

Sports as an Agency of Socialization: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

Sports are social locations rich in their potential for providing memorable and meaningful personal, social and cultural experiences. Social learning theory has shown that socialization is done best in sport activities. Sport is a system like other social systems, and they have, their own regulation of functioning and integration of its members. Sport is one of the primary agencies in the socialization as individual learns the lesson of cooperation, competition, conflict, assimilation and accommodation. It is a platform where he develops the component of 'self', he learns norms and values of the society. So this paper emphasize on conflict and functionalist approach to socialization in sports. It focused on three main topics: (1) socialization into sport, dealing with the initiation and continuation of sport participation; (2) socialization out of sport, dealing with termination and changes in sport participation; and (3) socialization through sport, dealing with participation and multiple facets of social development. An attempt has been made to correlate sports and socialization with the support of the researches conducted by the researchers.

KEYWORDS: Sport, socialization, agency, norms, values, society etc.

Introduction

According to the Coakley (1998) "Socialization is an active process of learning and social development that occurs as people interact with one another and become acquainted with the one another and with the social world in which they live, and as they form ideas about who they are, and make decisions about their goals and behaviors".

Sports are social locations rich in their potential for providing memorable and meaningful personal, social and cultural experiences. Secondly sports by themselves do not cause particular changes in the character traits, attitudes and behaviour of the athletes or spectators. In other words, when positive and negative socialization occurs in association with sports, we cannot just say it is caused by sports; instead, we treat sports as sites for experiences and then search for and explain the specific social processes through which socialization occurs.

Motor activities are an important source of socialization, communication and social integration being an ideal setting in forming young people and their further development (Sopa & Pomohaci, 2014a). Social learning theory has shown that socialization is done best in sport activities (Sopa, 2014). Motor activities are the perfect framework in forming young generations, being a social factor with increasing importance in contemporary society (Sopa & Pomohaci, 2014b).

Epuran (1998) defines socialization in sport as socialization has two meanings, which we can call them individual and group. The first is defined as (quoting Vlăsceanu): The psychosocial process of transmission acquiring the attitudes, values, perceptions and patterns of behavior specific to a group or a community so that it could form the

adaptation and social integration of a person. The second meaning concerns (quoting Vlăsceanu): expanding the number of individual agents controlling or directly participate in the development of a system, subsystem or sector. The athlete, as human being is characterized as being bio-psycho-social being unable to achieve its full manifest outside his socio-cultural determinants, determinants that can be optimized in a well-balanced society. In its turn performance is also determined by socio-cultural factors which helps the individual components skills and attitudes manifest maximized in terms of scientific training. Referring to the starting point of socialization in sport Epuran (1998) states: humanistic sciences, particularly psychology, sociology and pedagogy has agreed a long time ago the main aspects of the socialization of individual, his training for social life (family, group of friends, school, work and sports). In the language of this sciences the highest frequency it has next terms: social learning, interactive communication, personal preferences, group membership, membership affiliation, group structure, leadership, control, imitation, role, status, integration, compliance, ritual, conformism, social values as nonconformist, aggression, isolation, etc. The role of socialization in sport is special, the period of formation and primary socialization is a fundamental one in the further development of the child, Epuran (1998) structures this phenomenon in two ways: “keeping us in the first part of socialization, named individual, appear still two areas: socialization in sports and socializing through sports”. Regarding socialization in sport he states that “is basically athlete’s integration problem in system of attitudes, skills, needs and social structures of the sports group, group membership obliges knowing its rules”. In conclusion he states “sport must structure its socio-educational system in accordance with its specific and resist to dissocializing influences of the current era. Sport is a system like other social systems, and they have, their own regulation of functioning and integration of its members”.

In some cases, like sport games, the need for cooperation is huge (basketball, volleyball, football, rugby, handball), in others the need for cooperation is reduced (competitions for individual sports teams). 1. By its content and organizational form it creates a psycho-social environment that allows apparition and manifestation of all types of interaction, from the cooperative to the adversity. 2. By the specific of organizing physical education, sport branches, individuals simultaneously fulfill cooperative roles – members of their teams, but also adversity – with other team members. 3. Physical education and sport puts the individual in a position to assess and evaluate others and himself, which contributes to the formation of self-image.

Motor behavior in physical education and sport is socializing because it favors the emergence of the phenomenon of social facilitation, communication, cooperation, social interaction involved. In terms of socialization, schedules and forms of personal interaction are more important than the branches of sport. Some of those determining factors are: the degree of cooperation between individuals, quality of the management, competitive spirit, and the importance given to the victory, the share of individual activity and freedom of taking decision. Physical education and sport can be considered factor of socialization and social integration, due to their characteristics (Stănescu, 2000): – Takes place mostly in a group, thus facilitating interaction between individuals (prerequisite socialization). The socialization is favored due to the fact that physical education, but especially sports involves competition between individuals and groups of individuals.

Through competition it is realized the comparison with itself and with others, it ranks values.

Through the mid 1980s most sociological research on socialization and sport was grounded in structural functionalism or forms of Marxism, neo Marxism, and conflict theory. This research was based on the assumption that socialization was a process of role learning through which people internalized values and orientations enabling them to participate in established social systems. It was also based on the assumption that sport was a social institution organized in connection with the social system of which it was a part.

Since the mid 1980s most research has been grounded in a combination of interactionist and critical theories. The approach used in these studies assumes that: (a) human beings are active, self reflective decision makers who define situations and act on the basis of those decisions; (b) socialization is a lifelong process characterized by reciprocity and the interplay of the self conceptions, goals, and resources of all those involved in social interaction; (c) identities, roles, and patterns of social organization are socially constructed through social relations that are influenced by the distribution of power and resources in particular cultural settings; and (d) sports are cultural practices with variable forms and meanings (Coakley 2004).

A Conflict Approach to Sports Socialization

Studies based on conflict theory use an internalization model of socialization. This approach emphasized how socialization processes in sports serve the economic needs of capitalist systems by influencing peoples in society to become compliant workers and eager consumer of goods and services. Studies based on this approach have emphasized that how elitist, oppressively organized sport programs and autocratic, military style coaches produced athletes who were obedient, politically conservative, and willing to engage in violence to achieve goals approved by those who have power in the society.

This approach focus on these issues: • How sports were organized to produce work-based, militaristic, sexist, racist orientations among players and spectators • How people from low -income and working income and working-class backgrounds had few opportunities to play on their own terms and in their own way • How poor athletes lacked rights and were exploited for profits by those in power • How people in power positions control sports to make money and maintain their own interests?

A Functionalist Approach to Sports Socialization

This approach emphasizes what causes the individuals to participate in sports and how participation prepared them to be productive members of the society. Numerous functionalist studies have been done and it was found that how people involved in sports and what they learn when they sports. Research based on functionalist theory explains us that sports participation is related to three factors: (i) the availability of opportunities to play and experience success in sports, (ii) a person's abilities and characteristics, (iii) the influence of significant others, including parents, siblings, teachers, and peers.

After reviewing studies on sports and socialization one can conclude that:

- a. Sports provide opportunities to develop competence
- b. Formation of new relationships
- c. Experiences that go beyond the locker room and the playing field

Motor Activities: Sources of Socialization

Children can develop many social skills by attending team sports such as leadership skills, communication and socialization skills, team-building skills that will be very helpful throughout their entire lives, in school, in their future job or in personal relationships. Also team sport can be helpful in learning how to interact not only with children of their same age, but also with adults such as coaches, referees, sport officials, managers and fans (Sopa & Pomohaci, 2015a). Socialization through motor activities aims a wide range of consequences in practicing physical education: starting from the development of motor skills and social competence, to the acquisition of values and social norms. In other words refers to what is learned in sports without necessarily seek out sport utility (Patrikson, 1996). When we refer to socialization through motor activities we focus our attention on the effects of participation in these sports activities to other spheres of life. In fact these two aspects are intertwined; socialization is an ongoing dynamic process. The game is a complex activity, predominantly motor and emotional, spontaneous conducted according to predetermined rules, for recreational purposes, sporting and also of adaptation to the social reality (Sopa & Pomohaci, 2015b).

Communication in sport is very complex because of the many factors that intervene in the form of messages through verbal, motor and attitudes through body language. Adding communication with the masses (the audience), as with any show, athletes communication with their teammates and other factors, which are all reasons to develop a model (preferably more complex and more explicit) communication in sport. We refer in particular to communication between coaches and athletes, athletes between components of the group and between athletes and spectators, media, supporters etc (Sopa & Pomohaci, 2016). We can structure socialization as Serban (1998) said: individual socialization who “is based on integration through active acceptability according to specific conditions and requirements, with readjustment in terms of the group or team, in fact, a dissocializing/re-socialization on another plane of collective socialization” and anticipative socialization “updating values and guidelines for success in a new relationship, by resizing the roles in sports group, actually an adaptive social learning, conscious, cognitive, creative, emotional and motivated case”. Besides family, the first and most important social group, other groups contribute to the socialization of individuals: classmates, friends group, school group and later professional collective. One of the ways that socialization within the group of friends or colleagues is achieved is through sports. Individuals learn through sport to work together, to take on specific roles within the group and to define themselves within the group (Sopa & Pomohaci, 2014d).

Research on socialization and sport has also been done in psychology and anthropology, as well as sociology. Psychological studies have focused on the socialization effects of sport participation on personality characteristics, moral development, and achievement motivation, sense of competence, self esteem, and body image. Anthropological studies have focused on the role of play, games, and sports in the formation of value orientations in particular cultural contexts, especially those in pre industrial societies. Sociological studies, published mostly by scholars in North America, have focused on three main topics: (1) socialization into sport, dealing with the initiation and continuation of sport participation; (2) socialization out of sport, dealing with termination and changes in sport participation; and (3) socialization through sport, dealing with participation and multiple facets of social development.

This shift in the theoretical approaches and the assumptions used to guide research on socialization and sport is represented in the ways that scholars have studied socialization into sports, out of sports, and through sports.

Socialization into Sports

Research based on an interactionist social process approach has focused on the processes through which people make decisions to participate in sports; the ways that gender, class, race, and ethnic relations influence those decisions; the connections between participation decisions and identity dynamics; the social meanings that are given to sport participation in particular relationships and contexts; and the dynamics of sport participation as a “career” that changes over time. This research, often utilizing qualitative methods and interpretive analyses, indicates that sport participation is grounded in decision making processes involving self reflection, social support, social acceptance, and culturally based ideas about sports. Decisions about sport participation are made continually as people assess opportunities and consider how participation fits with their sense of self, their development, and how they are connected to the world around them. These decisions are mediated by changing relationships, the material conditions of everyday life, and cultural factors, including the sport related social meanings associated with gender, class, race, age, and physical (dis)abilities.

Socialization out of Sports

Research on changing or terminating sport participation is difficult to characterize in terms of the theoretical and methodological approaches used. Even the terminology used to describe socialization out of sport has been confusing. References have been made to attrition, disengagement, de-socialization, withdrawal from sport roles, dropping out, nonparticipation, burnout, transitions, alienation, “social death,” exits, retirement, and involuntary retirement (i.e., being “cut” or denied access to participation opportunities). Studies have focused on many issues, including the relationship between participation turnover rates and the structures of sport programs, the attributes and experiences of those who terminate or change their sport participation, the dynamics of transitions out of sport roles, the termination of participation in highly competitive sport contexts as a form of retirement or even as a form of “social death,” and the connection between declining rates of participation and the process of aging.

Prior to the mid 1970s, socialization out of sports was not a popular research topic. Changing or terminating sport participation was treated more as a fact than a problem. It became a problem when baby boom cohorts younger than 13 years old declined in size and growth trends in organized programs slowed relative to the rapid increases that characterized the 1960s. Additionally, many parents in the 1970s had come to define participation in organized sports as important for the development and social status of their children. A growing emphasis on physical fitness in post industrial nations also heightened general awareness that physical activities, especially the strenuous activities involved in sports, were important to health and well being. And finally, there was an emerging system of elite sport development that depended on an expanding pool of developing young athletes nurtured through a feeder system of youth sports and interscholastic teams. As the vested interests in participation grew, so did research on the processes related to terminating and changing participation in sports.

This research indicates that terminating or changing sport participation occurs in connection with the same interactive and decision making processes that underlie

becoming and staying involved in sports. When people end their active participation in one sport context, they often initiate participation in another context – one that is more or less competitive, for example. Terminating active participation due to victimization or exploitation is rare, although burnout, injuries, and negative experiences can and do influence decisions to change or end participation. Changes in patterns of sport participation often are associated with transitions in the rest of a person's life, such as moving from one school to another, graduating, initiating a career, marriage, and becoming a parent. And for people who end long careers in sports, adjustment problems are most common among those who have weakly defined identities apart from sports and lack the social and material resources required for making transitions into other careers, relationships, and social worlds.

Socialization through Sports

Although the history of beliefs about the consequences of sport participation varies by society, the notion that sport produces positive socialization effects has been widely accepted in most western industrial and post industrial societies, especially England, Canada, and the United States. For nearly a century the validity of these beliefs was taken for granted and promoted by those associated with organized competitive sports in these countries. It was not until the 1950s that people began to use research to test the validity of these beliefs.

Most research between the 1950s and the late 1980s consisted of a theoretical, co-relational analyses presenting statistical comparisons of the attributes of “athletes” and “non-athletes,” usually consisting of students in US high schools. The dependent variables in these studies included academic achievement, occupational mobility, prestige and status in school cultures, political orientations, rates of delinquency and deviance, and various character traits such as moral development. Because few of the studies used longitudinal, pre test/post test designs, research findings were usually qualified in light of questions about “socialization effects” (i.e., the attributes that were actually “caused” by sport participation) versus “selection effects” (i.e., the attributes that were initially possessed by those who chose to play organized sports or were selected to play by coaches and program directors). Additionally, most of these co-relational studies simply divided all respondents into so called “athletes” and “non-athletes,” thereby ignoring their participation histories and the confounding effects of participation in a wide range of activities offering experiences closely resembling those offered by playing on school sponsored varsity teams.

McCormack and Chalip published a key article in 1988 in which they critiqued the methodological premises of research on socialization through sports. They noted that most researchers mistakenly assumed that (a) all sports offered participants the same unique experiences, (b) all sport experiences were strong enough to have a measurable impact on participants' characters and orientations, (c) all sport participants passively internalized the “moral lessons” inherently contained in the sport experience, and (d) that sport participation provided socialization experiences that were unavailable through other activities. These assumptions led researchers to overlook that (a) sports are social constructions and offer diverse socialization experiences, (b) participants give meanings to sport experiences and those meanings vary with the social and cultural contexts in which participation occurs, (c) the personal implications of sport participation are integrated into people's lives in connection with other experiences and relationships, and

(d) sport participation involves agency in the form of making choices about and altering the conditions of participation.

However, research initiated during the 1980s and 1990s, often guided by interactionist and critical theories began to focus less on socialization outcomes and more on the social processes associated with sport participation and the social and cultural contexts in which sport experiences were given meaning and integrated into people's lives. The findings in this research indicated that:

- Sports are organized in vastly different ways across programs, teams, and situations offering many different socialization experiences, both positive and negative, to participants.
- People who choose to play sports are selected to participate by coaches, and those who remain on teams generally differ from others in terms of their characteristics and relationships.
- The meanings that people give to their sport experiences vary by context in connection with gender, race/ethnicity, social class, age, and (dis)ability, and they change through the life course as people redefine themselves and their connections with others.
- Socialization occurs through the social interaction that accompanies sport participation, and patterns of social interaction in sports are influenced by many factors, including those external to sport environments.
- Socialization through sport is tied to issues of identity and identity development.

Since the late 1980s an increasing number of studies related to sports and sport culture have viewed socialization as a community and cultural process. Using various combinations of critical theories, cultural studies, and post-structuralism, researchers have undertaken textual and semiotic analyses in which they focus on sports as sites where people construct and tell stories that can be used to make sense of their lives and the worlds in which they live. In the process, culture is produced, reproduced, reformed, or transformed. Much of this research analyzes media based discourses by deconstructing the images and narratives used in connection with sports and the personas of sport figures, especially high profile athletes.

This research acknowledges that sports and the discourses that constitute them have become one of the more influential narratives in twenty first century culture. They are implicated in struggles over meanings, processes of ideological hegemony, and the expansion of global capital ism and consumer culture. One of the goals of this research is to understand sports in ways that contribute to informed and progressive explanations of the political, economic, and social issues that influence people's lives.

Studies emphasizing on the correlation between sports and socialization

Mita, Miculescu and Dumitru (2002) in the study "Sport, socialization and practice in contemporary Romanian society" examine the role and importance of sports, teachers and parents in the social integration of children through motor activity. The research was conducted in 2002, in Bucharest on a sample of 550 students, 416 parents and 158 teachers, and emphasized the importance of sport classes, but especially the influence of parents and teachers in educating the taste for sport. Thus we can say besides family, the first and most important social group, other groups contribute to the socialization of individuals: classmates, group of friends, school group and later professional staff. One of the ways that socialization within the group of friends or colleagues is achieved is

through sports. Individuals learn through sport to work together, to take on specific roles within the group and to define themselves within the group.

Gavrila & Gavrila (2005) emphasizes the role of parents and the importance of socialization of children through sport activities, stating that physical inactivity and its consequences, parental implication, fashion and cultural usages leads many parents in finding solutions for spending leisure time and socialization through sport. Offers range is very extensive, from optional physical education classes from kindergarten and school to special sport centers for children. And in the case of performance sports we talk about secondary socialization, institutional type. Norms, rules and organizational values influence the manner of socialization and the identity of each one.

Basson and Smith (1998), in the study “Socialization through sport, Social representations through sport”, analyzed socialization through leisure sport activities, referring here to the practice of sports games such as volleyball, jogging, basketball, skateboard, rollerblading, cycling etc. which are opposed, as according to the authors, institutional socialization, that achieved in sports clubs and seen as a “social self” that does not cover the real needs of young people.

Turcu and Todor (2010) in their study regarding “Socialization through sport, effects of physical education and sport”, analyzes the complexity of sport and physical activity and the influence on man and society because “this activities produce beneficial effects on health maintenance, tonus and personality development”. Also the authors concluded that “time has validated the positive effects of physical activity and sport on self-concept, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, pressure and stress, self confidence, energy, mood, efficiency and wellbeing. Sport and physical activity contribute to the socialization of men and especially young people, in circumstances where there is a good control. It is said that socialization in sport can be promoted only when there are highlighted moral qualities, attitudes, skills and rules assimilated in physical activities can be transferred to any other social sphere and can be adapted to the specifics of any other social institution. Sports and physical education promotes respect for moral values in both the Olympic spirit and the core values of life in the community, fostering integration in the group and society and communication skills”.

Rusu (2000) states that “sport is viewed as a social institution, sport has its own sociological base in society, in that it has regulations, specific laws, sanctioning ways, it establishes relationships (social and cultural) and communication systems, identification of role-sets and status-sets, their ideology and principles” or “for nowadays societies (modern) sport acquires other connotations as: it becomes increasingly important in the sense that it is practiced by an increasing number of individuals within the school or leisure, it is followed with great interest (either directly or indirectly as a spectator or media), for most it has become a profession.

Stănescu (2000) in his study “Physical Education and Sport – Factors for Socializing Process” stated that “Motor activities of great complexity, through structure and functionality, physical education and sports are constantly revealed new meanings with implications for human development and society in general. Among the constant concerns of specialists in the field are those related to physical education and sport and the contribution of this to the process of socialization and social integration. Starting from the definition of socialization, according to which it represents “a fundamental social process through which any society is projecting, reproducing and performing the proper

conduct of its members, normative and cultural model”, physical education and sport can be considered factor of socialization and social integration, due to their characteristics (Stănescu, 2000).

Serban (1998) analyzes the influence of socialization into sports games, stating that “sport is essentially psycho-social, which includes multiple relationships between individuals, with feelings, emotions, attitudes, ultimately their behavior in specific environments (partners, opponents, fans etc.) and the nonspecific, bound to daily life” or “game reflects social existence, of acquiring knowledge by motor and mental action, they reproduce social relations by rules written and unwritten, between cooperation and non-cooperation, aimed at solving problems and overcome them through action”. “Sports game has psychosocial connotations, with individual behaviors, such as: motivations, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behaviors, attitudes, traditions, moods and feelings, as with the structured collectively as: conscious organization, relationships and tasks intra-group, reality and common objectives, management structures, etc.”

Constantinescu (2009) study “Characteristics of human communication in the process of socialization through sport”, summarizes the importance of communication in the process of socializing through sport by saying that “socialization is a progressively process and accumulating in which the children, over the period of growth, assimilates the behaviors, values, codes, roles, habits, conventions and ways of thinking, characteristic for the socio-cultural environment. Good socialization is achieved using communication”. “Individuals assimilate a whole system of knowledge, attitudes, skills and moral rules necessary for social life intra-community developing imagination and creative capacity, in the same time with the affection between balance of moral and psychological.

Ungureanu (1998) “Study regarding socializing phenomenon in juvenile performance sport”, based on assumption that it is possible to know and intervene on social elements (formative and integration) can increase performance capacity of young groups, they had conducted a study on the elements which determine the performance of juvenile socialization (student athlete, family, school and operating unit performance) with a representative sample of four football and basketball teams, based on social survey research method and mixed questionnaires. There was a downward slope on motivation for sport and highlights the idea that we must intervene in the direction of social stimulation and support of the student and inform through socialization policy makers (family, parents) for the support of students with bio-motor potential stating that “socialization of sport performance represents a complex psychosocial process conditioned by many economic and non-economic factors” or “during socialization it is realized the transmission and assimilation of values and behavioral patterns of individual and group sports, the purpose is to adapt, develop social integration of the individual”. The game, the competition and the motor activities has very specific and important roles in the overall process of socialization. The image on itself is not natural born, but is developed through socialization during childhood as a result of going through different experiences and roles.

Gavriliuță and Gavriliuță (2005) stated that “sport develops teamwork and increases self-confidence. Without a doubt, the biggest gain of socialization in sport is that it develops in us the idea of social belonging and team spirit”. The desire for belonging and recognition is causing the child to always model the communicational system and method of relationship.

Cârstea (1981) stated that about socializing character of sport “relationships created in circles of participants in various competitions are unusually durable and perform an important role in social microstructure” or “sport is a good way of revealing your own personality in free contact with others, sport appropriates the participants in these games, generates collegial links, attitudes and modes of behavior”. Through games and sports competition, the child can gain confidence and can try new forms of networking so as he can highlight his potential and qualities. Children learn the difference between themselves and the role they play. As they grow, children pass from noncompetitive gaming to competitions and ball games. At the stage of the game (more accurate at the stage of competitive games), children face more stringent rules and regulations. They develop a reflexive conception of self and their position in relation to others, and in addition self-image analyzing and image that others have of them.

Conclusions

Socialization aims child’s social integration. It is a process of gradual assimilation of the social and converting its specific personality characteristics. Thereby motor activities represent the perfect framework in developing young people, the period of forming and primary socialization period is one fundamental to the further development of the child. So sport can provide a framework of support and encouragement for children, developing relationships, communication and social integration. Besides family, the first and most important social group, other groups contribute to the socialization of individuals: classmates, friends group, school group and later professional staff. One of the ways that socialization within the group of friends or colleagues is achieved is through sports. Individuals learn through sport to work together, to take on specific roles within the group and to define themselves within the group.

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