

THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF BRAZILIAN SPORTS PRACTICES

LA (IN)VISIBILIDAD DE PRÁCTICAS DEPORTIVAS BRASILEÑAS

A (IN)VISIBILIDADE DE PRÁTICAS ESPORTIVAS BRASILEIRAS

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Abstract

This present text has aimed to discuss the (in)visibility of sports practices developed in the routine of non-athlete Brazilians until the 1970s. It is a theoretical-critical-reflective debate. It was realized that the occupation of free time by autonomous bodily practices has been losing its place to those dictated by dominant economic and political interests. From a historiographical and cultural approach, it is possible to recognize different possibilities of sports practice. A closer view has allowed the identification of important invisible sports practices, which do not meet the official regulatory dictates. Sports practice throughout history is still permeated by important (in)visibilities/negligences of the academy, which guides its perspective on the traditional model and based on comparisons, which ignore the multiple representations of sports cultures built, developed and/or adapted to everyday life of non-athlete subjects, free and liberating bodily practices.

Keywords: Sports; History; Culture; Historiography.

Resumen

Este texto tuvo como objetivo discutir la (in)visibilidad de las prácticas deportivas desarrolladas en la vida cotidiana de los brasileños no deportistas hasta la década de 1970. Se trata de un debate teórico-crítico-reflexivo. Se señaló que la ocupación del tiempo libre por prácticas corporales autónomas ha ido perdiendo terreno frente a las dictadas por los intereses económicos y políticos dominantes. Desde un enfoque historiográfico y cultural, es posible reconocer diferentes posibilidades de práctica deportiva. Una mirada más cercana permitió identificar importantes prácticas deportivas invisibles, que no cumplen con la normativa oficial. La práctica deportiva a lo largo de la historia todavía está impregnada de importantes (in)visibilidades/descuidos de la academia, que orienta su perspectiva sobre el modelo tradicional y basado en comparaciones, que desconocen las múltiples representaciones de culturas deportivas construidas, desarrolladas y/o adaptadas a la vida cotidiana. de sujetos no deportistas, prácticas corporales libres y liberadoras.

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Palabras clave: Deporte; Historia; Cultura; Historiografía.

Resumo

Esse texto objetivou discutir a (in)visibilidade de práticas esportivas desenvolvidas no cotidiano dos brasileiros não atletas até a década de 1970. Trata-se de um debate teórico-crítico-reflexivo. Notou-se que a ocupação do tempo livre por práticas corporais autônomas vem perdendo espaço para aquelas ditadas pelos interesses econômicos e políticos dominantes. A partir de uma abordagem historiográfica e cultural é possível reconhecer diferentes possibilidades da prática esportiva. Um olhar mais atento permitiu a identificação de importantes práticas esportivas invisíveis, que não atendem aos ditames regulamentares oficiais. A prática esportiva ao longo da história ainda é permeada por importantes (in)visibilidades/negligências da academia, que norteia sua perspectiva no modelo tradicional e baseada em comparações, que ignoram as múltiplas representações das culturas esportivas construídas, desenvolvidas e/ou adaptadas ao cotidiano dos sujeitos não atletas, práticas corporais livres e libertadoras.

Palavras-chave: Esporte; História; Cultura; Historiografía.

Introduction

Cultural History has already been quite elitist, both in the subjects and in the objects studied, “the notion of culture that permeated it was too restricted a notion, which advances in anthropological reflection came to disqualify it” (BARROS, 2013a, p.58). The discussions promoted during the 20th century allowed the addition of a multitude of interests to this historiographical field, starting to evaluate the culture, also, as a communicative process, human beings understand that to communicate is to produce culture, recognizing that the humanity communicates through its gestures, its bodies and its ways of living.

This new proposal of Cultural History becomes interested in the subjects that produce and receive culture and, beyond these subjects and agencies that produce it, they study the means how it is produced and transmitted: the practices and the processes (BARROS, 2013a). Thus, it is interested in the analysis in multiple perspectives and in the different subjects involved, the popular people and everyday actions assume a central position. In this sense, the act of reviewing the history and/or discourse presupposes prior construction of the awareness of invisible subjects and/or events, which can be considered subordinate (KALIMAN, 2001). The issue is a new legalization of these historical roles, valuing the speech of those previously ignored.

Based on this discussion the history of sport was constituted and constituted by historiographical, anthropological and sociological discussions, parallel and intrinsic to society and its political, economic and cultural functioning in a dynamic way. In this way, the sport whilst sociocultural phenomenon and practice is associated "with a network of other practices and diverse knowledge, social relations and political and cultural phenomena that are interconnected" (BARROS, 2013b, p.12), which allows its analysis as a means of critical understanding of the current culture. Thus, there is a rupture with a naive perspective of sport as something strange to the political dimension (GIULIANOTTI, 2016; PAZIN, AZEVÊDO, NERY, 2019) and consequently economic, social and cultural, making it an object of value to the academic-scientific environment.

Sport, in a broad perspective, is based on and through culture, with its practice being transmitted by the social environment, by the encouragement of someone or a community. It is a unique human social phenomenon, with an important presence in the media, preceding the heightened interest and curiosity in the most different regions of the world. However, there are important differences regarding to their structures, development and inclusions according to population groups (ANDERETE SCHWAL, 2021).

The way how the sporting activity is presented is a result of social values, according to the group in which it is practiced (SIGOLI; ROSE JÚNIOR, 2004). This fact justifies studies on its origins and development, since in addition to the sporting modalities present individual and peculiar characteristics for the practice, its populational presence is also influenced by factors extrinsic to it, such as geography, economy, culture and other elements.

Sport is more than a modality of body use; mentioning appropriate practices such as sports presupposes recognizing in these groups of actions a link understood as modernization, civilization and discipline (ELIAS, DUNNING, 2019). This manifestation is in constant formation, considering its knowledge and historical and cultural values, its diversity of participants, situations, places, meanings and purposes.

The sport “is a thing, but it is also a phenomenon; it's something concrete, but it's much more mystery and breath; it is a revealed theme and equally hidden soul; it is profane, but it aims at the sacred” (BENTO, 2006, p.166), manifesting itself under different possibilities: practice itself, instrument for intervention and modification of social reality, educational method or object, means of producing economic wealth, free cultural manifestation or even a mechanism of social alienation.

It is still possible to understand it as “an activity that contemplates, at the same time, the playful dimension (the game), the sense of overcoming (the competition, the agonism), the human movement and a formal regulatory structure” (PEIL, 2000, p. 126). Furthermore, during the sports practice, it is possible to visualize conflicts and social differences, which it can reinforce (ANDERETE SCHWAL, 2021).

The favoring of these individual factors, of human beings and creators of culture, can explain its capacity to attract and fascinate people, which also explains its use by dominant groups for the manipulation and alienation of the crowds. In other words, sport is capable of expressing, individually or socially, the exercise of power, which is eminently oppressive to the crowds.

By way of illustration, the growing studies about the History of Sport broaden the understanding of the development of an 'awareness of historicity', accepting that "the sport, in each one of its countless modalities, constitutes a universe in permanent transformation" (BARROS, 2013b, p.11). According to the context of analysis, the sport can figure as a subject and/or product, as well as a means and/or source for historical understanding in a broader sense, because it represents important cultural traits of the historical moment under analysis. Explaining that, the sports activities in modern societies move, release and control the flow of feelings and emotions, trying to keep them in a balanced way, hence all the special and fundamental meaning of sport in this society.

Within the cultural-historical focus, the notion of “representation” is seen as one of its fundamental center lines. The cultural history has as a goal identifying how a given cultural reality is constructed, thought of in different times and places. The "representations", "in a field of rivalry and competitions, whose challenges are enunciated in terms of power and domination, they produce ‘struggles of representations’” (CHARTIER, 1990, p.17), which generate "appropriations" of these representations according to social interests, political impositions and resistance, motivations and human needs. Therefore, this text intends to discuss the (in) visibility of sports practices developed in the daily life of non-athletes, recreational practitioners, Brazilians, until the 1970s.

Contextualizing Modern Sport

Modern sport can be accepted among the main and most relevant activities historically developed and/or incorporated by human societies. According to Vigarello and Holt (2009), the sport may have been born out of traditional parties and games, after the occurrence of structural changes that made its development possible.

However, it is not possible to deny that in some moments, depending on the desire to practice, the absence of infrastructure or even recognition of the importance of the fulfillment of the formal sporting totality, the path seems relatively inverse. For example, in some specific community groups, the sport activity “does not follow the formal structure, it is contextualized to local characteristics, needs and specificities” (MUSSI et al, 2015, p. 166), which ends up popularly naming as sport something that 'in fact', or conceptually, would not be the practice determined, or plastered, by the normative directive institutions, but neither would it be the creative and free-of-norm popular game.

So, modern sport is one of the most relevant cultural expressions of humanity, present in different regions of the world, often meeting local demands and specificities determined by the historical moment, infrastructure and institutional, financial and physical characteristics, which can facilitate or hinder the adherence of its practitioners.

In the political field, it presents itself as a vehicle of crowd communication, with rules and simple language, loaded with emotional tension capable of conveying objectives and ideologies (SIGOLI; ROSE JÚNIOR, 2004). Thus, it can become alienating in favor of political prestige (PAZIN; AZEVÊDO; NERY, 2019), fundamentally due to the feeling of compensation for the daily life and/or by the mistaken perception of sporting success as the subject.

The institutionalized organization confirms that the modern sport is predominantly based on competition, productivity, secularization, equal opportunities, supremacy of the most skillful, specialization of functions, quantification of results and setting of rules (FRANCO JÚNIOR, 2007), characteristics that were established to serve the cartesian scientific and economic models, and at various times in history it is possible to realize it as an instrument of domination by the political and/or capital elite, serving the interests of the restricted groups that hold these categories of power.

The quality and efficiency of this modern sport are measured based on the results obtained and the winners are awarded with trophies and medals, with symbolic prizes or materials that attest the reached position (GIGLIO, RÚBIO, 2013). Differently from traditional games, which were interested in the practiced activity and its complexities, this “new practice” directs its attention almost exclusively to the final result, the victory, as a symbol of suppression of its opponent, who will be taken as inferior and disqualified.

Thus, it was found that sport, differently from traditional games, would no longer serve only the 'simple' enjoyment of free time or even for the achievement of pleasure, it comes to represent a new model of bodily practices, which combines with the moral, social and ideological objectives of the historical moment of humanity, therefore modeled on the positivist scientific and capitalist economic paradigms.

It is necessary to pay attention to other determinant aspects of sporting activities directly related to the civilizing process in a broad way. The space directed to the sports practices must be thought in a systematic context, with each element receiving a specific value (BOURDIEU, 2004), since the bodily practices in specific groups represent collective thinking and mean the affirmation of what is usual, cultural and historical for that social group.

Considering the use of sport throughout History, the modern sport, structured during the Industrial Revolution, differs from the ancient games because of "the possibility of it being regulated by official rules, known and equal to everyone" (KNIJNIK, 2009, p .194), which allowed its regularization, regulation, dissemination and practical supervision, reduction of violence (among players and spectators) and increased self-control of the activity. However, it is important to recognize the limitation or even the withdrawal of some regional cultural characteristics, such as the international standards of sports arenas, which no longer intend to respect the local fan culture and the historically architecture constituted by the host countries of the sporting mega-events.

It is recognized that modern sport has a strong development linked to the urbanization/industrialization process. Thus, Vigarello and Holt (2009, p.421) comment that "if the amateur sport reached the bourgeois class above all in the nineteenth century, the need to offer workers what the Victorian Era called rational entertainment also played an important role in its dissemination". At that time, workers needed an activity that required skill, given the new work model that emerged: mechanized work.

But, at the same time, this activity would need to be controlled and during the Industrial Revolution the need to control the bodies and time of those workers emerges, even during free time.

Time is no longer governed by nature and started to be mechanically determined by the factory clock. This fact would allow not only the determination of working and non-working times, but also the emergence of a clear defined leisure time (MARTA, 2013, p.1).

This model of body control and the use of time hurts the understanding that “free time must provide to the subject the maximum self-conditioning and the minimum of hetero conditioning” (MUSSI et al, 2015, p.159). This offer does not accept that the participants freely modify the rules, regarding to the duration and safety of the activity, so that the workers, tired or injured, did not “embezzle” the factories in the following day. The fun and the recreation, originally involved in bodily practice, no longer represent the central axis (although they are not totally excluded), what the employers want is a moment of 'controlled bodily release', however it may seem strange, for the maintenance of labor productivity.

The reorganization of urban space, with workers controlled by the middle class, who saw the need to extinguish the practices, according to its perspective, that were not 'civilized', demanded the need to regulate the games. Non-work time could be spent playing or watching it, because, before it was fully structured, "there was already an active public that attended the events of a practice that was often considered, in the perception of time, as a sport ” (MELO, 2012, p.28).

Without wanting to disregard the important movements in favor of the occupation of the active sports space (RÚBIO, SIMÕES, 1999), it's noticed an impressive and growing structure of passive body monitoring for the enjoyment of sports activity, thus the worker would present even less risk of becoming absent due to injury related to its practice, even in the face of denial of free and recreational bodily action moment.

Sports development generates growth in the number of spectators and, consequently, competition venues start to dedicate more space to fans. This strategy allows a greater number of workers to be controlled in their free time. However, these athletes would no longer be necessarily sportsmen, they would assume, in their absolute majority, the position of fans (SIGOLI; ROSE JÚNIOR, 2004), ensuring the so-called bodily release controlled, on a large scale and with low risk for the bodies with alienating impacts and low bodily risk.

In the trajectory of configuring the generalization of sports practice, there were many developments and peculiarities, with emphasis on the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, when the echoes of the international flow of sports development arrived in Brazil (MELO, 2011). Studies³ point out that, in general, in Brazil, modern sport did not go through the development process that was experienced in Europe, but was transplanted to meet the interests of a national oligarchy. Representatives of the oligarchy who traveled to Europe, mainly to study, return with a vision of social and human development that includes a sport practice, primarily reserved for the dominant class.

It is important to note that several sports practices allowed / aimed at a restricted group (ANDERETE SCHWAL, 2021), ended up changing, including peculiar characteristics of regional culture, eminently arising from the most popular groups in Brazil. The greatest example is football, which entered our country as a highly elite sport, but after a few years it began to be developed, with important adaptations that facilitated its practice, in the wastelands of the outskirts and small towns of the inlands and even in rural communities⁴ of hard access. According to Mussi *et al* (2015), over the years, blacks, mestizos and poor white people have increasingly identified themselves with this sport, which has undergone social and cultural adjustment, transforming it into the 'national sport'.

³ Melo, 2011, Marta, 2013, Vigarello, 2009

⁴ See Mussi *et al*, 2015

We can understand this process as a characteristic, so well analyzed by Silvano Santiago (2000), in the discussion about the cultural anthropophagy, after all, even though football has arrived with its institutionalized rules, what prevailed and still prevails in social daily life is its guided practice by the rules and way of playing recreated by the people. Therefore, this anthropophagy proposed a kind of renewal ritual, that is, an act that, in cultural terms, would metaphorically take place through the destruction of previous cultures, in this case the institutionalized sport. And it is interesting to note that this “new” sport that has emerged in Brazilian lands, football art with dribbles and beautiful moves, is present in the best clubs in the world, despite its professionalization.

However, this standardization of modern sport that refers to traditionally created and regulated modalities in Europe and/or the United States deserves attention, considering that in Brazil and other Latin American countries the responsibility for idealizing and structuring sports modalities such as futsal, footvolley, frescoball, sand soccer, and possibly other activities that were already practiced by the people who inhabited these lands before the arrival of the Europeans, such as shuttlecock.

It is important to emphasize that there is a strong relationship between the dissemination of sports practice and the places where they were 'invented', constituting sports territories more or less developed according to various factors, such as: the historical colonial process, presence and execution of public sports policies, market logic and academic-professional training for its development (NUNES, MATTEDI, 2014). Thus, traditional metropolitan centers, such as Europe, tend to have a larger and/or better organized competitive sports structure than other world regions, often denying or hindering their development in other countries.

Probably this denial of the representative role that Brazil and Latin America have in the creation and practice of Sports is associated with its place of speech in the world economy and politics: a place of subordination, which according to Gayatri Spivak (2010) would be the subject of third world represented in Western discourse presented in intellectual production as part of Western international economic interests.

Thus, Brazil, which does not hold world economic power, can not compete with large corporations, even in sports such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Federation of Football Association (FIFA). This way, it can not establish a better dialogue and insert or suggest sports practices and/or changes that would be highly profitable, both economically and culturally, for our country and other nations in situations similar to ours.

This analysis of the Latin American countries subordination can be enriched with a debate about the role of the “between-place” that Latin American and Brazilian culture have in relation to other nations. For Silviano Santiago (2000) the concept of “between-place” would be the dominated culture being able to contribute with the art, confronting the dominant culture. The clash, the consequent cultural production is part of universality, because this presupposes, according to the critic, a process of expansion in which responses from peripheral countries are given to the values of the metropolis. Thus, the dominant countries do not give any endorsement or recognition to this culture. And in sport, this is watched from the moment that there are created modalities and already practiced in many other countries, but they still have not been acknowledged as Olympic sports such as futsal, footvolley and beach soccer.

This issue of Brazil and other Latin American countries being often ignored in this discussion of the “creation” of modern sport, it is also possible to discuss with the writings of Santiago (2000) when he critic the historians who have perpetuated the history for many years considered as “official” and in this specific case, we refer to sports historians. This situation only had significant change when the cultural history began to be better analyzed, as discussed at the beginning of this text. Santiago (2000) still uses an analysis made by Jacques Derrida to condemn the way history was written over the years: through comparisons and forgetting the originality and even the recreations that it was possible to see in new nations.

Sport interfaces in modern society

Before its irreducibility or specificity, characteristics that admit it as an element of culture, the analysis of the sports phenomenon allows the understanding of important social transformations (MOURA et al., 2010). Depending on the model of society, the sport ends up absorbing its social, economic and political precepts. After all, the policies inserted and the visibility given to certain practices are essential for them to become popular.

In Brazil, there are several occasions in history in which sport was used as a tool to bring the government and the population closer together. This happened during the Vargas Era and the popularization of football⁵ and was even more present in the period of the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985), which perceived sport “as a sphere of culture capable of giving political visibility to the actions of the Brazilian dictatorship internationally” (OLIVEIRA, 2009, p.389). The successes in the practice of sports in international competitions would serve to exemplify the successful management model of the Brazilian State and a comparison to the great powerful nations of that time could emerge, that disputed hegemony in all sectors, from economic to cultural.

The Brazilian dictatorial government still understood these sports practices with "a prescriptive character, identified as a promising space for the education of the senses and the will, linked to overcoming and self-discipline of the body and subjectivity" (PAZIN, 2014, p.29). Sport was applied in the policies of this authoritarian government throughout the 1970s, because it has always been worked very well on changes related to progress, sometimes mobilizing energy, sometimes sharpening values, senses and sensibilities.

In a regional context, for the military governments in the Southern Cone countries, Sport could calm the spirits of the population, control young people who could challenge the current government that sought the legitimacy of "institutional acts" and repressive attitudes such as murders, tortures and disappearances (PADRÓS, 2012), an important example of the use of sports in favor of alienating populations.

⁵ See Pardini (2009).

The government in that period promoted the sporting model that disciplined bodies, the intention was to act in the constitution of a submissive and obedient society. As well as “the ideal of a life of idleness and culture, [...], it was gradually abandoned” (VIGARELLO, HOLT, 2009, p.428), in European societies in the 19th century, in American countries it occurred late in the 20th century.

Even though the Brazilian dictatorial government has implemented a sport politics, this practice occurred less in terms of “body movement” and more in terms of the development of a “sports mentality” (OLIVEIRA, 2009). The media campaign used was very strong in relation to sports activity, but economic investments were not favorable for its large-scale implementation in society or, worse, investments were centralized in sports that already had a certain prominence in the media. Many sports nowadays have numerous development difficulties and this was due to the invisibility of these sports in the media and in the implemented public policies.

The dictatorship, which saw in sports practice a mechanism for strengthening the centrality of the State, due to the scarce resources demanded by this sector, ended up preparing the ground for the private capital. In this context, “sports, like other cultural activities, are in dynamic interaction with the different dimensions of reality, influencing and influenced by them” (MELO, 2009, p.137). The occupation of free time by practicing sports is always loaded with the intentions of the historical moment.

Thus, answering the new model of capitalist society, activities that were previously freely developed by people and communities, start to assume a labor character after structural adjustment. The subject who developed these activities spontaneously would now perform them according to bourgeois social dictates, that is, workers should learn to answer to monetary incentives (HOBSBAWN, 2016), confirming that “mechanical work begins to triumph over skillful work” (VIGARELLO, HOLT, 2009, p.414). The work that was much more characterized by strength and skill before at that time became automated and without much movement; thus, the need to implement rules emerges so that those workers could continue exercising, but with control over the time that should be spent.

In this process of sport modernization, the element that circulates is the norm, which according to Foucault (2005, p. 302) “can be applied to a body that somebody wants to discipline or to a population that somebody wants to regulate”. Therefore, workers' control can be exercised even in moments of free time, facilitating the normalization and discipline of this society that emerged from capital and that realizes time as money.

These characteristics are fundamental for the weakening of free and recreational practice and, simultaneously, for the strengthening of issues related to the promotion of its competitive dimension, followed by “professionalization”. However, on the other side, the Sport for All Movement emerged, in the late 1970s, which intended the democratization of sports practices (TUBINO, 2003).

Therefore, Dias, Fortes and Melo (2014) warn that even when spreading across the world, material and symbolic contacts are related to different degrees with local peculiarities. So, different levels of development can be seen in various sports practiced, according to place, social group, historical moment and economic situation, for example.

Final considerations

Cultural History, which surpasses the traditional aristocratic model, allows a demonstration that the practice of sports, a popular activity, represents an important element of human culture, capable of contributing to the understanding of social, political and economic issues according to the differences and/or similarities present in the most diverse communitarian groups.

Modern sport is featured by rules that differentiate it from games, but socially it seems that the practice of sports does not always meet the regulatory dictates, understanding that there are situations in which what prevails is the practice according to the structure that exists in that provided society or specialized community groups.

The historiographic analysis of Sport must make explicit the political, economic and social actions that permeated, or justified, its development or 'almost' forgetfulness. Understanding that “collective memory is not only an achievement, it is also an instrument of power” (LE GOFF, 2010, p.470) often at the service of groups or institutions with greater financial, educational and political capacity.

When we look for more detailed information about certain sports and their roles in society, it is clear that it is still a subject full of gaps and totally dependent on a traditional history based on comparisons. Several studies⁶ indicate that this field of investigation still requires analysis, especially when it comes to brazilian non-athletes. Therefore, there is a need for the progression of studies that promote more broadly the theoretical interaction between history, sociology, anthropology and other fields that involve the understanding of elements that influence and are influenced by modern sport.

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⁶ See Melo et al, 2013; Priore, Melo, 2009

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