Picturing the Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads

Modernist and Avant-Garde Engagement with Sport in Central Europe and the USSR, 1920–1932

Przemysław Strożek
This volume focuses on the modernist and avant-garde engagement with workers’ sport events that were organised or were planned to be organised in the cities of Central Europe and the USSR in the period of 1920–1932: Frankfurt am Main – Vienna – Moscow – Prague – Budapest – Berlin.

During the 1920s and 1930s, two organisations of workers’ sport operated: the Lucerne Sport International/Socialist Workers’ Sport International and the Red Sport International, which held the socialist Workers’ Olympics and the communist Spartakiads, respectively. These events were not aimed at cultivating national victories and individual athletic records, but rather at mobilising workers for the class struggle and at creating new culture for the working class. This book examines the visual propaganda of the Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads expressed through paintings, sculptures, prints, illustrations, posters, postcards, photomontages, photographs, films, theatre and architectural projects. It emphasises the significance of workers’ sport for the artistic and social changes within a utopian project of a new culture, as visualised by the modernist and avant-garde artists, including Varvara Stepanova, Gustav Klucis, and Otto Nagel.

This volume is of great use to students and scholars of the history of sport, art history and cultural history in interwar Europe and the Soviet Union.

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The nations of Central and Eastern Europe experienced a time of momentous change in the period following the Second World War. The vast majority were subject to Communism and central planning while events such as the Hungarian uprising and the Prague Spring stood out as key watershed moments against a distinct social, cultural and political backcloth. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification and the break-up of the Soviet Union, changes from the 1990s onwards have also been momentous with countries adjusting to various capitalist realities. The volumes in this series will help shine a light on the experiences of this key geopolitical zone with many lessons to be learned for the future.

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My interest in international, mega sporting events reaches back to my childhood. My first memories of consciously watching a sporting event are from the 1990 World Cup in Italy, which took place when I was 7 years old, and I was always a fanatic sports fan, especially of my local football team, Polonia Warsaw. An interest in sport was therefore certainly present in my life much earlier than an interest in the avant-garde and modernism, which developed during the last year of my high school studies. And while sports history always continued to interest me, it was not until the last decade that I considered it could also be an area of my scholarly research interests. During my studies and after my graduation from the University of Warsaw, Theatre Academy in Warsaw, and the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences I focused almost entirely on researching the history of the European avant-gardes. The moment when I started to link sport and the avant-garde occurred in 2012, when the European Football Championship was co-hosted in Poland and Ukraine. From this time on, I started to write on issues around football and art, and gradually saw the great potential in reconnecting art-historical research with a history of sport. The major scholarly inspiration for me at that time were publications by Peter Kühnst, John Hughson, Mike O’Mahony, Joann Skrypzak, and Andreas Kramer; a meeting with Daniel Haxall at the CECAC Conference in Durham was also instrumental. Most recently, a book by Bernard Vere on sport and modernism has continued to guide my thinking on the subject.

In my own research, I started to discover the interconnected issues of workers’ sport and art after analysing the football-related works by Soviet Constructivists, on which I first presented at Hofstra University in 2014, and which later led to the publication of an extended version of this talk as an article in the Digitales Handbuch der Sportgeschichte des östlichen Europa (The Digital Handbook of the History of Sport in Eastern Europe, 2015). This was my first real scholarly engagement with workers’ sport. Previously, I knew the stories of Polish football workers’ clubs, such as Widzew Łódź or RKS Marymont, but had never explored the topic in depth. Starting in 2016, I was able to further focus my research on workers’ sport after receiving a SONATA 9 grant, funded by the Polish National Science Centre entitled: Sport in the Visual Arts of Central and Eastern Europe 1918–1939 (2015/17/D/HS2/00530). Thanks to this, it was possible for me to conduct necessary research in the archives of the Archiv der Avantgarden in Dresden, the Olympic Museum
in Lausanne, the Open Society Archives and the Kassák Museum in Budapest, Sportmuseum in Leipzig, as well as in various other institutions, libraries and sports museums in Warsaw, Prague, Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, Vienna, Moscow and Munich. The funding enabled me also to visit the cities that hosted the Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads and to visit its venues: Waldstadion in Frankfurt, Ernst-Happel Stadium in Vienna, Dinamo Stadium in Moscow; and additionally Strahov Stadium in Prague. I then presented my research on workers’ sport and the avant-garde in lectures at numerous conferences, including the Courtauld Institute in London, De Montfort University in Leicester, the Pedagogische Hochschule in Ludwigsburg, the Kassák Museum in Budapest, and the Institute of Literature and Arts in Belgrade. I also published on the topic in the *International Journal of the History of Sport* (2018) and contributed three chapters on workers’ sport to the book *Modernizm – Sport – Polityka* (Modernism – Sport – Politics), published in Warsaw at my home institution in 2019. My most recent article on the of workers’ sport and avant-garde appeared in the volume *Sport and the European Avant-Garde, 1900–1945*, which I co-edited together with Andreas Kramer in 2021.

I would like to thank my editor at Routledge, Rob Langham, for his interest in the book proposal and his commitment to making this publication happen. While my background is in the field of theatre studies, art history and cultural studies, I am grateful for the avid interest in my work from historians, and for the opportunity to publish this book in the series called *Routledge Histories of Central and Eastern Europe*, series edited by Simon Whitmore, and therefore reach a wider readership.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has supported me in this project and who has highlighted the importance of my studies at the intersection of workers’ sport and art. This includes the following people: Andreas Kramer, Mike O’Mahony, Jindřich Toman, Patrick Clastres, Jong Sung Lee, Katalin Székely, Jed Rasula, Christian Wolter, Jennifer Doyle, Günter Berghaus, Piotr Juszkiewicz, Cezary Wąs, Joanna Sosnowska, Ewa Partyga, Anna Wierzbicka, Lech Sokół, Tomáš Winter, Alpesh Kantilal Patel, Paweł Książek and Marcin Dudek. I thank Marcin Bobiński, who translated some important parts of texts from Hungarian to Polish. I am very thankful to Gábor Dóbo for significant critical comments, which helped me to develop the chapter on Budapest and the Munka circle. I would also like to express my special thanks to Meghan Forbes, whose comments with regards to language and content on this book were extremely helpful. Working with Meghan on the structure of the book and responding to her critical comments allowed me to shape the manuscript in the way it reads now, suitable for a global readership. This is my first scholarly monograph published entirely in English, and thus it required a lot of work to perfect it in all respects, with the assistance of someone who is not only a native speaker and great writer, but also a well-known expert on the topic of Central European avant-gardes.

Additionally, for their support and encouragement I would like to thank my lovely life-partner, friend and wife, Sara Lagnaoui, as well as my father, mother, sister and her husband together with my wonderful nieces, Ola and Jagoda.

**Funding:** This book is a contribution to the research project: ‘Sport in Visual Art of Central and Eastern Europe, 1918–1939’, funded by National Science Centre, Poland (2015/17/D/ HS2/00530).
Abbreviations

Asnova (Association of New Architects)

AIZ (Workers’ Illustrated Newspaper)

AkhRR (Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia)

ASKÖ (Workers’ Association for Sports and Physical Culture in Austria)

ASV Fichte (Workers’ Sport Club Fichte)

ATSB (Workers’ Gymnastic and Sport Association)

ATZ (Workers’ Gymnastic Magazine)

Dědrasbor (Workers’ Dramatic Choir)

DTJ (Workers’ Physical Training Association)

FDTJ (Federation of Workers’ Physical Training Association)

FPT (Federation of Proletarian Physical Training)

INFIZKULT (Institute of Physical Culture)

IG (Syndicate for the Red Sport Unity)

KG (Fighting League for Red Sport Unity)

KPD (Communist Party of Germany)

LSI (Association of German Worker Photographers)

MTE (Workers’ Physical Training Association)

RSI (Red Sport International)

SDAPÖ (Socialist Democratic Workers’ Party of Austria)

SPD (Socialist Democratic Party of Germany)

SWSI (Socialist Workers’ Sport International)

TTE (Society of Friends of Tourism)

Vdafd (Association of German Worker Photographers)
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vsevobuch</td>
<td>Vseobshchee voenneoe obuchenie (Central Agency for Universal Military Training)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vkhutemas</td>
<td>Vysshie gosudarstvennye khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie master-skie (Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZRSS</td>
<td>Związek Robotniczych Stowarzyszeń Sportowych (Association of Workers’ Sport Associations)</td>
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The Workers’ Sport Movement in the 1920s and 1930s: The Largest Working-Class Cultural Movement in History

The cover of the fourth issue of Arbeiterbühne (Workers’ Stage) from 1930 (Figure 0.1) featured a photomontage that presented a performance conducted by children dressed in workers’ clothes together with a male worker and a faceless giant worker, who are both pointing in a leftward direction with their left hands. They are standing at the outline of the stage, which is placed in front of a mass demonstration inscribed within an outline of a factory and its chimneys. The photomontage should be interpreted as a propagandistic image related to the activities of workers’ theatres aimed at transmitting political ideology to the masses through a cultural enterprise for both children and adults. But one can deepen this interpretation. A worker placed in the middle of the composition is wearing a sporting training blouse with a logo bearing the letter ‘F’, an emblem of the communist sports club the Arbeiter Sport-Verein Fichte (Workers’ Sport Association Fichte) from Berlin. Taking this into account, he is not only a performer within a workers’ theatre, but at the same time a member of the workers’ sport club, which advocated communist agendas through sport and performance. The figure of a worker athlete as an actor on the workers’ stage was above all a testimony to direct links between workers’ sport and workers’ theatre, which contributed to mass workers’ culture. By the end of the 1920s the Berlin sports club ASV Fichte had adopted a resolution supporting a revolutionary path towards the victory of the proletariat and aligned with the communist Red Sport International, which was affiliated with the Comintern. This is also an important fact for the interpretation of the image from Arbeiterbühne (1930), which in this context was focused on visualising Comintern agendas, rather than socialist propaganda through workers’ theatre and workers’ sport. This small detail related to the sporting membership of the depicted worker thus expands the whole interpretation of the photomontage, a new artistic medium, which characterized the aesthetics of the leftist avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s. In many ways, photomontage was perceived by artists themselves as a new kind of agitation art and a ‘political weapon’, which often took on the propagandistic uses of sport as an intrinsic part of the working-class struggle.¹

Interpretation of images that depicted workers’ athletes provides new recognition of the importance of workers’ sport for workers’ culture propaganda. Such
images should be studied in relation to the activity of the two largest, most significant and most influential leftist sport organizations – the Lucerne Sport International/Socialist Workers’ Sport International (LSI, 1920–1927/SWSI, 1927–1939) and the Red Sport International (RSI, 1921–1937/40) – which strived to establish a mass workers’ sport movement, but often came into conflict with each other. Both sporting organisations were established at the very beginning of the 1920s and pursued specific political agendas of social democracy (later the Socialist International) and the Comintern, respectively. Their foundation coincided with the history of modernist and avant-garde tendencies in European art. They engaged modernist and avant-garde artists committed to the left to propagate their ideological goals. Ideal platforms for the projects of socially engaged art and workers’ sport propaganda that united the proletarian masses from many countries in one place and time were the two most influential international mega
Introducing the History of Workers’ Sport

sporting events. These were the socialist Workers’ Olympics held by LSI/SWSI, which fulfilled the need to raise the consciousness of the working class and the need to establish a mass workers’ movement; and the communist Spartakiads held by RSI, which used sporting events to bring attention to class struggle around the world and called for armed revolution against imperialism and the capitalist world.

The workers’ sport movement regarded sport as an integral part of the labour movement, a legitimate form of political activity connected to mass participation in physical culture and mass spectatorship. Workers’ sport was formed in Europe in the late 19th century as a reaction to the conservatism and nationalism of gymnastic societies, and provided an alternative to bourgeois competitive sport, to commercialism, nationalism and the obsession with sporting records. In the 1890s, several years before LSI/SWSI and RSI were established, the first workers’ sports associations were founded. Among them, the most influential were the Arbeiter Turner Bund (ATB, later known as the Arbeiter Turner-und Sportbund, ATSB) established in Germany in 1893 and the Dělnická tělovýchovná jednota (DTJ) in the Czech Lands in 1897 (both of which can be translated as Workers’ Gymnastic Association). From the outset, the workers’ sport organizations opposed the revival of the Olympic Games as proposed in the idea of Olympism postulated in the 1890s by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The modern Olympic Games were perceived by workers’ sport associations as the embodiment of ‘bourgeois’ competition and the officials of workers’ clubs opposed the idea of awarding athletes with medals.

While the first workers’ sport associations were founded by the end of the 19th century, it was not until the 1920s and the time of the establishment of LSI/SWSI and RSI, that they became one of the largest transnational working-class activist movements. The same decade saw its remarkable growth into, as James Riordan has underlined: ‘the largest working class cultural movement’. Together, the two Internationals claimed a membership of around five million: by 1931 the LSI/SWSI had around 2.6 million members, and by 1924 the RSI claimed to have around 2.14 million members. Both organizations postulated a united front of workers’ sport, but they were in fact initially hostile to each other and opposed their agendas, fighting for supremacy in the workers’ sports movement. This was for ideological reasons, as LSI/SWSI fostered social democracy, while RSI called for communist policies. The LSI/SWSI organized Winter and Summer Workers’ Olympics in Schreiberau and Frankfurt (1925), and in Mürzzuschlag and Vienna (1931), as well as a Winter Workers’ Olympics in Johannesbad (1937), banning RSI members and Soviet athletes from participation. On the other hand, the RSI organized Winter and Summer Spartakiads in Oslo and Moscow (1928), prepared a Spartakiad in Berlin (1931), which at the end was cancelled and never finalized, an Anti-fascist Rally for Athletes in Paris (1934), and a People’s Olympiad in Barcelona, which never took place due to the outbreak of Civil War in Spain in July 1936, in which worker athletes joined the fight on the barricades. This coincided with the increasingly strong position of nationalist and fascist influences in the structures of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), leading to the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany, and the following competition in 1940 in Fascist Japan. Consequently, the RSI and the LSI/SWSI needed to join forces against the
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‘fascization of the Olympic Games’ and organized together the third and final Workers’ Olympics in Antwerp in the summer of 1937. Despite the ideological differences between the Workers’ Olympics, which pursued the tenets of the moderate and social-democratic political programme of the LSI/SWSI, and the Spartakiads of the RSI, which advocated the militant and radical politics of the Comintern, their most important and common aim was to break down the global hegemony of the IOC. This had to be fulfilled not only through sporting and political aims, but also via aesthetic and cultural dimensions. The visual propaganda of the Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads did not always cut off links with the aesthetics of ancient sport, but was at the same time always positioned against the idea of Pierre de Coubertin’s revival of the modern Olympic Games. According to the beliefs of LSI/SWSI and RSI activists and members, the universal idea of the beauty of sport promoted by the IOC had been appropriated by capitalism, nationalism and the cultural bourgeoisie. In contrast to the Olympic Games, the organizers of the Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads did not aim at cultivating national victories and individual records, but at mobilising and raising the awareness of the masses in the fight for the liberation of the proletariat. This message was about to be mediated through artistic and cultural projects prepared especially for these mega sporting events. In contrast to the misogynist policy of the early editions of the Olympic Games, the international workers’ sport events glorified women’s sports and had included women athletics (that is the track and field competition) in the First Workers’ Olympics in Frankfurt in 1925, that is, four years before the official inclusion of women track and field competition at the Olympic Games during the ninth edition in Amsterdam in 1928. Due to the initial reluctance of the IOC to include women’s athletics in the framework of the Olympic Games, the Women’s International Sports Organisation, established in 1921 and based in Paris, organised the Women’s World Games between 1922 and 1934. The First Frankfurt Olympics was, next to the early workers’ sport festivals, one of the first major international sporting events where female athletes could compete in track and field alongside male athletes.

What united the LSI/SWSI and the RSI was not only anti-IOC sentiments, but also the shared belief that it was sport that was integral to the cultural activation of workers in both participatory and spectatorial terms. The workers’ sport, based on bodily training and perfecting physical exercise, as well as on paramilitary activities and military training, served (especially in the case of the RSI) to activate young athletes to be future soldiers in the global proletarian revolution. At the same time, it also functioned as an extremely important model for modernisation and cultural programmes to activate the working class. There was new infrastructure, new stadiums and sport buildings constructed on account of the particular Workers’ Olympics and Spartakiads in the host cities. Thus, mega sporting events clearly always existed as part of the political economy, while in its visual and more broadly cultural reception the engagement of artists, choreographers, theatre directors and musicians played a significant role. The Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads were always accompanied by propaganda posters and art in the public space, printed ephemera and official guides, workers’ photography, photomontages, films and theatrical performances, which reinforced the role of sport as the
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The largest cultural movement of the working class. In artistic practice, the promotion of workers’ sport served not only to visualize the improvement of the athletic body, but above all to shape a young, strong and socially-conscious proletariat, preparing to overthrow the bourgeoisie. The figure of the worker athlete was often embodied in the image of the Neuer Mensch (in German-speaking countries), Nový člověk (in Czech Lands), or Novyi Chelovek (in Russian), which can be translated as a New Human Being, an engendered form of a New Man and a New Woman.  

The emergence of an internationally organized workers’ sport movement, controlled in the 1920s and 1930s by social democrats from LSI/SWSI and communists from RSI, should not be viewed, therefore, as a single process, but as the confluence of several initiatives occurring simultaneously. This phenomenon belonged to the developing international and transnational movements of workers’ culture, such as the workers’ literature movement, the workers’ theatre movement, or the workers’ photography movement. The very term ‘workers’ culture’ referred to all areas and instances in which the historical working-class social group could be, or was, associated with culture understood as a system of socially shaped values, symbols and norms. As for the characteristics of workers’ culture, one can observe the particular cultural outlook, a code of conduct and a system of symbols, which concerned a specific historical social group that clearly influenced the cultural processes of society as a whole. Sport therefore served the cultural development of the worker. A belief that mass participation in physical culture could create the figure of the Neuer Mensch is evident as early as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ reference to the potential contribution of exercise and games to worker satisfaction and is still clearly present in Vladimir Lenin’s advocacy for the establishment of sports schools in post-revolutionary Russia.

Workers’ sport, workers’ theatre, or workers’ photography, which were the essence of a transnational workers’ culture, have until now typically been studied as separate phenomena. The history of workers’ sport in Germany, France, the USSR, Finland, Austria, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Canada and Israel was the subject of the monograph The Story of Worker Sport, edited by Arnd Krüger and James Riordan; the history of workers’ theatre in the USSR, Germany, France, Poland, the USA and Romania appeared as a four-volume publication: Le théâtre d’agit-prop de 1917 à 1932, edited by Denis Bablet, while the research on the role of workers’ photography in Soviet Russia, Weimar Germany, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Spain, the UK and the USA has been collected in the recently published book The Worker Photography Movement (1926–1939), edited by Jorge Ribalta and Erika Wolf on the occasion of the exhibition under the same title in Reina Sofia in Madrid. In the latter monograph, the paramount role of illustrated proletarian magazines was emphasised. These were magazines that initiated and nurtured international contacts between the press organs related to the goals of Socialist International (for example, the magazine of Red Vienna, Der Kuckuck) and, separately, between the press infiltrated and sponsored by the Comintern (for example, the German Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung). In those journals the theme of workers’ sport was visualised in print in the form of illustrations, photomontages and reproductions of photographs, most often taken by workers themselves. The constant presence of sport in the workers’ press
testified to its significant role within the mass media’s creation of the foundations of workers’ culture as a project encompassing mass agitation and the most diverse spheres of everyday life.

Many modernist and avant-garde artists who were ideologically committed to the left contributed to workers’ culture developments. I sometimes use both terms, ‘modernist’ and ‘avant-garde’, together to delineate and distinguish leftist moderate art (modernists, who did not belong to avant-garde groups, such as German and Austrian artists commissioned for propagandistic artworks related to LSI/SWSI) and leftist radical art (avant-garde artists, such as the Soviet Constructivists or Czechoslovakian Devětsil). In this view, the modernist and avant-garde artistic responses to workers’ sport belonged to a part of the wider cultural phenomena of modernism. In this book I use the term modernism, referring to the criteria adopted by Christopher Wilk, who, in the catalogue of the exhibition Modernism. Designing a New World 1914–1939, considered this notion as a set of ideas and artistic projects common for a certain period of time, connected with a rejection of tradition, with utopias of building a new, better world and with unwavering faith in the power of industrial technologies, against which physical culture, body culture, hygiene and sport played a key role. The criteria for (leftist) modernism cited by Wilk were based on Marshall Berman’s Marxist views on the subject and were distinguished by processes of technological and social change, or, more accurately, the rapid implementation of the idea of social transformation. These criteria regard (leftist) modernism as a set of ideas oriented towards the propagation of modernity, for which the utopias of a new workers’ culture and the Neuer Mensch/Nový človek/Novyj Chelovek (New Woman and New Man) are intended to usher in a new social order. These included both the projects of leftist artists with social-democratic convictions as promoters of the LSI/SWSI, as well as the realisation of specific programmes of modernist and avant-garde artistic production. This applied, above all, to the Constructivists, most of whom belonged or maintained a relation to communist parties and promoted the activities of the RSI and its militant goals.

The aim of this book is to explore the importance of workers’ sport through the prism of modernist and avant-garde projects directed towards new proletarian culture and art for the proletarian masses. I show proletarian mass sport, controlled by the LSI/SWSI and the RSI, as the largest cultural movement of the working class and I consider how it interacted with other projects of workers’ culture that were aimed at activating the proletariat. How did the works created by modernist and avant-garde artists, workers’ amateur photography, or the graphic design of proletarian-themed publications visualise the ideological demands of both organisations in particular countries from Central Europe and the USSR? How did visual propaganda, festivities, theatrical performances and exhibitions interact with mass sport events? To what extent did the activity of sports and socialist or communist party officials, as well as publishers of books and magazines on workers’ culture, influence the creation of artistic works on the theme of sport? Which modernist and avant-garde works were adapted to ideologies of workers’ sport, and which artists were directly involved in LSI/SWSI and RSI propaganda and created works commissioned by both organisations? In which aspects did they differ from
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Each other? What was the content and meaning of artistic activities promoting workers’ sport for LSI/SWSI and RSI in selected countries in the given historical and geopolitical context? How did the visual propaganda of the workers’ sport expand the range of avant-garde artistic experimentation?

The questions listed above point to the enormity of the issues that have built up around the study of workers’ sport as a cultural movement linked to the modernisation programmes of the interwar period. With such a diverse spectrum, however, there has not yet been a single monographic study that has analysed in one specific volume together the various variants of artistic relations to the ideological assumptions of workers’ sport, especially around the mega sporting events: the Workers’ Olympics and the Spartakiads. In this book, which combines the history of sport, the history of workers’ culture, the art history, theatre performance, photography, film and, more broadly, visual culture, I address a need to introduce research on workers’ sport into modernist and avant-garde studies. By basing this study on concrete methods and research perspectives, I show that workers’ sport should be researched not only in the field of sports history, but above all as a phenomenon that is an integral and intrinsic part of the transformation of modernist culture, influencing at the same time the aesthetic and social activities of the interwar modernism and the avant-garde.

The State of Scholarship on the History of the Interwar Workers’ Sport Movement

‘Perhaps the most important, albeit the most generally ignored and least understood, aspect of working class culture is sport’, wrote Robert F. Wheeler in 1978. This outlook from an American historian was a proper observation from the perspective of Anglophone academia, but did not, however, acknowledge the body of work originating in the Eastern Bloc. The history of research on interwar workers’ sport already dates back to the 1950s and 1960s. The initial studies on this issue appeared in communist countries behind the Iron Curtain, primarily in the region of Eastern Europe and the USSR. The first monographs on this subject were written primarily by communist party members and communist sport officials, who were involved in setting up the organisation of interwar workers’ sport associations. Those published beyond the USSR created a legendary account of pre-war workers’ sport as a phenomenon that ensured the victory of the proletariat after 1945 in the Eastern Bloc. The articles and books they wrote were based primarily on their experiences and memories and reprinted historical source material from the 1920s and 1930s, including reports from LSI/SWSI and RSI congresses. Parallel to the studies conducted in the Eastern Bloc countries, a decade later this research subject also began to increasingly interest academic circles in the West. Since the 1970s, the research on interwar workers’ sport started to be an important research topic for sports historians from West German and Anglophone academia. 1973 saw the publication of major monographs on the history of LSI/SWSI by German sports historians Horst Überhorst and Heinz Timmermann, while the issues of RSI and workers’ sport in the Soviet Union have been popularised mainly through the research of the British sports historian James Riordan beginning in 1977.