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FROM INDIVIDUAL (PHYSICAL) ACTIONS TO COLLECTIVE (DIGITAL) ACTION

Sport lover with a deep passion for the environment, a nimble entrepreneurial spirit, and serious social media chops. Laurent inspires people to increase their personal well-being through fitness and sports while embracing a more eco-friendly way of living. With his Berlin-based startup Active Giving, he wants to help companies in their transition to a more sustainable business.

From less stress to a boost in self-esteem, exercise is as great for our brain as it is for our body. But can exercise also be good for our planet? What if by doing something good for ourselves - like exercising - we could do something good for the world? A good deed that would not only benefit our health but the health of our planet and provide a better future for the generations to come. A simple daily action that can be multiplied to create collective action and therefore real change.

Many of us sometimes wonder if, as individuals, our actions really matter. Good or bad. If we drive a car or if we use a plastic bag or if we stop eating animal products, what difference would it make? Would it really affect the world around us? Well, it surely does. Not only because of the action itself, as insignificant as it may seem but also because of the message behind the action. Let's take sport and exercising as examples. In most cases, the practise of sport and exercising spread the message of good health and care for oneself. If we would convey more positive and meaningful messages with our daily actions, we can envision the world changing for the better. Don't you think?

While the mainstream media are constantly picturing a world that is falling apart, we, as part of the new digital generation need to take action. When it comes to climate change, the finger is usually pointed at big companies that are consciously harming the planet (and yes they surely do). Though, chasing the corporations and businesses that are responsible for damaging our planet's ecosystem is for most of us, out of our league. We humans, as individual entities, do not always have the power to change how society functions, at least today. But what if as a group we could create the necessary power? And what if this power could come from the sport communities?

"A man doesn't
plant a tree for
himself, he plants
it for prosperity."

Alexander Smith (poet)

Sport communities are gaining unprecedented importance online (digitally) notably through the explosion of social media and sport apps. It is now possible to follow the routine of our favourite athletes, sport clubs; to access sports on demand and even exercise at home with virtual coaches. The digital consumption of sport is booming, and yet ironically more than a quarter of the world's adult population (1.4 billion adults) are insufficiently active, while 81% of adolescents are not meeting the WHO¹ recommended times for physical activity.

¹ WHO - Physical Activity 2020 : <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity>

Could there be a way to increase personal wellbeing through sports while increasing global wellbeing?

As leaders in sports, athletes, federations, clubs or brands, it is crucial to create a path for more sustainability in sports. Sustainable Sport is still a young segment of the sport and fitness sector but has still a lot to explore and to prove. For instance, the latest Tokyo Olympics placed a major focus on using recycled and recyclable material, such as athletes beds made of cardboard, podiums made of recycled plastic, and even the medals were made from recycled devices. These initiatives should certainly be seen as steps forwards. Although, given the alarming state of climate change, we need to make big, bold moves that will support real change. And that is why the change can also come from our home, from the way we live our lives.

The Sports for Climate Action initiative led by UN Climate Change invites sports organizations and their stakeholders to join a new climate action for sport movements. And to use sports as a unifying tool to federate and create solidarity among global citizens for climate action². To this day 270 participants have joined the initiative and have committed to adhere to a set of five principles³ and incorporate them into strategies, policies and procedures, and mainstream them within the sports community, thus setting the stage for wider dissemination of the message and long-term success.

A movement is clearly on its way, and creating engagement amongst the sports fan community starts to happen gradually around the world. Last April on Earth Day, The International Biathlon Union (IBU) announced its Biathlon Climate Challenge to challenge fans to join one of ten different teams - all led by biathlon superstars - and to track their physical activity in a fitness app that will convert the distance they have covered or calories they have burned into planted trees by a reforestation project. In just 25 days, their goal of 100,000 trees was reached with almost 8 000 fans covering an accumulative distance of 618,595 km and burning a total of 32,369,652 calories.

² UNFCCC - Sports for Climate Action : <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/sectoral-engagement/sports-for-climate-action>

³ UNFCCC - Sports_for_Climate_Action_Declaration_and_Framework : https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Sports_for_Climate_Action_Declaration_and_Framework.pdf

⁴ Nielsen 2021 - <https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/nielsen-sponsorship-trends-2021-athlete-activism-sponsor-media-value>

Why trees? Trees are vital for our life on earth, they provide us with the oxygen we breathe, trees help mitigate human impact on climate change while providing essential habitats for diverse wildlife and help break the cycle of poverty and deforestation. Not only trees could be a key solution to mitigating climate change, but they also become a door opener to a more eco-conscious way of living. Indeed, if we can do good to our planet simply practising the sport we love. What other daily action could we turn into a good deed? Running and picking up litter (aka plogging)? Riding more often our bikes instead of cars. Adopt a plant-based diet. Giving a second life to our belongings by reusing, repairing, refurbishing or even recycling them instead of throwing them away. Many of these opportunities can be found in the concept of Circular Economy (as opposed to the linear economy we have been using for past centuries). Indeed circularity wants to tackle global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution, all at once and to create a closed-loop system, minimising the use of resource inputs and the creation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions.

As our lives are nowadays mainly influenced by what we consumed digitally. The message sent across channels must be the right one. Brands and athletes for instance must collaborate to inspire fans and sport amateurs to make the right decision when it comes to buying new products or new services. And the good news is that athlete advocacy posts are generating 63% more engagement for brands compared to other social content⁴. It's a win-win-win, the shift is already happening. This is why uniting behind a set of principles and initiatives, will incentivize climate action beyond the sports sector, and therefore help restore global wellbeing through a holistic approach that includes the governments, the sport enablers, the brands, the athletes and most importantly, the sport consumer, us. ■

