

## THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AS A STATE POLICY IN EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKEY: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH ÜLKÜ JOURNAL

### A RECONSTRUÇÃO DA CULTURA FÍSICA COMO POLÍTICA DE ESTADO NA TURQUIA DO INÍCIO DA REPÚBLICA: UMA ANÁLISE ATRAVÉS DA REVISTA ÜLKÜ

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#### Abstract

This study examines the reconstruction of the understanding of sport during the Atatürk era through an analysis of sports-related writings published in Ülkü Magazine, the official periodical of the People's Houses (Halkevleri), between 1933 and 1938. Drawing on historical content analysis, the article explores how sport was conceptualized as an ideological, cultural, and institutional instrument within the broader project of Republican modernization and nation-building. The primary data set consists of articles, reports, commentaries, and legislative discussions published in Ülkü, which were analyzed using an inductive qualitative approach. The findings reveal that sport in the early Republican period was not perceived merely as a form of physical activity but as a multifaceted social practice linked to bodily discipline, moral formation, and the construction of a modern national identity. The magazine strongly associated sport with ideals of health, discipline, collective consciousness, and national strength, while framing physical education as a means of cultivating a productive and ideologically committed youth. The dissemination of sport through the People's Houses and the institutionalization of physical training under state authority are shown to reflect a biopolitical understanding of the body aligned with Republican ideology. Moreover, the positive discourse on women's participation in sport highlights the transformative dimension of modernization in relation to gender norms. By

#### Resumo

*Este estudo examina a reconstrução da compreensão do esporte durante a era de Atatürk por meio de uma análise de textos relacionados ao esporte publicados na revista Ülkü, o periódico oficial das Casas do Povo (Halkevleri), entre 1933 e 1938. Com base na análise de conteúdo histórico, o artigo explora como o esporte foi conceituado como um instrumento ideológico, cultural e institucional no âmbito do projeto mais amplo de modernização republicana e construção da nação. O conjunto de dados primários consiste em artigos, reportagens, comentários e discussões legislativas publicados na Ülkü, que foram analisados utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa indutiva. Os resultados revelam que o esporte no início do período republicano não era percebido meramente como uma forma de atividade física, mas como uma prática social multifacetada ligada à disciplina corporal, à formação moral e à construção de uma identidade nacional moderna. A revista associava fortemente o esporte a ideais de saúde, disciplina, consciência coletiva e força nacional, ao mesmo tempo em que enquadrava a educação física como um meio de cultivar uma juventude produtiva e ideologicamente comprometida. A disseminação do esporte por meio das Casas do Povo e a institucionalização do treinamento físico sob a autoridade do Estado mostram-se como reflexo de uma compreensão biopolítica do corpo alinhada à ideologia republicana. Além disso, o discurso*



focusing on a periodical source rather than exclusively on legal regulations or institutional structures, this study contributes to the literature by illuminating the cultural and intellectual foundations of sport during the Atatürk era and offers a periodical-centered perspective on the social functions of sport in early Republican Turkey.

**Keywords:** Atatürk Era. People's House (Halkevi). Ülkü Magazine. Sports. Perspective.

*positivo sobre a participação das mulheres no esporte destaca a dimensão transformadora da modernização em relação às normas de gênero. Ao se concentrar em uma fonte periódica, em vez de exclusivamente em regulamentações legais ou estruturas institucionais, este estudo contribui para a literatura ao esclarecer os fundamentos culturais e intelectuais do esporte durante a era de Atatürk e oferece uma perspectiva centrada em periódicos sobre as funções sociais do esporte no início da República da Turquia.*

**Palavras-chave:** Era de Atatürk. Casa do Povo (Halkevi). Revista Ülkü. Esportes. Perspectiva.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the proclamation of the Republic, significant emphasis has been placed on advancing multiple fields, with national economy and national education at the forefront of these priorities.<sup>1</sup> In his speeches, Atatürk frequently underscored that the establishment of an educated society required, first and foremost, a healthy generation; for this reason, he repeatedly highlighted the strategic importance of sport at both the individual and societal levels, considering it a fundamental element in fostering the physical and moral well-being of Turkish youth. In Atatürk's discourse, sport was defined as an essential instrument for the "strengthening of the nation," the "improvement of the race," and the "elevation of the level of civilization."<sup>2</sup> He further stressed that Turkish athletes would attain their rightful place internationally and contribute not only to national life but also to the realm of civilization. Atatürk noted that Turkey had not yet achieved European standards in sport, asserting that sport would either serve as a means of propaganda or be practiced to complete the physical development of the nation.<sup>3</sup> Atatürk also addressed the Turkish nation's relationship with sport in his 1926 speech, emphasizing that rural

<sup>1</sup> Serhan Yücel, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarında Köy Yatı Mektepleri", *History Studies*, Cilt 15, Özel Sayı, 2023, s. 295.

<sup>2</sup> *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri Cilt III (1925-1938)*, "Atatürk'ün İdman Cemiyetleri İttifakı Kongresi Adına Gelen Sporculara Hitaben Çankaya Köşkü'nde Yaptığı Konuşma", 30 Eylül 1926, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara, 2024, s. 76-80.

<sup>3</sup> *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri Cilt III (1918-1937)*, "Sporun Gayesine Dair", Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1997, s. 86.

children spent their entire lives working in fields and pastures, yet such labor, being detached from the scientific and technical principles of the modern age, failed to produce the desired outcome. For this reason, he stated that a nation that had once ruled the world ought to raise a generation that was stronger and more resilient.<sup>4</sup> His famous dictum, “a sound mind resides in a sound body,” provided the foundation for the ideology of cultivating robust generations, positioning physical education and sport as instruments of both mental and bodily discipline. In the early Republican era, sport was conceptualized not merely as a physical activity but as a multilayered ideological field shaped by modernization, nation-building, and the state’s biopolitical regulation of the body.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the People’s Houses (Halkevleri), established in 1932, assumed a significant role as modern institutions aimed at disseminating sports among the public, embedding the new understanding of sport within the social fabric, and ensuring that sport acquired a distinctly national character.<sup>6</sup> *Ülkü Magazine*, published by the Center of Ankara, functioned as a central intellectual platform that conveyed the Republic’s sports ideology, the activities of sports branches, and the principles of modern physical education to broad segments of society.<sup>7</sup>

When the foundations of the Republic’s sports policies are evaluated within the framework of modernization theory, it becomes evident that Atatürk approached physical education in relation to the rationalization of society and its reorganization on a scientific basis. As Zürcher emphasizes, the early Republic sought to achieve social transformation not only through political institutions, but also through the cultivation of a modern sense of citizenship.<sup>8</sup> The presentation of sport in *Ülkü Magazine* as an “indicator of civilization” reflects the cultural manifestation of this logic of modernization.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Atatürk’ün *Söylev ve Demeçleri*, s. 76-80.

<sup>5</sup> Irmak Irmakoğlu, “Makbul Vatandaş Peşinde: Kemalist Rejimin Beden Terbiyesi Politikalarını Biyo-Politika Kavramı Üzerinden Okumak”, *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, Yıl 30, Sayı 119, Yaz 2025, s. 99-123; Utkan Kocatürk, *Atatürk’ün Fikir ve Düşünceleri*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara, 2017, s. 485.

<sup>6</sup> Gökhan Durak, “Atatürk’ün Halkçılık Anlayışı ve Halkevleri”, *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, S. 8, 2014, s. 12-18.

<sup>7</sup> Nurettin Güz, *Tek Parti İdeolojisinin Yayın Organları Halkevi Dergileri (1932–1951)*, Bilge Yayıncılık, Ankara, 1995, s. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye’nin Tarihi*, Çev. Yasemin Saner Gönen, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2015, s. 103-133.

<sup>9</sup> Rahmi Apak, “Türk Sporunun Yeni Yükümleri”, *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 36, İkinci Kanun 1935, s. 345.

The sports-related writings published in *Ülkü Magazine* demonstrate that modern sports functioned as practices that reinforced a shared national identity. Sports such as skiing, fencing, gymnastics, and athletics were emphasized as common bodily activities that strengthened both modern and national identity. In Talat Onat's 1935 article titled "Türkler ve Boks" ("The Turks and Boxing"), sport is explicitly described as a national sphere that enhances the representational strength of the younger generation.<sup>10</sup> The reinterpretation of traditional sports such as cirit (javelin on horseback) and archery through modern frameworks aligns with Hobsbawm's concept of the "invention of tradition."<sup>11</sup>

The institutionalization of sport under state authority constitutes one of the most salient dimensions of the early Republican body politics. In line with Foucault's concept of biopolitics, the state disciplined the bodies of its population through sport and generated a form of social order grounded in the ideal of the modern body.<sup>12</sup> The extensive coverage of the 1938 Physical Education Law (Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu) in *Ülkü Magazine* demonstrates that sport had become a formally regulated institutional field shaped by Republican ideology.<sup>13</sup> As emphasized in the studies of Durak and Güz on the People's Houses, the activities of the sports branches and the expansion of sports facilities formed an integral component of the cultural development strategy of the period.<sup>14</sup>

This study aims to reveal the ideological, cultural, and institutional foundations of the understanding of sport during the Atatürk Era by examining the sports-related articles published in *Ülkü Magazine* between 1933 and 1938 through the method of historical content analysis.

The methodological framework of this study was designed in accordance with a qualitative research model in order to examine the ideological and social functions of sport during the early Republican period. The primary data source of the research consists

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<sup>10</sup> Talat Onat, "Türkler ve Boks", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 2, Sayı 4, Şubat 1935, s. 447-448.

<sup>11</sup> Mustafa Bölükbaşı, "Bir Gelenek İcadı Olarak İstanbul'un Fethi", *Sosyoloji Dergisi*, Sayı 28, 2013, s. 67-88.

<sup>12</sup> Saniye Vatandaş-Celalettin Vatandaş, "Osmanlı'dan Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'ne Biyopolitika ve Sporun Siyaseti", *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Yıl 19, Sayı 39, Güz 2023, s. 1437-1469.

<sup>13</sup> "Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu", *Resmî Gazete*, No. 3530, 16 Temmuz 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Durak, agm, s. 22.

of all issues of *Ülkü Magazine* published between 1933 and 1938. The sports-related content in the magazine-including articles, news pieces, interviews, and commentaries-was analyzed using historical content analysis and documentary review techniques.<sup>15</sup> During the examination process, the texts were coded through an inductive approach, and three main themes were identified: “the modernization and disciplining of the body,” “the construction of a national sports culture,” and “the institutionalization of sport.” The analytical process was conducted with consideration of the political and social context of the time, and a comparative reading was carried out in relation to secondary literature on the modernization policies of the Atatürk era.

An evaluation of the texts published in *Ülkü Magazine* within the scope of the research reveals that sport during the Atatürk Era was not regarded merely as a physical activity, but rather as one of the fundamental components of the broader project of social reconstruction. The findings indicate that sport fulfilled multifaceted functions in the contexts of national identity formation, social solidarity, and the cultivation of the modern individual. In the articles featured in the magazine, sport was associated with values such as discipline, morality, endurance, and collective consciousness, and a direct connection was drawn between the physical development of the individual and the strengthening of the nation.

The role attributed to youth in the texts of *Ülkü Magazine* is particularly noteworthy. It is emphasized that sports activities serve the objective of cultivating a healthy, productive, and ideologically committed young generation aligned with the principles of the Republic. In this context, sport is presented as a cultural practice disseminated through the People’s Houses and similar institutions, and is positioned as an instrument of social integration in both rural and urban settings. Moreover, the positive discourse surrounding women’s participation in sports constitutes an important finding that reflects the modernization agenda and evolving gender norms of the period.

The findings also demonstrate that sport was associated with the concepts of military discipline, national defense, and physical training. Sport was approached with an understanding that prioritized collective achievement rather than individual competition

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<sup>15</sup> Osman Metin ve Şükriye Ünal, “İçerik Analizi Tekniği: İletişim Bilimlerinde ve Sosyolojide Doktora Tezlerinde Kullanımı”, *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Cilt 22, Özel Sayı, 2022, s. 273.

and was presented as a means of strengthening national unity and cohesion. In this regard, Ülkü Magazine constitutes an important source that reflects the ideological and cultural framework of sports policy during the Atatürk Era.

This study aims to offer an original contribution to the literature by examining the understanding of sport during the Atatürk Era not solely through institutional regulations, legal frameworks, or organizational structures, but through a periodical such as Ülkü Magazine, which reflects the intellectual and cultural orientations of the time. While a significant portion of existing scholarship analyzes sport in the early Republic within the context of physical education policies and institutional practices, this research reveals how sport was conceptualized through written cultural products, how it was translated into social life, and how it was associated with the ideology of the Republic. The evaluation of sports-related writings published in Ülkü Magazine through historical content analysis makes visible the position and social functions of sport within the intellectual landscape of the early Republican period; in doing so, it enables the ideological, cultural, and educational dimensions of sport to be considered in an integrated manner. In this respect, the study offers a complementary, periodical-centered interpretive perspective to the literature on the understanding of sport during the Atatürk Era.

## **2 ACTIVITIES OF THE SPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS BRANCHES OF THE PEOPLE'S HOUSES**

For many years, Atatürk recognized the need for a comprehensive institution in which the public and the intellectual elite could come together, thereby closing the gap between them and fostering the internalization of Republican ideals among the people.<sup>16</sup> It became clear that enacting laws alone was insufficient to elevate the nation to the desired level of civilization.<sup>17</sup> Ensuring unity and solidarity required that the broad masses

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<sup>16</sup> Gökhan Durak, "Atatürk'ün Halkçılık Anlayışı ve Halkevleri", *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Sayı 8, Aralık 2014, s. 422-423.

<sup>17</sup> Anıl Çeçen, *Atatürk'ün Kültür Kurumu Halkevleri*, Cumhuriyet Kitapları, İstanbul, 2000, s. 81.

who constituted the majority of society undergo a certain level of education, and that the reforms be integrated into the daily lives of the populace.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, Atatürk's conception of populism did not deny the existence of social classes; rather, it aimed to ensure that these classes advanced and prospered through their own development.<sup>19</sup> In this period, the newly established Republic was not only concerned with public education but was also engaged in examining the structures of advanced countries in fields such as sport, education, and law in order to identify a model of public education suitable for Turkey.<sup>20</sup> As a product of this search and vision, Atatürk initiated the establishment of People's Houses (Halkevleri) across the country in 1932.<sup>21</sup> With the opening of these cultural institutions, it was intended that both rural and urban populations would have access to learning opportunities, and that the long-neglected villages would also be uplifted.<sup>22</sup>

The activities carried out within the People's Houses were regulated through the directives periodically published by the institution. These directives were prepared not only to outline the foundational objectives of the People's Houses but also to establish the principles that would guide their operations. The directives specified that the People's Houses should consist of various branches in order to enable every citizen to choose in accordance with their interests and abilities. Although the newly established Republican administration had numerous matters requiring attention, it was considered essential that, alongside education, efforts also be made to cultivate the public's habit of engaging in sports.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, one of the essential branches that the People's Houses were required to include was the sports branch.<sup>24</sup> The Republican People's Party closely monitored the activities carried out in the People's Houses and offered numerous

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<sup>18</sup> Zeki Arıkan, "Halkevlerinin Kuruluşu Tarihsel İşlevi", *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 23, Mart 1999, s. 261-263.

<sup>19</sup> Nusret Kemal, "İnkılap İdeolojisinde Halkçılık", *Ülkü Halkevleri Dergisi* 3, No.13, Mart 1934, s. 41-45.

<sup>20</sup> Vildan Aşır Savaşır, "Halkevlerine Doğru", *Halkoyu Dergisi*, Sayı 9, Şubat 1977, s. 20-27.

<sup>21</sup> Halkevleri Her Tarafta Büyük Merasimle Açıldı", *Akşam*, 20 Şubat 1932, s. 1; "Gazinin Yeni Eseri", *Cumhuriyet*, 20 Şubat 1932, s. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (CA)*, 490.100/3.14.6. 6 Kasım 1936.

<sup>23</sup> Nursel Gülcü, *Antalya Halkevi ve Faaliyetleri*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara, 2020, s. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Halkevleri Talimatnamesi", *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 1932, s. 1-2. Spor Şubeleri, Beden Terbiyesi Genel Müdürlüğü'nün taşradaki en önemli yardımcı kollarıdır. *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1 Haziran 1940, s. 131.

recommendations. Among these were suggestions related to sports that were relatively unfamiliar to the public, such as fencing, sailing, gymnastics, and rowing. As sport constituted an important component of cultural development one of the primary objectives of the Turkish Revolution it was, for the first time, regarded as a matter of national significance, and the first substantial initiatives in this domain emerged within the People's Houses. The sports branch of the People's Houses undertook the responsibility of protecting public health and enabling individuals outside collective settings such as schools, barracks, and clubs to engage in structured physical activities, thereby ensuring that sports and games acquired a scientific character. Up to that point, the Turkish population had primarily participated in national defense and production-related activities; however, they were now being encouraged to adopt sport in order to lead vigorous and healthy lives.<sup>25</sup> The People's Houses not only encouraged the public to participate in sports but also served as spaces that met the basic needs of individuals wishing to learn sports techniques, even in cases where no formal gymnasium facilities were available.<sup>26</sup> The Secretariat of the Republican People's Party closely supervised all People's Houses across the country and offered recommendations to address observed shortcomings and to enhance the effectiveness of their activities. Reports from 1936 indicate that considerable importance was attached to sports-related initiatives. These reports emphasized the necessity of keeping existing sports facilities open and protecting them, praised the People's Houses and branches that were functioning effectively, and issued warnings to those that were underperforming.<sup>27</sup> One of the important activities of the People's Houses was the publication of periodicals. Among these publications, *Ülkü Magazine*, issued by the Center of Ankara, was the most significant. Through *Ülkü*, the national and universal dimensions of the Turkish Revolution were not only explained but also systematized. In this respect, *Ülkü Magazine* occupies a crucial place in understanding the intellectual and cultural life of the Republican era. The magazine also

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<sup>25</sup> *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29 Haziran 1938, s. 484; Naci Sait, "Çocuk Ölümü", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 3, Sayı 14, Nisan 1934, s. 130.

<sup>26</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Halkevleri Talimatnamesi", *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 1932, s. 1-2. Spor Şubeleri, Beden Terbiyesi Genel Müdürlüğü'nün taşradaki en önemli yardımcı kollarıdır. *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1 Haziran 1940, s. 131.

<sup>27</sup> CA., 490.100/3.1.11.8, 28 Ağustos 1934.

featured numerous articles on sports, and these writings constitute an important source for understanding the conception of sport developed during the Atatürk Period.

### 3 THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ÜLKÜ MAGAZINE TO THE TURKISH REVOLUTION

The activities carried out by the People's Houses (Halkevleri) were communicated to the public through the writings published by the publication committees of these institutions. The Library and Publication Committee, in addition to guiding the publications of the other branches of the People's House, undertook the responsibility of disseminating information beneficial to the public. Particularly after the proclamation of the Republic, during the 1930s and the years that followed, there was a significant need to instill the fundamental philosophy and principles of the Revolution. With the establishment of the People's Houses, it was deemed advantageous for each of them to publish a periodical within their respective localities in order to promote and consolidate the principles of the Republic throughout the country. Consequently, all People's Houses were encouraged, to the extent of their means, to produce their own journals.<sup>28</sup>

The People's Houses (Halkevleri) published periodicals that both reported their activities and provided information to the public on a wide range of topics. These journals not only offered new knowledge to readers but also created opportunities for young writers and researchers to showcase their abilities. One such periodical was Ülkü Magazine, published by the Publications Branch of the Center of Ankara. Ülkü Magazine played a significant role in explaining to the public the reforms introduced in the process of modernization following the proclamation of the Republic, and in ensuring that these reforms were understood and internalized by the populace. The purpose behind the publication of Ülkü Magazine was articulated by Recep Peker in the first issue of the periodical. In his article, Peker emphasized that Ülkü Magazine aimed to leave behind a dark period and to inspire enthusiasm among the new generation for a brighter future. He stated that the magazine sought to convey the intent of the reforms to the public in a

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<sup>28</sup> Nurettin Güz, *Tek Parti İdeolojisinin Yayın Organları Halkevi Dergileri*, (1932-1951), Bilge Yapım, Ankara, 1995, s. 20-21.

national language, through national history, national art, and culture, and to disseminate the activities of the People's Houses institutions committed to these ideals through written expression.<sup>29</sup> Ülkü Magazine holds a significant place in the intellectual and publishing life of the Republican era. The articles published in Ülkü covered a wide array of subjects. Among these, numerous pieces were devoted specifically to sports.<sup>30</sup> The sports-related articles published in Ülkü Magazine between 1933 and 1939 can be thematically categorized under the following headings: "Turks and Sports in History," "Mountain and Winter Sports," "The Meaning and Importance of Physical Education," "The Sports-Related Activities of the People's Houses," "The New Understanding of Sport," and "The Sports Law."

#### 4 TURKS AND SPORTS IN HISTORY

In the early Republican period, sport was approached not merely as a physical activity but also within the context of historical continuity and cultural heritage. In line with this perspective, several articles published in Ülkü Magazine examined the relationship between Turks and sports from a historical point of view, discussing the place and origins of various athletic practices within Turkish culture. These texts notably emphasized national identity and cultural continuity through the historical background of sports. In this context, the writings of authors such as Ali Rıza Seyfi, Çankırlılı Talat Onay, and Hasan Ortekin stand out as notable examples addressing different aspects of the history of Turkish sports.

In his article titled "Turks and Sports in History," Ali Rıza Seyfi examines the place of Turks in the history of sports as well as their historical connections with global athletic traditions. Seyfi argues that, in addition to wrestling, horsemanship, and various athletic activities, games resembling football and polo were played among Turkic societies from early periods onward. The article discusses historical debates concerning the origins of football and polo sports now regarded as national games of the English and asserts that these games were played nearly two thousand years ago in the Turkestan

<sup>29</sup> Recep Peker, "Ülkü Dergisi Niçin Çıkıyor", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 1, Sayı 1, Şubat 1933, s. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Nurcan Toksoy, *Halkevleri: Bir Kültürel Kalkınma Modeli Olarak*, Orion Yayınları, Ankara, 2007, s. 340-342.

region and within palace circles during periods when Turks exercised political dominance in China. Focusing particularly on the origins of polo, Seyfi, drawing on Chinese sources, notes that the game had gained prominence in the East and appeared in written records as early as the year 710. While presenting evidence that polo was played in Chinese imperial courts, the article also includes assessments suggesting that the game may in fact have Turkic origins.<sup>31</sup>

In Çankırılı Talat Onay's article titled "Boxing among the Turks," various data derived from different written sources concerning the history of Turkish sports are presented. Drawing on works such as *Gülistan*, *Baharistan*, Hafız's *Divan*, and *Tuhfe-i Vehbi*, Onay conveys that a form of sport involving the use of fists was known among the Turks. The explanations provided in Sudi Efendi's commentary on *Gülistan*, along with Şakir Efendi's accounts of palace life during the reign of Selim III, are presented as examples that point to the historical continuity of this type of game.<sup>32</sup>

In Hasan Ortekin's article titled "The Turks and Skiing," the historical background of skiing among Turkic communities is examined. Ortekin notes that skiing functioned not only as a sporting activity but also as a means of subsistence, emphasizing that the communities known as the Shor Turks, who lived around the Altai Mountains, made effective use of this practice. In this context, skiing is interpreted as an activity that aligned with the daily life and environmental conditions of the Turks.<sup>33</sup>

The articles examined in this section illustrate how sport was treated as a historical phenomenon in *Ülkü Magazine*. The texts reveal an attempt to construct a sense of continuity between the past and the Republican period by associating various branches of sport with Turkic societies. The authors' emphasis on the deep-rooted presence of sport within Turkish culture supported through references to diverse historical and literary sources demonstrates that the period's understanding of sport was grounded not only in the objectives of modernization but also in historical references.

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<sup>31</sup> Ali Rıza Seyfi, "Tarihte Türkler ve Spor", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 1, Sayı 6, Temmuz 1933, s. 477.

<sup>32</sup> Talat Onat, "Türkler ve Boks", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 2, Sayı 4, Şubat 1935, s. 447-448; Sudi'nin *Gülistan Şerhi*, 1249 Matbaa-ı Amire tabı, Hediye-tü'l İrfan, Şerhi Baharistan, Şakir Efendi Tercümesi, Sayı 132 Matbaa-i Amire Tabı. 1252.

<sup>33</sup> Ortekin Hasan, "Türkler ve Kayak", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 10, Sayı 60, Şubat 1938, s. 513; H. Ortekin explained the close relationship between the Turks and skiing by referring to various foreign sources: A. N. Adrianov, *Altay ve Sayan Taraflarında Seyahat 1881*. s. 172, V. İ. Verbitiski: *Altayskiye İnorodisi*, s. 18, D. P. Potapov: *Oçerkiorii şorii*, (1936) 24.

## 5 MOUNTAIN AND WINTER SPORTS

In Ülkü Magazine, the treatment of sports was not limited to discussions of historical origins; it was also addressed in relation to environmental conditions, technical knowledge, and individual experience. In line with this approach, Vildan Aşır's article titled "The Sport of the Mountains and Winter" stands out as an example that emphasizes the relationship between winter sports and the natural environment, as well as the necessity of engaging in sports consciously and with proper awareness.

In his article titled "The Sport of the Mountains and Winter," Vildan Aşır relates the emergence of sporting activities to environmental conditions and climate, noting that the recreational physical practices of the public initially developed as unsystematic and incidental forms of activity. According to Aşır, these activities were reorganized within advanced societies according to specific rules and techniques, thereby acquiring a legal and institutional structure that enabled their social benefits to be widely disseminated. The author states that a similar process took place during the Republican period, highlighting that sports previously regarded as "luxuries" were made accessible to the public with the aim of raising physical and cultural standards. Vildan Aşır directly associates winter sports with mountainous geography and approaches the concept of winter sport primarily through the example of skiing. Noting that skiing, despite the pleasure and enjoyment it offers, also entails various risks, the author draws on his personal experiences to describe in detail the incorrect practices frequently encountered in this field. Emphasizing that mountain sports require specialized knowledge and technique, Aşır underscores that the mountain environment can be dangerous under all circumstances, and therefore must be thoroughly understood. He further states that skiing demands serious physical preparation and training, adding that unconscious or improper practices pose significant risks due to the sport's high energy expenditure. The author also draws attention to the technical dimension of skiing, emphasizing that being able to walk on flat terrain does not equate to being able to ski, and noting that the mountain possesses a natural environment that is difficult to control. For this reason, Aşır underscores that skiing must be learned from qualified experts. Highlighting the critical role of equipment for safety, he states that not every type of ski is suitable for every terrain and that non-standard gear may lead to serious hazards. The physical fatigue that occurs

during falls, as well as exposure to cold and the resulting loss of energy, are also identified as factors that increase risks for the skier.<sup>34</sup>

This article demonstrates that, in *Ülkü Magazine*, sport was approached not merely as a recreational activity but as a field requiring knowledge, technique, and discipline. Vildan Aşır's account reveals that sport is directly linked to natural environmental conditions and that, unless these conditions are properly understood, sporting activities may become hazardous. Within this framework, winter sports particularly skiing are presented as activities that both support physical development and require conscious, well informed practice.

The warnings and experiential insights presented in the text indicate that sport must be approached as a regulated and teachable activity. Moreover, it is understood that during the Republican period, the process of promoting sports involved an effort to make disciplines previously associated with certain social groups accessible to the broader public. This approach aligns with the policies aimed at the socialization of sport and the enhancement of individuals' level of physical culture.

Overall, Aşır's article demonstrates that sport in *Ülkü Magazine* was approached within the contexts of nature, technical knowledge, and individual responsibility. It constitutes an important example that reveals the place and function of winter sports within the understanding of sport during the Republican period.

## 6 THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In the early years of the Republic, physical education was conceived not merely as a bodily activity, but as a comprehensive field of instruction aimed at fostering the physical, intellectual, and moral development of the new generation. For this reason, considerable importance was attached to this subject, and numerous articles concerning the meaning and significance of physical education were published in various journals issued by the People's Houses.<sup>35</sup> The articles published in *Ülkü Magazine* likewise

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<sup>34</sup> Vildan Aşır, "Dağın ve Kışın Sporu", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 4, Sayı 24, Şubat 1935, s. 449-450.

<sup>35</sup> Arzu Bay-Özgür Aktaş, "Halkevlerinin Çıkardığı Ülkü, Uludağ, Doğu ve Karacadağ Dergilerindeki Eğitim Yazılarının Değerlendirilmesi", *Çağdaş Türkiye Araştırmaları Dergisi XXV/50*, Bahar 2025, s. 261-291.

reflected this understanding clearly, offering detailed assessments of how primary school students should be educated through gymnastics.

In Zehra Cemal's article titled "Physical Education," the aims and objectives of gymnastics in primary schools are explained in detail. It is emphasized that gymnastics is as essential for young children as eating and drinking, and it is stated that children require not only special forms of nutrition but also a specialized gymnastics program to ensure healthy development. For this reason, it is argued that primary school curricula must take this objective into account. Zehra Cemal draws attention to the fact that children's muscles, bones, lungs, and hearts are still in a developmental stage. She emphasizes that just as inadequate nutrition, insufficient air, and lack of light negatively affect this development, insufficient movement has similarly detrimental effects. Among the points that teachers responsible for gymnastics classes must consider are the following: children should not be kept standing in line for long periods, as they have a strong need for movement; exercises should be made more enjoyable through imagination and imitation; and since lessons held twice a week are insufficient, children should be granted greater freedom of movement both inside and outside the classroom. At the end of the article, it is emphasized that gymnastics should serve not only physical development but also aims such as promoting healthy habits and fostering an understanding of nature.<sup>36</sup>

In the text derived from Prof. Dr. Jean Demoor's lecture and published in *Ülkü Magazine*, physical training is described as one of the fundamental issues of the civilized world. Demoor emphasizes that the essence of physical training lies in movement and stresses that such movements must be orderly, purposeful, and continuous. It is further stated that gymnastics exerts an influence not only on the body but also on moral qualities such as willpower, energy, moderation, speed, agility, and courage. Demoor underscores the importance of physical training in character formation with his statement: "I would prefer a child who knows nothing but possesses character over a child who knows many theoretical things but lacks personality." He also compares the German and Swedish gymnastics systems, noting his preference for Ling's system because it supports the development of the heart and lungs. Emphasizing that physical training must be considered together with moral education, Demoor asserts that physical education cannot

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<sup>36</sup> Zehra Cemal, "Beden Eğitimi", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 31, Eylül 1935, s. 52-54.

be relegated to a secondary position in school curricula, as it constitutes the foundation of education.<sup>37</sup>

When the writings of Zehra Cemal and Jean Demoor are evaluated together, it becomes evident that *Ülkü Magazine's* approach to physical education was shaped around three fundamental components. First, movement was presented as an indispensable part of child development, with insufficient physical activity considered as harmful as inadequate nutrition or insufficient air. Second, physical training was emphasized as an inseparable dimension of character and personality education. Third, gymnastics was described as a discipline that appeals to all segments of society due to its qualities of aesthetics, harmony, and comprehensive bodily development. Overall, *Ülkü Magazine* positions physical education as a core element of Republican modernization, an integral part of child development, a sphere in which moral and cultural qualities are cultivated, and a strategic component in shaping the ideal human type.

## **7 THE SPORTS-RELATED ACTIVITIES OF THE PEOPLE'S HOUSES**

The articles in *Ülkü Magazine* that address sports and physical training within the context of the People's Houses contain important discussions on the institutional organization of sports, its dissemination, and its social function. In these writings, sport is treated not merely as an individual activity but as a field associated with public spaces, educational policies, and public health objectives. The articles authored by Zehra Cemal, Rahmi Apak, Şinasi Şahingiray, and Nizamettin Kırşan are among the texts that illuminate the multifaceted role of the People's Houses in the domains of sports and physical education.

In her article titled "Winter Sports in the People's Houses," Zehra Cemal adopts a critical perspective, noting that although sports were officially encouraged in the country, the necessary spaces and facilities for their practice were insufficiently provided. She points out that schools had limited resources and that festivals and collective sporting activities were not given adequate attention. Cemal further argues that institutions of higher education were inadequate in conducting scientific research in the field of

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<sup>37</sup> *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 33, Kasım 1935, s. 174.

gymnastics, a situation that contributed to the perception among the public that gymnastics was unnecessary. At this point, she highlights that the People's Houses intervened by making financial sacrifices from their budgets and supporting public participation in physical education activities. The article particularly emphasizes that women should be encouraged to engage in gymnastics not as a luxury, but as an activity essential for health and quality of life.<sup>38</sup>

In his article titled "How Should the Sports Branches of the People's Houses Operate?" Rahmi Apak seeks to clarify the duties and scope of the sports branches within the People's Houses. Apak states that these branches were not limited to merely facilitating the establishment of sports clubs, but rather bore a broader responsibility aimed at promoting physical training among the population. Referring to the Regulation of the People's Houses<sup>39</sup>, he emphasizes that sports and gymnastics activities had to be conducted in a planned manner, under the supervision of qualified specialists, and in a way that targeted wide segments of society.<sup>40</sup>

In his article titled "Simple Sports Facilities in the People's Houses," Şinasi Şahingiray states that the People's Houses were capable of constructing low-cost sports facilities. Discussing sports areas that could be established in both open and closed spaces, Şahingiray notes that volleyball and basketball courts could be built quickly and with minimal expense. He further adds that although tennis courts were comparatively more costly, they could nonetheless be developed within the People's Houses under appropriate conditions.<sup>41</sup>

Nizamettin Kırşan, in his article titled "Physical Training in the People's Houses," focuses on the gymnastics activities that could be implemented within these institutions. He states that individuals who are unable to engage in sufficient physical activity in their daily lives regardless of age or gender could participate in physical education under

<sup>38</sup> Zehra Cemal, "Halkevinde Kış Sporları", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 35, Aralık 1935, s. 311-313.

<sup>39</sup> Rahmi Apak, "Halkevleri Spor Şubeleri Nasıl Çalışmalıdır", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 11, Sayı 64 Haziran 1938, s. 351.

<sup>40</sup> Rahmi Apak, "Halkevleri Spor Şubeleri Nasıl Çalışmalıdır", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 11, Sayı 64, Haziran 1938, s. 351-353.

<sup>41</sup> Şinasi Şahingiray, "Halkevlerinde Basit Spor Tesisleri", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 11, Sayı 65, Temmuz 1938, s. 520-524.

healthy and appropriate conditions through the facilities provided by the People's Houses.<sup>42</sup>

The articles examined in this section clearly demonstrate the role assumed by the People's Houses in the dissemination of sports and the socialization of the concept of physical training during the Republican period. In Zehra Cemal's article, a critical perspective is adopted regarding institutional deficiencies in the fields of sports and gymnastics, while the People's Houses are portrayed as a mechanism designed to address these shortcomings. The encouragement of women's participation in physical education activities is particularly significant, as it highlights the connection between sports, health, and quality of life. Rahmi Apak's assessments frame the duties and responsibilities of the People's House sports branches within a systematic structure, demonstrating that these branches assumed a mission of physical training aimed at broad segments of society rather than limiting their activities to the establishment of sports clubs. Şinasi Şahingiray's article, by focusing on the material infrastructure of sports, offers concrete recommendations on how low-cost and practical sports facilities could be created within the People's Houses. Nizamettin Kırşan's contributions, meanwhile, highlight practices that relate physical training to daily life and enable individuals of all ages to participate in sporting activities

## 8 THE NEW UNDERSTANDING OF SPORT

The articles on sports and physical training published in *Ülkü Magazine* constitute significant texts that reflect the intellectual and ideological framework of the understanding of sport adopted during the Republican period. In these writings, sport is treated not merely as an activity based on individual achievement but as a field encompassing society as a whole one associated with health, discipline, and national consciousness. The articles authored by Burhan Asaf, Rahmi Apak, and Dr. Osman Şevki Uludağ reveal, in different ways, the social, national, and scientific foundations of the Republican-era conception of sport.

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<sup>42</sup> Nizamettin Kırşan, "Halkevlerinde Beden Terbiyesi", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 12, Sayı 68, Ekim 1938, s. 126-125.

Burhan Asaf, in his article titled “Our Conception of Sport,” examines the understanding of sport that ought to be adopted during the Republican period. Comparing Western and Eastern societies, the author focuses on the question of whether sport should serve individual achievement or societal development. He notes that in the West, sport had long been practiced with an individualistic orientation, but from the twentieth century onward, it became institutionalized and acquired a more collective and social character. Asaf emphasizes that this process began late in Turkey and states that physical training became one of the fundamental issues of the Republican regime. Concluding his article, he argues that the presence of a few successful athletes is insufficient; instead, sport must be disseminated throughout the entire nation. He summarizes the principal objective of the Republic’s conception of sport as the cultivation of broad masses who are healthy, strong, and imbued with the moral principles of the Revolution.<sup>43</sup>

In his article titled “The New Obligations of Turkish Sport,” Rahmi Apak evaluates the efforts undertaken in the fields of sports and physical education during the first decade of the Republic, noting that from 1934 onward a new direction was introduced into Turkish sports. According to Apak, this new direction assigned a national responsibility to sport. The national conception of sport aimed to equip young people with agility, endurance, and qualities necessary for the defense of the country. In this regard, particular emphasis was placed on aviation sports, mountain sports, swimming, and shooting, while equestrianism and wrestling were regarded as complementary components of this national approach.<sup>44</sup>

Dr. Osman Şevki Uludağ, in his article titled “Sport Should Be the Product of Knowledge, Not Custom,” discusses the potential risks of practicing sports without grounding them in scientific and medical principles. Uludağ criticizes the instrumentalization of sport for personal interests and the tendency of clubs to promote professionalism under the guise of amateurism. The author explains through various examples that failing to develop an understanding of sport appropriate to different ages and physical constitutions may lead to serious health problems, emphasizing the necessity of subjecting athletes to comprehensive medical examinations. At the end of the article,

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<sup>43</sup> Burhan Asaf, “Spor Telakkimiz”, *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 1, Sayı 1, Şubat 1933, s. 71-72.

<sup>44</sup> Rahmi Apak, “Yeni Türk Sporunun Yeni Yükümleri”, *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 36, Ocak 1935, s. 345-348.

it is stated that sport should be a scientific activity free from ostentation and personal ambition that prepares individuals for the challenges posed by nature and life.<sup>45</sup>

The articles examined in this section demonstrate that, during the Republican period, sport was approached not as an arena of individual competition, but as a practice aimed at promoting social cohesion and enhancing the collective level of public health. The conception of sport emphasized by Burhan Asaf reveals an understanding in which sport was to be disseminated nationwide and physical training was regarded as an ideological duty. This approach indicates that the aim of sport was not merely to produce elite athletes, but to foster the physical and moral development of broad segments of the population.

Rahmi Apak's evaluations reveal that sport was directly associated with national defense and the physical competence of youth. The notion of a "national duty" attributed to sport after 1934 indicates that sports policies became closely intertwined with concepts of military preparedness, endurance, and discipline. Within this framework, sport is addressed as a component of collective responsibility rather than merely a matter of individual performance.

Dr. Osman Şevki Uludağ's perspective emphasizes that sport must be grounded in scientific and medical principles, drawing attention to the health risks that may arise from unregulated or uninformed practices. In this respect, sport is presented not only as an ideological instrument but also as an area that requires expertise, knowledge, and scientific oversight. Overall, these writings collectively reflect the social, national, and scientific dimensions of the understanding of sport that took shape in *Ülkü Magazine* during the Republican period.

## 9 THE SPORTS LAW

In the Republican Period, sport was treated as a national concern and regarded as one of the essential means for raising healthy generations. Accordingly, importance was attached to grounding practices in sports and physical training on scientific principles,

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<sup>45</sup> Osman Şevket Uludağ, "Spor Göreneğinin Değil Bilginin Eseri Olmalıdır", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 36, Şubat 1936, s. 431-438.

and evaluations and proposals related to the subject were presented to the public through articles published in *Ülkü Magazine*. Following these discussions, the Republican administration assumed direct responsibility for regulating the field of sports and moved toward establishing a legal framework for physical training activities.

The Physical Training Law, enacted on 29 June 1938, aimed to develop the physical and moral capacities of citizens in line with national and revolutionary objectives.<sup>46</sup> Due to the law's limited coverage in the press, Rahmi Apak authored a series of articles titled "The Physical Training Law I, II, and III" in *Ülkü Magazine* with the aim of informing the public. In his first article, Apak addresses the process of drafting the law by explaining the establishment of the General Directorate of Physical Training under the Prime Ministry and the centralization of sports affairs under a single authority. Referring to European examples, the author argues that relying solely on voluntarism in sports did not yield sufficient results; therefore, the provision of physical training services was made compulsory to be carried out through public officials.<sup>47</sup>

In his article titled "The Physical Training Law II," Apak discusses the principles governing the establishment of clubs and sports groups, explaining how sports organizations in cities, towns, and villages were to be structured within the framework of the relevant provisions of the law. In his article "The New Physical Training III," he presents the budgetary arrangements established to meet the needs of the sports and physical training unions to be formed in the provinces. In this context, it is noted that provincial administrations and municipalities were required to allocate specific portions of their budgets, thereby designating a substantial financial resource for sports. Apak emphasizes that he wrote these articles with the aim of informing the sports community and guiding the newly established institutions.<sup>48</sup>

The articles examined in this section demonstrate that the Republican administration structured sports and physical training as a centralized, planned, and state-supervised domain. With the adoption of the Physical Training Law, sport moved

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<sup>46</sup> The Physical Training Law, adopted by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) on 29 June 1938, was published in the Official Gazette No. 3961 and Law No. 3530 on 16 July 1938. (Source: TBMM.gov.tr)

<sup>47</sup> Rahmi Apak, "Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu I", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 11, Sayı 66, Ağustos 1938, s. 519.

<sup>48</sup> Rahmi Apak, "Yeni Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu", *Ülkü Dergisi*, Cilt 12, Sayı 67, Eylül 1938, s. 42-43.

beyond limited activities based solely on voluntarism and was placed on a legal and institutional foundation. Rahmi Apak's writings play an important role in this regard, as they elucidate both the rationale behind the legislation and the principles governing its implementation.

These texts published in *Ülkü Magazine* reveal that, within the framework of Republican ideology, sport was associated with the objectives of national development, public health, and the cultivation of disciplined individuals. In this respect, the magazine is regarded as one of the key sources reflecting both the intellectual background of the Physical Training Law and the process through which it was communicated to the public.

## 10 CONCLUSION

The findings obtained from the qualitative document analysis of the texts published in *Ülkü Magazine* indicate that, during the Atatürk era, sport was conceived as a field with significant social functions. The results demonstrate that sport was associated with the concepts of physical training and discipline and that, in this respect, it was presented within a framework aligned with the modernization and educational policies of the period. The treatment of sport in *Ülkü Magazine* within a youth-centered framework parallels the role attributed to youth in the early Republican period. The emphasis on supporting the physical and intellectual development of young people suggests that sport was conceptualized as an educational tool. Moreover, the repeated references to the dissemination of sport through institutions such as the People's Houses indicate that this field was approached within a planned and institutionalized structure. The positive discourse surrounding women's participation in sporting activities can be interpreted as a reflection of the period's broader goals of social transformation as applied to the realm of sport. In addition, the association of sport with military discipline, physical endurance, and a sense of collective action reveals that it was understood in connection with national strengthening and the cultivation of a consciousness of defense. These findings demonstrate that *Ülkü Magazine* functioned as a publication reflecting various dimensions of Republican ideology. This study, through the example of *Ülkü Magazine*, reveals that the understanding of sport during the Atatürk era exhibited a multidimensional structure. The results show that in the early Republican period, sport

was regarded not merely as an activity aimed at physical development but as a field directly connected to the establishment of social order, the cultivation of the modern individual, and the strengthening of national identity. Sport was positioned as an instrument serving collective societal goals rather than as a purely individual pursuit.

The treatment of sport in *Ülkü Magazine* along the axes of youth, women, and society demonstrates that bodily policies played a central role in the Republic's reconstruction process. It is understood that sport was intended to cultivate disciplined, healthy, and productive individuals, while simultaneously equipping them with a sense of collective consciousness and social responsibility. In this respect, sport was presented as a field integrated with the Republic's educational, cultural, and social policies.

The results of the study indicate that *Ülkü Magazine* served as an important written source reflecting the understanding of sport during the Atatürk era. The texts published in the magazine illuminate the ideological, cultural, and educational dimensions of sport, thereby shedding light on the social imagination of the early Republican period. This demonstrates the necessity of examining the history of sport not only through institutional regulations and organizational structures but also through periodicals and fields of intellectual production.

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