

CHARTING THE WELLNESS SOCIETY IN EUROPE

Social transformations in sport,
health and consumption

edited by
Giovanna Russo

FrancoAngeli



**COLLANA
SPORT, CORPO, SOCIETÀ**

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Il “manifesto” della Collana SCS suggerisce l'idea che nella società contemporanea lo sport sia divenuto un «fatto sociale totale», come direbbe Marcel Mauss (*Essai sur le don*, 1925), da almeno tre punti di vista.

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In secondo luogo appaiono decisive per le nuove generazioni *le implicazioni educative e culturali* che ha il diffuso ricorso allo sport come pratica socializzante.

Inoltre il tessuto di *associazioni sportive* diffuso nel territorio costituisce il vivaio di atleti e saperi tecnico-sportivi, ma per crescere esso necessita di professionisti preparatisi nei nuovi Corsi di Laurea in Scienze Motorie, più attrezzati a riconoscere e a risolvere le molteplici problematiche – bio-mediche, tecnico-sportive, socio-organizzative – che continuamente si pongono.

In breve, la Collana, spazio di convergenza per la multidisciplinarietà dei saperi scientifici sullo sport, si propone di tracciare nuovi percorsi e individuare nuovi approcci, atti a meglio conoscere e gestire questo «fatto sociale totale» emergente.

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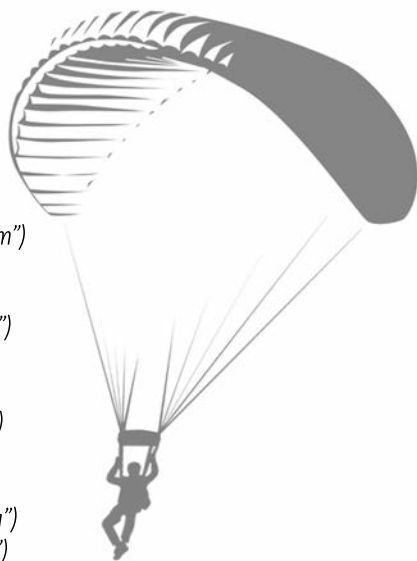
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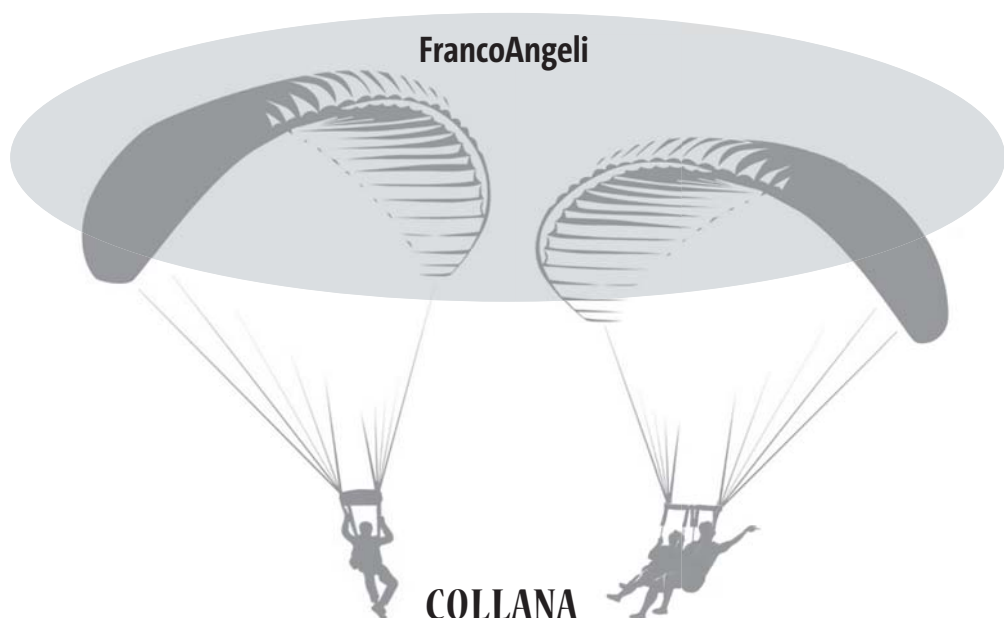
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Introduction

by *Giovanna Russo*

In the last decades, the physical and mental well-being of the population has become one of the primary goals of “advanced” societies. The concept of well-being is now a “concept-guide” for innovative actions for health, consumption and sustainable lifestyles.

Unsurprisingly, a well-known slogan nowadays is a warning to “move and keep fit first” underlining the importance of terms such as fitness, wellness and leisure... these concepts show a revolution arising from the growth and widespread search for well-being.

Daily life is becoming the object of “care” as never before. With a view to a better “life-time value” [Rifkin 2000: 11], individuals are becoming more aware of themselves and their needs, which leads to question of well-being that goes beyond overcoming the disease or pain, or the indication of a specific social status.

The notion of health is strongly intertwined with that of a healthy lifestyle, intercepting in sports practice and physical activity one of the keys to interpret the socio-cultural change that goes under the wider term of “wellness”. It is not just a matter of putting together fitness and well-being, but of going further. Nowadays, wellness refers not only to the idea of improving/preserving the health of the individual in order to increase wellbeing, but also to spread this vision to the community and the environment [Russo 2013].

The approach and work strategy presented in the document of the World Health Organization “*The European health report 2012: Charting the way to wellbeing*” [Who Europe 2013] states this key point. The report involves the broad perspective of well-being as a frame to achieve improvements for the psycho-physical, social and relational health of the population. Pursuing and maintaining these goals is part of the social contract that connects Governments to the citizens they represent. Health and wellbeing are therefore the most meaningful aspects of a social transformation in which

integration, social cohesion and security are requirements to the European welfare state. They are particularly important not only themselves, but also because they reduce inequalities in health that still are one of the main challenges for civilized countries.

The most well-known international documents aimed to promoting health and active lifestyles lie on these premises - from Ottawa Charter (1986), to Jakarta Declaration (1997), up to the Toronto Charter (2010) - specifically and strongly support physical activity as a tool of advocacy and invite people to adopt active and sustainable lifestyles.

In this context, health promotion represents a global, social and political process, including actions aimed to strengthening the skills and abilities of people both at an individual level, and at a macro level, thus changing social, environmental and economic conditions.

In other words, it is necessary to create favourable conditions for health and healthy lifestyles in terms of *advocacy* for health [Who 2013], mass media and the new subjects of public and social communication becoming strategic instruments for empowering people.

One of the *advocacy* main priorities is therefore, to counter the population's tendency to overweight and obesity, mainly reducing people's sedentary habitus [Bourdieu 1979] by promoting healthy and active lifestyles. The sedentariness is in fact the main reason for several diseases (chronic non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases) that cause about 600 thousand deaths per year in 53 European Who countries only. In these areas 30 to 80% of adults are obese and/or overweight; about 20% of children are overweight, among which 1/3 are obese [Oecd 2010, Who 2015]. Obesity, especially among children and elderly people, is a key issue for health organizations. Since 2000 «for the first time in human evolution the number of adults with excess weight (*has*) surpassed the number of those who were underweight” [Caballero 2007: 1].

This condition is mainly due to three interconnected factors, the following:

- 1) **Rapid globalization and urbanization:** the growth of economic, social and cultural integration between the different areas of the world has led to a change in lifestyle, involving nutrition and physical activity, which are defined, in some circumstances, as unhealthy. The scientific community defines the so-called *obesogenic environment* [Who-Fao 2003; Who 2007] referring to the plurality of causes (economic, technological and political factors) that increase the chances to gain weight and become obese. The exposure to the obesogenic environment «is increasing in both high-income

- countries and low- and middle-income countries and across all socioeconomic groups» [Who 2016: 4];
- 2) Changes in food availability and type: over the last decades, food production and distribution of always cheaper fatty food and therefore more easily accessible for a lot of people [ibidem];
 - 3) Decline of physical activity: decreasing opportunities for physical activity, and more time spent on sedentary leisure activities. Sedentary work and modern transportation imply that most of our life is spent while sitting [EU 2014: 6].

The direct consequences of a sedentary habitus are very important at an economic level, in terms of both private and public spending for hospital treatment, but the social, cultural and environmental effects are even worse [Edward and Tsouros 2008]. Therefore, between “macro” effects (welfare policies) and individual trajectories, cultural parameters are established to redefine the concept of well-being by stating the importance of sporting activities in order to keep fit/healthy.

The evolution of sports practices with a view to the pluralisation of sports choices, together with a conception of preventive and pro-active health, has highlighted the importance of sport and physical activity, their diffusion and ability to pursue a better quality of life.

Physical activity plays a double role in health promotion strategies. On one hand it contributes to countering obesity and chronic diseases; on the other, it is part of the broader project of promoting an active lifestyle among the population, encouraging people to walk, use a bicycle, move around the city, etc., with environmental advantages such as decreasing air pollution and reducing the risk of getting involved in traffic accidents. This in a perspective of sustainability and implementation of collaborative and relational dynamics [Who 2016].

This way, sports policies and widespread physical activity become instruments of social integration which are essential for health, environmental and sustainable mobility policies. Moreover, they also appear useful social “devices” for planning of urban spaces, design of infrastructures, mobility, social and educational services [Borgogni and Farinella 2017; Bizzaglia 2014; Edward and Tsouros 2011].

Following these standards, the *European Gaining in health* strategy promoted by Who Europe (autumn 2006), was included in Italy in the 2007 National Health Prevention Plan. The main objectives of the program were the following: promoting healthy eating, encouraging regular physical activity, controlling one's own weight and abandoning behaviours that are

harmful to health. Therefore, a set of basic actions have been implemented for the well-being of citizens to improve their lifestyle [IstiSan 2016: 118].

The socio-cultural change behind these transformations concerns the progressive expansion of the concept of sustainable well-being in the global society, which appears increasingly connected to life chances [Dahrendorf 1989] and the spread of “*wellness culture*” [Foster, Keller *et al.* 2011].

Exploring the wellness phenomenon nowadays means tackling a rapidly growing frontier theme that strongly characterizes contemporary sportscape¹. I believe it is particularly interesting because it helps to broaden the concept of well-being, whereby through sports practice it implies improving the “quality of life”.

Hence the assumption that wellness relates to a concept of healthy life, in which sporting activities are the main means of staying healthy, physical and psychic. Wellness as practices and knowledge, oriented towards a “good life” [Soper 2007]: a healthy existence, that is aimed to a more authentic and socially adequate concept of *well-being*.

I have discussed elsewhere² that sport and physical activities (PA) can be the best means to achieve the well-being by providing an ethical principle of the actions aimed to the well-being of individuals [Donati 2000]. The new challenges of the politics of well-being and health of the population are increasingly played on the awareness of the importance of active, healthy and socially participated lifestyles on an individual and collective level.

This means considering the importance of sport practices not only in relation to the amount of people doing sport or physical activity; but rather, for the proposed and spread values. The broader goal of sport and physical activity is pursuing a better quality of life, being healthier from both a psycho-physical and environmental and relational point of view [Russo 2013; Zenarolla 2014].

The following chapters discuss the core reflection of wellness culture in the European context and, in different ways, they contribute to its definition starting from a key point: the connection between health, sport and society.

¹ See Wakefield, Blodgett, Sloan [1996], who emphasize the concept of “scape” already used by Arjun Appadurai [2001: cap.1, 2]. In my view it well indicates the “experiential” sporting context into a global entertainment economy [Rifkin 2000].

² See mine: (2011), *La società della wellness. Corpi sportivi al traguardo della salute*, FrancoAngeli, Milano [*The wellness society. Sporting bodies towards health*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2011, ed.]; (2013), *Questioni di ben-essere. Pratiche emergenti di cultura, sport, consumi*, FrancoAngeli, Milano [*Issue of well-being. Emerging practices of culture, sport, consumption*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2013].

The first chapter (written by G. Russo) illustrates the main features of the wellness concept by providing a brief summary of the many theoretical approaches over the past 30 years. The evolution of the concept in its complexity, highlights both the material and immaterial aspects that it encompasses, focusing on the transformations of well-being cultures in the third millennium society. In this framework the strategies for physical activity at European level are discussed starting from Who Global Action Plan 2013-2020 [2015] to confirm the diffusion of the process of “sporting health” [Porro and Raimondo 2008]. The resulting idea of well-being has relevant consequences on the sports industry: a look at the market and consumption of wellness confirms the change taking place.

The second chapter (written by Adam Smith and Ivan Waddigton), confirms that, over the last years, many people within the sport policy community (inside and outside government), have sought to promote sport by pointing to what are frequently claimed to be the health benefits of sporting participation. The central object of chapter, is however to subject such claims to critical examination. More specifically, the authors seek to examine: (i) the assumptions highlighting one of the stated objectives of many government sport programmes, namely to improve the nation's health; (ii) some of the key *social* differences between sport and physical activity; (iii) some of the health consequences of these social differences; and (iv) some of the health implications for public policy designed to encourage greater participation in sport. It is argued that almost all the studies which are cited to support the idea that sport is good for health refer *not* to sport but to physical activity. But physical activity and sport are not the same.

The essay explores some of the key social differences between sport and physical activity – for example the fact that sport is inherently competitive and that many sports are mock battles in which aggression and the use of physical violence are central characteristics – and examines some of the health consequences of these differences, for example in terms of the risk of injury. The chapter draws on the analysis of public policy documents from the UK and US and notes significant differences between policies which have their origins in the public health community and which are designed to increase levels of physical activity, and policies which originate within the sport policy community and which are designed to increase participation in competitive sport. It is argued that if sports policies are, as is often claimed, intended to improve people's health, then more focused should be given to the kinds of physical activities we wish to encourage.

The third chapter (written by G. Gasparini) proposes to analyse first of all the main transformations of “sport-health” policies in France, starting from the observation of an increase in sedentary lifestyles that mainly affects the most disadvantaged populations. A second part is then devoted to the analysis of the social effects of secondary prevention public action through physical activity in Strasbourg based on the results of a survey of the first patients of the “Sport health on medical prescription”.

This survey points out that the municipal program has mainly affected a pre-social caring population, residing in the city's popular districts and generally far removed from physical and sporting practice. Started in 2012, the sport-health policy of Strasbourg shows that it is possible to reconcile primary prevention and secondary prevention through physical activity through urban development of the city.

Chapter number 4 (by Stefano Martelli) illustrates and explains how many Italians do sports and PA for health reasons and aim to wellness dimension (and their socio-demographic characteristics). In this chapter the author tries to answer these questions (and other ones) by using the best source of data available in the Country, i.e. the Italian Institute of Statistics (Istat). Starting from the most recent findings, collected by the Institute through the annual surveys about Italian family and its everyday life, and comparing them, he tries to provide an overview about people's choices about sport and physical activity, and the trends over in last 35 years (1982-2016)³. In specific, he tries to identify a type of practitioner, which makes it possible to distinguish those who play sports for wellness reasons only (health-conscious), and those who do so for other reasons. On the overall, this analysis highlights the characteristics of “wellness Italian people” (who they are, how many they are, for what reasons they practice physical activities wellness oriented), giving a socio-cultural portrait of sportsmen motivated by the health goal.

The following chapter (n. 5, by Julien Pierre) talks about the importance of sport practice in the labour market (particularly in the car industry), which seems to have developed concurrently in France and Italy since the end of the nineteenth century. Sport is the subject of various uses by the “*patrons de l'époque*” (quot. as defined in the chapter). It mainly serves to entertain and control a fallible work force, but also to maintain a healthy state aimed to performance.

³ The findings of the factorial analysis presented here are original and carried out by SportComLab (University of Bologna). The same analysis was realised on the last three national surveys on Italians' free time: 2000, 2006 and 2015, always achieving findings that confirm the discussed typology of sporting practices - including wellness.

Since then, the composition of the active population has changed, leading to a reconfiguration of the uses of sport. But what are the problems related to the advent and the practice of physical and sporting activities at work? What singularities do the French and Italian cases present? It is this double discussion, both diachronic (from the nineteenth to the present) and synchronic (comparison between two neighbour countries), which has fed the author's reflection.

The article tries to demonstrate that the analysis of the uses of sport at work for well-being purposes (in time and space) can explain the evolution of the business and society in general. The "cult" of wellbeing in the business companies is a goal for many of them (see in USA for example) in order to turn employees into actors being aware of their own health (physical, mental) and responsible for their own well-being.

The purpose of the last chapter (n. 6, by Mauro Ferraresi) is to analyse the changing of beauty and wellness based on the hyperconnected society. In specific the author takes the opportunity to explain why and how media technology and consumption are nowadays affecting beauty and wellness, changing the way to interpret and inhabit them. The attempt is to put together the potential of new media with the prospective of consumption to find out that both are excellent amplifiers of our choices, also in the domain of beauty and wellness. To that aim the author uses both the concepts of *blogosphere* and *consumptionsphere* that can contribute to explain, in an innovative way, what we know as "the beauty and wellness turn".

I believe that the variety of essays here collected to investigate the success of the "wellness revolution" [Zane Pilker 2002] in various ways can be a starting point for new reflections on the importance of the connection between sport, health and society.

The wish is to use this book to «increase the capacity for actions towards well-being» [Melucci 2000: 13].

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1. The wellness society: towards a new demand for well-being

by *Giovanna Russo*

1. Introduction

In Europe sport and physical activity nowadays represent a strategic tool for public health policies that aim to promote the wellbeing of population and, at the same time, represent an important economic sector. The spread of physical activities among the population is an indicator of a socio-cultural change showing how sport and wellness industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world economy [Rutgers *et al.* 2018].

Nowadays, “keeping fit” has become a fundamental goal for people willing to take care of their body, with a consequent increase in consumption of goods and services in the fitness and wellness industry. This transformation is the result of a sport culture that, spreading since the '70s, tends to replace the competitive ideal with the pleasure of experiencing different feelings. As a result, the aesthetic dimension prevails over the agonistic one. An epistemological turn point linking both body practices and investigations aimed at seeking greater authenticity of “ways of life” [Le Breton 2002]. This change is associated with the social movements of the previous decade and with the influence of Far-East philosophies and holistic disciplines that gave power of speech to the body¹. A multiplicity of differentiated body and sport practices is asserted (e.g. fitness, open air sports, soft gymnastics) referring to the value of being fit while enjoying the practice itself.

At first (years '80 and '90) fitness implies a work on the body that put together training and pleasure of leisure. In particular, fitness practices anticipate the connection between active lifestyles and health. The fitness culture in fact, spreading since the 1980s as a *technique* for being in a better shape, is oriented to psycho-physical wellbeing and health. If this discipline

¹ According to: Giddens [1991]; Bourdieu [1979]; Goffman [1969]; Le Camus [1984].

develops as a universal model of usefulness of bodies, turning into a sign of personal status, and spaces (gyms) where bodies are virtuously trained between commercial and hedonistic-health trends, it anticipates the “wellness supermarket” in which the customer-consumer can choose from multiple services. In other words, the prevalent image of efficient body of fitness culture is gradually replaced by the holistic vision of wellness philosophy [par. 2].

In short, wellness invades the social and the society wraps itself in wellness. The amount of health messages and the diffusion of wellness market influences the perception of individuals by stimulating the health demand and the re-appropriation of a personal existence oriented to “good life” [Soper 2007]. Many signs confirm this search for health. Among these, the growth of sports practices represents a sociological indicator of the changed relationship between people and well-being [Russo 2011, 2013].

Nowadays the sports participation in Europe brings out a concept of sport as a means for keeping healthy, improving one's physical situation, and being in contact with others. Thus, sporting practice goes beyond the competitive dimension towards the goal to enhance quality of life [par. 3].

In this framework, the progressive establishment of wellness culture develops a flexible model of body, aesthetic dimension and consumption [Codeluppi 2007]². The sporting body, in good health, aesthetically beautiful expresses both the influence of the hedonistic culture [Lipovetsky 2013]³ and a strong commercial interest [par. 4].

2. Describing wellness culture

The wellness philosophy conveys a broader idea of health, more complex than the fitness phenomenon above mentioned. The body exercise is extended to a world vision. The rediscovery of psycho-physical balance, of healthy diet, of alternative medicines, gentle exercise, the reinterpretation of thermalism, the explosion of biological... these are all expressions of a

² The “flow body” transforms itself thanks to the many “sporting” tools (physical activity, body building, professional sports training techniques, but also aesthetic surgery, diets, supplements, clothing ...), without forgetting the new ethical issues and values that attract the most current consumption world.

³ In terms of “artist capitalism” in which the aestheticization of the world it is no longer art but consumption [see chapter 6].

renewed “body&mind” culture, in which different practices coexist without any apparent contradictions.

These trends turn into a model of “relative performance” sports: what is matter is not the result of physical performance, but its usefulness [Porro 2008: 25]. It is the transition from the physical training to a broader idea in which the body is the main hub of sensations, emotions and positive images of the self and the context that surrounds it.

Today the term wellness belongs to the common language and indicates an “extended” state of good health. It develops as an approach around the '70s, starting from the United States where a new harmonic lifestyle (implying from the balance between mind, body and psyche) is meant to be coined.

In 1961 Halbert Dunn created the well-known term by outing together fitness (a good state of physical and mental shape mainly obtained through constant physical activity) and well-being (feeling good at a psychological, social and cultural level). Wellness therefore translates the idea of improving well-being and health of the individual, not forgetting the concepts related to the sensation of pleasure and care, highlighted by theories of the material and biological dimensions of well-being.

In 1948 the WHO (World Health Organization), giving a ruling after the consequences of the Second World War, provides a definition of health⁴ that calls into question the good existence of the individual essentially connected to the involvement of all aspects of being human. In the Preamble to the WHO Constitution it is indicated a broad (and discussed)⁵ definition of health intended as an expression of well-being of the person rather than a simple lack of disease. It requires the positive convergence of psychophysical, mental, social and spiritual aspects. The resulting concept of well-being takes the meaning of a global dimension, finding confirmation both in the roots of Eastern and Western philosophical thought, as well as consensus in the medical-scientific field.

It is actually the same concept of health that moves from the defense of body to a vision of people’s well-being, not without satisfaction, even aesthetic, for one's physical appearance [Bucchi and Neresini 2001]. The body must not only be defended, but preserved, embellished, enriched, modified and perfected thanks to appropriate measures as far as of nutrition

⁴ See: WHO [1948], n. 2: 100.

⁵ This definition has been much criticized: in fact, it seems more pertinent to the ideal of “happiness” than to the practice and care of people. Furthermore, the state of completeness appears difficult to measure. On the adaptations of the discourse on health over time I refer to the program of the Ottawa Charter [1986].