

Social and Cultural History of Sport and Physical Culture in the Soviet Union

Veranstalter: Nikolaus Katzer, Sandra Budy, Alexandra Köhring und Manfred Zeller im Rahmen des DFG-Forschungsprojektes Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Sportes und der Körperkultur in der Sowjetunion
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What might sport and physical culture tell us about Soviet society and the socialist way of life? And how can these aspects of culture be approached academically? These were some of the main issues that were brought to light and discussed by scholars from Europe and the United States.

In his introduction, NIKOLAUS KATZER (Helmut Schmidt University) called the 20th century an „age of sport“, during which sport or *fizkul'tura* could be seen as metaphors for modern life because they were intertwined with central discourses of Russian modernity: the technological change, the leading scientific disciplines of physiology, biology, medicine and hygiene, gender roles, and the idea of „new men“. An objective of the workshop was to trace the complex relationship between the affirmative and subversive effects of socio-politically modelled body concepts, conveyed into oral history and represented in the media, art or landscapes and in sport exercises.

EKATERINA EMELIANTSEVA (University of Zurich) opened the 1st section on Sites, Media, and Modernity, with her paper on „The Topography of Sports in Late Imperial St Petersburg and its Photographic Representation (1890-1914)“. Her aim was to show how the emerging sportive lifestyle changed the topography of the old imperial Capital to a metropolis of sports and entertainment. She argued that although St. Petersburg, unlike European cities like London, did not have a clearly structured social cityscape, social segregation nevertheless did exist on the mental map of its inhabitants. The segregation was intensified by the homogeneous photographic representation of the new sporting sites that excluded the different origins of the consumers.

New sporting sites were also one of the to-

pics included in the paper of BURCU DOGRAMACI (University of Hamburg): „Sports, Architecture, and Photography in the Young Turkish Republic“. In her paper, Dogramaci started from the Turkish revolution of 1923 that marked a political change from monarchy to parliamentary democracy and brought new values and norms with Westernisation and Europeanisation: The republican Turk was to be young, active and body-conscious. Accordingly, the Turkish constitution laid down that the state had to provide conditions for the physical and mental development of its population, which led to a gymnastic culture of mass performances that had not existed before. German experts played a major role in the construction of new sporting sites. Carl Diem, Hermann Jansen, Werner March, Hermann Altröck and others were all commissioned by the Turkish state to provide their expertise while importing a public body culture of heroic monumentality.

SANDRA BUDY (Helmut Schmidt University) closed the first section with her paper on „Changing Images of Sport in the Early Soviet Press“. The sport images of the early and mid 1920s were characterised by the exploration of the possibilities of a fairly new media. Many of the photos had an artistic touch, but there was also an emerging trend of documentary photography. The dominant credo of the twenties, however, was to emphasize the collective aspect of *fizkul'tura* at the expense of individuality. In the thirties, the balance between performance and mass participation shifted to the former. The hero of sports represented the potential of the nation. Photography thus became increasingly restricted to act mainly as a medium of propaganda, though examples of normal coverage of sport events also show that photography could not be fully controlled.

In her comment to the 1st Section, LOUISE Mc REYNOLDS (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) asked how the papers could contribute to a comparative history of modernizations: The papers showed that sports can be understood as a way of integration of the public and as a medium of cultural transformation. She recommended to figure out the absences in the modernization processes instead of stressing ambiguity.

The 2nd Section on Bodies, Strength, and Space, was opened by ALEXANDRA KÖHRING (Helmut Schmidt University) with her paper: „The Project of an ‘International Red Stadium’“ in Soviet Moscow of the 1920s. Even though the stadium never went beyond planning stage, the different positions of architects and urban planners give insight to contemporary concepts of spatial perception and/or in exclusions of bodily experiences. The Red stadium should unify the spectators and reduce the separation to the athletes in order to emphasize the mass character of sports. The distinctive formal character of a socialist stadium was discussed controversially: Nikolai Ladovsky, who became head of the building committee, introduced a design which complied with his psychophysiological conception of space, claiming that the body perceives the architectural form of the curve like a signal for motion. Some voices though were generally opposed to any stadium on the Lenin Hills and preferred a natural environment and an open area for mass rallies.

The „Sport Motive in Soviet Sculpture“ was the theme of BETTINA JÜNGEN’S (University of Zurich) paper. She discussed the problem of modelling motion in sculpture on the example of Vera Mukhina. One of the characteristics of Mukhina’s sculptures was the inner tension or static dynamics, according to Jüngen. In Mukhina’s work, the sport motif did not take its own place. Instead, the athletic body appeared in a non-sportive context. This proves her disinterest in sport as an ideological show. Nevertheless, her interest in the classical ideal of the human body suited the official ideology well.

The first of two examples of oral history during the workshop was given by CHRISTINA KIAER (Northwestern University, Chicago) in her paper about the „Vtorova Sisters and the Representation and Experience of Sport in the 1930s“. The Vtorova sisters, all elite athletes in the 1930s, provided a vivid example of the relationship between official ideology and the experience of belief in Soviet ideology in reality. Kiaer even pushed the argument further by stating that the sisters not only believed, but actively produced Soviet ideology, including the ideology of sports. In pictures from the family album, as Kiaer explained and show-

ed, we often see the sisters imitate poses from official posters. Yet in contrast to the strained orchestration of the official events and photographs, the sisters are playacting in front of the camera, fully conscious of the pomposity of the poses.

PAT SIMPSON (University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield) ended the 2nd section with her paper on „Liberation and Containment“, in which she explored the images of the *fizkul’turnitsa*, the Soviet sportswoman, during the German occupation. The idea of liberation embodied in the motive of the *fizkul’turnitsa*, according to Simpson, had its roots in revolutionary ideas about the engineering of the New Soviet (Wo)man and included the eugenic ideal of the *Homo Sovieticus*. The disciplined, hygienic body of the New Woman was destined to repopulate the USSR with „new people“. In this way, the Soviet notion of freedom for women, originating in the 1920s, was determined by containment within appropriate body disciplines.

In his comment to the 2nd section MIKE O’MAHONY (University of Bristol) pointed the argumentations of the papers to the question how sports was able to change behaviour. He stressed the influential role of visual representation – a closer look on the modes of visualization could therefore unfold the diversity of possible effects in the public.

EVA MAURER (University of Fribourg) opened the 3rd Section on Actors, Milieus, and Memory, with her paper on „The Socio-Cultural Milieu of Soviet Mountaineering from the 1920s to the 1950s“. In the Soviet prism, mountaineering occupied a place at the crossroads between sport and tourism like hiking or canoeing, and though since the revolution it had been the aim to open up this kind of sport to the masses, especially the young workers, it remained a sport for the privileged few and was dominated by the middle class, especially in urban academic spheres. In fact it was more than a sport – it was a network of like-minded people, a lifestyle with its own rituals: Mountaineering could also be seen as a contradiction to the Stalinist drive for urbanisation and industrialisation. The love of the periphery questioned the role of Moscow as the centre of the USSR. While for most clim-

bers the mountains were a temporary escape, some chose to stay permanently in search for a different way of life. Later, in the 1950s and 1960s, these ambivalences turned from escapism into openly critical or dissident activities.

ROBERT EDELMAN (University of California, San Diego) brought us back from the periphery to the centre of the Soviet Union with his paper on „Soviet Soccer's Most Scandalous Transfer“. According to Edelman, soccer experienced a real boom after the Second World War with crowded stadiums, mass gatherings around the stadiums and traffic jams on the streets of Moscow - fans became a strong public voice to be considered: A knockdown of a Spartak player overseen by the referee resulted in anger so intense that it forced the leadership of the Soviet Union to pay attention to the concerns of the fans in the stands. Not much later, outrage again occurred among the fans of Spartak when one of their top players, Sergei Sal'nikov, was to join Dinamo. Once again, the media was flooded with letters of complaint. And again the strong public voice was considered by the leadership. Thus, Edelman argued, the Thaw may not have been the watershed we have long thought. The emotional expressions did not suddenly begin with Stalin's death in 1953; they had at least been rehearsed earlier, for example among the fans of Spartak.

MANFRED ZELLER (Helmuth Schmidt University), with his paper on „Soviet Soccer in Retrospect“, provided the second example of the workshop of what oral history can tell us about the past. Based on several interviews with fans - active as well as former - Zeller brought examples of the relationship between the individual and the collective memory, and what influence Soviet ideology had hereupon. His case study revolved around the 1955 cup final, in which Lev Yashin, the star player of the USSR, was sent off the field. Zeller argued that the fact that people remembered this event does not mean that the perception of the incident is collective. Soccer was a way of expressing subjectivity. It was the various context of reception that mattered. This may be one explanation of why soccer was so popular in a country with ordered collective objectivities, Zeller suggested.

With impressions of the 2008 Beijing Olympics fresh in memory, OLGA CHEPURNAYA (European University, St Petersburg) took a closer look at the „1980 Moscow Olympics“, the first and only Olympic Games in the Soviet Union. The sports ground became a battle field in the Cold War between the capitalist and the socialist camp, and the 1980 Olympics was not an exception. Chepurayaya concentrated on retelling the atmosphere of the games: All in all the Olympics went by in a tense atmosphere, and, according to Chepurayaya, it was no coincidence that journalists described the event in terms of war. Paranoid fear of provocations led to substantial changes in everyday life - streets were patrolled by police, a lot of „suspicious“ people were moved out of the cities, members of the opposition were imprisoned, and mentally handicapped persons hospitalized.

In his comment to the 3rd section, Robert Edelman shared Zeller's argument that sporting milieus have to be considered as crucial parts of Soviet semi-publics. It will therefore be worth to describe the processes and rituals of liminality between the places of groupings and public spaces.

The last section of the workshop, Gender, Stereotypes, and Ideology, was opened by KATERYNA KOBCHENKO (National Taras Shevchenko University, Kiev) with her paper on „Soviet Women in Physical Culture and Sport in the 1920-1930s“. Especially in the 1930s, military drilling and sport went hand in hand, most clearly in shooting sports. Equestrianism, sports aviation and skiing served military purposes as well. The gender equality promoted by the state by the means of policy and propaganda changed women's self-perception as well as men's attitude towards them. Nevertheless, the underlying aim of the emancipation, to provide new soldiers of the revolution, created an image of a „new“ Soviet woman, who was conceived in opposition to the bourgeois lady, and who imitated men's features in behaviour and looks. Hence, Kobchenko argued, physical culture and sports led to the loss of female personality in its unification with other members within a collective body. Only by becoming men could women be emancipated.

In the following paper on „The Female Bo-

dy between Gender Stereotypes and Equal Opportunity Utopia“, ANKE HILBRENNER (University of Bonn) took a look at the gender situation in the 1960s and 1970s. On the one hand, Hilbrenner argued, women were encouraged to and had the opportunities of entering exceptional careers, on the other hand, the female gender ideals in the Era of Stagnation were „zhenstvennost“ and „krasota“, which meant a certain form of inner beauty linked with supposedly „female“ traits such as altruism, mental balance, compassion, grace, subordination, or motherhood. This ambivalence in gender policies can be exemplified with women’s soccer. Never part of the official framework of organized sports, but officially recognized, women’s soccer was banned in 1973 after some positive comments in the press about women’s soccer. According to Hilbrenner, the ban rested on three points: women’s soccer could attract male voyeurs, this could lead to greed of profit among certain sports administrators, and women’s soccer might damage female sexual functions.

STEFAN WIEDERKEHR (German Historical Institute, Warsaw) ended the row of readers with his paper on „Media, Gender, and Cold War“. Deploying the first World Championships in Athletics held in Helsinki in 1983 as a case study, Wiederkehr contributed with a comparative assessment of the socialist sportswoman in the Western media and, vice versa, the capitalist sportswoman in the Eastern. First looking at the Western media, Wiederkehr argued, that it, as a rule, did not recognize high performance of socialist sportswomen. The coverage rather questioned the femininity of these athletes and spread rumours about drug abuse. Hence, the presumption that beauty and athletic success excluded each other was perpetuated. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the media coverage shows no fundamental differences: The norms of female beauty did not differ on either side. What differed was the coverage of athletes, who did not fulfil the norms of beauty. Unlike the Western media, the Eastern media did not write about „ugly“ women, only about their performances.

In her comment to the 4th section, IRINA BYKHOVSKAYA (Russian State University of Physical Education and Russian Institute for

Cultural Research, Moscow) pointed at the enduring effects of internalization of cultural norms, including body and gender concepts, in the Soviet context. A history of sports could introduce a culture of interpreting and questioning those norms, but will also challenge methodological approaches to the question of soviet subjectivity.

In the 14 papers of the workshop, young as well as established researchers from various academic fields proved that the history of sports is alive and kicking. Sports, as an instrument of state-controlled „social engineering“ and a potential source of social discontent, but also as a sheet anchor of subjectivity, may provide answers to the state of social exhaustion. A publication of the papers is planned.

Program survey:

Introduction - Nikolaus Katzer, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg

SITES, MEDIA, AND MODERNITY

Discussant: Louise Mc Reynolds, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Chair: Nikolaus Katzer, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg

Ekaterina Emeliantseva, University of Zurich
Sports Visions and Sports Places: The Topography of Sports in Late Imperial St Petersburg and its Photographic Representation (1890-1914)

Burcu Dogramaci, University of Hamburg
Heading into Modernity: Sports, Architecture, and Photography in the Young Turkish Republic

Sandra Budy, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg
Changing Images of Sport in the Early Soviet Press

BODIES, STRENGTH, AND SPACE

Discussant: Mike O'Mahony, University of Bristol

Chair: Sandra Dahlke, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg

Alexandra Köhring, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg
Exploring the Power of the Curve: The Project of an „International Red Stadium“ in Soviet

Moscow of the 1920s

Bettina Jungen, University of Zurich
Frozen Action: The Sport Motive in Soviet Sculpture

Christina Kiaer, Northwestern University, Chicago
Deineka and the Vtorova Sisters: The Representation and Experience of Sport in the 1930s

Pat Simpson, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield
Liberation and Containment: Re-visualizing the Eugenic and Evolutionary Ideal of the Fizkul'turnitsa in 1944

ACTORS, MILIEUS, AND MEMORY

Discussant: Robert Edelman, University of California, San Diego
Chair: Hans-Joachim Braun, Helmut Schmidt-University, Hamburg

Eva Maurer, University of Fribourg
An Academic Escape to the Periphery? The Socio-Cultural Milieu of Soviet Mountaineering from the 1920s to the 1950s

Robert Edelman, University of California, San Diego
The Sal'nikov Affair of 1950: Soviet Football's Most Scandalous Transfer

Manfred Zeller, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg
When Lev Jaschin was Sent off the Field. Soviet Soccer in Retrospect – An Oral History

Olga Chepurnaya, European University, St. Petersburg
Moscow Olympics - Individual Biographies

GENDER, STEREOTYPES, AND IDEOLOGY

Discussant: Irina Bykhovskaya, Russian State University of Physical Education and Russian Institute for Cultural Research, Moscow

Chair: Esther Meier, Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg

Kateryna Kobchenko, National Taras Shevchenko University, Kiev
Emancipation within the Ruling Ideology: Soviet Women in Physical Culture and Sport in the 1920-1930s

Anke Hilbrenner, University of Bonn

Soviet Women in Sports: The Female Body between Gender Stereotypes and Equal Opportunity Utopia

Stefan Wiederkehr, German Historical Institute Warsaw

"... if Jarmila Kratochvilova is the Future of Women's Sports, I'm not Sure I'm Ready for it." Media, Gender, and Cold War

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