

ESZTERHÁZY KÁROLY CATHOLIC
UNIVERSITY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY

Éva Mácsainé Iván

**CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY
IN THE MODERN SPORTS HISTORY OF
SZEKSZÁRD**

Doctoral (PhD) thesis abstracts

EGER, 2025

Supervisor:

Dr. Béla Bartók, associate professor (EKKE)

Members of the Review Committee:

Dr. József Pap, university professor (EKKE)

– chair

Dr. Tamás Csíki associate professor (ME)

– official reviewer

Dr. György Majtényi, research professor (EKKE)

– official reviewer

Dr. Péter Szegedi researcher

– official reviewer

Dr. Szabó Lajos, former museum director (MOS)

– external member

Dr. László Ambrus university assistant professor

(EKKE)

– secretary

The topic and interpretative framework of the dissertation

Research into the history of sport in Szekszárd is a relatively unexplored area, which in itself justifies a historical work summarizing the history of sport in the county seat. The aim of the dissertation is to explore the modern sports history of Szekszárd in detail, but it can't be content with merely chronicling the development of sports in the city. The basis of the thesis is the elaboration and presentation of known events and processes in sports history, which also seeks answers to two important questions.

The first question concerns continuity and discontinuity, that is whether some kind of continuity can be detected in the approximately hundred year history of sports in Szekszárd. However history is never purely continuous or purely interrupted, so the question is rather in which areas (political, social, cultural) there is continuity and where radical change occurs. An important aspect of examining continuity in sport is whether the sport of successive historical periods was

able to build on the achievements of its predecessors. During my research I examined whether local sports innovations survived political upheavals, or whether everything had to start from scratch in sports after each regime change. Continuity can be found not only in sports infrastructure, but also in the urban presence of sports and in the people of Szekszárd who participate in sports. It is an interesting question whether there were any sports that were traditionally represented in the city, or whether discontinuity is characteristic of Szekszárd in this respect. The individuals involved in sports (athletes, sports managers, physical education teachers, coaches) also deserve to be examined from the perspective of whether some kind of continuity can be demonstrated in their cases. Another issue examined in the dissertation concerns the local manifestation of national trends affecting sports. The question arises as to how well a small rural town like Szekszárd has been able to keep up with national changes in sports. The aim of the research was to shed light on possible local deviations from the central trend and the reasons for their emergence.

There are several possible definitions of the "modern era" referred to in the title of the dissertation as the period of research. In most cases, the modern era is simply understood to mean the 20th century. However, there are definitions that mark an earlier or later date as the beginning of the modern era, such as the French Revolution or the start of World War I. The end of the era is also not entirely clear, as according to some interpretations, the modern era lasts until the present day, the beginning of the 21st century, while according to others, it only lasts until 1960. In my thesis I define the modern era as the period spanning roughly a hundred years from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century, or more precisely until the regime change of 1989. In my thesis I conclude my presentation of the sporting history of Szekszárd at the time of the regime change in 1989. The aim of the dissertation is not to describe and examine sport in the present day.

Sources of the thesis

In my research, I relied primarily on source material found in the Tolna County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives. Among the sports associations of the early 20th century, I was able to find the documents of the Szekszárd Turul Sports Association and the Tolna County Sports Association intact and in their entirety, while the documents of the Szekszárd Levente Association and all other documents related to Levente affairs were found in the documents of the Szekszárd City Mayor's Office, and found them among the priority documents. The archival sources relevant to the thesis from after 1945 were found in the documents of the Physical Education and Sports Committee, the Physical Education and Sports Council, and the Physical Education and Sports Inspectorate. The documents examined and collected contain important information related to the researched topic, primarily the reports, statements, and work plans of sports clubs, as well as reports related to the local activities of the MHK (Ready for Work and Struggle) movement and

the documents of the Szekszárd Sports School. In addition to archival sources the national and local press, as well as the school newsletters of the Garay High School of Szekszárd, served as very important sources in the writing of this thesis. In certain areas of historiography primarily in the research of 20th-century topics the information provided by photographs is indispensable. Historical photographs can usually be best interpreted in conjunction with other historical sources. The Wosinsky Mór Museum's collection of modern history archive photographs contains numerous sports-themed photographs, which I was able to use in my work. The photographs presented in the appendix provide a very good overview of sports life in Szekszárd during the period under review.

Presentation of research results

The dissertation focuses on two topics: the first is the question of continuity and discontinuity in the history of sport in Szekszárd, and the second is the local manifestation of national trends affecting sport. The

research results show that we can typically speak of partial continuities and partial discontinuities, which can be demonstrated in several ways in the city's sports history. In Szekszárd, the emergence of bourgeois sports clubs at the end of the 19th century provided the organizational basis for later sporting life, and these clubs represent the roots of local sports culture. The establishment of the first sports in the city's culture can be considered a partial continuity, as these sports have remained present in the city's sporting life, but their social base has changed over the different eras. The most popular sport in the city is football, attracting the most athletes. Its success has been unbroken since its appearance in 1912, as every sports club and sports association in Szekszárd that was worth its salt formed a football section. Most of the small sports clubs only maintained football teams, as they did not have enough capacity for other sports. Despite the popularity of football, the city's teams did not achieve any significant success. Road cycling was the sport that enjoyed the greatest success. The sport appeared in Szekszárd at the end of the 19th century, and there has been a cycling

association or club operating in the city almost continuously ever since. There were some years during in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Hungarian national team consist exclusively of competitors from Szekszárd. Among the sports that have a permanent presence in the city, fencing and swimming should be mentioned, even though neither has produced significant successes or a large number of athletes, as both have a long tradition in Szekszárd.

In the case of boxing there is also personal continuity, not just continuity in terms of the sport itself. Back in the 1930s the Leposa brothers started boxing at the Tolna County Sports Association and within a few years became the best boxers in the city. After World War II. the history of boxing in Szekszárd continued at Törekvés, and then the department moved to the Dózsa Sports Club, which was established in 1951. By this time the Leposa brothers were no longer competing, but were involved in the sport as coaches. The boxers of Szekszárd were among the best in the country, and for many years the "Leposa school" represented the elite of Hungarian boxing.

Transitional continuity in local sports management is ensured by the fact that some sports leaders and teachers survived the political changes. An excellent example of this is Gyula Bessenyei, who is revered in the city as the true founder of athletics in Szekszárd. He began his career as a physical education teacher at the Garay High School in the 1930s, while also actively competing, and from 1938 he also worked as a youth instructor. His career was not interrupted by the change of regime after 1945; he continued his career as a physical education teacher at the high school, continued to compete, and became the coach of the athletics section of the Bástya Sports Club, which was founded in the city in 1951. His past as a youth instructor did not prevent him from becoming the first inspector of the MTSB county sports inspectorate. It therefore happens that the careers of some athletes, sports managers, and coaches are not interrupted by changes or transformations in the system. There are also examples of families in certain sports who traditionally represent a particular sport and are outstanding talents in that field. However, it is not

possible to generalize, as in many cases new names and new people appear in the city's sports scene. Many people have come to Szekszárd from other cities and counties and have become involved in local sports.

There is relative continuity in the sports traditionally present in the city and, in some cases, in the careers of athletes or sports managers. Partial continuity can also be observed in the development of sports infrastructure. The operators of sports facilities changed, but the built environment provided a certain degree of continuity. In most cases, it was the pursuit of continuity that proved to be constant. The range of sports facilities expanded very slowly, and it was often necessary to start from scratch, almost from the ground up. In most cases, the lack of financial resources caused serious problems, and external assistance and state support had to be sought for construction. Another important factor was the expansion of the city, as sports facilities were often built on the outskirts of the city, which later stood in the way of new construction projects.

If we examine the social function of sport, we can see that there has been relative continuity since the Horthy era. The way in which sport was used by those in power was very similar during the Horthy, Rákosi, and Kádár eras, as it functioned as an educational and community-building tool, with only the ideological goal changing. The presence—and at times strengthening—of youth and national defense factors in sports can also be considered a partial continuity. It can be observed that the festive, community-oriented nature of sport has remained unchanged throughout the different eras, with only the narrative changing. Continuity can be seen in the reorganisation of associations, the revival of old names in a different political environment (Törekvés, Szekszárd Sport Club, etc.), the continuity of mass sports policy after 1945, and the maintenance of traditional sporting events over decades.

Alongside these continuities, discontinuities can also be observed, as political and ideological turning points inevitably caused some kind of disruption. The Rákosi era brought about the most

dramatic change by nationalizing sport and abolishing civil associations. The Kádár era partially restored self-organization, but within a socialist framework. Changes took place in the organizational framework: after the old associations were dissolved, new structures and new names appeared, all under central control. The gradual strengthening of women's sports during the 20th century also represents a discontinuity from the male-centered tradition of the 19th century. If we examine discontinuity in terms of sports, we must consider those that appeared late, after World War II, in Szekszárd, such as volleyball, handball, and basketball.

In this paper, I examined how Szekszárd was able to keep up with national changes in sports. Szekszárd is a county seat, but it is the smallest among the county seats. When examining its sporting history, it must be taken into account that even at the end of the 20th century, it remained a rural, primarily agricultural (wine-producing) small town, and this factor often limited its opportunities. Throughout the period under review, the city's sports administration sought to meet

the expectations of national sports policy and follow general trends. The fact that these efforts were often unsuccessful is primarily due to the small-town character of Szekszárd. However, this character has led to the development of a more human and direct sports community in the town. The biggest problem in the history of sports in Szekszárd has always been securing financial resources.

My doctoral dissertation examined the history of sports in Szekszárd up to 1989. Through source research and analysis, I was able to trace the developments that took place during the first century of the city's sporting life. However, the history of the decades following the change of regime raises a number of new questions. How did the structures of associations change, what role did sport play in the new social environment, and how did the city's sporting life transform with modernization in the 21st century? The research cannot end with this work, as exploring the later period could provide further valuable insights into the complete understanding of Szekszárd's sporting history. The new financing models, civil initiatives, and

international networks that emerged in the 1990s offer a wealth of data and a framework for interpretation that, beyond the chronological limits of this work, allow for further exploration of the continuity and discontinuity of Szekszárd's sporting history.

Important publications on the subject

1. Éva Mácsainé Iván: The Szekszárd Youth Levente Training Association. In: Wosinsky Mór Museum Yearbook XLII. (2020) 335–363.
2. Éva Mácsainé Iván: Sports life in Szekszárd at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In: Wosinsky Mór Museum Yearbook XLIII. (2021) 171–194.
3. Éva Mácsainé Iván: The Szekszárd Turul Sports Association. In: Wosinsky Mór Museum Yearbook XLIV. (2022) 467–482.
4. Éva Mácsainé Iván: Gemenc 50. Half a century on two wheels. Szekszárd, Mór Wosinsky County Museum (2024) 63 p.

5. Éva Mácsainé Iván: The socialist transformation of sport in Szekszárd after 1945. In: *Historical Museology Review* XXI–XXII. (2024) 99–122.
6. Éva Mácsainé Iván: The first century of cycling in Szekszárd. In: *Wosinsky Mór Museum Yearbook* XLV. (2025) 313–332.