

## WOMEN AND SPORTS

Anna Maria PIOLETTI

University of Florence, Italy

The relationship between man and sports is one of the most interesting aspects of cultural geography. Sports are a piece of our culture that many historians, sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, and scholars in statistics are fascinated by, and yet they have found a limited development in geography<sup>1</sup>. A new model is, however, coming to the fore. The crisis of the Ford model, based on uniformity and the importance of innovation, is being substituted by dynamics based on image- and culture-born differences. Diverse cultural approaches are justified taking into account values and representations aiming to explain phenomena such as production or the evolution of economical systems. The framework here is the land, or the site, according to different geographers' opinions. The site carries along a sense of belonging and identity, which can be the milestone for economical development.

British and American geographers are particularly vibrant supporters of geography of sports, filed under the category of "free time". This is why, in order to find some useful material, we had to resort to the contributions of english-speaking scholars, and (with limitation to Italy), the information provided by sociologists, sports journalists and workers in the field. The national and international sports scene is constantly evolving. Many sports have seen an increase in the number of their followers. In addition to "passive" forms of experiencing sports, there is a rising awareness of the importance of physical activity for one's own health, and its potential both for the economy and the job market. In the Maastricht Treaty of 1998, the European Commission has granted a special significance to sporting activities, by attributing them five different roles, in education, health, society, culture, and games.

The social function of sports is also recognized by the Committee responsible for revising the Maastricht treaty, and a specific statement about sports, where they "stress the importance of sports in society, and in particular their role in shaping identities and bringing people together", has been attached to the Amsterdam treaty. Through their history, sports have gone through several stages: from elite activity to mass spread in society with the institutionalization of performance activities and the birth of Federations in Europe. Yet the reason why sports are so relevant is because they are a lifestyle and offer cultural models. Sports are going through a new identity. Out with the stage of modern sports based on organization, selection, competition, cards and scoreboards, in with *post-modern* sports based on market-driven business. There is no one way to do sports any longer, as they leave room for a score of individual and group activities, connected to the quest for a new relationship with body and environment, to the chance of securing sporting activities to tourism or to the preservation of one's health. Everybody sees sports as a part of social welfare (A. Mussino, 2004). This is why there is talk of "sports without sport", in reference to an approach which is far from the original model, tied to registering to sporting federations (Porro, 2003). Quoting B. Rossi Mori (1979), the sporting system can be seen as a match between the supply and demand of sporting activities. Istat tried to do a census of sports in 1959 and 1989, thanks to CONI's research activity, highlighting as a result the typology of a talented single young male athlete. However, there are many ways of practicing sports: professional and amateur practice, and the kind related to lifestyle choices such as walking or biking to the office. Commercials thrive on sports as well: 60% of the advertisements have sports in them. A recent research has been carried out by Istat – the family and society/culture-oriented division on sports practice. Performed in 2000, it has led to the following figures: more than 16 million and 700 thousand people have reported practicing sports consistently (20.2%) or sporadically (9.8%), including 30% of the population above 3 years of age; 31.2% does some physical activity, such as walking for at least 2kms, swimming, biking, or other, even though they don't actually practice sports. Those who reported not practicing any sports nor doing any sort of physical activity are more than 21 million and 400 thousand, 38.4% of the population above 3 years of age. In

---

<sup>1</sup> See the works of Huizinga, 1983; Ghirelli, 1990; De Moja, 1987; Calabrese, 1977; Dal Lago, 2001; Bale, 1993.

connection to geographical areas, sporting activities are more frequent in the North-East than in the North-West. Other areas in the center and the south show lower values.

Table 1. Evolution of sport practice in Italy.

| <b>Year</b> | <b>1959</b> | <b>1982</b> | <b>1985</b> | <b>1988</b> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Men         | 1.187.000   | 5.228.000   | 7.850.000   | 8.276.000   |
| Women       | 121.000     | 2.561.000   | 3.942.000   | 3.988.000   |
| Total       | 1.308.000   | 8.089.000   | 1.792.000   | 12.264.000  |

Source: CONI multitarget research.

Table 2 - Number of women and men in each federation.

| <b>Federation</b>            | <b>N. of women</b> | <b>N. of men</b> |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Aero Club Torino             | 2                  | 287              |
| F.I. Athletics               | 1100               | 6500             |
| F.I. Badminton               | 53                 | 94               |
| F.I. Baseball e Softball     | 100                | 597              |
| F.I. Bowls                   | 134                | 3367             |
| F.I. Kanoa – Kayak           | 29                 | 127              |
| F.I. Rowing                  | 114                | 451              |
| F.I. Biking                  | 16                 | 1780             |
| F.I. Golf                    | 1534               | 3086             |
| F.I. Handball                | 25                 | 175              |
| F.I. Hockey                  | 330                | 700              |
| F.I. Hockey + roller skating | 120                | 130              |
| F.I. Motorbike               | 35                 | 850              |
| F.I. Swimming                | 1387               | 1912             |
| F.I. Modern Pentathlon       | 12                 | 24               |
| F.I. Sub-water fishing       | 615                | 6082             |
| F.I. Boxing                  | 28                 | 255              |
| F.I. Rugby                   | 36                 | 791              |
| F.I. Fencing                 | 134                | 380              |
| F.I. Skiing                  | 1761               | 3239             |
| F.I. Nautical Skiing         | 7                  | 50               |
| F.I. Ice sports              | 503                | 602              |
| F.I. Tennis                  | 2250               | 5250             |
| F.I. Ping Pong               | 60                 | 465              |
| F.I. Precision pull          | 185                | 2116             |
| F.I. Sky pull                | 15                 | 635              |
| F.I. Ark pull                | 357                | 697              |
| F.I. Gym                     | 2451               | 671              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                 | <b>13.393</b>      | <b>41.313</b>    |

Source: Torino Province

Some of the most practiced sports feature: fitness (39.9%), football (25.7%), swimming (13%), jogging (1.1%), biking (8.9%), volley, beach volley (6.5%), tennis (6.0%), skiing (4.6%), martial arts (4.0%), basketball (3.4%), gymnastics (2.9%), other sports (11.9%)<sup>2</sup>.

Sporting activities are differently consistent based on gender, with men prevailing over women, as can be seen in the following table. Increases in sporting practice amongst women are a function of education and of the way it has influenced job choices and use of free time.

The demand sector for the Italian sports system is composed by:

- around 6,900,000 athletes registered in a national sporting Federation or to CONI activities;

- around 14,6 million non-registered amateurs.

The supply sector for the Italian sports system, on the other hand, is composed by:

- around 72,000 sporting companies registered to CONI

- around 450,000 managers and 155,000 sports technicians.

The data gathered by the Torino Province offer us a picture of all registered athletes divided according to their gender, featuring a prevalence of women in activities such as gymnastics, or an equal number of users of both genders in areas such as hockey and roller skating.

## REFERENCES

Bale J., 1993, *Sport, space and the city*, London, Routledge.

Bale J., 1994, *Landscapes of modern sport*, London, Leicester University Press.

Battioli E., Di Monaco R., 2003, *Donne e uomini nello sport: una parità da costruire. Una ricerca sulle federazioni sportive nella provincia di Torino*, Torino.

Calabrese L., 1977, "Sociologia e sport", *Dizionario dello sport*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline.

Dal Lago A., *Descrizione di una battaglia. I rituali del calcio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2001.

De Moja C. A., *Psicologia e sport*, Padova, Piccin, 1987.

De Moja C.A., 2004, "Economie et culture: nouveaux enjeux géographiques", *Revue de Géographie et Cultures*, n. 49.

Ghirelli A., 1990, *Storia del calcio in Italia*, Torino, Einaudi.

Huizinga J., 1983, *Homo ludens*, Milano, Il Saggiatore.

ISTAT, 1981, *Indagine multiscopo sulle famiglie. Anni 1987 – 1991*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato.

ISTAT, 2003, *La pratica sportiva e l'attività fisica*, Report on line ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it))

Mussino A., 2004, "L'armonizzazione delle statistiche sulla partecipazione sportiva: una sfida europea", Relazione presentata alla XLI Riunione Scientifica della SIEDS, 20-22/5, Torino.

Porro N., 2003, *Lo sport per tutti come possibile strategia di inclusione sociale. Indagine condotta sulla Provincia di Torino*, Torino, Laboratorio stampa della Provincia di Torino.

Rossi Mori B. (a cura di), 1979, *Gli impianti sportivi nella pianificazione territoriale. Un programma locale per lo sviluppo dello sport*, Roma, CONI.

---

<sup>2</sup> 2002 datas. See the work of Mussino, 2004.

