

Sport and city in Brazilian historiography: a critical review

Cleber Dias[1]

Abstract

Researches have pointed urbanization as a major factor explaining the historical emergence of sports. This paper pretended to revisit them critically, analyzing cases from very-little urbanized regions, which also got to know sports practices. This process, moreover, was spread from different points, making the identification of a responsible single centre difficult, as it is sometimes suggested.

Keywords: history; sport; urbanization.

O esporte e a cidade na historiografia brasileira: uma revisão crítica

Resumo

Pesquisas têm apontado a urbanização como um dos principais vetores explicativos da emergência histórica dos esportes. Este trabalho pretendeu revisá-las criticamente, apontando casos de regiões pouco urbanizadas que conheceram práticas esportivas. Esse processo, além disso, irradiou-se de diferentes pontos, impedindo a identificação de um único centro responsável por isto, como às vezes sugere-se.

Palavras-chave: história; esporte; urbanização.

El deporte y la ciudad en la historiografía brasileña: una revisión crítica

Resumen

Investigaciones han señalado la urbanización como uno de los más importantes factores en la explicación de la aparición histórica de los deportes. Este trabajo se propuso revisar críticamente a ellas, señalando casos de regiones poco urbanizadas que conocieron prácticas deportivas. Ese proceso, todavía, fue diseminado desde diferentes puntos, lo que impidió la identificación de un centro único responsable de esto, como se sugiere en ciertos trabajos.

Palabras clave: historia; deporte; urbanización.

Le sport et la ville dans l'historiographie brésilienne: une analyse critique

Résumé

Recherchers soulignent l'urbanization comme un raison de l'émergence du sport. Ce travail a énuméré et a critiqué le sujet, montrant les cas de zones peu urbanizées où les gens font du sport. Ce processus a été diffusé à partir de différents points, donc n'est pas possible de déterminer un seul centre responsable, comme précédemment suggéré.

Mots-clés: histoire; Sport; urbanization.

According to current interpretation in sport studies, both in Brazil and abroad, this practice developed itself in profound articulation with urbanization, frequently pointed as one of the main explaining factors of the historical emergence of such activity.¹ Since the beginning of the consolidation of a research specialty dedicated to the subject, several studies have concurred to establish some type of consensus in this regard. In different ways, these works argued that the emergence and dissemination of sport have profound relations with the growth process of the cities. Not by chance, sport and modern cities would have shared, in addition, several characteristics in common.

In 1972, Dale Somers presented research about the ascension of sport in New Orleans between 1850 and 1900, highlighting the concern with problems related to the tensions of urban life as one of the facilitators in the popularization of this type of practice in that context.² In 1982, Stephen Hardy's research presented similar conclusions. Hardy affirmed that, in Boston, during the transition between the 19th and the 20th centuries, sports fields were regarded by many contemporaries as social spaces potentially capable of providing discipline and a feeling of belonging in a community to a population increasingly struck by the emergence of a series of transformations consequential of the new urban lifestyle. In this sense, sports would have been part of a collective response to perceptions of social and cultural disorders in the city at that time.³

However, one of the most influential works in this perspective dates back to the end of the 1980s: a sort of synthesis of the formulations referring to the relation between sport and cities. Dedicated to outlining a large panorama about the relations between the ascension of sports and the evolution of North-American urban society, Steve Riess argued that the development of the cities was one of the main factors to influence, perhaps more than any other, the development of sports. For Riess, urban areas offer a set of conditions favorable to this process, among which a large and concentrated mass of population to play, watch, and consume products related to the spectacle of sport. On the other hand, he proceeds, sport also influenced, in the opposite sense, the urbanization process, encouraging different changes in the city's urban fabric.⁴

Either directly or indirectly influenced by works like this, some conclusions regarding sports history in Brazil have generally followed the same argumentative scheme. The aim of the present work was to undertake a critical historiographical review of such studies. In this sense, the historical development of sports in Brazil, in a general manner, destabilizes, at least in certain measure, the theoretical model that postulates the city and urbanization as privileged variables in the historical explanation of the emergence of sports. The Brazilian case, in other words, presents some situations in which the

¹Ralph C. Wilcox, David L. Andrews, "Sport in the city: cultural, economic, and political portraits", In: Ralph C. Wilcox; David L. Andrews, Robert Pitter, Richard L. Irwin. (eds.), *Sporting Dystopias: the making and meanings of urban sport cultures*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 1-16.

²Dale Somers, *The rise of sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1972

³Stephen Hardy, *How Boston played: sport, recreation, and community, 1865-1915*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1982.

⁴Steve Riess, *City games: the evolution of American urban society and the rise of sports*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1989.

blossoming of sports occurred and still occurs in environments little or not at all urbanized, where one cannot identify easily, or not at all, traces of an experience that may be properly called urban.

However, differently than what they appear to be at first sight, the limits of Brazilian research under this aspect, supposing it is more or less pertinent to the criticism I am formulating here, are not only due to an eventual intellectual subordination to theories produced abroad, although this may be part of the problem as well. More than that, the imprisonment of Brazilian studies to historiographical models that inflate the role of the main metropolitan centers in the process of diffusion of modernizing practices and ideas, at the same time underestimating or even ignoring the place of regions that are culturally, economically, and politically peripheral in this process, seems to me one of the major factors, if not the main one, to obliterate a more radical renewal in this research field.

Cities sometimes distant from what is supposed to be the irradiating center of an idea of progress and modernity, little or not urbanized at all, also experienced, albeit in their own way, a sociability linked to sports. This differs, then, from the image of isolation that so characteristically marks represen-

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tations about the Brazilian hinterland. Regions of the hinterland maintained themselves, at times, interconnected as well as articulated to other more populated and more economically dynamic areas, which seems to have favored, in some cases, the emergence of a sports sphere even before any evidence of a urbanizing process.⁵

The city in Brazilian sports historiography

Many Brazilian studies have highlighted the affinity between the development of sports and urbanization in the regions where such process was developed. According to what has been argued, between the final decades of the 19th century but especially from the initial years of the 20th, populations from some Brazilian cities lived a new urban experience, marked by ideals of speed, dynamism, and innovation. This new urban ambiance would have favored, in large measure, the blooming of the taste for sports. Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Salvador, Aracaju, Recife, and Natal are some of the cities whose experiences with sports have been studied from this point of view.⁶

⁵For an analysis regarding the relations between urban and rural areas, see Maria Cristina Cortez Wissenbach, "Da escravidão à liberdade: dimensões de uma privacidade possível", In: Nicolau Secvenko (org.), *História da vida privada no Brasil*, vol. 3, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1998, p. 513-619.

⁶For the history of sport in these cities, as well as its relation with the urbanization process, see the articles in the compilation organized by Victor Melo (org.), *Os sports e as cidades brasileiras: transição dos séculos 19 e 20*, Rio de Janeiro, Apicuri/Faperj, 2010.

Only recently, however, initiatives dedicated to investigating sports history in a more regular and systematic manner in different Brazilian cities, such as the ones mentioned, have been observed. In general, a super-representation of certain regions prevails in contrast to the under-representation of others. According to Cesar Torres' evaluation, who recently performed a review of South American sports historiography, soccer, elite groups or metropolitan regions have received "ample academic attention", while other modalities, the involvement of minority ethnic groups, as well as broad and important geographical regions, have been studied marginally or, at times, even totally neglected.⁷ In this context, the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have been particularly explored in studies that reinforce the comprehension that links the historical development of such practices to processes of urban expansion.

On one hand, São Paulo was the Brazilian city that experienced the highest rates of urban growth on the course of the 20th century. Rio de Janeiro, on the other hand, was the first city whose population surpassed the mark of

However, the role of Rio de Janeiro and other metropolitan centers in the dissemination of sports "throughout Brazil" is at least relative if not entirely questionable

500,000 inhabitants back in 1890, at least 60 years prior, therefore, to the big urbanization outbreak that would cause the phenomenon to repeat itself in other regions of Brazil. Not by chance, Rio remained the country's most populated city until 1960, when it was surpassed, precisely, by São Paulo.⁸

From very early, these two scenarios have been associated with the emergence of the great enthusiasm for sports practices. In Rio de Janeiro, the transition from the 19th to the 20th century witnessed a true "sports fever".⁹ The urban reformation that affected the city starting in 1903 maintained a strong symbolic link to the practice of sports, above all rowing. Mayor Pereira Passos, one of the main political articulators of this reformation, not only encouraged sports practices, but also attended the races regularly.¹⁰ At that time, by amplifying the reach of such transformations, the city also began to be emotionally involved with soccer. Around 1906, there were already more than 40 teams, distributed throughout different neighborhoods and involving different sectors.¹¹

⁷Cesar R. Torres, "South America", In: Steven W. Pope, John Nauright (eds.), *Routledge companion to sports history*, New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 553-569.

⁸For data until 1920 (in the intervals of 1872, 1890, and 1900), see Brasil, *Anuário estatístico do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, Typographia do Departamento de Estatística e Publicidade, 1936, p. 46. For 1960, see Brasil, *Anuário Estatístico do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1960, p. 22.

⁹Nicolau Secvenko, "A capital irradiante: técnica, ritmos e ritos do Rio", In: _____. (org.), *História da vida privada no Brasil*, vol. 3, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1998, p. 513-619.

¹⁰Gilmar Mascarenhas, "Construindo a cidade moderna: a introdução dos esportes na vida urbana do Rio de Janeiro", *Estudos Históricos*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 23, jun. 1999, p. 17-39. (<http://bibliotecadigital.fgv.br/ojs/index.php/reh/article/viewArticle/2086>).

¹¹Leonardo Afonso de Miranda Pereira, "*Footballmania*: uma história social do futebol no Rio de Janeiro, 1902-1938", Rio de Janeiro, Nova Fronteira, 2000.

In São Paulo, likewise, there was news of the foundation of spaces such as the *Clube de Corrida Paulistano* (*Paulistano Athletics Club*), the São Paulo Athletic Club, the skating rink, and the *Velódromo Paulistano* (*Paulistano Speedway*) since 1875, when the city included approximately 31,000 inhabitants.¹² On the course of the first decades of the 20th century, as the city's urban scales grew, the passion for sports intensified. According to Nicolau Sevckenko, from 1919, "the growth of sporting practices and emotions is so palpable that it can be followed almost daily on the sports column, each time larger, and more vibrant with each edition".¹³ Still according to the author, when the city witnessed a "cyclopean multiplication of the scales of urban environments", an unmistakable "metropolization", the *Associação Paulista de Esportes Atléticos* (*Paulista Association of Athletic Sports*) "counted about 150 clubs of regular organization, composed of more than 15,000 young men".¹⁴

The seeming pioneering in the development of sports practices in both cities, and the undeniable reach of such practices in both contexts have favored the understanding that the axis Rio-São Paulo was a privileged place for the impulse of the historical development of sports towards several regions of Brazil. Thus, the historical explanation of the process of diffusion of sports in Brazil postulates that such practices irradiated from regions whose urbanization process was more developed towards those in which there was less progress, so that the historical advent of sports in the hinterland, when it existed, was only a sort of deployment of what had happened in the big centers. In his study on the development of sports in the 19th century, Victor Melo exposed this understanding quite explicitly by affirming that the dissemination of sports throughout Brazil was mediated by the pioneering development of such practices in Rio de Janeiro. Deeming this city as the "locus of great part of the changes" that were under process in Brazil during that period, Melo affirmed that "sport arrived in Rio de Janeiro and, in a certain manner, in Brazil. [...] Ergo, the case of Rio de Janeiro is quite interesting in the understanding of the country as a whole and even of a bit of Latin America".¹⁵

Similar conclusions were and still are reproduced to this day, reinforcing what Evaldo Cabral de Mello, criticizing the centrality attributed to Rio de Janeiro in the evaluation of the nation's destiny, called the "saquarema tradition of Brazilian historiography", "to which everything that happens in Brazil happens through Rio, thanks to Rio, and for Rio" — and this could be applied to the case of sports as well.¹⁶ Fabio Franzini, for instance, referring

¹²Fabio Franzini, "Esporte, cidade e modernidade: São Paulo", In: Victor Melo (org.), *Os sports e as cidades brasileiras: transição dos séculos 19 e 20*, Rio de Janeiro, Apicuri/Faperj, 2010, p. 49-70.

¹³Nicolau Sevckenko, *Orfeu extático na metrópole*, São Paulo, sociedade e cultura nos frementes anos 20, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1992, p. 44.

¹⁴*Ibidem*, p. 19 and 52, respectively.

¹⁵Victor Melo, *Cidadesportiva: primórdios do esporte no Rio de Janeiro*, Rio de Janeiro, Relume-Dumará/Faperj, 2001, p. 14.

¹⁶Evaldo Cabral de Mello, "A festa da espoliação", *Jornal do Commercio*, Pernambuco, 22 de janeiro de 2008, *apud*, José Murilo de Carvalho, "D. João e as histórias dos Brasis". *Revista Brasileira de História*, São Paulo, vol. 28, n. 56, 2008, p. 557. According to the definition offered by the author himself when referring, more specifically, to the constitution of Brazilian federalism, saquarema tradition of Brazilian historiography would be "the historiography of the fluminense court and its epigones in the Republic, to whom the history of our political emancipation is reduced to that of the construction of a unitary State. In this apologetic perspective, Brazil's unity was conceived and fulfilled by a few individuals gifted with great political foresight, who had the fortune of being born in the triangle Rio-São Paulo-Minas [...] - Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *Frei Caneca ou a outra Independência*, In: _____. (org.), *Frei do Amor Divino Caneca*, São Paulo, Editora 34, 2001, p. 16.

to Brazilian soccer, but talking about soccer only in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, affirmed that these cities, “for their condition of political and economic centers of the country, experienced the steps of the popularization of soccer and its consequences more closely and intensely”.¹⁷ Likewise, I myself, dealing with the history of surf, affirmed that:

the genesis of surf in Brazil is found in Rio de Janeiro, which was where the practice reached popularity, generated a market around it, and finally, consolidated a network of actors who, from then on, would adopt the sport as a lifestyle and a milestone formative of their identities.¹⁸

However, the role of Rio de Janeiro and other metropolitan centers in the dissemination of sports “throughout Brazil”, a country with a thriving cultural diversity, besides its well-known continental dimensions, is at least relative if not entirely questionable. These conditions, in fact, prevent even the identification of a single point for the dissemination of sports.¹⁹

The history of the propagation of soccer throughout Rio Grande do Sul is particularly interesting to illustrate how multiple and diversified were the paths for the development of sports in Brazil. According to Gilmar de Jesus, who researched the topic, the diffusion of this modality in that region is “intimately related to the influence of [the] Platina [Bay]”. The author also highlights that the Prata River region was the first in South America to experience a great force surrounding soccer, organizing clubs and federations, besides promoting championships regularly. The reasons for such a precocious receptivity, according to him, are found in the very historical circumstances that affected the Prata regions. At the end of the 19th century, British commercial interests were concentrated there in a particularly acute way. Around 1890, Argentina was already England’s main supplier of raw material, especially meats, grains, and wool. At that time, it is estimated that 40,000 English people lived in Argentina, whose capital, Buenos Aires, had a population composed of 75% of foreigners. In Uruguay, a similar economic prosperity was witnessed thanks, above all, to Montevideo’s intense port commerce.

In 1863, a branch office of the Bank of London was installed in the city, with plans for the construction of railways that were initiated in 1869, spreading to the Prata region. In 1887, cities such as Uruguaiiana, in the southeast part of Rio Grande do Sul, were assisted by *Brazil Great Southern’s* trails. Along with the railway trails there was the customary inflow of English institutions and workers. In a short time, names such as Lockwod Chompsom

¹⁷Fabio Franzini, *Corações na ponta da chuteira: capítulos iniciais do futebol brasileiro (1919-1938)*, Rio de Janeiro, DP&A, 2003, p. 11.

¹⁸Cleber Dias, “O surfe e a moderna tradição brasileira”. *Movimento*, Porto Alegre, v. 15, n. 4, 2009, p. 258 (<http://seer.ufrgs.br/Movimento/article/view/5537>). For self-criticism drawing on the case of surf in Salvador, which developed without any references whatsoever to the episodes in Rio de Janeiro, see Cleber Dias, “Vaca longa: re-pensando a historiografia brasileira do esporte a partir do surfe na Bahia”. *Recordes*, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 4, n. 2, 2011 (http://www.sport.ifcs.ufrj.br/recordes/pdf/recordesV4N2_2011_21.pdf).

¹⁹In Brazil, several works by geographer Gilmar Mascarenhas de Jesus have underlined this multiplicity of paths towards development, specifically that of soccer in the country, which perhaps might be extended, with usefulness, to the study of other modalities. As an example, see Gilmar Mascarenhas de Jesus, “A via platina da introdução do futebol no Rio Grande do Sul. *Lecturas*”, Buenos Aires, año 5, n. 26, 2000.

would lead initiatives such as the creation of the Esporte Clube Uruguaiana (Uruguaiana Sport Club).²⁰

In other terms, the case of Belém is also quite illustrative of the plurality of forms and paths for the dissemination of sports throughout Brazil. Since the 1870s, the region had experienced progressive urban growth due to the economic exploration of rubber. In 1875, Pará produced 1,632 tons a year, a number that increased to more than 7,700 tons in 1900, when the product began to represent more than 20% of all Brazilian exportation, second only to coffee. In the 1890s, rubber's golden period, the Brazilian production, almost entirely from Pará, represented 60% of the world's production.²¹

Economic dynamism, together with natural catastrophes such as the great northeast droughts from 1887 to 1890, attracted a large number of people to the region. On one hand, workers going to Pará in search of better life conditions; on the other, owners of foreign capital, settling in the region because they found a profitable enterprise in the rubber business, thus concurring to the atmosphere of prosperity that affected the city. "It is said that, in Belém or Manaus, cigars were lighted with bills of 500 mil-réis, that champagne was drunk as water, that any toothache was cured in Europe."²²

Particularly, the ties between Pará and England — the main importer of rubber at the time - were strengthened, which favored the assimilation of new ideas and practices, sports among them. Not by chance, the first sport practices had already been registered in Belém since the end of the 19th century. More than experiencing a certain simultaneity with the development of sports in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in Belém, sports were alien to any influences from these cities. In fact, London and Paris functioned as poles of attraction to the sporting ambitions of Pará's elites, interested, after all, in shaping their models of civility. In 1889, at the moment of the foundation of the Pará Sport Club, before a "numerous and chosen" public, local newspapers toasted the initiative as a "splendid idea". According to what was said, "this diversion [sports], so in vogue in Paris and London, and already so introduced into education, could not be forgotten in Pará's capital". In order to encourage the protagonists of the initiative, Patroni, a writer for the newspaper *O Liberal do Pará (Pará's Liberal)*, hurried in resorting to Paris' examples. In his words,

the Racing-Club, in the Boulogne Park, in Paris, started off with only 10 or 12 members, and this number rose to 500 shortly after. With work and perseverance, the difficulties that appear in the beginning of any enterprise are overcome. Onward, then!²³

From then on, news about sports events in Paris, London or New York would be featured regularly on the pages of Pará's newspapers. However, the same cannot be said about sports news in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo. In order

²⁰Gilmar Mascarenhas de Jesus, "A via platina da introdução do futebol no Rio Grande do Sul". *Lecturas*, Buenos Aires, año 5, n. 26, 2000.

²¹Ana Maria Daou, *A belle époque amazônica*, Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 2008.

²²Maria Lígia Coelho Prado, Maria Helena Rolim Cappelato, "A borracha na economia brasileira da Primeira República". In: Sergio Buarque De Holanda (dir.), *História geral da civilização brasileira*, tomo III, vol. 1, 8. ed. Rio de Janeiro, Bertrand Brasil, 1989, p. 300.

²³Patroni, "Na arena", *O liberal do Pará*, Belém, 02 out. 1889, n. 222, p. 3.

to measure such differences, it suffices to mention that, in 1904, the library at the Sport-Club's head office housed the subscription of 27 periodicals, out of which only two were from Rio de Janeiro. The remainder, except four that were published in Pará's capital, came from Europe: ten from France, five from England, three from Portugal, two from Germany, and one from Spain.²⁴

Situations such as this, in which sport blooms simultaneously or even independently of Rio de Janeiro's or São Paulo's influences are also registered and well-documented in Recife, Salvador, and São Luís.²⁵

Sport and rurality in Brazil's hinterland

Besides the multiplicity of forms and paths for the dissemination of sports in Brazil, the relativization of the influence of the big metropolitan centers in this process and the causal explicative role of urbanization can also be seriously reevaluated. Up to this day, cities such as Jutaí, Amaturá, Olivença, Eirunepé, Carauari or Manacapuru, in Amazonas, among many others, with population under 10,000 inhabitants and a low population density if compared to

London and Paris functioned as poles of attraction to the sporting ambitions of Pará's elites, interested in shaping their models of civility

the largest Brazilian metropolises, get to experience, even so, the great enthusiasm and involvement with the practice of sports. Every year, the populations of these cities mobilize themselves to send their teams to the Rios Cup, a competition organized by the Federação Amazonense de Futebol (Amazonian Soccer Federation) since 1992. Lasting months, the games of this championship gather hundreds of players from cities sometimes separated by more than 20 hours by boat from Manaus, which is the closest metropolitan region. The essentially rural condition of such places, however, seems neither to prevent nor impair the development of a taste for sports, as the success and longevity of the Rios Cup proves, not to mention other competitions.²⁶

In fact, the very understanding of the classification of these "cities" may be a reason for controversy. Although officially classified as "urban",

²⁴Sport-Club do Pará, *Relatório apresentado pela Directoria do Sport-Club do Pará em sessão de Assembleia Geral de 30 de janeiro de 1904*, Belém, Secção de Obras d'A Província do Pará, 1904.

²⁵See Givanildo Alves, *História do futebol em Pernambuco*, 2 ed., Recife, Bagaço, 1998; Coriolano Pereira Rocha Junior, Fernando Reis do E. Santo, "Futebol em Salvador: o início de uma história (1899-1920)", *Movimento*, Porto Alegre, vol. 17, n. 3, 2011, p. 79-95 (<http://seer.ufrgs.br/Movimento/article/view/17683>); Claunísio Amorim Carvalho, *Terra, grama e paralelepípedos: os primeiros tempos do futebol em São Luís (1906-1930)*, São Luís, Café & Lápis, 2009. Moreover, many of the cities in the north and in the northeast established a strong reciprocity among themselves. Around the beginning of the 1920s, competitions and festivals among teams of Recife, Belém, Manaus, São Luís, and Parnaíba, in Piauí, were common.

²⁶For a description of the Rios Cup, see Mario Magalhães, *Viagem ao país do futebol*, São Paulo, DBA Artes Gráficas, 1998. Another good example would be the Soccer Match Championship of Amazonas, popularly known as "Peladão". Occurring since 1973, the tournament currently gathers more than 27,000 players, distributed into 1,000 teams, who compete in 80 soccer fields for six months (see Alex Bellos, *Futebol: o Brasil em campo*, Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar, 2002, especially chapter 1).

they are, at most, dwelling zones effectively distant from any traces of a social experience appropriately classifiable in such terms. José Eli da Veiga presented interesting questions in this sense, criticizing the definition of city adopted by the census in Brazil since 1938, when decree 311 established, in its third article, that the main towns of the municipalities would always be considered “cities”, regardless of their function, size or situation. Since then, one of the effects of this decree, according to the author, has been the distortion of the real proportions between the Brazilian population that lives in the countryside and the one that lives in urban areas.

According to the definition usually adopted in Brazilian census, in 2000, “cities” such as Vitória do Jari, in Amapá, with a population of less than 10,000 people and demographic density of 0.3 inhabitant per square kilometer, are officially classified as urban areas. If one adopts, however, other criteria, such as those of the Cooperation and Economic Development Organization, which prescribes a minimum density of 150 inhabitants per square kilometer in order to define an urban area, only 411 of the 5,507 Brazilian towns would fit into these terms, decreasing the index of the Brazilian population that lives in “cities” by at least 10%.²⁷

If data that belong to the end of the 20th century can be relativized in these terms, what to say of the periods previous to the outbreak of urbanization that hit the country after 1950? For 1940, for instance, already under the criteria of definition of city prescribed by decree 311, official data registered 31% of the Brazilian population living in rural zones. At that time, sports in general, and soccer in particular, were phenomena widely disseminated throughout almost the entire country. In light of the theoretical model that links the development of sports to the city and to urbanization, in this context, there would be two possibilities basically: either this effervescence for sports did not affect 31% of the Brazilian population, or the theoretical model did not entirely apply to Brazil.

The available historiography in this respect is extremely limited, given that rural regions of the hinterland, in general, have practically not been studied yet. In this context, a case such as that of Goiás illustrates the possibilities or even the necessity of a reevaluation of the theoretical relations established between sport and city.

In Goiás, the first registers of sporting practices in the region, namely the occurrence of soccer games, date back to the mid-1910s. At that moment, there was news of matches in at least four cities: Pirenópolis, Catalão, Anápolis, and Goiás, the state’s capital.²⁸ Some of them experienced a leap of development then, above all Anápolis and even more Catalão — Goiás’ most populated city for some time. The proximity with cities of the Minas Gerais Triangle, assisted by the railways of the *Companhia Mogiana de Estradas de Ferro (Mogi’s Railway Company)* since 1889, stimulated Catalão’s growth greatly. In 1910, three years prior to the arrival of the railways, the city’s newspapers already reported “the constant arrival of new people”, and even “the lack of houses to

²⁷José Eli da Veiga, *Cidades imaginárias: o Brasil é menos urbano do que se imagina*, Campinas, Autores Associados, 2002.

²⁸Cleber Dias, “Primórdios do futebol em Goiás, 1907-1936”. *Revista de História Regional*, Maringá, vol. 18, n. 1, in press.

rent”, due to the approximation of the railways, in accordance with what the contemporaries diagnosed.²⁹

The beginning of the activities of the *Estrada de Ferro Goiás*, in 1913, played a fundamental role in a series of transformations. From 1917 on, progressive growth would be registered in the exportation index of agricultural and pastoral products in Goiás. In 1920, this state was the fourth major rice producer in Brazil. At the same time, the population of the region came to grow beyond the national average in this period. Alterations in the behavioral standards of the region would soon be noticed.³⁰ In 1913, the Catalan Soccer Club was founded, one of the first sports teams to be created more formally in the region. Nine years later, in 1922, the *Leão do Cerrado*, as the club was known, inaugurated its sports plaza.

However much these transformations weigh, remarkable in many aspects, Goiás was still a fundamentally rural region. At the beginning of 1930, when more than 130 automobiles were counted in the state — apparatuses almost always regarded as an unmistakable indication of progress and modernity — the existence of at least 150 oxcarts in each of the towns of Goiás was known.³¹ Not by chance, the effort made by the public power to amplify Goiás’ railway fabric was followed by constant concern about the damage caused by the heavy wooden wheels of the oxcarts.³²

Up until the advanced years of the 20th century, the forms of labor occupation prevalent in the region, excluding unpaid domestic activities, unemployment or people occupied in “undefined conditions”, who summed up 52% altogether, still testified to the rural nature of life in Goiás. According to the demographic and economic data from the 1940 census, over 38% of the economically active population was employed in jobs directly linked to agriculture and livestock tending. Although considered different activities, more modern and symbolically linked to the urban environment of the cities, such as the “merchandise commerce” or the sector of “transportation and communication”, responsible for slightly less than 4% of the labor occupations in Goiás, workers were found employed, roughly, in the “transportation by animal traction” or in the “sale of food and agricultural products.”³³ Thus, it is not without reason that some cities in Goiás would keep on being represented, for a long time to come, as “places of mud and dust”, “without attractions of urban caliber”, with its characteristic constructions erected with “walls of mud adobe, coated with plaster here and there, made of sand mixed with fresh cow shit”³⁴

Despite that, the organization of sports practices did not cease to be conducted. From the 1920s on, soccer games or, in some cases, other sports practices such as athletics, were registered in Natividade, Porto Nacional, Jaraguá, Ipameri, Morrinhos, Santa Rita, Itumbiara, Bela Vista, Leopoldo de Bulhões, Buriti Alegre, Rio Verde, and Rio Bonito; some of them were distant from the

²⁹*Gazeta de Catalão*, 20 dez. 1910, *apud*, Antônio Miguel Jorge Chaud, *Memorial do Catalão*, Goiânia, Editora do Autor, 2000.

³⁰Barsanufu Gomes Borges, *O despertar dos dormentes*, Goiânia, Editora da Universidade Federal de Goiás, 1990; Ana Lúcia da Silva, *A revolução de 30 em Goiás*, 2 ed., Goiânia, Cànone, 2005.

³¹Wilson Cavalcanti Nogueira, *Pires do Rio: marco da historia de Goiás*, Goiânia, Roriz, 1977, p. 33.

³²Nova estrada para carro de bois. *Correio Oficial*, Goyaz, 04 de setembro de 1920, n. 287, p. 11.

³³Brasil, *Recenseamento geral do Brasil*, vol. 21, Rio de Janeiro, Serviço Gráfico do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1952, p. 94.

³⁴Joaquim Rosa, *Por esse Goiás afora*, Goiânia, Cultura Goiana, 1974, *passim*.

radius of transformation that affected the State. More than that, sports competitions among teams of these cities agitated their populations' daily life more and more.³⁵

In this environment, the assimilation of modern practices, such as sports, was pervaded by innumerable traditional customs and habits. Trips for soccer matches, besides relying simultaneously on horses and automobiles, combining in this way the old and the modern, happened with special joy and enthusiasm during traditional festivities and pilgrimages, namely those of São João, Bom Jesus, and Divino Espírito Santo.³⁶

Perhaps the most pragmatic case on the possibilities of sports development in non-urban situations was that of the indigenous people, who dedicated themselves passionately to sports, especially soccer.³⁷ In Goiás, specifically, the *Protection Service to Indigenous People*, created in 1910, established, in 1927, the Indigenous Redemption Post, in the island of Bananal, located at the border between Mato Grosso and the north of Goiás (currently Tocantins). Darcy Bandeira de Mello, a worker at the post and former practitioner of swimming, rowing, athletics, horse riding, and shooting at the *Associação Atlética de São Paulo (São Paulo Athletic Association)* started animating the practice of sports among the "hinterland woodsmen", particularly swimming, water polo, and soccer. Lauro de Alencar Castello Branco, a teacher at the boys' school that functioned there, also dedicated himself with great interest to the organization of sports in the island.³⁸

Around 1929, official reports related the existence of the Esporte Clube Índio Carajá (Carajá Indigenous Sport Club), which had accomplished 31 practices and seven official games.³⁹ Rapidly, these matches mobilized the attention not only of the residents of the post, which included indigenous and white people, but also of the media and others also interested, who saw in them a "curious cultural initiative", according to Durval Borges' words.⁴⁰

Final considerations

The criticism I presented regarding urbanization and the growth of the cities as an explaining variable of the historical emergence of sports does not intend to deny the correlation between both entities: sports and the cities. In many situations, both phenomena were indeed historically related, as several

³⁵See Cleber Dias, *Primórdios do futebol em Goiás, 1907-1936*, *Revista de História Regional, Maringá*, vol. 18, n. 1, no prelo

³⁶*Ibidem*.

³⁷In 1927, in a visit to the Guarani village of Bananal, in the inner portion of the state of São Paulo, anthropologist Helbert Baldus registered the existence of a "soccer field that would satisfy any white sport club. Some even have uniforms and soccer shoes" (Herbert Baldus, "Ligeiras notas sobre os índios Guarani do litoral paulista", *Revista do Museu Paulista*, São Paulo, vol. 16, 1929, p. 88). Between 1958 and 1964, conducting field work among the Xavantes, in Mato Grosso, David Maybury-Lewis also registered "the passion, or one can even say, the addiction to soccer". According to him, already at that time, "everyone played, young and old, and all the time" ((David Maybury-Lewis, *A sociedade xavante*, Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Alves, 1984, p. 61). For a synthesis of the most recent ethnographic registers about indigenous involvement with soccer, see Cleber Dias, *Esporte, lazer e culturas tradicionais*, In: Ana Márcia Silva; José Luiz Cirqueira Falcão; Tatiana Tucunduva (orgs.), *Práticas corporais em comunidades quilombolas de Goiás*, Goiânia, Editora da PUC/GO, 2011, p. 93-117.

³⁸See Cleber Dias, "A Igreja, o Estado e a bola: história do esporte entre os índios do Brasil Central". *Pensar a Prática*, Goiânia, vol. 15, n. 1, 2012, p. 148-175 (<http://www.revistas.ufg.br/index.php/fef/article/view/17069>).

³⁹Manuel Silvino Bandeira de Mello, *Relatório apresentado ao Snr. Tenente-Coronel Alencarliense Fernandes da Costa*, Goiás, Ministério da Agricultura, Indústria e Comércio, 1931, parte segunda, quadro número 23, s.p.

⁴⁰Durval Rosa Sarmiento Borges, *Rio Araguaia: corpo e alma*, São Paulo, Ibrasa, 1986, p. 360.

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studies show. Such elements, however, were not necessarily present in all situations, as the present work endeavored to show. The blooming of sports practices in environments little or not at all urbanized did not even suffer significant influences from metropolitan centers at times. In these cases, other regions of the hinterland propelled the growth of sport.

But what would be, then, the aspects that offer causal explanations to these cases besides urbanization? A few alternative hypotheses are perhaps possible. However, less than replacing one “theory” with another, maybe it would be proper simply to abandon big impulses of generalization, with the dedication, in lieu of that, to the explanation of particular situations, within their own specificities, thus valuing the singularity of historical facts. The causal historical explanation, contrary to the explicative model used in Natural Sciences, does not depend on grand theories and general enunciations. Moreover, in Human Sciences, in general, even the consensual recognition of the existence of “theories” is controversial.⁴¹ Historical theories, as Isaiah Berlin said well, never offered historians any wings to speedily transpose large territories. Instead, Berlin affirmed,

we continue to trust in the ones who spent their lives building up their knowledge from fragments of real evidence [...] no matter how strange the pattern or even without the conscience of any pattern whatsoever.⁴²

⁴¹See Luis de Gusmão, *O fetichismo do conceito: conhecimento teórico na investigação social*. Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2012.

⁴²Isaiah Berlin, *O sentido da realidade*, Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1999, p. 24.