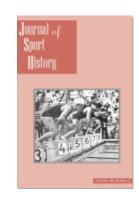


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Austrian Sport and the Challenges of Its Recent Historiography

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In Austria sports history is situated between history (which is not interested in sports) and physical education (which is no longer interested in history). Although sports history enjoyed a long tradition at Vienna University, academic research in the field trickled to a halt in the 1980s. From the beginning of the 1990s, however, a new sports history emerged in the work of academic freelancers who came from different research disciplines. On the basis of this interdisciplinary approach they established a wide-ranging field of research based primarily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and the British model of cultural studies. Initially, their work dealt with the obvious topic of soccer, but over the last decade, the focus has broadened to embrace questions of nationalism, migration, masculinity and gender, body politics, and space as well as other forms of sport and the nature of sporting cultures in general.

As in many countries of continental Europe, the beginnings of modern sport in Austria—particularly in the German-speaking parts of the monarchy—can be traced to the late nineteenth century. Emanating from the English motherland, sport spread in

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concentric circles, reaching Vienna at a relatively late stage, and extending from the metropolis to the smaller towns and finally the rural areas only after a considerable delay. Essential precursors included equestrian sports, for which extensive racecourses were set up in Vienna in 1839 (canter) and 1878 (trotting), as well as gymnastics, strength events, and the "Vienna School" of ice skating.¹

Between 1880 and 1900, radiating out from the Viennese metropolis, clubs and early associations were established for alpine sports and mountain climbing. At the same time, there was significant quantitative growth in cycling, athletics, lawn tennis, and most of all football, both in terms of active participants and spectator numbers at what was becoming the sporting spectacle. Even before the outbreak of World War I, bourgeois sporting life was rich and varied and, most significantly, had already become an indispensable part of the media industry.

As a result of the First World War sport expanded in Austria in three ways. First, the sporting activities in training, both at the front and in prisoner-of-war camps, kindled considerable enthusiasm for sport, so that sporting practices grew enormously from around 1920. Second, large sections of the (male) workforce had acquired a fascination for sport and did not want to be left out of these activities in the early Republic: thanks to new social legislation and increased leisure time, the capital and the outlying industrial areas in the "provinces" developed independent worker sports operations, which were autonomous from the bourgeois establishment. Third, the experience of sport that many people had gathered during their service in the military ensured that sport spread rapidly across the country.

Workers' sport, like its bourgeois counterpart, became a mass phenomenon. It placed community, solidarity, and active exertion at its center, an ethos that culminated in the hosting of the Second Workers' Olympiad in 1931 in Vienna. Bourgeois sport, by contrast, was characterized by its emphasis on results and commercial gain. Football, particularly Viennese football, became the most popular sport, with its early mediatization (*Sport-Tagblatt* from 1918-1919), professionalization (1924-1925), and internationalization. Under the leadership of Hugo Meisl, Viennese football was instrumental from 1927 in the creation of early transnational ("Central European") competitions for clubs (Mitropa Cup) and national teams (Svehla Cup). In the era of Austro-Fascism (1933 to 1938), football remained one of the few ways that national consciousness could be expressed. And even in the Nazi era, during which sport was largely indoctrinated and instrumentalized, Viennese football was able to maintain a special position and was tolerated by the regime.

Sport made a distinct contribution to the belated national consciousness, which rapidly developed in the course of the Second Austrian Republic. First it allowed citizens to experience territorial unity (e.g., in the form of the Tour d'Autriche for cyclists), and then, from 1948 (with Austria's participation at the winter Olympics in St. Moritz), it strengthened Austria's presence in the international arena. The national football team's third-place finish in the 1954 World Cup and Toni Sailer's Olympic victories made sporting achievements—next to music, literature, and landscape—an essential component of Austrian self-confidence.

However, some of the special features of Austrian sport have died out since the 1950s. Specific national and local developments were leveled in the course of the Europeanization

and globalization of sporting events, particularly in alpine skiing (e.g., the exclusion of professional ski instructors from World Championships and the Olympics) and football (the orientation of the Mitropa Cup towards countries that formerly belonged to the monarchy). Significantly enhanced by the advent of international sport on television, Austrian sport became part of the (Western) European sporting landscape and—sometimes directly, sometimes with a little delay—experienced the fundamental trends of mediatization, professionalization, and above all, commercialization. This incorporation into the international scene was, of course, linked to the country's enormous success in alpine (and since the 1980s, nordic) skiing, as well as in various fringe sports such as judo, canoeing, and fistball.

Thus it is not surprising that, in addition to football—which, after its slump in the 1990s is now attracting large audiences—alpine skiing has become a national sport. Strongly supported by the skiing and tourism industries and led by an association that is both untouchable and unquestioned by the media, skiing is able to acquire an ever-growing portion of sponsorship and advertising budgets and to claim more and more media coverage. To some considerable extent, it has also turned university sports science—in branches such as sports medicine, physiology, pedagogy, and biomechanics—into an ancillary branch of the sport itself. Scandals such as the blood doping of Austrian athletes at the 2006 winter Olympics in Turin are not discussed at any length by either the media or the Ski Association.

The Development of University Sport History Research in Austria

Research into the history of Austrian sport² began at the end of the eighteenth century, when in the age of Josephinism the need arose for a theorization of physical training as part of a movement for comprehensive physical education for all classes. This was based primarily on medical, pedagogical, and historical works that dealt particularly with the physical exercises and competitions of Greek and Roman times. With the introduction of elective school gymnastics in 1848, a further need arose for qualified teachers, and this was met by the establishment of a "University Gymnastics Institute" in Vienna. From 1870 an entry examination was required for this training and this stipulated, among other things, knowledge of the historical development of gymnastics. Prior to the First World War, university training had also begun in Graz and Innsbruck, and the theoretical foundation of the subject was constantly expanding—particularly after the appointment of the gymnastics specialist Jaroslaus Pawel in Vienna. Pawel studied Roman athletics as well as the history of German and Swedish gymnastics.

It was not until the mid 1920s that the training of sport instructors took on a scholarly bent. History was made compulsory and research in the area followed different paths: Greek sport was studied in Innsbruck, while ancient and Germanic sport as well as German gymnastics was investigated in Vienna, under the leadership of the German national Erwin Mehl who went on to become the leading sports historian in the "Ostmark" during the Nazi era. Mehl had honorary professorship status, which meant that dissertations on sports history were possible for the first time. In addition to his historical seminars, he lectured on "race and physical education." After a brief early retirement, he returned to the university in 1948 and remained in post until 1965. By this stage, a renewed process of

"academicization" combined with a gradual decline in the importance of historical topics caused the theory of physical education to split into several subjects, such as pedagogy, physiology, history, and finally sociology.

Research and teaching in the field of sport history has made a significant contribution to the establishment of sports science as an independent discipline and field of academic study in Austria.³ But because sports science has since diversified into other important areas, the history of sport has largely been eliminated from the curricula. Since 1995, the one remaining academic position in sport history has remained unoccupied; sport history in Vienna, Graz, Salzburg, and Innsbruck is now the responsibility of colleagues in other subjects or taught by external instructors. Vienna is the only place where sports history still exists as an independent department.

Currently sports research on historical questions undertaken at Austrian universities is limited to a few names and topics: Ingomar Weiler (Graz) is the author of seminal studies of Greek sport and edits the internationally renowned journal *Nikephoros*; Frederick Fetz and Elmar Kornexl (Innsbruck) work on the history of methodology, kinesiology, and biomechanics; Stefan Größing (Salzburg) deals with the history of sports pedagogy, particularly Karl Gaulhofer's and Margarete Streicher's "natural gymnastics." Hannes Strohmeyer (Vienna) has published ground-breaking work on the development of university sport and the sporting practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not least being his edited anthology, which represents the only comprehensive survey to date of Austrian sport history from the Middle Ages to the present.

The State of Research in Sports History

Over the last fifteen years, sports history research has been situated between professional history, which is not interested in sport, and sports science, which is indifferent to history. As a result, academic output is very thin, and graduate theses of any quality are an equal rarity. In sports science, Reinhard Krammer's seminal studies of workers' sport, Rainer Amstädter's reassessment of Austrian alpinism and Rudolf Müllner's account of school sports in the Nazi era are worth mentioning.⁶ There is also the deep-rooted investigation of sport in Tirol by Karl Graf.⁷ In the realm of historical scholarship, Carmen Feuchtner's work on early Viennese women's sport, Gerhard Urbanek's investigation of Austro-German relations exemplified by football, and Florian Labitsch's thoughts on sporting events as "lieux de mémoire" are also worthy of note.⁸

Of course, history, in particular modern history, cannot neglect sports-related topics entirely. When Enst Hanisch wrote a history of masculinity in Austria in the twentieth century, he could not fail to devote a (short) chapter to the subject of athletes. And when it comes to national identity, the contribution of sporting victories and heroes cannot be overlooked. Vet sport per se—as in Wolfgang Weber's localized study of a hundred years of German gymnastics in Vorarlberg—hardly ever forms the main focus. A rare exception is Linz economic and social historian Michael John, who has published a variety of studies on Austrian football in the twentieth century and the origin and history of Jewish sport.

There have been occasional contributions to Austrian sports history from other disciplines such as sociology, where Ernst Gerhard Eder wrote a history of early swimming culture.¹³ Gilbert Norden has published several seminal accounts of the early years of Austrian sport and studies on the origins of golf, tennis, roller-skating, ice-skating, and early Viennese football.¹⁴ Another focus of Norden's work is the history of Austrian sports museums.¹⁵ Political science also considers aspects of sports history, particularly under the rubric of masculinity, and political scientist John Bunzl delivered the first account of the history of the Jewish flagship club Hakoah.¹⁶ Some aspects of sports history are also covered by theater and communication studies, where Christian Rapp has dealt with the treatment of sport in mountain films, Minas Dimitriou has written a history of sports media, and Johanna Dorer has produced historical explorations of sport, media, and gender.¹⁷

Important contributions to the history of sport in Austria have also been made by authors from Switzerland (Christian Koller) and especially from Germany. Hajo Bernett has been critically occupied with "natural gymnastics" and Margarete Streicher, and Gertrud Pfister has written a seminal contribution on early women's sport in Austria. Dietrich Schulze-Marmeling and Rudolf Oswald have been intensively engaged with aspects of Viennese football, particularly in the 1930s and the Nazi era. And finally, Andreas and Wolfgang Hafer, along with Erik Eggers, have assembled an enormous amount of material on the journalist Willy Meisl and on the coach and official Hugo Meisl.

Finally, some of the substantial number of accounts written by journalists deserve mention because of the academic standards they meet in terms of primary research and their use of literature: Wolfgang Weisgram, whose focus is primarily on the development of Viennese football; Hannes Skocek, who has produced a book on sports stars of previous eras; Thomas Karny who has written on, among other topics, motorcycle champion Rupert Hollaus, who was fatally injured in 1954.²² In 1998, Michael Wassermair and Lukas Wieselberg published a collection marking the twentieth anniversary of the World Cup victory over West Germany in Cordoba, Argentina, which was so important for national identity, and journalists Andreas Tröscher and Edgar Schütz (working together with Matthias Marschik) assembled stories about, and histories of, Austria's important football stadiums.²³

Until this point, Austrian sports historiography has conformed to an entirely Western or European model. A lack of interest on the part of professional historians and the decline in historical sports research has been balanced somewhat by an increasing engagement from scholars from other disciplines, external researchers, and journalists. The topics discussed owe a great deal to amateurism (in the positive, original sense of the word), because in many cases such research is carried out free of charge, on the side, and on the basis of personal leanings, hobbies, or passions. A broad spectrum of historical sporting events is covered with varying historiographical approaches, from the sport of medieval nobles to its bourgeois turn in the second half of the nineteenth century, from the origins of modern sport to developments of recent times. The main focus undoubtedly lies in the twentieth century, especially on football and the Olympic movement, alpinism and alpine skiing. And there are certainly overlaps between strictly scholarly and popular works and the numerous association, club, and anniversary books, which naturally provide important material.

Cultural History of Austrian Sport

When Roman Horak, Wolfgang Reiter, and Kurt Stocker founded the Institute for Cultural Studies (IKUS) in Vienna in the late 1980s, they were guided by the research agenda of British cultural studies. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the mass culture of Viennese football became an early research topic.²⁴ Their first outputs included a study of hooliganism in Vienna and an analysis of the political and economic interconnectedness of football between 1945 and 1990.²⁵ From these beginnings, a specific kind of sports culture research with a strong historiographical component has evolved over the past twenty years. It is characterized by the fact that, on the one hand, sport is understood as popular culture, and therefore is seen in relation to political and economic contexts, and, on the other hand, that it is not perceived as a microcosm of society but as its own autonomous terrain.²⁶ In other words, despite the heavy influence of economics and politics, cultures of movement (*Bewegungskulturen*) can develop their own values and modes of resistance.

This new sports history was initially undertaken by independent researchers outside the university establishment. In the spirit of cultural studies, their approach was interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary. Initially this work focused very clearly on the mass culture of Viennese football, on the early phase up to its establishment as a commercialized spectator sport, on its heyday in the First Austrian Republic, on Viennese football during the Nazi era, and on the "reconstruction" years after 1945.²⁷ Later, it was concerned with workers' football as well as women's football and questions of masculinity.²⁸ Significantly, the model of national-focused sports analysis was loosened up as the local Viennese level was enriched at a very early stage via comparisons with international urban football and other sports cultures.²⁹ Another important area in which national borders were transcended was the theme of Central European football, especially the Svehla and the Mitropa Cups which ran from 1927 to 1938 as well as the attempts to reestablish them after 1951.³⁰

Since the millennium, the focus has extended in two directions. On the one hand, the analysis of football has been broadened to cover more general cultures of movement, with topics pursued such as the delayed formation of the nation, the relationship between sport and place, sports coverage in the media, or models of corporeality.³¹ On the other hand, a second generation of young researchers has asked new questions about the authenticity of sport and sporting heroes, sports-based migration flows, and the concepts and practices of participants in Jewish sport.³²

In recent years, sport history research at university level has begun to open itself to culturally-oriented approaches, thus paving the way in recent years for an increasing number of collaborations such as conferences (e.g., the European Committee for Sport History, or CESH, congress in Vienna in 2006), exhibitions (e.g., during EURO 2008 in Vienna and Linz), or anthologies such as *Sport Studies*, which also set out to establish this culture-orientated line of research for the first time in the German-speaking world.³³

Desiderata and Outlook for Future Research

The primary occupation of cultural studies-oriented research with popular mass culture has left several gaps in the history of Austrian sport. First, the concentration on Vienna means that the sporting connections with Prague and Budapest have been stressed more

than those with rural areas or small towns. Second, the emphasis on football has led to the neglect of other sports. This applies not only to fringe sports but also to sports run by women or the transition to late-modern practices of individualized and related physical activity that takes place beyond the confines of associations. Strikingly, the second Austrian national sport, alpine skiing, has scarcely been examined in terms of its national, economic, and political meanings.

Sport in the provinces and sports other than football have therefore received very little attention in Austria. Much has been written on the establishment of modern sport in Vienna, but little on how sport spread and why it failed to reach its tentacles out to the remote Alpine valleys until the 1950s. Further research desiderata would include investigations of periods in which vital changes occurred, or the militarization of sport in the First World War, or its reorganization under Austro-Fascism. The history of sports history itself is little researched.

And finally, it should be stressed that in many cases in German-speaking Europe cultural studies gradually lost its critical impulse as it transformed into *Kulturwissenschaft*: the close investigation of historical events and their embedding in political and economic contexts has sometimes disappeared behind mere descriptions of sporting activities.³⁴ Should this continue, the great virtue of cultural studies-oriented Austrian sport history of the 1990s would certainly be lost.

KEYWORDS: SPORT, SPORTS HISTORY, AUSTRIA

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