

SPORTS AND RELIGION IN ALBANIA: VIEWPOINT IN THE STUDENTS LINE

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SUMMARY

This article focuses on the relation between religious and sports institutions, which have similarities and interweave with each other. These institutions contribute to the society through their control and integration functions. Thus, favourable conditions might be created, which would alleviate the contradictions, disagreements and stress of the individuals. These issues are dealt with in the context of university youth. The relation of sports activity to religious belief is analysed using sociological study tools such as surveys, interviews and questionnaires. A total of 520 subjects, mostly (91%) students from the University of Tirana responded in relation to individual, cultural and social factors. Belief might influence individuals and social groups, providing a powerful impact on cultural ideology and relationships. Similarly, various sports activities are linked to cultural practices with different histories, traditions and aims. Sport and religion may be offered to the young generation as forms of equilibrium establishment for the individual who experiences the distressful pace of modern life.

Key words: Religious belief, symbols, rituals, social factors, social relationship

ÖZET

ARNAVUTLUK'TA SPOR VE DİN: ÖĞRENCİLERİN GÖRÜŞ AÇISI

Bu çalışma, sportif ve dinsel kurumların benzerlikleri ve ilişkileri üzerinde odaklanmaktadır. Bu kurumlar toplum üzerinde control ve entegrasyon özellikleriyle etkili olurlar. Böylece gerçekleştirilecek uygun ortamlar çelişkilerin, anlaşmazlıkların ve bireysel stresin üstesinden gelinmesinde katkıda bulunabilir. Bu konular üniversite gençliği özelinde ele alınmaktadır. Sportif aktivitelerin dinsel inançla olan ilişkisi anket,

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söyleşi ve sorgulama türündeki sosyolojik araştırma araçlarıyla analiz edilmektedir. Tiran Üniversitesi'nden çoğu (%91) öğrenci olan 520 denek yanıtlarını bireysel, kültürel ve sosyal faktörler ışığında verdiler. İnanç; bireyleri ve sosyal grupları etkileyip kültürel ideolojiler ve ilişkiler üzerinde güçlü bir etkide bulunabilir. Benzer şekilde, değişik sportif aktiviteler de farklı tarih, gelenek ve hedefleri olan kültürel uygulamalarla ilişkilidir. Spor ve din, modern hayatın stresli ritmini yaşayan bireyin dengeye ulaşma biçimleri olarak genç kuşaklara sunulabilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Dinsel inanç, semboller, törenler, sosyal faktörler, sosyal ilişkiler*

INTRODUCTION

Religious and sports institutions have similarities that interweave with each-other. Displaying common characteristics, they contribute to the society through their essential functions including social control and social integration. These mechanisms create favorable conditions that tend to alleviate the contradictions, disagreements and stress of the individual involved in social life. The phenomenon is displayed more emphatically in societies in transition, where the lack of belief is obvious. When the latter is interwoven with weaknesses of the system such as unemployment, economic poverty, etc., the outcome is even more serious. Hence, it is necessary that the alleviation of these contradictions comes into life through a number of economic, political and social mechanisms, where the social institutions of religion and sport gain priority by extending their activity among all age groups. (See 1-4).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To judge the relation of sports activities to religious belief under concrete circumstances of the Albanian reality, the analysis was done under the light of the conceptual structures of the sociology of religion and that of sport. To focus on the relations between these two social areas as well as on their influence on individual life, it was found of interest to deal with these issues in the sensitive category of the society of university youth. Sociological study methods such as surveys, interviews and a special questionnaire were applied to the students.

For this purpose, 472 students (91%) and 48 non-students (9%), all members of religious associations, from all the faculties of the University of Tirana were questioned. Demographically a total of 342 (66%) were females and 178 (34%) were males. The age distribution was

as such: 18 yrs 26 (5%), 19 yrs 176 (34%), 20 yrs 174 (33%), 21 yrs 44 (8%), 22 yrs 24 (5%), 22 yrs and over 76 (15%).

Members of religious associations counted 213 (41%), of which 165 were students and 48 were non-students. Whereas faculty distributions of non-member students were as such: 93 in Social Sciences (18%), 87 in Law (17%), 58 in Natural Sciences (11%), 69 in Economics (13%); that of association member students were 34 (7%), 41 (8%), 29 (6%) and 61 (12%) in those respective faculties. Religious belongings were 254 Muslim (49%), 146 Orthodox (28%), 48 Protestant (9%), 40 Catholic (8%), and 32 (6%) other beliefs.

It is worth pointing out that to reflect these issues from the students' perspective; it was aimed to obtain data and opinions from all social strata with different psycho – cultural formation, to make it possible to assess wide-scale social issues. The questionnaire applied to the students aimed at making evident the mutual interactions of the two social institutions, religion and sport. It consists of such approaches to explain:

- how much sports activities influence the religious formation of the individual,
- to what extent sports activities comply with the religious faith of people,
- how the various sports activities influence relations between believers,
- whether there is any similarity between the authoritative figure of a high level religious representative and that of the sports leader,
- if there are any similarities as regards to the assimilation of religious ritual rules and sports game rules; whether there are differences between aims in sport and religion (Table 1);
- if the belonging of the religious traditional values of the self corresponds with individual discipline, work, individualism, or competition (Table 2);
- whether religious symbols or rituals intervene more with the strengthening of faith, release of energies, reflection of individual values, anxiety control, incitement of courage and pride, or organization of the religious group (Table 3);
- which way and how much the praying affects believers as a religious practice, etc. (Table 4).

The main purpose of the questionnaire is not only to reveal the relation between the two institutions, but also to define on this basis

certain stakes so as to find out ways, forms and manners to deal with the problem in a defined environment. The opinions given by the students to the multiple-choice options of the questionnaire, depending on the relevant issues dealt with, vary in compliance with the developmental conditions of a society in transition.

RESULTS

The assessment of various questions about sportive-religious interactions, the areas of coincidence of traditional religious values, the areas that religious symbols and rituals affect, and the degree of frequentation of religious institutions are given in Tables 1 to 4 respectively.

Table 1. Assessment of various questions about sportive-religious interactions (N, %)

Question	Much	Somehow	Little	None	No ans.
How much does the sportive activities influence on your religious education?	60 (12%)	58 (11%)	266 (51%)	90 (17%)	46 (9%)
How much do the sportive activities fit with your religious convictions?	38 (7%)	100 (19%)	232 (45%)	104 (20%)	46 (9%)
How much do different sportive activities influence relationships between believers?	186 (36%)	44 (8%)	48 (9%)	68 (13%)	174 (33%)
Is there any similarity btw the image of high level religious representative and the sportive leader image?	44 (8%)	118 (23%)	142 (27%)	172 (33%)	44 (8%)
Is there any similarity in acquiring religious rules and rituals, and those in the sportive game?	56 (11%)	148 (28%)	154 (30%)	128 (25%)	34 (7%)

Table 2. Coincidence of traditional religious values

Coincides with	N	(%)
Individual discipline	308	59
Work	74	14
Initiative	40	8
Individualism	52	10
Competition	32	6
No answer	14	3

Table 3. The areas that religious symbols and rituals affect

Affects	N	(%)
The belief strengthening	268	52
The release of energies	28	5
The reflection of individual values	64	12
Anxiety control	26	5
The believers organization group	56	11
The courage and pride stimulation	32	6
No answer	46	9

Table 4. The degree of frequentation of religious institutions

Frequentation	N	(%)
Every day	32	6
Once a week	114	22
In religious celebrations occasions	260	50
Never	90	17
No answer	24	5

DISCUSSION

During the last decade when Albania opened towards the West, religious belief became more present in the largest part of the population, including the youth. The tendency to embrace the lack of belief has come about through a series of social, economic, psychological etc. factors. Another important factor is the family environment, where parents themselves have had their influence by making their children approach the “God’s Way”. This might be either an element inherited in latent forms or a need for peace under the conditions of a society hurled into a distressful pace of life.

Another dominating influence might have coincided with the arrival of the religious spirit through a number of religious associations and foundations, which, under the new circumstances of the development of society, found suitable environment to carry out their activity. Sociability which is a leading characteristic of the young age has undoubtedly had its influence. Conversations that the young people have with each other help in conveying one’s own experience. The feelings the individual experiences are displayed not only through conversations with representatives of the religions, but also through direct contact with the religious environments and cults.

Another process which has influenced the formation of religious beliefs of the young people in our country has come about through work the individual carried in religious organizations. "Head to head" work has been carried out by representatives of various religions in every Albanian family for more than a decade. Each individual has felt more than once their presence in their families through the free conversations they have had, the donated religious books and posters. Various activities with a religious spirit they have organized attracted large numbers of individuals towards religious beliefs and cults.

The options chosen by the questioned students as regards to the introduced choices correspond to their way of conceiving the two major social areas related to the individual, cultural and social factors of which it would be appropriate to point out:

1. Delayed introduction of religious beliefs in a massive way in the country.
2. Atheism tendency which prevailed in general in the country during the period before the establishment of democracy.
3. Lack of the tradition of setting up religious institutions.
4. Generally distorted mentality about physical training and participation in sports activities, related to:
 - a) The family formation concerning the sports area;
 - b) The somewhat unfavorable social environment;
 - c) The worn out infrastructure and poor sports material aids in towns and districts the questioned students came from;
 - d) The way of sports activity organization by the sports leaders in the district for an all-round involvement of the youth in sports activities;
 - e) The inappropriate level of the job done by the teachers in the subject of physical training during various cycles of the education, not citing the above mentioned conditions which are much more obvious in rural areas, leading to an unfavorable situation concerning a right concept regarding the sports area.

As for the options chosen by the questioned students concerning their attendance to religious environments and cults, a series of reasons might prevail, which are connected with:

1. The intensive work the religious organizations have carried out with the individual during the recent years;

2. The influence of the family environment as a result of the country becoming open to religious institutions and cults;
3. The face – up of the living conditions, whereby the experienced stress in connection to economic and social factors leads the individual to release the collected energy, so as to relieve the suffering spirit;
4. The increasing number of divorces due to economic, cultural and psychological factors;
5. The non – accomplishment of desires and dreams which create powerful perceptions for the youth;
6. The unexpected encounters offered by the distressful pace of life;
7. The relief felt in religious cults, where the so much longed-for-peace prevails.

This situation is closely linked to the too long transition the country has gone through for more than a decade, with various stages including unstable situation, economic poverty, unemployment, etc.

The material is widely permeated by concepts of belief which holds special importance from the sociological viewpoint, because it allows people to think about the world, about themselves and their relation to the world or other people. When people relate power and authority with God or other supernatural forms, their belief constitutes an important social aspect. Such forms of belief might correspond with:

1. Powerful forms of group unity and social integration or forms of group destruction as a result of conflicts and violence.
2. A loving and accepting spirit about the morals of the right, by means of which ideas and people are marginalized or punished.
3. Domination of social norms or their refusal by accepting new ones.

In this context, belief might influence the individuals and the social groups thus having a powerful impact on the cultural ideology that people use to give sense to the world in their relationship with others and themselves. From this point of view, the various sports activities which are closely related to religious beliefs constitute cultural practices with different histories, traditions and aims. They have been and continue to be social structures expressed in different ways about various issues through various cooperative relations. This implies that the connection between religious belief and sports activities coincides with what the individual believes and the way she/he takes part in the sports area.

The material as a whole aims to introduce the relation of two important social areas, sport and religion, as a possibility offered to the young generation to be reintegrated in the contemporary society, to be closer to lacking belief, as one of the forms of establishment of equilibriums so necessary for the individual who experiences more than ever the distressful pace of the modern life.

Michael Novak (5) means exactly this relation when he quotes: "Having a religion means stimulating and encouraging your body, your desire, your will, the feeling of beauty and the feeling of being in unity with the universe and all the other beings. You need to listen to the song, to the melody... That feeling which can not be described is where all want the same thing, as if they were all parts of a single body. All these are in sport as well ... Sports are forms of religion."

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