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When the Double-Headed Eagle Pumps Iron: Sport and Society in Russia

Guest Editors:
Sandra Budy und Manfred Zeller (Hamburg)

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Technical editor: Matthias Neumann

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Forschungsstelle Osteuropa | Publikationsreferat | Klagenfurter Str. 3 | 28359 Bremen
tel. +49 421 218-3302 or -3257 | fax +49 421 218-3269
mailto: *fsopr@uni-bremen.de* | Internet: *www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de*

Sport in Contemporary Russia – the Expression of a Way of Living

editorial

At first glance, the choice of sport as a subject for an issue of *kultura* might seem puzzling. However, the phrase 'physical culture' illustrates the close connection between sport and culture. Modern sport has shaped social life for more than 100 years. Both participation and spectator sports reflect social processes and cultural conventions. The current issue of *kultura* seeks to investigate this phenomenon more closely from both sides.

In the Soviet Union, participation sport was an element of the socialist way of life. According to the Soviet ideology, *fizkultura* (physical culture) was the key to cultivating a well-rounded character with a socialist ethos: it was a means of promoting health and efficiency so that the citizen could serve the motherland, both through his or her physical labour and readiness to defend the nation, and provided a deterrent against vices such as excessive alcohol consumption. As in all other areas of life, the state controlled the organisation of the sporting movement. *Fizkultura* and sport were propagated as mass phenomena; collective sport programmes, often in the form of gymnastics exercises, were compulsory not only in the schools and universities, but also at the workplace.

Since Perestroika, a rapid transformation has taken place. Privately organised leisure activities have replaced state-monopolised compulsory exercise. Sport has acquired a voluntary character. Olga Chepurnaya, a specialist in cultural studies from St. Petersburg, examines this development in Russian sport from the 1980s to the present. Her analysis is complemented by Tim Bernd Peters's description of his experiences at a fitness studio in his chosen city of residence, Moscow. Both contributions emphasise that an overwhelmingly urban middle class expresses its attitude towards life via leisure sport activity. Sport may have become more diverse and appealing, but is only available for those who can afford it.

Not every sports enthusiast actually takes part in sport. Spectator sport has been around as long as participation sport. Even in the early days of the Soviet Union, football filled the stadiums.

Therefore, the second part of this issue concentrates on the fans rather than active athletes. Manfred Zeller, a historian from Hamburg, provides insight into the subculture of today's fans in Russia and traces its historical traditions. In the eyes of the media, contemporary fan culture is dominated by organised groups of potentially violent fans. However, fan culture is subject to repeated generational change, which makes it far more diverse than is first apparent.

At the centre of the video project 'Contact' by the St. Petersburg new media artist Dmitry Vilensky is the collision between the police and fans at the stadium turnstiles. Vilensky is interested in images of the masses and conveying state surveillance.

Whether one is talking about participation or spectator sport, whether one takes part actively or passively, sport is always an expression of a way of life.

About the Guest Editors:

Sandra Budy and *Manfred Zeller* are research associates on the DFG (German Research Foundation) project 'A Social History of Sport and Physical Culture in the Soviet Union' in the Department for Eastern European History at the Helmut Schmidt University, Hamburg.

Sandra Budy is writing a doctoral thesis on sports journalism and photography.

Manfred Zeller is undertaking a PhD on fan culture in the Soviet Union.

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Sport and Lifestyle

Olga Chepurnaya

Over the last twenty years, sport has undergone fundamental changes in Russian society. Where once it was a social institution tied to the dominant ideology, it has become a part of the leisure economy. It has gone through the process of commercialisation and has created structures and fashions specific to different social classes. For many people in Russia, it has become a part of their lifestyle which demonstrates their social status and success.

Mass sport in the Soviet Union

In the 1980s, the social functions and organisational forms of Soviet sport changed radically. Up until that point, it had been instrumentalised and controlled by the state and had followed the rules of the planned economy. As in all the other branches of the Soviet economy, sport, along with its 'material basis', the athletes themselves, their records and mass sport were instruments of the state and were centrally planned and directed from above.

Sport fell under the planning and record-keeping authority of various state departments. However, the leaders of the country, and their representatives in the regions and localities, did not simply organise the sports programmes and events or decide which athletes took part in them; they also managed the results, victories and records.

In sport the state followed the principle of 'we know best what is good for the people'. Since the beginnings of the Soviet Union, sport was seen as a means of raising strong, healthy and disciplined citizens who would be more useful and effective in both the defence of their country and in the workplace. In many communist countries, the integration of sport into the system of social planning was the prerequisite for their international sporting success and recognition. Alongside socialist countries, so-called developing countries also put sport to the service of social change. In such a system it was impossible for commercialised mass sport to become part of the culture of leisure.

Soviet policy continually emphasised the primacy of mass sport over outstanding achievement and over the years presented statistics which claimed to confirm this principle: millions of Soviet citizens regularly took part in sporting activities; the majority of school-children and students earned the GTO sports badge[1]; a third of the population participated in the *Spartakyads* (sporting competitions) which took place every three months; factory workers and civil servants did gymnastics every day at their workplaces.

Today we know that only 8% of men and 2% of women regularly took part in sporting activities, and that only a third of all school-children and students met the requirements for the sporting badge. Schools, technical colleges and universities were dominated by an atmosphere hostile to sport; although it was a compulsory subject, it had the highest truancy rate. The gyms were poorly equipped and the training programmes monotonous.

Sport during Perestroika

In 1981 serious efforts were undertaken to bring sport to the Soviet youth. The government ordered that the country's 7,500 special sports schools should be opened to all children and not just the highly talented. This policy was opposed by the trainers, who had to demonstrate the results of their work in the form of competition victories. In a further step, the state swimming baths, sports halls, stadiums and ice rinks were opened to the general public. Visitors now had to pay. This latter measure was intended to win support for the new policies among the managers of the sports complexes.

1 GTO: an organisation which promoted sporting activities in order to create a population capable of defending the country.

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The granting of official approval to the first 'co-operatives' (the precursors to private companies) in 1987 led to the creation of non-state sport clubs and fitness or health centres. The main reason for this governmental policy was the young people's obvious lack of interest in the official youth organisations; over the first half of 1980, the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol lost more than 6 million members.

During this period, unofficial and illegal sport clubs sprang up, especially clubs with training equipment and karate clubs. Given its recent initiatives, the state did not want to, or could not, prohibit the clubs; instead, it legalised them by changing the law. The unofficial associations not only brought together football fans; they also catered to enthusiasts for sports which received little support, such as aerobics, yoga, bodybuilding or karate and other martial arts. The latter were either banned in the Soviet Union (as in the case of karate) or only practised in military schools and special military units.

The sport clubs were often set up in the cellars of residential blocks of flats. They owe their beginnings to the initiatives of enthusiasts, who were often young people on the fringes of society, either from the informal cultural scene (which spawned the yoga clubs) or from the criminal world (responsible for fashioning home-made bodybuilding equipment). Often these clubs popped up in the remoter districts or suburbs of the city, where it was easier to evade the attention of the authorities. Many clubs were defined by their tight bonds of membership and offered free training, albeit only for certain groups, for example to boys from a certain quarter. It was not uncommon for these clubs to have links to criminal gangs. One of the nationally best well-known unofficial organisations originated in the Moscow hinterlands of Lyubertsy.

'Become like Putin': Fragment from a Special Page for State Servants, Komsomolskaya Pravda, *22.08.2007 (Printable Version):* To be hung in the office.

In many cities, the clubs, which had by that stage become 'cooperatives', migrated to the official sports facilities and used them for their own evening programme during off-hours. The first clubs of this type were 'democratic', i.e. inexpensive and affordable for people on a middling or low income. The upper echelons of society, that is the Soviet *nomenklatura* and their children, as well as those groups connected to them (doctors, artists, people involved in trade etc.) had always had access to swimming baths, sports grounds, horse stables and so on; some even owned these privately.

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The first sports clubs were the forerunners of today's sports centres in only a limited sense; contemporary sport has now been integrated into the consumer and service structure of the health/leisure sector. Commercialised sport for the general masses developed first in Moscow and St. Petersburg and from there conquered other cities. Sport has become a typical element of urban culture as a leisure activity, while in rural areas it remains, with few exceptions, the preserve of children and young people.

Sport for 'Special' Sections of the Population

In the Soviet Union, women had long been discouraged from taking up sports which could supposedly harm their health, including football, bodybuilding, ice hockey, judo, water polo and long distance running. The last official document on the subject appeared in 1973 and called on women to content themselves with closely following the achievements of the men. It firmly asserted that football was harmful to healthy sexuality, and promoted varicose veins and inflammation of the superficial veins. The resolution did not explain why football did not endanger men's health, or why recognised Olympic disciplines such as basketball, ice skating and field hockey did not have such deleterious consequences for women.

However, as early as the beginning of the 1980s, the first judo competitions for women took place; judo clubs boasted 15,000 female members. In 1982 the Moscow State University set up the first women's water polo team. In August 1987 the first championship for women's football took place; it received financial support from *Sobesednik*, a magazine for young people. In the first year, eight teams took part, in 1988 twenty and in 1989 fifty. The first competition for female bodybuilders was held in 1988 in Tyumen. Women's hockey, a sport of the 1920s, was re-established. Women participated in marathons for the first time. All of these changes were brought about by the efforts of a small number of active women who did not shy away from flouting official prohibitions in order to pursue their chosen sporting activity.

The opportunities for people with physical disabilities to take part in sport were particularly limited. Sports functionaries did not see them as potential athletes at all. When the first Paralympics took place in Seoul in 1988, the only recently founded sporting federation for physically disabled people organised their first championships in Tallinn. This was the highpoint of years of conflict between a lobby group, mainly made up of veterans from the war in Afghanistan, and sporting functionaries. Following a cleverly organised campaign which produced a series of publications claiming that sport for people with physical disabilities was on the rise in all countries of the world apart from the Soviet Union, a team was hastily put together for the Paralympics in Seoul.

Since then, in addition to the Paralympic team, specialised sports centres for people with physical disabilities have been founded and regional and national championships are now organised. However, as in the Soviet period, the question of 'sport for invalids' is still not a matter of public interest; the media ignore the competitions and their results. The real opportunities for this section of the population to take part in sport are as limited as ever; no efforts are made to woo them as customers, either.

The recognition won during the 1980s for the new sporting initiatives meant a radical renunciation of the centralised organisation of sport. Now, for the first time since the end of the 1990s, the state is in a position to provide resources for sport. Presidents, members of government and parliamentarians promote sport using themselves as examples and publicise their successes. One can learn about the sporting achievements of politicians, actors and entrepreneurs on the television news and TV

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shows. Duma representatives, musicians, singers and actors form their own football teams, which play against professional teams in fund-raising matches.

Sport as Leisure, Fitness as Lifestyle

The official authorisation for the non-state sports facilities triggered a process of social differentiation. Today, the more expensive, elitist sports are tennis, riding and golf. Aerobics, the gym, yoga and swimming represent the middling level. Running, cross-country skiing, street football and the like are the most common forms of sport, and the least subject to formal organisation. This is also true of muscle training in 'sweat shops' with home-made pieces of equipment. As in the past, a gender-specific divide still exits, although it no longer possesses a normative character. Men primarily go in for bodybuilding, while women prefer yoga, aerobics and dancing. Married women with children, however, rarely pursue any leisure activities, and therefore do not take part in sport.

In today's Russia, the services offered by fitness studios are very popular. This was revealed in interviews conducted in St. Petersburg and Moscow in summer 2007 and by an evaluation of internet forums. Over the last 10 years, fitness centres have been enjoying growing popularity among the upper and middle classes and their number have risen. The largest of these are chains (for example, Fitness Planet and City-Fitness) which are active across the country or in individual cities and have expanded into the provinces. The services they offer include different versions of aerobics, pilates, yoga, body sculpting, t'ai chi, various forms of dance, programmes for pregnant women, martial

How to Be Like Putin *(Sandra Budy)*

In the Soviet Union, physical culture (*fizkultura*) stood for a healthy, disciplined lifestyle oriented towards achievement. In the West, sport is also held in high esteem, as expressed in the adage: 'a sound mind in a healthy body'. This maxim remains valid today. It is no coincidence that sport is taught in schools and is a ubiquitous leisure activity.

Rarely, however, has sport – and all of its positive connotations – been so closely associated with a head of state as in the case of President Vladimir Putin. When he succeeded the old and sickly Boris Yeltsin, the twenty-year difference in age alone underlined the stark contrast between the two presidents. Young, dynamic and energetic, Putin soon acquired the image of a man who could take charge and lead the state out of the reform-era chaos back to stability – in short, a man who would show the way forward.

From the outset, the discipline of the former KGB officer was stressed and his sporting activities have been repeatedly captured in pictures. In front of the TV cameras, the black-belted president throws opponents to the ground, pumps iron, skies, rides on horseback, and goes hunting and fishing. These frolics can all be viewed in the photo gallery on the president's official website.

On a joint fishing trip in Maine, he outshone even the president of the last remaining superpower: in his white, body-hugging outfit, he seemed to be in considerably better shape than George Bush, who was clad in a lumberjack shirt and baseball cap. In contrast to his host, Putin quickly had a fish dangling from his line. While on a trip to the lakes of Siberia with the heir to the throne of Monaco, he

arts, swimming, aqua-gymnastics, training using exercise equipment and sport activities for children; visitors can also make use of saunas, solariums, hairdressers', bars and cafes. Often the exercises are done in groups separated by gender. The services of masseurs, personal trainers and doctors are also available.

There are special discounts for business customers. Many large companies use these for their employees, who can go to a fitness centre either for free or at a reduced price. The rationale is that team and corporate spirit are strengthened when colleagues pursue sport together in their free time.

Lifestyle magazines report of the health benefits in going to the gym and staying in shape; moreover, doing so supposedly keeps the body healthy and beautiful. This attitude to sport was also observed in the above-mentioned interviews. Both men and women characterised sport as a way of taking care of one's self, body, appearance and health. Sport is increasingly becoming a way of life. Many people associate sport not only with activity, youth and energy, but also with success. Moreover, sport enables individual social groups to strengthen their solidarity and demonstrate their particularity.

The results of the interviews also show that Russians continue to place great value on physical exercise for their children. Sport is compulsory in schools and many schools try to offer a certain degree of variety; however, on the whole, the options are not very interesting and, at only one hour per week, hardly sufficient. Parents therefore attempt to ensure that their children attend extracurricular sport facilities, be it for playing football or tennis, swimming, riding, skiing or exercising in a gym.

All those asked believed that sporting activities must always be voluntary and that every child should choose which sport to do and how often to do it. Many middleclass families go to the fitness centre with their children on days off, play tennis or go skiing. This enables parents in employment,

gave the impression that he could also hold his own in the wilderness. Both appearances were covered extensively by the international press. Putin was compared to none other than James Bond.

What a shining example for and glowing representative of his compatriots, who still labour under the cliché of the lethargic, vodka-drinking Russian! Last year, a study by British academics at the London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine caused a sensation by claiming that alcohol abuse was the most common cause of death for Russian men between the ages of 25 and 54. As recently as 2005, the Russian State Office for Statistics, Roskomstat, independently concluded that the national life expectancy was 57.8 years, the lowest in Europe. The causes included cardiovascular diseases, accidents, poisoning and injuries. What a great opportunity this non-smoking, abstemious and sporty president presents to his countrymen!

So that other public servants and the general populace can emulate the president in the matter of fitness, the tabloid *Komsomolskaia Pravda* recently published a training programme to build up muscles of presidential proportions. The candidates in next year's presidential elections would be well advised to get down to the gym as soon as possible.

Translated from the German by Christopher Gilley

URLs: *http://www.kp.ru/daily/23954/71877/*
http://www.kremlin.ru/photoalbum.shtml

especially fathers, to spend time with the whole family and participate in activities with their children. Families like these prefer facilities which offer programmes for children and/or families. Even when every individual member of the family pursues his or her own sport, it is important for them to find their 'own' club and go there together; this strengthens familial bonds. The same is true when friends or groups of colleagues participate in the same sports together.

Conclusion

The decisive change in Russian sport in the 1980s and 1990s was its integration into the service-oriented market of the leisure and health industries. On the one hand, the range of sports on offer has grown, but on the other, sport has become commercialised, which has in turn served to rigidify the social stratification within this sphere. Elements of state planning are of secondary importance in mass sport. The programmes for sport development which have been drawn up by the president, government and city councils are mainly for children and young people.

On the whole, sporting events are actively sponsored by non-governmental organisations. In many cities, competitions are arranged by large companies, magazines and the representatives of religious and other social groups. Of note was the football championship in the Kizhi[2] district, which was organised by local priests and in which several village teams took part. Another notable event which provoked considerable interest was the 'Race on Stilettos' organised by Glamour magazine in Moscow and St. Petersburg in summer 2007 for its readers. In these and other cases, sport was instrumentalised in the name of advertising or the dissemination of religious or political ideas. In this way, the commercialisation of sport also influences its ideological components; sport is not only used by the state for 'educational' or propagandistic purposes, but also by individual corporations, political parties and social institutions.

Translated by Christopher Gilley

About the Author:

Olga Chepurnaya is a cultural sociologist and teaches at the European University in St. Petersburg. Her research interests lie in the areas of the sociology of religion, women's and gender studies, as well as the sociology of sport.

Reading Suggestions:

- James Riordan: Sports, politics and communism. Manchester 1991
- Barbara Keys: Soviet Sport and Transnational Mass Culture in the 1930s, in: Journal of Contemporary History 38 (2003), pp. 413–434.

2 Kizhi: an island in the Lake Onega in the thinly populated north of European Russia (Karelia).

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portrait

Fitness, Russian style

Tim B. Peters

The Russian capital is not conducive to keep-fit activities. The heavy traffic and its exhaust fumes are not particularly inviting to joggers, while those who choose to ride a bike are taking their own life into their hands. There is no doubt that Moscow has beautiful parks and patches of green – but who wants to take the underground to reach them after a hard day's work? This may be one of the reasons for the boom in the fitness industry ever since the opening of the first modern gym in 1993. More than 350 gyms now offer Muscovites the opportunity to take part in individual sport at a time which suits them; some of the clubs are even open 24 hours.

At first sight, the Moscow gyms are not so very different to their counterparts in Berlin or anywhere else: training apparatus, weights, gymnastics equipment, treadmills equipped with headsets and in view of televisions, water dispensers, and so on – one can find everything belonging to a modern athletics centre. Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look at Russian gyms: they are a sporting microcosm in which it is possible – with some perspicacity – to observe a few of the socio-political realities of contemporary Russia.

My choice of 'Fitness-Tsentr' was, as is the case for most people, determined by its proximity and the ease of travelling to it. These days, gyms can be found even in the "dormitory towns" on the outskirts of Moscow, and they often offer better value for one's money than those in the city centre. My gym is near the Moscow State University in an office and entertainment complex which also contains several shops, a bowling lane and a casino. When I first enter the building, I encounter a man who is always dressed in a black suit, who, judging by his stocky figure, has been performing muscle-expanding exercises for a quite some time. A security check every bit as thorough as those performed in airports always follows. I go through a metal arch, which routinely beeps due to my belt buckle, requiring the man in black to conduct a careful inspection of my sports bag with a handheld metal detector.

My hope that this procedure would become less complicated over the course of time and daily visits has not yet been fulfilled. My conjecture that these tight security precautions were related to the casino also turned out to be wrong; orders from the mayor of Moscow stipulate that security checks should take place in all large building complexes. This tight security reminds one of the ever-present danger of terrorism in Russia. Nevertheless, I am more often than not annoyed that the tiresome checks, as is so often the case in this country, are just for show: the side entrance is open and unguarded.

The studio is characterised by its 'integrated approach', which many of the gyms in the highly competitive Moscow market use in order to attract potential clients: the 1000 square metre area includes not only the obligatory training and aerobics room, but also a hairdresser's, a sun studio, a sauna, a massage studio and a bar. The extensive range of sporting activities on offer is rounded out with belly dancing lessons, yoga and stripping lessons. Lastly, no complex is complete without the beauty parlours so popular with the Russian ladies. Other clubs tempt guests with affiliated sports shops, restaurants or even twenty-four hour swimming baths – so much so that these additional services sometimes represent more than a third of the club's income.

In total, about fourty members of staff, including six trained fitness instructors, look after – in the broadest meaning of the phrase – the customers. The great consideration shown to children in Russia is evident in the existence of a separate room

portrait

in which children receive care and can play from morning to evening while their parents work up a sweat a few metres away. Alternatively, gymnastics for children is also offered. In the changing rooms, one is struck by the television installed above the door showing a looped stream of adverts for products appropriate to the setting, including deodorants, body lotion and lifestyle magazines.

Among the clientele, everything at first seems just as one would expect. There are men with bulging muscles and seemingly small heads lifting weights, women highly conscious of their figures doing gymnastics, as well as very sporty looking people who clearly want to add some sort of balance to their working lives. This is confirmed by the testimony of the club's manager, who claims that the typical visitor to my gym is in his or her mid-thirties and in work. Forming 60% of the clientele, women are slightly overrepresented. According to the management, there has been a continuous increase in the number of guests for many years.

Two social groups are, however, in comparison to German gyms, clearly underrepresented: pensioners and young people. For them, the prices are often simply too high. How many Russian pensioners can pay a yearly fee of 35,000 Roubles (around 1,400 US dollars or 690 British pounds) for a gym in the middle of the price range? These fees are out of reach for many young people, too.

All the same, the starting prices for the simpler gyms are around 30 euros per month, which is reflected in the older equipment and poorer service. For many students living on low grants, the sport programme offered by the university is therefore more tempting. At the other end of the spectrum, are the VIP gyms, some of which charge about 4,000 euros per year.

In view of these prices, many Russian sport lovers fall back on another individual alternative, which in the middle-term pays off just as well and is therefore very popular in Russia: the exercise bike.

Translated from the German
by Christopher Gilley

About the Author:
Tim B. Peters teaches political science and history at the Free Russian-German Institute for Journalism at the Lomonossov University in Moscow and is writing a PhD thesis on the topic of federalism in Russia.

Fitness Studio in Moscow © Tim B. Peters

analysis

To the Away Game by Dog Sleigh – Football Fans in Russia

Manfred Zeller

Fan culture in Russia has undergone great changes since the late 1970s. Football was the number one sport in the Soviet Union, and was followed passionately by a large portion of the population. Since then, fan culture among the younger generation has become a divided phenomenon. The majority of fans in Russia are peaceful. However, an organised and brutal minority of 'fanatical' supporters, who draw meaning from the choreography of fandom, away games and violence, shape the public perception of fans.

This year's football season in Russia kicked off on 11 March 2007 with the classic derby between Dynamo and Spartak Moscow in the 36,000-capacity Dynamo stadium in Moscow. Although this was nominally a home game for Dynamo, the overwhelming majority of spectators in the not sold-out stadium wore the red-white colours of Spartak. It was, therefore, all the more surprising that during the first half hour, the small but tightly organised groups of fans in the Dynamo stands were the only ones to be heard. The notorious supporters of Spartak, which has the largest following in Russian football, were silent.

At first glance, this picture contradicts the Western image of Russian football fans. When one speaks of them in the West, normally they are associated with rioting and violence. In September 2006, the German media reported that in the run up to the Champions' League game between TsSKA Moscow and Hamburg SV, violent fans of the Russian army team had attacked German fans. There is in fact a more aggressive atmosphere in the top Russian league than in the Bundesliga; in Germany the hooligans tend to congregate in the lower leagues. In Russia, the best clubs supply the most vicious fans, who practically bedeck their websites with violence, posting, for example, lists of their most successful brawls with rivals.

Spartak's Silent Protest

At second glance, the silence of the Spartak supporters underlines the tight organisation of fans in contemporary Russia. Two days before the match, the online news ticker of the unofficial supporters' organisation, *Fratria Spartak*, announced that due to the team's recent 'lousy performance' it had been decided to ignore the first thirty minutes of the first game of the season. This was, therefore, a planned demonstration, and it sparked heated debate in internet forums before the game. On the day of the match itself, however, everyone abided by the decision. A large banner had been hung in the stands upon which a quote from Nikolai Starostin, the founder of Spartak, appealed to the morale of the players: *'Love Spartak within yourselves, not yourselves within Spartak'*. The fans had chosen the game against Dynamo Moscow, one of their main rivals, to make their protest in order to underline the seriousness of the warning signal. The refusal to chant or sing constitutes an extreme case; the unconditional support of one's 'own' team is one of the central ideas of a 'fanatical' consciousness, as is visibly setting oneself apart from other sports spectators.

In Russia, a 'fanatical' fan conjures up images of a spectator combining the passion of Liverpool's Kop End with a hooligan's propensity to violence. The Russian media, athletes and fans all differentiate between this hard, 'fanatical' core within Russian fan culture and normal football fans, who in Russian are described as *bolel'shchiki* ('feverish' fans) – the word is derived from the verb *bolet'* (to be ill or to suffer). Whereas stories about 'fanatical' fans are often told, the unorganised majority of peaceful supporters are often overlooked, even though they can claim a considerably longer tradition.

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Being a Fan – Then and Now

Football was by far the most popular sport in the Soviet Union. Up until in the early 1980s, however, the behaviour and appearance of fans differed greatly from what is understood to be fan culture today. They were not organised, did not wear football jerseys and did not sing songs. The most successful clubs initially all came from Moscow. As early as the 1930s, countless spectators crammed public transport full on their way to the new Dynamo stadium. Young people tried to push past the stewards into the stadium. This state of affairs contradicted the idealised image of the young Soviet generation as disciplined and hard-working. For this reason, the media in the post-war period took pains to portray the spectator as interested and eager to learn, watching in order to participate later. Most fans, both before and after the war, rallied around the most successful clubs, above all Spartak Moscow, which, in contrast to the police team Dynamo and the army club TsDKA (today TsSKA), did not seem to represent the Stalinist regime. With the rise of Dynamo Kiev, Ararat Yerevan and others, new centres of football appeared on the peripheries of the multi-ethnic empire. In 1961 Dynamo Kiev won the championship, the first team from outside Moscow to do so.

Alliances and antagonisms sprang up between the supporters' organisations. A dividing line ran, for example, between the centre and the periphery; at the same time, the hostilities in Moscow between Dynamo, TsDKA and Spartak remained intact. While Moscow fans celebrated the victories of provincial teams against their rivals, the spectators from the other republics were only interested in one thing: seeing the Muscovites knocked off their high horse.

The Olympic Games in Russia (*Sandra Budy*)

In 1980, Russia organised the Olympic Games for the first – and to date, only – time. The Soviet Union was one of the great sporting nations and a superpower at that time. This event was even chronicled in Soviet cartoons. The 13th episode of the well-loved series *Volk i Zaiats* (Wolf and Hare), a kind of Eastern European 'Tom and Jerry', took place against the backdrop of the Summer Games. These were, however, overshadowed by the Cold War: athletes from 65 countries, including the USA and the German Federal Republic, did not take part. The boycott was governments' response to the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops.

Detail Komsomolskaja Prawda *22.8.2007*

The 2014 Winter Games will take place in Sochi, a Russian health resort on the Black Sea. In the wake of the tumultuous reform period and Russia's fear of fading into political insignificance, hosting the games is a sign of the country's new self-esteem. Russia is *somebody* again: its economy is booming and its political importance in the world is increasing. The president and numerous well-known athletes threw their weight behind the campaign. The latter even called Putin their 'team captain'. The Russian political team, meanwhile, were not afraid to do a bit of grandstanding: to Guatemala, where the International Olympic Committee was deliberating, they shipped an ice rink on which Yevgeny Plyushchenko, the reigning Olympic champion, performed his crowd-pleasing pir-

analysis

Several generations of mostly male football fans were socialised in the Soviet Union. Their numbers are large because the Soviet Union possessed few leisure activities which provided an opportunity for identification comparable to that offered by football. Given the great variety of leisure activities today, it is hardly surprising that there are considerably more older fans in Russia than young ones. The overwhelming part of the older generation of fans follows the games on television. The rest of the *bolel'shchiki*, that is older men with families, children and grand-children, constitute about half of the stadium-goers in Moscow. Their knowledge and self-image is not, however, written on banners, and cannot be heard in chants or internet forums. This is because even in Soviet times they did not present or conduct themselves as fans. For more information about this section of fan culture, one must look in back yards, kitchens, living rooms, parks and book markets.

Russian fan culture is masculine. The women who were approached for interviews usually deferred to the men. Moreover, the interviewees who were between 50 and 80 years old always distanced themselves from 'fanatical' fan culture.[1] They regretted the low level of today's league, which lost many of the Russian teams' main rivals due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet spectator was, they say, as civilised as he was knowledgeable (a claim that recalls the image presented by the Soviet media), regardless of whether he had become a supporter of his team on account of the nice red kits, or because his mother had categorically answered his question of which team to support with *'Spartak, of course!'*. They said that today's 'fanatical' fans are primitive and egocentric. Fans did not perpetrate violent attacks in their day. Alongside

1 Alongside material from websites and media reports, this article is based on eleven interviews in March 2007 in Moscow and five interviews in May in Kiev which the author conducted with fans of different teams and generations.

ouettes. Money was apparently no object – the same was true of climatic conditions. The message of this performance was: if we want something, we can get it.

The choice of location echoes this sentiment. Sochi is above all known as a summer resort, one of the most popular in Soviet times. Behind it stretch the ridges of the Caucasus, which can be counted on for snow. The planned arenas and Olympic villages only exist in the form of computer animations at this stage. Critics of the development plans have pointed out that many of the proposed sites are in conservation areas. Their protests have died away largely unheard.

The project is simply far too attractive. Finding investors in Russia for the new sports complexes has not been a problem, and with Gazprom involved, the Games have a financially powerful sponsor. Numerous oligarchs have also happily given money to the project: the aluminium king Oleg Deripaska already owns the recently built airport; he will invest a total of about 2,000 million dollars in Sochi. The banker and head of the Interros investment trust, Vladimir Potanin, wants to develop a skiing area – to the tune of 350 million dollars. The Russian population shall also profit from the estimated 150,000 new jobs and as future holidaymakers in a multifunctional, modern resort.

The Olympics in Sochi represent the new, aspiring Russia. They underpin the country's self-confidence and offer the winners of the reform process splendid facilities for sport and relaxation. The event will no doubt make Russia an attractive future destination for winter holidays among wealthy Russians and foreign guests alike.

Translated from the German by Christopher Gilley

the high gate prices of 14 US dollars or 7 British pounds[2] for the neutral stands, this rowdiness is the main reason that many older fans do not go to the stadium anymore. These supporters do not define themselves through violence, in contrast to the 'fanatical' camp, whose history also stretches back into the time of the Soviet Union.

'Fanatical' Fans – Then…

Every young person interested in football in Russia nowadays is presented with the 'fanatical' fans' grandstanding as a model of 'correct' behaviour for fans. There have been 'fanatical' football fans in Russia since the late 1970s, and it was during this time, as well as during the upheavals of the 1980s, that the criteria emerged for how a 'fanatical' fan should follow his team. From the beginning, three elements were key: supporting the team in the stadium, away games and punch-ups.

Young supporters of Spartak Moscow, inspired by West European (above all English) fans, started the trend in the mid-1970s. Although it was forbidden to wear team colours, they came to the stadium with hand-knitted red and white scarves. They sat together, invented fan songs and developed synchronised moves. They were followed in the early 1980s by fans from Dynamo Kiev, TsSKA Moscow, Dynamo Moscow and other teams.

Even more important for the 'fanatical' self-image in Russia are the journeys to the away games. While these games are also important for Western supporters, for Russian fans, then as now, it is almost impossible to exaggerate their significance, given the immense distances and the country's ramshackle infrastructure. Frequent journeys to away games were seen as a great achievement on the part of a 'fanatical fan' and increased his prestige in the group. Fans often chose to travel by means of the time-consuming 'dog sleigh'[3]. Be it from Moscow to St. Petersburg or from Kiev to Moscow, groups of fans have been travelling to away games on regional trains without buying a ticket since the 1980s. The uncomfortable journey from Kiev to Moscow, for example, took 22 hours. On the way, they felt uninhibited, boozed a lot and tormented the vendors selling food and drinks on the provincial railway platforms. They were rarely asked for their tickets in the trains, and if they were, they always found a way to talk themselves out of trouble. Many of these fans were students and therefore had enough time for lengthy journeys.

Dynamo Kiev and Spartak Moscow were the most successful football clubs in the late Soviet period and represented, at least according to the interviewees, the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. Even at the stations there were scuffles between the teams' supporters. Following one brawl at the stadium in Kiev one could hear the chant 'Kievans are better at the station and in bed'.

…and Today

In the late Soviet context, the triad of collective team support, journeys to away games and fights, which all drew on Western examples, created the basis for the culture of violence among today's 'fanatical' fans. This does not mean that all who go to the stadium want trouble, or that all 'fanatical' fans are violent. Only a small minority conduct themselves in this way. These aggressive fans have, however, managed to create a general climate of violence with which every fan must grapple in one way or another.

The average age of the 'fanatical' fans is around 20 nowadays. The violent minority come together to form informal, unstable groups under the umbrella of the teams' official fan clubs, whose leaders they normally meet in the stadium. In the cases

2 About 350 roubles, roughly 10% of the average national pension.

3 In Russian: na sobakakh – by dog sleigh.

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of Moscow and St. Petersburg, there are numerous documented examples of groups having arranged fights outside the stadium via mobile phone. Recorded on video, several of these fights can even be watched on YouTube now.[4]

There is controversy about the ethical considerations and the extent of the violence. Some speak of honourable restraint and 'friendly' partings at the end of fights. Others mention stones, belts and knives or other sharpened weapons. Outside Moscow, this organised form of violence does not yet exist. The clubs normally do not acknowledge such incidents, and the media rarely reports them.

Violence is not only expressed physically; it is also evident in the match chants, graffiti and football fans' slang. The supporters of the former police club, Dynamo Moscow, are, for example, referred to as 'filth' (*musor*, literally 'rubbish'), a term of abuse for Russian policemen.

The state has an ambivalent relationship to fan violence. The sale of alcohol is forbidden within a radius of several kilometres around stadiums during league games. Checks at the entrance before the game, and the formation of a narrow corridor to the Underground afterwards, as well as the presence of special police units (the OMON), serve to prevent clashes between the different groups of fans. Although the OMON have held back in recent years, they are infamous among fans for their brutality. They are a martial representation of the state's monopoly of force. Nevertheless, sometimes the over-thorough checks at the entrance are abandoned shortly before the match begins in order to get all the spectators into the stadium in time. This practice is evident from the sight of banned flares set off during the game.

Fan Culture and the Radical Right?

Over the years, the rumour has repeatedly surfaced that the radical right is active within Russian fan culture. According to media reports, during the rioting of 'fanatical' fans following Russia's defeat by Japan in the 2002 World Cup, a man was stabbed to death, a Japanese restaurant was stormed, policemen were beaten up and the windows of the parliament building were smashed. Drunken hooligans wearing paramilitary uniforms chanted 'Down with Japan' and 'Russia for the Russians' in front of the Duma and Kremlin. Other reports from left-wing groups tell of infiltration of the fans by right-wing groups or of the right-wing sympathies of many Russian fans, as evidenced, for example, by the participation of Spartak fans in a demonstration organised by the radical right in 2005.

In August of this year, a fine of 14,000 euros was im-

4 Under the keywords, for example, Dynamo, TsSKA, Spartak.

All the same, they celebrated at the end. 'Fanatical' Spartak fans after their 1:0 victory. 11.03.2007 @ Manfred Zeller

analysis

posed on Spartak Moscow after some of the team's own fans unfurled a banner calling the club's new Brazilian player, Velliton, an ape. The management of the club distanced itself from the event, and claimed that it could not have been the work of organised Spartak fans. Is this example indicative of the wide-spread racism among Russian fans, or does it illustrate the effort to wage war against racism in the stadiums? In response to this query, a supporter of TsSKA said that skinheads had been largely absent from stadiums in Moscow in recent years. In the past, they had provoked the police; in the meantime, the situation had become noticeably less tense. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, the punch-ups have apparently taken on the strictly organised, purely 'fanatical' character described above and take place outside the stadiums. Although the culture of violence still exists, more and more families would probably consider attending football games.

The culture of Russian fans is not uniform and it is changing. This transformation will certainly be shaped by the young average age of the coming generation of fans. The latest trend of different groups of fans wearing expensive designer clothes to differentiate themselves is a likely sign that the children of Moscow's new middle class are beginning to stream into the stadiums; the topic is heavily discussed on internet forums.

Football is one of the few topics capable of exciting a 70 year-old pensioner and a 15 year-old schoolchild in equal measure. This underlines the situation in which Russian fan culture today finds itself: between generational conflict and a culture of violence, and Soviet traditions and post-Soviet uncertainty.

Translated from the German
by Christopher Gilley

Reading Suggestions:

- Robert Edelman: Serious Fun. A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Simon Kuper: Football against the enemy, London: Orion 1994.
- Andy Dougan: Defending the Honour of Kiev-Dynamo, London 2001.

video

'Contact' – a video project by Dmitry Vilensky

A special nexus between sport and culture takes place in the artistic examination of sport-related topics. The 2002 video project 'Contact' by Dmitry Vilensky, a St. Petersburg-based artist, documents the checks at the stadium's turnstiles carried out by special police units. It conveys the feeling of the totality of the measures of surveillance. Anyone who wants to take part in a large sporting event must be prepared for direct, i.e. physical, contact with the representatives of state power. The pictures are augmented by the sounds of the crowds, football chants ('We will rock you') and the police announcements over tannoys. As part of this year's documenta *Art Exhibition in Kassel, Dmitry Vilensky came to Germany, and we had the opportunity to ask him some questions about this project.*

kultura: What was the impetus for the creation of the 'Contact' project?
Vilensky: It was 2002, and at that time I was working on the spontaneous documentation of different types of crowds.
kultura: How did you come to choose the topic of football fans?

video

Vilensky: They provided the clearest reflection of the situation; it was important for me to show the social context. For this reason I chose the checks at the turnstiles.

kultura: Where has the project been shown and what have the reactions to it been?

Vilensky: Among other places, it has been shown in Scandinavia and Germany. However, this is a small project – the video only lasts about 4 minutes; it's more like a single image. It's therefore hard to say anything about the reaction. As far as I know, it hasn't been mentioned in any of the serious articles written about my work.

Contact. *Video still. © Dmitry Vilensky 2002*

kultura: Do you have a special affinity for sport-related topics? During the G8 meeting in St. Petersburg last year, you showed the demonstrations in the Kirov Stadium.

Vilensky: Not at all. That was just a coincidence – I hate sport and am primarily interested in politics.

kultura: Isn't sport also a part of politics?

Vilensky: Hm, I suppose so. At the moment, everybody in Russia is obsessed with sport and the Olympic Games.

About the Artist:

Dmitry Vilensky was a successful photographer in Russia, who also exhibited abroad, before he began living and working in various European countries. At that time he became acquainted with the New Left. He is a member of 'Chto delat/What is to be done?', a group of artists, philosophers and writers living in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhni Novgorod and Berlin (see the article by A. Penzin in *kultura* 10/2007). Since 2003, the group has published a bilingual (in Russian and English) newspaper of the same name. This name (see V.I. Lenin's *What is to be done?* from 1902) places the group in the traditions of the left, but they take their lead more from Marx than from V.I. Lenin in his Bolshevik period: it adds a critique of the Soviet system to its criticism of the capitalism.

One of the concerns underlying their action is the problem of the avant-garde committed to emancipatory values, namely the question of how artistic and scholarly practice can be transformed into politics. They have two goals here: to find a new way of investigating reality proceeding from the everyday life of people and the spaces in which this life takes place, and to reveal the potential for political action.

The prerequisite for this can be seen in Vilensky's study *The Masses*, which, in the words of the art scholar Viktor Miziano, shows 'how from the remains of a society which has been straitjacketed and controlled a new fabric, a multiplicity…is emerging'.

video

In 2005, Vilensky presented 10 theses on political art exhibitions. They deal with, for example, the creation of new models of communication, an audience belonging to a different social class than the established one, the mobilisation of the audience towards collective action as political subjects, and the creation of new public spaces in response to the fact that in the existing areas (of politics and art) every initiative is automatically usurped and reinterpreted.
The creation of a potentially political place is documented in the project 'Angry Sandwich-People' from 2005 in a socially downgraded former workers' district of St. Petersburg where Vilensky spent his childhood. The use of a text by Bertolt Brecht ('In Praise of Dialectics') and the group's employment of Brecht's aesthetic programme is interesting. An entire issue of *Chto delat/What is to be done?* is devoted to the question of how Brecht's fundamental axioms can be adapted to the contemporary situation.

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URLs:

- On 'Contact':
  www.ncca-spb.ru/ev/eng/wru_17html
- For the documentation of the protest during the 2006 G8 summit in St. Petersburg:
  http://www.brightcove.tv/title.jsp?title=537085489&channel=29794487
- On the question of the political exhibition:
  http://ifyouseesomethingsaysomething.net/dmitry.htm
- On 'Angry Sandwich-People':
  http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=313&Itemid=180

PREVIEW:
kultura 4/2007 will appear in December and will deal with the question of the freedom of the arts in contemporary Russia.
The guest editor will be Sandra Frimmel, Berlin.