

Sports in postmodern era

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Abstract

The present study tries to make a resume from a socio-cultural point of view of the sportiv peisage analized in the evolution of society trying to answer some questions such as: What is the place of sports in our modern society? How does sport influence social and cultural evolutions? What are the cultural tendencies which can be distinguished in the sports practice? These are a few questions which could lead to establishing raports between sports, culture and society. Sport is more and more amrked by the charactersitics of postmoderinsm. New social values are being vehiclated by current generations which influence sportive behaviours. The popularity of sports has a big influence in the process of globalisation of politics, economics and culture. In our days we observe the fact that some contradictions are being manifested: globalisation and individualisation, „sportivisation” and „desportivisation”, a culture of health and a culture of amusement and finally, spontaneity and fragmentation compared to the security and autentification of the individual.

Key words: *sport, culture, society, globalisation*

Rezumat

Studiul de față încearcă să facă o trecere în revistă din punct de vedere sociocultural a peisajului sportiv contemporan analizat în cadrul evoluției societății încercând să dea un răspuns la câteva întrebări cum ar fi: Care este locul sportului în societatea noastră modernă? Cum influențează sportul evoluțiile sociale și culturale? Care sunt tendințele culturale ce se pot distinge în practica sportivă? Acestea sunt câteva întrebări care ar putea duce la stabilirea raporturilor între sport, cultură și societate. Sportul este din ce în ce mai marcat de caracteristicile postmodernității. Noi valori sociale sunt vehiculate de către generațiile actuale care influențează comportamentele sportive. Popularitatea sportului are o mare influență în procesul de globalizare a politicii, economiei și culturii. În perioada actuală observăm faptul că se manifestă unele contradicții: globalizare și individualizare, „sportivizare” și „desportivizare”, o cultură a sănătății și o cultură a amuzamentului și în fine, spontaneitatea și fragmentarea în raport cu securitatea și autentificarea individului.

Cuvinte chele: *sport, cultură societate, globalizare*

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This study tries to make a review from a socio-cultural viewpoint of the sportif peisage in the development of society. The end of the century proves the way in which everybody is having conscience reconsiderations.

The comercialism and consumerism of the XXlth century were announced long before they were put into practice during the years to come. Comunist implosions on one side, the fall of the old Soviet Union, on the other side, played a catalyst role even though these eventes were announced on a sportif basis. The fall of the Berlin Wall announced the beginning of a new era. All the same, United Nations, The Cold War, the expansion of a worldwide economy, like the technological and scientific changes of the 3rd industrial revolution, contributed to the spread of this reconsideration of conscience.

Some observers suggested that what happens in our days is a change towards a new society, which is not based mainly on industrialisation. They claim that we are about to step into a pahse that is completely new to industrialisation. But the term entered into usual language – used for the first time by Daniel Bell in the U.S. and by Alain Touraine in France – is that of POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY (Bell, 1973; Touraine, 1974), in which „post” – with the meaning of „after” – refers itself to the fact that we would surpass the old forms of industrialisation.

Post-industrial order, Bell sais in „The Coming of Post-industrial Society (1973) (1), distinguishes itself by a growth of extra-curricular to the disadvantage of job opening in the sphere of material industry. The term of „postmodernism” suggestes that we have greatly surpassed the global limit of modernism. „Postmodernul” became a pretty modest conception for defining the changes of society of

western wealth after the war. Some writers claimed that the evolutions, which are taking place, are even deeper that signaling the end of the posmodernist era. What is happening is just a movement beyond modernism – the atitudes and lifestyles associated with modern societies – such as our belief in progress, in the benefits of science and in our capacity of controlling the modern world.

The sustainers of the idea of post-modernism claim that modern societies extracted their inspiration from the idea that history has a shape – it leads to a certain direction, leading to progress – and that at the present this notion lost its meaning. There are no more “great stories” – general conceptions on history – that make any sense (Lyotard, 1985) (2). Not only is there no more general notion of progress which could be defended, there isn't even a history. The post-modern world is thus extremely pluralistic and divers. By thea means of numerous movies, videao tapes and TV programs, the imagies circle the world. We come in contact with numerous ideas and valors, but these semm to not have any connection with the history of the places in which we live and neither with our personal histories. Everything appears to be into a continuous flux (3). Mass production, mass consume, the metropolis, the state governing other states, the extension of real-estate property, just as the nation's state, are in decline: the flexibility, diversification, diferentiation and mobility, communication, descentralisation and internationalisation are in ascension. During this process, our own identities, our self-conscience, our subjectivity, they all suffer changes.

The socio-cultural and economical aspects of our period, such as consumerism, greed, worshipping of the body and material prosperity, are the real values of postmodern era. The co-existence of different generations, the values of family, the influence of great corporations, the aging of the

population, the rise of life expectancy, are things that assure a great stability to our current day's society (4).

Event though globalisation is the work of worldwide dispersion and of organising the market and the economy, this phenom has a strong impact in the domain of culture, of mass communication, of politics, of sports, Modern Olympic Games, also, became universal.

The postmodern man prefers originality in the place of generality. His needs appear mostly because he is very preoccupied by the environment in which he lives in. Sub-cultures (lifestyles in continuous change) are becoming more and more away from the ideologi of class. Even if professional forming remains indispensable to certain cultural practices, age and generation have their own role. In the post-materialist orientation, the need of pleasure and having an interesting life determines the person to choose a certain career and gives him a certain social status (5).

In a world that has been taken over by the internet and e-mail, we are flooded with information. The new form of society, evolutive, emancipated, fractioned and informatized, gives birth to people of the same kind. A powerfull interaction takes place between the socio-cultural evolutions on one side and the way of forming the personality of individuals on the other side.

The concept of individualisation is the most vigorous characteristic of social dynamics. Other cultural tentencies appeared along the last 30 years, among these we have: informalisation, emancipation, the loss of cohezion and changing of standards. In a way or another, these tendencies are tied to those of individualisation and de-massification.

Globalising of sport

In the XIXth century, sportif divestiment was practiced only regionally and local. Today, sports activities changed their character, becoming standard. Clubs with official status were founded and the cultural events took an universal character. The globalisation of sport was realised due to the great sports organizations. The cluture of organized movement is a worldwide fact which tags along a process of sports globalisation. Sports became a real engine of capital, media, technology, economy, politics... thus overcoming the initial status, of local sports mostly due to the advantages this offers. We can also notice another aspect, that of the emigration of athletes.

Sport offers more and more senzorial experiences, such as speed and risk. Due to the fact that people are being invaded by virtual images and lose somewhat the sense of reality, they search for material senastions (4).

The means of communication are mainly the ones that determine the corporal aesthetics. The popularity of sports has a big influence in the process of globalising the politics, economy and culture. Sport loses some of its educational and cultural attributes becoming free of traditional values and becomes a product of consume (6).

A growing devotion towards sport is manifesting not only in the private domain, but also in the great social institutions, such as shoools, government organisations and international ones, sport also obtained a great diversity. Sex, age and social status, do not have such a big influence on practicing sports. On the other hand, organizing of sport, his offer and his criterias of participating have deeply changed.

In his essay on sport (1992) (5), Crum, considers that the wvolution of our days sport followed 2 contradictory ways which compose since then the

two aspects of the so called "sportivisation" of the society. Thus, the author distinguishes, on one hand, the way of continuous "sportivisation". After this evolution, the Citius-Altius-Fortius orientation of meritocratic sport has changed radically under the influence of technology, commercialising and mediatisation of sport. This way is characterized by an international commercialization of professional athletes. On the other hand, the second way is that of "desportivisation". This tendency differs from the first because it distinguishes from the principles of modern sport such as rivalry, objectivity, specialisation and quantification. For describing this way, Crum talks about "alternativ sport". He insists on the reaction against "sportivisation". The two tendencies enounced by Crum try to sustain a democratisation of sport, criticising the principles of professional sport. Crum attracts attention on the postindustrial rediscovery of the body and post-material revalorification of corporality. Based on his analysis, Crum establishes 7 types of sportif modes: professional, for contest, for fun, fitness, adventure, for loisir and for cosmetics purposes. Alain Loret, french sociolog, proposes as a factor of a real cultural revolution the apparition of a new generation of movement, "sliding generation", which fits the phenom of "desportivisation" (1995) (7). This movement manifests itself on 5 fronts: the evolution of technology, media impact, socio-cultural developments, a strategical-economical upsetting and a pedagogic fracture. We are searching for a maximum of tactile and audio-visual stimulation, which proves the apparition of a sensorial culture. The athlete from the "sliding generation" prefers non-standard environments such as nature or artificial obstacles. This generation gives much more importance to the experiences of aesthetics than to the criterias of performance.

The growth of the power of buying things, globalisation of products, the explosion for the advertising field and of the means of communication tend to achieve a loss of moral importance in sports in favour of personal objectives of loisir, pleasure, esthetism, performance and social distinction (Pigeassou, 2002) (8).

Sport and health

Sports and health are often associated. Physical activities are considered a necessary instrument for obtaining an optimal physical condition. Corporal aesthetics and medical normality become social standards. Health is being commercialised and the products that speak of maintaining and growth of the overall health are being consumed abundantly. The illusion of a control over one's physical aspect is very present.

Mass media and the medical domain play a very important role in this process, projecting images of an ideal physique. Private institutions and government ones, brought under the culture of prosperity, prove that health is a problem of responsibility. Organisations put at the disposal of their employees fitness gyms and uphold the battle against tobacco. Our society is full with standards of health and forms of discipline. Conscienting the need of maintaining in an optimal shape of health takes such an ample attitude that a special development is being manifested of sports practiced individually.

The body is no longer exclusively associated to health but also to appearance, privilege reserved other times only to higher social classes. For combatting anonymous physiognomy (physically speaking, everybody is equal) we are looking for a social and cultural distinguishment through the

ways of physique (Vanderkerkhove, 1982, quoted by Vanreusel, 2000) (9).

Individual sport vs collective sport

The body became an important source of social recognition and self-accomplishment. The utilizing of drugs and plastic surgery to enhance the human body can be a plausible explanation in this way. The tendency of individual practicing of sports activities goes along with re-evaluating of the body and social self-accomplishment.

We try to find the time to exercise, to be active, alone or using what the environment offers us, all of these to react against globalisation, anonymity or the abstract. Being physically active and accomplishing this feature individually, makes us speak of a new form of practicing motric activities; the eco-sport becomes "ego-sport" (Vanreusel, 2000) (9). Fitness and health also play an important role in the "ego" era. And yet, the ego sport does not have just an aesthetic purpose as it might seem at first sight.

Sport has been practiced for a long time in a corporatist and collectivist atmosphere. If a person wished to practice a sport he had to address a local club. Sport was translated by "everybody on the field, then everybody at the bar", it was a group activity. Today, sport is practiced more and more individually. Sportive individualism permits the creation of an individual life style (such as wearing certain sport brands) which prove personal self-accomplishment, this representing a raised social status.

Individualism of sport can be seen as a reaction to competition sports way to organized. Sport career is put less focus on and more focus of a temporary practice and diversified sportive activities.

The interest for organized sports has diminished in the profit of individual sport, fact that leads to a loss of monopoly from the classic sportive associations of public interest, these coming into rivalry with the private structured ones. Older people form a more and more numerous social group, physical activity is a vital element for them having in sight the benefic elements which the sport has for maintaining health.

The idea that only youth is the target of sports is long ago surpassed.

Hibridization of sport

It's obvious that sport is more and more marked by the characteristics of postmodernism. New social values are being vehiculated by current generations that influence sportive behaviours (Chifflet, 2000) (10). The uniformity of sports made place for diversity, because of a number of ways in which one can practice sports and a high demand of new forms of sport. Some call this phenomenon "hibridization of sports". Hibridization, is at the same time the motor and product of the process of cultural changing.

The confusion of values has greatly marked the development of sport. Sportive hibridization produced diversification and confusion of values such as health, relaxation and civil spirit. Still, 4 values are clearly distinguished in the phenomenon of hibridization: performance, training, production and entertainment. Even if these 4 values are being presented separately, they manifest each other many times by the same means, which is why we can not make a clear distinction between them.

Most of the cultural manifestations presents characteristics proper to each of these 4 values. For instance, the term of edutaining refers to a mixture of postmodern education, practice and training, this characterising the future of movement.

Conclusions

The culture of movement remains an innovating domain. Internal and external tendencies of this culture lead to an extension, a change of scale, a differentiation and a new social density.

This study tries to put into light the innovations observed in the culture of movement. It's surprising the fact that some contradictions appear: globalisation and individualisation, "sportivisation" and "desportivisation", a culture of health and a culture of amusement and finally, spontaneity and the fragmentation reported to security and authentication.

We can say that it would be a bold prediction to foresee 2 patterns because of 2 things: their temporality and their impact. Because the different tendencies of cultural movement can manifest each other at the same time (or not), they can be contradictory or parallel, the final product being

always new, but never predictable of a certain manner.

Finding the balance between political assistance and creative dynamics of the culture of movement remains a challenge for the future.

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