

## **Social Change and Sport: A Sociological Evaluation**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to discuss *the relation between social change and sports from a sociological point of view*. This study is *descriptive* in its aim, *periodic* (discussion) in the length of time it covers and *theoretical* based on literature in its technique.

“Social change” is a value judgement-free concept which does not indicate a direction but determines the new situation, the difference occurring in the society compared to the former era or situation. Every society changes in time; however, it could at times be “positive” (in the direction of development, progress, etc...) and “negative” at other times (in the direction of regress, deconstruction, etc...).

As a social institution, sport, while affecting some social institutions (family, education, economics, politics, religion, communication, healthcare, law), is also affected by them. The process of social change has affected, moreover, has determined sports. As a social event, phenomenon, and institution, sports gains its meaning in the society that it takes place; and it both gets affected by the changes in the society and affects these changes there. It could be the “reason” and the “result” of social changes.

Radical changes in the sports and even in the rules of branches of sports are made depending on the changing social needs, preferences and expectations. Although there isn't an obligatory relation between “social progress” and “sports” theoretically, it can be said that the process of social progress contributes to sports and vice versa.

**Key Words:** Social Change, Sports, Sociology.

## 1. Introduction

“Change”, the fundamental law of the universe, is also the essential characteristic of man. Everything is in a status of constant change and transformation. Heraclitus said “Nothing endures, but change” and “You could not step into the same river twice”.

Societies change, too. Culture of no society can be transferred to another society without any change, as it is. Change is inevitable; even castes, where social mobility is very limited, change and have changed in time. However, “every society changes” doesn’t mean “every society develops”.

“Social change” is a value judgement-free, neutral concept which does not indicate a direction but determines the new situation and the difference occurring in the society compared with the former era or situation. “Social change is a scientific and objective concept. Therefore, it does not have value judgment like good or bad. However, terms like “social development” or “progress” for example, either have value judgment or indicate a change towards a certain direction according to a certain criterion. In this regard, it shall not be forgotten that change is a very different term from development and improvement.” (Kongar, 1981: 56).

Economical concepts on change such as “improvement” and “growth”, on the other hand, determine the direction and rate of social change according to some criteria. Concepts of “evolution” and “revolution” are specific ways of change in the concept of change, too. Likewise, the concept of “modernisation” which is used to describe the change of underdeveloped and developing countries in accordance with the pattern of industrialized countries, is a specific form of change.

In fact, there is not a big discussion over “what” is change. The major discussion is about the “reasons”, “directions”, “speed”, “scope”, in short, about the “laws” of change.

There are various approaches trying to explain social change: These are universal Grand Theories(organismist, evolutionist and dialectic models) covering the whole human history, Middle Range Theories(structural-functional models, conflict models) approaching the society as the unit of change, Small Theories(group and individualist models) basing social change upon group processes and psychological factors. (Kongar, 1981).

Every society changes in time; however, it could at times be “positive” (in the direction of development, progress) and “negative” at other times (in the direction of regress, deconstruction).

There are two basic reasons forcing societies to change: The first one is the changes formed by the influence of the dynamics of the society itself(internal reasons); the second one is the changes formed by the influence of environmental change and other societies(external reasons).

Each and every one of the basic components forming the society continuously gets influenced by changing circumstances and also influences the society. It provides the “accumulation” which will cause society-level changes. It is necessary to evaluate and see the “internal reasons”(natural environment, population, culture, technology, social institutions, etc) which provide the change in society, in “integration”. Probably, the most important one of the “external reasons” forcing societies to change is “cultural contacts and expansions”. Especially in this global and small world after the development and popularization of mass communication devices, societies and cultures are in a closer and more intense interaction

with each other. Frontiers, in cultural sense, have practically disappeared. Innovations and discoveries at one end of the earth can spread to other societies in a very short time, through many different ways (tourism, sport organizations, mass communication devices, etc.) at a very high speed.

Social change is a “natural”, “inevitable” and “necessary” “process”. This process is, at times, so fast that members of the society experience the change as if watching a historical movie. The best example of this is what happens during and after civil insurrections, wars and revolutions. The change in society is, at other times, so slowly that the members of the society could think that nothing is changing, that everything remains as it is. However, it is changing; at least the necessary “accumulation” for the change is forming.

Changes in different fields or institutions of the society must be balanced and in harmony with each other. Otherwise, there could be stress, “conflicts” in the society. In addition, disconnections between material and immaterial cultural elements, weakness in the national unity awareness, ineffectiveness in democratic institutionalization, not renovating the social values, the feeling of being “the other”, etc could cause “social deconstructions”.

As is seen, “change” is a natural result in societies. However, external influences (human effect) can be added to this process, sometimes. This kind of “social change” can be realized through “democratic” ways as well as “antidemocratic” ones. In the former (process of democratic social change), the process of social change is directed by scientific, rational ways. The change in the behaviour is achieved by making use of education and mass media instruments. Formal and widespread education institutions, public advertorials on television channels are examples of them. The principle here is “for the society, in the name of the society and together with the society”. In the latter (process of antidemocratic alteration), however, the change in the behaviour is created by force, by pressure. Freedoms are restricted. Regulations are alleged to be done “for the society, in the name of the society”; however, their distinctive characteristic is that they are carried out “despite the society” and even “against the society”. Violence, coup and terror are examples of this. At the end of this kind of change, the number of sensible, self-confident, brave, aware people in the society decreases while the number of introvert ones increases.

There have been and will always be some powers that are attached to the past and resist “change”. These can, in the worst case, slow down the speed of change (and even that would be for a while). There is not any power to block change especially in the long term. The greatest power in democracies is the society.

## 2. Conclusion

All in all, every society “necessarily” changes “fast” or “slowly”, “negatively” or “positively”, due to “inner” or “outer” reasons. Change is the destiny of both people and societies.

The process of social change has affected, moreover has determined sport.

“As is known, societies consist of institutions. Institutions are basic social bodies having emerged from social needs and regulating the social functioning and they can exist as long as they can perform these functions.

Not any society puts its existence or continuity at stake, neither can it do so. Therefore, societies create their own institutions; and they develop them during the process.

Institutions can be said to have four basic functions in all societies:

1. Regulating individuals' behaviours and relations
2. Preparing individuals for the society
3. Determining the relations between individuals and institutions
4. Thus, maintaining the social continuity

Sport is one of the oldest and most fundamental social institutions and deserves to be studied at least as much as other fundamental institutions. Moreover, it is a necessity (to approach sport as a social institution) in this age. For the societies of this age, sport is a very important element of the society.”(Kaplan, 2007: 87)

As a social institution, sport is in a close and intense interaction with other social institutions, notably with the family, economics and mass media. “This makes the sociological analyze of sport difficult.”(Cited by Amman, 2000: 96). The importance of the institution of sport “derives from the fact that the bond it has established with other fundamental institutions has grown stronger and the fact that the outcomes of this will mutually affect our entire social life.”(Talimciler, 2005: 529). Studying the institution of sport could help us understand the society we live in.

As a social institution, sport, while affecting some other social institutions(family, education, economics, politics, religion, communication, healthcare, law), is also affected by them. It is a relation of “interaction”: Sport and other social institutions both affect each other and are affected by each other.

Sociologically, the basic importance of sport is that large masses take place in it –both as the audience and as the practitioner. Sport, not in any era in history, has been as popular as it is today. “Today, it is affected due to the changes and developments in this age and even due to the effectiveness of mass media instruments and the speed of them when presenting events; and as a result of this exposure, people are more and more interested in artistic and sportive activities, for instance.”(Doğan, 2007: 51-52).

“In the flow of time, we come across with the changes happening in sport in the world as the activities of technological, economical and cultural changes. Such that, it will do to compare the masses' interest in a sportive organization anywhere in the world 2025 years ago with the intensity of the interest and awareness nowadays.”(Doğan, 2007: 52).

The analysis of the relation between “social development” as a positive social change and “sport” shows that “theoretically, there is not necessarily a relation between social development and sport. More clearly, social development is not a prerequisite condition for sport and vice versa. Besides, it is observed that in developed countries, sport is developed, too. In developing societies, on the other hand, while some successful results are occasionally observed in some branches of especially the elite sport, sport cannot be said to have developed when examined as a whole.”(Amman, 2000: 130)

Although there isn't an obligatory relation between “social progress” and “sport” theoretically, it can easily be said that the process of social progress directly and indirectly contributes to sport and vice versa.

As a “cultural element”, sport has an essential place and function in social life, too. In the process that a culture becomes distinguished, sport is as necessary and important as science, art, philosophy, literature, etc. The success or leadership in a field usually supports the

success or leadership in other fields. Successful countries in international level sportive organizations, for instance, are also the countries successful in science, art, philosophy, etc. In this sense, the level gained in sport can be regarded as a development criterion. (See also Erkal et al., 1998: 18).

Sport can be an agent of change; can cause social change and the production of new behaviour patterns. As a social phenomenon, sport gains its meaning in the society that it takes place; and it both gets affected by the changes in the society and affects these changes there. It could be the “reason” and the “result” of social changes. It affects economics, education, media, fashion, tourism, etc... and gets affected by them. The natural result of this “interaction” is “new things” in the society and sport. Radical changes in sport and even in the rules of branches of sport can be made depending on the changing social needs, preferences and expectations.

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