

The Benefits of Traditional Sports and Games: What they can Bring to Children and Youth of Today

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In the project “Recall: Games of the Past – Sports for Today” led by TAFISA and co-funded by the European Commission, one of the questions is: what are the benefits of promoting TSG to children/youth of today?

The following is a list of benefits to consider:

- TSG have old cultural roots but **can be promoted like something new and fun** - for the kids of today.
- TSG work in the **local** context and TSG are visible and practical, in contrast to Olympic Sport as a global phenomenon.
- TSG take their starting point in local needs and **possibilities**.
- TSG are **heritage**, culture and history that are worthwhile to learn about.
- TSG reinforce cultural **identities** for many participants.
- TSG have health benefits that can be seen as a part of healthy and active living.
- TSG have a socializing influence to good **morals** when they emphasizes fairness, respect for diversity and ability and cooperation in the game. Participants make their own rules, unlike in sports where judges stand outside the game and make rules for all.
- TSG, in general, **are easy to do** - with simple tools and few rules and easy to facilitate.
- TSG are an activity that can involve all ages playing together. Many games can be adapted for persons with disabilities.
- The tools to TSG are simple, **inexpensive** and can be homemade and carried around easily.
- TSG are for the **masses**. Sport is for the classes (Dr. Deshpande HVP Amravati India).

TSG generally involve simple physical games in the matter of rules and tolls. Most TSG are based on natural movement of the human body – they are about running, jumping, being fast, strong and flexible or hitting something or somebody. TSG involve complexity in socializing a group in how play. The participants have to take account of each other if the play is to succeed in a good way. In this perspective TSG are about the development and cultivation of the body and mind among the players.

TSG are usually easy to understand, with simple basic rules and a clear purpose. This makes it easy to participate on the basic level. But to master all the movement of the play, the tactics of the game and skill required can take years to develop. The same can be said about truly understanding the dynamic and complexity in socializing a group in play. Thus, TSG offer games and play for the beginner to expert, the able-bodied and disabled, and for the young and old.

TSG hold many options to organize fun, simple and inexpensive activities for children, youth, adults and older adults. Activities are based on local resources, surroundings and culture. Play can begin in simple forms, and then build in complexity. It can be guided by other children or educators, teachers or sports leader, or done alone.

TSG offer an alternative to modern sport, training and fitness in modern society, where physical inactivity is a growing health problem for children, youth and adults. A good example of TSG that can make people active and fit in a social cross-generational is the Gerlev Playpark (www.gerlevplaypark.dk).

Traditional play and games do not require special facilities or equipment. TSG in most forms are based on local areas where one lives, goes to school or works. Play can occur on the street, in the backyard, in the park, beach or forest. A good example is the Urban Play project at Gerlev Playpark (see <http://www.byensleg.dk>).

Many of the mega-cities of the world cannot supply growing numbers of inhabitants, particularly children, with low cost sports training and fitness facilities. TSG can be a significant part of the answer because it is low cost and takes advantage of existing local resources and surroundings. A challenge is to provide inhabitants of the mega-cities of the world coming from different culture to play together. Recall/TAFISA promises to help groups, cities and communities to play together despite cultural differences.

Recall / TAFISA is part of a global initiative, **Designed to Move**, that aims to break the deadly cycle of physical inactivity by creating early positive experiences for children and youth. For more information, go to www.designedtomove.org. We can truly say that TSG can constitute a viable approach towards tackling this challenge.

The principles in using TSG in a pedagogical context are:

- The chosen game must be simple with few rules.
- The tools must be simple to handle for the children.
- The equipment can be very inexpensive and light enough to be carried in a bag.
- Local soundings should be used, like playground, schoolyards, parks, backyards, which are all places where it safe to play.

From a pedagogical point of view, many forms of TSG are optimal when the goal is training children physically and mentally, in a playful way. More educators, teachers and sport leaders should become aware of the opportunities in TSG. The Recall project shows how TSG can be a positive option to promote physical activity among children.

An example of socialization in TSG can be given: catching games require performance, but no one wins. Children good at running can challenge each other, and those less fast can try to catch others with clever moves based on their own level of ability. Thus, children can be challenged on the physical and mental level that suits them.

At the same time this enhances interaction within a social community. Often catching games keep going continuously if the playing is fun. This is contrast to sport where the fastest and the best always win.

TSG are more than physical activity; they offer socialization in the direction of cooperation and community. This aspect of TSG is perhaps its most valuable characteristic. We play because it is fun and it encourages our feeling of togetherness, in a social community. There are smiles and laughter among the participants.

In TSG we create a space in everyday life for a few minutes, a few hours or all day. TSG stand in opposition to modern sports and fitness; where gravity, control and quest for the perfect are in focus and the will to victory and the pain of defeat are present all the time. The imperfect human being, failure and ineptitude can be laughed at when we are caught in a game of tag or found when we are playing to hide.

Modern lifestyle has a lack of movement and physical activity due the shrinking availability of space, the loss of family time, and preoccupation with media, among other reasons. It is imperative that children - as well adults - move more every day.

TSG offers a treasure trove of culturally different, inclusive and enjoyable ways to achieve physical activity in contrast to participation in competitive sports. Children get as much exercise out of physically active play as the participation in sports, particularly when adults guide the TSG. Yet, too, TSG can inspire children to initiate their own play, make up their own rules and create their own tools for play. A good phrase to use is "Children who are good to play get friends as youth and good life as adults."

In sum, the outcomes of TSG for children and young people are a combination of exercise for the body, cultural and social learning, positive social values and skill development.

This article edited by the Gerlev Playpark is published as part of project „Recall: Games of the Past – Sports for Today”, co-funded by the European Commission. Project Recall aims to reintroduce Traditional Sports and Games into the daily lives of children and youth, as a means to tackle social challenges of today, including the physical inactivity crisis.

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Led by TAFISA, project Recall gathers 13 transnational project partners coming from all over Europe:

