

# FROM DEMOCRATIZATION OF SPORT TO MARKET HEGEMONY: THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT AND THE SPANISH CASE

*A DEMOCRATIZAÇÃO DO ESPORTE PARA A HEGEMONIA DOS MERCADOS:  
O CASO ESPANHOL*

*DE LA DEMOCRATIZACIÓN DEL DEPORTE A LA HEGEMONÍA DE LOS  
MERCADOS: EL CASO ESPAÑOL*

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## Keywords

Social Welfare.  
Neoliberalism.  
Public policies.  
Spain.

**Abstract:** The sport system in democratic countries is undergoing a crisis. This is because the Welfare State, on which many public sport policies are based, has been superseded by a new cycle of neoliberal hegemony. To illustrate this reality, we focus on the case of Spain. It becomes evident that civil society has low representation in political decision-making in sport matters and that organized sport has failed to fulfill a social function, being confined to the interests of economic agents. This article requests that social sciences take a critical stance toward this reality.

## Palavras-chave

Bem-estar social.  
Neoliberalismo.  
Políticas Públicas.  
Espanha.

**Resumo:** O sistema esportivo próprio da democracia está em crise. Isto porque o Estado de bem-estar, sobre o qual se sustentam muitas das políticas públicas ao esporte, tem sido desbancado por um novo ciclo de hegemonia neoliberal. Para ilustrar essa realidade, nos centramos no caso espanhol. Evidencia-se como a sociedade civil se encontra pouco representada pelas decisões políticas em matéria esportiva, e como o esporte organizado tem deixado de cumprir uma função social, ao circunscrever-se aos interesses dos agentes econômicos. O artigo reclama das ciências sociais uma postura crítica ante tal realidade.

## Palabras clave

Bienestar social.  
Políticas Públicas.  
Neoliberalismo.  
España.

**Resumen:** El sistema deportivo propio de la democracia está en crisis. Lo está porque el Estado de Bienestar, sobre el que se sustentan muchas de las políticas deportivas públicas, ha sido desbancado por un nuevo ciclo de hegemonía neoliberal. Para ilustrar esta realidad, nos centramos en el caso de España. En este país, se evidencia cómo la sociedad civil se encuentra poco representada por las decisiones políticas en materia deportiva, y cómo el deporte organizado ha dejado de cumplir una función social, al circunscribirse a los intereses de los agentes económicos. El artículo reclama de las ciencias sociales una postura crítica ante esta realidad.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Sport is a good observatory from which to analyze the process of crisis experienced by the Welfare State. The idea of the Welfare State or Welfare Society has become the ideological emblem (the Keynesian consensus against liberal *laissez faire*) in Europe after the Second World War and has marked the region's historical development until recent times. Since then, the reconstruction of European States based on the conviction that they should be guarantors of citizens' access to healthcare, education or work, among other services, has marked sport with this logic.

In its European version, sport policies have undergone numerous versions in the last decades of the twentieth century, helping to promote it in all strata of society. The effort to ensure the presence of sport in our lives as a citizen right dates back to the creation of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. After that, the Council of Europe triggered an intense activity aimed at promotion of sport, its standardization in the education system and its regulation. The 1975 European Sport for All Charter (COMISIÓN EUROPEA, 1976, p. 2) is the best example of this effort to strengthen sport in European society. It argues that:

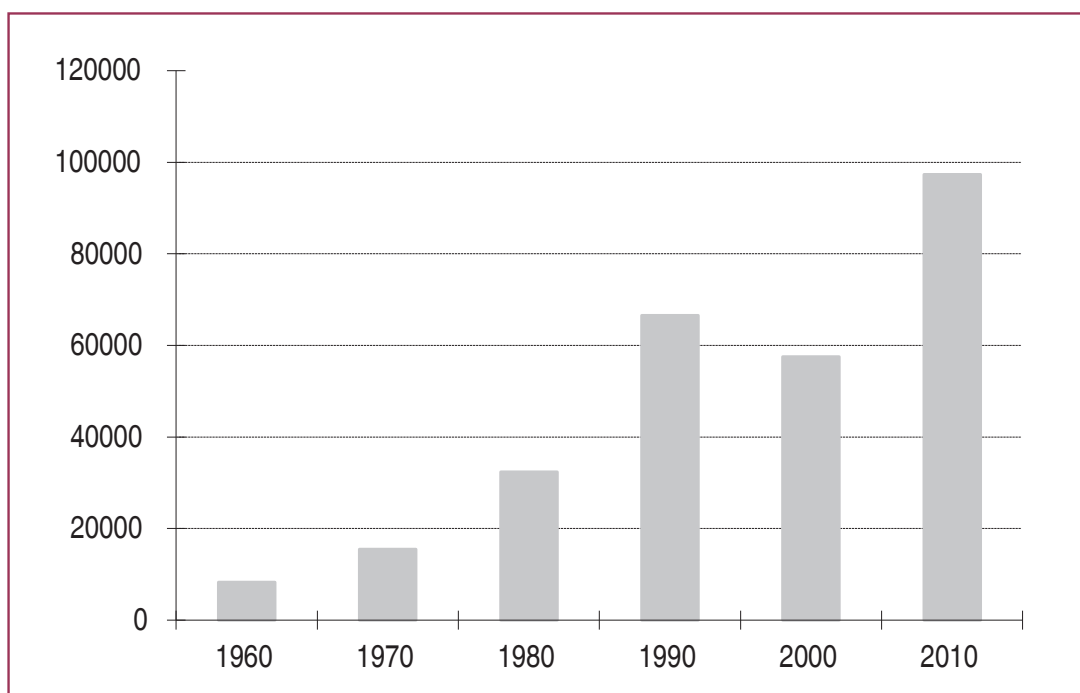
[...] sport shall be encouraged as an important factor in human beings' development and appropriate support shall be made available out of public funds, whatever their age, sex, profession, to understand the value of sport and lifelong practice, [obliging the government to ensure] best conditions for the practice of sport for all, which will cease to be a privilege of few to become an achievement and a need of every society.

And this idea has gradually gained strength, manifesting itself in recent years with increased visibility through expressions such as a renewed European Sports Charter of 1992 and the White Paper on Sport (COMISIÓN EUROPEA, 2007, p. 2), which states that:

[...] sport is a growing social and economic phenomenon which makes an important contribution to the European Union's strategic objectives of solidarity and prosperity. It generates important values such as team spirit, solidarity, tolerance and fair play. It promotes the active contribution of EU citizens to society and thereby helps to foster active citizenship. The Commission acknowledges the essential role of sport in European society.

In this context, European civil society has boosted sporting activities for decades. At the end of the day, the democratization implicit in the theory of the Welfare State is nothing but a process of civil conversion of the State itself; ultimately, it transfers the burden of meeting society's civil claims to society itself (GIL-CALVO, 1995).

In the case of sport, this idea manifested itself as the activity developed through sports clubs and federations, which proved decisive for its gradual institutionalization (Figure 1). Under the umbrella of the Welfare State and the democratic system, citizens could organize autonomously to promote sporting culture. During these decades, this effort has contributed for sports practice to multiply and reach all strata of society in many countries of the European Union.

**Figure 1:** Evolution of the number of federated sports clubs in Spain (series by decades; 1960-2010)

Source: INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA, 2014.

Official statistics show that in 1975, in countries like Spain, there were few sports facilities (0.5 per thousand practitioners), fewer people could access them (53% were private), and there were also few sports practitioners (22% of the population) located mainly in the upper middle classes.

Since the Welfare State was established in Spain, sport has gained the public space of citizenship and become a field of great social, political and economic influence. However, in reality, as also stated in the White Paper on Sport (2007, p. 2), the activity

[...] is also confronted with new threats and challenges which have emerged in European society, such as commercial pressure, exploitation of young players, doping, racism, violence, corruption and money laundering.

In the 1990s there were certainly changes in the European sports system. Some authors have expressed their concern about the weight of major economic forces over commodification of sports and the damages it has brought to the public functions of sport (ROBERTSON; GIULIANOTTI, 2006). As a result, given the political and institutional rhetoric that has involved many of the sports policies in Europe in previous decades, its sports system has suffered as a public service and has placed the weight of major decisions that mark their becoming on economic actors (mass media, multinational companies, sports brands and the financial sector).

That might explain why the practice of sport in most countries of the European Union has stagnated, despite generational changes towards a population educated in sports culture. Also, what Moscoso (2013) has called “sports divide” persists – the fact that many people still do not practice sports because of cultural and economic reasons.

Nevertheless, we must explain that this process has been accompanied by socialization of neoliberal ideology in the very culture of citizenship, which has led to accommodation of the situation described above. It comes as no surprise that until recently, there was almost no social mobilization against this hegemony of markets regarding policy decisions in sport. Recent

criticism by public opinion in Spain against the Madrid 2020 Olympic bid or economic rewards that the Spanish State offered to players of the national football team for a hypothetical victory in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil underscore an emerging public awareness about mainstream sports policy, but also indicate assimilation of those neoliberal values by citizens themselves, since there was no criticism before that. Such ambivalence that seems recent only in sports, at least in Spain, has long been part of our society's value system as shown by some authors (BELL, 1977; INGLEHART, 1991; BECK; GIDDENS; LASH, 1997).

This article seeks to explain such paradoxical reality of contemporary sport. Having spread in Europe and Spain under the umbrella of the compelling ideology of the Welfare State and the democratic system, it ended up based on the typical perversions of neoliberalism. And it has finally prevailed in today's social reality, institutions and policies.

To illustrate this process, we focus on the case of Spain – where sports gained unprecedented importance throughout the 80s and where, after the 92 Olympics in Barcelona, an unusual passion was aroused in citizens. The reality of this trend towards a crisis of the Welfare State and market hegemony in the European sport system is expressed very clearly in Spain. On one hand, its citizens feel overwhelmed by the influence of their athletes and the victories of their national teams. On the other hand, after nearly four decades of democratic experience and the Welfare State, the percentage of the population that regularly practice sports remains low (only two out of ten citizens); barriers and social inequalities in access to sport persist (still with low levels of practice among women, the elderly and people with low education and income); crimes related to doping and trafficking of doping substances have increased (e. g., “Operation Puerto”, involving Olympic athlete Marta Domínguez, or “Operation Galgo”); there are plenty of public corruption scandals (e. g. the Palma Arena, Bernabéu or Nóos cases) and tax evasion (e. g. the Tax Agency's charges against players like Messi or Neymar); and finally, the country's sporting events and agendas are managed by the media rather than the Government.

Our hypothesis is that, despite the Welfare State's effort, the right to sport in Spain has been captured by the neoliberal system and (uncritically) normalized as reality within society. A review of the political agenda – and processes, milestones and social changes – of nearly 40 years of democracy in Spain, as well as an analysis of its main official sport statistics, allow us to envision this process of appropriation of sport as a public service by private interests. We are aware of the plurality of theoretical approaches from which this analysis can be addressed. We postulate a critical approach close to the legacy of authors like Brohm (1982), who have marked a tradition in the study of sport from a Marxist viewpoint.

## 2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This work explores secondary data. It relies on two main statistical and sociological sources on sport in Spain: the Survey on Sporting Habits of Spanish Citizens (*Encuesta de Hábitos Deportivos de los Españoles*, EHDE) and the National Census on Sports Facilities (*Censo Nacional de Instalaciones Deportivas*).

The Survey on Sporting Habits of Spanish Citizens started after the enforcement of the General Law of Physical Culture and Sport 13/1980 (ESPAÑA, 1980). At the beginning of democracy in Spain, public administrations requested data in order to properly plan sports policies. Therefore, a survey was created to build a comparative overview of the evolution of attitudes, behaviors and habits in Spanish sports (MOSCOSO; MUÑOZ; 2012). This has been

carried out by the Centre for Sociological Research – henceforth CIS – every five years between 1980 and 2010. Seven surveys have been conducted during that period (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** EHDE Time Series

Surveys	Sample	Year
Sporting Habits Survey no. 1257	4,493	1980
Sporting Habits Survey (n. n.)*	1,557	1985
Sporting Habits Survey no. 2198	3,329	1990
Sporting Habits Survey no. 2397	3,000	1995
Sporting Habits Survey no. 2493	5,160	2000
Sporting Habits Survey no. 2599	8,170	2005
Sporting Habits Survey no. 2833	8,925	2010

**Source:** CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLOGICAS, 2010.

\* The 1985 survey was conducted by the Higher Sports Council rather than the Center for Sociological Research.

The National Census of Sports Facilities – henceforth NCSF – conducted by the Higher Sports Council – henceforth HSC – offers data on the number and characteristics of Spanish sports facilities along three censuses (1986, 1997 and 2005) (Table 2). It covers sports facilities located in 8,116 population centers of 17 Spanish regions and two autonomous cities. Three censuses have been conducted during the period, and the last one is currently under completion. They allowed us to analyze the situation of sports facilities between different Spanish territories and compare them from a time-based perspective. Their aim is to facilitate the implementation of master plans for sports facilities in different regions.

**Table 2:** NCSF time series

Survey	Sample	Year
First National Census of Sports Facilities	4,493	1986
Second National Census of Sports Facilities	1,557	1997
Third National Census of Sports Facilities	8,925	2005

**Source:** Prepared by the authors after CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE DEPORTES (2005, p 33).

Additionally, we relied on data produced in the study of Moscoso, Martín Sánchez and Pedrajas (2013) for the Higher Sports Council of the Government of Spain (Ref.: 007/UPB10/12) to support some of our assumptions and arguments of this paper.

### 3 DEMOCRATIZATION OF SPORT IN SPAIN? FROM SPORT FOR ALL TO THE SPORTS MARKET

To understand the process of capture of sport as citizen's right by sports markets as well as the process of neoliberal ideologizing of sports at the superstructure, it is useful to review the historical process experienced during the democratization of sport in Spain.

#### 3.1. The Glorious Years of Sport for All

García and Lagardera (1998) consider that the democratic transition and particularly the Spanish Constitution of 1978 played a decisive role in spreading sports, causing it to be no longer a

privilege of wealthy minorities. In the Third Chapter of Title I of the Constitution (ESPAÑA..., 1978), Article 43.3 states that “[...] public authorities shall foster health education, physical education and sport”. We might agree with the view that this fact finally allowed Spanish society to shed the burdens of the past that prevented access to sport. Democracy was a shock to many social fields, including sports, which was part of that climate of change and social demands. As noted by Garcia and Lagardera (1998, p. 37):

[...] the intention was to broaden the basis of popular sport and facilitate sports practice to the greatest possible number of people in proper facilities; the aspiration was universal teaching and practice of Physical Education and sport at school – while considering sport as a civil right and a public service.

From that moment on, the situation of sport in Spain seemed to normalize after Physical Education teaching became official and the number of facilities and practitioners increased.

The Spanish Constitution provided political and administrative institutions with basic legislation to achieve that goal. General Law 13/1980, of Physical Culture and Sport (ESPAÑA, 1980, p. 7909) intended, according to its Article 1 “[...] to encourage, guide and coordinate Physical Education and sport as essential factors in individuals’ formation and whole development”.

In practice, the implementation of the law meant that all schools should offer enough sports facilities for teaching Physical Education and culture. It also supported the construction of other public spaces and facilities to promote sport. In those years, Spain went from 19,418 sports facilities in 1975 to 48,723 in 1986 (a 60% increase). Furthermore, in that last year, 32% of schools already had some facilities – 79% in 2005, according to the 3<sup>rd</sup> NCSF survey (CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE DEPORTES, 2005).

In this context, a favorable situation emerges for the final impulse to sport in Spain: the implementation of a series of measures related to the principles of the already mentioned 1975 *European Sport for All Charter*. The Spanish administration was to promote sporting activities and the construction of sports facilities through municipalities and schools (RODRÍGUEZ, 2008). The proof of this impulse is that the number of sports practitioners increased by 11% from 1980 to 1985 (from 25% to 34%; Figure 2), i. e., an annual growth of nearly 2% during that period.

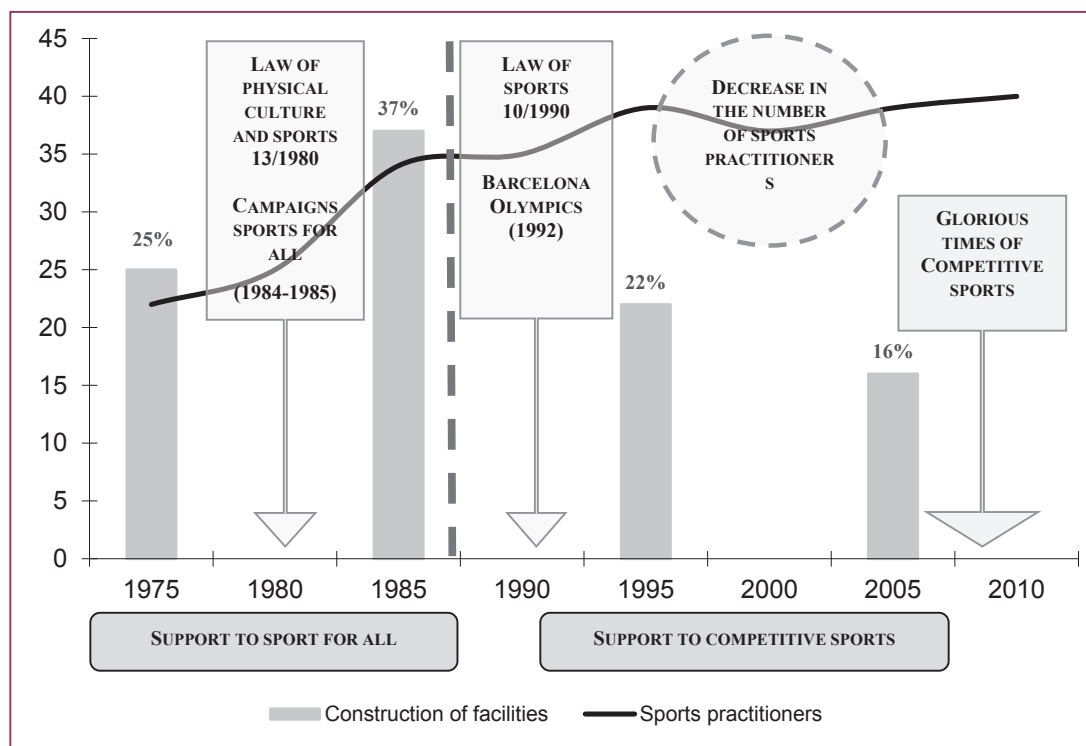
This upward trend in the number of sports practitioners remained until the mid-1990s just as the number of sports facilities. In 1995, Spanish sports practitioners approached 39% according to the EHDE (CIS, 1995) and facilities totaled 66,670 in 1997 according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> NCSF survey (CSD, 1997) – a 27% increase over 1986 (CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE DEPORTES, 2005) (Figure 2).

In the early 1990s, sport had become so important in the lives of Spaniards that it is now hard to understand this society without considering it as an essential part of their culture. As expressed by Lagardera (1992, p. 16):

[...] Today’s men and women have learned to live while running after a ball, watching Olympic finals on TV, betting money or wearing tracksuits and sports shoes as regular attire during physical practices or weekend breaks.

Therefore, besides the increase in the number of sports practitioners, we believe that it is important that sport ended up winning the cultural imagination of Spaniards.



**Figure 2:** Democratization of sport in Spain (1975-2010). Milestones and stages.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on GARCÍA FERRANDO (1997) and CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLÓGICAS (1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010) (data as percentages).

### 3.2 The domain of competitive and spectacle sport

The promising trend that had marked democratization of sport in Spain during the first decade of the democratic period has gradually dissipated. First, the percentage of athletes has increased only by 1% from 1995 to 2010 (39% and 40%, respectively) – in contrast with the 11% increase from 1980 to 1995. Secondly, the growing number of sports facilities fell considerably between 1996 and 2005: while the ratio of sports facilities per 1,000 inhabitants was 1.73 in 1996, it was 1.76 in 2010, with similar figures (CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE DEPORTES, 2005).

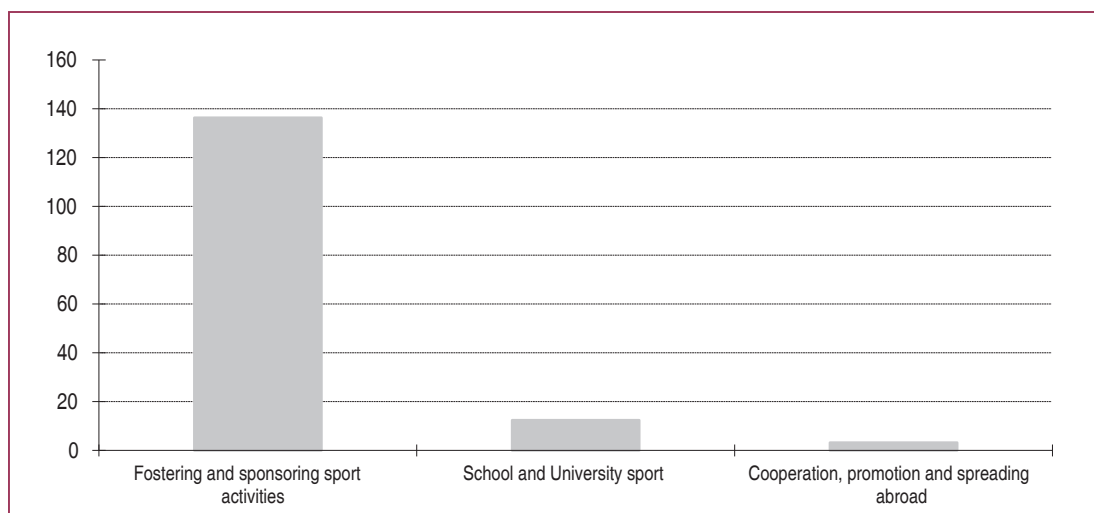
Therefore, we understand that low reproduction of sports practice is related to a change in Spain's sports policy, which opposed professional/spectacle sport and sport for all. Indeed, our view is that the following two elements have influenced it: changes in the legislation governing sport in Spain in 1990 and the celebration of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.

As to the first element, General Law 13/1980 of Physical Culture and Sport was canceled by a new legal framework: Law 10/1990 of Sport. This new law was a turning point in Spanish sports policy because it set different priorities. The new law sought professional regulation of sports and consolidation of high-competition sport. The Law is unclear about the role played by "sport for all". Sport emerged alongside the concept of citizenship in the beginning of Spanish democracy, in an almost perfect symbiosis with predominance of the idea of "sport for all". However, with maturity reached after the enactment of Law 10/1990 of Sport – which still regulates sport in Spain 25 years later – citizens are relegated to the background, behind sports organizations and professional sport. That is what explains the shift in the Spanish sports field.

It is no coincidence that the law was created two years before the 92 Olympics in Barcelona, and public resources for competitive sport have increased since then. Indeed, before Law 10/1990 of Sport, the Government of Spain started sponsoring several high performance athletes through multiple means. One of those means was the implementation of the 1989 Plan of Assistance to Olympic Sports (ADO), a specific program to fund high-level athletes' full time dedication to practicing and preparing for Olympic competitions. Another way to support high-level sport was the provision of sports facilities for excellence in sport – seven High Performance Centers and 36 Centers for “Technification” of Sports were built.

As we said, public resources for competitive sport have been increasing at the expense of Physical Education and sport for all. According to data provided by INE, most of the public budget of the Spanish State Administration for sports, which only accounts for 0.01% of the GDP (3.3 euros per inhabitant/year) – is aimed at federated sport and competitive sport – 92% (136.4 million euros<sup>1</sup> in one heading and 3.2 million euros<sup>2</sup> in other heading). By contrast, the budget to promote sport for all is irrelevant: 8% of the sport budget and always with a competitive bias (12.3 million euros<sup>3</sup>) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Public expenditure on sport, as planned



**Source:** MINISTERIO DE HACIENDA Y ADMINISTRACIONES PÚBLICAS. Liquidación de los Presupuestos del Estado. Ejercicio 2011 (data in million €)

Therefore, the same budget heading *322K: School and University Sports*, which is mostly directed to organize school and university competitions as well as to improve sports facilities in educational institutions, mobilized 11,109 children and youth in 2012, spending an average 1,216 euros per participant per year. This seems irrelevant in comparison to the high budget called ADO Plan,<sup>4</sup> enjoyed by some 370 athletes in 2008-2012, representing an investment of 42,567 euros per athlete per year (Figure 4).

1 Budget program 336A: *Fostering support to sport activities*. Promotion of federated sports practice, improvement of federation management, improvement of high competition, organization of “technification”, and degrees of Physical and Sport Education, activity of Anti-Doping Agency.

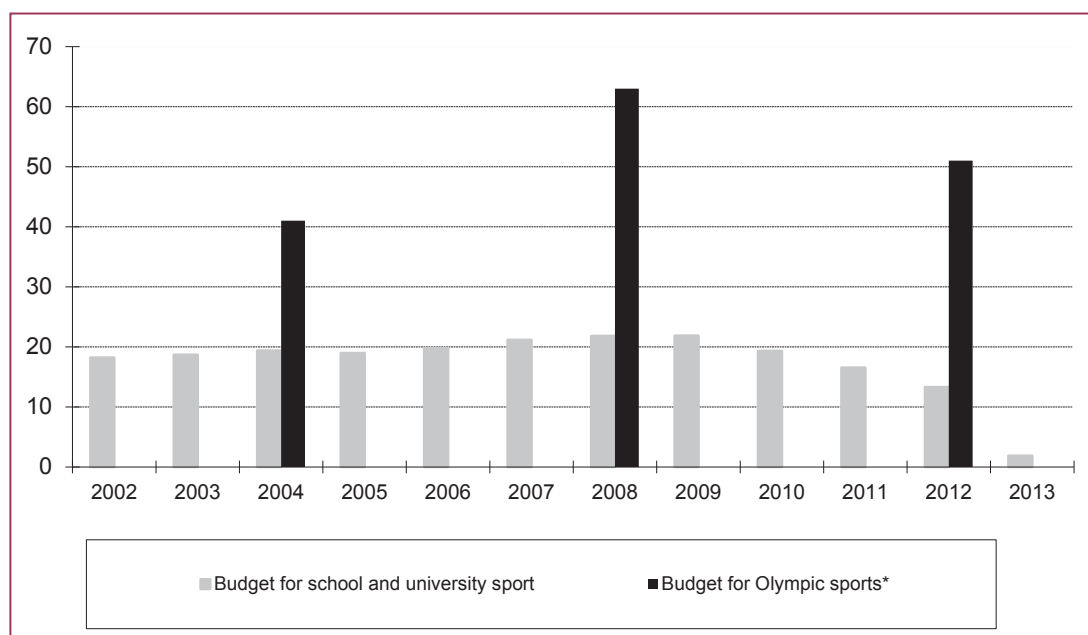
2 Budget program 144A: *Cooperation, promotion and cultural diffusion abroad*. Promotion of federation activity abroad and enhancing the presence of Spain in international organizations.

3 Budget program 322K: *School age and University sport*. Enhancing school and university sport at the national level and the actions of scientific support, research and technological development for sport-related applied research purposes.

4 ADO Plan budgets are issued every four years, and are only presented in Figure 4 with that frequency. The difference with respect to school sport lies not only in the size of the budget, but in the number of people who enjoy it.



**Figure 4:** Public expenditure in sport (*Item: 322 K: School and university sport*) and ADO Funding Plan 2004-2008, 2008-2012, and 2012-2016.



**Source:** MINISTERIO DE HACIENDA Y ADMINISTRACIONES PÚBLICAS. Liquidación de los Presupuestos del Estado; and CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE DEPORTES (data as million €).

After the 1990s, resources to promote sport for all in Spain have been significantly reduced in favor of competitive sport. Among other reasons, that might be due to fact that competence for promoting sport for all has been transferred from the central government to regional governments and from these, in turn, to municipalities, thus diluting and limiting government intervention in sport. For example, in 2011, while the central government spent 0.07% of the total budget in sport-related headings (3.3 euros per inhabitant/year), regional governments allocated 0.33% of their budgets to those headings (12.6 euros inhabitants/year) while municipalities spent 3.54% (54.6 euros inhabitant/year) (table 3). From our point of view, this situation is an obstacle for small municipalities, which do not have enough funds to promote sport for all.

**Table 3:** Public expenditure on sport, according to the nature of the administration

Public expenditure	Administración General del Estado	Administraciones Autonómicas	Administraciones locales
linked to sport	Central Administration	Autonomic administrations	Local administrations
% of total expenditure	0.07	0.33	3.52
% of GDP.	0.01	0.05	0.24
Average values per inhabitant (€)	3.3	12.6	54.6

**Source:** MINISTERIO DE HACIENDA Y ADMINISTRACIONES PÚBLICAS. Liquidación de los Presupuestos del Estado. Ejercicio 2011.

In turn, this new scenario could be explained, among other reasons, by three different circumstances beyond sport strictly speaking: growing interest by mass media in sporting events, marketing created around the world of sports, and changing values in Spanish society during these three decades – to which we referred in the introduction.

Regarding the first circumstance, in recent decades the media have managed to turn what used to be a simple physical and collectively enjoyed activity into an audiovisual market product (DESBORDES; OHL; TRIBOU, 1999), making sport a powerful phenomenon. In this regard, 36.2 million viewers watched the broadcast of the major competitions held during the

2012 London Olympics only in Spain; around 15 million viewers were watching a screen during the final match of the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010; and many others did the same in the final of the *Copa del Rey* between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. In 2011, according to EGM (2013). This corresponds to strong media impact and high audiovisual market revenue. However, the fact is that the characteristics of the sporting phenomenon that are spread through the mass media are not attuned to the motivations of sport practice among a significant part of the population, as evidenced by the work of Moscoso *et al.* (2013).

This leads us to the second factor – marketing of spectacle sport – produced with victories, sports news and bets, sports equipment, sponsorships, advertising, or sports broadcasts themselves. According to the Center for Sport Business Management, football alone has an economic impact of 10,000 million euros per year in Spain, i. e. 1% of the country's GDP. Only for retransmissions, the Professional Football League has to pay 600 million euros a year. Companies like *MediaPró* have to pay 2,400 million euros for sports rights, mainly to football clubs (GARCÍA; ALCOLEA, 2011). As Robertson and Giulianotti (2006) argue, the presidents of major European football clubs are mostly construction or finance magnates who use their position in collusion with big media groups to foster their business interests.

The third circumstance has transversal character, which reaches all levels of culture and social structure: changing values of Spanish citizens. In recent decades, materialistic values have spread and affected sport in the same way as other areas. Due to the image projected by the media and sports organizations themselves in recent years, sport is now perceived as a way toward prestige, personal enrichment and consumerism symbolized by the sports elite. The famous team of Real Madrid's "Galactic Era" in the 2000-2006 season, which gave the sport a certain glamour, clearly expressed that image. So much so that many parents in Spain express their desire to have a child who engages in professional sport: three out of four (75%), according to the EHDE (CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLOGICAS, 2010).

#### 4 CONSEQUENCES OF IMPERFECT DEMOCRATIZATION OF SPORT

Based on the approach adopted, we argue that this historical experience of democratization of sport in Spain and especially what happened in the last period have split the reality of sport into two parallel worlds: 1) competitive and spectacle sport and 2) sports for all. However, data seem to indicate a clear prevalence of the former over the latter, which causes mainly discouragement and damage to sport for all.

According to the above, when media-based spectacle, elitism and competition prevail in the public sphere of sport, our data could suggest that what occurs is discouragement of citizens to practice it. That happens because citizens do not pursue competitive interests in sport, so they feel weary of and socially critical to public institutions and major beneficiaries (mass media) of a model that provides exclusivity and prominence to the values derived from itself, as shown in the following stories from Moscoso *et al.* (2013, p. 264).

I like football and I'm tired of tuning to sports and all you hear is Cristiano Ronaldo, Messi. You end up saying: okay, I don't want it anymore!  
(Female, 18, practices sport)

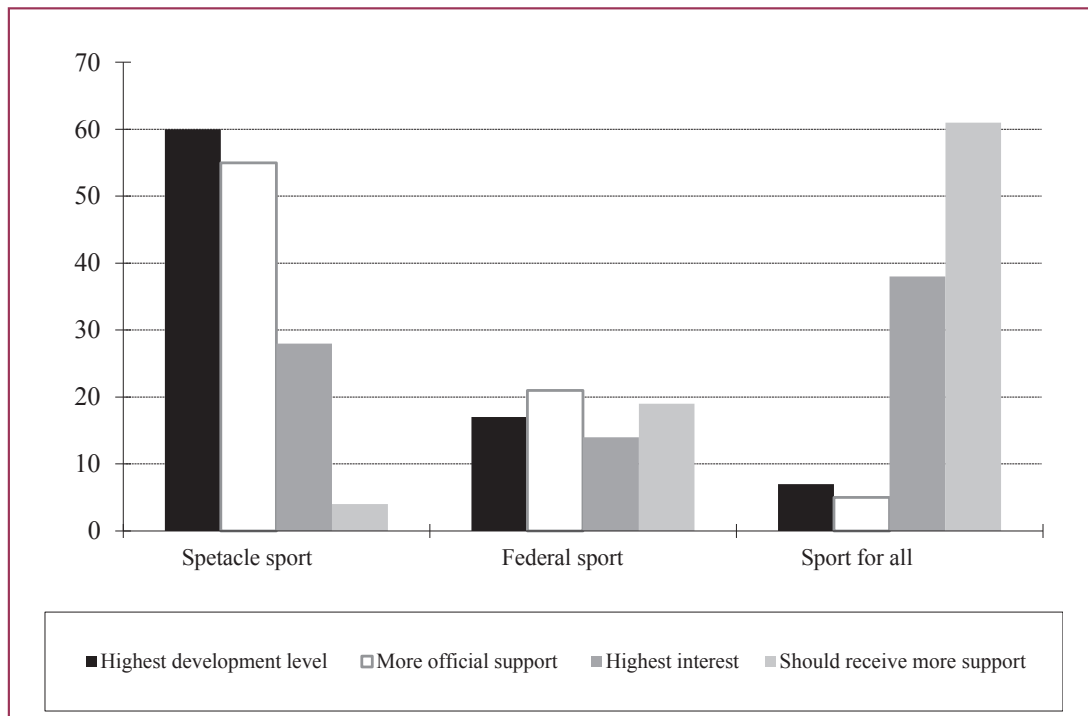
Barça, Madrid, football and that's it. As for superathletes ... I see it more in terms of information for us, for regular people – basic sport, of which there's nothing.  
(Female, 25, does not practice sport)

For me the media talk about everything except football. So, what football is in essence, what I used to play when I was a kid has nothing to do with what you see on TV or what they do now. For me, that sport has evolved and changed for the worse (...) When I started playing it used to be a cool sport, it was clean and healthy and sporty, and what's in the news is anything but football.

(Male, 23, practices sports)

These accounts seem to be in line with data from other sources. Indeed, Spanish citizens have also been consulted on this issue by the EHDE (CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLÓGICAS, 2010). When asked “What kind of sport do you think is more developed and receives more government support in Spain? (spectacle and professional sports, federated sport, or sport for all)”, most respondents say that spectacle sport is more developed and receives more official support in Spain. Conversely, most respondents consider that sport for all is less developed and gets less official support. Finally, when citizens are asked about which of them should get more support and what kind of sport they are most interested in, the answer is clear: most agree that sport for all should receive more support (Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** Spanish citizens' opinion about spectacle sport, federated sport and sport for all.



Source: CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLÓGICAS (2010)

Despite such evidence, the same sources also show the ambivalent reality lying in the very system of cultural values and pointed out at the start of this work, namely: the contradiction or inconsistency in citizens' stances. On the one hand, 55% think that spectacle sport is the kind of sport that receives the highest support, while 61% think that sport for all should receive the highest support. On the other hand, as noted above, 75% would like their children to be professional athletes, 86% say they have sports equipment at home – even though only 40% actually practice sports – 67% and 68% say they watch television broadcasts of football or other sports, respectively, and 47% say they have attended a sporting event or spectacle as spectators in the last year (CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLÓGICAS, 2010).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined the ambivalent status of the current sports system in the context of the crisis of the Welfare State and market hegemony. We focused on rebuilding the history of democratization of sport in Spain – imperfect, in our opinion. Our analysis shows a reality that supports two parallel and contradictory worlds in sport.

The first such world is that of *visible sport*, made by journalists, advertisers, entrepreneurs, club managers and sports federations. Sports experience is traded in it through the TV screen, sports garment brands or an ad for a phone company. That is sport as we all know it – the public image of sport: that of media idols, which defines forms with institutional backing. The second world – that of *invisible sport* – is the world of most citizens. It is actual experience, that of schoolchildren and teenagers playing on the schoolyard, popular racing competitions and weekend activities. It has nothing to do with the forms imposed by visible sport, it breaks no record, it has no wins and, therefore, it does not exist as “public view” on sport.

According to our data, given Spain’s existing sports policy and the stance of mass media, sports brands and sports federations, citizenship chooses sport for all and the rest of actors chooses the sport market. While resources for spectacle sport have grown substantially over the past two decades, Spanish citizens somehow do not identify with that policy and feel dissatisfied with their government when it comes to sports.

A more thoughtful critical analysis also shows that not all explanations must fall on the structure – in the Marxist sense of the term – since citizens, as social agents, have taken an uncritical stance about that ideology that has prevailed in the field of sport, which might be common given the cultural contradictions mentioned by Bell (1977). From this perspective, we must also reflect on the possibility that the predominance of sport as a pastime and enjoyment to which we referred, with all damages it can cause to other interests of our society, continues to be based on social behaviors that feed its continuity, rather than neutralizing it.

Finally, we are convinced that social sciences have to establish greater public commitment to sport, in order to neutralize the hegemony of a sporting model based exclusively on the market. The deontological code of sciences like Sociology requires the provision of critical arguments and strategies that contribute to advocate the general interests of our society. An important group of sociologists related to the *American Sociological Association*, among whom Burawoy (2004 and 2005) stands out, have voiced arguments along this line since the 1990s. Nevertheless, a research dynamics sunk into opportunism has also been experienced in social science during that period, which allows itself to be taken by topics funded by private businesses (MOSCOSO, 2006). This has caused the real social problems related to sport to be often relegated to a lower position. It is only by approaching them from a public sociology standpoint that there will be any chance to reverse some of the changes in our Era that cause serious damage to the sustainability of the Welfare Society. In the case of sport, its conversion into a preeminently market-based product and service takes us to times past when civil rights were meaningless for power agencies. From this perspective, the challenge for social scientists in this century is to influence major agencies – in Giddens’s (1995) terms – whose decisions affect the sporting system in order to defend the survival of sport for all as citizens’ right and general interest.

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