



REVIEW PAPER

**SPORTS - RIGHT OR PRIVILEGE?
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN SPORT.
CASE OF ROMANIA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present from a historical perspective the way in which membership in a social class influences the access and participation in sport of people from Romania. The specific features of the social, political and cultural context of the two discussed periods, the communist and the democratic regime, highlight the practices encountered both in terms of sport for all, especially performance sport. The Communist political regime, established after the Second World War, but especially the one led by Ceausescu (1965-1989), approached a special policy towards sports, sportsmen, in particular, the results in international sports competitions bringing a superior social position and, implicitly, privileges. The Communist Party and its leaders have used sport as a resource in international politics, supporting and controlling the organization and participation in multi-level sports, using propaganda. People's interest in sports was as constituting one of the few alternative leisure, with consequences for social ascension. After the 1989 Revolution, the established democratic regime produces changes in all areas of activity, including sports. Professionalisation of sport depends on supply and demand in the market of sport. Sport remains an opportunity to climb on a social scale. Inequalities between individuals are more pronounced, preferences and access to certain sports branches are correlated with socio-professional status and cultural background.

Keywords: *social class, cultural capital, socio-economic status, Romania, communism, democracy, participation in sport*

Introduction

Broadly speaking, social stratification consists of any form of social differentiation capable of identifying groups in a partial or total order.

According to Giddens (2001, p. 26), social stratification is understood as "structural inequalities between different groups of people."

Regardless of the period and stage of development, society has always been divided into classes. Thus, regardless of professional qualification or occupation, the role it plays in the production, of economic criteria (income, wealth, etc.), level of education, the individual belongs to a social class, which gives it a certain status, prestige completed within the community to which it belongs. Bourdieu's perspective of analyzing the competition between social classes is also adapted to sport as human activity (1978a, p.24).

Many studies highlight the systematic relationship between belonging to a certain social class and practicing sport (Bourdieu, 1991, Gruneau, 1975, Loy, 1969, Scheerder et al., 2002, Wilson, 2002, quoted by Scheerder et al., 2005, Wilson, 2002, Mehraein, 2016, Moens & Scheerder 2004). Social class indicators are good predictors of sports participation. Higher classes practice sport more often. The social class is inversely correlated with engaging in physical engagement sports.

The current trends in social stratification in sport refer to:

- the democratic governance system has not canceled social inequality in sports: there is a tendency to practice inaccessible sports in disadvantaged classes.
- the middle class adopts positive attitudes towards sport, valorizing its beneficial social effects and the opportunity to join the top.
- the democratization of access to education tends to reduce the differences in sports participation (studies in England show that they are maintained, but in the US they see the diminishing of differences), but sometimes sport in schools and the lack of facilities strengthen them.
- the practice of sport by the working class is influenced on the one hand by the middle class, but, to a large extent, we find today the traditional sports values (victory, material gain, contempt for authority and norms, hardness etc.).

Two paradigms are distinguished to explain these trends. The *lifestyle paradigm* analyzes sport as a field of activity, a way of distinguishing, a prestigious source of the upper class compared to other social classes (the theory of the loisir class (Veblen, 1953).) In another approach, according to the theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1978b), sport is regarded as any cultural activity that requires specific preferences

and tastes, but also skills and knowledge that are associated with social class. All these are forwarded through socialization and are markers and legitimators of social differences.

The second paradigm, the *economic* one, postulates that the practice of sport requires resources such as money and time, and upper classes hold them to a greater extent. High physical engagement sports are relatively not expensive, and therefore attractive to people with lower socio-economic status.

The practice of sports by adults is closely related to membership in a social class. Access to the practice of sport is therefore determined by the social class, but what is more interesting is that there is a link between the chosen discipline and the socio-economic environment (Thomas, 1983).

Lüschen (1969), studying the origin of a sample of 1,880 athletes, calculated for each sport branch a socioeconomic level index. Its variation is between 0 (if all the practitioners are in the lower class) and 300 (if all are in the upper class). Thus his studies show that on the built-up scale different branches of sport are as follows: tennis 209, hockey on grass 186, skiing 181, parachuting 141, athletics 139, swimming 136, riding 133, gymnastics 125, canoe-canoe 117, table tennis 116, badminton 103, handball 87, weightlifting 81, football 68.

Another classification of sports was developed by Renson (1976) who divided them as follows:

- prestigious sports - include skiing, tennis and golf; the practitioners of these sports disciplines come from the upper classes. They are considered elements of aristocratic fashion. The social values of this group are: softness, restraint, distance. Competition requires a certain distance between competitors.
- nature-related sports - including canoeing, rowing, deltaplanism, or climbing. They require complex equipment, and their followers cover their heads with a helmet - a symbol of risk. They are practiced by action men, entrepreneurs, whose ambition is to reach the highest peaks. Aggressive against impersonal obstacles, they seek to dominate the forces of nature. These disciplines are practiced by the great bourgeoisie.
- sports within which a precise objective is set, which does not coincide with that of the previous category. The presence of a balloon, net, basket or panel characterizes this type of discipline, which is practiced by the small bourgeoisie, the transient class.
- modest classes sports - body contact is tight; here are the wrestling, judo, boxing. The author speaks of a "corporal communism" in this respect.

Diem (1971) thought that the nature of sport changes while changing work and way of life. The author believes that industrialization and city development have had effects on the concept of sports.

Another approach is the sport orientation as a result of social change (Hasbrook 1986 Scheerder & al., 2005). For example, in its original form, the emergence of sport in England in the seventeenth century is linked to the formation of aristocracy, not linked to production and disposal of free time.

Sport and access to any form of physical activity is a human right, regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, national identity, sexual orientation etc. It is a valuable reference, along with other ideals, of several international institutions and organizations, and is enshrined in several official documents: the Declaration of Human Rights, the Olympic Charter, the European Charter for Sport for All, etc. It is precisely these criteria of differentiation between individuals that are the source of social inequalities, even in sports (Jarvie, 2011).

Studies reveal other variables that can influence the level and forms of practicing sport and physical activities: marital status, the geography, education level, occupation (Scheerder & Vos, S., 2011 Greendorfer 1978, Washington, & Karen, 2001). van Tuykom and Scheerder (2008), Hartmann (2006), using data included in the 2005 Eurobarometer on recreational sports activities of 27 Member States, reveal that:

- in some states (Scandinavia - Finland, Sweden, Denmark) citizens are more physically active than others in other countries (Portugal, Romania);
- geographically, people in the northern part of the European Union practice more physical activities than those in southern countries; Western population is more sporting compared to those in Eastern countries;
- gender differences tend to balance men versus women;
- 15-24 year old practitioners give more time to sports activities than middle-aged (45-65);
- the level of involvement in sport is directly proportional to the level of education;
- the level of involvement in sport is directly proportional to the level of education;
- marital status influences the practice of sport: single people practice a higher percentage of sport than divorced and married or cohabiting relationships. Widows are the least physically active.
- students are much more active compared to retired people. Managers and office workers are involved more than self-employed and unemployed;

- the urban population is more active in sports than in rural areas. The number of practitioners is higher In large cities comparing to the smallest.

Social stratification in sport. Case of Romania

By discussing the social stratification in sport, the analysis of the subject in Romania can be done in correlation with the political regime.

Sport, golden key to regime and communist party leader

The Romanian communist political regime had a policy of privileging sports in relation to other areas of activity (the church, for example). The potential of the sport to make political propaganda to the party and its leaders has been maximized. The values and ideals of sport were on the same wavelength as the demands of the multilaterally developed socialist society, the development of the mass sports sport and the sports activity in schools being the solution.

The values and ideals of doctrine were promoted through the athletes, their success being, in fact, the success of communist ideology. In this way, Romania formed its own image of the nation, on the one hand, by identifying with the athletes (the athletes became a positive model for each citizen of the country, and the foreigners associated the success of the athletes with the success of the regime), and of the leading elite, on the other hand (the political leaders assimilated the success of the athletes, using their image in international political meetings) (Rusu, 2016).

According to communist ideology, sport and the results in competitions represented a high level of living, the prosperity of the economy, the viability of the political regime, and, at the same time, a weapon against capitalism, being used as an efficient propaganda tool (within sport associations, unions and party structures, sport had to contribute to the education of athletes in the spirit of love for the homeland and its defense).

The equalization of socio-economic conditions in the socialist countries has created prerequisites for reducing the contrasts in the level of sports performance in these countries. According to Maximenko (quoted by Ponomariov, 1977) superior performance athletes from socialist countries to major sporting events to those in capitalist countries is explained by the welfare society members due to socioeconomic factors, while under capitalism they reflect only the general status of the social -economic of the nation.

Romanian Communist Party also saw sport as a means of social control, aiming to attract different types of sports organizations in exercising a systematic social influences on youth. All these efforts had only a major final goal: to attract youth into the sport movement and, implicitly, into the

ranks of the Romanian Communist Party. The state has become the main financial supporter of sports activities: built (but also destroyed) a solid material basis - stadiums, sports centers, gyms - which made possible the holding of international competitions in Romania, created the premises for setting up sporting clubs and associations on the ideas of amateurism and the image of amateur athletes (Rusu, 2016). The latter was used, trying to suggest that sport is, in fact, an activity complementary to work.

If spectators have become advocates of this idea, the athletes had to cope with the professional athletes in the capitalist countries. A solution of semi-professionalism or masked professionalism, however, had to be found, even if it contravened the doctrine of the party. The solution was the following: the exemption of work athletes in factories/enterprises. Even if they were employees, remuneration was, in fact, for sports activity. Under the sign of false amateurism and social stratification in sport, the Communists not only deviated from ideology but had the interest to mask and use it in their favor. In fact, social stratification through sport was done in an apparent way, because social-scale ascension was done by studying the "dossier," and any form of dissent to the party automatically led to the cancellation of any chance of promotion.

Sport - market product in the democratic regime

After the Revolution of 1989, sporting phenomenon can be viewed from different perspectives: now important is the relationship sport - market economy - freedom of expression. Market economy recognizes the inequality of opportunities but at the same time competition (based on supply and demand regulated by the free market). The means of advertising in this type of economy differ from those of the socialist regime. Thus, the sport-economy relationship is achieved in other terms: many brands / firms appeal to athletes to advertise. Sport has become a business, pluralist patronage in this area being a consequence of this. The funds spent by companies are in a clear increase and the same can be said about the number of applicants. Sports organizations typically seek sponsorship to increase their financial resources to improve the standard of a team or competition to support a new activity or to improve internal administration and promotion. Sports sponsorship has become really big business.

Integrating, after 1989, into the once-labeled world of "capitalism," sport has become a good business, transition to a market economy and professionalism by contributing fully to this. Many young people have had and have the opportunity to earn relatively large amounts of money in a relatively short time, which can open new perspectives in many spheres, including professionally. Sports people have felt the effects of the market economy faster than others, taking advantage of the social impact of sport

and attracting those people who can contribute to the development and spread of sport.

The most profitable relationship that has been established was between television and sports: sport has steadily strengthened and increased its interest among spectators by granting broadcasting rights to televisions that have paid their fees. In exchange, the advertising time for sport has increased.

Thus, sport has become the material of mass communication and a consumer in the current information society. It has become part of a culture that focuses on tension, fun and performance, but can be threatened by consumer passivity and total dominance of the media.

If in socialist society, social stratification was only apparent, today society offers all its members the opportunity to make profits. Under such conditions, practicing large amounts of money (skiing, tennis, cycling, horseback riding, golf, yachting, etc.) became almost impossible for a large part of the population. Those who meet to do sports are often individuals with opportunities close to winning, sporting materials used by them as an indication of their belonging to a social class or another.

Changes in the Romanian democratic society have obviously produced major changes in terms of sport, whether for all, or for high performance. At the level of organization and structure, the activity has diversified - along with existing ones, private clubs have been set up in several sports sectors, some of the public were privatized, others have been abolished. Sports at the high level of performance are supported by non-governmental organizations (the Romanian Olympic and Sporting Committee), and for all by public authorities (through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Sport and Youth). The problem is that it is underfunded, money is not enough to produce major successes in major international competitions. The establishment of professional leagues (football, boxing, handball) has led to the professionalization of sport and, obviously, the creation of differentiations, even inequities (for athletes evolving in the same league but at different sports clubs in the same sporting branch) concerns the financial rewards of athletes from different sports. All these changes have been accompanied by legislative changes that have facilitated the work in accordance with international and national regulations (here we are talking about transfers, change of citizenship, employment, remuneration etc.).

Professionalization of sport brings new perspectives to approach sport as a profession. New jobs have been created as a result of the diversification of the service offer, especially in the area of sport for all. Other jobs came from other fields, adjacent to sports - journalism, economics (management, marketing), legal science, psychology and

sociology, medicine, etc.

Preferences to certain sectors and the availability of practicing sports are correlated with socio-professional status and income. Highly qualified individuals, in leadership positions and financial options, opt for generally-costly, cost-related sports (for equipment, subscriptions, personal assistance, rental, travel, including exotic locations, etc.), in while for middle class people are hard to reach or inaccessible.

The socio-economic status of social classes in nowadays life in Romania influences preferences and participation in sport. The emergence of a social class with incomes, but not necessarily highly qualified, brings about a series of changes in behavior and attitude. Practicing certain branches of sports (golf, horse riding, sailing, extreme sports locations extreme, trainings with personal trainer in exclusive fitness centers, etc.) is, along with other factors (purchase expensive goods - houses, cars, clothes etc.) standards of belonging to this social category, promoting a certain lifestyle.

Acceding social scale through sport remains an opportunity and democratic regime. Also, the opportunity to use prestige, recognition, and income earned during sports careers are used to build another after, whether in sports or in other fields (politics, journalism, management etc.). There are several examples of athletes who, after completing their sports career, occupy or hold different leadership positions in national and international institutions (ministers, councilors and state secretaries, presidents of sports organizations - Romanian Olympic and Sporting Committee, federations, sports clubs and associations etc.) (public and private) have invested in various sports activities (sports academies, organizing national and international sports events, building leisure centers and hotels, etc.), became journalists to broadcasters (public and private), have invested in various ventures in sport (sports academies in different branches, organization of national and international sports events, construction of recreation and spa facilities and hotels etc.).

Conclusions

In essence, social stratification through sport in Romania until '89 is limited to the political position of the athlete, because the basis of any decision was the party's agreement, and the rank offered political power from a social, not only economic point of view. A privileged social position could be achieved by practicing sport, more precisely, sports results provided superior status.

The development in a relatively short time of the sport was based on the communist propaganda (there was a permanent and controlled balance

between the tasks of the Communist Party and the achievements in sport) and the effect materialized in the desire of the Romanians to practice sport because they were not offered leisure alternatives. Enjoying political support, sport knew rewarding helping by creating a positive image of Romania in the world, the most valuable results of the history of Romanian sport being achieved during this period.

The democratic regime established in Romania in the early 1990s brings profound changes, in organization, in legislation, but especially in the professionalization of everything that means sports, regardless of direction (sport for all, performance, for people with disabilities or in school) . The sport with everything it involves (athletes, coaches, mainly sporting events, equipment, working and organizational system, institutions etc.) becomes a product that sells and buys driven by the principles of market economy.

Social inequalities between athletes, coaches, clubs are visible, negative effects being felt at the highest level. Preferences to certain sports and accessibility practices are related to socio-professional and economic status. Acceding social scale through sport remains an opportunity in the democratic regime as well.

However, irrespective of the political regime, it should also be sought to identify opportunities to equalize the chances of individuals in any field of activity, including access to physical and sporting activities.

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