

INFLUENCE OF PARENT PROFESSION IN CHOOSING CHILDREN'S SPORTS

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ABSTRACT. The present study was meant to be a part of a more complex investigation on the perceptions, opinions and beliefs of today's Romanian children on sport. The data were collected using methods like the direct observation, the spontaneous and directional conversation and the standardized questionnaires. Based on the results, tennis seems to be preferred as a sport for their children by parents with an intellectual profession, while football is preferred mostly by workers.

Keywords: *children, sport, profession, parents, tennis.*

REZUMAT. *Influența profesiei părinților în alegerea sportului copiilor.* Studiul de față a fost menit să facă parte dintr-o investigație mai complexă cu privire la percepțiile, opiniile și credințele copiilor români de azi cu privire la sport. Datele au fost colectate folosind metode precum observația directă, conversația spontană și direcțională și chestionarele standardizate. Pe baza rezultatelor, tenisul pare să fie preferat ca sport pentru copiii lor de părinții care au o profesie intelectuală, în timp ce fotbalul este preferat mai ales de lucrători.

Cuvinte cheie: *copii, sport, profesie, părinți, tenis*

Introduction

Answering why the social classes and the socio-professional categories practice sports in different amounts of time and especially why they differ regarding the type of sports activities the get involved into, sociologists often call on the famous French sociologist P. Bourdieu, and in particular his famous work, "La distinction" (1979). He argues that the positioning of social groups (and implicitly of their members) in the social space is made according to two main dimensions: economic capital (material-financial possibilities) and cultural-

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symbolic capital (schooling, value system, social representations). At the individual and subjective level, these dimensions are internalized in the form of habits, dispositions and habits of manifesting in a certain way, distinctly, in different sectors of social life. Orientation to the future or to the past, optimism or pessimism, are determined by the perceived social trajectory, the way in which the groups manage to reproduce the properties of the ancestors and the way they feel able to pass on these properties to their descendants. The economic, cultural capital and habits also operate in the field of sport. Not by chance, says P. Bourdieu, in France tennis is practiced only by 1.5% of workers and 15.5% by senior managers (1979, p. 238).

To a large extent, in the view of the French sociologist quoted, playing a sport is an issue of accessibility (economic cost, first and foremost). But as R. Thomas (2002) points out, nothing is less costly than jogging, and it is practiced to a lesser extent by the lower classes and more by individuals at the top of the social hierarchy. Other arguments are in favor of the thesis that the explanation regarding the differences between social classes in sports practice is complex. For example, it could also account for the difference in size by socio-professional categories. According to statistics from the 70's France, in this country the average height for men was as follows (in cm): agricultural employees - 167.5, farmers - 169, workers - 170, employees - 171, average level employees - 172.5, upper level employees - 173 (cf. Thomas, 2002)

It is well known that certain sports require a higher height, such as basketball and even tennis. Several studies, including some on monozygotic twins, have shown that there is a genetic predisposition to certain types of sports, both in practice and in vision (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Let us also not forget that sport, with its anti-establishment function, is not practiced too much by farmers and workers, because the physical movement is part of their work and life. It seems quite clear that no single factor can account for the social configuration of sports practice. It depends on some conditions and factors, which are intertwined, the influence of some cancelling each other, of others adding up, which makes the sports board look different at country level. Even among young people, the differences are striking.

A Eurobarometer made in 1990 by the Council of Europe indicates the following figures regarding those who practice at least one sport, in the population aged 15-20: 56% in Denmark, 45% in Luxembourg, 35% in Ireland, 59% in The Netherlands, 34% in the United Kingdom, 34% in Germany, 26% in France, 21% in Italy, 16% in Greece, 11% in Portugal, 13% in Spain. Although the general tendency is to increase sports activities worldwide, these figures do not seem to have changed radically in the last 10 years (Thomas, 2002). The traditions of a country or of societal classes, blankets and

professions, more broadly, the general lifestyle, also guide the practice of sports activities, and the option for some of them. On the other hand, it is necessary to keep in mind that the process of globalization, migration, tourism, mass-media makes the boundaries of lifestyle between peoples and the social segments within them no longer so rigid. Based on field research on sports in 6 cities in France, finding the intersection of multiple socio-demographic criteria (age, gender, occupation, etc.), S. Juan (1991) asks rhetorically, about the cultural capital assumed by P. Bourdieu, if social classes still represent a homogeneous cultural reality?

Materials and methods

The direct observation, spontaneous and guided conversations with parents and the standardized questionnaire were the specific methods of this study. As a qualitative-general methodological principle, we used the so-called grounded theory (Iluț, 1997; Băban, 2002; Chelcea, 2004). M. Agabrian in his work "The qualitative research of the socio-human" (2004), quoting Strauss and Corbin (1990) shows that it represents "a qualitative research method derived in an inductive manner, using a systematic set of procedures...".

Although, without fulfilling all the requirements of a qualitative research of this kind, the principle of emergent theory was applied. The investigation was based on the observation "from the inside". As a tennis coach, we drew on a comparison between the profession of parents who guide their children towards tennis and those who guide them towards football. We could see this because both the tennis and football lessons took place in the same sports ground. Supporting the idea that tennis is an elite sport, and football more popular, I made a list of the professions of parents whose children were enrolled in the "Ivansuc" Football School and those who were in the "Ciprian Porumb" Tennis School.

Results

Table 1. The situation regarding the occupations of the parents and the performance sport practiced by their children

Sport Type	Tennis	Football	Total
Parental occupation			
Elite, intellectual occupations	20 41.7%	—	20 23.0%
Other intellectual occupations	27 56.3%	8 20.5%	35 40.2%

Sport Type	Tennis	Football	Total
Parental occupation			
Average employee	1 2.1%	8 20.5%	9 10.3%
Working class	—	23 59.0%	23 26.4%
Total	48 100%	39 100%	87 100%

$p: 0,00000000001237 < 10; df = 3; \chi^2 = 58,453$

Discussion

Before proceeding to interpret this completely significant difference, two important observations are appropriate: 1) By "elite intellectual occupation" I have designated the parents with an university degree in architecture, law, medicine, university professors, and the business owners entered the "Another intellectual category"; 2) It is known that the calculation of significance coefficients (χ^2) makes sense if the samples are probabilistically chosen. However, in the literature they are used even if these samples are not strictly probabilistic. In our case, however, we only observed those who practice football (at the "Ivansuc" school) and those who play tennis (at "Ciprian Porumb" school). The justification for calculating differences and significance would be that the two groups are representative of what is called "contrasting sampling" (Radu, 1994), very close to "theoretical sampling" in qualitative research (Agabrian, 2004). But we add that based on direct observations and discussions with other coaches, the situation is largely the same throughout the country.

This situation refers to the fact that wealthy parents (as schooling and earnings) guide their children towards tennis, while the more modest ones as school and socio-economic status, towards football. From the conversations with the parents, coaches and other factors involved, as well as on the basis of the specialized literature (Bourdieu, 1978; Defrance, 2000; Thomas, 2002), it follows that the explanation consists mainly of the material possibilities and the mentality (values, attitudes, habits): for tennis, much more money is spent on lessons, court booking, equipment, participation in tournaments than for football. Then, the elitist parents as a scholar and economic-social status do not want to expose their children to a more brutal and risky game such as football, but to a more "noble" one, without such disadvantages.

Regarding the investments that parents make in their children when it comes to becoming performance athletes, especially tennis players, we have found in the literature more indirect references to this issue (Thomas, 2002;

Defrance, 2000; Gasparini, 2000), but even more direct, in the work "From Parent to Child" (1995), written by J. Behrman, R. Pollak and P. Taubman. It is true that this book, entitled "Intrahousehold Allocations and Intergenerational Relations in the United States", mainly analyses the investments that parents make in their school careers, but also examines other types of allowances, including leisure and of sport. Moreover, one of the basic conclusions of the authors, drawn from meticulous statistical processing of the collected data, is that the school success itself and later success in life is also due to the investments that parents make in non-school activities, including the practice of sports, is a considerable one. Probably, as the authors suggest, engaging in systematic sports activities means, on the one hand, the functioning of the "healthy mind in the healthy body" principle, and on the other, protecting children from involvement in delinquent acts, harmful both individually and socially.

In the empirical research I found, based on conversations with parents and direct observation, that they spend significant amounts for their children to learn tennis, in the hope that they will become performers. Thus, until the age of 11, while not playing tournaments abroad, the average amount would be around 120-130 euros per month (counting here, payment of lessons, court booking, equipment and travel within the country). From the age of 12, those who have good results and participate in international tournaments, require expenses of 12-15 thousand euros per year.

Tied to the material investments, and in close determination with them, the parents also invest in an aspirational manner in their children. Naturally, parents want that their children assert themselves in tennis, become champions, be stars and make money, have a higher quality of life. What is important to note here, however, is that these desires and aspirations are quite realistic. It was clear from the immediate observations, from the conversations with parents, children and coaches, that the strategy adopted regarding the future was to combine the intense training in becoming a tennis player with the good school performance, or the idea that in the effort to obtain the best results in tennis, the school should not be neglected. This also results from a standard questionnaire applied to parents and children. Although respondents are few in both the case of the parents and the children, the consensually in answers to some questions is an argument in favor of the above conclusion. Thus, to the question "What will you encourage the child?", More than 70% of parents answer "to dedicate to tennis but also to school" and 29% opt for the "depends on how it evolves" variant, which in essence, is not in competition with the former. When asked "What do you want by playing this sport?" addressed to the children, they answer almost 80% "to become a champion", but to the question "Do you want to dedicate more to tennis or school", more than 60% of them choose the "both" option, while 33% respond "only to tennis".

Conclusions

Therefore, even though in the children's vision the emphasis is placed more on tennis than on school, both the players and their parents are agreeing with the idea that the two activities should be combined. An interesting problem to study would be how "parents" and children "negotiate" the enrolment both in the demands of the school and in those of a good preparation in tennis. Also, it would be profitable to look at the similar situation, in the case of the parents who guided their children towards football. However, it is necessary to observe that when we are talking about children up to the age of 11, in the vast majority, dropping out of school is somewhat out of the question, but this is likely to happen if we think about high school and higher education.

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