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From Corsets to Cockpits: The Politics of the Female Body and the Rise of Women's Sport in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary (1867–1914)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the institutionalization and social perception of women's sports in Hungary during the Dual Monarchy (1867–1914), situated within the broader modernization context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The research is based on a systematic exploration of primary sources, including contemporary Hungarian sports journals (e.g., Herkules, Sport-Világ, Ladies' Cycling Journal), fashion magazines carrying feminist discourses (e.g., Divatszalon), illustrated weeklies (e.g., Vasárnapi Ujság, Új Idők), and period medical literature. The central thesis of the paper posits that the emergence of women's sports was not an isolated leisure phenomenon, but rather a visual and physical catalyst for the construction of the modern autonomous female subject. Applying the theoretical frameworks of body politics and the performative turn, the author demonstrates how the female body became a contested zone between conservative biopolitical control and liberal emancipatory aspirations. The analysis details the specific social functions of various sporting activities: ice skating as a space for controlled social representation; cycling as a revolutionary technology of female mobility and the reclamation of public space; and tennis and swimming as practices challenging gender hierarchies and hygienic norms. A dedicated chapter discusses clothing reform, arguing that the abandonment of the corset and the introduction of functional sportswear liberated the female body from patriarchal discipline in both a symbolic and physical sense. Furthermore, the research highlights the ambivalence of medical discourses, which simultaneously viewed sport as a source of "racial degeneration" and a "guarantee of national health." The conclusion asserts that the pioneers of Hungarian women's sports, ranging from internationally successful figure skaters to the first female aviators, systematically dismantled the visual and mental barriers hindering the social and political equality of women, thereby paving the way for the 20th-century ideal of the modern woman.

Keywords: Women's History, Sport History, Body Politics, Fin-de-siècle Hungary, Clothing Reform, Emancipation.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 19th century, Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, experienced a period of rapid urbanization and social transformation: the era was defined by the unfolding of capitalism, population growth, embourgeoisement, urban development, and the expansion of transportation and the tertiary sector. In the four decades following the Compromise of 1867 between Austria and Hungary, the population increased from 13.6 million to 18.3 million. The most significant phase of Hungarian urban development unfolded around the turn of the century, although the proportion of the population living in rural, agrarian settlements remained dominant even then. Cities and city centers took on an urban appearance, and the contemporary architectural

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character of many Hungarian settlements was established at that time (banks, hotels, city halls, residential buildings, and post offices were constructed). The achievements of civilization spread throughout the cities, schools multiplied, new inventions gained ground, and modern mass transit emerged. In the case of women in Hungary, much like in Western Europe, the changing lifestyle and the expansion of educational and leisure opportunities primarily characterized various strata of urban women.

For the Kingdom of Hungary, the turn of the century was thus an era of radical social and structural transformation. In this dense historical moment, the "woman question" appeared not only at political (suffrage) or educational (university admission) levels but also on the plane of physical visibility. The fundamental premise of this study is that the emergence of women's sports was not an isolated leisure fad, but a crucial instrument for the construction of the modern autonomous subject. In this context, the emancipation of women became inseparable from physical culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND SOURCES

In recent years, the female body and female biology have been prominent and continuous subjects of historical-medical, as well as psychological-anthropological research (Bäder, 1964; Shorter, 1982; Rahaim, 2004). These studies (unlike the approach of earlier, traditional anthropological investigations) emphasize the historical and cultural determinacy of the human body (Németh, 2019, p. 124). The starting point for all of this is essentially the idea that people in different eras and geographical areas relate to their own bodies and to others in different ways. This is naturally true regarding the history of male-female relations, the female body, girls' physical education, and women's sports; thus, it can be stated that research emerging under the influence of the performative turn has brought new and alternative approaches to the exploration of women's history and the education of girls. The spread of systematic physical exercise for girls and women's sports can be traced back to the 19th century in the Western world, as can the emergence of heightened (state and individual) attention directed toward health protection. It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of analyses dealing with these subject areas examine the phenomena and events of the past 150–200 years (For example: Powell, 1991; Costa, 1994; Thébaud – Zancarini-Fournel, 2006).

As Michel Foucault (1978) or more recent research in women's history points out, physical education was part of state biopolitics: the upbringing of healthy mothers appeared as a national interest. Applying the theoretical frameworks developed by international literature (e.g., Guttmann, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994), this research examines how the sports field became a buffer zone between liberal emancipatory efforts and conservative biopolitical control. While Western European research often places the Anglo-Saxon model at the center, the present study focuses on Central European specificities: the dynamics where national identity building and bourgeois modernization went hand in hand with the liberation of the female body. One of the peculiarities of Hungarian development was that the democratization of sporting activities (skating, cycling) took place in parallel with political emancipatory efforts. This study is not merely a summary of sports history; rather, by applying the methodology of the performative turn, it examines how the female presence changed in public spaces. As primary sources, the research utilized contemporary sports journals (Herkules, Sport-Világ, Nemzeti Sport, Kerékpárosok Lapja and Kerékpáros Hölgyek Lapja, Magyar Vízi Sport), fashion magazines (e.g., Divatszalon), illustrated weeklies and certain dailies (e.g., Vasárnapi Ujság, Új Idők, Budapesti Hírlap, Tolnai Világlapja), and medical bulletins using the method of discourse analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: MEDICAL ARGUMENTS AND MORAL CONCERNS OVER THE FEMALE BODY

At the end of the 19th century, debates surrounding women's sports were not merely about leisure activities but about power. The male-dominated medical and pedagogical elite viewed the female body as the reproductive "property" of the nation; consequently, any form of movement that endangered this function or the aesthetics of female passivity was branded as pathological or immoral.

Medical Discourse: In Defense of "Biological Destiny"

The medical science of the era primarily defined women as biological beings and mothers. Medical resistance to sport was based on three pseudo-scientific arguments. One of these was the principle of the conservation of energy. Certain authors of the period believed that the female organism possessed a finite energy reserve, and if this were diverted to "unnecessary" muscular labor (e.g., cycling, tennis), it would drain energy away from the reproductive organs. Therefore, sport was considered a direct source of infertility or "female troubles" (uterine displacement, menstrual disorders). They further argued based on the fragility of the nervous system: the era's

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favorite diagnosis, neurasthenia (nervous exhaustion), was linked to excessive irritability in the case of women. The excitement and competitive spirit inherent in sport were deemed harmful to the female nervous system and conducive to hysteria. Present as a third argument was the fear of "masculinization." Doctors and anthropologists feared that sport would transform the female skeletal and muscular structure, making the body "wiry" and "bony," which, in their view, represented the biological loss of femininity. A prime example of this is a 1913 article in the Budapesti Hírlap, which, following a physician's account, reported on the physical proportions of a "sporting woman," comparing these data with those of the Venus de Milo. Compared to the latter, the doctor concluded that the chest and hip measurements of sporting women fell short of "ideal" female dimensions, while their bodies became bionier and leaner due to exercise. In summary, the article stated that immoderate and especially one-sided sporting activity disturbs the harmony of lines and proportions, from which it follows not that women should not participate in sports, but that they should partake in every sport as much as possible and avoid overindulging in any single one. (The Female Body and Sport, 1913, 27)

Moral Panic: Movement and the Eroticized Body

Behind the moral concerns articulated regarding sporting women lay the perceived erotic and social dangers of free female movement. One element of this was the collapse of the chaperonage system. Sport (especially cycling) provided women with radical mobility. In the eyes of the era, unescorted travel was synonymous with sexual freedom and moral decay. The image of the "errant woman" envisioned the disintegration of the social order. Another discourse, also mentioned in Hungarian sources, involved the connection between "vibration" and the bicycle saddle. The bicycle saddle triggered a specific moral debate, as some conservative authors assumed it provided "ignoble pleasures" (onanism) for women. This bizarre yet widespread argument clearly demonstrates how much the male-centered society dreaded the loss of control over the female body. Public exhibitionism was also raised as a phenomenon accompanying female sporting. Every sport that required the parting of the legs or the shortening of the skirt (fencing, tennis, cycling) was evaluated as an assault on modesty. Behind the accusation of "displaying fluttering clothes" lay the fear that the woman would transform from an object of the gaze (passivity) into the director of the gaze (activity).

Counter-Discourses: Sport as Therapy for the "Modern Woman"

At the same time, by the turn of the century, a progressive movement represented by often female writers (e.g., Janka Wohl, Gizella Kocsis) and liberal doctors emerged in opposition to the aforementioned group of arguments. The authors associated with this movement offered a critique of "demureness" in their works: according to these emancipated authors, it was not sport but rather the corset and confinement, the lack of fresh air and movement, that made women ill. Movement and sports practiced outdoors lead not to "unfemininity" but to vitality. The reformers cleverly inverted the medical arguments: according to them, only a mother with a healthy, athletic body is capable of bringing a healthy "national generation" into the world. By doing so, they elevated sport to the level of patriotic duty and essentially redefined the content of the national interest. These were the authors who also contributed to the aesthetic turn. Their writings introduced the "tall, slender, and strong" female ideal (mentioning Scandinavian and American models in their works), which championed vital, modern beauty over fragile, porcelain-doll beauty.

RESULTS

The Spaces of Visibility: From the Ice to the Air

While cycling served as a technology of "outdoor rebellion," winter sports and fencing originated from the inner circles of the Hungarian aristocracy and the upper-middle class, gradually expanding the social legitimacy of female physical activity.

Social Life and the Ice (The "Gentle" Beginnings)

Skating was one of the first sporting activities to appear in Hungarian social life by the 1870s. Sports history textbooks trace the beginnings of European skating to the 13th and 14th centuries, when the population of the Low Countries strapped skates made of bone, and later a combination of iron and wood, to their feet for sport or winter transportation. In Hungary, however, skating was not a fashionable sport until the 1860s, particularly among women. In 1869, the Pest Skating Association (later the Budapest Skating Association) was established, likely inspired by news of the association in Vienna. Skating became the first accepted form of female sporting activity,

and the City Park (Városliget) ice rink became a venue for social representation. The gain in popularity of skating in Hungary starting from the 1870s is an excellent example of how a physical activity becomes a legitimate space for social interaction. The City Park ice rink in Budapest was not merely a sports venue but a kind of "winter promenade" or "open salon" where the presence of women, unlike street cycling, was more accepted from the outset, as it stood under the patronage of the aristocracy. Baron József Eötvös (1813–1871), Minister of Religion and Education, frequently skated with his daughters, providing a model for others; their example demonstrates how sport was legitimized from above, by the elite. The spread of skating was aided by the development and establishment of associations and rinks, as well as the perfection of the skate (the Halifax-system metal skate was replaced by the thin-bladed steel skate) and the modernization of artificial ice production (Kun, 1992, p. 210).

Our source research revealed how the discourse of this "gentle" sport unfolded: the contemporary press (such as the illustrated weekly Vasárnapi Újság) supported this sport because it was aesthetically compatible with the zeitgeist. The grace of gliding on ice resembled dancing, and thus did not threaten the traditional image of femininity. A significant turn for this sport was the breakthrough of professionalization: the figure of Lili Kronberger (1890–1974) is considered revolutionary in this context. In 1908, in Troppau, she became the world champion in figure skating, specifically in the men's championship, as a women's championship did not yet exist (Kronberger, 1908, p. 90). On the advice of composer and music educator Zoltán Kodály, the young woman performed her routine to music, with a military band playing at the edge of the rink while she skated; she thus placed this sport at the intersection of art and physical performance. This was the first moment when Hungarian women's sport became an internationally recognized, professional achievement, stepping out of the category of simple "pastime." Lili went on to win the gold medal three more times, in 1909, 1910, and 1911, at the Russian championships (Kenyeres, 1981, p. 446). The International Skating Union (ISU) inducted her into the Hall of Fame as the only Hungarian skater.

In Hungary, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, ladies also indulged in several other winter sports, which, however, were by no means as democratized as skating. Skiing, sledding, and "ice hockey" were the sports of the few, primarily wealthy women.

The Bicycle: The Technology of Emancipation and the Conquest of Public Space

At the end of the century, a new sport spreading through broad strata of society appeared in Hungary: cycling. Its adherents had to contend with numerous prejudices, just as the devotees of skating had 20–25 years earlier (Frisnyák, 1988; Zsinkó, 2006). Cycling spread quickly among men, but for women, contemporaries initially considered it dangerous and incompatible with decorum and the female physique. In the case of Hungary, the appearance of the bicycle did not merely mean the importation of another sport; it brought a radical technological intervention into the traditional system of gender roles. While skating or tennis took place in controlled, semi-private spaces, cycling took the woman out onto the street and into public spaces, thereby issuing a direct challenge to the patriarchal social order. From a technological perspective, the bicycle thus became the most important "emancipatory mechanism."

The writings of the author Janka Wohl (1841–1901) prove that Hungarian intellectual women consciously linked cycling with bourgeois civil liberties. She wrote, for example: "throughout the foreign world, not to mention the New World, which precedes decrepit Europe in everything, the bicycle has passed into everyday life, just like dancing, riding, and carriage driving, and those who oppose it are considered old-fashioned and backward" (Wohl, 1898, p. 485). At the same time, the opposing voices appearing in the Hungarian press (especially in the 1897 debates of Pesti Napló) well reflect the "body panic" of the era. The figure of the cycling woman caused tension on three levels. One of these was the emergence of concern regarding the lack of supervision. The bicycle enabled women to move quickly and independently. This, however, abolished the "chaperone system," which contemporaries interpreted as a destabilization of moral foundations, fearing the loss of control over female mobility. Another concern also appeared in newspaper articles: some authors feared for femininity, worrying that women using bicycles would become androgynous. The "costumes" required for cycling (reform dresses and shortened skirts) blurred the boundaries between the sexes in a visually unprecedented way. The mockery of the press, which claimed that every woman on a bicycle was "ugly" and "unfeminine", served to protect the traditional aesthetic canon against the modern, functional female ideal. Arguments of biological determinism also frequently appeared in the articles. Medical discourse viewed the female organism as a fragile instrument intended for reproduction. Cycling was often portrayed as a cause of "organic troubles," masking the fact that the real danger was not the movement itself, but the increase in women's self-determination.

The pioneers of the Hungarian feminist movement, such as the aforementioned Janka Wohl, recognized the political dimension of sport. According to Wohl's reasoning, the bicycle was not a "fad" but the most significant achievement of the second half of the 19th century: the ascent of woman from the level of "adored idol" to the status of "independent citizen." This perspective elevated the bicycle into an instrument of modernity. The

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responses of rural and urban women in the press (for example, the letter from a mother mounting the "iron steed") indicate that sport became a practical part of everyday life, dismantling stereotypes about the passivity of the "fairer sex." In the early history of cycling in Hungary, regional peculiarities were also observable. The institutionalization of the sport (associations, flag dedications) took on a specific national character. A late 19th-century city of Pécs cycling flag, embroidered by ladies, well illustrates the transition between sport and traditional female roles (handicraft). At the same time, the "cycling halls" of Budapest became hybrid spaces where the etiquette of capital city social life met physical performance, providing women with an opportunity for public self-expression. In these venues, both men and women could cycle provided they followed the rules, and the spread of the sport was naturally aided by the fact that more and more famous, well-known ladies took to the saddle, thereby creating a fashion among aristocratic families and female members of the middle class.

Tennis: Bourgeois Exclusivity and the Symbolic Battle of the Sexes

Tennis, as a new sporting discipline, was slow to gain ground in Hungary, particularly among women. While the first women's tennis championship was held in Dublin as early as 1872, the first tennis club in Hungary that admitted female members was only established in 1885. By the end of the 19th century, tennis (or lawn-tennis, as it was known at the time) had become the most significant status symbol among the Hungarian upper-middle class and aristocracy. The tennis court served as a space for bourgeois segregation and a symbol of economic and cultural capital. From an international perspective, the tennis court was a "semi-private" space where women could demonstrate their physical competence under controlled circumstances. The most astonishing event in the early history of Hungarian tennis was Countess Paulina Pálffy's victory in the men's national championship in 1894 (Umminger, 1992, p. 180). This moment fundamentally shook the dogma of "male physical superiority" in Hungary and represented a symbolic overthrow of gender hierarchy in the field of sports. This event can be interpreted as a significant instance of gender-blurring. Tennis contributed most significantly to the emergence of the cult of the female sportsperson as a "celebrity athlete." The international successes achieved by Margit Madarász and Katica Cséry in the early 1900s (for instance, at tournaments in Hamburg and Berlin) established the cult of the female athlete as a national icon. Tennis allowed a woman to be not only "beautiful" but also "successful," while the inherent elegance of the sport reassured conservative critics. Tennis clubs (such as the BLTC or the PAC) functioned as network hubs where sporting activities facilitated social mobility. On the tennis court, a woman was an equal partner to men rather than a subordinate decorative element.

Swimming: Hygiene, Morality, and the Unveiled Body

The history of swimming is the most sensitive area among women's sports, as it is here that discourses on the visibility of the body and public health converged. In the late 19th century, swimming was primarily viewed as a health (hydrotherapeutic) matter. Articles appearing in the Hungarian press (e.g., Jó Egészség) emphasized that swimming exercised every muscle and was essential for the "health of the nation." At the same time, mixed-gender bathing and wet, form-fitting attire triggered the most heated moral debates. Views on hygiene and modesty clashed regarding this sport. Additionally, a "lifesaving" discourse existed: interestingly, women's participation in swimming lessons was often legitimized for pragmatic reasons, specifically for the "prevention of accidents" (see: Szokolay, 1885, p. 1259). This provided a kind of moral shield: a woman learned to swim to save lives, not to display herself. It is also important to emphasize the process that led to the democratization of the sport. While tennis, for example, was an expensive form of exercise, swimming became accessible to broader social strata through river and lake baths. By the early 20th century, the international reputation of Hungarian swimming (following Alfréd Hajós's Olympic victories) opened competitive frameworks for women as well, where the functional swimsuit (already free of unnecessary fabrics) represented the final victory of physical efficiency over Victorian prudery.

Breaking Boundaries: Automobilism and Aviation

A major novelty at the beginning of the 20th century, both in terms of sports and transportation, was the spread of the automobile. The first car, a four-wheeled vehicle with solid rubber tires, was brought to Hungary in 1895 by the instrument maker Béla Hatsek, and in the same year, the Hungarian champagne manufacturer József Törley also became the owner of a Benz automobile. The first Hungarian Automobile Club was founded in Budapest in 1900 with 45 members (Lindner – Illés, 1930). Alongside sufficient interest and marketable demand, the expansion of the road network, the establishment of filling stations, the regulation of motor vehicle traffic, and, naturally, domestic manufacturing were all necessary for the spread of this new means of transport in the early century. In 1901, the first automobile race and exhibition were held in Hungary, and by 1914, 3,319 cars were registered in the

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country (Murányi et al., 2002). Several ladies sat behind the wheel from the very beginning; this required not only driving skills but also appropriate clothing: goggles, some form of headgear against the draft, and long coats. The first major long-distance tour for Hungarian drivers was the 1912 Constantinople tour, in which women also participated; two women completed the 2,500 km distance: Ilona Madarassy Beck in her Fiat and Mrs. Román Frohner in her Mercedes (Baracskai, 1997, p. 54). In the 1910s, it was no longer the automobile but aviation that counted as a true novelty among Hungarian ladies; the first Hungarian female pilot was Lili Steinschneider.
In the first decades of the 20th century, women in Hungary appeared in the most modern technological sports, which represented a final break with the Victorian-era image of the “weak woman.” Driving and flying were no longer merely physical exercises but symbols of mastery over the machine. The press now treated these achievements not only as moral matters but as points of national pride. Iconic figures such as figure skating champion Lili Kronberger or pilot Lili Steinschneider placed Hungary at the forefront of the international sports map. In their cases, the press no longer merely mocked them but used them as evidence of “Hungarian talent” in international competition.

Women’s Gymnastics

The practice of women’s gymnastics originated with the French and gained ground very slowly in Hungary, despite the fact that contemporary pedagogical journals and educational textbooks regularly addressed the topic. Article XXXVIII of 1868, which mandated compulsory schooling for children aged 6-12, made gymnastics mandatory for both boys and girls in state elementary schools in Hungary. However, physical education required suitable sports grounds and gymnasiums, which were largely absent from Hungarian primary schools between the 1870s and 1890s. Women’s physical education in Hungary began to unfold primarily in urban environments in the 1880s. By the end of the century, this form of education became increasingly emphasized in civil girls' schools and teacher training colleges, as contemporary educators and physicians considered it important not only for the body but also for the development of the mind and soul. A significant example in popularizing women’s gymnastics in Hungary was Empress Elisabeth (Sissi), the wife of the Habsburg Emperor and King of Hungary Franz Joseph, who exercised regularly (Hamann, 2008). From the beginning of the 20th century, numerous photographs have survived depicting girls practicing gymnastics for the readers of contemporary newspapers.

Clothing Reform as a Visual Revolution

New sports had a profound impact on the evolution of clothing: several outfits changed in such a way that gender markers were almost completely obscured for the sake of function. This represented the final stage of a process that led from the corset to total physical freedom. Sport compelled a radical simplification of women’s fashion. The abandonment of corsets and the introduction of shortened skirts (or breeches) were not merely matters of convenience but symbols of the liberation of the female body. Thus, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the transformation of women's sportswear was not only an aesthetic shift but the most visible rebellion against patriarchal control over the female body. The clothing reform of the era can be interpreted as a kind of “visual revolution,” during which representative passivity (the woman as a decorative object) was replaced by movement-centered agency (the woman as an acting subject).

The Corset as an Instrument of Biopolitical Oppression

At the end of the Victorian era, the female body was forced into an artificial, unnatural S-curve by the corset. This garment represented not only a physical constraint but also maintained the social construction of female weakness and fragility. The garment served as a tool of biopolitical discipline by restricting breathing, digestion, and movement, thereby physically sustaining the social myth of female “weakness” and “helplessness.” When women began to abandon the corset on the tennis court or the ice rink, medical public opinion accused them of “prolapse of internal organs” and moral licentiousness. In connection with life-reform movements, the “reform dress” movement also appeared in Hungary, emphasizing health-protection efforts that advocated for the restoration of the natural figure. Sport served as the „pretext,” the recognized „exceptional state,” under which women could with impunity cast off the braces that tormented their bodies. In Hungary at the turn of the century, the close intertwining of sport and health protection legitimized corset-free attire. The „looser” lacing appearing on the tennis court or the ice rink was not merely a matter of comfort but also a reclamation of female anatomy from the dictatorship of fashion.

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The Dialectic of the Skirt and the Trousers: The "Breeches" and the "Bloomer"

The greatest social scandal was caused by the visibility or separation of the legs. Among various sports, cycling and fencing forced the most daring innovations in fashion. The knickerbocker-like trousers appearing in the 1890s, named after the American Amelia Bloomer (the Bloomer costume), provoked fierce ridicule in the Hungarian press. The Ladies' Cycling Journal (Kerékpáros Hölgyek Lapja) was therefore forced to recommend "hybrid" solutions: the garment should be trousers on the bicycle, but as soon as the lady dismounts, she must cover her "masculine" attire with a detachable skirt to hide the "scandalous" legs. During tennis and skating, the length of skirts shortened centimeter by centimeter. Every newly visible ankle symbolized the expansion and broadening of female mobility. A recommendation from the journal Fashion Salon (Divatszalon) in 1893 for a knee-length, wide wool skirt for female fencers already clearly proclaimed the victory of function over decoration.

Technological Textiles and Masculine Codes

With the emergence of technical sports (motoring, aviation) at the beginning of the 20th century, masculine elements broke into women's fashion even more decisively. The safe operation of automobiles required not only driving skills but also appropriate clothing: goggles, some form of headgear against the draft, and long coats. Aviation demanded even more serious changes in attire. Pilot Lili Steinschneider's "dove-grey riding breeches" and brown steward's coat represented a deliberate blurring of gender markers for the sake of safety and speed. The press referred to her as "Miss Breeches," which was simultaneously a derogatory nickname and an acknowledgment of the new, modern type of woman. A revolution in accessories also took place: practical caps replaced large, flowery hats, and leather protectors replaced silk gloves. This shift indicated that the woman was no longer the "object of the gaze" (male gaze) but the "controller of the machine."

Changes in Visual Representation in the Media

In Hungary at the turn of the century, a shift was observable in the illustrations of weekly magazines (e.g., Tolnai Világlapja, Új Idők). In the initial phase, the sporting woman was depicted in caricatures as a ridiculous, "masculinized" monster. Later, the sporting woman appeared in the newspaper columns as an aesthetic ornament (e.g., in the form of a lady posing with a tennis racket but not sweating). In the modern depictions of these journals, the dynamic female body represented in motion appeared, in images where musculature and strength became the new ideal of beauty (e.g., female athletes of the 1910s).
In conclusion, it can be said that the clothing reform was not merely about textiles. By making their attire suitable for sport, women reclaimed power over their own bodies. Casting off the corset and donning trousers was the first step toward women demanding a place for themselves not only on the sports field but also in the voting booths and university benches. The visual revolution simultaneously made it possible for society to "get used to" the sight of the active, independent woman. Thus, the clothing reform can actually be interpreted as a political act. The change in sportswear made the autonomous female subject visible and acceptable to society.

CONCLUSION

The Genesis of the Modern Hungarian Woman

The analyses in this study highlight that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in Hungary, women's participation in sports went far beyond mere physical exercise. It was a visual and social revolution, and the history of Hungarian women's sports during that era is a success story of modernization. The initial medical and moral protests were overcome by the demands of the bourgeois lifestyle. Hungarian women became visible in public life through sports, and this physical freedom prepared the ground for later political equality. The transformation of women's sportswear at the time was not merely an aesthetic issue but the most visible form of rebellion against social control over the female body. The clothing reform of the era can be interpreted as a kind of "visual revolution," during which representative passivity was replaced by movement-oriented functionality.

The research proves that in Hungary, women's sport was not a marginal phenomenon but an indicator of social modernization. On one hand, this represented a reclamation of space for women: starting from the ice rinks, through bicycles and swimming pools to the streets, and eventually to the air, they conquered public spaces. Sport legitimized the presence of women in the public eye without it appearing as direct political aggression.

This process was also significant in terms of strengthening body consciousness, as through sport, the female body ceased to be a purely passive, reproductive instrument; it became an active, capable, and disciplined entity. The clothing reform, the abandonment of the corset and the introduction of trousers and shortened skirts,

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physically enabled women for self-determination. The disciplined, trained body no longer represented the Victorian ideal of the "weak woman," but rather the capable modern citizen.

The freedom of sporting activity correlated directly with the struggle for legal and educational equality, making it an important milestone for female emancipation. The Hungarian example, while following Western (English, German, Austrian, French, American) models, showed a unique dynamics within the framework of the Monarchy, where national self-awareness and bourgeois development also sought forms of self-expression on the sports fields. Although medical and moral resistance was significant, athletes and reformers successfully inverted the arguments, elevating movement into a cornerstone of the nation's health and modernity.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the pioneers of Hungarian women's sports, from skaters to female pilots, did not only break records but systematically dismantled the physical and mental barriers that had restricted women's social participation for centuries. The freedom gained on the sports field was a direct precursor to subsequent political and social equality.

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