

## KEYS TO THE BEGINNING OF THE SPORTS DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN PORTUGAL (1974-1982)

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### **Abstract**

From a historical perspective, at the end of the Portuguese dictatorship (1926-1974), a framework of remarkable changes was set up, which enhanced the modernization of society and the dissemination of an up-to-then scarcely generalized sports phenomenon among the population. Despite the political and social instability particular to the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* (1974-1976), this first post-dictatorial period permitted some advance in the field of sports, mainly because of initiatives from associativism and related to the adoption of a sport for all model. The inflection point regarding the development of the sports issue took place when the first constitutional governments were formed and the *Constituição da República Portuguesa* (1976) was passed. From then, the implementation of decentralized sports policies allowed for its transformation towards a more generalized, diversified, and balanced model.

**Keywords:** political transition; sports democratization; Portugal.

### **Resumo**

**Chaves para o começo do processo de democratização dos esportes em Portugal.**

De uma perspectiva histórica, no final da ditadura Portuguesa (1926-1974), um quadro de mudanças notáveis foi criado, o que aprimorou a modernização da sociedade

e a difusão de um fenômeno desportivo até então pouco generalizado entre a população. Apesar da instabilidade política e social, particular ao processo revolucionário em curso (1974-1976), este primeiro período pós-ditatorial permitiu algum avanço no campo dos esportes, principalmente por causa de iniciativas de associativismo e relacionadas com a adoção de um modelo de esporte para todos. O ponto de inflexão em relação ao desenvolvimento do tema dos esportes ocorreu quando os primeiros governos constitucionais foram formados e a Constituição da República Portuguesa (1976) foi aprovada. A partir de então, a implementação de políticas desportivas descentralizadas permitiu a sua transformação para um modelo mais generalizado, diversificado e equilibrado.

**Palavras-chave:** transição política; democratização nos esportes; Portugal.

## 1. Introduction

Within the framework of the third democratizing wave, in spring 1974, Portugal started a leading change in the governmental model after having undergone the negative consequences of a dictatorial regime, such as Spain and Greece (HUNTINGTON, 1994, p. 17; TUSELL, 1996, p. 110; FUSI, 1997, p. 38).

The *coup d'état* on 25 April 1974, which put an end to the dictatorship that had begun on 28 May 1926, known as *Estado Novo* since 1933 (1933-1974), made it possible to develop the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* (PREM) with a strong ground-breaking nature (1974-1976) and the subsequent formation of the first constitutional governments. This post-dictatorial period enhanced the modernization of society and, as a result, the development and dissemination of sports, which at that moment were in a much poorer situation than in other European countries. It was in the mid-70s onwards when, by implementing a sports policy focused on the dissemination of sports among the Portuguese population, the existing deficit started to decrease gradually, in the current context of freedom and modernization, and the adoption of sports habits by the population.

This article aims at highlighting some of the most outstanding elements that enhanced and account for the change in the Portuguese sports phenomenon and its real

limitations during the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* (1974-1976) and the first constitutional governments, which led to the 80s and the first revision, in 1982, of the *Constituição da República Portuguesa* (1976).

## **2. Portuguese Sport and Authoritarianism: From *Ditadura militar* (1926-1933) to *Estado Novo* (1933-1974)**

Despite the institutionalization of the Portuguese sports system that started in 1926 with the creation of such bodies as the *Organização Nacional da Mocidade Portuguesa* (1936), the *Instituto Nacional de Educação Física* (1940) or the *Direcção Geral da Educação Física, Desportos e Saúde Escolar* (1942), this phenomenon had a very secondary role among the priorities of the dictatorship (CARVALHO, 1975, p. 13). During this long period, characterized by the lack of continuity and periods of crisis, as it happened at the international level, there was not a remarkable development of sports, with a great gap existing between Portuguese sports entities and those in more developed European countries (DIAS & FERREIRA, 2000, p. 61). In this sense, while many European countries promoted an increased quality of life and generalized sports practice, with governments taking on more responsibility towards the citizens as implied by the gradual adoption of a Welfare State model from 1945, in Portugal this process started some decades later.

In turn, the Portuguese dictatorship's greater interventionism influenced sports associativism remarkably as these associations were considered to be some kind of resistance to power (CARVALHO, 1978, p. 32). In this sense, the most institutionally promoted dimension was that of show sports –particularlyly football – to the detriment of sports practice limited to the most privileged classes (ROGADO, 1998, p. 27).

After António Oliveira Salazar's exoneration at the end of 1968, who had been leading the *Estado Novo* since 1933, his successor, Marcelo Caetano, proved to be unable to regenerate a dictatorship in full organizational and social decline, and resigned to disappearing. At the sports level, the impossibility to face up to the regime's inertia also became apparent, with this period being characterized by football scandals, unease in sports clubs, non-existence of real school sports, or the lowest percentage of athletes in all Europe (CARVALHO, 1975, p. 7).

In this way, the difficult situation of sports was another example of the impossibility to prevent the Portuguese dictatorial regime from falling down or to propose any kind of alternative. Finally, on 25 April 1974, a coup d'état took place, led by the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (MFA), which, in the shape of a political-military breakdown, allowed the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* to begin (ROSAS, 1999, p. 27).

### **3. *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* (1974-1976): Breaking Away from the Past in a Highly Unstable Context**

In the period after the Carnation Revolution, there were up to six provisional governments and two attempted coups d'état, in a context of high economic instability as a result of the international crisis and the effects of decolonization (PEREIRA, 2002, p. 39). This period ended with the passing of the *Constituição da República Portuguesa* -25 April 1976- and the formation of the *I Governo Constitucional* -23 July 1976- (CARVALHO, 2002, p. 23). Certainly, the events of 25 April 1974 led to a situation of political breakdown, which sped up the gradual modification of habits and mentality of

the population towards a better quality of life, already observed in the last years of dictatorship (FERREIRA, 1994, p. 140).

Sport, far from keeping away from these changes, started its transformation towards a less exclusivist concept, and therefore closer to the concept of sport for all (DIAS & FERREIRA, 2000, p. 62), in keeping with the fact that a high percentage of population had become aware of the fact that access to sports was a right and a key factor to improve their quality of life (CARVALHO, 1994, p. 106). Since then, the Portuguese sports structures began to open up while entities created by the *Estado Novo* started to disappear, and some discourse emerged on the need to guarantee the right to sport for all the citizens and the autonomy of sports associations (MARIVOET, 1998, p. 57).

Nevertheless, the first expected changes in Portuguese sports policies were completely conditioned by the context of instability and political-social upheavals particular to this period (DIAS & FERREIRA, 2000, p. 75). A good example can be the little success of some initiatives in the 1974-1976 period such as the *Encontro Nacional do Desporto*, the *Juvento* and the *Movimento Voluntário Desportivo* (PIRES, 2005, p. 16). Thus, the evolution of the sports phenomenon during this first post-dictatorial period was mainly due to the modernization and interest of society, rather than to action by the highest political sports officers. In this sense, the role of the Portuguese sports associativism is outstanding, a movement that, after the passing of Government Decree 594/74, on the right to freedom of association (MALVEIRO, 1996, p. 5), witnessed how 942 clubs were newly created throughout the country from 1975 to the first semester of 1978, as well as their progressive and more and more homogeneous allocation. Moreover, during this first post-dictatorial period, the role of neighbourhood and

workers' associations was also crucial, often in collaboration with the *Direcção Geral dos Desportos* (DGD), for the population's access to sports practice (ROSÁRIO, 1994, p. 353). Another sign of this transformation undergone by sport at that time was the emergence and spread of non-professional races, in parallel to the international success of Portuguese athlete Carlos Lopes and the DGD campaign to promote athletics (PIRES, 2005, p. 16).

In this context, there were also some significant changes in Physical Education, such as the recognition and parity of PE teachers with regard to the other teachers (ROSÁRIO, 1994, p. 313). The climax of this advance was the transformation, in 1975, of the INEFs (*Instituto Nacional de Educação Física*) of Lisbon and Porto into ISEFs (*Instituto Superior de Educação Física*), becoming integrated into the *Universidade Técnica de Lisboa* and the *Universidade de Porto*, respectively (PEREIRA, 2001, p. 83), after many and continuous claims by students, teachers and professionals of that sector. This circumstance was of the utmost importance to ensure the progressive labour integration of qualified professionals into the different sports sectors of the country.

Despite these initiatives in the first post-dictatorial period, which implied some advance in sports access for Portuguese population, the fact is that the great regional imbalances and asymmetries that existed due to the *Estado Novo* sports policy could not be solved (ROSÁRIO, 1994, p. 310). It was particularly from 1976, together with a bigger concern about sports shortages in many sectors of society, when the mainly elitist model developed into a mass model with sport for all as the key referent (PEREIRA, 2001, p. 67).

#### **4. Transformations of Portuguese Sport in the First Constitutional Governments of the *II República Portuguesa* (1976-1983)**

On 23 July 1976, the *I Governo Constitucional* was set up with Mário Soares as prime minister, after Ramalho Eanes –president of the Republic from 1976 to 1986- had won the presidential elections as leader of the *Partido Socialista* on 27 June of that same year, thus breaking away from the political-ideological stance that had existed since the Carnation Revolution.

In the field of sports, this new period was characterized by the implementation of policies that promoted the development of sport throughout the country. The adoption of a group of measures such as the inclusion of this phenomenon in the constitutional text, the creation of the *Instituto Nacional de Desportos*, the modernization and democratization of associativism, as well as the process of political decentralization through the *Câmaras Municipais*, led to the establishment of the foundations for the development of a sports democratization process among the Portuguese population. In this way, sport was finally incorporated into the dynamics of expansion and development already present in other areas of society.

##### **4.1. Constitutionalization of Sport and Consequences for the Country's Sports Reality**

The policy of the *I Governo Constitucional* of President Ramalho Eanes was marked by the passing of the *Constituição da República Portuguesa* by the *Assembleia Constituinte* in April 1976, which implied the constitutionalization of sport through Article 79 (MARQUES, 1998, p. 611). This article stated specifically the recognition of the citizens' right to physical culture and sports by the State, with its promotion and

dissemination being the State's concern (ASSEMBLEIA CONSTITUINTE, 1976). Article 46 was also important, which recognized the citizens' right to freely set up associations without state impediments or impositions (MEIRIM, 2002, p. 263), a key element for the sports system to be structured around these new guidelines.

Indeed, during the second half of the 70s, the sports policy of the successive constitutional governments focused on recognizing the autonomy of the sports association movement, by providing sports organizations in turn with a substantial part of the financial means they needed to develop and promote sport among the population (MALVEIRO & MARIVOET, 2002, p. 142). At the same time, they took on responsibility for improving and increasing the network of sports facilities, legislated on prevention of violence in sports and drug use control, and got involved in the training of sports professionals. The core of the measures implemented since then and coordinated by the *Conselho Superior de Desportos* was the promotion of sport at schools and the support to sports entities, which also implied the transformation of such bodies as the *Direcção-Geral dos Desportos*, the *Fundo do Fomento do Desporto* or the *Comité Olímpico Português* (DIAS & FERREIRA, 2000, p. 66).

Another essential aspect was the decentralization of the government action towards wider competences and action means of municipalities (SOUSA, 1988, p. 53), shown in the passing of Act 1/79, which enabled the transfer of many competences, such as sports ones among others, to autarchic entities, with special attention to the *Câmaras Municipais*. In this sense, from the *I Governo Constitucional* and gradually during the second half of the 70s, the aforementioned *Câmaras* moved forward towards the creation of *Conselhos Desportivos Municipais*. This fact implied an increase in local involvement with this issue, as other social services were resolved and improved. Their



actions were enhanced by the *Direcção Geral dos Desportos*, which, aware of the fact that most *Câmaras* had not enough means, supported them through a sports outlying technician, by lending or transferring sports facilities or equipment, and even through subsidies to build sports facilities.

During all this period, the development of these measures substantially modified the Portuguese sports scene, contributing in a decisive manner to the sports democratization process of the country. Nevertheless, the dictatorial sports legacy did not allow the Portuguese sports development to stop being the lowest in Europe in the 80s (ENCONTRO DE QUADROS DO PCP, 1985, p. 189). Some of the most important shortages referred to the spread of sport among the population with disabilities, the elderly, or children. The DGD, aware of it, started different programs to promote sport addressed at these specific groups, which also had the aim of promoting athletics races by building 153 maintenance tracks allocated in the 22 Portuguese districts in 1979 (DIRECÇÃO-GERAL DOS DESPORTOS, 1980, p. 174). With such measures as the latter, the dynamics of sports practice away from federation structures and a mainly competitive model, already present in society, were stressed (ROSÁRIO, 1994, p. 290 & 483). As regards federated sport, the limited participation of women is remarkable – in the 77/78 season, they represented only 12% of all athletes-, as well as the little diversification regarding the most practised sports –37% of licences belonged to football.

With regard to the number of sports facilities, there was also a scarcely homogeneous allocation throughout the land, with the districts of Lisbon (20.6%), Porto (11.1%) and Santarém (7.9%) being the most outstanding. In keeping with the most practised sports, the largest number of facilities corresponded to football pitches, gyms,

and outdoor multi-purpose buildings (DIRECÇÃO-GERAL DOS DESPORTOS, 1980, p. 187). The country's educational centres also had significant shortages in relation to facilities available, which conditioned giving Physical Education.

At a political level, the increasing pressure by the opposition and the more and more noticeable economic problems forced the *Partido Socialista* to negotiate, at the end of 1977, with the *Centro Democrático Social*, thus forming, on 23 February 1978, the *II Governo Constitucional* with members of both parties and Mário Soares as prime minister, as well.

Among the sports organizations created from that moment, the *Instituto Nacional de Desportos* (IND) stands out, directly dependent on the *Direcção Geral* and focused on establishing the foundations for a real policy to promote the highest participation of population in sports (DIAS & FERREIRA, 2000, p. 67). With the aim of getting closer to those sectors with greater shortages in this sense, from 1978 the IND launched sports promotion programs throughout the country among population with disabilities and the elderly. Also in 1978, the *1º Manual de Construção de Instalações Desportivas* was published, which was used as a support for the different administrations and sports organizations to build sports facilities, undoubtedly a key element for the country's sports development (DIRECÇÃO-GERAL DOS DESPORTOS, 1978).

Another remarkable aspect was the gradual democratization of many among the existing sports in the country after the dictatorship disappeared. In this process, the promotion campaigns by the DGD and some sports federations were very important. Thus, they achieved that up to 1,977 5-to-12-year-old children played roller hockey after a campaign known as *Promoção* (GOUVERIA, 2002, p. 80) or that, during 1981,

there were about 6,700 rugby players as a result of the *Plano de Desenvolvimento do Rugby Juvenil*, in force from 1975 to 1982 (CORDOVIL, 1985, p. 18). Another sport that also stood out thanks to its promotion was athletics, for example with the campaign *Atletismo à Porta de Casa*. This initiative, which started in 1975, together with the sports success of athlete Carlos Lopes, enabled the creation of new clubs and the emergence of new athletes in all the country (CARDOSO, 2001, p. 46), remarkably resulting in the proliferation of non-professional races, considered to be a priority in order to promote the expansion of this sport. The progressive diversification of sports practice in the clubs, which previously had focussed mainly on one sport –particularly, football- was also significant for the development of the different sports. This circumstance stressed the increasing popularity of other sports such as handball, basketball, roller hockey, skating, athletics, gymnastics, or cycling (MARQUES, 1980, p. 97).

The many arguments and disagreements within the *II Governo Constitucional* led the two political parties that made it up to dissolve their agreement and Mário Soárez to resign, in August 1978. From then and until December 1979, three more constitutional governments were formed, aside from the political parties, but with participation of party members. These five governments managed to stabilize, more or less, the political situation of the country, and to promote its economic recovery. It was not until 3 January 1980 when the *VI Governo Constitucional* could be formed, with a majority by the coalition *Aliança Democrática* and Francisco Sá Carneiro as prime minister. His sudden death led to the VII (1981) and VIII (1981-1983) constitutional governments, both headed by prime minister Francisco Pinto Balsemão. In this context, with a revision of the *Constituição da República Portuguesa* in 1982, its ideological

content was reduced, the economic system of the country was made more flexible, and the structures of political power were redefined, with the disappearance of the *Conselho da Revolução* and the creation of the *Tribunal Constitucional*.

## 5. Conclusions

Despite the social and economic transformation that Portugal underwent particularly from the 60s, the fact is that the sports reality of the country was still negative and uneven. The *Estado Novo*, far from contributing to the process of Portuguese sports democratization, was characterized by its little interest in this phenomenon, affecting sports development and generalization among the population.

After the Carnation Revolution, the political breakdown particular to the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso* (1974-1976) implied a transformation of the sports issue towards a sport for all model, conditioned by the context of high political and social instability at that moment. In this sense, the role of the association movement – not only sports associations- is outstanding, as well as the advances in the field of Physical Education with the transformation of the INEFs of Lisbon and Porto into ISEFs, and the remarkable increase in the number of sports clubs after Government Decree 594/74, on the right to freedom of association. Despite these improvements, during the first post-dictatorial period, there were still significant imbalance and limitations concerning the population's access to sports.

After the passing of the *Constituição da República Portuguesa* (1976), the successive constitutional governments were characterized by the implementation of sports policies that promoted its expansion and development in the entire country, often in collaboration with the association movement. Some of the most significant actions

focused on sports promotion –with special attention to specific groups-, support to initiatives of the association movement, training of professionals, or building and improving sports facilities. These actions were developed at the same time as the transformation and creation of new entities such as the *Instituto Nacional de Desportos* (IND), as well as the gradual decentralization of the government action through the *Câmaras Municipais*.

Thus, the set of actions that took place in the second half of the 70s contributed to the sports democratization of the country and to a greater awareness of its importance among the citizens. Nevertheless, at the end of this decade, there were still important shortages concerning a diversified sports practice among the different sectors of the population, the number, diversity and allocation of sports facilities, or the status and quality of Physical Education given in Portuguese educational centres.

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