

AIR SPORTS: SURVIVING THE 21st CENTURY

A GUIDELINE FOR THE FAI ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Air sports activity competes for LAND, competes for AIRSPACE, and competes for ATTENTION in a leisure world full of offers. It also competes for TIME in a world where people, especially youngsters, look for quick thrills and switch from activity to activity, mixing virtual worlds with real.

Ecology is part of environmental issues Air sports face nowadays, but the footprint of aviation noise and pollution on nature is marginal at best compared to housing, automobile, industry, and energy production. This does not mean it should not be taken care of (fuel issue is a real one, if only for political and economical reasons), but perception of impact by human beings is far more important than real impact of air sports on nature.

Main part of the mission of the Environmental Commission of FAI needs to be to connect Air sports with a new world which is being built upon references which have nothing to do with what presided over the creation of our sports.

The western society where most sport flyers live is no longer fascinated by flying, past the early ages of childhood. The first challenge now is to be accepted as an activity among people who reject or ignore most of what we stand for (rigor, focus, training, calculated risk, dedication...) or what we produce (noise, overview of private properties, land occupation). The second challenge is to persuade those people and others to see the attraction of our activities and to entice them to want to try them.

The new frontiers for sport aviation, in countries where people are developing these activities, will be to deal with other environmental factors where airspace regulation and fuel availability are keys.

Our challenge, along with the Education Commission, is to find how to allow and encourage the next generations to fly: our generation, which received air sports as a gift from 20th century pioneers, has to invent a new philosophy for sport aviation, acceptable by authorities and other citizens alike, which may be a real life complement to the virtual world so common to 21st century born children.

Because the sky belongs to all, including ground bound only people, we have to respect each other.

Not being mainstream may be an important asset as it puts us in the spotlight, and somehow above many other sports in terms of image as viewed by most people. But it is also a heavy responsibility when it comes to find the right seat around a table where the menu is more inclined to shows and big crowds than personal experience in the big open sky.

Nevertheless, if we do not take care of our environment, our environment will take care of us...

Respect

Respect is the master word for us for the coming decades: either we respect our environment (and let it be known to others that we do so), in which case we may be accepted as legitimate players by other populations, or we deny and refuse to recognize the impact we have, in which case the masses will wipe us out of the ground and thus out of the sky. Therefore, our best friends are communication and education on one side, regulation on the other.

Regulation

For the past century, regulation has been seen by pilots as an everlasting enemy as it built barriers to our freedom and development.

For the next century, as we shall be struggling to exist, competing with other activities for people time and dedication, as well as fighting against the rigors of self-proclaimed protectors of the environment, fair regulation of our activities can become a welcome asset to protect us from the crowd.

If we do not create these regulations ourselves, others will do so from outside the aviation world.

Self imposed restrictions are always more manageable than the ones dictated by outsiders without any understanding of the whereabouts of sport aviation. Pro-activity is key.

Respect, Education, Regulation: these are the three words to define Environment in Air sports, and then FAI Environmental Commission mission.