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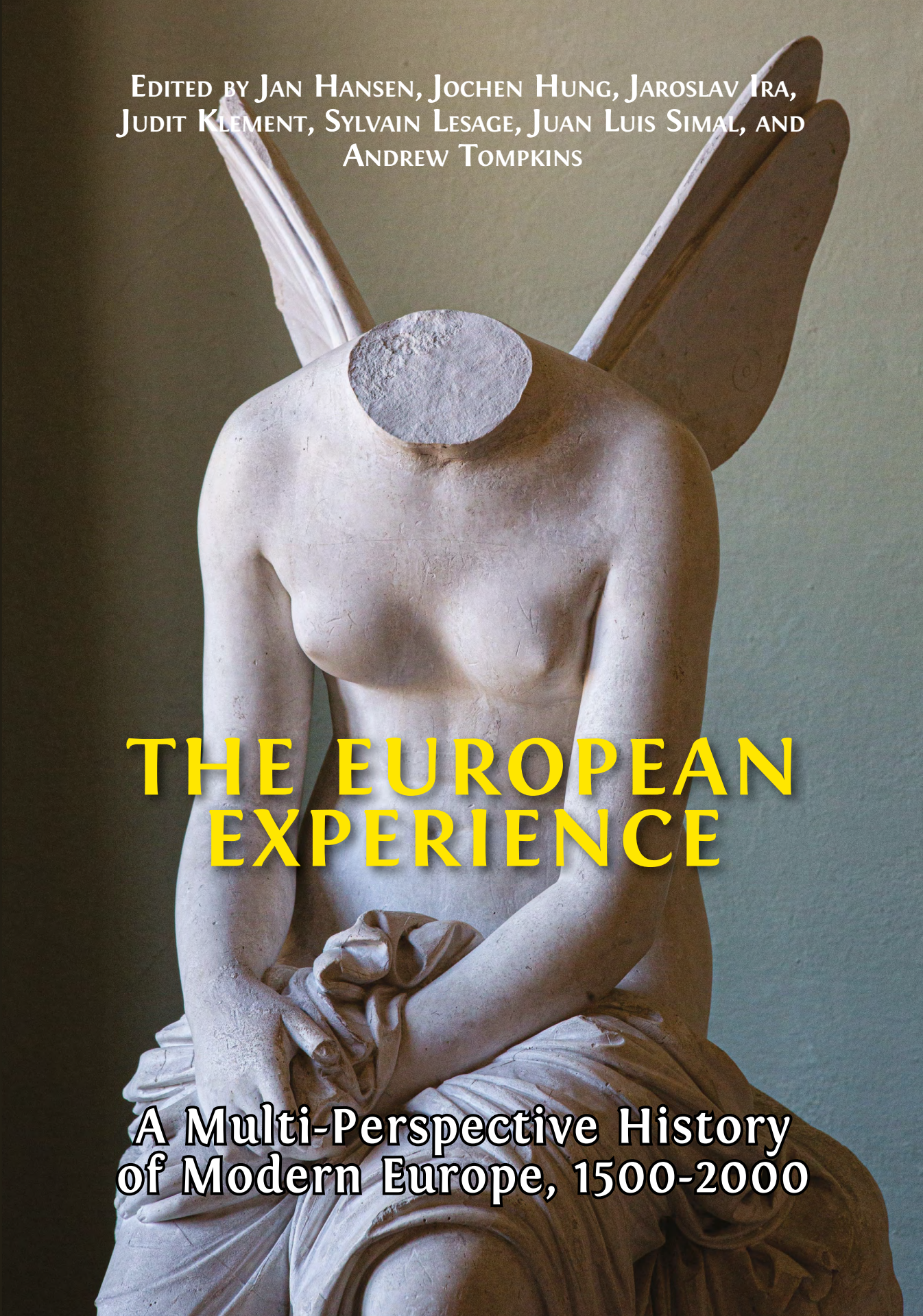

The European Experience

A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe, 1500-2000

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7.3.2 Sports and Leisure in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)

Alejandro Camino, Sylvain Lesage, Tomáš Masař, and Frank Reichherzer

Introduction

Pleasure and amusement, as well as idleness and boredom, are integral experiences and features of human life. Recreation and fun as experiences are not limited to a 'leisure class' or the wealthy. It would be too much to describe 'leisure' as exclusively a modern, European, bourgeois or nineteenth-century invention. But one can argue that in the framework of modernity, 'leisure' acquired a specific (if heavily contested) meaning which increasingly shaped and affected individuals and their societies. In fact, the nineteenth century saw the arrival of what Peter Burke has called the "European system of leisure" and—by 1948—the "right to rest and leisure" was codified under Article 24 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But how did this system of leisure come into place? What are the core characteristics of *leisure time*? How do people experience and make sense of this time? As this chapter argues, manifold processes came together in the emergence of the leisure system. The first part gives an overview of how leisure emerged during the nineteenth century. In the following section, the urban leisure-scape of nineteenth-century Paris, the relationship between sports and (inter)nationalism, and the professionalisation and commodification of sports all highlight cultural, political and economic aspects of practising and experiencing (leisure) time.

Towards a European Leisure System: Modern Times and the Emergence of 'Leisure'

The widespread use of reliable timekeepers—like watches and clocks—and the commodification of work and personal freedom were overarching forces

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that underpinned and enabled the rise of industrial capitalism. This modern, evolving time regime put forward a notion of time as empty and composed of uniform and discrete mechanical units. This new conceptualisation of time could be described as a long-lasting process of rationalisation and differentiation. Other ways of conceptualising time did not vanish, and these different ways of conceptualising time continued to overlap and colour everyday life: the reassembly of time was a long-lasting—sometimes heavily opposed or disputed—process of diffusion, adoption, and amalgamation.

During the nineteenth century, clock-time became dominant and formative, reconfiguring the temporal order of the modern world, even if its impact varied in different places and times. At the dawn of the twentieth century, clock-time emerged in many parts of Europe and around the globe as a powerful symbol and means not only of temporal but also of political and social order. According to English historian E.P. Thompson, in its new, specifically modern understanding, "time orientation" began to interfere with "task orientation." Old, "polychronic" habits were overwhelmed by a newly dominant, "monochronic" framing of human behaviour.

This modern understanding of time broke the day and the week down into discrete and exclusive temporal segments, with different qualities and tasks appropriate to each. The battle-cry of the late nineteenth century moderate working-class movement for "eight hours for work, eight hours for rest and eight hours for what we will" makes this temporal demarcation clear. Employers accepted the separation of time into discrete segments, and fought over the precise length of time assigned to the working day. Here, a fundamental aspect of the modern European leisure system becomes clear: first, leisure is a specific period of time. Second, leisure-time is separate from but strongly connected to work. Third, leisure is a distinct period that differs from breaks, or time dedicated to essential activities such as sleeping and eating. Fourth, even if leisure-time could be imagined as a "realm of freedom" next to the "realm of necessities" (as Karl Marx did in the third volume of *Das Kapital*, published in 1894), the self-determination of time is under siege and colonised from many sides. Setting distinct boundaries between periods of time marks them both. Nevertheless, these boundaries are always challenged and can become blurred. Hence—fifth—the question of how leisure time should be used is contested, with potential competing uses that include idleness as well as education, physical and mental health, consumption, hobbies, or self-improvement. A history of leisure is therefore not only a history of amusement, fun, idleness, the weekend, or a growing leisure industry, but is equally a history of fierce cultural, political, social, and economic struggles over the 'right' or 'proper' use and allocation of time for individual men, women, and children, as well as society as a whole.

Paris and the New Experience of Leisure

In the process of defining leisure and using it as a tool to reshape social hierarchies, cities played a key role. More than any other city, Paris embodied the transformation of leisure practices in Europe in the nineteenth century and constituted a model that both fascinated and provoked imitation. The ambivalent image of Paris as a capital of pleasure dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it became more prominent in the nineteenth century. This idea of Paris as a capital of pleasure was developed in the travel guides that were published from the 1830s onwards—travel guides from Baedeker, Conti, or Joanne—which offered an organised catalogue of places, itineraries, schedules, and activities to experience '*le gai Paris*'.

Time and leisure in Paris were organised around the cityscape and the public spaces created for the enjoyment of urban life. Urban developments that had been taking shape since the seventeenth century were accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Napoleon III returned from his British exile with the idea of making Paris a festive and monumental capital adorned with green spaces, a project of reconstruction that was undertaken by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891) and engineer Adolphe Alphand (1817–1891).

It was then that Paris took on its current form, with the construction of major arteries (*boulevards*), the widening of sidewalks, and the creation of promenades, parks, and gardens. This redevelopment of the urban landscape corresponds to a transformation of urban rhythms and sociability in a city that itself became a landscape worth seeing. In the urban planning project that turned the boulevards into open-air lounges, public benches, which had previously been reserved for gardens, were adapted to the city—introducing a new sociability. Installed along the boulevards, they were presented to walkers, allowing them to pause and relax while enjoying a street scene. Beyond the bench, the boulevards, which rethought urban traffic, also offered a new commercial organisation of pleasure and entertainment: public entertainers, organ players, magic lantern artists, acrobats and street vendors attracted dense crowds which could stroll and stop between the benches, kiosks, and advertising columns—an experience embodied by the French writer Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) in the figure of the '*flâneur*'. But the boulevard was above all the home of cafés—hubs of sociability that have proliferated in Paris since coffee first arrived as an exotic alternative to alcohol in the second half of the seventeenth century. In fine weather, the terraces overflowed onto the pavement, attracting crowds of customers and bystanders. In the café, Parisians and tourists alike could experience the pleasure of not doing anything more than reading and watching passers-by.

In addition to the boulevard, Parisian urban planning was redesigned to include parks and gardens which would provide Parisians with air and help them to 'expel the miasma', i.e. to turn the busy and industrious city into a modern and healthy one. The park did not only bring fresh air to the city, it was also essentially an experience of aesthetic and cultural recreation. Napoleon III had the Bois de Boulogne and Bois de Vincennes developed on the model of Hyde Park in London, but distributed on the western and eastern outskirts of Paris. In the 1850s, the Bois de Boulogne was arranged with viewpoints, around ninety-five kilometres of alleys and pathways, floral gardens, lakes, islands, rivers, and waterfalls. Cafés and restaurants were set up there, promoting the sociability of the boulevard. In addition, there were two horse racetracks (Longchamp, then Auteuil) and a zoo offering a profusion of exotic leisure activities, including camel rides, llama-drawn carts, a Chinese pavilion, and more.

Fig. 1: Béraud, Jean, *The Cycle Chalet in the Bois de Boulogne* (ca. 1900), CC BY 1.0, Paris Musées, https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/musee-carnavalet/oeuvres/le-chalet-du-cycle-au-bois-de-boulogne#infos-principales.

To the east of Paris, the Bois de Vincennes had similar features. But it was the Bois de Boulogne that became the heart of worldly society—it was the place where worldly men and women went to be seen before lunch in town, and then again in the afternoon before drinks on the boulevards and the shows that followed.

Paris, its parks, and its boulevards redefined the experience of pleasure and the sense of urbanity for elites and the middle class. Its model radiated

throughout Europe and attracted masses of tourists, in a city made accessible by a rapidly expanding network of train lines.

Sports and Nationalism

As nationalism grew during the age of the Napoleonic Wars, it became apparent that sport and physical education would be influenced by nationalistic ideas. Public health and physical fitness were seen as one of the major aspects of national welfare. The healthier and fitter the nation was, the better its economic productivity and military capacity would be. In these terms, healthy and fit nations could better compete for resources not only against other European nations but against countries all over the world. Political and economic leaders of states and nations therefore argued in favour of organised sport and physical exercise programmes.

Unlike in Great Britain, where competitive sports clubs were most popular, in continental Europe gymnastics and collective exercising were initially dominant. In contrast to sports like football or rugby, gymnastics was non-competitive. Thus, while developing and strengthening the bodies of individual gymnasts, it also focused firmly on group cooperation and building a spirit of mutual solidarity between team members.

One of the first individuals to realise the potential of physical education in the service of the nation was German pedagogue Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852). In 1810, influenced by nationalist anti-Napoleonic philosophy, Jahn and a group of colleagues founded the Deutscher Bund, a secret organisation which—through organised group exercise—aimed to increase patriotism among German people and prepare them for the battle of national liberation.

For most of the first half of the nineteenth century, Jahn's Deutscher Bund and the German gymnastics movement (*Turnbewegung*), which was based on his ideas, were forbidden in German lands. After the Revolution of 1848, many of the so-called '*Turner*' were forced into exile outside Europe. The majority went to the USA, where their ideas swiftly spread. Jahn's principles for exercise were also adopted in many other European countries and were used to further the formation of physically strong and healthy populations. Jahn's contribution to Germans' physical abilities was first fully recognised after the successful process of unification of Germany in the 1860s and 1870s. The praxis of '*Turnen*' as a popular form of physical education was gradually expanded to all German-speaking areas in Central Europe, but would later be heavily exploited by Nazi ideology.

The idea of collective exercise inspired by Jahn was also instrumental to the formation of national sports movements in other countries. One example is the Czech Sokol organisation, which also became popular among Czech

diasporas around the world and also, to a lesser extent, in other Slavic nations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sports movements were significant in stateless nations (i.e. ethnic groups without nation-state sovereignty) not only for their role in strengthening national ideas, but also in some cases for their contribution to clandestine training of the male population for future independence struggles—for instance, the Voimaliitto resistance organisation in Finland during the period of Russification in the early twentieth century.

The end of the nineteenth century saw a growing internationalisation of sport, which created new arenas for national agendas and interests. Among many other emerging international championships and races, a new phenomenon in sport—the modern Olympic movement—appeared. Inspired by growing interest in ancient archaeology and contemporary excavations of ancient Greek Olympia, French pedagogue and historian Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937) gained enough support from the wider sports community to found the International Olympic Committee in 1894. The first modern Olympic Games took place two years later in Athens, Greece. Even though it took several years to amass a broader public audience, the idea of modern Olympism proved to be vital, and the games' popularity increased after they were hosted in London in 1908.

The Olympic Games also posed an ideal stage for stateless nations. In the pre-1914 Olympiads, members of the Hungarian, Czech, or Norwegian nations (before Norway gained independence from Sweden in 1905)—later joined by Finns and Icelanders—competed in their own national teams. The integration of these nations into the sports community not only affirmed their equality with other national sporting communities, but also enabled them to exhibit their skills and abilities through physical accomplishments.

Medals and records won in international events were often seen as an achievement of the nation as a whole, which helped to create bonds between citizens, as well as stronger national loyalty. Particularly in the case of stateless nations, any success on the international level strengthened a sense of national belonging, while also helping individuals to perceive the nation as a concrete group of fellow countrymen rather than an abstract entity.

Professionalisation and Commodification of Leisure Activities

The boundaries between leisure and sport were blurred in the nineteenth century. Many activities, such as football, rugby, cycling or athletics, were halfway between sport and a purely leisurely pastime. However, in the 1860s some sports began to be professionalised. For that reason, a strong struggle

between amateurism and professionalism took place within and between European countries, with different factions defending different stances on sport and its purposes. On the one hand, amateurs—usually from the upper and middle classes—saw sport as a leisure activity played for personal satisfaction and a love of the game. They played sports intensely, but strove to show that they did not take their outcome too seriously, emphasising effortless achievement and values such as fair play and character-building. There was also an interclass amateur associationism, with highly regulated competitions, in which each association represented a local, regional, or national identity—in these contexts, the result clearly mattered. On the other hand, outside of these amateur competitions, professionals defended the right to compete for cash rewards.

Cycling, which developed as a leisure and sporting pursuit from the 1860s, is a good example of the struggle between amateurism and professionalism. In particular, from the 1890s onwards, cycling engendered transnational flows of ideas and practices, as racers crossed borders with increasing swiftness. However, each European country regulated cycling competitions according to their own nation's prevalent position on the question of amateurism versus professionalism, with different paths emerging. While the cycling associations established in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany during the early 1880s resolutely adopted amateurism in competitions, in Italy and especially France racing for monetary reward soon became the dominant mode of competition. Countries like Belgium went for a middle ground between the two stances.

Fig. 2: Jules Beau, *Participants of the Paris-Roubaix cycle race before the start* (19 April 1896), Public Domain, Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Btv1b8438637g-p030.jpg.

An example of the conflict between amateurism and professionalism within a country is the FA Cup football tournament. The leading competition in Britain, the FA Cup tournament started in 1871 with amateur rules. When the northern clubs with predominantly working-class memberships entered the competition soon after, the FA tried to defend the amateur status of the game against incipient signs of professionalism, such as the regular payments that some working-class teams started to offer to some of their players so that those could focus on playing football. This happened clandestinely, of course, as professionalism was not allowed, for instance by formally providing them with supplementary jobs. In 1883, Blackburn Olympic became the first professional club (and the first from a working-class background) to win the tournament and in 1885 the FA legalised professionalism.

At the end of the nineteenth century, sport was becoming increasingly professionalised and internationalised. There were attempts to institutionalise the rules of various sports on an international scale to ensure that international competitions were staged fairly. For that reason, in the 1900s and 1910s, most major sports created international bodies, from cycling (UCI, 1900) and football (FIFA, 1904), to swimming (FINA, 1908) and athletics (IAAF, 1912). However, these organisations often struggled to assert authority over countries where sports were not dominated by amateurism. Amateurism gradually began to decline from the late nineteenth century onwards, although it still survived for a considerable time in certain sports. For example, while the first modern Olympic Games had taken place in Athens as early as 1896 (without female participants), professionals were excluded from the games until the Seoul Olympics in 1988. Amateurism was also the essence of Rugby Union until 1995, with rugby remaining the last significant international sport to sanction professionalism.

The development of professionalism at the end of the nineteenth century, taking advantage of the modern market society, initiated a quick commodification and commercialisation of sports (as well as its leisure side). However, amateurism also stood fast against commodification: defenders of amateurism felt that if sports were commercialised, victory would become more important than participation, and sports would not remain a friendly activity. Cycling is a perfect illustration of this commodification process. There was a growing international market for bicycles of all kinds, a cross-border flow of technological advances and bicycle manufacturers, and a growing interest from the sporting press in cycling. Newspapers had a principal role in all of these shifts because they advertised technological advances, as well as new models of bicycle, and competitions in other countries. Additionally, another form of leisure was reading sports newspapers, as fans sought to be informed about results of road races, because these competitions, which

covered long distances were (unlike other sports) impossible to watch in person. For this reason, some newspapers became race organisers, with the aim of increasing their sales and earning more money from advertising. In fact, the Tour de France (1903)—which revolutionised competitive racing worldwide—and later, the Tour of Italy (1909) and Tour of Spain (1935), were created, respectively, by the newspapers *L'Auto*, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, and *Informaciones*, successfully seeking to profit from the commodification and commercialisation of sport.

Conclusion

During the nineteenth century, leisure evolved as a more or less clearly defined concept. Developing in close connection to a reframing of work and labour in an age of industrialisation and modernity, leisure emerged as a discrete unit of time. Leisure was more than non-work, rest, or recreation. The leisure system did not appear overnight in Europe: it was the product of deep social, economic, political, and even cultural transformations. From a macro perspective, the nineteenth century could be seen as a formative period for the modern time regime. But from a micro perspective, we can observe that the modern condition of time, and hence leisure, emerged in different places, different periods, and even different forms. But these diverse manifestations of modern time transcended common categories and binary distinctions of urban/rural or industrial/agrarian.

Leisure and sports are an important part of the history of the nineteenth century. Leisure activities and sports did not take place in a vacuum: leisure was coupled with other political, social, cultural, and economic trends like urban planning and entertainment, social movements and nationalism, professionalism, the commodification of leisure and sports, and much more. Analysing the constitution of modern temporalities from the perspective of leisure and sports poses fundamental questions: how and by whom were leisure and its practices conceptualised—and for what purpose? When and where did specific forms of leisure like sports appear? And, especially, how did people and groups make sense of their (free) time? By asking questions like these, one can identify core mechanisms characterising nineteenth-century societies and advance to a fundamental understanding of the modern world.

Discussion questions

1. What was the role of capitalism in the development of leisure culture in nineteenth-century Europe?

2. How did people and groups make sense of free time? What power structures could be identified in the use of time?
3. Why did sports play such an important role in the development of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe?
4. What is the role of sport and other leisure activities today? How does it differ from the nineteenth century?

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