

**„Babes-Bolyai” University, Cluj – Napoca**

**Sociology and Social Work**

**SPORTS AS A MEANS OF SOCIALIZATION OF STUDENTS. CASE  
STUDY – UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT IN CLUJ-NAPOCA (UBB AND  
UTCN) UNIVERSITIES**

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The current thesis tries to make a connection that is not unlikely, between having sport activities, and on the other hand, a series of social phenomena, from which we underline that of socialization. Besides the family, the first and foremost socialization group, other groups contribute to the socialization of the individual: schoolmates, groups of peers and, later on, the group of professionals (colleagues). One of the ways in which socialization in the peer group is achieved is through sports. Individuals learn by playing sports to work together, to assume particular roles within the group, and to define themselves. This is the motivation for choosing the topic as relevant, but we will also see throughout that paper that socialization and sports intertwine in a variety of ways.

The major hypotheses of the paper are as follows:

Hypothesis: students that are more active with regard to sports are socialized not only in the spirit of sport values, but also in that of human values such as: team work, taking responsibilities, solidarity towards the group, playing by the rules, tenacity.

Hypothesis: sport is connected with identity factors such as self-esteem, self-appreciation, feeling of belonging, the need for integration.

Hypothesis: sport can have negative effects of socialization, like learning violent attitudes and breaking the rules to achieve glory within the competition.

Secondly, our hypotheses revolve around the idea that young women are much less willing to socialize through team sports, rarely dedicating free time to such activities. Young men, on the other hand, probably as a proof of masculinity, organize in increased manner in such competitive in which force and strength are important elements. Also, when physical education is no longer in the curricula, the actions of general socialization decrease too. In time, students reduce their group of friends and acquaintances, which also means giving up sports.

## **Chapter 1 Current topics in the sociology of sports**

The first big chapter of the thesis begins with a broad presentation of sociological and psycho sociological problems that can be associated with the area of sport. Sport is presented in relation to a series of major theoretical perspectives. The first one is functionalism.

Functionalist authors see sport as religious-like institution that uses ritual and ceremony to strengthen certain values shared within a society, in a way similar to the way the religion works. Sport contributes to the adaptive needs of the system helping maintain the physical well-being of individuals, such that we can consider the field as a functional part of the social group.

Also, sport reunites members of a community, whether small or large, such as a nation, having the capacity of generating a feeling of social unity and solidarity. From a functionalist perspective, sport can be seen as a means of liberating frustrations and tensions in an environment that allows, to a certain degree, a behavior usually unaccepted in the other parts of social life.

From a micro-functionalist perspective, Loy, McPherson and Kenyon (1978, apud Loy și Booth, 2000) divide the functionalist problems that the subculture of sports is confronted with into four categories, as follows:

- issues of pattern-maintenance in recruitment and socialization of new members, in keeping members through reward and motivation, retirement from sport and de-socialization, maintaining cultural elements (norms, values, beliefs, symbols, language, posture, myths and legends, traditions and technologies).

- issues of integration – learning of skills connected to the task, functional specialization connected to the task, social status and mobility within the structure, establishing of peer reciprocated relationships

- issues of goal-obtainment – acquiring and demonstrating of cognitive and motor abilities unique to the subculture of sport

- issues of adaptation – differentiated relations to the dominant culture and to the outsiders

From a Marxist perspective, the following ideas arise:

- rejecting the bourgeois-capitalist concept of competitive sport
- analyzing sport as an instrument for solving social problems
- sport has to sustain women's emancipation
- sport and physical health heighten human productivity, and, thus, society's productivity as an ensemble
- Also with connection to Marxism, conflict theory underlines the negative contribution of the instauration of the bourgeois-capitalist concept of sport. Conflict theory sustains that social order is based on constraint and exploitation. Sport reflects and exacerbates many of the social cleavages, including those regarding gender, social class and race.

From a feminist perspective, it is claimed that sport, as a cultural and commercial production, creates the idea of gender and then sells it. Radical feminism, on the other hand, is interested in the role sport has in the social construction of male gender dominance and women's submission to it.

Afterwards, the main research directions of the field are presented; sport being studied in the context of globalization, media, also in relation to violence, to the creation of social networks – sport functions like a catalyst for creating social networks -, to health and leadership.

Of the more important aspects is the parallel with the Uses & gratifications theory, which can refer to the reasons for which individuals are interested in media sports. Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz (1974) have divided the theory into four distinct views, each appealing to another type of benefit that the spectator searches for:

- escapism – the will to evade daily life

- personal relations – individuals search for the creation of personal relationships with media characters, feeling that they know and trust them
- personal identity – when an individual constructs part of his identity by taking on traits that he considers to be attractive from media character
- supervision – the audience gains an understanding of the surrounding world, through media consumption

With regard to the theme of violence, the theory of social learning claims that an aggressive behavior can be learned by imitating a model of behavior. This behavior is then strengthened through rewards and punishments. Young athletes create idols and role models for themselves amongst the participants in athletic competition, and their aggressiveness can be associated with values such as commitment to the team, will for victory, physical strength and courage.

Sport and health are also put into parallel perspective. The positive, as well as the negative effects of practicing sport are shown. Some studies (Sherlock, 1999) have shown that there is a tendency at a group level that the social ambitions of women be accompanied by training regimes that absorb, together with work and sleep, their entire way of life. Training to become faster has meant excluding food almost totally or rationalizing a diet with low fats for the reduction of body weight.

Last but not least, we make reference to Giddens (2001) to underline the connection between sports and globalization. Sports are frequently labeled as the global culture industry, par excellence. It crosses language barriers and borders, attracting spectators and participants toward a common language of passion and desire. The sports phenomenon brings together communities all over the world and it generates economical well-being.

## **Chapter 2. The concept of socialization**

This chapter's goal is to make an inventory of the literature on the theme of socialization. Firstly, we make a review of all sciences that claim the concept of socialization: anthropology, psychology and sociology. The **anthropologic** preoccupation with socialization is noticeable in the 20's-'30's, when scientists such as Mead and Malinowski were focusing on the cultural practices that affected the raising of children, transmission of values and development of personality.

On the other hand, for psychologists, especially those influenced by Piaget, socialization is a matter of cognitive development. For the behaviorists, socialization is a synonym for the learning of behavior patterns. For the clinical psychology, the term means establishing personality traits in the context of early life experience.

Sociologically speaking, there are two ways to explain the concept – one is a functionalist perspective and regards socialization as learning of social roles. According to this perspective, individuals become an integral part of society through the learning of roles and statuses relevant for the group they are part of. The other orientation, symbolic interaction, studies socialization as a process of the formation of self. The developing of the self and of self-identity in the context of intimate relationships is considered the core of socialization.

Thus, socialization does not have to be seen as a simple process of learning rules and norms or behavior patterns, as it is a problem of learning all these things just until the point in which they become part of the way individuals define themselves. A successful socialization involves “the transformation of social control into self-control” (Borgatta, 2000). This is made possible partly through the development of identities, labels and characteristics that we attribute to the self.

Commitment towards the assumed identity is a source of motivation for the individual; the motivation to behave in accordance with the norms and values that are specific for those identities.

Further, the concept of primary socialization is discussed. In this respect, it has been discovered that parental support can be positively correlated to the cognitive development of the child, to his moral behavior, to the degree of conformation to adult standards, to self-esteem, to academic performance and to social competence.

In opposition, the lack of support is associated with negative socialization: lack of self esteem, delinquency, deviant behavior, drug abuse and other problems. (see Barnes and Farrell, 1992). On the other hand, control refers to the degree and manner in which parents try to constrain the child's behavior.

Gender and age roles are among the first to be learned. Socialization in the direction of gender roles is continuous and long-term process. At the same time, it is an omnipresent one, as there are a multitude of agents and contexts of gender socialization. Society usually has well defined roles for men and women, different from each-other, and children are raised to fit into those roles. But the transmission of a certain content through socialization is done also according to age (Berger and Luckmann, 1999).

Durkheim (2002) has another vision on education and socialization: "continuous effort to impose ways of seeing, feeling and acting, on the child; models that he would not have reached spontaneously."

The factors of socialization include – the family, the group of friends, the media, and school. The peer group is an important factor of socialization due to the fact it is a voluntary association and for the children, the first one of its kind. This allows for a greater freedom of association within the group. Secondly, the association is done among equal statuses, making it more likely that relationships be based on egalitarian norms.

**Secondary socialization** also represents a learning of roles, but this time they are institutional roles. Adult-specific roles are learnt, such as occupation, marriage and parent roles. As individuals become committed to the roles they play, they identify themselves and have a self image in accordance to those role identities.

**Re-education.** An important aspect of this phenomenon is the substitution of prior individual value and belief systems, as well as self image, with a new set based on the ideology of the group where socialization is made. Usually, the process is done through small group intense interactions, where physical and symbolic environment are controlled by socialization agents.

**Continuous socialization.** Individuals go through important experiences of socialization for all their lives. As we grow older, we gain new statuses and play new roles. Socialization after childhood is sometimes necessary when a social change rapidly changes the norms.

Whereas during childhood and adolescence, the self and personality of the individual begins to take shape – basically through the absorption of the reactions around him, through the social mirror reflection – at an adult stage, personality is consolidated and the accent falls upon on the way the self is presented to others. Plenary insertion into a profession, to a social status, to the adult condition, involves a careful approach to the impression they leave others with, for most social actors.

**Organizational socialization** is „a process through which the individual accumulates social knowledge and abilities necessary for assuming an organizational role” (Van Maanen and Schein, 1978: 3).

The socialization of an individual into a devout believer, for instance, is the church’s way of ensuring its own existence in time, creating the role of involved citizen is the way the state ensures that it will survive as a structure, and the efficient employee is the way through which the firm/organization/corporation will live on.

**Dennis Wrong (1961) and the oversocialized conception of man.**

There are theories claiming that the merits of socialization are limited. Wrong’s discourse revolves around a dichotomy individual-society and it tries to explain that although man is a social being, he is never completely socialized and he resists the process of socialization.

### **Chapter 3. Socialization through sports**

The current chapter's aim is to gather as much as possible from the results other research has had on the topic of sports and socialization. The most exposed to both phenomena – physical activity and socialization – are children and youngsters. Research has been concentrating on these groups of population.

All that has been written so far in these pages is there to support the idea that sport, through its competitive nature, and due to the fact it is often associated with team-work, may change something in the way athletes regard themselves in relation to others around them. Moreover, it has been shown that, usually, involvement in athletic activities promotes positive values, such as: competition, fair-play, responsibility, self-esteem etc. Some studies have shown even behavior and major attitude changes in day-to-day life, when it came to individuals involved in physical activity.

Most perspectives which have been offered by the theory of social learning are connected to functionalist theories (Theberge, 1984), who regard the process as one of value transmission, value learning and individual modeling towards prescribed roles (Giddens, 1979). Researchers assume that abilities learned during childhood games are applicable to the social, political and economical spheres of adult life, and personal development through sport takes place through a set of predetermined societal orientations, practices and values that are transmitted from generation to generation, having sports and games as vehicles.

Sport is important for socialization in many ways and perspectives. Firstly, it offers the opportunity to meet other people and to communicate with them, to assume different roles, to achieve social skills, to accept attitudes connected to day-to-day activity or to adapt to the goals of a team.

Secondly, in the case of children, there is a learning process, of knowing the outside world, of role acquisition through games, which helps the child become sociable. Thirdly, practicing organized sports facilitates the association in perspective of free social contacts.

Last but not least, an important part of socialization is the development of one's personality and the finding of one's identity, and sport has, in this respect, a major role, being a determinant factor of self-appreciation, growth of self-esteem, decrease of stress and growth of efficiency.

Furthermore, there is evidence on the positive effect physical activities have on deviant behavior and on the state of mind of individuals with disabilities.

Social life developed within athletic activities becomes important because sport offers an appropriate environment for the forming and maintaining of social relations, developing team spirit and solidarity. Studies show that athletic activities are associated with a low level of deviant behavior and with a high academic and social performance. It has been shown, also, by interviewing and surveying parents, that these regard sporting extracurricular activities as a socialization arena for children; in the spirit of values and abilities that reach beyond the simple benefits of participating to an athletic activity.

Surveys such as the ones conducted by Alwin (2001), Dukes and Coakley (2002) or Lareau (2003) prove that parents strongly believe that athletic activities help develop qualities in children that they need in order to be successful, adapted and respectable members of society. Among the values learned through sports we can include team-work, fair play, discipline, devotion, responsibility, self-respect, self-trust etc. (Kremer-Sadlik și Kim, 2007).

In connection to the topic of education through sport and bringing athletic values to daily behavior, the state of Alabama, USA, has launched an ample program for character education through sport. In Alabama there is now a law that imposes a mandatory 10 minute character education, followed by „**sportsmanship education**” in the curricula. The results of the programs' implementation are impressive. Coaches talk about a change in

attitude and behavior, athletes becoming more respectful, more willing to work in a team, and more disciplined, on the field, as well as off it.

The unit of implementation for the Alabama project has noticed a positive impact on the behavior during class of students that were part of the program. They declare that the project has been developed to help coaches teach youngsters and those close to them to radiate a sportsmanlike spirit using tactics that can be easily remembered and transferred towards real life situations.

A national program for education through sport, developed in Great Britain, has underlined, among others, that students have acknowledged without any doubt that their individual performance has an effect on the teams' performance, claiming that a poor performance would disappoint the other members of the team. Assuming a role behavior was another important issue for the subjects. The sense of responsibility was enhanced by this factor.

In this chapter, group integration as a measure of ones successful socialization was also taken into discussion. Also, there is a debate on the de-socializing effects that sport may have.

In Romania, Ganciu (2003) underwent an experiment that was aimed at discovering whether sport has anything to do with social integration. From the studies data comes the conclusion that the experimental group realizes a much more significant social integration than the control group, the average mark for the first being 8.47, as opposed to the second, 7.15.

Other studies (Șelărescu, 2004) prove that systematical practicing of sports shapes personality in harmony. All the investigated athletes mentioned that sport encourages traits of personality such as: tenacity, perseverance, willingness, toughness, courage. Also, sport disciplines and forms habits of physical and mental health, which are absolutely necessary to social success.

The tests applied revealed common characteristics of the athletes that were subjects of investigation:

- “authoritarian, affirmed, dominant character;
- Intelligence, intellectual qualities, learning abilities;
- Force over self: seriousness, sense of duty, moral force;
- Practical spirit, formalization, hard-working;
- Independent spirit, self-reliant;
- Personal resources.” (Șelărescu, 2004)

#### **Chapter 4. Case study – UBB and UTCN universities**

Methods – survey and group interview

Questionnaire items:

The first questions refer to current habits connected to physical activity. The purpose of this set of questions is to determine how physically active students are. Next, there are questions on the relation to sports during childhood and adolescence, which are important for differentiating the extent to which sport constitutes a socialization factor for the subjects.

In the next part of the questionnaire, the reasons for which students practice sports are investigated. Also, the partners they usually have, the locations where they play and whether access and costs are problems that deter them from sporting activities. There is an item on the general health state of the subjects, too.

Digging further and deeper, there are variables that check the individual psychology in relation to sport. Thus, there are questions about feelings and emotions associated with sport.

Not lastly, the most ample set of variables of the questionnaire is the one which verifies general sets of values and attitudes about life, specially life within groups of belonging. Thus, the attitudes toward individualism, collectivism, responsibility, team work, the will for appreciation, competition, the will to be liked, respecting the rules, and self-esteem are measured.

To refer also to the possibility of a socialization towards values that are not desirable, the questionnaire ends with a few questions on the attitude towards violence in sport. Some hypothetical situations are presented, in which violent reactions occur, and the subjects are asked to evaluate them. The questionnaire ends with the socio-demographics.

The sample for the survey is built up of 382 subjects from two universities in Cluj, the confidence at a 95% level, with a +/- 5 confidence interval, in relation to the variable *belonging faculty*. The sample is stratified in relation to the same variable, at a faculty level a convenient selection having been done (those present during the day of application being also the ones questioned). There is no frame of reference regarding gender distribution, therefore the confidence level in this respect cannot be calculated.

The subjects were exclusively from the category of students who had the discipline physical education in their curricula at the time of the survey. This is why students from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year of faculty are over-represented, and those from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> are limited to appearing only in the case when they had postponed one of the semesters of physical education. By making this supplementary selection we ensured that there were no situations when students wouldn't practice sport at all due to chronic illness or the situations when students are too close to graduating.

Also, to complete the quantitative method, 4 group interviews have taken place:

- 1 interview with 8 girls from UTCN
- 1 interview with 8 boys from UTCN
- 1 interview with 8 girls from UBB
- 1 interview with 8 boys from UBB

The selection of the subjects tried to take into account the personality traits of those selected. There were extrovert, as well as introvert individuals, students with relatively good results in school, as well as

students with academic problems. Furthermore, in each group we had subjects that were involved in extracurricular activities, usually having a job.

**Results** indicate that we clearly have less young students that have sporting activities on a regular basis than we do students that do not get involved into physical activity at all or almost at all. Likewise, disinterest towards sport exists on a spectator level too. In all chapters of activity, women are less active than men. The most obvious differences in this respect are seen when correlating “team sports” and “watching sports on tv”.

It has been shown that during childhood and adolescence there is more perseverance with regard to physical activity, rather than at the time when youngsters join a faculty. Also, not unimportant is the fact that sports professional performance seems to be prescribed rather as a masculine trait, only 31% of the women in the sample, compared to 46.1% of the men have ever practiced (semi)professional sports.

As for the factors of socialization, the role of the family in the socialization through sport is regarded as minor by the subjects. Friends and media remain factors of socialization whose attributed influence is higher than expected. women declare much less categorically that they have had role models among professional athletes.

Other results show that over 50% of the sample are involved in sports because they are concerned with health problems (including weight loss). So, we have a first indication of the fact that sport does not necessarily mean a socialization towards values such as competition and winning. Women are less likely to meet new people through sport, a normal consequence of the fact that they are more oriented towards individual sport.

Regarding values and self opinion, the following conclusions arise. The vast majority of respondents signal the appearance of positive feelings after sports. We have to deal with a socialization towards a positive image of oneself, rather than a negative one. Paradoxically, subjects affirm at the same level that in life you have to be self-reliant and work it out alone, as

they confirm that they work well in teams and they manifest solidarity towards those around them, when they have problems.

Moreover, a physical activity at low levels increases the odds for a low evaluation of ones own popularity, which means that subjects have less self-confidence and self-respect. It is also likely that going to the gym on a regular basis is a factor of self-esteem enhancement. Also, the more students have practiced sport during childhood and adolescence, the more likely they are to feel popular.

The lack of sport may suggest, also, a greater will for recognition of ones efforts, which denotes a certain insecurity, but also a permanent reference to the attitude of those around towards ones person. To strengthen this correlation, let us underline the fact that youngsters who have tried professional sport at a certain time are less likely to feel the will for recognition.

Predictably, the more people are involved in team sports, the more likely that they develop positive attitudes towards team work. The declared preference for team work is also correlated to a high level of watching live sports (at a sporting venue). Those who practice team sports more often are at the same time more open to the formation of friendships. The big number of contacts with teammates leads to a predisposition towards communication, sociability and increase of social capital. Those who have practiced semi-professional sport are more likely to have been socialized in the direction of being open, popular and willing to form friendships.

The research proves that sport is not a very important socialization factor. Practicing organized physical activities does not induce a competitive spirit in daily life. Contrary to results proposed by other researches, there is no evidence that sport would increase the feeling of responsibility among youngsters and neither does it have an obvious relation to socialization towards respecting the rules in life.

Also, there is no indication of the fact that sport would lead to a greater feeling of solidarity towards those around, when they are in trouble. Moreover, sport does not influence the will to be liked.

On the other hand, sport is automatically associated with acts of violence by young students and the results are an alarm signal towards the tolerance we show these actions. To be taken into account are also a few aspects concerning athletes who have at a certain moment practiced semi-professional sport. These are slightly less tolerant towards both physical and language violence.

The **focus group** has revealed a few added aspects. Here we have again the idea part of the group is totally reticent towards sport and does not practice it almost at all, in the sense of organized, competitive physical activity. The other activities mentioned are in great part individual.

The feelings of relaxation, the will for socialization with colleagues, the satisfaction of winning are much less important than what we may call „competition with ones self”. Thus, asked how they feel after they run (the main physical activity of the subjects in the group), the young women talk about will, about satisfaction of having realized something, about self-fulfilment.

The young students almost always reduce the idea of sport to that of weight loss regime. They recognize and appreciate certain attributes of the professional athlete such as: the great ability to work, the effort, perseverance, team spirit, loialty and well outlined goals. It is interesting that this is to a certain extent the model that the girls follow, so it can be said that in this respect, sport is a socialization factor.

Although girls from the group do not practice team sports, part of them insist on values such as appreciating team work, communication, responsabilization, dependency on and from others, belonging to a group. The overload of the daily schedule – a busier school program for some, and a

job for others – leads to many of the subjects not being able to practice sports anymore.

Men from the group under study have profound feelings of admiration towards athletes they watch, whether on tv, or in person. These athletes serve as role models and are, without doubt, an important factor in the secondary and continued socialization of the subjects.

The boys place a more important accent on competition, combat spirit, money, success at any cost, individualism, „standing out”, being well seen and respected by others. These individual, masculine values, corroborated with the fact that boys prefer individual sports, rather than team sports, may suggest that sport is to some extent a factor for socialization.

In conclusion, the results of the study suggest a certain connection between athletic activities and socialization towards a positive human set of values, but highly relevant correlations are few and far between. On the other hand, there is no correlation to key variables for our study, such as the sense of responsibility and solidarity toward others. This leads to the idea that sport is a rather weak factor of socialization. There is, however, a faint connection between sport and attitudes toward violence. In this respect, youngsters with an athletic history are less tolerant towards violence, but, like others in our sample, they tend to be rather accepting of violence as a natural factor connected to athletic activity.