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SPIRITUALITY IN SPORT IN DIFFERENT HISTORICAL
CONTEXTS

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Abstract

Aim. The purpose of this study is to analyse how the spiritual values of sport evolved over time, from antiquity to the present. Religion and sport are interdependent in different social and historical contexts. The terms meanings over time are different and fine context differentiation is required. **Methodology.** Research is based on participatory observation, document study and meta-analysis. **Results.** From ancient times, sport was a way of venerating the gods, a way of expressing corporality, a means of expressing spirituality. In the current social context sport is not religious but personal and it is a means of social recognition by venerating the winners. In a political context, the great leaders politicized the games transferring the glory and grandeur of the games to their personal worship. In the Christian Age, the values of sport as hygiene, corporality, physical beauty displayed were replaced by new ideology with obedience, religious manipulation and obscurantism. In these conditions, sport and physical manifestations took place in a useful utility form: work, military training, horse and water transport, etc. **Conclusions.** In a historical and social context, sport has moved from a component of gods' veneration rituals, expression of corporality and social representation, to a phenomenon of great magnitude, without religious valences and with great economic and social impact.

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1. Introduction

In the history of physical exercises and the Olympic Games, we can see that some old customs are still practiced under the conditions of secularization of postmodern social life. We find transgenerational transmission of stereotypes and social clichés in terms of hope, help or fear of divinity.

Sport is a phenomenon resulting from human actions; it is a cultural construct which refers to a certain anthropological and axiological conception of the human being. Sporting behaviour deals not just with athletes who practice sport, but also with all those persons who train and educate such sportspeople. Therefore, sport, as a whole, does not represent just an exclusive expression of the biological and physical potential of individuals, but rather a set of complex and systemic features, which are relational, social and moral and emerge from our commonly shared human nature (Isidori, & Benetton, 2015).

In high performance sports, each sports person is seen as unique, his/her training being based on sports anthropology, where human knowledge and sports knowledge is closely related to ethical and moral values.

The main value in sports is given by performance, which is measured in records, points, qualifications for higher levels of the competition, national and international recognition. One of the ethical values of sports is „olympism”, a word that involves tolerance, generosity, solidarity, friendship, non-discrimination and respect for the others, all these being also known as fair-play.

Fair-play is not just an ethical or a random behaviour. It stands for a whole moral code, a psychology, a code of unwritten chivalrous, traditional laws. The specialized literature all over the world studies the concept of fair-play as it was used by the English sports ethics after Shakespeare. It is thus a concept with various meanings, a concept which expresses fair fighting, following written and unwritten rules, and having respect for the opponent, in other words, sports behaviour (Popescu, 2010).

2. Problem Statement

In the modern society sport paradigm represent just an exclusive expression of the biological and physical potential of individuals. The value in sports is given by performance, measured in records, points, qualifications for higher levels of the competition, national and international recognition.

Sport should represent a set of complex and systemic features, which are ethical, social and moral and emerge from our commonly shared human nature.

3. Research Questions

Religion and sport are interdependent in different social and historical contexts. The terms meanings over time are different and fine context differentiation is required.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the evolution of the spiritual values of sport over time, from antiquity to the present, in social, historic and economic context.

5. Research Methods

The research methods are participatory observation, document study and meta-analysis.

6. Findings

6.1. Sports as a way of venerating the gods – legends and myths

Often the origins of sport and physical education are related to the ancient Olympic Games. Mythology, subjectivism, legends, sacred, games, everything in one place in deployments, a little credible today. Sources of other cultures such as Egyptian, Syrian, Oriental, etc. are less quoted or studied, so we remain in the Western European culture space.

Olympia derives from the word Olympus which means mountain. The site was dedicated to the worship of the earth and fertility. From another perspective, the name of the sacred place was received from Olympian Zeus, the father of all gods and men.

The Great Sanctuary attracted people from the entire Mediterranean Basin who worshiped the divinities in hopes of obtaining help and protection. Held in honour of the great God, the events were called the Olympic Games. Conferences and religious events were organized. The reputation of the place and the reputation of the games as a symbol of the Greek Brotherhood attracted participants from different places. The history of ancient Greece is woven by wars, changes in areas of influence, but which do not attenuate the importance of religious ceremony throughout the geographical area. Games have become an idea.

The Olympic Games symbolized for twelve centuries the apogee of Greek civilization and the Greek life of those times. Time was measured in the Olympiads, which means four-year periods (Sirracos, 1984, p. 24).

The model of the Olympic Games, where Zeus also took part, was taken over in other parts of ancient Ellada and a circuit was created that took place in different years. The ceremonies received names related to places or facts. The Pythic Games referred to Apollo's Victory on the Piton serpent. As Apollo was the god of the day, of the arts and of the light, the first contests had an artistic character of music and interpretation. The award to the winners was a laurel wreath brought from another region, which Apollo had dedicated to his great Daphne love. With the passage of time, in the program of events have been introduced sporting competitions. The Isthmic Games took their name from the geographic area, the Corinth arena where they were held. The contests were utilitarian, such as running, jumping, throwing, carriage racing, racing and pentathlon. Together with the physical skills competitions, musical and rehearsal competitions took place. The prize was a crown of pine branches, a plant specific to the place.

The Nemean Games were organized in honor of Zeus. The great local event consisted in the murder by Hercules of the lion that terrorized people in the area. The winner received a crown of wild celery leaves that praised the beauty of youth. Here, all the athletes wishing to win all four competitions started and finished their career. We deduce that counting the years through Olympiads is due to the fact that every competition came once every four years (Olympic Guide, 2013, p. 17).

Physical education and sport contests had an important place in the life of the Roman Empire's inhabitants. Physical activities and sports competitions were very numerous and complex, starting from the simple movement outdoors (running, marching and swimming) to systematically organized activities, which are linked to certain political and religious events or to public sports competitions (wrestling, racings,

fighters in the amphitheater etc.) and to activities that had either a luxury character (dance) involving large material investments (tourism trips).

The Roman state initiated, encouraged, popularized and financed many of these sport activities, having the obvious tendency to ensure the population with fun and relaxation; among donors was the emperor; so the funding has become a policy of the state.

The Roman state supported or facilitated the sport advertising especially for the public games, either by building sports bases (stadiums, circuses, amphitheaters) on the Roman state (especially in its western part where there was a preference for such events), either by advertising sports through monetary shows, inscriptions, models of action (Moşneag & Bulduş, 2016),

The phenomenon of secularization, so visible in the postmodern era did not spoil the respect for the symbols of human potential and the ability of the actors. According to the divine rules transposed in social terms, women could not attend ceremonies.

Social gender inequalities originated in the worship of sacredness. In some more liberal states, competitions were held for girls, and women were eligible to participate as spectators. In the world of symbols of Greek antiquity, myths, legends, weapons, glory, and helplessness were insinuated with faith and religious hope.

The war between cultures is manifest in our days. The woman becomes more and more visible on the sport field and in more and more sporadic sports. Although in certain religions the woman cannot step into the sacred place of the altar, social rights are increasingly visible with access to information and gaining economic independence. Neither the church no longer opposes the training of the woman.

Faith adapts to the new times. In Islamic religions due to the globalization and interpenetration of cultures as a general social trend, the woman becomes slightly more visible on the field of sports.

The worship of the ancient gods required an ethical code strictly complied with in order not to provoke the wrath of the gods. Normative constraints functioned at that time.

Favouring a competitor would have prompted the wrath of the gods, which would have fallen on the false winner or the city he represented (Stoll, 1964, 91-94).

In the modern age, ethical participation is ensured by ensuring equal opportunities for competition. There are regulations, specialized and monitored athletes and referees. Anti-doping controls are performing more and keep pace with the evolution of the pharmaceutical industry, etc. If the sacred has an antonym, then ethics has opposition to doping.

The Ancients have, besides divinity, a frame of reference to the world of the missing. Homer reports that in the Bronze Age, common games were dedicated to the dead. In ancient Greece the contests were dedicated to heroes, demons or gods (Sirracos, 1984). As in the Japanese and the Chinese, man does not die, his spirit remains around his community and he enjoys the memories of the descendants (Mace, 1988).

In present days, memorial competitions are held in remembrance of great personalities, which contribute to the preservation of tradition and image, have promotional, economic, social and political functions.

6.2. Sport as a way of expressing corporality

An aspect of the ancient Greek world is the concern for corporality, for physical beauty. A beautiful body is not only the sign of perfect harmony, but also of the presence of the gods in the human body. Herakles is the son of Zeus with an earthly woman Alkiminia and, according to some sources, is the initiator of the Olympic Games as a form of awe for the Father of Olympus (Schwab, 1997).

In the aspirations towards sacredness and perfection in the Greek mythology and the legends of the Olympian, the imaginary and the concrete are intertwined, forming a referential framework specific to time and place. In earthly life the concern for physical perfection, body hygiene inspires homosexuality and paedophilia.

The gods were treated as real entities that intervened in the life of the characters with punishments and rewards. Being gods or gods of Olympus, the worthy were rewarded with olive laurels or gifts, but they were grateful to the God for help directed toward them (Olympic Guide, 2013 p. 17).

Heracles' life has been used to illustrate the symbols and principles at the ground of Olympism (Balius & Juli, 1992). David J. Lunt, for instance, argues that "the most attractive heroic model for a powerful athlete was Herakles." (Lunt, 2009: 378) He gathered many of the virtues that are essential in athletes such as unselfish fortitude, labouring for the good of the others, and struggling for achieving virtue (Morford & Lenardon, 2003: p. 538).

The most important lesson contained in Heracles' myth is the hero's superhuman will to overcome all the obstacles in his path to success. Heracles' life inspires young people, in general, and athletes, in particular, to strive to achieve their goals, to become victors (Frias et al., 2015).

Many athletes nowadays thank heaven for success and make the sign of the Christians cross. Ancestral superstitions are displayed or faith in the power of divinity is demonstrated.

Today, the winners are true gods on earth, are rewarded, recognized until the fall of the record when they are forgotten and replaced. Hidden or discreet homosexuality in the sport world now fall into the liberal currents of human rights manifestation and in contradiction with some major religions.

Aspiration to immortality or access to the secrets of the world and zealotry are desiderata achievable through acts of courage, power and understanding, such as the sacrifice of sacred animals.

In Crete, bull fighting demonstrates these socially respectable qualities and prefigures the bloody corridas of today (Morrissey & Kilbz, 1978). In present times various organizations, more or less religious, take attitude to these cruel, anachronistic manifestations.

6.3. Dance as a means of expressing spirituality

A means of expression through movement, manifest in all ancient cultures is sacred dance. Dependence of nature, totemic beliefs and arbitrariness of divinity are the fields of manifestation that determine human behaviour. Warrior dance, invoking rain, fertility and abundance, casting away unclean spirits and dangers is expressed by movement at percussion and insinuating rhythms. Often the dance attempts on musical rhythms the passage between tellurium, concrete to symbolic, abstract.

Today, dancing occupies a special place in social practice and loads events with metaphorical meanings that are easy to perceive: from sacred to profane, from discrete to manifest, from ancestral to contemporary.

6.4. Sport in a political context

The fast that accompanied the games demonstrated the level of veneration of deity and the piety of the participants. In some areas, peace was established during the ceremony. But in time, the great leaders politicized the games, Philip II, and then the son of Alexander Macedon, transferring the glory and grandeur of the games to his own person.

The same story is true today: as in Berlin, Munich, Los Angeles, Moscow, when the church looks involved or powerless at great economic or military interests. Revolutions are stolen, distorted and the attention of the population is distracted for various reasons.

Greek culture has been communicated alive, but also by writing. Greek language and Greek culture imposed and influenced politics, literature, trade, social life and religion in the East Mediterranean region in the Balkans and later in other parts of Europe (Georgiadis, 2003).

6.5. Sports in the Christian Age

History has witnessed the fall of empires, the administrative rebuilding of society, the development and spread of Christianity as a dominant religion in Europe. Many Greeks, Romans, and other ethnicities convert to the new religion and, through their political functions, can influence important decision-making. Religion is politicized. Changing the cult involves reneging the past. Any reference to nude, sexuality or religions other than Christian was denigrated and considered pagan. The Roman thermal baths lose their fame, hygiene and corporality are reconsidered as useful and moral. Religion controls society. The Greek and Roman centres, which aim to celebrate the deities, are destroyed, or closed and declared illegal by administrative authority decisions.

The orders of the Christian emperors Theodosius I, followed by Theodosius II, stretch over a period of 70 years (393-462). The symbols that have influenced the world for hundreds of years are being replaced brutally with the Christian ones to seduce. Of course, there are important changes in other cultures that we do not refer to.

The result is that hygiene, corporality, physical beauty displayed are replaced by new ideology with obedience, religious manipulation, obscurantism. In these conditions, sport and physical manifestations take place in a useful utility form: work, military training, horse and water transport, etc. Play, fun and laugh are replaced by repentance and hope of salvation.

6.6. The Revival of the Olympic Games

In the revival of the Olympic Games, many Greek and other personalities are noteworthy. The endeavors of some personalities from Greece released from the Ottoman Empire or UK personalities have improved over time until the optimal socio-historical conditions for the revival of the Olympic Games have emerged.

Evangelie Zappa takes over Soutsos' ideas and financially supports the organization of the event. Baron Pierre de Coubertin recognizes in the ancient Olympic institution the means by which to implement the philosophy of sport, individual and society (Olympic Guide, 2013, pp.33).

6.7. Sport in the current social context

In sport, cohesiveness fades even more as the stake is more tempting. The care for health is almost anonymous compared to performance. The new religion of profession is that of money.

The normative codes are observed at the law limit. Friendship is managed through forms of marketing and exchange theory. The Christian religion of the love of one's neighbour also manifests itself in sport as in all the complexities of everyday life, ranging from selfishness to altruism under increasingly diverse and interchangeable circumstances.

Secularization detaches the world from the intangible divinity and, with industrialization, brings man closer to concrete reality and then to ideology of consumption and market. The rule is that there are no rules. Other ideology makes place for other social control.

"Cohesion is no longer expressed by veneration of common symbols; The communities involved are now too large, their backgrounds are too diverse, and the knowledge - too vast and too fragmented - for a totem, a god, a saviour or a saint to mean something to them "(Wilson, 1981 , p. 195).

The modern and postmodern society uses the Olympic Games for commercial and marketing purposes by promoting power, efficiency, etc. The sharing of the joy and special emotion of the participants and the entire spectator world keeps the Olympic spirit alive by television broadcasts made in superb technological conditions.

7. Conclusion

In ancient world sport was part of the rituals of worship of the gods. In the middle Ages the focus is on salvation through piety and obedience. At present, it is not religious but personal and it is a means of social recognition by venerating the winners. Habits and rituals characteristic of the pagan world have been transmitted to our day with specific forms.

In ancient times caring for body harmony reflects homage to the creative god. In the Middle Ages corporality is inhibited. At present, concern for corporality is influenced by advertising and reflects the trend of fashion. The postmodern era is dominated by the promotion of the image and the symbols of power.

The values in sport are greatly influenced by ideology, state organization, religion and economic power.

Spectacles, specific to the opening and closing of competitions, become a contest in itself, superb artistic representations that bring together millions of people across the globe in the human Olympic dream "Citius. Altius. Fortius ".

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