

Sociological Analysis of the Congolese Handball Development Model from 1970 to 2022

Litoto Pambou Lucien¹, Bayette Jean Bruno², Elega Hygin Bellarmin¹, Massamba Alphonse^{1*}

¹Sociology of Sport Laboratory, Higher Institute of Physical Education and Sports, Marien Ngouabi University, Brazzaville, Congo

²Sociology of Education Laboratory, Faculty of Literature, Arts and Humanities, Marien Ngouabi University, Brazzaville, Congo

Email: *mboya53@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Lucien, L. P., Bruno, B. J., Bellarmin, E. H., & Alphonse, M. (2024). Sociological Analysis of the Congolese Handball Development Model from 1970 to 2022. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 14, 573-591. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2024.1410038>

Received: September 21, 2024

Accepted: October 22, 2024

Published: October 25, 2024

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to show that the development model for top-level handball in the Congo, inherited from France, is unsuited to the local context and to global, harmonious development, i.e. economic, scientific and technological development. For this, the authors use a model obtained from the combination of two theoretical models by Castejon Paz and Novikov and Maximenko. They analyze the sporting elements through Congo's handball achievements and results, the sporting situation and, finally, the sporting level. The results show that the transfer of the Western model to a black African country like the Congo is applied outside its logic.

Keywords

Handball, Sport Development Model, Performance, Integral Development, Sociological Analysis, Congo

1. Introduction

From the colonial period to the present day, the organization of sport in French-speaking Black Africa has been discontinuous. As a colonial power, France sought to bring its culture to its colonies in all areas, including sport (Charitas, 2009). The educational and sporting initiatives undertaken by the colonizers did not recognize the originality and value of indigenous societies, and sought to bring them into modernity without respecting their particularity. In this sense, "colonization operated and acted as if these societies had no past, no history, no personality and no identity" (Abbassi, 2009; Gouda, 1986: p. 46). In fact, the introduction of physical exercise and sports in the territories of French Equatorial Africa and French West Africa was a move by the colonial powers to perpetuate their domineering,

disciplinary and “civilizing” potential. In Brazzaville of Congo, this desire very quickly came up against the indifference and rejection of the natives and indigenous populations, who preferred local sports games such as “Kongo” (a game of dexterity with the hands) played by men and “Nzango” (a game of dexterity with the feet played by women)—a game accompanied by song, alongside other games linked to fighting rituals. In this way, the sporting practices desired by the colonial power became a battleground between the colonized and the colonial administration. It was against this backdrop that the expansion of schooling introduced by Catholic missionaries took place, and sport developed in a climate where preconceived local ideas about the sporting games brought by the “whites” persisted. After the First World War, France encouraged the practice of physical education and sports, as well as military training, in order to improve the physical condition of the population. At the end of the Second World War, however, having no longer imposed military preparation, it was forced to spread athletics, a discipline deemed highly educational. Over time, and before independence in 1960, other disciplines appeared in the Congo: soccer, basketball, volleyball, boxing, judo, tennis, handball and cycling. Some major competitions were developed during this period: Coupe des Tropiques, Championnats des Indigènes, etc. But it wasn’t until the country gained independence that the sporting movement began to develop, with the creation of the first national sports federations, the organization of the first All-Africa Games in Brazzaville in 1965, and the creation of the African and Club Champions Cups. During those pre-independence years and the first five years after independence, the only sports development model adopted in French-speaking black Africa, including the Republic of Congo, was therefore that of performance sport, as proposed by the Olympic Charter, which stipulated that sport could be conceived outside political, economic and cultural constraints. This single industrial, technological and scientific model of sport organization can be presented in three variants according to its political and ideological characteristics: the liberal model, the state model and the mixed model.

7-a-side handball first saw the light of day in the Congo in 1958, and began to be played mainly in schools during the colonial era in French Equatorial Africa. Its expansion was supported by the foreign experience of European expatriates who came to reinforce the national specialists in the teaching of physical education and sport in secondary schools. 1965 was a pivotal year for handball in the Congo. Brazzaville, the capital of the Congo, organized the first All-Africa Games from July 18 to 25, 1965, giving the Congolese public the opportunity to discover the great sporting events on offer. Egypt, Senegal, Tunisia and Côte d’Ivoire put on a great show, motivating the public despite their team’s non-participation in the games. After learning the lessons of this sporting feast, civilian teams were formed in Brazzaville and two other towns in the country. In 1966, Congo took part for the first time in an international match against the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the Republic of Congo (formerly the “People’s Republic of Congo” from 1968 to 1992), during the colonial period, France (as in all other colonies) directed

economic, social and political development according to its own representations, i.e. Western values (Bouvier, 2010; Deville-Danthu, 1998). The French model of sports organization was therefore applied during the colonial period, and continued after independence in 1960 (Gouda, 1986: pp. 54-82). On December 31, 1969, the Congo opted for an official Marxist-Leninist ideology. From then on, the various sectors of social life were influenced by this option, and the organization of sport was socialist from 1969 onwards. However, from 1991 onwards, the economic, social and cultural crisis led to many questions being raised. Marxism-Leninism was rejected as the country's official ideology on March 15, 1992, and all sectors of national life were reorganized on the basis of liberalism and democracy.

In the 1970s, handball in Congo Brazzaville was one of the three most representative sports in the country. It was under the impetus of the Congolese Handball Federation that the Congo made a name for itself in this discipline, taking second place in 1979 in the tricontinental (Asia, America and Africa) qualifying tournament for the Moscow Olympic Games in the USSR (CAHB, 2006). Throughout the 1980s, Congolese handball established its supremacy in Africa, winning three successive editions of the "Coupe Challenge Marien NGOUABI". Then, at the various African Nations Handball Championships, Congolese teams were always ranked among the top three in the various continental competitions (CAHB, 2006). From 1997 to the present day, Congolese handball has experienced a regression in sporting performance, a situation that has preoccupied many of the sport's supporters at the highest level: the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education and the Congolese Handball Federation. Generally speaking, in recent years in Congo Brazzaville, the management or governance of national sports federations has been assumed by major political figures (ministers, deputies, ministers' sons, etc.). The majority of these people are presidents of national sports federations, and have considerable influence in terms of finance and decision-making. This explains the arrival of new players in the management of Congolese national sports organizations. However, one question remains: What changes have they brought about in the administrative, financial and technical management of handball from 1970 to 2022?

From the colonial period to the present day, the Congo has experienced several models of sports organization. First, the French sports organization model was used in the Republic of Congo (formerly the "People's Republic of Congo" from 1968 to 1992); during the colonial period, France (as in all other colonies) directed economic, social and political development according to its own representations, i.e. Western values. The French model of sports organization was therefore applied during the colonial period, and continued after independence in 1960 (Gouda, 1986: pp. 54-82). Second, the socialist model was used. Indeed, on December 31, 1969, the Congo opted for an official Marxist-Leninist ideology. From then on, the various sectors of social life were influenced by this option, and the organization of sport was socialist from 1969 onwards. Third, the liberal model was selected because, from 1991 onwards, the economic, social and cultural crisis led to

many questions being raised. Marxism-Leninism was rejected as the country's official ideology on March 15, 1992, and all sectors of national life were reorganized on the basis of liberalism and democracy.

Therefore, it is here that we set out to understand which of the three models adopted by the various Congolese handball authorities has best contributed to the development of the discipline. To study this problem, we started from a central question formulated as follows: Are the poor performances observed in Congolese handball linked to the management model adopted by sports leaders for the development of the discipline? In other words, can the sports development model dominating international sport serve as a reference, in a transposition approach, to the construction of a national sports system in the Congo, particularly in handball? Two secondary questions constitute corollaries to this main question. The first is as follows: Is sport, and handball in particular, a value of civilization or a lever for development? Despite all the attempts, Congolese handball did not achieve great success until the 1970s. After this period, the Congo never really emerged in any sporting discipline, and never reached the top level of sport (a world place, for example). In the fabric of international relations, whether political, economic or cultural, the Congo occupies a mixed position, i.e. one of dependence. This leads to the second question. By giving meaning to the first sub-question, it is of the utmost importance: isn't developing handball in the Congo tantamount to taking up several challenges, namely eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, providing basic education for all, promoting gender equality and women's autonomy, ensuring access to healthcare for all, modernizing the living environment and, finally, implementing the global partnership for development?

With these questions in mind, we have formulated the following hypothesis: in Congo-Brazzaville, the development of high-level handball depends not only on the level of economic and technological development, but also on how this development affects handball players' levels of practice and lifestyle. The aim of this study is to attempt to show the limits of development models for performance handball in Congo-Brazzaville over the last fifty years, which models are based on global and harmonious development, i.e. economic, scientific and technological development. Using two sport development models, we analyze the technical-administrative organization of Congolese handball and its impact on performance from 1970 to 2022.

To carry out this study, we based our diagnosis on the theoretical models of Castejon (1973) and Novikov and Maximenko (1972). We propose a model obtained from the combination of the Castejon Paz and Novikov and Maximenko models. We analyze the sporting elements through Congo's handball achievements and results, sporting situation and finally sporting level as proposed in the first part of Castejon Paz's analysis model. Next, we present the non-sporting elements, namely the conditioning framework and development factors, which represent the second part of Castejon Paz's analysis model; and it's at this level that Novikov and Maximenko's analysis model comes into play through the six factors that

represent non-sporting factors of sport development. These are national income per capita, the value of the population's diet (expressed in calories), average life expectancy, the percentage of illiterates, the percentage of the urban population and the total number of inhabitants. This study has a triple purpose: first, to provide information on the evolution of the technical and administrative organization of handball; second, to verify the relevance of the management tools of the federal structures of Congolese handball in order to take stock of the administrative, budgetary and technical problems encountered by the clubs, and thirdly to assess the impact of this administrative organization on the sporting performance of the national team.

2. Methodology

2.1. Type and Scope of Study

The study took place from February 10 to August 12, 2023 in the main towns of Congo's nine departments: Brazzaville (political capital), Pointe-Noire (economic capital), Dolisie (capital of the Niari department and forestry town), Nkayi (capital of the Bouenza department and agro-industrial town), Owando (capital of the Cuvette department, located in the Congolese forest basin), Djambala (capital of the Plateaux department), Ouessou (capital of the Sangha department), Impfondo (capital of the Likouala department, located in the Congolese forest basin), Sibiti (capital of the Lekoumou department, located in the Mayombe forest basin). These towns are home to handball clubs that have won handball trophies at national, sub-regional or regional level. The study was exploratory, descriptive and comprehensive, and was carried out at the headquarters of the Congolese Handball Federation, the clubs' head offices, the Departmental Handball Leagues, at the practice site and, in a few cases, at home.

2.2. Data Sources

We carried out a content study of numerous documents: articles published and contained in databases such as Web of Science, Mendeley, SCOPUS and EZB; archives of newspapers published from 1970 to 2022 in Congo; ministerial and federal archives; archives of departmental leagues. Interviews were also conducted with 138 subjects (97 males and 41 females): 32 general secretaries, past and present, from the Federation and Leagues; 34 technical staff, past and present, from the Federation, Leagues and clubs; 35 players, past and present, from clubs; 39 members, past and present, of club boards). They focused on sporting results of Congolese handball and, above all, about the organization of and access to handball sports in the Congo. Finally, local knowledge and observation enabled us to refine our analysis of the data obtained.

To take part in the study, the minimum age of 25 was required. The other criteria were: to be or have been a member of the Congolese Handball Federation; to be or have been a member of one of the departmental leagues; to have been a member of a handball club affiliated to the Federation; to be a former or new

player in the national or departmental team; to be a referee of the African Handball Confederation; to be or have been a coach at national or club level; to have managed the senior national team; to be a sports doctor approved by the Congolese Handball Federation; to be an executive who has managed the federation or league. Not included: federal referees; players who have never taken part in national championships; table officials and technical delegates; players who have played competitive handball for less than five years.

2.3. Method and Interview Protocol

The interviews with the 138 players surveyed were semi-directive, to give the respondent the greatest possible opportunity to provide with information relating to the technical-administrative organization of handball and its repercussions on performance. Indeed, the experience of the Congolese sports environment has shown that it can be more or less difficult to gather information from a sporting population because of the omnipresence of political power in the environment, hence the existence of the presuppositions of intrusion and political surveillance of the environment. On the other hand, a pre-survey showed that face-to-face interviews posed a number of problems for politically inclined players. For others, in order to arouse their desire and interest, it's important to get them to think about the issue individually using an attractive method. Therefore, these feel better taken in isolation than in a group. However, to ensure that our interviewees felt involved, a large number of questions were asked over a period of 20 to 30 minutes, in order to gather as much precise and complete information as possible, as recommended by several authors (Loubet Del Bayle, 2000; Patton, 2002). For this purpose, an interview guide was used to follow a pre-established plan, obeying relatively precise rules, to give the interviewer more information about the respondents. We drew our inspiration from interview guides for adults (Odier, 1985: p. 8). The choice of the semi-structured interview as the data collection method was based on several factors. Firstly, the paper questionnaire situation was rejected, as it would put the respondent in a situation akin to a police interrogation. Secondly, respondents with a low level of education are numerous in Congolese handball may have difficulty reading and writing to the questionnaire. We then considered the solution of social networks such as WhatsApp. However, adopting this approach lead to the respondent's isolation from his or her mobile; in addition, the level of French language writing by our respondents in the formulation of sentences and the length of texts in relation to the number and type of question statements would constitute a methodological limitation. The method chosen was therefore that of a dictaphone interview. The use of a Dictaphone is highly flexible, with the possibility of recording and modulating the length of the interview. However, it features a few disadvantages linked to operational hazards; in addition, the verbal exchange of the soundtrack recording may be too slow or too fast for some interviewees. However, the dictaphone meets all our expectations. The interviews took place in locations indicated by the interviewees, notably at federation

or league headquarters, handball practice sites, or at home for some interviewees.

2.4. Content analysis of Interviews

The tapes were listened to, and then the 138 interviews with the respondents were captured, transcribed in full and translated, in an attempt to keep as close as possible to the young people's discourse. To analyze this corpus, we first carried out a content analysis. This involves applying a range of techniques and methods to uncover the exact meaning of the discourse. Content analysis which is based on the construction of evidence, requires various stages (Mucchielli, 1998). We built our first content analysis grid on the basis of the three longest interviews and most precise, enabled to delve deeper into the various themes studied thanks to our numerous reminders. Our analysis categories and sub-categories were then enriched as we processed the verbatim from the various interviews, enabling us to draw up our definitive analysis grid. Secondly, we classified the data collected on several content analysis sheets corresponding to each theme and sub-theme. This was followed by a cross-sectional analysis of the verbatim of all the sports players interviewed, corresponding to each theme and sub-theme. This cross-sectional analysis reveals both differences and commonalities in the representations of handball management in the Congo, their perception of their situation, depending on individual and contextual variables. All this enabled us to establish a typology of the participants approached.

3. The Reference Organizational Construct for Congolese Sport

The reference organizational construct for Congolese sport is that of France. It has gone through six stages in its evolution. Each is characterized by an objective and an organizational logic. These stages are set out in **Table 1** and **Table 2**.

This table illustrates the situation that prevailed in France between 1900 and 1984. This model was widely disseminated in the former French colonies of Black Africa, notably the Congo.

Table 2 represents the organizational model of sport in France from 1984. This will be consolidated with the triumph of neo-liberalism and the strengthening of the role of national and continental leagues and international federations. The differences between the contents of Tables 1 and 2 show that the contemporary world has inherited a completely reconstructed sports system. Indeed, the ideological model of the "Cold War" has gradually given way to a segmented model in which there is not one sport, but different forms and levels of sporting practice.

The social objective of sport is matched by a local strategy, i.e., a framework for the manifestation of a counter-cultural behavioral model: jogging in your neighborhood doesn't require membership of a club or federation. New organizations (municipalities) have taken over sport at grassroots level. The economic objective

Table 1. Organization of the supply of sports products and services in France.

Actors	Organizational Logics	Sporting models
Civil society: citizens	Associative logic: - Social distinction - Well-being Conviviality	Ideological model Clubs Aristocratic model
State: public or authorized institutions (federations)	Public service logic: - Representation and delegation of authority - Administrative reference - Primacy of public power	Interventionist state model (state control)
State and Federation: mixed players	Public service logic relying on private players: - Political logic - Co-responsibility - State/Federations	Private clubs Private federations under state supervision (limited control)

Table 2. Organization of sports products and services in France.

Actors	Organizational logic	Sporting models
Communes State Citizens	Local logic Community logic Identity logic	Sport for all Community sports Proximity model
Companies Federations Municipalities	Managerial logic Economic logic Financial logic	Public-private partnerships Autonomous federations National leagues High performance
Companies/Federations Municipalities/National and supranational leagues State/Federation/ International Federation	Competition logic Industrial logic Market logic	Market model National League Sports companies Speculation model High performance Continental league

of sport is matched by a managerial strategy in which financial profitability is the key factor: sport becomes a commodity, and the club the modern business that sells entertainment. In this way, sport is linked to economic development and stock market speculation. The demands of the sports market are matched by a competitive strategy: several products are offered to customers by multinationals that dominate the sports field (Gouda, 1997: p. 56). Some sports companies are listed on the Stock Exchange. Amateurism has definitely exploded. Sport has matured into an economic sector.

4. The Situation of Congolese Handball

In Congo, the current situation reveals is that sport is still managed on the basis of the objectives when States were centralized, i.e. the objectives of ideological and amateur sport.

4.1. Organizational Framework and Diagnosis

Handball has been played in Congo Brazzaville since 1958. Federal archives show that handball is mainly played in schools, dating back to the colonial era in French Equatorial Africa (A.E.F.). The Lycée Savorgnan De Brazza, which had the best team, represented Congo at the A.E.F. school games in Cameroon. In 1970, the women's national team was created, followed a year later, in 1971, by the men's national team. In 1974, the African Handball Confederation organized an inter-state African course in Brazzaville for third-level coaches and referees. That same year, the men's and women's national teams came second and first respectively in the qualifiers for the second All-Africa Games, held in Brazzaville in July 1972. This so-called genesis period was a preparatory phase in which administration was in its infancy, and technical organization was reserved exclusively for physical education and sports teachers.

4.2. Technical Organization

In the 1980s, the technical organization stipulated that only certified coaches could coach a club or national team. The national technical director was responsible for proposing training sessions to the coaches, and after discussion between the two parties, a weekly, monthly or annual work plan was drawn up, taking into account competition periods. The national team trained in the mornings and evenings when it was in the preparatory phase of a high-level competition. A daily session lasted six hours, with a three-hour coffee break. The players were subject to a boarding school regime, with no other social activities allowed. The boarding regime also contributed to the effectiveness of the training. Because of the commitment of the players in those days, they were insured by the state to defend the nation and beat their own records. Premiums however minimal, and their appeal was secondary. So it's in the spirit of commitment, dedication and determination that that the players of the National Team called the Red Devils gleaned their trophies.

However, during the 1990s, sports performance declines and the flame of the Red Devils began to die out at continental level. The politicization of handball sports administration, the settlement of conflicts, subjective selection of players within the national team, the government's withdrawal from financing training courses and seminars for national coaches, all contributed significantly to the decline of Congolese handball. Players began to move to Europe to develop their skills at the highest level and "sell" their talents to better structured, financially well-off teams. As the interest in money grew, so did the vagrancy of players from club to club. The armed socio-political conflicts of 1992, 1997 and 1998-2006 have accelerated the mega-management of Congolese sport in general and handball in particular, while ethnic conflicts also destabilized the Congolese sports administration. For decades, Congolese handball has been run from top to bottom by former players, former club managers and coaches, in short, those who have made the sport their passion. There are thus similarities in the administrative management

of handball between Congo and some African countries, including Cameroon (Dikoume & Jabea, 2016). As an African state heir to a French-speaking colonial past, it appears that France has profoundly influenced the centralized mode of organization.

Congo manages sport in a very “bureaucratic and legalistic” way, making national federations the basis of the organizational system in order to promote a few champions on the international stage. But the “star” facade of Congolese teams masks a sports market that is not very diversified or attractive, as its economic weight seems derisory. In short, the model of public co-management of sport in our country seems to be in crisis today as it faces up to the challenges of the commodification of the global sports system. And yet, when we take an inside look at the sporting elite, we can identify a number of players, practices and principles that govern the governance of performance. Anyone involved in the management of performance sport can see that competition between participants is becoming increasingly fierce. It is becoming increasingly difficult to be among the best, and the effort required for an athlete or team to become part of the sporting elite is growing both quantitatively and qualitatively.

One of the consequences of report of affairs is that the structure of sports performance factors is changing. Whereas just a few years ago, the physical, technical and tactical aspects, i.e. purely sporting, factors held the attention of all those involved in producing sporting performance today we have to acknowledge the importance of the managerial factor in the quest for performance (Barreira et al., 2022; Dunning, 1994). Clubs are rationalizing, adopting a more managerial and commercial structure. They are recruiting salaried executives with specialized missions. However, the professionalization of Congolese handball is still a long way off, even if salaried players, managers and company directors can be found within clubs.

Today, no single model of global sports development serves as a recognized benchmark. The club is made up of a wide variety of players: professional athletes (soldiers from the Sports Battalion of the Congolese Armed Forces, playing in the Inter Club military team and that of the General Directorate of Presidential Security), amateur athletes (who represent almost the entire sporting population), no professional trainers, caregivers, sports educators, volunteer managers and administrators. Handball is thus characterized as a series of players whose actions, number and quality of commitments follow a diversified logic as Green and Oakley (2001) point out. Only efficient research can improve the fluidity of relations between the members of the various bodies on the one hand, and between funding bodies and the various players on the other, in order to optimize performance (Halldorsson et al., 2017).

4.3. Administrative Organization

The administrative organization of Congolese handball rest essentially on the offices of the Fédération Congolaise de Handball and those of the departmental

leagues. All these institutions are overseen by the government of the republic via the Ministry of Sport. Each league is independent and organizes its own departmental championship, which is then followed by a national championship bringing together the best teams from the various departments. Each departmental championship produces a departmental selection which is proposed to the national coaches, who are free to confirm certain players to the national team after their performance at the national championship. The sine qua non condition for being recruited to the national team is to first belong to the departmental selection and then “shine” during the national championship. Nowadays, our lack of sponsorship and the meagre funds allocated to the Federation explain why handball’s Red Devils no longer benefit from training camps lasting two to three months before the competition, as they used to, and are no longer put on a boarding school diet before matches. The marked vagrancy of our players from one club to another without spending five years together in a team diminishes the evolution of their sporting performance. Coaches, too, no longer benefit from training courses and seminars designed to enhance their coaching and grading skills.

On the other hand, every time a new federal administration is installed, a national team is assembled in favor of clubs run by men from the ruling political seraglio. The national technical director and national coaches no longer have a monopoly on assembling a national team, but rather have to submit to the squad submitted to them by the federation. However, it is well known that the associative dimension of a federation implies a diversity of statuses among the players: administrative staff, sports technicians and volunteer managers. As a result, organizational and human realities reflect the complexity of a national sports federation (Black, 2010; Rofe, 2021). However, it is clear from our experience and current observations that the design and implementation of a federal sports policy for handball is proving difficult. These require the involvement of players with different objectives and day-to-day realities. Such involvement is not direct, but requires exchanges and back-and-forth between players. Which leads us to Green and Houlihan’s (2008) statement that “a sports policy, however clear, can be diluted, adapted and/or diverted” (p. 72). In fact, Giband and Holz (2007) shows “the need for a theoretical framework that can at least account for the configuration of actors and their actions” (p. 83).

4.4. Management Policy

As part of its general sports management policy, the government is expected to supervise handball schools, to boost the sport in the various departments by organizing school and university games, and then to identify young talent and direct it towards the various national sports federations for elite training. Therefore, handball schools are to be set up in every department of the Congo. It is in this context that the government’s mission is to build high-standard sports facilities in all departments to provide better training. The Congolese Handball Federation and the departmental handball leagues each have the task of organizing youngsters

in all categories to prepare the next generation. The ministerial authorities have the task of helping clubs financially and signing a win-win agreement with private partners in order to subsidize Congolese handball and restore a taste for the sport among the Congolese public. The administrative organization of the leagues and the federation needs to be reviewed, involving and integrating former players, coaches and national technical directors who are passionate about handball. In short, the ministry responsible must organize capacity-building seminars for national coaches, organize high-level training courses for players, and provide the federal administration with the financial means to organize and/or participate in major regional, intercontinental and international competitions. The Congolese Handball Federation must also, have value the players evolving on the national territory and reconstitute the backbone of the national team on the basis of these players.

4.5. Sports Facilities

There are twelve built sports facilities in the Congo, including a handball court. There are three open-air tartan stadiums and twenty cement-surfaced stadiums. Unpaved stadiums are the most numerous, totalling eighty-seven.

4.6. Financing

Until 1980, the Congolese State was heavily involved in financing the handball. The participation of the men's and women's national teams in the various continental tournaments and the World Cup mobilized a large sum of money, the amount of which was not communicated to us. Today, Congolese handball does not benefit from a substantial budget. However, the amount allocated is very poorly used.

4.7. Conditional Framework

The Republic of Congo is characterized by the diversity of its socio-cultural groups. Neither colonization nor independence created a national melting pot from which a national culture would emanate, as seemed to be hoped. Several recent studies have shown that in Congo sporting practice is still under the influence of ethnicity (Magema et al., 2016), religious beliefs and (traditional) bodily practices (Magema et al., 2016; Litoto Pambou et al., 2020).

4.8. The Evolution of Sporting Performance

Four periods characterize the evolution of Congolese handball in terms of performances achieved.

From 1970 to 1990. In 1972, the women's Red Devils made their name in the qualifiers for the Second African Games in Lagos. The Congolese won the tournament ahead of Cameroon and the Central African Republic with an unbeaten record. During the 1970s, Congolese handball players all played in their home countries for various Congolese clubs. Coaches systematically controlled all the

players in their careers. From the 1970s to the 1990s, Congolese handball enjoyed its heyday and was placed at the pinnacle of African handball. The women's Red Devils won four successive African Cups between 1980 and 1986. The Red Devils were Africa's first representatives at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. They played in several World Cups, but never finished in the top ten. In those days, the government organized player training camps lasting two or three months prior to the competition, to get players up to speed. Financial resources were often made available in good time to the Congolese Handball Federation for the players' emoluments, and to the technical staff concerned for travel and preparation. Only the national technical director and the national coaches had the commitment, if not the onerous mission, of putting together a national team without any injunction from the federal administration or the ministry in charge. The players were in excellent physical condition throughout the game, both at club and national team level. The backbone of the national team was essentially, if not 100%, made up of local players who had played together for several years and naturally had plenty of playing time.

The 2000s. The Congo men's national team performed well in African championships during this period: second in 2000, sixth in 2002, fifth in 2004 and third in 2006 and 2008. It took part in three of the five World Championships: twenty-second in 2001, seventeenth in 2007 and twentieth in 2009. During the All-Africa Games, she finished fourth in 2003 and second in 2007.

2010: a mixed record for Congolese handball. This was the darkest period for Congolese handball, with the team only managing to qualify for one World Championship. On the continental stage, the results were clearly catastrophic, with Congo failing to achieve even a single podium finish at the African Championships, finishing fifth in 2010, 2014 and 2018, sixth in 2012 and fourth in 2016. During the All-Africa Games, the team finished second in 2011 and only sixth during the fiftieth anniversary of the All-Africa Games in Brazzaville in 2015.

Starting in 2020. After a ten-year hiatus, the Congo team seems to be getting back into form, enabling it to return to the continental and international scene, notably in 2021, when it finished fourth at the African Championship. This enabled it to return to the international stage at the 2021 World Championship, being the only African team to emerge from the group stages. In 2022, the team won its first medal at an African Championship since 2008, qualifying for the 2023 World Championship in Sweden.

4.9. Development Factors

In this study, we have selected six development indicators as [Green \(2005\)](#), [Lehman \(2010\)](#), [Lyras & Peachy \(2011\)](#) point out. The first is per capita national income in the Congo, which is 13.37 billion/year/capita. The second is the value of food (in calories) equal to 3580 calories/capita/day. For the FAO, the minimum viable value of food is 2400 calories/capita/day. For Klatzmann, it's between 5700 and 2800 calories/capita/day, and for the sportsman, the average value of the diet

would be greater than or equal to 2,500 calories/capita/day. The third is average life expectancy, estimated at 63.78 years in 2020. The fourth indicator is the percentage of the population living in urban areas, which stands at 38.9%. The fifth is the percentage of illiterates, which, according to a report by the Demographic Studies Department of the Centre National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, is 20 percent. The sixth indicator is the total population of the Republic of Congo, estimated at 5.836 million in 2021.

Table 3 compares four socio-economic indicators between the Congo and two other types of African country.

Table 3. Comparison of four socio-economic indicators between Congo and two other African countries.

Socioeconomic indicators	Congo	Ghana	Angola
Life expectancy ($\cdot 10^{-1}$)	63.78 years	63 years	62.26 years
Literacy rate ($\cdot 10^{-1}$)	80%	79.04%	71.1%
PNB/hbt	5 980 dollars PPA (2021)	191.1 billiards dollars PPA (2021)	5 980 dollars PPA (2021)
PIB/hbt	67.4 billiards USD (2021)	2 363,30 USD (2021)	67.4 billiards USD (2021)

Source: Human Development Report, UNDP, 2021.

5. Interview Data

All the data presented above, which have an impact on the development of Congolese handball, are consistent with the opinions expressed by our interviewees. Below are a few extracts.

5.1. Members of the Congolese Handball Federation

Do you receive regular funding from the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education?

“The Ministry hardly funds the Federation because we roll up our sleeves to get things done. It’s a real gymnastics exercise”.

“On the eve of the competitions, the specifications presented to the government are not taken into account and the players find it difficult to pass their bet over”.

What are the criteria for recruiting coaches and players to the national team?

“To recruit a coach for the national team, he must have the required diploma, which attests to his profile and analyses his performance with his home club”.

“To recruit a player for the national team, we use his position and know-how during the national championship”.

What were the years of praise for the Congolese Red Devils?

“The women’s Red Devils won four consecutive African Cups in 1980, 1982, 1984 and 1986. They took part in the World Cup without shining”.

“Unlike the ladies, the men haven’t yet reached the pinnacle of African or world handball. Their best performance was in the quarter-finals of the African Cup”.

5.2. Members of Departmental Handball Leagues

How does your institution work?

“Our institution runs on team memberships, fees for participation in the various championships, fines, donations and legacies”.

“The departmental council, puts in place the general and particular regulations to apply them and have them applied. We’re also reaching out to sponsors, to handball’s passionate executives, to help us bring this institution to a successful conclusion”.

How do you qualify a player for the departmental championship on behalf of his or her club?

“A player qualifies by showing proof of identity, a birth certificate and a medical certificate issued by a doctor sworn in for the sport”.

“We check the player’s originality and mentality before issuing a license”.

5.3. Trainers

Do you have any employment contracts with your club?

“Our contract is not initialed, nor applicable to the letter, it emerges from the willingness of the club president to provide assistance of his convenience.”

“The contract with the club is verbal and not subject to any legal proceedings. So in the club we live from day to day”.

Do the clubs have adequate sports facilities for training?

“They don’t have adequate sports facilities, but they do have spaces set aside for handball practice.

“We find it hard to develop the players’ qualities, and these uneven pitches are a drag on handball’s sporting performance”.

5.4. Old and new players

Are your dietary requirements assured?

“The clubs only take care of us at the end of training when we’re given the trip, which serves as a ration. This trip is also to come back for tomorrow’s training sessions.

“We don’t eat before or after training sessions, it’s our managers who confuse the trip with the ration after intense work, so we’re put at the parents’ disposal”.

Do you have any contracts with your clubs?

“We don’t have contracts with our clubs, we simply do voluntary work”.

“Our presidents don’t want to sign contracts with us, because they don’t think players are ever punctual with the club for 10 years”.

5.5. Club Managers

Are your players insured?

“Yes, we pay for insurance for 10 places, valid for one year.

“We only ensure former players who have already spent more than 10 years with the club without being subject to vagrancy”.

Why is the sporting performance of Congolese handball going downhill?

“In recent years, handball has been in difficulty because the clubs are not supported by the state; we subsidize our clubs alone. So the players strut around the clubs for the money”.

“The lack of effective discussion with the players about their treatment affects their work on the court and lowers their performance, and the lack of seminars on the evolution of the rules of the game is a decline”.

Furthermore, the literature shows that fund-raising is one of the best ways for a sports organization to generate its own income and achieve financial independence. However, the statements of most respondents reveal that members of Congolese handball federal structures and clubs encounter difficulties in implementing programmed activities due to a lack of funding. Indeed, obtaining funds in whatever form is an ongoing necessity in order to achieve the objectives set.

In short, Congolese handball is not enjoying great success after the boom years of 1970 to 1980. Our results show that the sporting elements are almost non-existent. Human resources for high-level handball are inadequate, and this is not surprising given the Congo’s sporting population and the sporting infrastructure available to the general public (stadiums in gymnasiums are not allocated to clubs). The Congolese state has invested a fair amount of money in sport, but this has not been used to promote handball due to a lack of political vision. And yet, the Congo has no real shortage of sports managers capable of developing the discipline. Nevertheless, it has to be said that, thanks to handball, the Congo has achieved a certain international renown without really convincing anyone. The real problem facing handball in the Congo is the lack of a material base. The living conditions of the Congolese people do not allow them to practice and excel in physical and sporting activities, including handball. The proof is that Congolese handball players who represent the Congo in international competitions and tend to excel don’t live in the Congo. They live in richer countries (Europe) or better organized African countries (Angola). This is the case of Fabienne Ferraez, who lives in France and trains there in favorable conditions, incomparable to those of handball players living in Congo. The Congo is a poor country, and poverty is not

conducive to sporting activity. To raise the level of handball, we must first eliminate extreme poverty, provide basic education for all, ensure access to healthcare for all, improve the living environment, promote gender equality and create a global partnership for development. The hypothesis has been verified and shows that non-sporting elements contribute to the development of handball by providing the necessary material, financial and human foundations. In this case, the Congo cannot be the heir to the transposed French model. It must invent its own sports development model based on its own genius, conditions and endogenous resources.

6. Implications and Lessons to Be Learned

Our results therefore highlight:

- *Voluntary, “day-to-day” sports management with no managerial strategy*

At the level of the Congolese Handball Federation’s component parts (clubs, committees, leagues, etc.), it is clear that almost all sports leaders lack a managerial spirit. Four club models can be distinguished the notabiliaire model, where the club is controlled by notables who hold political and/or economic positions (e.g. Etoile du Congo); these are the most numerous clubs; the community model, where clubs are managed by leaders from the public or the club (e.g. Club JMT), but these clubs are rare; the municipal model, where clubs are controlled by the municipality (e.g. the Munisport club in Nkayi), but this is the only example; the company model, where the club is dependent on the company that created it (e.g. the AS Cheminots club), but this is the only example in the country.

- *Notorious amateurism and scarcity of foreign players*

In almost all clubs, the players are maintained on a day-to-day basis by the club president, in the absence of a minimum salary that would ensure a sporting lifestyle. In the absence of significant revenue from entertainment, sponsorship and competition broadcasting, clubs are unable to generate substantial income by transferring their best players from the big clubs.

- *A sports federation without resources or managerial logic*

The federation appears to be a structure devoid of resources, which is not conducive to the development of handball as a whole. The low budget allocated by the Ministry of Sport reflects, in part, the lack of importance attached by the political authorities to the development of the discipline. All funding for the sport (infrastructure construction, subsidies, management training, preparation of the elite) comes from the state, while the participation of other public (local authorities) and private agents remains insignificant.

7. Conclusion

Our results show that the transfer of the Western model to a black African country like the Congo is being applied outside its logic; it is unsuited to the local context, which cannot bear the burden imposed for the development of this discipline. Indeed, even if handball in the Congo is the product of French broadcasting, the way

it is presented in our country does not correspond to a way of life. The level of development of the Congo's industrial and technological production system does not allow for the creation of an environment capable of serving as a basis for the development of handball. We therefore feel it is important to stress that the French model is not the only solution, and that a handball development model specific to the Congo must be found. We therefore need to think in terms of a global society, in order to integrate the issue of creating a Congolese handball development system into the process of building an emerging Congo.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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