This text offers a sociological perspective on the circumstances of sports in the city of Barcelona. It deals with the following aspects:

- People who practice sports and those who do not. It provides an overview of the main topics, paying special attention to how municipal activities seem to affect the practice of sports among the city’s residents.
- Organizations, especially clubs and associations dedicated specifically to promoting all aspects of sports.
- Professionals or volunteers who work in the sector, with a focus on their education.
- Conclusion with a minor suggestion for improvement.

The Practice of Sports

According to the survey on the practice of sports among Barcelona’s adult population (Barcelona City Council. Barcelona Sports Institute, 2017a), in 2017 71.6% of people in the city over the age of 17 engaged in sports activities. There seems to have been an increase compared to 2013 (55.6%), although the survey was not conducted under the exact same conditions (season, sample, etc.) which makes it difficult to provide precise data. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the comparison between Catalonia and Spain. In Catalonia, in 2014 68.4% of people engaged in sports activities and in Spain it was 65.9% (Catalan Sports Observatory; http://www.observatoridelesport.cat/). There is a progressive growth in the rates of participation in sports activities, also accompanied by an increase in regularity.

In all cases, this data includes “walking” with the intention of staying fit or improving fitness as among the activities considered to be sports. In the report from 2013 on the impact of sports in Barcelona walkers were calculated to be 207,000 people (GAP, 2013). 60% of them did not combine that activity with any other. It is important to keep this in mind when making forecasts for the offer of sports facilities and sports programs.

As for the population under 18, in 2013 76% of boys and girls from 6 to 18 years of age participated in sports activities regularly (weekly) during the school year and outside of school hours (GAPS, 2013).
In absolute figures, these percentages indicate that, in 2013, 760,000 adults in Barcelona over the age of 18 and 126,000 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 18 participated in sports activities.

The most common activities include walking for exercise (50.5%), swimming (20.1%), running (16.5%) and activities using cardio machines (15.2%). In fifth place, and far below the rest, comes weight lifting (8.8%).

Continuing with the data collecting in the survey for 2017, there are important differences depending on the respondents' gender, age, education level, social status and neighborhood of residence.

More men practice sports than women: 74.4% versus 69.2%, respectively. More young people engage in sports activities than seniors. People with higher levels of education participate in sports more than people who have only completed the mandatory education, and people in higher social classes are more active than those in the lower classes. The district with the highest rates of participation is Sarrià-Sant Gervasi (77.1%) and with the lowest, Horta Guinardó (59.7%) (Barcelona City Council. Barcelona Sports Institute, 2017b:21). These differences are not only quantitative but also qualitative in terms of preferred kinds of sports, the place where sports are practiced, the intensity, the material used, motivations, etc.

Aspects to highlight in the data provided by the survey include:

- Much of this activity takes place outside of sports facilities. This can be seen clearly by the most popular types of sports. It also means that when it comes to planning spaces for the practice of sports, we need to consider both sports facilities and public spaces in the city.
- It is striking that the rates of participation in sports by neighborhood have not been ordered according to the socio-professional categories of the population, as is usually the case in similar analyses. As such, Sant Martí and Sant Andreu occupy the second and third places, with 74.9% and 74.3%, respectively. In contrast, the Eixample and Les Corts, more well-off areas of the city, fall below the city average (71.3% and 65.2%) (Barcelona City Council. Barcelona Sports Institute, 2017b:21). It would be reasonable to interpret this fact as a consequence of the urban design project for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and the municipal policies regarding sports. The aforementioned project was intended to provide the city as a whole with all the necessary sports facilities. Furthermore, the City Council has implemented policies for the promotion of sports that target the population as a whole.
- We need to properly interpret the responses from people who do not participate in sports activities. 51.2% of people say they do not have enough time (Barcelona City Council. Barcelona Sports Institute, 2017b:26). Their days are undoubtedly quite busy, but that is true for most everyone. It all comes down to choosing what you have time for, and
many people prefer doing other things, rather than exercising. Obviously, answering that you don’t play sports because you don’t like to, because you are lazy, or because you don’t see the point is not as socially acceptable as saying you just don’t have the time. We should keep in mind that there may be a significant number of people who aren’t interested in playing sports and who prefer other leisure activities.

Clubs and Associations

In Barcelona, there are roughly 2,517 organizations whose purposes are sports-related (GAPS, 2013: 26-36). This tradition of forming associations is quite old, seeing as 50% of them were founded before 1990 and some date from the late 19th century.

Most of these organizations (2,450) are very small in size, with an average of 80 members, limited budget and considerable support from volunteers; around 10 people offer part of their time to help keep each club running. In total, there are 35,000 people in Barcelona who engage in volunteer activities related to these associations, mostly on a part-time basis.

The sector has a low rate of direct dependence on public funding (56% of organizations receive none), although they may make use of municipal sports facilities. Their activities are mainly associated with federative sports (8 out of 10 organizations compete within a federation) and their existence contributes to strengthening the third sector in the city. Sports clubs are a meeting place for members to get together, build friendships and work – without the interference of external agents – to achieve the aim for which they were founded.

Aside from these small-scale clubs scattered across the city and aimed at the promotion of all kinds of sports, there are 62 others that are considered medium-sized (37), large (24) or very large (1), like Futbol Club Barcelona, the importance of which (in economic, social, symbolic terms, etc.) reaches far beyond the local sphere.

While the functions and activities associated with these organizations help promote the third sector in the city, they also contribute to promoting the practice of sports, often in collaboration with the City Council. Many of them have their own facilities where they organize programs that promote involvement in sports, and they train teams to participate in competitions on all levels, including internationally. Other organizations manage municipal facilities through administrative concessions that are renewed periodically. Here it is important to highlight that, although there are many employees, there is a large proportion of people who work as volunteers, whether on the boards of directors or in the different departments that make up a club.
Sports Sector Employees

In Barcelona, some 27,600 people work in the sports business and associations sector. Furthermore, as we stated earlier, there are some 35,000 people who work as volunteers in sports associations (GAPS, 2013). In 2013, there were 95,298 professionals who worked in the sports industry in Catalonia (Catalan Council of Sports, 2017; Catalan Sports Observatory; 2017:81). Approximately 29% of them were in Barcelona.

What we are interested in highlighting in this text are the improvements that have taken place in the training of these people – whether professionals or volunteers – since the early days of municipal sports-related policy. As an anecdote, it is worth pointing out that one of the first initiatives was undertaken by the Barcelona City Council in 1985 to improve physical education training for teachers in municipal schools. Little by little, all over Catalonia – and across the Spanish state – different training programs have been developed, offered by duly recognized institutions (universities, federations, IES, Escola Catalana de l’Esport, certified centers, etc.). Currently, the training certificates include (Catalan Sports Observatory; 2017:57): Sports specialist; Specialist in outdoor physical activities/sports; Specialist in organizing physical activities/sports; Bachelor’s degree in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences Master’s degrees and PhDs.

It is very difficult to tally the total number of the most basic training programs in Barcelona, since many centers offer them. However, there is quite precise information regarding the higher education programs.

According to the Catalan Sports Observatory, there are three universities in Barcelona (in the 2018-2019 academic year there will be four) that offer a Bachelor’s degree in Physical Activity and Sports Sciences, with some 1777 students in 2016-2017. In total, there are 14 Master’s degrees offered (official or internal) at five higher education centers, with some 507 students. Finally, PhDs are offered at four universities, with a total of 143 students in 2016-2017.

All of the students who have been trained over the years have been given an education that supports the quality of Barcelona’s offer in the area of sports. The city has developed a diversified system of sports, which provides for the population according to its needs, developing a sports-related industry and commerce which managed to weather the worst of the recent economic crisis (Catalan Council of Sports 2017).

Finally, A Minor Suggestion for Improvement

In writing this text, we were struck by the lack of an ongoing database that would have allowed for analyzing tendencies in Barcelona beginning in the 1980s.
The most that was recorded were surveys on population habits. Unfortunately, the questions varied from one survey to the next, such that only the differences between 2013 and 2017 can be interpreted, but comparisons with other earlier versions were impossible.

There are no data series regarding the number of organizations dedicated to questions of sports, commercial companies, training courses, etc. Part of this problem could be addressed by looking at the databases of the Catalan Sports Observatory. However, they do not always offer information that is specific only to the city of Barcelona.

In compliance with the city’s strategic plan (2012-2022), Barcelona’s Sports and Physical Activities Observatory has been created. That is good news. Now, to the extent that it is possible, we need to try to remedy the shortfalls we have mentioned here, to promote the ongoing management of knowledge about the city’s sports-related systems.

Works Cited

Barcelona City Council. Barcelona Sports Institute, (2017a) *Enquesta d’hàbits esportius de la població adulta de Barcelona*. [Survey of Sports Habits Among Barcelona’s Adult Population]. Available at: [http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/esports/sites/default/files/Informe%20complet%20- %20Enquesta%20d%E2%80%99h%C3%A0bits%20esportius%20de%20la%20poblaci%C3%B3%20adulta%20de%20Barcelona%202017_0.pdf](http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/esports/sites/default/files/Informe%20complet%20-%20Enquesta%20d%E2%80%99h%C3%A0bits%20esportius%20de%20la%20poblaci%C3%B3%20adulta%20de%20Barcelona%202017_0.pdf)

Barcelona City Council. Barcelona Sports Institute, (2017b) *Hàbits esportius a Barcelona. Resum*. [Sports Habits in Barcelona: A Summary]. Available at: [http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/esports/sites/default/files/INFORME%20RESUM%20de%20l%27Enquesta%20d%27h%C3%A0bits%20esportius%20de%20la%20poblaci%C3%B3%20adulta%20de%20Barcelona.pdf](http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/esports/sites/default/files/INFORME%20RESUM%20de%20l%27Enquesta%20d%27h%C3%A0bits%20esportius%20de%20la%20poblaci%C3%B3%20adulta%20de%20Barcelona.pdf)

