

## Modern and Folk Sports in Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin: Uzbekistan from 1925 to 1952

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### Abstract

Soviet physical culture was a soft power tool used to create healthy and patriotic citizen-soldiers and help modernise the urban Soviet Union: one key strand of this was modern sports. Josef Stalin (Communist Party leader from 1925 to 1953) imposed the physical culture and sports culture on society and had it institutionalised. Moreover, except for policy revisions, the institutions of his sports model continued until the mid-1980s. This paper will investigate the impact of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (established 1925, hereafter Communist Party) through sport in Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic (hereafter Uzbekistan). Critically reading selected Cold War and contemporary studies, we explore the acculturation and integration role of the Soviet sports culture in multicultural Uzbekistan from 1925 to 1952. In this interdisciplinary paper, we ask: What was the impact of Soviet sports in Uzbekistan? How and why did Lenin and Stalin reposition folk sports in society? The themes examined include the concept of Soviet sports, folk sports, and the development and impact of modern sports culture.

**Keywords:** communist sport, folk sport, modern sport, physical culture, Soviet sport, Uzbekistan.

### Lenin ve Stalin Dönemlerinde Orta Asya'da Modern ve Geleneksel Sporlar: 1925'ten 1952'ye Özbekistan

#### Özet

Sovyet beden kültürü, sağlıklı ve yurtsever vatandaş-askerler yetiştirmek ve Sovyetler Birliği'nin kentli nüfusunun modernleşmesine yardımcı olmak için kullanılan yumuşak bir güç aracıydı. Bunun en önemli yollarından biri modern sporlardı. Josef Stalin (1925'ten 1953'e kadar Komünist Parti lideri) topluma

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beden ve spor kültürünü kabul ettirip kurumsallaştırdı. Bununla birlikte, siyasi değişiklikler haricinde, spor modelinin kurumları 1980'lerin ortasına kadar varlığını devam ettirdi. Bu çalışma Sovyetler Birliği Komünist Partisi'nin (1925'de kuruldu, bundan sonra Komünist Parti) spor vasıtasıyla Özbekistan Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti (bundan sonra Özbekistan) üzerindeki etkisini inceleyecektir. Seçilmiş Soğuk Savaş ve çağdaş çalışmaları eleştirel bir şekilde ele alarak, 1925'ten 1952'ye çok kültürlü Özbekistan'da Sovyet spor kültürünün yerleşme ve bütünleşme rolünü araştıracağız. Disiplinler arası bu çalışmadaki sorumuz şu: Sovyet sporunun Özbekistan'daki etkisi neydi? Lenin ve Stalin geleneksel sporları topluma nasıl ve neden yeniden benimsetti? İncelenen hususlar arasında Sovyet sporları kavramı, geleneksel sporlar ve modern spor kültürünün gelişimi ve etkisi yer almaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Komünist spor, geleneksel spor, modern spor, beden kültürü, Sovyet sporu, Özbekistan

## Introduction

The Soviet culture '*... was essentially Russian and thus European, the new art forms that were introduced into Central Asia in the 1930s and 1940s were very much in the western tradition... Many other elements of western-style culture, sport and entertainment were developed, almost always at the expense of local traditions*'.<sup>1</sup> This statement by Shirin Akiner outlines the implementation of a revolutionary and modernising culture upon a traditional Muslim society in the Soviet Union's periphery. In particular, it highlights the use of Soviet culture to integrate the Central Asians into Soviet society. By the late-1920s, the worst effects of the upheaval caused by the Russian Civil War were passing and what came next were industrialisation and collectivisation and three Five Year Plans (between 1928 and 1938). In the ten years following the 1917 Revolution, physical culture and sport became a vital acculturation channel in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (established 1922, hereafter Soviet Union). By 1936, 'physical culture', 'rest and leisure' and access to sports facilities became a constitutional right.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?* (London: Whitehall Paper Series, 1993), 11.

<sup>2</sup> David Lane, *Soviet Society Under Perestroika* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 358-60.

Uzbekistan was chosen as the case study because it contains the largest population in Central Asia, and its capital of Tashkent was once the fourth largest Soviet city (population nearly 1,780,000 in 1979). Moreover, the development of the Soviet sports in Central Asia is interesting because the population was predominantly rural, religious and ethnically diverse. The story which unfolded in Uzbekistan is perhaps the strongest case of sports development in Soviet-era Central Asia—with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan following up close behind, and mountainous Tajikistan showing the least progress. Furthermore, in the eyes of Moscow, traditional Central Asia was a place to experiment with the Soviet modernisation project. It was a region to test its social discipline methods and social engineering schemes. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the establishment of Uzbekistan in 1924-25 occurred at the same moment as the Communist Party introduced the new state socialisation channels.<sup>3</sup> These included the centralised sports system, secular civic ceremonies, and the youth movements (the Young Pioneers for ages 10 to 14, established 1922, and the *Komsomol* for ages 15 to 28, established 1918).

The literature we draw upon includes James Riordan (1980, 1991, 1993), and N.N. Shneidman (1979), both of whom have extensively researched communist sport. Susan Grant's (2013) archival study examines the connection between physical culture, propaganda, and acculturation during the 1920s and 1930s—with a chapter devoted to rural peasants and national minorities.<sup>4</sup> Nikolaus Katzer's edited volume *Euphoria and Exhaustion* (2010) is a collection of critically written chapters that address sport and 'integration, dissatisfaction and exclusion'.<sup>5</sup> Timofeyev and Kopytkin's *Soviet Sport: The Success Story* (1987), was produced by the Soviets for Western readers; however, it

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<sup>3</sup> Formerly the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (founded 1898).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society: Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s* (London: Routledge, 2013); see also Sevet Akyildiz, 'Soviet Physical Culture in Uzbekistan: Implementation and Social Impact', in *Sports and Coaching: Pasts and Futures*, ed. Dave Day (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2012), 105-122.

<sup>5</sup> Nikolaus Katzer and Sandra Budy and Alexandra Kohring and Manfred Zeller, *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society* (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010).

provides the reader with no critical analysis.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, at some future point, all of the Soviet statistics used in this paper need to be verified. Soviet economic and social statistics are ideologically loaded and frequently contain falsified data and information and therefore are questionable: to satisfy Moscow's set quotas, local officials manipulated the data. In this work, firstly, we will outline the socio-political context of modern sport in urban Central Asia—and the effect of this on folk sports. Secondly, the impact of Soviet sports culture in Uzbekistan, in terms of development, socialisation and acculturation are analysed. To assess the impact of modern sports on Uzbekistan, we have opted for a long-term study from the 1920s to the early 1950s. In our approach, we reappraise the view that the Communist Party relied upon force when dealing with its citizens in all cases. Instead, we argue that in the Soviet imperium, many citizens and the elite athletes benefitted in terms of careers and personal enjoyment from the modern sports culture. The structure of this paper contains three parts: the building of the Soviet culture and society; Marxism-Leninism and physical culture and sport; and development of sport and change in centralised approaches within Uzbekistan.

### **Building Soviet Culture and Society**

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War and War Communism (1918-1921), Russian society was war-weary and economically impoverished. Domestic refugees and migrants took to the road seeking shelter and food. Furthermore, drought and famine meant that food aid from the United States was necessary. In this broken condition, the Soviet Union (1922-1991) was born, with the Communist Party (formerly the Bolsheviks) as the sovereign power in the new Party-state model. Marxism-Leninism is Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's (1870-1924) reinterpretation of Marxism, with his emphasis upon its application. Lenin was the leader of the 1917 Revolution, helped to found the Russian Communist Party (1918 to 1925), and was also an initiator of the Soviet state. In attempting to reimpose order on society, Lenin implemented the New Economic Policy (1921 to 1928). In this case, 'modernisation' meant the reversal of the Soviet Union's socio-

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<sup>6</sup> A. Timofeyev and Y. Kopytkin, *Soviet Sport: The Success Story* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1987).

economic 'backwardness' exemplified by its majority agrarian society. The 1917 Revolution promised a better future. In seeking to convert the young, the workers, and the peasants to communism and advance Soviet policies, Lenin sought voluntary and conscious acceptance among them based upon rationalist discourse and revolutionary enthusiasm. Under his leadership, the social revolution introduced universal literacy, schooling, and healthcare. Following Lenin's death, Stalin (d. 1953) briefly continued with his predecessor's policies. However, Lenin's notion of '*... ideological persuasion greatly receded in importance*' and was replaced by '*coercion*'.<sup>7</sup> Also, to consolidate state power, Stalin discarded the idea of international revolution and replaced it with isolationism and autarky: 'socialism in one country'. During the late-1920s he forced on society far-reaching and rapid industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation. He also expanded the state bureaucracy to cater for the growing organisational function of the Party.

In the Soviet Union, the socialist culture was developed to integrate and acculturate the 100 nations and groups living there. Eva Maurer has reported that modern sports were used '*to train and discipline*' citizen's bodies for work and national defence, and '*to further implement ideas of hygiene and a modern lifestyle*'.<sup>8</sup> Burcu Dogramaci thinks the 'cult of sport' became '*a tool for education that should turn the pre-revolutionary people into new human beings*'.<sup>9</sup> The new sports channels assisted with the political education (Sovietisation) and moral upbringing of the socialist people. In brief, Soviet sport and leisure were part of the radical social transformation of society.<sup>10</sup> Leisure and modern

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<sup>7</sup> Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: The Soviet Case* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1981), 29; see also Sevket Akyildiz and Richard Carlson, *Social and Cultural Change in Central Asia: The Soviet Legacy* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Eva Maurer, 'An Academic Escape to the Periphery? The Social and Cultural Milieu of Soviet Mountaineering from the 1920s to the 1960s', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 159.

<sup>9</sup> Burcu Dogramaci, 'Heading into Modernity: Sporting Culture, Architecture and Photography in the Early Turkish Republic', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 112.

<sup>10</sup> The Communist Party resolution of 1925 highlights the comprehensive nature of physical culture: '*... physical culture must be considered not simply from the stand-point*

sports were made accessible for all citizens, and their involvement in it became a 'social duty'.

In advancing the Revolution, it was necessary that first, modern societies were established among the Russians and the 'backward' nations (Central Asia consisted of dynastic regions, not nation-states). The 'modernity' referred to in the Soviet context means the transformation of a traditional society into a modern one. It means the replacement of religion, monarchy, rural life and agriculture, kin and regional communities by science, 'popular sovereignty', nations and citizenship, factories and offices and city life. The processes of 'modernisation' include rationalisation, secularisation, industrialisation, bureaucratisation and urbanisation. Hans-Joachim Braun and Katzer say *'The inclination to the politics of social-engineering and forced industrialization fostered American-style technocratic planning of megaprojects and a "scientification" of all spheres of life.'*<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the Stalinist socio-economic and cultural management strategies reflect this doctrine.

The Cultural Revolution (1928 to 1931) introduced one dominant culture across the Soviet Union, intending to create a unionwide civic identity. In this context, 'Soviet culture' refers to particular values, norms, education, dress, material goods, language, intellectual and artistic works and architecture in the context of their forms and meanings. Also, it promoted Europeanised Russian popular and high cultures, with Russian as the official state language (Russification). Over generations, acculturation was meant to bond ethnic plurality around a

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*of public health and physical education, not only as an aspect of the cultural, economic and military training of young people. It should also be seen as a means to educate the masses (inasmuch as it develops will power, teamwork, endurance, resourcefulness and other valuable qualities). It must be regarded, moreover, as a means of rallying the bulk of the workers and peasants to the various Party, government and trade-union organizations, through which they can be drawn into social and political activity... Physical culture must be an inseparable part of overall political and cultural education and of public health',* cited in James Riordan, *Soviet Sport: Background to the Olympics* (New York, Washington Mews Books, 1980), 30.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Joachim Braun and Nikolaus Katzer, 'Training Methods and Soccer Tactics in the Late Soviet Union: Rational Systems of Bodies and Space', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 269.

shared Soviet identity, thereby holding the multinational union together. Overall, the Soviet culture promoted a 'way of life', constructed and reproduced through upbringing (*vospitanie*) and the socialisation channels (of mass education, physical culture, youth movements, and civic ceremonies). In the 1930s the drive to enlighten and civilise the population was labelled *kul'turnost* (level of culture) and particularly targeted the peasantry, the working-classes, and the national minorities.

### **Marxism-Leninism and Physical Culture and Sport**

The Communist Party borrowed from the European models and the imperial Russian sports organisations;<sup>12</sup> and developed Soviet physical culture into a 'programme for identity'... '*a multifunctional and flexible programme...*', that included hygiene and health plans, sports, '*defence interests, labour concerns, leisure, education, and general cultural enlightenment*'.<sup>13</sup> It was '*... in many ways a lifestyle, an attitude, and a mode of behaviour*'.<sup>14</sup> In brief, it has four primary strands: '*organised physical education, playful activities, active leisure pursuits and sport*'.<sup>15</sup> So, 'physical culture' is a broad concept; it incorporates sport and first emerged in nineteenth-century Germany and Scandinavia in partnership with industrialisation, urbanisation, military preparedness, and nationalism. Physical culture is associated with new thinking about wellbeing and planned leisure—in particular, fitness regimes, improved diet, public hygiene, and the creation of healthier and stronger citizen-soldiers.

'Sport' in its modern form refers to the rules and regulations, societies and facilities, athletes, coaches and trainers, spectators and fans. In this paper, we discuss the modern versions of aquatic sports, ball games, equestrian sports, field and track sports, martial arts, racket sports, and snow sports. The Communist Party introduced these

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<sup>12</sup> Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4; N.N. Shneidman, *The Soviet Road to Olympus: Theory and Practice of Soviet Physical Culture and Sport*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 4.

modern sports across the Soviet Union to create a universal sports culture among all Soviet ethnicities and classes. Modern sports were used to bring together the Central Asians and the Russians through shared experiences and memories. The geographic specificity and regional diversity of folk sport prevented it from being used as a unionwide socialisation agent. Many of the modern sports practices have European origins; those with Eurasian or Asiatic heritage are chess, judo, karate, wrestling, and polo. Some sports like archery and canoeing defy provenance. The aesthetic influence of modern sport is visible in costume and sports architecture.<sup>16</sup>

The general Soviet interpretation of sport says it is a social institution with a socialisation function.<sup>17</sup> A more sophisticated analysis says its purpose is to train athletes to win awards at sporting competitions; to foster ideological values through a state-sponsored social movement; to show that the Communist Party had created a dynamic society and to propagate a Soviet art form designed to inspire and provide '*real aesthetic enjoyment*'.<sup>18</sup> Here Stalin's role was to expand the functional and symbolic use of sport through mass participation, incorporating collectivist values and behavioural norms. Indeed, its entertainment function matched its moral, social, and military-training roles.<sup>19</sup>

### Central Asian Folk Sport

The peasants and workers of nineteenth-century Russia and the peripheral regions had few opportunities, if any, to participate in modern sport. Rather, they played their folk and traditional sports, particularly during holidays and festivals. Russian and Central Asian folk sport had roots in communal events, military-training, and workplace strength training. Research investigating social change and modern society has shown that folk sports survive if they connect with group

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<sup>16</sup> Mike O'Mahony, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture: Visual Culture* (Trowbridge: Reaktion Books, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> N.I. Ponomaryov, 'Fenomen igry i sporta', *Teoriya i praktika fizicheskoi kul'tury*, no. 8 (1972): 6, cited in Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> V.B. Kuchevsky, 'Sport kak sovokupnost obshchestvennykh otnoshenii', *Teoriya i praktika fizicheskoi kul'tury*, no. 9 (1972): 5, cited in Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> See Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

identification. Richard Holt reports that in Britain, despite industrialisation and the commodification and standardisation of modern sport ‘... a wide range of old-established sports’ continued from the second half of the nineteenth-century into the twentieth-century.<sup>20</sup>

In Central Asia, the urban, rural and migratory communities have a long history of folk sport and leisure. Central Asians developed an equestrian culture in response to the natural environment, and because of the need to communicate, trade, and battle across steppe lands.<sup>21</sup> Native Muslim scholars have discussed the relationship between physical exercise and moral and intellectual upbringing. The philosopher Abu Nasr Al-Farabi (872-950AD), author of *Virtuous City*, and the physician Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980-1037AD), author of the *Canon of Medical Science*, discussed children’s physical training, rest, adult physical exercise, and health awareness.<sup>22</sup>

In the preparation of young men for military campaigns, the Central Asian *beys* (chieftains or governors) organised mass hunting parties. The hunt, whether small or large, was entertainment, but its organisation and the tactics deployed to capture or kill wild animals gave participants invaluable military and skills training in stalking, chasing, and working together. Sword skills were watched for visual spectacle and entertainment, while cross-country running and foot racing prepared soldiers for endurance. In Central Asia, a type of polo (*uloq-kupari*) developed into a game of two teams competing for the possession of the carcass of a goat or calf.<sup>23</sup>

Traditional festivals in Central Asia hosted folk sports, music, and dance. These mass gatherings were part of the local social calendar and were organised to celebrate seasonal holidays and royal events, notably, the Spring Equinox (*Nawruz*, pre-Islamic New Year’s Day) and the two

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992), 57.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Bradley and Andrew Palmer, *The Silk Road* (Basingstoke: Insight, 2008) 49, 65.

<sup>22</sup> E. Ableyev, ‘Principles of Physical Training in the Pedagogical Works of Educators from Central Asia’, in *Education, Physical Activities and Sport in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Jordi Mones (Barcelona, Spain, 1992), 39-42.

<sup>23</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Polo’, <http://www.britannica.com/sports/polo> (accessed 7 April 2016).

Islamic holidays (*Eid al-Fitr*, after the Ramadan fast, and *Eid al-Adha*, the 'Sacrifice Feast'). At festivals, family members and other ethnic kin met: *'When it came to physical culture and sports activities, peasants preferred simple games with simple objectives or entertainment with elements of social interaction.'*<sup>24</sup> Circuses and fairs entertained the audience, with muscular, strong men (*palvans*) displaying their physical power, and acrobats performing gymnastic feats such as walking a tightrope.

### Colonial Sport

Between 1731 and 1854 Russia took control of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz steppes, and from 1865 to 1884 it seized the remainder of Central Asia—renaming it Turkestan. The Russians living in Central Asia, ensconced in urban centres (like Tashkent), resided separately from the mostly rural, native population. The primary aim of Russian colonisation was to *'consolidate domination by keeping peace and order in the area but interfering as little as possible with the religion, customs, and the way of life'*, says Michael Rywkin.<sup>25</sup> The cultural and everyday life of Central Asians continued under Russian colonisation, but the traditional social order was irreparably changed. The Russians seized land for cotton production, and between 1891 and 1917 the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz experienced forced land evictions, famine, and mass migrations. The once-proud Turkic dynasties of the region, noted for their military prowess, had become vassals of the Russian czar.<sup>26</sup>

In Central Asia, the new world of modern sports was produced for and consumed by the urban Slavic settlers. However, it is essential to distinguish the settler groups: first of these was the Russian elites; second, the Russian middle-classes; and third, the Russian working-classes. The latter group, in terms of participation in modern sports, like the working-classes in Russia, were marginalised from the official sports associations and clubhouses. One 1912 Russian sports magazine reports: *'Sport is first and foremost an expensive pastime. It is not for workers. Their path is to the pub. And next morning, hunched and*

<sup>24</sup> Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 14.

<sup>26</sup> Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge*, 16.

*ragged, they're off to work again.*<sup>27</sup> In Russia, the working-classes laboured for long hours, and they lacked the expertise and resources to organise national sports societies. Despite these barriers, some urban working-class men held their local football games.<sup>28</sup> Riordan says '*most workers were not integrated into the system through the medium of games...*'<sup>29</sup>; instead, the sports administration in Russia applied '*social apartheid*'.<sup>30</sup> In the Central Asian case, the exclusion of the Russian working-class settlers from modern sports due to their lowly status. The exclusion of Muslims from modern sports was due to their race, religion, and class. The Russian government marginalised even the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Central Asian '*modernist*' reformers (Jadids). Ekaterina Emeliantseva's comment about sport in St. Petersburg between 1890 and 1914 is relevant to Tashkent: '*The phenomenon of so-called "urbanism", which is bound up with social intermingling, can only be observed with respect to the upper and middle classes; the lower strata of the population had no access to sporting activities.*'<sup>31</sup>

The Tashkent Amateur Cycling Society was formed in 1885, though Riordan does not give the ethnicity of its members.<sup>32</sup> The local Muslim men and women, probably non-Russian speakers, would not have joined Russian clubs (assuming they were not ethnically exclusive sites). The Russian elites may have introduced the sons of the Muslim elites to modern sports (a topic that needs further research). The British Raj in India (1858-1947) took a different approach. To keep the peace, they encouraged the British expatriate community and the Indian upper-classes to participate in sporting encounters involving cricket, polo, and tennis. However, in Russian Central Asia, inter-communal mixing around modern sport was not official government policy, and no plans were

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<sup>27</sup> *K sportu*, no. 11 (1912), cited in Timofeyev, *Success Story*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> James Riordan, *Sport Under Communism: the USSR, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, China, Cuba* (London: C. Hurst, 1978), 14-22.

<sup>29</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ekaterina Emeliantseva, 'Sports Vision and Sports Places: The Social Topography of Sport in Late Imperial St. Petersburg and its Representation in Contemporary Photography (1890-1914)', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 35.

<sup>32</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 15, 40.

made to bring communities together through sports events. In the wake of the 1917 Revolution, this might partly explain the resistance by Central Asians to modern sports and their lack of interest in sports culture. Modern sports in the minds of the natives was associated with the colonial settlers and the Slavs. The nature of agrarian work meant they had little time for organised modern sports. Moreover, an anti-communist and pro-Islam insurrection started in 1917 across rural Turkestan; and was not suppressed until 1926.

After 1917, the Communist Party went about integrating all ethnicities into one citizenship model. While the rhetoric spoke of establishing mass health and fitness programmes, in reality, the general health and hygiene of the rural national minorities were poor. So, firstly, qualified health personnel needed to be instructed. The '*physical culture acculturation*', which required '*physical and psychological transformation*', would have to wait because in rural areas, during the 1920s, cultural change was slow. The urban network of Soviet socialisation channels that could offer modern sports did not emerge until the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> It partly explains why folk sports remained so popular. Yet, the continuity of folk sports was a challenge for the communists, as they looked upon all things progressive as the rational outcome of Marxist-Leninist theory. Still, in building a federal state identity (and a sports culture) they had to face reality—the Soviet Union was multinational. In response, the national folk culture of each ethnicity was homogenised, with one version of each folk sport selected and developed—such as one national wrestling style. This standardisation allowed for the incorporation of national folk sports into the Soviet physical culture. The elite folk sports athletes could attain the prestigious Soviet Master of Sport ranking.<sup>34</sup>

The institutionalisation of folk sport enabled the communists to influence all mass sports events and, at the same time, disseminate its propaganda. Communist officials, the federal hammer and sickle flag,

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<sup>33</sup> Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 99, 123.

<sup>34</sup> Y. Lukashin, *National Folk Sports in the USSR* (Moscow: Progress Press, 1980), 6-26, 86, 111-18; Tourism.uz.com, 'Sports in Uzbekistan', <http://tourism.uz/info/134/> (accessed 6 July 2015).

and other Soviet imagery were always visible at mass folk sports competitions and festivals: an example of '*socialist in content and national in form*'. Furthermore, in allowing the folk sport to continue, the Communist Party could reasonably claim the Soviet nationalities policy was not assimilative but integrative and even respectful of minority cultures. In addition, the management of folk culture was intended to prevent ethnic nationalists from mobilising their communities around exclusive cultural characteristics. There are parallels here with Hann's contemporary study of the Chinese Communist Party's management of ethnic sports in the Muslim Xingjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region of China.<sup>35</sup>

### **Uzbekistan: Development of Sport and Changes in Centralised Approaches**

In 1924 approximately 84.5 per cent of the Turkic-Uzbeks living in the Soviet Union resided within a multicultural Uzbekistan. As discussed by Francine Hirsch, this came to pass with the creation of the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, the promotion of national consciousness and the creation of a people (*narod*).<sup>36</sup> Uzbeks constituted approximately 70 per cent of the total population of Uzbekistan, and the others included Kazakhs, Tajiks, Turkmen, Tatars, and Slavs. The total population of Uzbekistan increased from approximately 5 million (1917) to 18 million (1985)—including, by 1991, more than 1.5 million Slavic migrants.<sup>37</sup>

The nature of Soviet modernity meant the urban citizenry had a more intense acculturation experience. During the 1930s and 1940s, modern sports culture increasingly became part of everyday life for all urban Soviet citizens, including residents of the Central Asian cities. The city '*was meant to organize daily life according to the principles of socialism, i.e. to foster class and gender equality and to ensure the*

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<sup>35</sup> C.M. Hann, 'Ethnic Games in Xinjiang: Anthropological Approaches', in *Cultural Change and Continuity in Central Asia*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London: Kegan Paul International, 1991), 218-35.

<sup>36</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, United States: Cornell University Press, 2005), 3, 145.

<sup>37</sup> Shirin Akiner, 'Uzbekistan: Republic of Many Tongues', in *Language Planning in the Soviet Union*, ed. J.M. Kirkwood (Macmillan: London, 1989), 103; Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 21-2.

*materialist direction of life processes, first and foremost by regulating consumption',* says Alexandra Kohring.<sup>38</sup> The cities offered contemporary multisport facilities, and while the provision of urban sports facilities was at a developing stage, they were subsidised and inclusive. It allowed the regime to assemble in one place large numbers of people for socialisation and acculturation. Importantly, the new leisure infrastructure and opportunities allowed the masses to consume and reproduce the imported popular culture. Furthermore, in the context of twentieth-century town planning and industrialisation, the stadium became a symbolic site, because '*sporting sites could be directly associated with the function of the modern city*', balancing '*work, recreation and entertainment and health*', says Kohring.<sup>39</sup> In reference to integration, at the state-controlled sports sites, the athletes and spectators could interact and mix.

However, this urban focus hindered sporting development in rural districts. Indeed, physical culture and the modern sport were less evident in rural areas, with poor facilities, inadequate funding, and insufficient trained sports personnel (and this remained so throughout communist rule).<sup>40</sup> It was a problem because the Uzbeks were a rural majority population. The urban and rural distribution of the Uzbeks (and other Central Asians) always defied the state planners. Almost 18.3 per cent of the Uzbeks within Uzbekistan were classified as urban in 1926; while the figure for 1970 increased only to 23.0 per cent.<sup>41</sup>

Despite this, the modern sports culture enabled the Communist Party to influence the bodies, mentalities, and behaviour of the urban citizenry and helped to transform cityscapes. In this section, we argue that soon after the Revolution, the communist leadership used sport to help integrate and control the periphery, and particularly the urban population. The inauguration and impact of modern sports in Uzbekistan are discussed below within the framework of the first two

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<sup>38</sup> Alexandra Kohring, 'Exploring the Power of the Curve: Projects for an International Red Stadium in 1920s Moscow', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 41.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union* (London: Kegan Paul, 1983), 277.

Soviet leaders. In the context of Lenin, we explain his introduction of modern sports culture into Central Asian society as a tool of integration and mass socialisation. In the case of Stalin, we highlight sport and sites of socialisation, women, heroes, coaches and trainers, war, and Olympic athletes. Together, these selected topics help us to evaluate the key strengths and weaknesses of Soviet sports-related development and acculturation.

### **The 1920s: The First Mass Sports Events**

Limited state resources and untrained personnel restricted Lenin's use of sports culture in Central Asia. However, soon after the Revolution, the urban Central Asians were introduced to the new Soviet sports. One method chosen was the mass exhibition, utilising voluntary participation and revolutionary enthusiasm. These events would showcase the arrival of modern popular culture and assist with Lenin's propagation of Marxism-Leninism. The Central Asians' exposure to modern sports commenced before the formation of the five Central Asian republics, and with the formation of the Supreme Council of Physical Culture (1920, Moscow). In Tashkent during the summer of July 1920, the Bolsheviks organised the 'First Central Asian Olympics'—and coordinated with sports events in Omsk and Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk) in Russia. The regional ethnic groups and Russians were brought together for ten days – for the first time in a sporting context – with approximately 3,000 athletes from Turkestan competing in folk sports and modern sports. At the final ceremony, almost 1,500 athletes participated, displaying gymnastics and folk dancing.<sup>42</sup>

The Central Asian Games of 1921 (Tashkent) included Russian athletes performing the modern sports that would one day dominate local urban leisure (basketball, decathlon, football, gymnastics, pentathlon, and weightlifting)—and integrate local society with the unionwide sports culture. Attending was Sidney Lvovich Jackson, an American socialist, traveller, and trained boxer. (Some years later, Jackson attained the title of Soviet Master Boxing Coach and established

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<sup>42</sup> Y. Sholomitsky, 'Fizicheskaya kul'tura i sport v sovetskom Uzbekistane', cited in *Ocherki po istorii fizicheskoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1964), 90, in Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 80.

a boys boxing gym in Tashkent.)<sup>43</sup> However, there was a mixed response from locals to modern culture, and Jackson's girlfriend, an Uzbek, '*... was murdered when she went into the old quarter of Tashkent to try to attract Uzbek women to the first Central Asian Games in 1921*'.<sup>44</sup> One group of conservative Muslim clerics decried football thus: '*See, the Russians have brought you the head of the devil; see how it jumps and brings you misfortune*'.<sup>45</sup> Riordan says '*It was later recognised that, in their haste to use organised sport as a cohesive agent to bring peoples together, some officials had tried to import into Central Asia European games for which there existed no real popular (even urban) basis*'.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the local resistance (and Lenin's death in 1924), the communist regime continued with its modernisation agenda. A 'Turkestan Olympics' was held in 1924, followed in 1927 by the first All-Uzbekistan Spartakiad.<sup>47</sup> Almost 26,000 citizens of Uzbekistan had joined sports clubs by the end of 1926 (but Riordan does not mention the ethnicity of these athletes).<sup>48</sup> With this in mind, during the 1920s '*a variety of concepts and ideas existed in the sports movement*', and '*Different groups searched the right socialist way; a more or less open society still existed*,' says Sandra Budy.<sup>49</sup> However, this was to change during the 1930s under the leadership of Stalin.

### **The 1930s to 1952: Stalinist Policies**

Stalin's authoritarian turn and centralised planning intensified state control. On the sports front, in 1931, the Ready for Labour and Defence programme (GTO) gave structure and direction to the Soviet sports,

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<sup>43</sup> Fatima Sharipova, *Fighter* (Tashkent: T-Publishing, 2000), 20.

<sup>44</sup> G. Sviridov, *Jackson ostayotsya v Rossii* (Moscow, 1963), cited in Jim Riordan, 'The Social Emancipation of Women through Sport', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 2, no. 1 (1985): 53-61, 56.

<sup>45</sup> D. Yeshchin and A. Pustovalov, 'Natsional'ny vopros v fizkul'turnom dvizhenii' (Moscow-Leningrad, 1938), 12, cited in Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 114.

<sup>46</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 114.

<sup>47</sup> 'Spartakiad' refers to sports competitions held at schools, workplaces and places for Young Pioneers and amateur groups, circa the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>48</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 113.

<sup>49</sup> Sandra Budy, 'Changing Images of Sport in the Early Soviet Press', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 84-5.

specifically worker's fitness and labour productivity, and focusing on preparing young men for military service.<sup>50</sup> Workplace sports societies opened in factories and farms, and local and national competitions were created, allowing sportspeople to mix and to test their skills against opponents.<sup>51</sup> Assisting with the mobilisation of the masses was the symbolic use of sport: Budy says '*Sports parades took place regularly after 1931... The apparently strict order of the Soviet state, in which the masses were organized and disciplined, was demonstrated by the parades.*'<sup>52</sup>

Under Stalin, new sites of socialisation opened in Uzbekistan. Thousands of new sports clubs and societies existed, often attached to state farms, factories, *mahallas* (Muslim neighbourhoods), schools, and universities.<sup>53</sup> Also, urban development was used in newspapers and propaganda posters to showcase modernity to the domestic rural population. On market days, the visiting agricultural workers would undoubtedly have been impressed by the visual impact of modern sports architecture and the scope of contemporary recreation. In contrast, modern sports facilities in the nonurban districts were patchy, and take up in Central Asian villages (*auls*) was '*particularly weak*'.<sup>54</sup>

The Committee on Physical Culture and Sports Affairs (founded in 1936) was represented locally by governmental branches, trade unions, physical culture activists, and volunteer sports societies. The scale of sports provision helped to change Tashkent, including the residents' '*mental map of the city*'. In fact, '*a new "sporting city" emerged*' (here we have quoted Emeliansteva's statement about late imperial St. Petersburg to explain Tashkent).<sup>55</sup> Two artificial beaches opened within the new parks: Komsomol Lake (built in 1939), in Komsomol Park, and

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<sup>50</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 158-60.

<sup>51</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 120-1.

<sup>52</sup> Budy, 'Changing Images of Sport in the Early Soviet Press', 81.

<sup>53</sup> Timofeyev, *Success Story*, 19-21, 66; Shneidman, *The Soviet Road to Olympus*, 16. Funding came from the Party, *Glavsportprom* (maker of sports equipment and builder of facilities), and *Sovetsky Sport* the sports publisher, commercial enterprises, workers' subscriptions, and the trade unions.

<sup>54</sup> Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 102; Rafis Abazov, *Culture and Customs of the Central Asian Republics* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 2007), 248.

<sup>55</sup> Emeliantseva, 'Sports Vision and Sports Places', 22.

the Lake Pobeda (Victory) in Forest Park.<sup>56</sup> At the Komsomol Lake, built on land requisitioned from the Muslim Old City, swimming and boating were available, with numerous modern sports taking place in both parks.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, an ice-hockey arena existed in Tashkent, a city with a substantial population of Russian migrants who enjoyed this sport. At the time a phrase made by Stalin in 1935 was popularised by state propaganda: *'Life has become better, comrades, life has become more cheerful.'*<sup>58</sup> The youth movements promoted sports and helped integrate members into the physical culture mindset. This occurred at the Young Pioneer Houses and Palaces where boys and girls aged 10 to 14 gathered for extracurricular leisure. In Tashkent, the Pioneer Palace in Marx Street (1935 to the mid-1980s) catered yearly for approximately 3,000 Pioneers, providing ballet, basketball, chess, folk crafts and dance, football, modern dance, and volleyball.<sup>59</sup>

The liberation of women was a core value of Marxism-Leninism. *'Sport in Central Asia in the 1920s was intended not only to encourage the acculturation of national and ethnic groups, but also to integrate women into public life'* and to *'counter the Islamic traditions'*, writes Anke Hilbrenner.<sup>60</sup> Over the decades, the promotion of equality recalibrated gender relations in urban Central Asia.<sup>61</sup> Gender equality policy promoted female athletes; however, they became a direct challenge to patriarchal values and norms. Grant says: *'The clothes worn by women in villages and the republics were often highly traditional and symbolic and at odds with sporting attire.'*<sup>62</sup> With this in mind, structural barriers hindered women, for instance, fulltime employment left

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<sup>56</sup> *Cultural Establishments of Tashkent: A Brief Reference Book on Theatrical, Scientific and Cultural Instructive Establishments* (Uzbek SSR, Goslitizdat, 1958), 91, 181-4.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 2, 67.

<sup>58</sup> 1st December 1935, speech given by Stalin, *Soch*, I (XIV), 106, cited in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 90, 224.

<sup>59</sup> Miriam Morton, *The Making of Champions: Soviet Sports for Children and Teenagers* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 5.

<sup>60</sup> Anke Hilbrenner, 'Soviet Women in Sports in the Brezhnev Years: The Female Body and Soviet Modernism', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 302.

<sup>61</sup> Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

mothers insufficient time to play sports.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, most Uzbek women resided in rural districts and towns, caring for their families and working in agriculture. As a result, Central Asian female athletes were a minority group during the 1920s and 1930s—an issue common across the Soviet Union’s countryside. In this case, women’s double burden was due to cultural tradition and a 1930s Soviet policy encouraging them to be mothers (of future socialist generations).<sup>64</sup> Modern washing machines and other time-saving devices were intended to reduce the burden of women’s housework; enabling them ‘*to benefit from cultural, entertainment and sporting opportunities of modern Soviet life*’.<sup>65</sup>

One key integrative device used under Stalin was the sports hero. David Hassan and Dean Allen say that within the context of modern nation-building projects, top-level athletes function as role models and national heroes.<sup>66</sup> Sports heroes and icons have a unique role within a historical context. They exemplify the values and characteristics of a nation. In the Soviet Union, a sports hero was a ‘hero of labour’ because a core Soviet value was work—and this included notable political and military feats and ‘... *to achievements in such sports as ice hockey or football, the central importance of labour is given expression*’.<sup>67</sup> The unionwide Master of Sport award was created in 1932 to motivate the elite athletes—and inspire young people from all ethnicities to work hard in a disciplined manner.<sup>68</sup> Even though heroes of physical culture were a new concept during the early Stalinist period, at the First-All Uzbek Congress of Labouring Female Youth (1935) ‘*some of the delegates had trained as parachutists*’. Their role was to inspire the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 94-7.

<sup>64</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> Hilbrenner, ‘Soviet Women in Sports in the Brezhnev Years’, 304.

<sup>66</sup> Dean Allen, ‘“National Heroes”: Sport and the Creation of Icons’, *Sport in History* 33, no. 4 (December 2013): 584-94; David Hassan, ‘Introduction: What makes a Sporting Icon?’, *Sport in History* 33, no. 4 (December 2013): 417-26; See also Sevket Akyildiz, ‘Olympic Culture in Soviet Uzbekistan 1951-1991: International Prestige and Local Heroes’, *Polyvocia—The SOAS Journal of Graduate Research* 3 (March 2011): 1-16.

<sup>67</sup> Lane, *Rites of Rulers*, 208.

<sup>68</sup> Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 133.

Uzbeks to take up modern leisure pursuits. This activity was popularised by the communists not least because of its military application.<sup>69</sup>

The first Central Asian trainers and coaches graduated between the 1930s and 1950s from the newly created physical education college departments (previously Russian trainers were employed). It was partly the result of the 1930s 'positive discrimination' employment policy (*korenizatsiya*) intended to advance the minorities, and in each republic, the native ethnic groups were educated and promoted in the workplace and local government jobs. The new faculties trained the local skilled athletes; their sporting career began at school, the *Komsomol* or college sports club, and once spotted, the sports system nurtured the talented young athletes.

The rise of European fascist regimes and the prospect of war influenced communist sports policy-making. The paramilitary training by the *Komsomol* and GTO instructors, in the large towns and cities of the 1930s, was intended to create a reserve of soldiers and to enhance the physical activities useful to the military. The physical education practices in Germany and Italy were studied to see how they prepared young citizens for war.<sup>70</sup> Despite the massive loss of human life and devastation as a result of the Second World War, the Soviet Union emerged with superpower status. However, soon afterwards, the Cold War (1947 to 1991) developed between the Soviet Bloc and the Western powers; this ideological standoff was played out in proxy wars and cultural confrontation. The entry of the Soviet Union into the 'bourgeois' world of international sport (circa 1951) ended its '*cultural isolation*'.<sup>71</sup> The Soviet elite athletes prepared for international sports meetings; in this cultural battle, the aim was to 'catch up and overtake' the Western opposition. While in the Soviet cities, to meet the popular demand for sport and leisure, the Soviet sports culture was expanded and new venues built.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Seth Bernstein, *Raised Under Stalin: Young Communists and the Defence of Socialism* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2017), 167, 170-2.

<sup>71</sup> Braun and Katzer, *Training Methods and Soccer Tactics*, 269.

<sup>72</sup> In 1955 Avery Brundage (an American and President of the International Olympic Committee from 1952 to 1972) gave a speech in Detroit (United States) about one mass

The first Soviet team participated in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games; two residents of Uzbekistan joined the team, the Uzbek, Galina Shamray (women's rhythmic gymnastics) won gold, while the Russian Sergey Popov participated in athletics.<sup>73</sup> Ever since then Uzbekistan athletes have won medals at most of the Summer Olympics. The story behind each top-level Uzbek athlete was a team of coaches, teachers, *Komsomol* activists, family members, friends and well-wishers. They all supported the athlete's physical development and emotional wellbeing. Here organised sports taps into the collective psyche, uniting people around shared feelings of national success and achievement. The interconnection of sports excellence, status, and rewards influenced parents and their children. They saw how elite sport, though strenuous, offered access to material privileges and social recognition. This connects with Christina Kiaer's work on the individual experiences of Russian athletes circa 1930s, especially when she says '*... rather than simply being its victims, as in the traditional Cold War model...*', they actively participated in Soviet sports.<sup>74</sup> What is more, the participation of Uzbek athletes at international sports events aided nation-state building. Karsten Bruggemann reports that international sporting victories are essential for '*small or young states*': '*They make the country known, give status, confidence and motivation. Winners generate*

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unionwide Soviet sports meeting: '*... I have seen many things in various parts of the world, but never anything that would even approach this one, either in magnitude or beauty... There were Uzbeks and Tadzhiks and Cossacks and Armenians and Georgians and Kirgiz... Each delegation included from 400 to 3,000 boys and girls... it went on for five hours like clockwork*'. At the event, the printed slogans and banners visible during the displays read: '*... ready for labour and defence; glory to the Fatherland; hail Lenin and Stalin; three million bales of cotton for the nation; success to the Communist Party; peace-peace-peace*.' Source: From a speech to the Economic Club of Detroit on 7 February 1955, cited in H.W. Morton, *Soviet Sport* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 61-63, in Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, 175.

<sup>73</sup> International Olympic Committee, 'The Olympic Movement: Uzbekistan', <http://www.olympic.org/uzbekistan> (accessed 6 July 2015); National Olympic Committee of Uzbekistan, <http://www.olympic.uz/en/> (accessed 6 July 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Christina Kiaer, 'The Swimming Vtorova Sisters: The Representation and Experience of Sport in the 1930s', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 90.

*positive emotions in their own country, creating a community of recollections which continue to function decades later.*<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

The Communist Party claimed it was building the workers' governed society and a homeland for the 'Soviet people'. The regime, to bring about social transformation and assist with nation-state building, implemented radical interventionist programmes. Physical culture and sport were one Soviet cultural programme designed to influence the minds and bodies of the citizens. Lenin viewed modern sport in practical and symbolic ways, and despite the revolutionary upheaval he planned to balance work, rest and play for all. Accordingly, in the early 1920s the Soviet sports model was deployed to create healthier workers and soldiers and as a soft power tool, to entertain, mobilise, and inspire the peoples of the multinational federal union.

During the 1930s, Stalin used Soviet culture to help intensify the socialisation and acculturation of the masses, and to marginalise religious and ethnic associations and identities. The folk sports were absorbed into the Soviet physical culture. In terms of urban development, between 1920 and 1951, a modern sports culture was created, and the core Soviet sports policies and institutions established. Importantly, the leisure facilities and services were inclusive and state-supported. The Communist Party contrasted this with the inequalities and prejudices of the imperial Russian sports associations. So, despite the morally questionable link between the Soviet culture with authoritarianism and colonisation, the Soviet physical culture introduced modern health and fitness for the masses. Those behind this were the central planners, native cadres, Russian and native trainers and coaches, sports societies, and the *Komsomol*.

Soviet Union participation at international sports competitions generated prestige and projected an image of a healthy and vibrant workers' society. By 1952 their domination of the Summer Olympic

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<sup>75</sup> Karsten Bruggemann, 'Imperial Careers and National Recollection: Baltic Wrestlers and the Organization of National Sports in the Late Tsarist Empire', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion: Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Nikolaus Katzer (Frankfurt: CampusVerlag, 2010), 133.

Games had begun. Altogether, the Soviet sport was an urban phenomenon, and elite athletes benefited from state resources and were professional in all but name.

### **Uzbekistan**

In Central Asia of 1917 modern sports were unknown except among the Russian settlers, so the short-term challenge was to mobilise the locals, particularly young men and women. Here Lenin was inclined to use persuasion and propaganda; and in the early 1920s, the physical culture and modern sports formed part of the mass events and the universal health campaigns. However, under Stalin, the centralisation of political power became increasingly authoritarian. Traditional institutions closed and dissenting voices purged.

From the 1930s and 1940s onwards, the urban civic centres were rebuilt using modern architectural designs. The built environment of gymnasiums, sports-fields, -halls, and stadiums helped to radically change the cultural landscape, reinventing place attachment and meaning. The sources on Soviet sport in Central Asia reveal a network of modern urban sports facilities, services, events, and personnel, which became part of everyday leisure and organised play for children and adults.

The first Central Asian male and female elite athletes and sports personnel trained during the 1930s and 1940s, and by the 1950s Central Asian elite athletes and teams were ready to compete at the Olympic Games. The regime trusted them to be cultural ambassadors both at home and abroad. Furthermore, the coming together of different ethnicities through Soviet sport was interpreted by the communists as social integration at work. Intercultural communication among athletes and spectators exposed them to positive encounters with the Other. Also, at the club and national level, sports-related allegiances and loyalties saw different ethnic and social communities cooperate and empathise with each other.

Conversely, away from the cities, the rollout of modern sports was sparse and underfunded, here the rural masses, particularly women and the physically disabled, had fewer opportunities to partake in modern sport. The situation in Uzbekistan was no different from that found in

most Soviet republics. Alternatively, in the rural areas, folk sport had deep roots and could match the popular appeal of modern sports.

It is simplistic to say that sport (as part of popular culture) can significantly (re-)shape national identity; but it can partner other socialisation channels (education, youth movements, museums, and civic ceremonies) in social change. For instance, Central Asians and Slavs interacted in the workplace and the sports centre, but they tended not to intermarry. In Central Asia, the notion of communist sport as an anti-religious device or 'surrogate religion' is problematic, and there is no evidence to prove it worked conclusively. We can say that Soviet socialisation and acculturation failed to turn most Central Asians into standardised Soviet citizens. Instead, they generated a synergy of both Muslim and Soviet identities, a creative collaboration of the two cultures. Importantly, the Soviet sports culture did succeed in acculturating many urban and rural Uzbeks into modern sportspeople.

The story of modern sports in Uzbekistan is complex; it was a modernisation project imposed in a colonial fashion. In terms of policy aims and outputs, sports culture generally proved 'successful' and popular among urban and rural dwellers regardless of ethnicity. The modern sport had a profound social and cultural impact, in 1917 the Olympic Games were unknown to most Central Asians, and by 1952 an ethnic Uzbek female athlete had won a Gold Olympic medal.

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