

The outdoor-life ideal in German-Brazilian gymnastics societies
(1880-1938)^{1 2}

*O ideário de vida ao ar livre nas sociedades ginásticas teuto-brasileiras
(1880 -1938)*

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Abstract: This paper presents results from researches about an outdoor-living ideal found within the gymnastics societies created by German immigrants in South and Southeast Brazil. In these societies, nature and its elements appear as essential to educational procedures (inside or outside of schools), as well as to the healthcare and the amusement of this group of immigrants, who saw themselves as “pioneers” and “trailblazers” of the Brazilian nature. This paper’s goal is to comprehend the relations between education, healthcare, and outdoor living present in these associations created between the end of the 19th century and the 1930s, when the nationalization politics of the Vargas government were set in motion. The sources for this research are periodicals, festive publications, statutes, photographs, and newspaper clippings. Thus, this paper aims at contributing for the comprehension of the outdoor-living ideal constituted by these societies, considered by immigration researchers as merely “recreational”.

Keywords: nature; outdoor life; gymnastics societies; German immigration; education of the body

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Resumo: O artigo apresenta resultados de pesquisas sobre um ideário de vida ao ar livre no interior das sociedades ginásticas tento-brasileiras nas regiões sul e sudeste do país, em que a natureza e seus elementos se mostraram como centrais em procedimentos educativos (escolares ou não), de saúde e de divertimento desse grupo imigrante, constantemente representado como “pioneiro” e “desbravador” da natureza brasileira. O objetivo é compreender as relações entre educação, cuidados do corpo e vida ao ar livre, presentes nas associações constituídas por este grupo entre o final do século XIX e a década de 1930, período em que se iniciaram as políticas de nacionalização do governo Vargas. As fontes utilizadas neste artigo são: periódicos; publicações festivas; estatutos; fotografias e recortes de jornais. Pretende-se, assim, contribuir para uma leitura do ideário de vida ao ar livre constituído por essas associações, consideradas pelos estudiosos da imigração como meramente “recreativas”.

Palavras-chave: natureza, vida ao ar livre, sociedades ginásticas, imigração alemã, educação do corpo

1 - German-Brazilian gymnastics societies: between recreation, health, and education

Studies about German immigration to Brazil often evoke associative life as a common characteristic of the areas colonized by this group. As pointed out by Frederik Luebke (1987) “societies were created wherever German-Brazilians were numerous enough in one place to organize and maintain them” (p. 47). Indeed, as indicated by Giralda Seyferth’s studies (1999, 2000), associations created by German immigrants in Brazil can be found even before the beginning of their systematic immigration to the country. It is the case of Gesellschaft Germania, created in Rio de Janeiro in 1821 by tradesmen from different European territories identified with German language and culture.

The traces indicated by Seyferth in a way corroborate Luebcke’s somewhat generalist assertion that German immigrants would create associations wherever they were numerous enough to keep these associations working. However, one may observe that this associational tendency is much more connected to matters related to the immigrant’s level of education and to the areas they came from, as well as where they settled in. It is only from the middle of the 19th century on, when individuals with higher levels of education and coming from urban areas started to settle in Brazil, that the German-Brazilian associational life gained an impulse. As Erneldo Schallenberger (2009) points out, German-Brazilian associative life gained form and

expression in the complex urban development among intellectuals and sectors linked to business and industry.

The associations founded by these immigrants had various purposes. Benevolent societies (Hilfsvereine), school societies (Schulvereine), and church associations (Kirchvereine) were usually the first to appear and frequently worked together. Many school societies, for instance, were attached to church associations, both Catholic and Lutheran. This was not, however, the predominant type of association, even though it clearly met the main initial demands of the immigrants — education, welfare, and religious service (especially in the protestant case). According to Seyferth (1999), the most numerous associations in areas with German settlements were those classified by this author as “recreational”, from which we can highlight those of singing, shooting, and gymnastics (the so-called Turnvereine). This group also included other associations whose main activities were amusements amid nature, such as hiking groups in São Paulo and Curitiba, and hunting societies, found particularly in the area of Blumenau.

Like the singing and shooting societies, gymnastics societies were created and structured based on a model already known, which started to be established in Germany mostly from the 1840s on. In their home country, these gymnasts were closely involved with political movements and the struggles for the unification of the German states. When they arrived in Brazil, even though they did not get too involved in political issues, they contributed to the development of the associational life and to the preservation of an ideal of Germanness³ in our country.

The first German-Brazilian gymnastics societies date from the end of the 1850s and were established in the cities of Joinville and Rio de Janeiro. According to a survey made by Lothar Wieser (1991), 55 Turnvereine were created in south and southeast Brazil until World War I. A survey carried out by Turnerbund Porto Alegre in 1932 indicates the existence of 57 Turnvereine in these areas, concentrated mainly in Rio Grande do Sul.

³ Germanness (*Deutschtum*) is a notion created by German nationalism in the beginning of the 19th century, and it involves elements such as language, culture, and loyalty to the German nation as parts of what constitutes their nationality (Seyferth, 1982). It derives directly from the concept of *Volkstum*, created by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn as a substitute for expressions related to nationality that he considered as having “foreign origins”, such as *National* (“national”), *Nationalität* (“nationality”), *Nationaleigentümlichkeit* (“national specificity”).

The purpose of the Turnvereine was the physical, spiritual, and moral strengthening of their associates through the regular practice of Turnen, a systematization of physical exercises created by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in the beginning of the 19th century⁴. During the eight decades that went by between the foundation of the first German-Brazilian gymnastics societies and the beginning of the nationalization politics that placed a burden upon associations created by immigrants, these gymnastics societies aimed at acting as outposts of Germanness and reaching as many individuals of their colonies as they could. The main target of these societies was the German-Brazilian youth, and they tried to work, whenever possible, in a constant cooperation with other associations, especially schools, offering their facilities and instructors and, in some cases, becoming directly responsible for the physical education of boys and girls enrolled in German schools (Quitau, 2011; 2016).

The work in cooperation with schools intensified the activities of the gymnastics societies. During the week, their facilities were in constant use, since they received students during the day and became a meeting place for their associates at night, when they gathered in gymnastics sessions, training their bodies in exercises in parallel bars, the pommel horse, rings, and other apparatuses. In the weekends, these associates would gather again, but this time outdoors, in their playgrounds, wooded places out in the open, where they could exercise in running, jumping, throwing, swimming, and new games that were introduced during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, such as fistball, football, and handball⁵.

⁴ An extensive study about *Turnen* in Brazil was carried out by Quitau (2011, 2016), in which the author analyses the development of gymnastics in Germany and Brazil, working with the first gymnastics manuals written in that country in the turn of the 18th to the 19th century. About *Turnen* in Germany, see Krüger (1996, 2010); on its spread to other countries, such as the United States, see Hofmann (2001, 2015).

⁵ Fistball (*Faustball*) was a very common game in German-Brazilian gymnastics societies. It is similar to volleyball, but the net is placed closer to the ground and the ball must always be hit with a fist.



Fig. 1 - Presentation at the playground of Turnerschaft von 1890 in São Paulo (Turnerschaft von 1890, 1931)

Archive of the Instituto Martius-Staden

By establishing that this paper aims to study the relations between education, body care, and outdoor life within the context of German-Brazilian associational life, we indicate, even though implicitly, a geographical delimitation that comprehends the South and the Southeast of Brazil, areas that received the greatest amount of Germans throughout the period of over one-hundred years they immigrated to our country. However, we also need to establish a timeframe that allows us to deepen our perspective of this issue.

The timeframe of this paper could go from 1858 (when the first German-Brazilian gymnastics society was founded) to 1938. However, we choose a slightly smaller timeframe, which goes from the 1880s, when German-Brazilian associational life started to gain strength and spread, until the moment these societies were forced to go through a nationalization process⁶ at the end on the 1930s, thus going through profound structural changes.

⁶ From 1938 on, Getúlio Vargas's government published a series of decrees that aimed at nationalizing institutions created by immigrants. Among these decrees, we can highlight numbers 383 and 406 that forbade, respectively, the foundation of foreign organizations and political parties in Brazil, and the teaching of foreign languages for children

Throughout the six decades comprehended by our timeframe, the associations we analyze produced different kinds of materials that can help us understand the relations between education, body care, and outdoor life within German-Brazilian associational life. Considering that “everything can be interrogated by a historian with the idea of finding there some information about the past” (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 189), and that these documents are creations of time, selected, kept, or even destroyed by individuals and institutions, intentionally or accidentally (Le Goff, 1992), we need to look for those documents that, among all the possible historical testimonies, allow us to get closer to the issue of education, body care, and outdoor life in German-Brazilian associations.

Le Goff (1992, p. 535) understands documents as a choice made whether by forces that operate on the development of the world and humanity through time or by those who dedicate themselves to the science of the past and of the time that goes by. In the case of this research, the documents are mostly “unofficial” — testimonies that have survived through time by chance, due to subjective actions that allowed their conservation and ended up bringing them to the archives and collections we have visited. This obviously represents a certain limitation of this research, since not all German-Brazilian gymnastics societies have left traces behind that allow us to comprehend their existence, their actions, or, in this specific case, the ideation of outdoor life that possibly pervaded them.

On the other hand, even if their survival through time may result from unintentional actions, the fact that certain individuals produced the different records that we use here also indicates the attempts to create a collective memory and a concern with posterity from those who lived during the researched period and tried to register not only the different practices that were part of their associational life, but also the precepts that guided their existence. Thus, the selected set of documents results from random processes, but also from an effort of these institutions to impose to the future — whether voluntarily or involuntarily — a certain image of themselves (Le Goff, 1992, p. 548).

under 14, instituting the adoption of educational materials only in Portuguese. About the migratory policies established during the Vargas’ government, see Geraldo (2007).

The set of documents analyzed consist mainly of: 1) *gymnastics periodicals*, edited by the clubs and that circulated mostly during the 1930s (in this category we also include the *Deutsche Turnzeitung*, an official organ of the *Deutsche Turnerschaft* from Germany, where we found fundamental traces of outdoor life in German-Brazilian gymnastics societies); 2) *commemorative magazines*, published on the occasion of festivities that celebrated anniversaries and special dates; 3) *statutes*; 4) *photographs*; 5) *clippings of German-language newspapers published in Brazil*.

The clippings we use here report some of the excursions carried out by the German-Brazilian gymnastics societies and point out to the space they had, in these newspapers, to promote their actions and activities. Among German-language newspapers that circulated in Brazil during the timeframe of this research we can highlight: 1) *Deutsche Zeitung* (Porto Alegre); 2) *Der Urwaldsbote* (Blumenau); 3) *Deutsches Volksblatt* (São Leopoldo); 4) *Kolonie Zeitung* (Joinville); 5) *Koseritz Deutsche Zeitung* (Porto Alegre); 6) *Neue Deutsche Zeitung* (Porto Alegre); 7) *Deutsche Post* (São Leopoldo); 8) *Der Kompass* (Curitiba); 9) *Deutsche Zeitung* (São Paulo).

These documents were found in the following public and private institutions: 1) *Instituto Martius-Staden*, São Paulo; 2) *Arquivo Histórico José Ferreira da Silva*, Blumenau; 3) *Museu Antropológico Diretor Pestana*, Ijuí; 4) *Arquivo Histórico Visconde de São Leopoldo*, São Leopoldo; 5) *Arquivo Histórico de Joinville*, Joinville; 6) *Biblioteca Nacional*, Rio de Janeiro; 7) *Biblioteca do Institut für Sportwissenschaft* of the *Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster* (WWU-Münster), Münster/Germany; 8) *Zentralbibliothek der Sportwissenschaft der Deutschen Sporthochschule Köln*, Cologne/Germany; 9) *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek*, Leipzig/Germany; 10) archives of the gymnastics societies.

Returning to Ricoeur's idea that anything can become a source for the understanding of the past if it can be *questioned* by the historian (Ricoeur, 2007) — a notion that is also in Bloch (2002) and Le Goff (2012) —, the fact that the abovementioned documents were produced in the timeframe of this research does not mean that they are automatically sources. Unlike an oral testimony, which is directly given to a listener, a document is only a trace of its producer (even when it is intentionally made to survive the actions of time), and therefore can only become understandable to those who are able to question it (Ricoeur, 2007).

It is important to recognize that these testimonies are not mirrors of a past, that facts are not simply silently waiting for historians to extract them from the documents. They are constructions established by those who have guarded them and by those who interrogate them. The document, therefore, “is not simply given, as the idea of trace might suggest. It is sought for and found. What is more, it is circumscribed, and in this sense constituted, instituted as document through questioning” (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 189). It is a result from this process of locating and questioning, from the comparison with other records of the reality in which they were produced. It is only through this process that one can extract from texts and images the bases to establish an interpretation of the relations between body education and outdoor life within German-Brazilian associational life. Thus, every document is a written testimony that must work in dialogue with other traces.

In this process of creating a historical knowledge from the documents left by the institutions we analyze, the act of questioning is therefore fundamental. In this sense, there is an interdependency between document, fact, and questioning: one can only establish interrelations between ideas and events, one can only assure the intelligibility of the information present on the documents, by questioning them, by approaching them with hypothesis, with underpinned questions. This need to compare different documents, to *question*, indicates, therefore, the need for references that allow us to analyze these different materials concerning the relations between education, body care, and outdoor life in German-Brazilian associational life.

If the societies created for the practice of German gymnastics, the so-called *Turnen*, are our starting point to understand these relations, we first need to comprehend the relations between gymnastics and nature in Germany. One of the main sources for this process are the gymnastics handbooks written by Guts Muths⁷ and Jahn, which are the foundations for the constitution of this practice in Germany throughout the 19th century. An important reference to the discussion of the relations between *Turnen*, nature and outdoor life is Keith Thomas’s (2010) study on the changes in the relations between men and nature that shows the gradual transformation of this space into a place for education, healing, and amusement.

⁷ On the place of nature in Guts Muths’s systematization, see Quitzau and Soares (2016).

If Thomas' studies allow us to comprehend how the relations between men and the natural world have change through time, it is especially in the works of Corbin (1986, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2013a, 2013b), Rauch (2001), and Vigarello (1996) that we looked for references on how these new sensibilities generated new uses of the natural elements in different aspects of individual and social life, which go from hygiene to amusement. Among these other authors, we also highlight Williams's (2007) study on hiking, nudism, and scouting in Germany in the beginning of the 20th century. Lastly, we highlight Sallas's research (2013) on the works of German travelers such as Martius, Rugendas, and Wied-Neuwied, whose writings and paintings about the Brazilian fauna and flora certainly contributed to the creation of a certain image that Germans had of the local nature and influenced the perspective of the German-Brazilian gymnasts during their forays through the woods and mountains, especially at the end of the 19th century.

2 - An ideal of outdoor life is created

The open-air exercises performed in the playgrounds of these associations were mostly elements that constituted German gymnastics since its first systematizations at the end of the 18th century. When Johann Christoph Friedrich Guts Muths (1928) wrote his handbook on gymnastics, in the 1790s, he contemplated his systematization as an orderly return to nature, as a practice that happened essentially outdoors. This notion is clear on *Gymnastics for youth* (1928), when he says that “our gymnasium is, as far as is practicable, the open air. We would inure our boys to the variations of nature, where fair alternates with foul: to what purposes, therefore, should we erect spacious edifices?” (p. 210).

Nature is a central feature of Guts Muths's systematization, which insists on the necessity of educating the body out in the open. Throughout his book, he presents an appreciation for nature that indicates how deeply this author was connected to the ideas that circulated in Europe in the 18th century. New and even unprecedented representations of nature and its elements are produced during this century, portrayed as good, generous, benevolent, and beautiful. It is worth observing the place that the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau have in Guts

Muths's work regarding this theme, since this Genevan author is considered the advocate of the notion of a recovered nature. It is especially in his work *Emile* (1762) that Rousseau develops the place of nature and its elements in the education of children and youth in a more accurate and detailed way. It is also in this book that he enunciates the physical nature as capable of fully educating people through the apprehension of senses and feelings⁸.

These notions and concepts developed by Rousseau contribute to the constitution of a new perspective in relation to the idea of nature, something that Lenoble (1990) explains in his work when he affirms that Nature becomes, once more, the fruitful Mother of men, who start asking her again for the regulation of their manners. The author also posits that, during this time, science continues, always through safer ways, its methodical exploration of Nature.

According to Villaret (2016, p. 72), Rousseau's work provides not only a canonical argument regarding nature's educational virtues, but also formalizes a proposition of full education that grants a place of honor for physical exercises. Villaret also defends that we need to consider the influence that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works had not only in France, but also in Germanic countries. Witness of a tendency regarding representations of nature, the Rousseauian writings widely circulate within the intellectual elites of all Europe, and particularly in the center of the German states and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Rousseau's work contributes to the growth of the philanthropic movement initiated by Johann Bernhard Basedow, to whom children's education should be structured far from cities and in touch with nature. Likewise, Rousseau's writings also influenced and favored the ideas surrounding natural healing that reached its peak at the end of the 19th century in countries like Germany, where water, air, and sun, as well as dietary and clothing changes, start to constitute new therapies (Villaret, 2016). Guts Muths (1928) based his work on physical exercises alongside nature on the work he carried out within the Philantropinum and on Rousseau's writings. His gymnastics would be responsible for leading "the pupil into the open air, where, in the ardour of exercise, he is regardless of rain and wind, heat and cold; where he steels his muscles, integuments, and nerves; where bodily fatigue of various kinds become pleasant to him" (p. 177).

⁸ See, among others, the masters' thesis of Rachel Souza (2016), entitled "*Educação do corpo pela natureza na obra Emílio de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*". In this work, the author systematically explores the relations that Rousseau established of nature as an educator of the human being.

Running, throwing, shooting, balancing, leaping amid trees and in terrains of various topographical characteristics were basic exercises in Guts Muths's (Fig.2) proposition and were considered extremely beneficial, especially when carried out in contact with cold air, as well as cold water, thus contributing for the strengthening of nerves, muscles, and teguments.

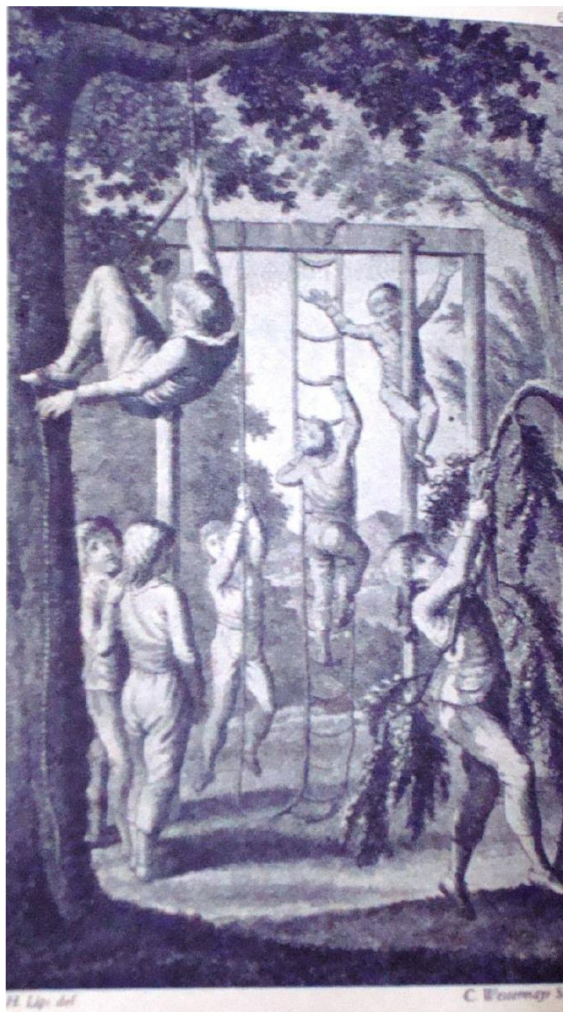


Fig. 2 - Children in climbing exercises

Source: Guts Muths (1928)

In this work, one notices evidences of a transformation of human attitude toward the natural world, and Guts Muths expresses the one that was closest to the first steps of modern science regarding physical exercises amid nature. This is because, on the one hand, we have conceptions and notions filled with religious symbols, and on the other hand, those produced by science, or even those created from the simple relation of human beings with multiple forms

and uses of nature and its elements. At the same time, one can observe the use of elements as a metaphor for the human body, to the extent that Guts Muths (1928) compares the relations between body and mind to the growth of plants, saying:

destroy the roots of the healthiest plants, their heads will droop and die. Many excellent qualities of the mind have their roots, in fact, in the body: their summits, which adorn the spiritual being, the mind will wither, if we neglect the soil of these valuable plants, and thus injure their roots. (p. 89)

Thus, there are *natures*, perceived and lived according to what can be known and conceived in each period. Thomas (2010) claims that “between 1500 and 1800 [...] there occurred a whole cluster of changes in the way in which men and women, at all social levels, perceived and classified the natural world around them” (p. 19). This period would also determine the emergence of new sensibilities⁹ towards animals, as well as plants and, more widely, landscape. As Schama (1996) wrote, “of course the very act of identifying (not to mention photographing) the place presupposes our presence, and along with us all the heavy cultural backpacks that we lug with us on the trail. The wilderness, after all, does not locate itself, does not name itself” (p. 17).

It is, therefore, a period that insists in “liberating” nature from the domains of devils, from hazards, and from an aesthetic of ugliness, as highlighted by Villaret (2005). It restores nature operating for education, health, and amusements, as conceived by Guts Muths, whose ideas and ideals somewhat remained in the outdoor life ideation that was created within the gymnastics societies studied here.

One of the ideas developed during the 18th century that remains in the constitution of what we call an ideation of outdoor life is that nature is good and generous, a source of virtues, kindness, and beauty. Numerous educational possibilities, as well as therapeutic procedures and various forms of amusement, arise from this understanding and gradually substantiate very precise propositions while being disseminated by different institutions, as well as by the press in its various forms. The ideal of returning to nature found in Guts Muths’ handbook cannot

⁹ Regarding *sensibility in history*, we refer to Barran ([s.d.]), Corbin (1986, 1994, 2000), and particularly Corbin’s studies on a *history of sensibility regarding nature and its elements*, such as Corbin (1991, 2001, 2005, 2010, 2013a, 2013b), Corbin, Courtine, and Vigarello (2016, 2v.), Febvre (1989, 2000, 2003), Haroche, (2008), Huizinga (2010), Vigarello (2014), among others.

be found, however, in the writings of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, which underpinned both the development of *Turnen* in Germany throughout the 19th century, as well as the actions of the German-Brazilian gymnastics societies. Although Jahn also took his *Turners* to exercise out in the open, he had a much more interventionist relation with nature: if for Guts Muths nature offered the obstacles that had to be overcome by the pupils, for Jahn nature offered the materials to build the gymnastics apparatuses they would use. For this author, the establishment of gymnastics grounds out in the open was related more with his intention to make his *Turnen* visible to all, than to an orderly return to nature aiming to obtain physical and moral benefits from the contact with its elements. Although Jahn establishes clear criteria regarding the kinds of trees that should surround the gymnastics grounds, nature does not play a central role in his book.

Despite its origins as an outdoor practice, *Turnen* arrives in Brazil already as an indoor practice. By the time the *Turnvereine* started to appear in our country, they were organized in rented spaces, hotel lounges, and schoolyards that were gradually replaced by their own buildings, paid for with resources gathered by the gymnasts. However, just as they strived to acquire a building where they could not only exercise, but also constitute libraries and spaces for social meetings and theatrical and musical presentations, they strived also to acquire playgrounds, where they could exercise outdoors.

For these associations, exercising and playing outdoors was understood as an important element in the fight against the hazards that growing cities could present, especially to young people. Running, leaping, and swimming, which were already present in the first German systematizations of physical exercises, appear in these German-Brazilian societies as a complement to the gymnastics sessions that happened in enclosed spaces, as a counterpoint to life in this incipient urban, industrial environment, full of potential vices, considered extremely fertile for the development of physical and moral afflictions.

On her study about the city of São Paulo, Soares (2016) states that a new developing urban order constitutes new relations with nature, evoking the *fresh air* and the *outdoor life* as a pedagogy of the body and as therapeutic for diseases caused by the new urban rhythms in which nervous breakdowns, tuberculosis, and other pulmonary problems were present. These notions

about outdoor life are also often found in the German-Brazilian societies, though justified based on a German literature, and not on the writings of Brazilian physicians and hygienists.

The studies about the gymnastics associational life in Brazil, such as the ones made by Wieser (1991) and Quitzau (2011, 2013, 2016), have focused more on aspects regarding the organizational aspects of these associations and their relations with *Germanness*. However, they point out to *outdoor life* as an important element in the daily routine of the *Turnvereine* and in their project for the education of the German-Brazilian population, especially its youth.

3- Physical exercises, hiking, and playgrounds

The documentation produced by the German-Brazilian gymnastics societies reveals that bodily practices outdoors were an important complement to *Turnen*, enabling it to become an even more multifaceted, harmonious, and beneficial form of education of the body. Exercising outdoors — swimming, riding bicycles, rowing, or playing — amid the trees and under the tropical sun appeared in these contexts as a healthy activity from a hygienic and a social points of view. In fact, there are evidences that these practices sometimes brought men and women together, allowing them to carry out these exercises together, as we can observe in the photographic records from Porto Alegre and Rio de Janeiro.

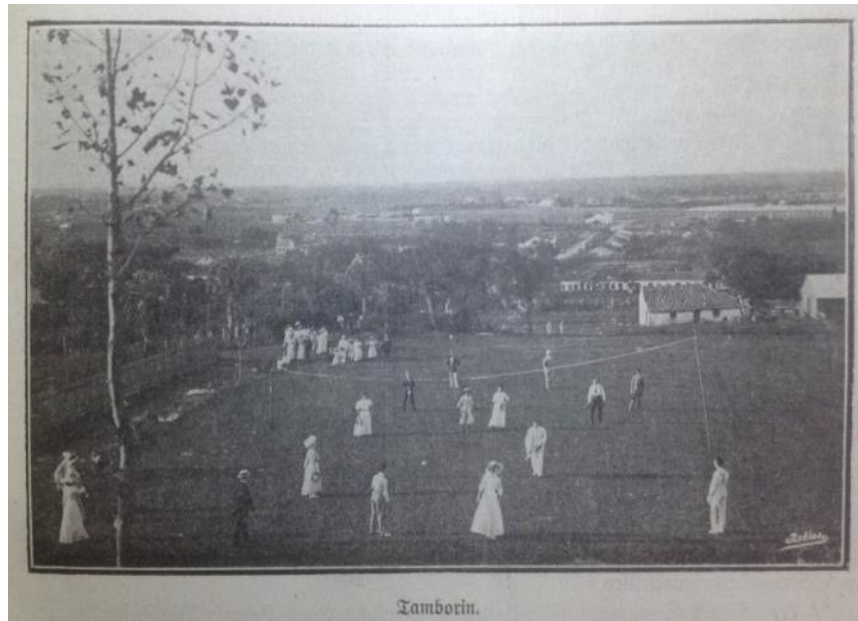


Fig. 3 - Members of *Turnerbund Porto Alegre* playing *Tamburinball* in the association's playground. We can notice that men and women form the teams. (*Turner-Bund Porto Alegre*, 1917, p. 21)

Source: Donated by the researcher Lothar Wieser (Germany)



Fig. 4 - Members of *Deutscher Turn- und Sportverein Rio de Janeiro* in an excursion to Castelos, Serra dos Órgãos (1932)

Source: Private collection of Clube Ginástico e Desportivo Rio de Janeiro

The activities performed in the playgrounds of the gymnastics societies seem to have played an important role as *complements* of *Turnen*. However, great attention was also paid to two other practices that extrapolated the limits of these associations and presented a closer and deeper contact with Brazilian nature: hiking and scouting¹⁰, the latter of which, from the evidence we have found so far, was limited to the context of Rio Grande do Sul.

Hiking (*Wanderungen*), which was part of a broader category of practices known as *Turnfahrten* (gymnastics trips), seem to have been present in the German-Brazilian gymnastics societies since the first associations of this kind were created. There are records of forays through nature in the 1860s already, when a group of members of *Turnverein Rio de Janeiro* endeavored to climb the Sugarloaf Mountain (Quitau, 2016).

In associations such as *Turnerschaft von 1890 in São Paulo* and *Turnerbund Porto Alegre*, the *Turnfahrten* were one of the items present in their annual activities report, and they were prescribed in their statutes as a means to reach their goals, that is, the physical, moral, and spiritual strengthening of their associates. In *Deutscher Turn- und Sportverein Rio de Janeiro* the members of the association created a group named *Bergfreund* (“Friends of the Mountains”), dedicated to organizing frequent excursions, mostly on foot, to the surroundings of the city. In Blumenau, in the beginning of the 20th century, gymnasts carried out annual excursions to the mountains near the city. In these trips’ reports, there are detailed descriptions of the natural elements, the difficulties enforced by the paths, and especially the “signs of civilization” introduced by the German “pioneers” since mid-19th century. The oldest of these reports dates from 1904 and narrates the excursion to the mountain Spitzkopf.

The higher we climbed — it was a climb indeed —, the more the forest lost its tropical character. Palm trees fully disappeared, giant trees were more and more sporadic, even the woods were smaller. They were replaced by the annoying high bushes. Ticks (bush lice) were a real plague that seem to have foreseen our arrival.... The last stretch until the top was cheerfully greeted. We arrived a little after two o’clock. The forest had ended, and in its place, there were whither bushes and thorns. The eyes were obfuscated when we went from the darkness of the jungle to the brightness of sunlight. We had finished the climb in five and a half hours.

Towards the hinterland, the eyes gazed the endless course of woods that was interrupted by small clearings from time to time. Men appeared amid the plants in this giant carpet of wild

¹⁰ Scouting is a matter that deserves a closer examination; therefore, we will not deal with it in this paper.-

jungle like burn marks in fur clothing.... All in all, everything one sees is jungle. (Eine Turnfahrt nach dem Spitzkopf bei Blumenau in Süd-Brasilien, 1904, p. 829-830, our translation)

The thick woods the gymnasts crossed on their long way up offers moments of beauty and dazzle. Once they reach the top, where nature has an arid aspect, the moments of beauty and dazzle are provided by another element: the overview of the valley, whose landscape is composed by signs of human occupation, more specifically by evidences of the assiduity and persistence that were characteristic of the “German work”, that is, of Germanness. The view provided by Spitzkopf became the reference for comparison in further excursions performed by the gymnasts from Blumenau, such as the climbing of Hundeberg (1905) and Bugerkopf (1910). If at Bugerkopf the overview was “disappointing” and “limited”, (Eine Turnfahrt nach dem Bugerkopf in Brasilien, 1910, p.509-510) at Hundeberg

the ratio between native forest and cultivated land seems much different when seen from Spitzkopf. The latter is, without a doubt, prevailing, for the observer obtains a notion of what has been achieved here, in half a century, due to German dedication and persistence.

In my opinion, the view from Hundeberg is, if not broader, at least more grateful than that from Spitzkopf, since the image is more detailed.... The height of Hundeberg is of 760 meters, that is to say, it is 200 meters below Spitzkopf. But that doesn't mean a less beautiful view, and whoever is lucky enough, like us, to come in a day with good weather, will be rewarded for the efforts of the climb. (Eine Turnfahrt nach dem Hundeberg, 1905, p. 691, our translation)

This relation between nature and civilization present in the reports of *Turnfabrten*, and especially the idea of the German as a “pioneer” and a “civilizer”, is also present in some reports from Rio Grande do Sul, especially in 1924, the year they celebrated the centenary of the German immigration to Brazil. In these narratives, we find a discourse about the German immigrant, who had faced the wild animals and the numerous dangers that the thick Brazilian forest would provide, turning it into a richly cultivated area, raised with hard work, omitting that indigenous groups with their own cultures already occupied these same lands.

In the jungle, it was the sharp axe in the hand of the German-Brazilian settler that transformed this wild nature into fruitful fields uninterruptedly over the past 100 years.... Like the farmers of Italian origin cultivate their wine and transform it into a source of income, so did the Germans with their products of pig farming. (100 Jahre Deutsche Kolonisationsarbeit in Rio Grande do Sul, 1924, p.37, our translation)

The walks in nature performed by these societies were embedded in a common logic within these institutions: the need to get to know the place they lived in, the *Heimat*¹¹ they had adopted, in order to love it. This notion is attributed to Jahn, who dedicates a chapter of his book *Deutsches Volkstum* (1810) to what we could translate as “patriotic hiking” (*Vaterländische Wanderungen*), which would allow the individuals to increase the knowledge about their land and their compatriots. The members of *Turnverein São Sebastião do Cabuy* seem to have persistently cultivated this idea in their excursions, especially the notion of getting to know the place they lived in, not paying too much attention to the act of hiking itself. There are records of great trips during the 1930s that, despite being carried out with means of transportation such as buses and trucks, shared with hiking this ideal of knowing the place they lived in.

Although the excursions of *São Sebastião do Cabuy* were performed in a different way, nature, its beauties, and its challenges were also the main theme of the reports we have found. Gymnasts were amazed by the “astonishing, romantic region” of the Caracol park, in the city of Canela; by the panorama of a valley, on their way to Alfredo Chaves, which allowed them, from their truck, to observe that in the distance “amidst the green, there was a wriggling silver stripe, the Das Antas river, which lacerated its way through rocks and gaps, so it later formed the Taquari River” (Neue Deutsche Zeitung, 1936, [n.p.], our translation); by the “pleasant sea bath” in the city of Torres (Eine Turnfahrt nach Torres, 1938, [n.p.], our translation); by the crossing of Da Prata river, which

seemed to be a real piece of heaven. Crystal clear, bright grey water, surrounded by dark green trees, whose trunks were reflected on the silver water, just like us, when we groom in front of the mirror on Sunday morning. Peacefully and silently, the ferry slid with us over the Prata. (Neue Deutsche Zeitung, 1936, [n.p.], our translation)

The fact that these trips amid nature (whether on foot or with motor vehicles) were published in German-Brazilian and German newspapers¹² points out to the role played by this practice in the gymnastics societies and in the German-Brazilian associational life in a broader sense. There is evidence that these trips were often open to the public, as indicated by the advertisements of *Turnfahrten* found in German-Brazilian newspapers from Santa Catarina, with information about destination, date, meeting point, and departure time, which allowed the

¹¹ *Heimat* is often translated to “homeland” or “home”, always with a strong emotional charge (Magalhães, 1998).

¹² Many of the reports from Blumenau were found in the *Deutsche Turnzeitung*, an official organ of the *Deutsche Turnerschaft*, located in Germany.

participation of non-members in these activities. In the specific case of Rio Grande do Sul, a similar role was played, in these societies, by scouting, which was organized in autonomous departments within the gymnastics societies and aimed at educating the German-Brazilian youth by using activities amid the nature, such as hiking and camping. With the purpose of reaching the youth of the colony in general, these departments allowed scouting groups to be attended by those who did not have conditions to be part of the gymnastics societies.



Fig. 5 - Advertisement of a Turnfahrt to the Pirai waterfalls, made by Turnverein Joinville, published in the newspaper Kolonie Zeitung, in July 28, 1898

Source: Historical Archive of Joinville

Among the institutions identified by immigration studies as “recreational”, gymnastics societies were the most numerous. However, they were not the only ones focusing on education, health, and body care. A broader look over the German-Brazilian associational life points to other societies with a focus on the issues of body care and, more specifically, on the education of the body alongside nature. Besides the abovementioned boy scouts from Rio Grande do Sul — who were organized within the gymnastics societies —, hiking groups and even an association for enthusiasts of natural healing methods — *Naturheilverein Porto Alegre* (Society for

Natural Healing, Porto Alegre) — were organized by German-Brazilians and seem to have kept certain proximity to gymnastics societies¹³ (Tesche, 2015).

Looking at the outdoor practices carried out by the gymnastics societies, as well as to the actions of other associations whose main purpose were an outdoor life and natural healing methods, provides us with a broader understanding of the sociability of German-Brazilian immigrants in the South and the Southeast areas of the country. Thus, we aimed to extrapolate the limits of the sporting and school associations and enable a greater approximation to other practices of amusement, health, and body care cultivated by this group of immigrants.

4 - Outdoor life, body regeneration, and health

From the broad set of different records produced by these associations, we could notice that although gymnastics was the central feature and their associates' primary means of education of the body, it was impossible to fully achieve their goal of health care if they remained limited to the gymnastics sessions that happened indoors, during weeknights. Thus, games and physical exercises out in the open emerged in these institutions as a key complement to this program of education and health, leading the gymnasts from Porto Alegre, for instance, to affirm that "Turnen without hiking is like soup with no salt, a half measure" (Im Anfang war das Wandern, 1929, p.2, our translation), and the ones from Curitiba to advocate for the acquisition of a plot of land for the building of their playground, affirming that

while Turnen is almost exclusively cultivated at night, in enclosed gymnasiums, sports are practiced in God's free nature, favored by the sun, which by itself has the best benefits over the human body that we can imagine. This is why we wish to acquire a plot of land, as quickly as possible, that is suitable for our sporting goals and that is also appropriate for water sports. (Wichtige Vereinsinteressen, 1929, p.1)

The analyzed sources evidence that physical exercise outdoors had a role almost as important in these institutions as gymnastics itself. In these contexts, playing games in open places and especially doing excursions in the nature surrounding the cities the associations were

¹³ According to Tesche (2015), the *Naturbeilverein Porto Alegre* was one of the founders of the Swimming League (*Schwimmverband*) in Porto Alegre at the end of the 19th century, with the *Turnerbund* and *Ruderclub* (Rowing Club)

located in, seem to have been procedures for healing, regeneration of the body, and also amusement, especially by representing an opposition and a counterbalance to life in growing cities.

This is because, in the first decades of the 20th century, traces of a benevolent, beautiful, and generous nature, important to Rousseau's thought, seem to remain present in some Brazilian cities, especially in the capitals. It is possible to notice the existence of an ideation of outdoor life, where nature transformed by human hands may educate urban individuals and produce a new sensibility, such as in the case of German-Brazilians, who created new human attitudes towards nature in these places.

In the sources we have analyzed, traces of a closer relation to outdoor life as part of a health-care procedure correspond to the ideas advocated by educators, scientists, artists, town planners, physicians, and many other professionals who worked in the setting of new educational projects in Brazil in the beginning of the 20th century, where an ideation of outdoor life seems to play a leading role. It is in this reference frame that fresh air and the sun, as well as river and sea baths, are frequently mentioned elements and considered in different procedures (Corbin, 2013b; Dalben, 2009, 2014; Schossler, 2013).

Water, for instance, is an element that constantly appears connected to amusement as well as bodily recovery. Baths in seas and waterfalls appear as moments of break, alleviating the fatigue generated by the walks and especially by the intense heat. Here, they function as refreshment and as a source of rehydration, as well as a place for bathing, contributing to reinvigorate the body and allowing the continuation of the walk. Rainwaters have a similar action: when moderate and without thunders and lightnings, rain appears as a pleasant gift from nature to the gymnasts wandering in the trails. When heavy, they forced the gymnasts to look for shelter, which did not necessarily mean something bad: looking for covered places and gathering around bonfires to keep warm often turned rains into “the funniest and coziest hours of the day” (Erste Officielle Tour unserer Wandergruppe “Bergfreunde” nach dem “Taquara”, 1932, p. 7, our translation).

In the case of *Turnerschaft von 1890 in São Paulo*, rainwaters were not regarded as something to be celebrated, but rather as an obstacle to overcome. In a São Paulo that still presented certain rural aspects, summer rains almost became a barrier for the development of this gymnastics society, for its first activities

started during the rainy season, and sometimes it was pleasant to observe how Brazilian families, that every evening were busy taking care of their flock, looked amazed at the gymnasts, who despite the torrential rain and the soaked soil carried on with their exercises until the end. The only protection were 11 umbrellas for a group of 12 men, and this protection was enough, for the person on the apparatus could not use an umbrella.

These unfavorable conditions, however, lowered the amount of gymnasts that visited the Turnplatz, going from an average of 20 people to a small group of 12 men. (*Die Turnerschaft von 1890 in São Paulo tritt mit diesem Jahre in das sechste Jahr ihres Bestehens*, 1896, p. 925, our translation)

Preserving life, maintaining health, challenging oneself, and, at the same time, having a good time, were actions that demanded a specific education regarding the places that were built for these purposes. Thus, the outdoor life identified in the documents produced by German-Brazilian gymnastics societies, especially from the end of the 19th century on, is quite prominent. Considered as “recreational” and perceived as the most numerous (Seyferth, 1999), these societies are still little studied by historians of education and of German immigration. Adding to this gap is the delimitation of bodily practices amid nature and its singularities¹⁴.

¹⁴ As pointed out by the studies of Soares (2015, 2016).

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