, the question of the preservation of the natural "feminine grace" arises. The women who claim to be athletes are compared to standards of plastic beauty and elegance or to medical restrictions. Little by little the things are changing and even the media today suggests to all women, sportswomen or not, the adoption of "athletic body" as the ideal body.

1°) At the beginning of modern sports recreational holiday activities were allowed for women because they do not damage the female body, which must in no way deviate from the values of beauty. In the 30s, in "La Femme et la bicyclette", Dr. Ruffier denounced the prejudices and errors still held by his colleagues against the bicycle and its apparent sanitary dangers.

2°) The movements in physical education which were close to dance were preferred as it gave women the opportunity to exalt the qualities of health and beauty. The research for strength was banned for medical and aesthetic reasons.

3°) The new model of femininity was driven by the "Tomboy" with short hair and slim body and the acceptance of women in sports allowed the progressive "uncovering" of the body in the period between the two wars. It led to a greater liberty in movement and gave women a chance to reclaim their bodies.

4°) Physical activities in the open air or at home and diets more or less aimed to look like the champions endowed with a perfect body (slender and toned) who had become highly mediated models.

Panel 9 - Clothing Constraints

Fashion, the reflection of social and cultural context of a period reveals the representations associated with the female body. More than for men, aesthetic and moral imperatives closely

governed women's dress codes. With new morals and customs came new fashion and finally shorts, pants and culottes replaced the long dresses.

1°) Various activities for women were restricted because of the corset and long dresses. This had two advantages: the preservation of the bourgeois customs and a moderate female practice of sports.

2°) The adoption of pants was a revolution that liberated the sportswomen to be point of becoming a threat to the society. If the skiers would adopt pants after 1918, cyclists had already adopted the knickers called "bloomers".

3°) The footballers and athletes had adopted shorts and vests, breaking the traditional model. These clothes which were seen as masculine put into question the difference in clothing on the basis of gender and hence the social order.

4°) The 1920s corresponded to a great era in women's tennis. Lenglen made a mark in sports fashion by introducing knee-length skirt and tulle headband. Major brands like Chanel, Patou, Lanvi introduced fashion where refined elegance and liberty of movement came together for the sportswomen.

Panel 10 - The sportswoman, a promotional "object"

The association of photos of beautiful women with a product was one of the constants of the promotional image. The female body had always been overused to sell a product, a brand or a destination. But wouldn't the increasing sexualisation of advertising be an echo of an increasingly erotic society, and the advertising just conformed to the norms of the time? It nevertheless imposes stereotypes by associating sportswomen with the positive values of modernity: beauty, health, well-being, nature and youth.

1°) At the end of the 19th century the sportswoman was used to praise the virtues of one or the other product. During the Belle Epoque sportswomen were the selling point for various brands of cycles. The sellers vouched for the quality of their machines based on the values of femininity like grace, lightness and fluidity.

2°) Between 1919 and 1939 women were largely present in the publicity for railway track companies who wanted to attract tourists to the stations they served; female swimmers, skiers and golfers embodied the elegance of these new holiday destinations.

3°) In press and publicity sportswomen were used for their glamorous and sexy aspect but mainly with the virtues of health that we associate with them. Beauty through physical exercise became the method to obtain a healthy body.

4°) Sportswomen rushed into the sector of "health through sport" and sports fashion. They became icons for the young girls looking for role-models of professional and physical success.

5°) Sometimes the sportswomen misused the publicity which sometimes turned them into seductive and well selling Barbie dolls, sometimes to the extent of ignoring their sporting careers.

Panel 11 – Challenges to be faced

While sport was thought to be emancipated from any form of tutelage, educators are alarmed by a significant drop in the number of people involved in sport. Because of reasons like modesty or incompatibility with their religious beliefs women have distanced themselves from sport. In face of these difficulties, the efforts to make sport “a right for all” have increased.

For young girls, with an immigrant background, sport is an obstacle course. Due to the lack of resources, time and “sporting culture” a lot of them do not practise any sport.

Local initiatives are multiplying, in the Ile de France region; the event “Sports en filles” (Girls’ sports) allows girls from the suburbs to discover various sports in a single day. In 2005, 450 among them discovered boxing, football or rugby. Some sports coupons were distributed so that they could continue the experiences in a club.

Certain sportswomen who shine during sports competitions serve as role-models for entire generations.

Some women’s sport disciplines like rugby, boxing and weightlifting face some difficulties. In popular opinion they are considered “dangerous” for the practitioners or non-conforming to the ideal image of a woman. Yet, their practice is a real tool for social inclusion for girls

Panel 12 - For a greater recognition

Beyond the difficulties of access to decision-making positions and discrimination on religious grounds, women also face multiple practical and cultural obstacles on a daily basis, which can only hinder the development of female sport.

The sportswomen of higher levels do not enjoy the same preferential treatment as their male counterparts when it comes to media coverage. The broadcast hours for women’s events are quite late and with an exception of tennis most female sport events remain forgotten by the media.

Media’s perspective towards female sports is sometimes sexist. More than the achievements of sportswomen their private lives are given preference.

However, many national and local initiatives tend to offer the best conditions for women's access to sport and to provide a better knowledge for media and public about women’s sport respecting the equality of the sexes.

Can we develop female and mixed sports by acknowledging the difference between the genders without being sexist? Does FIFA (**International Federation of Association Football**) cross yellow line when it believes that “women's football should attract sponsors with more feminine outfits or tight shorts, such as for example for volleyball?”