

Social Perceptions and Strategies for the Valorization of Traditional Leisure Activities in Sifié (Ivory Coast): Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change

Kane Aminata¹, Ella Tano Mehsou Mylène^{2*}, Sahgui Denga³, Tra Fulbert⁴

¹National Institute of Youth and Sports, Abidjan, Ivory Coast

²Multidisciplinary Laboratory, Human Movement, Development, and Well-Being Sciences (LAP-SMHDBE), National Institute of Youth and Sports, Félix Houphouët-Boigny University, Abidjan, Ivory Coast

³Laboratory for Research and Expertise “Sport, Education and Social Interventions for Development” (LARSEID), National Institute of Youth, Physical Education and Sport (INJEPS), University of Abomey-Calavi, Abomey-Calavi, Republic of Benin

⁴Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Study and Research in Social Sciences (LERISS), Félix Houphouët-Boigny University, Abidjan, Ivory Coast

Email: *ella_2020@yahoo.fr

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Abstract

This article examines the social perceptions of traditional leisure activities among the populations of Sifié. Adopting a qualitative approach, the purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 17 individuals with in-depth knowledge of the studied phenomenon, with whom interviews were conducted. The study results show that young people seek “trendy” and highly valued leisure activities, and reject those associated with the past, shame, or cultural backwardness. Likewise, traditional leisure activities suffer from social stigmatization; practicing them exposes individuals to negative judgments, associated with an image of “backwardness” or being out of step. Faced with this decline, the Sifié community is developing strategies to revitalize its traditional leisure forms. These initiatives aim to strengthen identity pride, transmit knowledge across generations, and revalorize these activities via the media.

Keywords

Leisure, Perception, Strategies for Valorization, Tradition

1. Introduction

Leisure activities play a significant role in maintaining and preserving the physical

and mental well-being of individuals. Consistent with this view, in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly recognized in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights that: “Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay” [1]. Consequently, in 1967, the International Recreation and Leisure Association officially proclaimed the Charter of Leisure, which states in its preamble that: “Every person has the right to leisure”. “Leisure is therefore not considered a privilege but a right for all, on an equal footing with work, health and education” [2].

Furthermore, traditional leisure is the foundation of a people’s recreational activities perpetuates itself through numerous transformations while giving life to the cultural values of society [3]. In developing countries, it holds an important role for the development of their culture [3].

In the structuring of African societies, particularly in Sifié, a locality located in the north of Côte d’Ivoire, traditional leisure whether involving recreational practices, dances, games, or songs transcends its simple entertainment function to reinforce an environment of expression and transmission, promoting social and cultural dynamics [3]. They constitute vectors for the transmission of cultural heritage and cohesion among the inhabitants of the said locality.

However, in an era of contemporary changes marked by urbanization, globalization, and the rise of digital leisure, these traditional forms of recreation appear to be losing ground, raising questions about their place and future. It is within this perspective that the current research analyzed the perceptions of Sifié’s populations regarding their traditional leisure activities. It also highlighted the valorization strategies implemented in the face of contemporary changes.

2. Methods and Materials

The research took place in Sifié, a sub-prefecture in the Séguéla department in northern Côte d’Ivoire. This cross-sectional research adopts a qualitative approach. Purposive sampling was used to obtain a sample composed of 17 individuals. An interview guide was administered to: 03 members of the village notability, 02 district chiefs, 04 community leaders, and 08 members of the Sifié village community. This size is justified by theoretical saturation, whereby after the 17th interview, responses became repetitive and no new responses relating to the themes emerged. This sample size covered the diversity of participant profiles, highlighting the variety of perceptions of leisure activities in Sifié. The study participants consisted of men and women aged between 18 and 70. They represented a diverse range of socio-professional profiles, including students, a prominent figure, a youth leader, a housewife and a teacher. The recruitment process was carried out on a voluntary basis and according to a reasoned choice, in order to ensure the representativeness of the different social and generational categories present in the community of Sifié. The survey was conducted from September 8 to November 16, 2024. Data analysis relied on thematic content analysis. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and field was used for the interpretation and analysis of the re-

sults. The analysis focused on the social perceptions of traditional leisure, shaped by the habitus of the various actor groups in Sifíé. It also aimed to analyze the valorization strategies observed in the face of tensions between heritage and contemporary changes. These strategies relate to actions carried out within the field of cultural practices to accumulate or defend various forms of capital (cultural, social, symbolic, economic).

The interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were then coded to identify recurring themes, which were used as initial codes (young people's lack of interest, social stigmatisation, family transmission, intergenerational connection). These were grouped into categories such as generational rejection, social pressure, cultural heritage and strengthening social ties. This analytical process led to the identification of four themes: The Rejection of Traditional Leisure Activities, Traditional Leisure Activities (Between Social Stigmatisation and Tangible Constraints), Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Leisure Activities, and Strengthening Engagement through Intergenerational Connection and Communication, which were used in the results.

3. Results

3.1. Perceptions of Traditional Leisure Activities within the Sifíé Locality

3.1.1. The Rejection of Traditional Leisure Activities

Perceptions are not neutral; they are shaped by past experiences, social positions, and individuals' schemas of thought. The schemas of thought of the respondents are grouped in the following direct quotations. A Community Leader expresses their perception of traditional leisure activities through these remarks:

“Ah, traditional leisure, honestly, it's really boring, *dêh!* It doesn't even cheer us up, you see. Besides, these activities are too outdated. They're old stuff, you know! We don't relate to them at all anymore. They no longer match the desires of people today, especially us, the youth. We want something new, modern; something that makes us vibrate and excites us. The time for folk dances and old games is over for us. We are constantly attracted to trends that bring strong sensations, new experiences. You know that's the current reality; I'm not here to pretend. Young people look for what is trendy, what makes them dream. Traditional leisure doesn't speak to us anymore, and it's a real shame, but that's how it is.” P.L 30 ans, A Young Community Member.

This quote reveals a perception of obsolescence and boredom among Sifíé's youth towards traditional leisure, which is viewed as incompatible with their desire for new, modern, and “trendy” experiences. It highlights a generational gap where cultural heritage struggles to compete with the appeal of contemporary entertainment and its intense sensations. A Young Community Member, subscribing to the same line of thought, indicates:

“Before, we only knew our own traditions, our dances, our games. But now, with TV, the internet, we see lots of different things. Young people listen to foreign music, wear clothes from elsewhere; they want to be like those they see on TV. Our traditions seem old-fashioned to them. They prefer modern things, things that come from outside. It’s as if we are ashamed of our own traditions. It’s a pity, because that is what makes up our identity.” K.B 20 years, young community member.

These statements highlight the impact of cultural globalization and media dissemination on the habitus of the youth in Sifié. They devalue their local traditions when confronted with the appeal of exogenous cultural trends and practices. This reveals an identity tension where exposure to “modernity” leads to a loss of prestige for indigenous cultural forms, which are perceived as “old-fashioned” and a source of “shame,” thereby threatening the reproduction of local cultural capital.

3.1.2. Traditional Leisure Activities (Between Social Stigmatization and Tangible Constraints)

This section presents another angle of the respondents’ perception of traditional leisure activities. A Community Member specifies that:

Traditional leisure, well, it seems really outdated, you see. It’s as if, when we practice them, we feel a sense of shame, as if we were somehow less worthy than others. Frankly, we don’t want to be in that situation, you know. We prefer to turn to other activities that are more in tune with our time. People think that if we do old stuff, we’re a bit behind, as if we can’t keep up with the pace of modernity. It’s sad, but as a result, we avoid practicing these leisure activities for fear of being judged. We want to live experiences that reflect who we are, that showcase us and make us feel valued. So, that’s why we don’t practice them, you see? T.M 54 years, member of community.

This quote reveals a social stigmatization of traditional leisure activities, which are perceived as “outdated” and generating a sense of shame, inconsistent with the internalized norms of modernity. Actors disengage from these practices due to fear of social judgment and to avoid being associated with “backwardness”, thus favoring activities deemed more valorizing and aligned with contemporary aspirations. This highlights a symbolic struggle within the cultural field, where the value of practices is redefined in relation to the dynamics of distinction and the quest for a “modern” identity. A Member of the Notability emphasizes that:

“Actually, participating in traditional leisure activities is not simple. There are cultural norms we must respect to be able to engage in them. For example, to take part in certain practices, you must first be initiated into the culture; otherwise, you risk feeling lost. People often wait for you to already be ‘in the loop’ before integrating you. And then, when it’s time for festivals or competitions, it’s as if the community is watching you closely. You are pushed to be there, to show your presence, which can create some pressure. If you don’t

participate, some might judge you or think you don't respect the traditions. In short, these social rules and codes are perceived as limiting". M.T 65 years, Member of the notability.

The testimony reveals that participation in traditional leisure activities in Sifé is governed by rigid social and cultural norms, including initiation rites and strong community pressure for conformity. These social codes are perceived as limiting, creating barriers to entry and a feeling of being judged for those who do not master them or who deviate, which can hinder the engagement and intergenerational transmission of these practices.

A Member of the Village Community indicates:

Before, we did everything together. The festivals, the games, the dances... We were one family. But today, everyone stays home. Young people don't want to go out; they prefer their phones. Even the elders don't come to the village meetings anymore. It's every man for himself. We don't talk anymore; we don't see each other anymore. How do you expect traditional leisure activities to survive under these conditions? They need all of us, our presence, our sharing. But if everyone stays in their corner, they will surely die. D.A 50 years Member of the village community.

The discourse highlights a disintegration of social capital and community solidarity in Sifé, which was once the cement of participation in traditional leisure. The fragmentation of social ties, exacerbated by the individualization of practices (such as phone use) and the withdrawal of young people and elders, directly threatens the reproduction of these activities, which are intrinsically dependent on collective cohesion and intergenerational sharing for their survival.

3.2. Strategies for Promoting Traditional Leisure Activities in Sifé

3.2.1. Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Leisure Activities

This section focuses on the concrete approaches proposed for the valorization of traditional leisure activities in the Sifé locality. A Member of the Notability advocates:

We should take the time to write them down, to film them, to take pictures. We must keep a record of all this, so that our children and grandchildren can know them. And then, there should be a place where we could showcase them, teach them. A cultural center, you know. A place of our own, where we could be proud of our traditions. K.L 68 ans, Member of the notability.

The respondent expresses a desire for the recognition of the values of traditional leisure activities in Sifé, seeking to transform incorporated cultural capital into objectified cultural capital (archives, films, photos) and institutionalized cultural capital (cultural center). This approach aims to secure intergenerational transmission and legitimize these practices by granting them formal recognition, thereby reinforcing identity pride and symbolic valorization within the community. A

District Chief emphasizes:

“Our artisans are the ones who keep our traditions alive! They make the masks, the musical instruments, the tools we used in the past. But they struggle to make a living from their work... We must help them, give them the means to continue. We could give them loans... train them in new sales techniques... create workshops... organize exhibitions, craft fairs...” T.P 55 years District chief.

This respondent highlights the fundamental role of artisans in the reproduction and vitality of cultural capital through objects (masks and instruments) in Sifié. They reveal a fragility in the face of socio-economic changes. The proposed strategies (financial aid, training, exhibitions) aim to valorize their expertise and strengthen their economic and symbolic capital, which is essential for ensuring the sustainability and transmission of these traditional practices.

3.2.2. Strengthening Engagement through Intergenerational Connection and Communication

This section illustrates initiatives aimed at boosting community participation, fostering the link between generations, and improving the visibility and image of traditional leisure activities.

A Member of the Notability advocates:

“We must revive our traditions! We cannot let our dances, our songs, our games disappear just like that. We must organize festivals, big events, where everyone participates. Young people, elders, children, everyone! We could have a big village festival once a year... We would invite neighboring villages, tourists too. That would make our traditions known; it would show that we are proud of our culture.” D.G 70 years, Member of the notability.

The discourse reveals a collective will for the reappropriation and revitalization of traditional leisure activities, perceived as important elements of Sifié’s cultural identity. Organizing big, inclusive events and festivals aims to strengthen social capital by mobilizing all generations, and to convert local cultural capital into symbolic capital (pride, recognition) by opening it up to neighboring communities and tourists. A Community Leader recommends:

“We must organize meetings, moments where the elders can transmit their knowledge to the young. Moments where they can show them how to dance... And then, we must valorize our elders. Show them that they are important... And as for the young people, we must interest them, show them that our traditions are not corny! Make them understand that this is what makes up our identity... We must build bridges between the generations.” M.J 45 years Community leader.

The respondent’s remarks underscore the importance of intergenerational transmission for the reproduction of cultural capital in Sifié. They emphasize the need to create spaces where the elders, who hold the knowledge, can share their

skills. They also reveal the desire to symbolically revalorize traditions for the youth by breaking the image of “ridicule” or “corny-ness”, so that they see it as a pillar of their collective identity. A District Chief suggests that:

“We must talk about our traditions, show them to the whole world! Too many people here, especially the young, think it’s old-fashioned, that it’s no longer relevant... We could do radio shows, TV shows, to showcase our traditions. We could make videos on social media, to reach the youth... We must change the image of our traditions. Show that it’s not just for the elders, that it’s fun, that it’s creative.” K.F 60 years District chief.

The testimony reveals a strategy of symbolic revalorization of Sifié’s traditions. The goal is to transform their cultural capital, perceived as “old-fashioned”, into a desirable and relevant asset for young people and the outside world. The use of media (radio, TV, social networks) aims to modify social perceptions and increase the visibility of these practices, presenting them as dynamic and creative to counter stigmatization and encourage their reappropriation.

4. Discussion of Results

4.1. Perceptions of Traditional Leisure Activities within the Locality of Sifié

The perception of young people in Sifié, shaped by exposure to media and cultural globalization, generates a sense of obsolescence and boredom toward traditional leisure activities. In the cultural field, these practices are losing their symbolic capital and legitimacy when confronted with modern “trends” and exogenous entertainment that promises “thrills.” This devaluation leads to rejection, as participation in ancestral traditions is perceived as a source of “shame” and “backwardness”, directly threatening the reproduction of these forms of local cultural capital and the identity associated with them. The study’s results align with the work of [4], who highlight the discourse that: “traditional games are said to be complex, and the techniques to which they refer are old-fashioned, but they may perhaps deserve, despite their antiquated character, to be rehabilitated because, on the motor and strategic levels, they are just as rich as other more current practices.”

The habitus of the respondents in Sifié, deeply influenced by the norms of modernity, leads to a social stigmatization of traditional leisure, which is perceived as “outdated” and generates a feeling of “shame” in the cultural field. This perception pushes actors to disengage from these activities for fear of judgment and to preserve their symbolic capital, favoring practices that confer distinction and valorization in line with contemporary aspirations. Moreover, the rigid cultural norms and communal pressures for conformity in this field create barriers to participation, limiting the transmission and reproduction of the cultural capital linked to these leisure activities. Finally, the erosion of social capital and community cohesion, where individuals increasingly retreat into themselves, further weakens these practices, which intrinsically depend on sharing and collective presence for their

survival. The study by [5] is consistent with our results. She emphasizes that: “leisure activities themselves, particularly stereotypical activities, may be constraining through the reinforcement of traditional gender relations.” Following this logic [6], states that “Leisure, like culture in general, has a wild and hybrid aspect that refers to individual idiosyncrasy and its affective impulses, before being harnessed by moral options and social orientations. This has resulted in a whole historical and moral literature on its harmful effects, the propensity for vice and the expression of the lowest human instincts, and has founded a teleology of its good uses that we will discuss later. But one fact remains undeniable: its virtual dimension cannot be denied; at most, it can be domesticated.

[7] shows in their work that millennials reject cultural leisure activities and propose strategies to encourage them to take an interest in museums. Millennials are the largest generation in the world and have the potential to influence museum economics if cultivated. However, the majority of millennials in Zimbabwe are not interested in visiting museums compared to participating in other leisure, entertainment and sporting activities. Millennials have indicated that they prefer museum programmes that integrate life skills learning with entertainment, socialisation, problem solving, play, the use of technology and affordable admission fees. The author [8] outlines the reasons for the decline of traditional games in Ivory Coast. In his view, this can be explained both by symbolic stigmatisation, which associates them with a past considered outdated, and by material and institutional constraints (low funding, lack of qualified facilitators, overlapping ministerial responsibilities). These two aspects undermine their transmission and limit their presence in schools and communities. Despite the efforts of the Directorate for the Promotion, Training and Development of Traditional Games (DVFPJT) to revive these practices through the creation of school clubs, their sustainability still depends on genuine institutional support and a change in social perceptions of endogenous leisure activities.

4.2. Strategies for Promoting Traditional Leisure Activities in Sifé

These results reveal a strategic will for cultural appropriation of traditional leisure activities in Sifé, seeking to consolidate cultural capital in its objectified (archives, objects) and institutionalized (cultural center) forms. This approach aims to legitimize these practices and ensure their intergenerational transmission, thereby strengthening identity pride within the local cultural field.

The acknowledgment of the economic vulnerability of artisans, who possess crucial know-how, highlights the need to consolidate their economic and symbolic capital for the survival and reproduction of this heritage. The proposals for supporting artisans, as well as the creation of dedicated spaces for conservation and teaching, are active attempts to adapt the collective habitus to contemporary changes and ensure the future vitality of these traditions.

[9] specifies that the valorization of natural and cultural heritage must be part of a sustainable development approach based on the know-how of communities.

According to these authors, the ideal is for this valorization to be accompanied by the creation and maintenance of collective infrastructures and equipment that guarantee accessibility for all.

In this regard, the study demonstrates that local projects, led by the communities themselves, are particularly effective in counteracting the decline of traditional leisure. Indeed, the results indicate that community initiatives favor the intergenerational transmission of know-how and traditions, which translates into the creation of spaces for meeting and exchange between generations.

In this vein, [10] points out that “Festivals and celebrations are presented as times of great social appeasement, social cohesion, encounter, popular success, investment in public space, and identity construction.” Furthermore, [11], citing [12], indicates that: “When the population feels involved, they will be more inclined to participate in an activity. This involvement gains importance, and the participation rate in leisure activities is likely to be higher if community values are taken into account.”

Faced with the decline of traditional leisure, the members of the Sifié community express a collective will for reappropriation, seeking to strengthen social capital through the organization of inclusive events that mobilize all generations within the cultural field. These strategies aim to convert local cultural capital into symbolic capital (pride, recognition) by opening these practices to a wider audience, including tourists, and legitimizing their place in the collective identity. Intergenerational transmission is perceived as crucial for the reproduction of this knowledge, requiring the creation of bridges between elders and youth in order to re-evaluate traditions and shatter the perception of “uncoolness.”

Finally, the strategic use of media and social networks seeks to modify social perceptions of traditional leisure, presenting them as dynamic and creative to erase stigmatization and encourage their reappropriation by a more contemporary habitus.

The valorization of culture and heritage through festivals is an asset for the socio-cultural and economic development of territories [13]. Consequently, these events attract not only local participants but also external visitors, thus creating enthusiasm around practices often threatened by modernity. Moreover, the study highlights a positive impact on youth participation by integrating interactive elements, such as practical workshops, which manage to capture their interest. Thus, this intergenerational involvement fosters the transmission of know-how and cultural knowledge, helping to strengthen community ties.

In the same dynamic, Dannat’s (2003, p. 9) [14] results show that the influence of biological parents in transmitting a cultural passion to their offspring is comparable to that exerted for leisure, but varies greatly depending on the activity. It is very strong for reading and music and weaker for live performance. However, by including siblings and grandparents, the extended family is by far the most decisive cultural “passer”, as only one person in five receives their passion from someone outside the family circle. These results confirm that the family context

plays an essential and major role, surpassing the influence of friends, neighbors, and teachers, in the acquisition of cultural passions.

4.3. Limitations

This study presents valuable insights into social perceptions of traditional leisure activities in Sifié and highlights their role in community cohesion and cultural transmission. However, it has its limitations. First, the small sample size (17 participants) limits the generalisation of the results to the entire population. Second, the potential influence of the interviewer, linked to the social dynamics and context of the survey, may have led to certain responses that reflect socially valued discourses. Finally, the choice of a single objective focused on social perceptions limits the overall understanding of the phenomenon, leaving aside the economic or political dimensions of the valorisation of traditional leisure activities. A mixed approach and a larger sample would allow for a more representative and nuanced analysis.

5. Conclusion

The study reveals a dual movement in Sifié: on the one hand, a rejection of traditional leisure activities motivated by the pursuit of modernity and the fear of social judgment; on the other hand, a will to safeguard and re-evaluate this cultural heritage through structured local initiatives. Traditional leisure activities, having lost symbolic legitimacy, can regain a central place in the community provided they adapt to social transformations and strengthen their visibility and appeal, particularly among young people. The valorization of these traditional leisure activities will depend on the capacity of local actors to articulate memory, innovation, and transmission within a cultural space redefined by the challenges of globalization and individualization.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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