PUTTING THE MOSAIC TOGETHER – INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In former East Germany, or the German Democratic Republic (GDR), women were not regarded as the “weaker sex”, either in sports or in other areas of society. Hence, after the great political upheaval of 1989 their reputation as the “strong sex” sparked off numerous sociological studies of “Eastern women” which enquired into the ideologies surrounding womanhood as well as the situation of women in the GDR, more specifically their self-awareness and their everyday lives. The subject of women and sport, however, has so far been a focus of neither sports science, gender studies nor “GDR research”.

This is all the more surprising since the GDR, which saw itself not only as a land of sport but also as a land of women’s emancipation, might serve as an excellent example with which to investigate the interconnections and interactions between gender, society and sport. Attracted to these exceptional research perspectives, I have taken an interest in women’s sport in the GDR since the 1980s, and after the “political change” in 1989 (commonly known as die Wende in Germany) the opportunity eventually presented itself of settling a great number of questions “in situ”, as it were, and undertaking a research project on the subject of women and sport in the GDR, the results of which form the basis of this contribution.

However, conducting enquiries into women’s sport proved to be extremely difficult and the initial euphoria quickly melted away in the face of the quantity and the disorder of the documentation. The crucial problem – which we had anticipated but whose magnitude we had underestimated – turned out to be the ‘invisibility’ of the women. Since in the GDR the “women’s issue” had been regarded as settled, the gender of athletes, officials, delegates, etc. was not mentioned in most of the documents. Even in statistics, such as the numbers of competitors at sports meetings, no differentiation was
made, as a rule, with regard to the gender of the athletes. Hence, in this contribution it is often only possible to point to tendencies.

**WOMEN AND SPORT – ISSUES**

Women made a considerable contribution to the GDR’s great achievements in sport, its so-called “sporting miracle”. The high standards of its top-level sports, especially the successes of its women athletes, were attributed in the GDR to the efficiency of the political system as well as to the ‘emancipation’ of women during the socialist period. This raises the question as to which effects does this system, along with the sporting successes of its women athletes, have on leisure sports and ‘sports for all’. Did successful women athletes serve as role models and did investments in elite sports also benefit women in leisure sports? And did the high proportion of female unemployment, which was equated with emancipation, have a positive or a negative effect on women’s participation in sport?

In answering these questions, I first of all enquire into the number of women active in sports in the GDR and into the nature of their activity. How many women took up sport in the GDR; how frequently and how intensively did they play their sports; and in what type of sports did they take part? Which opportunities were given to women in order to pursue their sporting activities and what problems did they face?

The findings are then interpreted, at first, against the background of developments within sport itself and, secondly, in the context of the circumstances of women’s personal life. In doing so, my starting point and interpretive approach is the gender order and how it affected the everyday life of women in the GDR.

**THE SPORTS SYSTEM**

The development of sport in the GDR as well as that of women’s sport must be viewed against the background of the hierarchically structured and centralized sports system.

After the Second World War sport in the GDR was newly and – following a number of organisational changes – effectively structured. At the same time the significance of concentration on elite sports grew continuously. Characteristic features were the centralisation and politicisation of sport, which was given political weight, among others things, by its being embedded in the executive bodies of the ‘state party’, the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands).

The central control and administration of sport was shared by different SED bodies, above all the Department of Sport within the Central Committee of the SED; the State Secretariat for Physical Culture and Sport, a kind of sports ministry; and the DTSB (Deutscher Turn- und Sportbund), the umbrella organisation for as well the executive body of sport in the GDR. Sport was of such major importance to the SED that the missions of physical culture, sport and tourism were anchored in the GDR’s constitution in 1968, its support by the state and society thus being officially endorsed.

Sport in the GDR was divided into three major areas: elite sports, “coaching, training and competitions” at the ‘mass sport’ level and, finally, “recreational and leisure sports”, which was not incorporated into the traditional competition system. Responsibility for ‘mass sport’ and recreational sport laid in the hands of “sports communities”
The Other Side of the Coin - Women in ‘Sport for all’ in the German Democratic Republic

(Sportgemeinschaften, SG) at the workplace. Since the sports communities (SG), which in many respects resembled sports clubs, were affiliated to funding institutions, they received all kinds of material as well as manpower resources.

Following the political will of the SED, top-level sports clearly occupied a central position within the GDR’s sports system, with school sports and also ‘mass sport’ being dominated by specific sports as well as competition-based activities. By contrast, target-group oriented activities and activities not based on specific sports, in which the focus was on fun, relaxation or social contacts, were of secondary importance. Sport was more or less synonymous with performance and competition. Nevertheless, despite its regulatory nature and its centralized and hierarchical structures, the GDR’s state-controlled sports system did leave a modicum of freedom for people to interpret or redefine state directives and use them to suit their own purposes. Especially recreational and leisure sports provided opportunities for individual patterns of interpretation: for citizens caught up between authoritarian rule and everyday life, between being instrumentalized and existing in their own world, these kinds of sport proved to be a way “of being able to escape official sporting practices and the formalized structures of organized sport”.

WOMEN IN ‘MASS SPORT’ AND LEISURE SPORTS

In official declarations the great importance attached to ‘mass sport’ and ‘recreational and leisure sports’ was indisputable. The aim of recreational and leisure sports in the GDR was in particular to improve health and physical fitness, and participating in sport was considered an indispensable criterion for the “development of a socialist personality”. At the same time, references to the “mass character of physical culture” were intended to signal social equality, cover over shortcomings in the quality of people’s lives and obscure the mechanisms of control.

Women’s sports had further functions besides these. They were to have a “stimulating effect on the relationship of married couples” and help “in the development of socialist family relations”. In addition, the aim of sporting activities was to combat overweight and satisfy the “desire of modern women for a trim, aesthetically formed and trained body”. However, the promise of beauty that sport seemed to offer did not meet with universal acceptance since in many people’s view the muscles and the distorted faces of women athletes under great physical strain were by no means considered beautiful.

But did women in the GDR have the desire to play sports and train their bodies at all? And, if so, did they have the opportunity to pursue their sporting interests?

First of all, it must be pointed out that the attitude of the populace towards leisure sports was very positive, as revealed for example in a representative survey conducted in 1965. Here, 83% of the male and 78% of the female respondents agreed that “physical recuperation through sport, games and rambling” belonged to a healthy life. This attitude was in keeping with the rhyming slogan propagated in 1959 by the then general secretary of the SED, Walter Ulbricht: “Jedermann an jedem Ort, jede Woche einmal Sport” (Every person at every place should play sport once a week). It must be asked, though, whether – and, if so, to what extent – this positive attitude towards sport was put into practice in the form of an active participation in sports.
Participation in sports – figures

Sport in the GDR was supervised, organized and controlled by the DTSB. This does not mean, however, that sports were not played in many different forms and contexts outside the DTSB. Yet, unfortunately there is relatively little documentation available about the nature and the scope of sports participation in the GDR which also takes into account informal sporting activities.

A DTSB report from 1959 contains some information about the GDR population’s participation in sport: it is stated that, all in all, 7.5% of the population were physically active at that time but that not even 2% of all girls and women took part in sporting activities\textsuperscript{17}. In the period that followed, people’s interest in sport grew continuously, although the gap between men’s and women’s participation in sport did not become any narrower. A representative survey shows that at the beginning of the 1980s 56% of the male population but only 37% of the female population took an active part in sports. Moreover, as age increased, the percentage of women who were still physically active decreased\textsuperscript{18}, but even among adolescents there were gender-specific differences with regard to sports participation. In 1981 Heidi Bierstedt, a GDR sociologist, came to the following conclusion: “Even in adolescence there are signs of the phenomenon that far more boys than girls include sport in their leisure activities”\textsuperscript{19}.

Surveys conducted in 1969, 1976 and 1987 by the Central Institute of Youth Research in Leipzig in collaboration with the German College of Physical Culture, which polled 2,500 people in each survey between the ages of 16 and 35, came to quite similar results. A distinction was made in this study between apprentices, young workers (up to age 25) and older workers. In all three age groups and in all forms of sport (i.e. “organized sports in SG”, “non-organized sports played with others” and “individual sports”) girls and women were underrepresented (sometimes considerably so) with one notable exception: 44% of the older female workers but only 33% of the older working men reported in 1987 that they played individual sports. In contrast, in the same year, 41% of the male apprentices but only 25% of the female apprentices, 35% of the young male workers but only 18% of the young female workers and 30% of the older male workers but only 19% of the older female workers took part in organized sports in sport communities (SG). A comparison of the results of the three surveys over the years reveals a growing interest in sport between 1969 and 1978 and a stagnation, or even a decrease of interest in some cases, during the 1980s\textsuperscript{20}.

In evaluating the available survey results, it must be taken into account that the data are not always reliable and precise, a difficulty which partly arises from general problems concerning surveys on sports participation. Unclear definitions of the term “doing sport” as well as the attempts of the respondents to give socially acceptable answers may have distorted the findings quite considerably. Thus, the numbers of people actually active in sports were probably substantially lower than those given above.

Membership figures and quotas of women in organized sport

The DTSB, the umbrella organisation for sports in the GDR, attempted – as was repeatedly emphasized in numerous pronouncements – not only to increase the numbers of people participating in sport but also to bind (and thus control) as many of them as possible, something which it only partly succeeded in doing. The information that is
available on DTSB membership shows that only a relatively small percentage of the GDR’s populace, approximately 20%, took part in organized sports. It must be taken into consideration, though, that the membership figures published by the DTSB also included many children and adolescents who played sports, i.e. the large potential of young sporting talent that was systematically promoted and supported.

The proportion of female members of the DTSB in 1958, one year after it was founded, amounted to 22.5%. Although the DTSB succeeded in increasing its female membership, the disproportionate men-to-women ratio, with a substantial “overbalance” of men, continued to increase until 1989. In 1988 it had 1,076,000 female and 2,583,000 male members, meaning that 29% of its members were women. Thus, the proportion of girls and women in the DTSB was not even a third, even though women formed the majority of the GDR’s population.

In the evaluation of the membership figures, moreover, account must be taken not only of general problems of ‘counting heads’, for example the double or triple recording of members enrolled in more than one sport community, but also of deliberate falsifications. In its yearly plans, namely, the DTSB laid down targets for membership growth rates, which were then invariably achieved. It can be assumed that the pressure to succeed encouraged manipulations of membership figures. In a book on “The Rise and Fall of the GDR’s Sports Miracle”, which he edited together with Ruth Fuchs (many times world champion in throwing the javelin), Klaus Ullrich (Huhn), former sports editor of the Neues Deutschland newspaper, confessed, for example, that functionaries “were specialized in reporting successes” and ignored grievances. Hence, the numbers of DTSB members must be put at figures considerably lower than those given above. However, this does nothing to change the disproportion of the men-to-women ratio in organized sports in the GDR.

**DTSB members – the correlation between age and gender**

The membership statistics that are available are not systematically ordered according to age and so we have no detailed information at our disposal with regard to the proportion of adult women (above the age of 18) among DTSB members over the course of the GDR’s history. Nevertheless, certain data indicate that, here, percentages are significantly below the average values of all female members.

Bierstedt/Wiele came to the conclusion that the lack of interest in sport among girls and women was considerable and especially critical in the case of adult women, stating that “in 1980 only 5.5% of women in the GDR over the age of 18 are members of the DTSB, as compared with 24.4% of men of the same age group.” A case study on sports participation among the inhabitants of Neubrandenburg (a town 140km north of Berlin) points in the same direction. In 1984 roughly 15% of the population of Neubrandenburg were DTSB members, “for the most part children and adolescents.” According to Grünwald, in many sports there were few adults who were active.

Thus, after leaving school or vocational training at the latest, girls appear to have “dropped out” of organized sport, i.e. at the point where the burden of work and family began to increase. Adult women formed only a tiny minority of those active in organized sport.
The participation of girls and women in different sports

Data is available on the participation of girls and women in various sports from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Gymnastics (in the broadest sense of the term) had always been the most popular sport among girls and women: 41% of women DTSB members took part in gymnastics in 1971 and the proportion of women in the Gymnastics Association (Turnverband) amounted to 69%. The percentage of women in the Roller-Skating Association was just as high but the association only had a membership of roughly 6,000. In all other sports women formed the minority of association members: in basketball, badminton, swimming and tennis they made up over 40% of members while in billiards, football, weight-lifting and wrestling there were virtually no women enrolled. In 1980, likewise, girls and women formed the majority of members in the Gymnastic Association. Adult women also took part in German nine-pin bowling (Kegeln) (39,000), hiking (15,000), angling (15,000) and volleyball (13,500). 60% of all adult female members of the DTSB participated in these five sports. To sum up, it can be affirmed that the GDR succeeded neither in “including the majority of women in regular sporting activities” nor in preventing a gender-specific segregation of sport.

Sports priorities and motives

On the question of sports priorities it can be stated that at the beginning of the 1980s ordinary physical activities with little orientation towards performance but of high recreational value predominated among both sexes such as hiking, swimming, bowling, badminton and table tennis. Furthermore, the preferred sports which men named with a significantly higher frequency than women were “football, rowing, volleyball, athletics, physical conditioning and boxing” while women took a greater interest than men in gymnastics. From these findings Bierstedt and Wiele came to the conclusion that “in contrast to men, women prefer more aesthetically oriented and physically less strenuous sports. At the same time it is observable that greater gender-specific differences exist in performance-oriented sports than in the typical leisure sports”. According to Bierstedt and Wiele, no attempt should be made to bridge the gap between men’s sporting interests and those of women; instead, girls’ physical education should be oriented towards women’s interests and place emphasis on gymnastics.

In a survey conducted in the mid 1980s young people of both sexes stated that they wished to play predominantly the sport of their choice and that in sport they wanted less training and competitions and more social contact and stimulation. Compared with the sporting priorities of 1978, the list of preferred sports drawn up by young people in 1987 reveals a clear shift away from traditional sports such as German gymnastics, cycling and handball towards more fashionable sports such as pop gymnastics (aerobics), bodybuilding and water sports. Considerable differences were apparent between girls’ preferred sports and those of boys, the girls’ favourite sports being horse-riding and pop gymnastics. Other popular sports among the girls and young women surveyed were swimming, tennis and volleyball. By contrast, the young men’s lists of preferred sports were dominated by football and motor sports,
but also frequently named were combatant sports, strength training, angling, tennis and table tennis.

A survey of the “wishes, needs and motives of GDR citizens related to sport” revealed that men and women in equal numbers named health, fitness and excitement as reasons for their taking up sport. The female respondents’ motives, however, showed less orientation towards performance or to a particular type of sport than the male respondents, who put emphasis on the need to improve self-discipline as well as the wish for comradeship and getting together socially. The desire for a good figure, on the other hand, was mainly a high priority of the women40 41.

Based on DTSB membership figures, it would seem that the wishes named in the surveys largely concur with the sporting activities chosen, with women predominating in gymnastics and men predominating in combatant sports, strength training and team sports, especially football. This concurrence of wish and reality may in part be due to the fact that only sports that could actually be played in the GDR found their way onto the lists of the respondents’ wishes.

Official reactions?

Despite the successes reported by sports functionaries, the marginal role that women played in sports and the lack of supportive measures could not be overlooked. As early as 1958, for example, Rudi Reichert, the DTSB president, criticized the fact that not enough was done to encourage women to take up sport. According to him, “the few opportunities that we have so far created do not reflect in any way women’s position in society”42.

Not only in the sports press but also at DTSB general assemblies was there, over the years, no exhortations and recommendations or even reports on successful initiatives such as the inauguration of gymnastics courses. But viable and effective long-term strategies for winning over women to an active life in sport were not developed, not least because they would have required considerable resources of both funding and personnel. In resolutions, speeches and planning conferences women’s sport occupied a place, if at all, on the fringes; and even if it was included in the planning, things usually went no further than vague declarations of intent.

As an example of the DTSB’s indifference towards women’s sports, I would like at this point to report in detail a keynote speech given in 1961 by DTSB president Manfred Ewald, outlining the future direction of sport in the GDR43. In 1965, according to Ewald, “the victory of socialism in the country will have been completed. What does this mean in the field of sport? It means that, in developing a socialist physical culture – which, of course, is part of socialist culture – we will also have to have succeeded in bringing about a change in the field of work to achieve a truly socialist people’s sports movement. We can no longer be satisfied when five or six million people take part in sport occasionally. We must ensure that several millions take part in sport regularly and at least once a week …”44. Women are mentioned in only one passage of Ewald’s long speech. If in the years to come, said Ewald, the DTSB wanted to succeed in fulfilling its central task of getting the population to take part regularly in sport, it was clear that “we must at the same time place the problems of the physical education of children and young adults in the foreground”. The aim must be to “instil in every child and
adolescent an enthusiasm for sporting activities ... There is no other way of achieving a socialist people’s sports movement. I mean, for example, even if we presented other things as our main task, so to speak, such as women’s sport or after-work gymnastics in factories and offices, we would not achieve our aim”.

Ewald thus held women’s sport to be of secondary importance after children’s and youth sport, partly perhaps because the latter served at the same time as a preparation for top-level sports. Was it the limited resources which caused him to set the priorities in such a way or did he not consider women’s “after-work gymnastics” to be “true sport”? Ewald’s speech shows that women’s sport did not receive any support from the DTSB, even though encouraging women to take up sport would have been necessary to achieve the aims it had set itself. Or was the goal of developing physical culture and sport in the GDR into a “people’s sports movement” within five years purely propaganda in order to conceal the overriding priority of top-level sports?45

Whatever the case, the implementation of concrete measures and schemes to increase the number of people (especially women) active in sports depended less on being conceived and planned “from above” and more on the personal initiative of committed sports officials. Abundant examples of this can be found in the DTSB’s files, ranging from commitments to establish gymnastics groups to the organisation of special women’s competitions46. Reading the files has led me to the conclusion that an awareness for the lack of interest in sport among the female population on the part of the DTSB’s executive bodies and the sports associations decreased rather than increased from the 1960s onwards parallel to the growing competition in international top-level sports.

CHALLENGES, DEVELOPMENTS AND HINDRANCES IN LEISURE SPORTS

The dictate of performance

Leisure sports in the GDR suffered from the dictates of performance, competition and record breaking, i.e. the principles on which “modern sport” is based and which are typically put into practice in top-level sports. The dominance of top-level sports applied not only to the allocation of resources but also to ways of thinking that were propagated in numerous manifestos and speeches and which formed the image of sport in the people’s minds. As Dickwach was able to demonstrate in her survey, sport was identified with performance and competition47. Up until the 1980s “specific competition-oriented sports” not only predominated in school sports as well as in the Sportgemeinschaften but also influenced “recreational and leisure sports”. In social science teaching materials issued in 1981 it was written: “Recreational and leisure sports need not to be organized or regularly played; nor do they have to be based on performance or tied to one particular sport. However, if sport is to have any great effect, one must aim both at regular sporting activities in a group and at success in sporting contests”48. This mixture of ‘mass sport’ and competitive sports was characteristic of numerous campaigns and schemes such as “Table tennis tournament for thousands”, running meetings named “Going miles in a hurry” [Eile mit Meile] and volleyball series called “Everyone to the net”, in which hundreds of thousands of people took part according to Henning49. Such campaigns were also designed to reach women and
families as target groups; and from 1967 onwards the women’s magazine “Für Dich” [For You], for example, organized a family competition (with contests in a number of track-and-field disciplines held all over the country) in which more than 36,000 families entered.

It is not known whether the participants of these events were subsequently persuaded to take up sport regularly. The relatively limited participation of the GDR population in sports, at any rate, is hardly compatible with the reports of success regularly issued after such campaigns. From the documentation it is impossible to judge the extent to which these ‘people’s sports’ competitions attracted women since there is no categorisation of the participants according to gender. It can be assumed that few women were attracted by this kind of performance-oriented recreational sport. In her study on the “reasons for the physical inactivity of the adult female population”, Dickwach came to the conclusion that because of “socially conveyed thresholds” women were not willing to take part in forms of sport which they associated with athleticism and performance. In her view there were “too few opportunities for all age groups and for both sexes to participate in one or more sports for the joy it brings to their lives and for the great benefit it brings to their health without being put into different classes and having to take part in competitions”.

**Sport provision in a “land of shortages”**

Among the factors which made it difficult for women to participate in sport was no doubt the limited number or the one-sided nature of the sports offered. There was little opportunity, for example, to take up sports like tennis and horse riding – sports which are especially popular among girls and women, as proved by the membership figures of the associations of these two sports after the political “change” in 1989. This was also confirmed in a survey conducted in 1987 among young people, in which Roski observed a considerable discrepancy between wishes and reality: the gap between the supply of and demand for sports such as horse riding, water sports and tennis was as wide as ever. In these sports the “reservoir of potential DTSB members” had not been fully exploited due to the lack of the necessary resources. As demanded at a meeting of the “agitation” section of the SED’s central committee, these sports were not to be propagated in the mass media since the relevant resources, i.e. facilities, balls, feed for the horses, etc., were not available. Even DTSB president Manfred Ewald had to admit: “It was not possible for everyone to play the sport they would have liked to. The conditions in the GDR did not permit this”. In the opinion of Ruth Fuchs, a GDR “showcase” athlete, too little was done for ‘sport for all’.

Despite the sports functionaries’ promise to make sport a “people’s movement” it was not even possible to satisfy the interest in sport that was already there; on the contrary, wishes were ignored and participation prevented, for example on account of the fact that sports apparatus like alpine skis or tennis racquets were not manufactured in the GDR and therefore could not be purchased anywhere without hard currency.

There was also a shortage of sports facilities, especially of swimming pools; moreover, the few that existed were largely reserved for training and competitions. This narrowed the spectrum of sports that attracted women, thus wasting an opportunity of winning over girls and women for regular sporting activities.
The lack of provision in ‘mass sport’ and leisure sports is also confirmed by the findings of youth surveys that are available. In a survey carried out among 848 schoolgirls from years five to ten only 2% of the girls interviewed gave “no interest in sport” as the reason for their not being physically active. In comparison, 27% of the girls reported that there was no opportunity for them to take part in training for their preferred sport. Focusing interest and resources on competitive sports was a problem not only for “unathletic types” but also for those who no longer attained the performance required. As explained by the participants in our interview study, too, for example, you were soon expelled from the training ‘squad’ if you were no longer up to standard, and this frequently meant giving up sport for ever.

As early as 1968, in response to the discrepancy between the aim of getting the whole population to participate in sports and the relatively few material resources available, sports leaders propagated the “natural environment as sports ground”. In the years that followed, encouraging people to use their natural surroundings for physical activities was regularly contained in the resolutions passed by the DTSB’s executive. This was believed to be the only way of resolving the dilemma of wanting to increase the numbers of active participants in sport without at the same time being able to provide the facilities.

“Alternative” sports and new forms of organisation

People who attempted to take up new, “alternative” or fashionable types of sport such as yoga, Asian martial arts, bodybuilding or even the triathlon were suspected of wishing to propagate Western ideologies and met with the DTSB’s more or less open opposition.

Nevertheless, as described by Austermühle for example, new sporting activities spread outside the DTSB’s control, either because the “central leadership” failed to gain any influence over a trend or because the trend was a marginal phenomenon. A running culture arose, for instance, which, disliked but tolerated by the authorities, attracted mainly men. One way of overcoming resistance to fashionable “Western” sports was to re-define them and give them a new name. In this way, yoga was called “yoganastics” and aerobics labelled “pop gymnastics” with the result that they eventually lost their image of being “imports from the West”.

Although in a report contained in the GDR’S 1983 Yearbook of Sports it was written that pop gymnastics differed in many respects from aerobics, the staging, the movements and above all the home-made costumes clearly showed a resemblance to the original Western model. Long knitted stockings, wristbands and headbands were all part of the imaginative outfits. Aerobics’ breakthrough in the GDR, reflected in the great popularity of “pop gymnastics groups”, can be regarded as a small victory of women over the sports bureaucracy. Not only did these gymnastics groups establish themselves at first outside the existing structures of the Sportgemeinschaften (the works’ “sports communities”); they also refused to submit themselves to performance tests and comparisons, both of which played an important role in ‘mass sport’, for example in the form of countrywide sports competitions. And, in the beginning, they had to fight for the necessary resources from the musical equipment to the training of coaches. However, the Gymnastics Association, responsible for all forms of gymnastics in the
GDR, reacted promptly: in 1984 a commission was set up to keep a watch over pop gymnastics and, apparently, at the same time take control of its development. Its aim was to “steer the flood in the right direction” but it also recognized an opportunity of mobilising a target group (i.e. women) that was difficult to attract to sport in traditional ways.

According to Austermühle neither pop gymnastics nor other “alternative” physical cultures were linked to subversive activities and/or political goals. For the participants they were merely ways of putting into practice their interest in modern developments of sports and perhaps also to make their mark on alternative sports.

It was not until the 1980s that the DTSB began to accept the “de-sportification” of sport, a concept which had been established in Western countries as early as the 1960s.

Thus, in the 1980s, as the rapid spread of pop gymnastics showed, even the Wall (which still divided East and West, at least physically) could not hold back the wave of new types and forms of sport; and in the closing years of the 1980s even GDR sports leaders seemed to have acknowledged the signs of the times. In a speech he gave at an IOC Congress in 1988, DTSB president Klaus Eichler not only showed great understanding for new trends in sport such as skate-boarding and karate but even proposed that the Sportgemeinschaften should provide courses for non-members in order to “lower the thresholds for taking up sports”. The first trials with such courses revealed that there was a great demand for them on the part of women, who made up 80% of the participants.

In response to the growing dissatisfaction among the population and its lack of interest in traditional sports, the authorities established Sportgemeinschaften in residential areas (so-called WSGs), aimed at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants in new housing areas, where the infrastructure was inadequate. Since the 1970s the state housing programme had consisted almost entirely of building large blocks of flats (constructed with prefabricated concrete slabs – Plattenbauten as they were called) predominantly on the outskirts of towns, and sport was meant to reach the people in their surroundings in order to bring them (so the promise of the authorities) “health, physical fitness and the joy of living”. Since these areas had schools with gymnasiums, the conditions for running the WSGs were quite favourable. However, despite the considerable effort put into publicising it, the success of the “Local Sports” campaign seems to have been rather limited. As shown by data from Marzahn (a housing area in the east of Berlin that was intended to serve as a model for others), of the 85,000 people living there roughly 5,000 – among them many children and teenagers – took advantage of the sports facilities provided by the WSGs. For adults the WSGs’ programme was largely made up of gymnastics, meaning that especially women were attracted to the courses. Nevertheless, numbers of women participants were relatively small considering the number of women in the population. And, according to Hinsching, no “enthusiasm for mass sports” arose under the infrastructural conditions of these housing areas, unfavourable as they were for playing sports. One must also ask, eventually, whether the information about the sports provided by the WSGs actually reached the women. Approximately half the women interviewed by Dickwach reported the lack of information to be among the reasons for their physical
inactivity\textsuperscript{75}: they did not know, for example, who to contact if they wished to take up a sport. Dickwach came to the conclusion that “these findings reveal a certain anonymity of the WSGs, especially in the new housing areas”\textsuperscript{76}.

Asked to assess the provision of leisure sports for the female population, the women we interviewed in our project came to ambivalent conclusions. On the one hand, it became clear that on account of the demands of work and the family it was often difficult to take part in sporting activities. Although the gymnastics groups were good opportunities to absorb women who were not able – or willing – to take part in the DTSB’s training programmes and competitions, it was not always easy to find such a group. Depending on the type of sport they wished to play, quite a bit of effort was also necessary for the women to overcome the difficulties which invariably arose, such as getting hold of the equipment. On the other hand, many of the women interviewed emphasized the low costs of the sports provided as well as the good atmosphere in the sports groups – even when compared with the situation after the political changes in 1989.

**REASONS FOR THE WOMEN’S LACK OF INTEREST IN SPORT – THE WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVE**

**Digression: observations on the gender order in the GDR**

Various answers suggest themselves to the question of how to embed the sports system and the development of women’s sports in the GDR in a theoretical context. Sport can be described as a component of a modern dictatorship or analysed from a perspective “from below”. There are currently various reflections on and analysis of the GDR’s political system, its mechanisms of control and the effects these had on everyday life. These studies, however, have failed to take gender relations into consideration\textsuperscript{77}. The theoretical background of this contribution comprises approaches of gender studies which have as their starting point a social construction of reality in which gender is regarded as “a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because its embeddedness in the family, the workplace, and the state as well as in sexuality, language, and culture”\textsuperscript{78}. Thus, gender always has an individual as well as an institutional aspect since individuals acquire gender based on the “scripts” prevalent in a given society. But gender is not something that we have or we are but something we do. Gender is a performative act; it is enacted constantly and produced in interactions. The prerequisites as well as the consequences of gender differences and gender hierarchies are the gender-based division of labour and the symbolically conveyed duality of gender\textsuperscript{79}.

In the GDR, too, the gender order was determined by the division of labour, an imbalance of power to the advantage of men, and gender ideals and stereotypes based on gender differences. Characteristic of all the GDR’s historical phases was the great number of women in employment, which was considered both a great success and a sign of emancipation. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals in the GDR, too, both vertical and horizontal segregations in the sphere of employment, the lines of demarcation running partly along the gender boundary. This is proved, for example, by the differences in wages, with women earning 25-30% less than men\textsuperscript{80}. The vertical segregation is clearly
seen in the relatively small proportion of women in positions of leadership. The higher the position in politics or industry (and this also applied to sports organisations), the lower the percentage of women office holders. The gender-based division of labour was cemented by the women’s responsibility for the home and the children. This responsibility was called into question neither in public nor in private and neither by men nor by women. The official model, consensus, inner conviction and everyday practice was the combination of work inside and outside the home, and finding the right balance between the two often required a strenuous effort. Therefore women were also the addressees of the state’s policies on the family, which left the role of men largely untouched. Women, by contrast, were expected to “square a circle” and reconcile productive work outside the home and reproductive work in the home. Providing an almost complete network of day nurseries, kindergartens and facilities for children to be supervised before and after school may have made it easier for mothers to go out to work but it only helped to reduce their workload in certain areas and in no way relieved them of their responsibility for the family. Women were forced to find their own solutions at the individual level, make concessions with regard to both family and career and make compromises which put them in a clear position of disadvantage compared to men.

Despite the official model image of the “emancipated” woman, traditional myths and stereotypes of femininity were common in the GDR. Gender was constructed as a binary concept with two poles, not least due to homophobia and the denial of homosexuality. According to the survey findings published by Bruhm-Schlegel/Kabat vel Job, gender-specific attitudes and behaviour hindered the GDR population from “laying full claim to gender equality.”

In summary, one can say that the ideals and the roles of men and women in the GDR developed in a specific way in accordance with the values, norms and ways of thinking prevailing in society as a whole and oriented towards the perspective of gender differences. A hierarchical gender order can be proved to have also existed in the GDR with its roots in the gender-based division of labour as well as in the concept of a symbolically conveyed gender duality which shaped the daily lives of the inhabitants. In the GDR, too, the continuance of society was based on women's unpaid work in the home and above all on their responsibility for bringing up the children. “In the GDR the fundamental conflict between work in production and work in the reproduction of labour was neither resolved in principle nor was it possible to come to any ‘gender-neutral’ arrangement”; in other words, gender duality and the division of labour brought a social imbalance between the sexes.

The implications of this for women’s personal life circumstances may be illustrated by the following quotation: “I am successful in my job and manage to get my work done just like the others, including the men. And I wanted to be a good mother, too, … and, of course, someone to talk to for my husband and a good lover … and, well, be responsible for everything. And be active in social affairs, besides. These were all like stepping stones in the water and I tried to jump back and forth between them. But I never found out all the while who I really was myself in all this.”
Gender arrangements in the GDR were closely interwoven with the life circumstances of men and women and they also influenced ideas, attitudes and behaviour related to sport. Hence, stereotypical views with regard to the kinds of sport that were suitable for men and women were widespread, and on the GDR’s sports grounds and in its gymnasia, for example at the sports and gymnastics festival held every four years with more than 30,000 competitors, the men enacted masculinity with their acrobatic exercises while the women gymnasts demonstrated femininity with their aesthetic performances containing elements of dance.

The result of this gender arrangement was male dominance in sport. Numerous GDR authors pointed out – for the most part briefly and in passing and sometimes based on the findings of surveys – that, on account of the burden of work and family, women often found neither the time nor the energy to take part in sporting activities. I. Wonneberger, for example, pointed out that “women today must spend most of their time (80%) on the housework and the family” and it was therefore hard to convey to them an enthusiasm for sport. In the study undertaken by Dickwach especially women between 26 and 35 stressed that sporting activities were too time-consuming for them.

Bierstedt/Wiele came to the following conclusion in their study: “A major factor is that women’s work outside the home in addition to their work in the household, looking after and bringing up the children means – now as before – a greater burden, both physically and with regard to the time at their disposal. This has led to the circumstance that women do not have in all cases the same favourable conditions as men in sporting activities. If today women still devote at least twice as much time to looking after the family as men, then the cause lies in the upbringing of children, which has not yet managed to overcome the traditional roles of men and women completely.”

These survey results are confirmed by the answers given by the women we interviewed. They made clear that, although it may not have been impossible, it was nevertheless very difficult to take up sports in addition to career and family. And it was also the responsibility for the housework and looking after the children that the women named most frequently as the cause of their limited participation in sporting activities. The dense network of childcare facilities was of little help in this respect since they were only open until 6pm; thus, in their leisure hours women had to seek solution by themselves to the problem of finding someone to look after their children. But the women we interviewed also reported that despite the threefold burden of motherhood – family, career and society – it was still possible to find a niche for oneself in sport – and even, with a lot of effort, to take part in ‘exotic’ sports like surfing or skiing.

It also seems to have been, among other things, the lack of balance in demand and supply that hindered women’s participation in sport. This also applies to the most important providers of leisure sports, the Sportgemeinschaften, which took little consideration of women’s personal circumstances. Although, at least on paper, the Sportgemeinschaften seemed in many respects to meet the needs of the population, including those of women (i.e. low costs, low thresholds of access, a wide range of sports provided), it was above all the fact that the sports took place directly after work.
that made them scarcely accessible for women. For after work there were many chores waiting for women, including picking up the children from after-school care facilities and doing the shopping.

**SUMMARY**

It is not easy to piece together the mosaic in order to form a coherent picture of the role which women played in mass sports and leisure sports in the GDR. But perhaps this is of little value anyway since, despite many similarities, women’s lives and daily routines, their leisure and sports, their wishes and needs as well as their joys and cares all differed from a considerable degree. A homogeneous “women’s sport” existed in the GDR just as little as it does anywhere else in the world. Nevertheless, a number of general trends and interrelationships can be identified and answers formulated (even if these are only preliminary) to the questions asked at the beginning of my contribution.

The assumption that the successes and the image of top-level sportswomen had a positive effect on leisure sports is untenable. On the contrary, the concentration of resources on elite sports had, in many respects, an adverse effect on the other areas of sport: although it was combined with the provision of a wide range of sports for children as well as the particular support of young talent, its consequences were severe restrictions in the field of recreational sports, for example with regard to facilities and apparatus.

The result was that the sports specifically provided for adult women were not only insufficient in number but also one-sided in orientation. There was a huge gap between women’s sporting interests and the opportunity they had of playing their preferred sports.

With regard to the question why women showed such a lack of interest in recreational sports it must also be pointed out that the DTSB has never attached any importance whatsoever to the support and advancement of women in sport. Moreover, the lack of women in the higher echelons of sport was a further reason why no great attention was paid to women’s limited participation in sport. Furthermore, mention must be made of the obstacles at the individual level which hindered women from taking part in sporting activities. The great workload of women in daily life, the difficulty of integrating the sport that was offered to their personal life circumstances, the lack of attractive sports provided – it was the combination of these and other factors which then led to a rather diffuse but quite effective indifference towards sport. As Bierstedt and Wiele described, “among women there is a predominance of such reasons as ‘because I couldn’t be bothered up to now’, ‘because there’s a lot of effort involved’ or ‘because I have no wish to take up sports’”

Thus, without a doubt, the key reason for women’s lack of interest in sport in the GDR is to be sought in their personal life circumstances and, hence, also in the gender order, where it can be assumed that close interrelationships exist between gender-specific patterns of sports participation on the one hand and gender arrangements on the other hand, above all the gender-specific allocation of roles and gender duality as interpretive pattern as well as script.
NOTES


Through the support of the German Ministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend and the German Institute of Sports Sciences I was given the opportunity of undertaking a project to study the role of women in sport. Together with Toni Niewerth I sought out libraries and archives in search of material. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Toni Niewerth for his great help.

2 The sources used were specialist journals and books as well as the minutes of meetings of relevant organisations and bodies, especially the DTSB (Deutscher Turn- und Sportbund) of the GDR. In order to find out about the personal experiences, strategies and assessments of women, we conducted guided interviews with two different groups of women: namely, 20 women active in different sports and ten women who had never played sports as adults.

For pragmatic reasons I frequently speak in a general way of girls, women and men in this contribution. These terms relate to averages and majorities.

Cf. the diagram in NIESE L.H., Sport im Wandel, Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 1997, p. 116.

6 The principles of sports policy and the related ideological and political dogma of the SED leadership are laid down, for example, in a 1968 State Council resolution on the “Tasks of Physical Culture and Sport”; cf. ROSSADE W., Sport und Kultur in der DDR, München, Tuduv Verlag, 1987, p. 9. On the organisation of sport in the last years of the GDR, see TIECHLER H.J., K. REINARTZ et al., Das Leistungssportsystem der DDR in den 80er Jahren und im Prozess der Wende, Schorndorf, Hofmann, 1999.

I cannot here go into the question of whether the lofty goals of recreational and leisure sports were achieved; cf. J. Hinsching (ed.), Alltagssport in der DDR, Aachen, Meyer und Meyer, 1998.


14 An article in the Volkszeitung (dated 10. 4. 1980) referred to the widespread view that jogging gave women solid legs and face wrinkles.


17 Gymnastik und Turnen (GT), 1959, 1, p. 7.


20 Cf. Roski G., “Die Entwicklung des freizeitlichen Sporttreibens von Lehrlingen, Arbeitern und Studenten zwischen 1969 und 1987”, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der DHfK, 31, 1990, pp. 71-83. People were considered physically active when they played a sport at least once a week. It was possible to give more than one answer. See also Bierstedt H., “Die Einbeziehung der sportlichen Betätigung in die Lebensweise der Familien”, Theorie und Praxis der Körperkultur, 30, 1981, pp. 32-34. Here, too, it was shown that the percentage of women among the physically active population decreased as the extent, the intensity and the orientation towards performance increased.

For an overview of how membership developed in the DS and the DTSB, see Tables 1 and 2 in G. PFISTER, Frauen und Sport in der DDR, Köln, Strauss 2001, who also names the sources.


See especially the analysis of the survey on “time budgets” by PRILLER E., “Jedermann an jedem Ort – jede Woche mehrmals Sport: Sport im Zeitbudget von Erwachsenen in der DDR”, in HINSCHING J. (ed.), Alltagssport in der DDR, Aachen, Meyer und Meyer, 1998, pp. 195-312, which shows that the number of people who were physically active fell continuously; see also TEICHLER J., K. REINARTZ et al., Das Leistungssportsystem der DDR in den 80er Jahren und im Prozess der Wende, Schorndorf, Hofmann, 1999, p. 87. According to this source, checks which were made in the 1980s showed that in some DTSB-affiliated sport communities membership figures were “rounded upwards” by up to 20%.

Cf. PONERT A., Die Entwicklung des Frauensports in der DDR nach dem VIII. Parteitag der SED (1971 bis 1976), (diploma dissertation submitted to the DHfK Leipzig), Leipzig, 1978, p. 33, who reports that in 1975 25% of female adolescents but only 4% of adult women were members of the DTSB.


The Turnverband was also responsible for gymnastics.


37 See, for example, the papers given at a conference on the subject of “Physical Education and Gender Specificity” at Humboldt Universität, Sektion Sportwissenschaft. Forschungsgruppe Schulsport (ed.), *Sportunterricht und Geschlechtsbesonderheiten*, (Reports 84:8), Berlin, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, 1984.


42 See the documentation in the “Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin” (SAPMO). SAPMO DY 12/892, DTSB Bestand Bundesvorstand, Büro des Präsidiums, Redemanuskript Reichert, p. 6; see also *Gymnastik und Turnen* (GT), 1961, 4, p. 67; *Neues Deutsches Turnen* (NDT) 1962, 4, p. 4.

43 The speech can be found in the following file: XI. Tagung des Bundesvorstandes DTSB, 6-7 April 1961 (SAPMO; DY 12/898, DTSB Bundesvorstand, Büro des Präsidiums).


See, for example, the speech given by Wolfgang Sellin, a delegate to the 11th Congress of the Executive Committee of the DTSB in 1961. As a way of gaining new members, Sellin proposed that alternatives might be introduced to replace the usual competitions (SAPMO DY 12/898 DTSB, Bundesvorstand, Büro des Präsidenten, Unterlagen der XII. Bundesvorstandstagung, 1961).


SAß I., “Probleme der sportlichen Freizeitbetätigung von Mädchen aus allgemeinbildenden Schulen”, Theorie und Praxis der Körperkultur, 23, 1974, p. 523. Girls at school complained about the lack of facilities for training in handball (27%), swimming (9%), volleyball (12%), athletics (12%) and gymnastics (9%).

Cf. the resolution of the DTSB Executive Committee following the 10th SED Party Congress. Deutsches Sporecho, 30th April 1981, p. 2.


On the diffusion of pop gymnastics, see, for example, SCHNEIDER T., Neuere Entwicklungen des Sports in der DDR im Spiegel ausgewählter DDR-Veröffentlichungen, (dissertation submitted to the Freie Universität Berlin), Berlin, 1984, pp. 46ff.


Dickwach (1986) conducted a survey of 1047 inhabitants of a large town in the GDR to find out the reasons for their non-participation in sport. She made use of a standardized questionnaire.
