

The Role of People's Houses in Shaping Türkiye's Early Republican Sports Policies

Türkiye'nin Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Spor Politikalarının Şekillenmesinde Halkevlerinin Rolü

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the proclamation of the Republic in Türkiye, efforts were made to build a modern and national social identity. Statesmen particularly used social and cultural activities to ensure that the new order would be recognized and accepted by the public. Within this framework, sport gained social and ideological significance and was placed under state control. It is known that, especially after the establishment of the People's Houses, sports activities were promoted nationwide in line with this approach. In line with the single-party administration of the period, the Republican People's Party closely supervised and directed all activities carried out within the People's Houses. Sports activities in the People's Houses were conducted in line with the principles of populism and nationalism of the Republic. The aim was to create tens of thousands of strong citizens instead of a few elites. This study analyzes early Republican sports policies through People's House activities to show how sport was understood at the time. The findings show that sports activities in the People's Houses were seen not only as physical exercises but also as ideological tools designed to strengthen national consciousness and introduce the public to the values of the new regime. Archival documents indicate that sport became an important instrument for realizing the state's modernization and nation-building goals. This study is significant for understanding how sport functioned as a means of expressing Republican values in daily life and for clarifying the role played by the People's Houses in this process.

Key Words: Sports, Sporting Events, Republican People's Party, People's Houses, Türkiye

Öz

Türkiye'de Cumhuriyetin ilanından sonra gerçekleştirilen yeni düzen çalışmaları ile modern ve milli bir toplumsal kimlik inşa edilmek istenmiştir. Devlet adamları, yeni düzen çalışmalarının halk tarafından tanınması ve kabul edilmesi hususunda özellikle sosyal ve kültürel etkinliklerden faydalanmışlardır. Erken Cumhuriyet devrinde spor bu anlayış çerçevesinde toplumsal ve ideolojik bir mahiyete sahip olmuş ve devlet tarafından kontrol edilmiştir. Özellikle 1932 yılında Halkevlerinin açılması ile birlikte spor etkinlikleri bu anlayış doğrultusunda yurt geneline yayılmıştır. CHP, Halkevleri bünyesinde yürütülen tüm faaliyetleri yakından takip etmiş ve direktiflerle yönetmiştir. Bu faaliyetler için ihtiyaç duyulan malzemeler ise dönemin ve ülke ekonomisinin koşullarına göre yine CHP yönetimi tarafından sağlanmıştır. Halkevlerinde spor faaliyetleri Cumhuriyetin, halkçılık ve milliyetçilik ilkeleri doğrultusunda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Zira "Seçkin tekler yerine gürbüz on binler yaratmak" bu dönemde spor etkinliklerinin öncelikli hedefi olmuştur. Çalışmamız, erken Cumhuriyet döneminde Türkiye'nin spor politikalarını Halkevlerinin spor faaliyetleri etrafında değerlendirmek ve söz konusu dönemde spora atfedilen anlamları ortaya koymak maksadı ile hazırlanmıştır. Çalışmamızın bulguları, Halkevlerinde gerçekleştirilen spor etkinliklerinin yalnızca fiziksel bir aktivite olarak değil, aynı zamanda milli bilinci güçlendirmek ve halkı yeni rejimin değerleri ile tanıştırmak için kullanılan ideolojik bir araç olarak da kabul edildiğini göstermektedir. Arşiv belgeleri, spor etkinliklerinin devletin modernleşme ve ulus inşası hedeflerini gerçekleştirmek adına önemli bir argüman olduğunu koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, sporun

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Cumhuriyet değerlerinin günlük yaşamda karşılık bulması adına nasıl bir araç haline geldiğini anlamak ve Halkevlerinin Halkevlerinin bu hususta sahip olduğu rolün anlaşılması bakımından önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spor, Sportif Etkinlikler, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, Halkevleri, Türkiye

Introduction

Sports is a phenomenon as old as human history and not only ensures the physical development of individuals; It has been an important tool in establishing social order in religious, social, military and political contexts. Throughout history, the nature, function, and social meaning of sports have undergone constant transformation. Since ancient times, sports have been intertwined with rituals, war preparations, and practices that strengthen social solidarity.¹ In the modern era, it has become a part of the state's policies to shape society. Especially in Europe, the changes that occurred in urbanization and modern state mechanisms, particularly due to industrialization, paved the way for sports to be viewed as a social tool with functions such as directing masses, disciplining them, and uniting them around common values. Thus, from the 19th century onwards, sports acquired an ideological nature. In this context, sports have become a crucial tool for the ideology of Nationalism.²

In Türkiye, sports came into the state's sphere of interest for the first time during the Tanzimat Era with a similar understanding. As a matter of fact, during this period, physical education and sports became integral to both military and general education policies, in line with the goals of modernization³. And during the Second Constitutional era, sports policies were shaped according to the goals of disciplining youth and strengthening social solidarity. This understanding continued its influence after the proclamation of the republic; the sports and physical education policies of the new regime were shaped in line with the goals of modernization and nation-building.⁴ On 19 February 1932, People's Houses were simultaneously As an educational and cultural institution, People's Houses played an important role in shaping and implementing sports policies in Türkiye during the early Republican period.⁵

- 1 John William Devine, Francisco Javier Lopez Frías, "Philosophy of Sport", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2020, <http://seop.illc.uva.nl/entries/sport/> access date: 15.09.2024
- 2 Stefan Szymanski, "A Theory of the Evolution of Modern Sport", *Journal of Sport History*, Spring 2008, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring 2008), p. 2 ff.
- 3 Adem Bayazıt, Emre Boz, "Osmanlı Devleti ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dönemi Yenileşme Hareketlerinin Türk Spor Kültürüne Etkileri "Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Spor", *Uluslararası Kültürel ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 3/ Special Issue 2, 2017, p.p. 215.
- 4 Suha Karaca, "II. Meşrutiyet'ten Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemine İstanbul'da Sporun Yapılanması (1908-1938)." *Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi Cumhuriyet Özel Sayısı*, 2023 p. 488 ff.
- 5 Mehmet Korkud Aydın, "Edirne Halkevi'nin Kuruluşu ve Faaliyetleri." *ESAR Journal*, 2(3), 2021, p. 120 ff.

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This study examines approaches to sports in the early Republican period in Türkiye, with a focus on the sports activities of People's Houses. The research focuses particularly on the activities of the sports branches of the People's Houses guided by the principles of populism and nationalism of the Republic. In fact, these activities directly served the Republican administration's goals of creating a national identity and raising ideal and healthy citizens. Therefore, during this period, sports were not only considered a physical activity but also a tool used to ensure the ideals of the Republic and social unity.

People's Houses, through their sports branches, made sports events accessible to the public. This made it possible to introduce modern sports to the public and revive traditional sports as well. Thus, diverse social groups had the opportunity to come together through sports events in daily life.

Within the scope of the research, the sports activities of the People's Houses were discussed in a historical context. At this point, the current literature on related subjects, Republican People's Party publications, and archival documents from the State Archives of the Republic of Türkiye were examined. The analysis of the publications and documents in question was used to concretize the scope, method, and effects of the organizations carried out by the People's Houses through their sports branches. In this context, the study aims to reveal the unique role of People's Houses' sporting activities in the early Republican period. It is also believed that the study contributes to the literature on historical sports sociology and early Republican studies by analyzing how sports functioned as a state-organized social project.

Sports as an Instrument of Nation-Building in the Modern Era and Its Reflections in Türkiye

With the emergence of nation-states in Europe, sports evolved into a state policy employed to discipline individuals and strengthen national consciousness⁶. In this period, sports moved beyond an activity associated merely with public health; it acquired ideological and cultural dimensions and became one of the tools used by modern states to shape society. As noted by Camino et al., the Turnbewegung (Turner Movement) that emerged in Germany was organized around a nationalist ideology and aimed to train physically strong, disciplined, and loyal individuals. Following Germany's political unification, this movement turned into a cultural mechanism that provided social unity; during the Nazi period, sports became a central instrument in cultivating loyal supporters of the regime⁷

6 Devine & Lopez Frias, op. cit., access date: 15.09.2024

7 Alejandro Camino et al., "Sports and Leisure in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)," in *The European Experience*, ed. Jan Henssen et al. Open Book Publishers, Cambridge, 2023), p. 901 ff.

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A similar example can be observed in the Sokol organizations across the Austro-Hungarian territories. According to Troch, the Sokol movement was structured to reinforce solidarity and the sense of independence among Slavic communities through both sports and cultural activities. Sokols subsequently became part of the nation-building processes in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.⁸

The development of sports in England, on the other hand, was directly linked to the emergence of leisure time among the working class after industrialization. The elite classes feared that uncontrolled leisure could hinder productivity and weaken social order; therefore, sports was regarded as a means to discipline the working class. Consequently, sports policies in England were shaped by the aim of integrating the working population into the social system and maintaining discipline.⁹ According to Szymanski, from the nineteenth century onward, physical education and sporting associations in France operated under direct state oversight, as compulsory gymnastics, state-supported gymnastic societies, and strict legal controls on associations integrated sport into broader national objectives such as physical training and national defense.¹⁰

The theoretical background of these developments can be explained through Durkheim's approach to social rituals. Durkheim argues that activities requiring collective participation reinforce social solidarity and moral order. Building on this view, Susan Birrell conceptualizes sport not merely as a physical practice but as a symbolic ritual space in which societal values are reproduced in modern societies. According to her, the athlete serves as a role model that links individuals to the moral order¹¹ This theoretical framework clarifies why sport became an influential ideological tool in the nation-building processes of Europe.

This transformation became evident in the Ottoman Empire, particularly after the Tanzimat reforms. From the second half of the 19th century onward, physical education, adapted from Western educational models, was incorporated into the curriculum of institutions such as Galatasaray Sultanisi and, later, the Harbiye and Darülmüallimin¹² The Committee of Union and Progress, the dominant political force during the Second Constitutional Era, adopted

8 Pieter Troch, "Interwar Yugoslav State-Building and the Changing Social Position of The Sokol Gymnastics Movement." *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire*, 26/1, 2019, p. 61 ff.

9 Wamplery Wray, "Sport, Industry and Industrial Sport in Britain before 1914: Review and Revision", *Sport in Society*, 19(3), 2016, p. 342 ff.

10 Szymanski, op. cit. p. 5 ff.

11 Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman", *Social Forces*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Special Issue (Dec., 1981), p. 356.

12 Bayazit and Boz, op. cit. p. 216

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a militaristic perspective on sports. Rather than merely serving purposes of individual health and leisure, sports were seen as a key instrument for fostering societal discipline and national consciousness. Accordingly, physical education activities were promoted through youth organizations to inculcate these values.¹³ Gymnastics, wrestling, and football matches emerged as prominent events designed to engage and influence the younger generation.¹⁴ Following the proclamation of the Republic, Türkiye, under Atatürk's leadership, entered a period of far-reaching reforms that reshaped nearly every aspect of social life.¹⁵ Sports became one of the key instruments for conveying these reforms to society, functioning simultaneously as educational and ideological tools. Through these initiatives, the new administration sought to strengthen national identity and cultivate modern, healthy, and resilient citizens. In this context, the People's Houses (Halkevleri) emerged as one of the fundamental institutions shaping sports policies in the early Republic. Established in 1932, the People's Houses rapidly expanded across the country with the aim of familiarizing society with the values of the new regime and encouraging their adoption.¹⁶ Sports activities carried out within the People's Houses contributed significantly to the establishment of modern and scientific foundations of sports in Türkiye. The physical education courses conducted under their auspices helped institutionalize a systematic understanding of physical training. The founding philosophy of the People's Houses rested not only on cultural principles but also on a theoretical framework grounded in social solidarity and the construction of national identity. In this period, the ideological framework of the People's Houses was shaped by Ziya Gökalp's understanding of the national society and by Durkheim's conception of social cohesion, which together positioned sports as a form of collective education that reinforced national unity.¹⁷

Current literature shows that sports remains one of the key fields through which national identity is expressed and reproduced. It constitutes a social environment where collective belonging becomes visible and where nationalist meanings are sustained.¹⁸ In the context of globalization, international sports events continue to reflect historical rivalries and keep percep-

- 13 Salih Başkutlu, "İttihat Terakki Cemiyeti'nin Genç Nesil Algısı Ve Yönetimi." *Uluslararası Anadolu Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 4/4, 2020, p.11
- 14 Emrah Özer, Mehmet Gül. "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Tanzimat'tan II. Meşrutiyet'e Sporda Batılılaşma Hareketleri." *Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Spor Bilimleri Dergisi*, 1/1, 2020, p.48.
- 15 Aydın, op. cit. 116
- 16 Melih Canberk Din, *Halkevlerinin Türk Sporunun Gelişmesindeki Yeri ve Önemi* (Master's Thesis) Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2018, s.24 ff.; Anıl Çeçen, *Halkevleri*, Gündoğan Yayınları, Ankara, 1990, p.107 ff.
- 17 Taha Parla, *Ziya Gökalp, Kemalizm ve Türkiye'de Korporatizm, İletişim*, İstanbul, 1993. P.50 ff
- 18 Rahşan İnal, "Bizim Şampiyonumuz: Spor, Milliyetçilik ve Millî Kimlik", *AUSBD*, Vol: 23, No: 4, 2023, p. 1568 ff.

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tions of the “other” alive. Although sports does not create national identity by itself, it has long contributed to strengthening social cohesion.¹⁹ In contemporary Türkiye, widely followed sports such as football, basketball, and volleyball bring different social groups together and create shared emotional experiences. Sports retains its unifying character, yet its meaning has shifted since the early Republican period, becoming a common leisure practice shaped by individual participation and state guidance.²⁰ This transformation is also reflected in the evolution of Türkiye’s sports policies. During the 1980s and 1990s, policies were largely oriented toward international achievements and national prestige. From the 2000s onward, a more inclusive and participatory understanding emerged, supported by infrastructures designed to broaden access to sport²¹. Development plans indicate that sports policies increasingly adapted to changing social and economic conditions and relied on qualitative targets rather than fixed numerical objectives²². As the leisure dimension of sports acquired economic value, the sector expanded, professionalized, and developed into a multi-component structure.²³

Since this study relies primarily on state archive materials, CHP reports, and official publications, it is necessary to recognize that these sources convey the ideological priorities of their period. Their language often frames sports within goals such as national unity, discipline, and education, which may foreground intended outcomes while reducing alternative perspectives. Recognizing these limitations provides a clearer basis for interpreting how early Republican institutions approached sport. When viewed from this angle, the sports activities carried out in the People’s Houses represent an early and instructive example of how sport was used to strengthen social unity.

The People’s Houses as Agents of Social Transformation and Nation-Building in Early Republican Türkiye

People’s Houses, which serve as the primary focus of this study, emerged in the 1930s as a structural necessity for the new Republic. Following the proclamation of the Republic, the regime embarked on a rapid and far-reaching reform process; however, significant challenges arose in social life. Events such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion and the Menemen Incident clearly dem-

- 19 Mustafa Yaşar Şahin et all, “Spor ve Milliyetçilik Etkileşimi: Ulusal Kimlik Oluşturmada Sporun Yeri ve Önemi”, *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi*, Vol:7 No:1, 2010, p.1259
- 20 Aziz Demirhan at all, “Kalkınma Planları Çerçevesinde Türkiye’de Spor Politikalarının Evrimi”, *Sportif Bakış: Spor ve Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 11(3), 2024, p.347 ff.
- 21 Kadir Yıldız, “Yerel Yönetimler ve Kalkınma Planları Çerçevesinde Spor Hizmetleri”, *Gaziantep Üniversitesi, Spor Bilimleri Dergisi*, Vol:3 No:1, 2018, p. 73 ff.
- 22 Kenan Sivrikaya, Ayşe Demir, “Türkiye’de 2001 Yılı Ve Sonrasında Uygulanan Spor Ekonomisi Politikalarına Yönelik Bir Değerlendirme”, *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi*, Yıl: 2019, Vol: 10, No: 23, p.p..126-136132 ff.
- 23 Demirhan et. all. Op.cit. 347

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onstrated that large segments of the population had not yet fully understood or embraced the new order. In response, the Republican People's Party (CHP) sought to reach society more effectively and promote the values of the new regime through cultural and educational institutions. As a matter of fact, at the 1927 congress of the CHP, it was decided that the Turkish Hearths would undertake this task, and the Turkish Hearths became an organization affiliated with the CHP.²⁴ However, the ideologically independent stance of the Turkish Hearths proved incompatible with the CHP's objectives. This incompatibility was clearly reflected in Atatürk's assertion that the Turkish Hearths needed to become "one body" with the CHP. Consequently, on 10 April 1931, the Turkish Hearths were dissolved and all of their assets were transferred to the CHP.²⁵ After the dissolution of the Turkish Hearths, a decision was made to establish an educational and cultural institution directly affiliated with the CHP. In preparation, several international models were examined, including Czechoslovakia's Masaryk Public Education Institution, Italy's Dopolavoro National Cultural Organization, Hungary's National Cultural Society, the Uranya Society, Workers' Gymnasiums, and Farmers' Associations. Studies highlighted that even in societies with literacy rates as high as 95–100 percent, public cultural organizations were given increasing importance, underscoring their role in fostering collective civic values.²⁶

The name "People's Houses" (Halkevleri) was adopted for this new institution, a term first proposed by Vildan Aşir Savaşır, one of the prominent sports figures of the period. Having studied European models, Savaşır advocated adopting the Sokol model from Czechoslovakia, emphasizing that the new institution should maintain direct contact with the populace, organize mass sports activities, and embody a disciplined and nationalist character.²⁷ With Atatürk's support for this proposal, Dr. Reşit Galip was appointed to oversee the preparations for establishing the People's Houses. Founded in 1932, the People's Houses spread rapidly across the country with the aim of familiarizing the public with the values of the Republic and encouraging their adoption. Until their closure in 1951, they functioned as educational and cultural institutions affiliated with the Republican People's Party (CHP).²⁸ As idealistic institutions by their establishment purpose, People's Houses aimed to create effective individuals and a strong national character inspired by Turkish history and

24 Tahir Kodal, "Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ve Türk Ocakları", *Journal of Turkish Research Institute*, Issue: 52, 2014, p.308.

25 Zeki Arkan, "Halkevlerinin Kuruluşu ve Tarihsel İşlevi". *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, 6(23), 1999, p. 266.

26 CHF, *Halkevleri Talimatnamesi*. Hakimiyeti Milliye Matbaası, Ankara 1932, p. 3-4; CHF, *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Katib-i Umumiliğinin Fırka Teşkilatına Umumi Tebliğatı*, Cilt: I, Hakimiyeti Milliye Matbaası, Ankara, 1933, p. 90; Nurcan Toksoy, *Bir Kültürel Kalkınma Modeli Olarak Halkevleri*, Orion Kitabevi, Ankara 2007, p. 26-30.

27 Çeçen, op. cit. 108

28 Arkan, op. cit., 263 ff.

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culture. Rather than serving as propaganda centers, People's Houses operated as educational and cultural institutions. Through education, culture, arts, and sports activities, they aimed to enhance the knowledge of citizens previously unexposed to such activities and bring people together in a social environment.

From their inception, People's Houses operated through nine different branches, one of which was the Sports Branch.²⁹ The sports and physical education activities conducted by this branch were a significant tool for promoting the republic's ideological objectives and strengthening societal solidarity. This approach reflected CHP's policies. In a 1935 speech, Recep Peker, the Secretary General of CHP, emphasized that sports were as important as political, administrative, and economic issues, highlighting the need for sports to be conducted in a disciplined manner beyond being a technical activity.³⁰ This ideological emphasis on collective discipline also shaped how the People's Houses organized and managed their sports programs. People's Houses took significant steps to base sports activities on scientific foundations. From the mid-1930s, handbooks on various sports were prepared and distributed to People's Houses through CHP's 6th Bureau. Resources such as *Introduction to Rowing Education and Training*, the Rowing Federation's *Rowing, Athletics Charts*, Kerim A. Bükey's *Tennis*, and the General Directorate of Physical Education's *Physical Education and Sports Journal* were provided to athletes. Thus, sports education was intended to be conducted scientifically.³¹ Additionally, works like Burhaneddin Bey's translation of *Modern Athletics*, *Athlete's Handbook* and Burhan Felek's translation of the *International Amateur Athletics Federation Handbook* were distributed to People's Houses to ensure modern athletic training.³² Western sports studies were also followed. Zehra Alagöz, a teacher at Gazi Education Institute, attended an international sports meeting in Stockholm and reported her experiences, contributing to the development of People's Houses' sports policies. People's Houses collaborated with sports authorities in Türkiye to organize various activities, promoting sports education. From 1935, physical education classes were held in Elazığ, Amasya, and Kayseri People's Houses; expert-led activities were conducted in Mardin, Diyarbakır, and Zonguldak. Mardin People's House summarized this scientific approach, stating, "We brought in experts to prevent sports clubs from operating haphazardly." Numerous classes were held in Eminönü and İzmit, referee courses were opened in İzmir, and sports films were shown in Ankara, Adana, Afyon, and Eskişehir to educate athletes.³³

29 op. cit. 141 ff; Toksoy, op. cit, 345

30 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935): 103 Halkevi Geçen Yıllarda Nasıl Çalıştı*. Ankara 1935, p. 66

31 Republic of Türkiye Directorate of State Archives Republican Archives (BCA), 490.1.0.0/1100.20.1/44-328; BCA, 490.1.0.0/14.74.1; BCA, 490.1.0.0/1097.9.1; BCA, 490.1.0.0/1097.9.1/32-208; BCA, 490.1.0.0/1300.320.2.

32 BCA, 490.1.0.0/1100.20.1/44-328; BCA, 490.1.0.0/1100.20.1/329-490

33 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 66-80

CHP's Sports Policies: Constructing the Ideal Republican Citizen Through People's Houses

In the Early Republican period, sports were regarded by the state as a domain to be both supported and closely monitored. The establishment of the *Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı* (Turkish Training Associations Alliance) in 1924 laid one of the first institutional foundations in this field by organizing sports branches under professional federations. This organization was transformed into the *Turkish Sports Institution* in 1936; however, it was short-lived and was dissolved in 1938. In the same year, the enactment of the *Physical Education Law* led to the creation of the *General Directorate of Physical Education*, which placed all sports and physical education activities fully under state control and adopted a centralized management approach in this field.³⁴ From their inception, the Sports Branches of the People's Houses collaborated first with the Turkish Training Associations Alliance, then with the Turkish Sports Institution, and finally with the General Directorate of Physical Education.

In the 1930s, the People's Houses regarded sports as an integral part of national culture and, in line with this perspective, implemented a comprehensive organizational structure. Following the directives issued by the CHP's 6th Bureau, the People's Houses supported both clubs affiliated with the Turkish Training Associations Alliance and independent sports clubs, thereby contributing significantly to the nationwide dissemination of technical sports. At the People's Houses, sports and physical exercises were regarded as an integral part of youth education and defined as a national activity.³⁵ In line with this approach, the People's Houses in Düzce, Mersin, Gümüşhane, Afyon, Uzunköprü, Kars, and Samsun reorganized non-affiliated clubs in accordance with regulations and supported the development of their activities. Similarly, the People's Houses in Sivas, Aydın, and Kırklareli worked to ensure that local sports clubs joined the federation; such efforts continued during the period of the General Directorate of Physical Education as well.³⁶ In this way, the People's Houses played a key role in implementing state policies aimed at promoting sports at the local level.

The official booklet published by the People's Houses in 1935 defined the target audience of sports activities as the large masses outside the cadres covered by the Physical Education Law. Accordingly, professional and amateur

- 34 Mert Kerem Zelyurt, "Türk Modernleşmesinde Spor: Tanzimat'tan Erken Cumhuriyet'e.", *Electronic Turkish Studies*, 8/12, 2013, p. 1472; Yunus Tayga, *Türk Spor Tarihine Genel Bakış*, Gençlik ve Spor Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını, Ankara, 1990, p. 162-163; Rıza Sümer, *Sporla Demokrasi*, Türk Spor Vakfı, Ankara, 1990, p. 28; Resmi Gazete, Sayı: 1160, Yıl: 1938, p. 64
- 35 CHF, *Halkevleri Talimatnamesi*, op. cit., p. 11-12; Mersin Halkevi, *C.H.F. Halkevleri Talimatnamesi*, Yeni Mersin Matbaası, Mersin 1933, p. 18; CHP, *Halkevleri Öğrenejî*, Recep Ulusoğlu Basımevi, Ankara 1938, p. 12.
- 36 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 73.

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athletes were excluded from the scope of these activities. Priority was instead given to meeting the sporting needs of young people not enrolled in formal education and the broader public. The directive also aimed to disseminate the discipline of sports among the populace, to develop an understanding of physical education based on scientific methods, and to convey the technical expertise of the General Directorate of Physical Education to society through the People's Houses. Furthermore, the directive emphasized the importance of cooperation with the regional branches of the General Directorate of Physical Education and encouraged experienced athletes to engage with the People's Houses.³⁷ This collaboration sought to ensure the conscious and systematic practice of sports, thereby fostering a national sports culture.

This conceptual framework also shaped how the People's Houses interpreted the role of sports in daily life. People's Houses approached sports not as an individual pursuit but as a collective responsibility, aiming to transform it from a "fantasy" into a habit within the daily lives of the populace. The slogan "to create tens of thousands of strong citizens instead of a few elites" summarized the ideological goal of the period.³⁸ This approach was supported by the idea that sports should enhance the populace's work efficiency and strengthen national defense capabilities. Thus, the Youth and Sports Day was declared on 19 May 1938 in line with this understanding.³⁹ Additionally, People's House regulations noted that winter sports like mountaineering and skiing were considered military defense elements.⁴⁰

In order to realize the envisioned national sports culture, the People's Houses were also tasked with organizing sports activities within their own facilities and ensuring the provision of appropriate physical conditions for these activities. The CHP undertook a systematic effort to improve the sports infrastructure of the People's Houses, prioritizing the modernization of sports and gymnastics halls with contemporary equipment.⁴¹ However, it appears that this infrastructure had not reached a sufficient level by 1938. The buildings initially transferred from the Turkish Hearths during the establishment of the People's Houses were generally unsuitable for sports activities. This situation necessitated the construction of new facilities and the renovation of existing ones. Indeed, People's House directives and activity reports explicitly stated the need to include sports halls and courtyards, in addition to libraries, re-

37 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 68.

38 op. cit., p. 68; CHP, *XVI. Yıldönümünde Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*. Ulus Basımevi, Ankara 1948, p. 7.

39 Nurcan Toksoy, *Halkevleri: Bir Kültürel Kalkınma Modeli Olarak*, Orion Yayınevi, Ankara 2007, p. 273; Mehmet Korkud Aydın, "May 19th Day Celebrations and the Case of Malatya People's House." *International Conference on Research in Education and Science (ICRES)*, April 28- May 01, 2018, p.. 292 ff.

40 CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları(1932-1942)*.Alaeddin Kırıl Basımevi, Ankara 1943, p. 7.

41 CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları(1932-1942)*, op. cit. p. 6-8

ading rooms, and performance halls. These requirements were incorporated into the design of new buildings, while existing structures were renovated to the extent possible. The CHP also allocated a dedicated budget to address these needs.⁴² On 1 August 1938, Minister of the Interior and CHP Secretary General Şükrü Kaya sent a circular to the party's provincial organizations, announcing that the necessary equipment to promote sports activities nationwide would be provided to the People's Houses. As part of this initiative, a survey was prepared to assess the sports halls, courtyards, and other facilities of the People's Houses, aiming to restructure their sports branches based on the survey results.⁴³ However, the passing of Atatürk disrupted these efforts, and the projects were temporarily suspended.

During the İsmet İnönü's presidency era, Ahmet Fikri Tüzer, who was appointed as the Secretary General of the CHP, took action to complete the unfinished infrastructure projects, developing a new program in cooperation with the General Directorate of Physical Education.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the outbreak of World War II in 1939 significantly hindered the implementation of these objectives. The government prioritized keeping Türkiye out of the war and ensuring national security, which made it impossible to complete the planned investments in sports infrastructure. Despite these challenges, the CHP continued to support the sports branches of the People's Houses; between 1940 and 1942, a total of 13,116 pieces of gymnastics and sports equipment, 354 pairs of skis and boots, as well as water sports gear, were distributed to the People's Houses. However, the CHP Secretary General noted that support would be provided only to the "most active" People's Houses and acknowledged that the needs could only be partially met.⁴⁵

In the postwar period, the CHP once again took action to strengthen the sports infrastructure of the People's Houses. For this purpose, the brochure *Sketches and Explanations of Outdoor Sports Fields*, prepared and distributed to the People's Houses in 1945, served as a guide for designing sports facilities and planning activities in line with contemporary conditions.⁴⁶ In the same year, the report entitled *People's Houses and Community Rooms in 1945* noted that meeting the basic sports equipment needs of the approximately 500 People's Houses and over 4,000 Community Rooms operating at the time would require a budget of several million liras. This observation highlighted that deficiencies

42 CHP, *Halkevleri Öğreneği*, op. cit., p. 13; CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları (1932-1942)*, op. cit. p. 7; CHP, *1945 Yılında Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*, Başbakanlık Devlet Matbaası, Ankara 1946, p. 17; CHP, *XVI. Yıldönümünde Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*, op. cit., p. 18.

43 BCA, 490.1.0.0/4.18.10/1-2

44 BCA, 490.1.0.0/4.20.12/1

45 CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları (1932-1942)*, op. cit., p. 7; CHP, *1945 Yılında Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*, op. cit., p. 16-17.

46 BCA, 490.1.0.0/1115.70.1/1-22

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in the sports infrastructure still had not been fully addressed.⁴⁷ To remedy these shortcomings, a new initiative was launched on 17 January 1946 under the title *Survey on People's Houses' Sports Fields and Equipment*. The first section of the survey inquired about the condition of outdoor sports areas, the existence of handball, volleyball, and basketball courts, as well as sand pits and climbing ropes. The second section focused on the equipment and sanitary infrastructure of indoor sports halls, while the third section asked about the need for additional sports gear.⁴⁸ Based on the survey results, new sports equipment was delivered to the People's Houses to address these deficiencies, and the sports infrastructure in some centers was subsequently improved.

Sports Activities in People's Houses: Policies and Social Impacts

From the day of their establishment, the sports branches of the People's Houses carried out their activities with deliberate and pragmatic policies. Contributing to the development of the respective sports disciplines in Türkiye, the People's Houses also initiated a mobilization to realize the concept of *mass sports*, which was regarded as a national cause, through easily accessible and widely practicable sports activities. The directives sent to the sports branches classified sports disciplines and emphasized the promotion of activities selected in line with local interests as well as the climate and geographical characteristics of each region. In various directives published at different times, the sections concerning sports categorized the disciplines as follows:

- 1- Sports primarily serving health-related purposes, strengthening the body and enhancing physical development: gymnastics, rowing, athletics, and walking.
- 2- Sports requiring strength and skill and contributing to the development of these qualities: football, advanced gymnastics movements, fencing, boxing, wrestling, automobile sports, cycling, swimming, hunting, and shooting.
- 3- Sports demanding strength and skill and considered somewhat hazardous: driven hunts, equestrian sports, *cirit*, mountain and winter sports, sailing, deep-sea fishing, and offshore sailing.⁴⁹

In pursuit of promoting and organizing at least a few of these sports disciplines, the sports branches of the People's Houses also established People's House sports clubs. They maintained close contact with local sports clubs, thereby fostering an environment of athletic competition. Throughout the year, various competitions and matches were organized to enhance public interest in sports⁵⁰

47 CHP, *1945 Yılında Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*, op. cit., p. 17.

48 BCA, 490.1.0.0/1115.71.2/1-4

49 CHP, *Halkevleri Öğreneği*, op. cit., p. 13; CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları (1932-1942)*, op. cit., p. 7.

50 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 72-73; CHP, *Halkevleri Öğreneği*, op. cit., p. 12.

Football, Volleyball, and Basketball Activities

Among the sports activities organized by the People's Houses' sports branches within the framework of a club-like structure, football held the most prominent position. In this regard, the People's Houses also revitalized struggling local clubs by bringing them under their auspices. For example, when the Urfa People's House was established, the Uyanış and İdman Yurdu clubs were merged under the name *Halkspor* to form the sports branch of the People's House.⁵¹ In Mardin, the *Türkgücü* club was affiliated with the People's House, where talented young athletes were gathered at the newly constructed field, trained with technical instruction, and organized into new teams based on their abilities. As a result, in addition to a football team, athletics teams were also established within the Mardin People's House.⁵² Football teams were prioritized within the People's House sports clubs. Existing football teams were supported under the protection of the People's Houses, and new teams were created where necessary. In addition to the examples of Urfa and Mardin, teams such as *Turan*, *Şeker*, *Ergenekon*, and *Gençlerbirliği* were formed in Uşak, while in Malatya, *Fıratspor* was incorporated into the People's House, thereby strengthening its football branch.⁵³ It is fair to conclude that, through the People's Houses, sports clubs operating in the provinces were effectively brought under state control.

The People's Houses also organized volleyball activities. Volleyball teams were established in the People's Houses of Bartın, Bergama, Sinop, Silvan, Düzce, Uşak, and Samsun.⁵⁴ In 1934, the CHP General Secretariat prepared a volleyball regulation, distributed it to the People's Houses in Ankara, Mersin, and Bolu, and ensured that the activities were conducted in accordance with established rules.⁵⁵ In 1945, a volleyball net and a plastic ball were sent to the Hakkari People's House.⁵⁶

Compared to football and volleyball, basketball remained a less prominent discipline within the People's Houses. Nevertheless, in 1936, basketball guides and regulations were distributed to the People's Houses in Kula, Sivas, Muş, Bolu, Samsun, Ödemiş, Urfa, Aydın, and Düzce, with instructions to apply scientific methods in this field. From this information, it can be inferred that basketball was practiced only in a limited number of People's Houses as a sports activity.⁵⁷

51 Urfa Halkevi, *Urfa Halkevinin Bir Yıllık İş Sayımı*, Hüsniyatıat Matbaası, İstanbul 1936, p. 25-28.

52 *Mardin-Cumhuriyetten Önce ve Sonra. Halkevi Broşürü*, Resimli Ay Matbaası, İstanbul 1938, p. 97-98.

53 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/989-829-2/16; CHP, *Halkevlerinin 1935 Senesi Faaliyet Raporları Hulâsası*, Ulus Basımevi, Ankara 1936, p. 89; *Cumhuriyetin XV. Yılında Malatya*, Malatya Vilayeti CHP Başkanlığı, Malatya 1938, p. 112-113.

54 CHP, *Halkevlere (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p.73; CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları(1932-1942)*, op. cit. p.7; *Sinop Halkevi Broşürü*, Sinop Halkevi, Sinop Vilâyet Matbaası, Sinop 1933, p. 17.

55 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/14.74.2

56 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1122.96.3/1-2

57 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/15.77.15/1-11

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The statization of football clubs, particularly through the People's Houses, facilitated the Republican administration's public outreach and self-promotion through these structures. This practice is a typical example of early Republican policies aimed at shaping an ideal citizenry. It also concretely reflects the goal of mass participation and the concept of raising healthy citizens that shaped the sports policies of the period. In this context, football had become an effective tool for statesmen to achieve their aims of organizing society around People's Houses. However, it is also understood that volleyball and basketball did not find sufficient public support during this period. In this context, it can be assumed that these branches were organized by the state, particularly in the provinces, and integrated into social life.

Athletics and Gymnastics

Athletics and gymnastics were among the priority sports disciplines promoted by the People's Houses. Regulations indicate that all People's Houses engaged in activities related to physical education, athletics, and gymnastics, with some additionally prioritizing apparatus-based gymnastics, national dances, and plastic arts dances. According to Article 50 of the People's Houses' regulations, local gymnastics days were to be organized every one or two years, while nationwide gymnastics festivals, coordinated by the CHP General Secretariat, were to be held every three to four years.⁵⁸ Such events were held in major cities, including Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir.

The Kadıköy People's House organized a series of athletic events between 2 February and 20 April 1940, featuring 3,000–5,000 meter races, shot put, and tug-of-war competitions, with participation from athletes representing Kadıköy, Eminönü, Beyoğlu, Beşiktaş, Üsküdar, Fatih, and Bakırköy.⁵⁹ On 9 March 1941, the Istanbul People's Houses organized competitions in six disciplines, with athletes from Eminönü, Beyoğlu, Üsküdar, Bakırköy, Fatih, Beşiktaş, and Sarıyer taking part. Musical gymnastics competitions were also held between Eminönü and Beyoğlu, with trophies, vases, and busts awarded to the top two performers.⁶⁰ Similarly, on 19 May 1941, the Beşiktaş People's House hosted running, shot put, volleyball, tug-of-war, and shooting competitions in collaboration with Sarıyer and Beyoğlu People's Houses.⁶¹

In line with the populist principle of the Republic, the administration sought to foster a healthy and disciplined society by involving the masses in sports rather than cultivating elite individuals. This policy also influenced the People's Houses' approach to individual sports such as athletics and gymnas-

58 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 78; CHP, *Halkevleri Öğreneği*, op. cit., p. 14; CHP, *Halkevleri İdare ve Teşkilat Talimatnamesi*, Zerbamat Basımevi, Ankara 1940, p.19)

59 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1100.19.1/11–13

60 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1100.19.1/20–23

61 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1100.19.1/4–5

tics. These sports, based on personal performance, were implemented as teams within the People's Houses to popularize them. In Türkiye, as in Europe, athletics and gymnastics served to develop strong and healthy citizens. In this respect, the People's Houses' approach to sports could be considered, at least in part, a militaristic tendency.

Cross-Country and Running Races

Cross-country races were among the notable sporting activities organized by the People's Houses. In February and March 1940, the People's Houses of Western Anatolia organized cross-country, shot put, and bayonet fencing competitions with the aim of bringing the public together. Athletes from İzmit, Eskişehir, Balıkesir, Bandırma, İzmir, Denizli, Akhisar, Manisa, Bergama, Ayvalık, Edremit, Sındırgı, Bursa, Karamürsel, Adapazarı, Gönen, and İnegöl competed on 3–5 km courses. Winners of the cross-country races received tracksuits, shorts, and undershirts, while those placing in the shot put and bayonet fencing events were awarded pens valued at 2.5 lira.⁶²

In 1940, running races were held at the People's Houses in Kütahya, Bursa, Eskişehir, Edremit, Balıkesir, Manisa, Akhisar, Bergama, Bandırma, İzmir, Ayvalık, Kastamonu, Gönen, Denizli, Bolu, İzmit, Sındırgı, Karamürsel, Adapazarı, İnegöl, and Sinop, with expenses covered by the CHP General Secretariat. Similar races were organized in 1941 in Manisa, Bolu, Denizli, Sinop, İzmir, Kütahya, Kocaeli, Eskişehir, and Balıkesir, and in 1943 in İzmir as part of the fair.⁶³ The *Atatürk Run*, which began on 27 December 1936, invited athletes from across the country to Ankara, fostering interaction among athletes from different regions. The fifth edition of the Atatürk Run, held in 1940, saw the participation of 380 young athletes from İstanbul, İzmit, Bursa, Eskişehir, and Malatya.

Cross-country races and similar competitions with broad participation demonstrate that People's Houses brought together diverse social segments on a common ground. This practice aligns with the republican principle of populism. The interweaving of sports activities with cultural events made People's Houses one of the most effective social gathering places in the provinces during the early Republican period. Undoubtedly, these events were seen as tools that embodied the Republic's ideal of a modern, disciplined citizen united by shared values.

Traditional and National Sports

The CHP General Secretariat attached special importance to the inclusion of wrestling—long regarded as a Turkish national sport—within the activities of

62 BCA, 490.1.0.0/1099.16.2

63 BCA, 490.1.0.0/1100.20.1/1-31

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the People's Houses. For this purpose, the historic *Kırkpınar* wrestling tournament was organized in 1945 by the Edirne People's House, with participation from prominent wrestlers. Traditional wrestling trousers (*kışpet*) were commissioned from renowned craftsmen in Edirne and Balıkesir, and medals for the winners were minted by the state mint.⁶⁴ In addition to preserving the tradition of oil wrestling, freestyle wrestling was also revitalized in the People's Houses of Edirne, Kırklareli, and their respective districts.

People's House sports clubs in Bursa, Mersin, Trabzon, Maraş, Samsun, Kütahya, Çorlu, Kırklareli, and Kastamonu also organized wrestling competitions. Furthermore, wrestling classes were offered at these centers, and appropriate facilities for wrestling were established.⁶⁵ In the Ankara People's House, freestyle wrestling programs were held on a weekly basis, providing opportunities for a total of 2,070 wrestlers to train.⁶⁶ Wrestling activities likewise became widespread through the People's Houses in numerous other provinces and districts, including Sinop, Malatya, Çankırı, Amasya, Maraş, Kocaeli, Samsun, Balıkesir, and Sivas.

Cirit, a traditional Turkish equestrian sport, was similarly promoted nationwide through the efforts of the People's Houses. Teams were established in the People's Houses of Çorum, Çankırı, Uşak, Bayburt, Denizli, Yozgat, Adana, Malatya, Erzincan, Erzurum, Ardahan, and Kars, contributing to the development of this heritage sport in their respective regions. The Beyoğlu People's House, for example, hosted two *cirit* games featuring 13 players from Bayburt. Watched by an audience of 3,500 spectators, these matches significantly boosted interest in the sport across Istanbul.⁶⁷

Hunting was also recognized by the People's Houses as a national sport and was promoted throughout the country. In this context, *Hunters' Festivals* were celebrated at the People's Houses, and organized hunting drives were held.⁶⁸

It is known that the Ankara People's House's hunting branch, consisting of 87 members, went hunting on a weekly basis. In addition, the People's Houses in Uşak, Çorum, Kütahya, Zonguldak, Milas, Aydın, Samsun, Adapazarı, Adana, İzmir, Sinop, and Kastamonu undertook efforts to eliminate harmful animals.⁶⁹

64 CHP, *1945 Yılında Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*, op. cit., p. 16

65 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 74.

66 *Ankara Halkevi Bir Yıl İçinde 408.673 Yurddaşı Çatısı Altında Topladı (1938-1939)*, Ankara 1939, p. 22.

67 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1130.124.1/113; Bursa Halkevi, *Halkevi Bursa*, Bizim Matbaa, Bursa 1933, p. 3-14; CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 78; *Cumhuriyetin 15. Yılında Çankırı*, Tan Matbaası, İstanbul 1938 p. 113; *Cumhuriyetin XV. Yılında Malatya*, op. cit. p. 114; CHP Kars Başkanlığı, *Kars*, İstanbul: Yeni Sabah Matbaası, İstanbul 1943, p. 81; Uşak Halkevi, *Uşak Halkevi: İki Yıllık Çalışma*, Resimli Ay Matbaası, İstanbul 1936, p. 30; "Şehir Haberleri", *Derme*, Sayı: 14, Yıl: 1944, Malatya, p. 20

68 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 74-75

69 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1098.14.1/18

Similarly, shooting was among the sports practiced at the People's Houses. Regular shooting drills were held at the People's Houses in Ankara, Tokat, Tekirdağ, Simav, Siirt, and Milas.⁷⁰ The athletes of the Ankara People's House also trained at a shooting range, using target cartridges. For a shooting competition organized by the Ankara People's House in 1944, a total of 20,000 rounds of 22 caliber ammunition were used, with the ammunition supplied by the CHP General Secretariat.⁷¹

Equestrian sports, which have long been associated with Turkish national identity, were also among the sporting activities encouraged by the People's Houses. According to the regulations, the People's Houses in Niğde, Maraş, Alanya, İnegöl, Iğdır, Şebinkarahisar, and Alaşehir organized horseback riding tours. Horse races were held at the People's Houses in Adapazarı, Erzurum, and Kastamonu, while equestrian sports clubs were established under the auspices of the People's Houses in Adana, Sivas, Uşak, Niğde, Alaşehir, Alanya, and Tokat.⁷²

These examples demonstrate that People's Houses aimed not only to preserve traditional sports but also to modernize and institutionalize them. The continuation of traditional branches within People's Houses reflects the Republic's principle of nationalism. Moreover, realizing these sports within a scientific framework through regulations and technical instructions recalls Gökalp's distinction between culture and civilization. This approach illustrates the harmonization of national culture with modern Western methods. Thus, People's Houses have preserved the sporting traditions of Turkish culture and integrated them with modern sports pedagogy, thereby contributing to the nation-building process at both a cultural and ideological level.

Sports Promoted and Popularized through the People's Houses

People's Houses practiced several familiar sports using scientific methods, but they also introduced and promoted a number of branches that had not been widely known before. Among these were skiing, mountaineering, tennis, table tennis, fencing, and various water sports. These activities became a part of everyday practice within the People's Houses, reflecting both the Republic's modernization agenda and its commitment to the principle of populism.

Skiing was one of the sports that developed in Türkiye following the establishment of the People's Houses. An examination of the People's House regulations reveals that skiing was given considerable importance, as it was perceived during this period as an element of military defense.⁷³ The sport was

70 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 74

71 BCA, 490.1.0.0/1127-116-3/7-8

72 CHP, *Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 75; *Halkevi Bursa*, op. cit. p. 23

73 CHP, *Halkevleri ve Halkodaları (1932-1942)*, op. cit. p. 7.

introduced and popularized in Türkiye's Eastern and Central Anatolia regions, with the sports branches of the People's Houses in Ankara, Antalya, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Tunceli, Giresun, Amasya, and Isparta making significant efforts to revive and promote skiing.⁷⁴

In the winters, large-scale skiing competitions were organized in various regions, with the events in Sarıkamış becoming a tradition. On 27 January 1945, competitions were held with participants from the People's Houses of Gümüşhane, Bayburt, Aşkale, Erzurum, Hasankale, Göle, and Sarıkamış. The races were conducted in two disciplines: a 1,500-meter downhill and a 12,000–18,000-meter endurance downhill. The winners received one candelabrum and two trays as prizes.⁷⁵

In Ankara, skiing and mountaineering became some of the most popular sports. From 1934 onward, skiing was revived with the participation of 30 athletes, and activities began in Elmadağ, the Dikmen ridges, and Gölbaşı.⁷⁶ The People's House collaborated with the Ankara Regional Mountaineering and Skiing Agency for winter sports activities. In the 1938–1939 period, collective skiing sessions were organized every Sunday, while instructional sessions were held on Thursdays. A total of 236 young people in Ankara actively engaged in skiing.⁷⁷

Through the efforts of the People's Houses, tennis was transformed from an elite pastime into a sport accessible to a wider audience. The Ankara Tennis Club, co-founded by Şükrü Saraçoğlu, pioneered the popularization of tennis. In Istanbul, tennis matches were played on four courts in 1946, and with the support of the governor, matches expanded to seven courts in 1947, increasing public interest in the sport. Tennis courts were also built in Gaziantep and Elazığ.⁷⁸ The instructional workbook *Tennis*, prepared by Kerim A. Bükey, was distributed to People's Houses, contributing to the adoption of scientific methods in tennis training at the Centers⁷⁹

Through People's Houses, new sports like fencing, boxing, and table tennis ("ping pong") were introduced, particularly in İstanbul district People's Houses, Ankara, Samsun, Bursa, and Mudanya.

The *Table Tennis* book, published by the "Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı," was sent to 22 People's Houses to promote the sport.⁸⁰ Table ten-

74 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1101.22.1; *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1101.23.1; *Halkevi Bursa*, op. cit. p. 23; CHP, *Halkevleri Öğreneği*, op. cit., p. 142.

75 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1101.24.1/176

76 *Ankara Halkevi Bir Yıl İçinde 300000 Yurddaşı Çatısı Altında Topladı (1935-1936)*, Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, Ankara 1936, p. 23.

77 *Ankara Halkevi Bir Yıl İçinde 408.673 Yurddaşı Çatısı Altında Topladı*, op. cit. p. 22.

78 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1097.9.1/1-30

79 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1097.9.1/32-208

80 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/16.84.1/1-22

nis was particularly popular among Samsun People's House members.⁸¹ Fencing developed under the leadership of Ankara and İstanbul People's Houses, which attempted to form fencing teams. The CHP General Secretariat distributed fencing competition handbooks from the "Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı" to Mudanya, Bafra, Aydın, Adapazarı, Uşak, Balıkesir, Bergama, Milas, Manisa, and Bursa People's Houses, requesting their adoption.⁸²

Activity reports from 1935-1936 note that fencing activities intensified, with three female athletes and military officers participating.⁸³ In 1938, 703 youths engaged in fencing at Ankara People's House under the supervision of three young instructors.⁸⁴

Cycling was established as a sports activity through People's Houses, which organized intercity cycling tours as both recreational and sporting events. Cyclists from Antalya and Denizli People's Houses reached Ankara, while those from Burdur and Eminönü completed a 2,000-kilometer tour. Cyclists from Alaşehir and Edirne began their first tours in 1934.⁸⁵

Water sports were another discipline developed through the efforts of the People's Houses. The People's House regulations also emphasized the need to promote activities in this area. In line with this directive, the People's Houses in Alanya, Ayvalık, Mersin, Sinop, Bartın, İnebolu, İzmir, Sarıyer, Eminönü, Tekirdağ, Zonguldak, and Samsun took the lead in fostering the development of water sports.⁸⁶ In Samsun, swimming and water polo were practiced as organized activities.⁸⁷ In Ankara, swimming was regarded as a prominent sport, with water sports competitions held in the "Karadeniz" pool, one of the architectural landmarks of the period.⁸⁸ From 1938 onwards, in cooperation with the General Directorate of Physical Education, "Swimming Promotion Competitions" were organized. The 1938 competitions saw the participation of the People's Houses of Trabzon, Bursa, İzmir, İstanbul, Kocaeli, İçel, Giresun, and Hatay.⁸⁹

81 *Samsun Halkevi (1932-1939)*, Samsun Halkevi, Samsun 1939, p. 18.

82 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/17-90-3-1-18

83 *Ankara Halkevi Bir Yıl İçinde 300000 Yurddaşı Çatısı Altında Topladı*, op. cit. p. 23

84 *Ankara Halkevi Bir Yıl İçinde 408.673 Yurddaşı Çatısı Altında Topladı*, op. cit. p. 21.

85 *CHP, Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 75-76; *Cumhuriyetin 15. Yılında Bursa*, İl Basımevi, Bursa 1938, p.142; *CHF İzmir Halkevi: Açıldığı Günden Beri*, Marifet Matbaası, İzmir 1932, p.12.

86 *Halkevi Bursa*, op. cit. p. 58; *CHP, Halkevleri (1932-1935)*, op. cit. p. 77-78; *Sinop Halkevi Broşür*, op. cit. p. 16-17.

87 *Cumhuriyetimizin Yıl Dönümü Münasebetiyle Samsun Halkevi (1923-1933)*. Şems Matbaası, Samsun 1934, p. 38

88 *Ankara Halkevi Bir Yıl İçinde 408.673 Yurddaşı Çatısı Altında Topladı*, op. cit. p. 21-23.

89 *BCA*, 490.1.0.0/1099.15.5

Conclusion

This study shows that the sports activities organized in the People's Houses during the Early Republican period were shaped as much by ideological aims as by educational and physical concerns. Thematic findings and archival evidence make it clear that sport was used to instill collective discipline, national consciousness, and loyalty to the values of the Republic. In CHP publications and archival documents, sports fields appear not only as places of physical training but also as spaces where the regime presented itself to the public through ceremonies, performances, and national celebrations.

The People's Houses prioritized broad participation over individual achievement, reflecting the principles of populism and nationalism. The well-known slogan, creating robust hundreds of thousands instead of elite individuals, summarizes this understanding. Within this framework, sports became a practical way to cultivate healthy, disciplined, and socially integrated citizens. The findings align with the wider scholarship on the ideological uses of sport and show how these goals were translated into daily practice through the People's Houses.

In this era, influences from European movements such as the German Turnbewegung and the Czechoslovak Sokol movement were also visible. Figures like Vildan Aşır Savaşır and Selim Sırrı Tarcan adapted aspects of these models—especially their emphasis on collective exercises and civic morality—to the conditions of Türkiye. Yet these ideas were reshaped according to the aims of the early Republic, particularly its focus on national unity and social cohesion.

The People's Houses activities combined traditional and modern elements. Wrestling and cirit were revived as symbols of national heritage, while skiing, tennis, and gymnastics reflected Western models of physical education. This blend illustrates how national traditions were fitted into a modern institutional structure in line with the broader project of nation-building.

Archival sources also show that sports events helped create a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the new regime. Mass performances, group gymnastics, and collective marches made national identity visible in everyday life. In this sense, the People's Houses served not only as cultural venues but also as places where the Republic expressed its civic ideals.

The study also has limitations. Local differences and gender dynamics were not covered, and these areas require further research. Future studies may also examine individual athletes, branch-based developments, or regional variations in training.

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Several concrete cases from the period help clarify these findings. The merger of Uyanış and İdman Yurdu into Halkspor in Urfa shows how local clubs were reorganized under state oversight. The skiing competitions held in Sarıkamış on 27 January 1945, with participants from several eastern districts, reveal how modern sports were linked to discipline and public participation. The 1940 cross-country races in Western Anatolia, which brought together athletes from many provinces, show how the People's Houses created common social spaces across regions. The 1945 organization of the Kırkpınar wrestling tournament by the Edirne People's House illustrates how traditional sports were continued within a modern institutional setting.

All of these findings show that the People's Houses treated sport as a tool for shaping collective identity and integrating citizens into the civic ideals of the Republic. Through these activities, the regime made its values visible in public life and strengthened its connection with society. For this reason, the People's Houses should be seen not only as cultural institutions but also as important actors in the formation of modern citizenship in Türkiye.

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