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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FIRST PAN-AMERICAN GAMES' DESIGN

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Abstract: The organization of the First Pan American Games encountered significant challenges. Initially scheduled for 1942, the event was postponed —and ultimately held in 1951— due to the Americas' involvement in World War II. This article argues that the postponement was rooted in three major crises: two political and one sporting, revealing the underlying tensions that shaped the planning process. These issues must be examined within the broader historical context of the Western Hemisphere at the time, including national political dynamics, inter-American relations, and the evolution of the Olympic movement in Latin America.

Keywords: Pan-Americanism; Pan-American Games; Good Neighbor Policy, Sport, Olympism.

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EL AUGE Y EL FRACASO DE LA ORGANIZACIÓN DE LOS PRIMEROS JUEGOS PAN-AMERICANOS

Resumen: La organización de los Primeros Juegos Panamericanos enfrentó obstáculos sumamente complejos. Inicialmente planificados para 1942, fueron pospuestos —y finalmente celebrados en 1951— debido a la implicación del continente americano en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Este artículo sostiene que las razones de dicho aplazamiento fueron profundas y se relacionan con tres crisis: dos de índole política y una de carácter deportivo, lo que evidencia las dificultades que surgieron durante el proceso de planificación de estos juegos. Estas deben analizarse en el contexto histórico del hemisferio occidental en ese momento, tanto en términos de las situaciones políticas de cada país como de las relaciones interamericanas y del desarrollo del movimiento olímpico en América Latina.

Palabras clave: Pan-Americanismo; Juegos Pan-Americanos; Política de Buena Vecindad; deporte; olimpismo.

I. Introduction

On February 25, 1951, Juan Domingo Perón inaugurated the first edition of the Pan-American Games. Marked by the mass participation typical of the Peronist regime, this sporting event was intended to showcase the success of the so-called “New Argentina” to the Americas and the wider world. As Eva Perón stated during the closing ceremony: “From here, from this corner of America, illuminated by the star of the Peronist doctrine that seeks to offer the world a new solution —the 'justicialist' solution— we affirm our faith in the eternal values of man”[1]. Eva suggested that Argentina served as a model, offering, through the “Third Position” a worldview very different from the political cultures of the Cold War emerging at that time. This stance, appealing to the common roots of a segment of the international community —specifically, the grassroots of Latin civilization— already had a rich foundation in Latin America. Its ideological origins dated back to the

[1] *La Época*, 10 March 1951, p. 8.

1930s, influencing politicians and thinkers such as Víctor Haya de la Torre and Getúlio Vargas, whose political cultures had found significant success in their respective countries, Peru and Brazil (Zanatta 2012; Rein 2015; Kidd and Torres 2016).

Similarly, the design of the First Pan-American Games also had a long history, originating in the late 1930s, though it developed within a different ideological and cultural framework. Specifically, the Games were part of a new policy initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the Western Hemisphere during the 1930s, known as the "Good Neighbor Policy". From the U.S. perspective, Pan-American ideology functioned as a tool to advance its strategic goals in Latin America: primarily the consolidation of free market principles and, once World War II began, the defence of hemispheric security. This understanding of Pan-Americanism dominated the Pan-American conferences of the 1930s.

Emerging in this cultural and political context, the organization of the First Pan-American Games in Buenos Aires was initially planned for 1940 and then postponed to November 1942. However, just months before their scheduled start, the Games were cancelled. Several factors contributed to this outcome, foremost among them the Western Hemisphere's involvement in World War II, particularly between 1941 and 1942. On December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, prompting the United States to join the Allied forces against the Axis powers. Following the U.S. declaration of war, many Latin American countries, at varying times, severed diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany and its allies.

Yet two additional crises contributed to the failure of the original plan for the Pan-American Games, and these are the focus of this article. The first concerned the tension between Pan-American ideals and the nationalistic political culture prevalent in Latin American public opinion at the time[2]. The second crisis involved the Olympic movement itself, caught

[2] Following the suggestions of French historian Pierre Rosanvallon, I will use the 'political culture' as a tool to understand "the 'politico' refers at the same time to a sphere and a process. In the first case – as a sphere – it represents the place in which the lives of men and women are intertwined, and it provides a framework for their actions. This idea is connected to an idea of a 'society' that appears to its members as a meaningful 'whole'. As a process, the 'politico' represents the path of a group of people […] that become a true community" (Rosanvallon 2005, 8).

in transition between the death of President Henri Baillet-Latour in 1942 and the appointment of Sigfrid Edström as his successor. During this period, many Latin American countries faced challenges in establishing and consolidating their National Olympic Committees.

As a result, the project for the First Pan-American Games was abandoned, while other inter-American cultural initiatives continued to be implemented during the same years, as Richard Cándida Smith showed (Cándida Smith 2017, 111-168).

II. Pan-Americanism and the "Good Neighbor Policy"

A new phase in inter-American relations began even before Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed the presidency[3]. Roosevelt's policy rebranded Herbert Hoover's earlier conciliatory approach toward Latin America (Smith 2005, 93-94). In his inaugural address on March 4, 1933, Roosevelt declared: "In the field of world policy, I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor — the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others"[4].

In this context, a new concept of Pan-American solidarity emerged[5]. Several factors explained the profound shift in the United States' attitude.

[3] The drop of the armed intervention strategy was eased by the publication of the so called "Clark Memorandum", an official document on the Monroe Doctrine prepared by Under Secretary of State J. Ruben Clark, at the close of the Coolidge Administration. In this memorandum Clark tried to demonstrate that the strategy of armed intervention was damaging the image of the United States in South America and it was not within the Doctrine as announced by Monroe. See, among others, Smith (2012) and Rinke (2015). On the Pan-American relation, during the Hoover Administration, see: DeConde (1970), Walker (2006), Wöpke (2008).

[4] Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1933 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/froos1.asp]

[5] The history of Pan-Americanism is deeply rooted in the history of the Western Hemisphere since the early nineteenth century. It should not be forgotten, however, that Pan-Americanism was not the only vision through which the continent was imagined as a unified whole. Of particular importance and influence over the centuries was the Pan-Latin ideal, which, beginning with the Anfictionic Congress of Panama in 1826,

First, the deep economic crisis triggered by the 1929 crash. Despite the turmoil in the U.S. capitalist system, the absence of European powers enabled the U.S. to strengthen its presence in the southern part of the hemisphere (Drinot and Knight 2014). Second, Latin America came to be viewed as a region that could be 'elevated' and integrated into the U.S. hegemonic project (Ninkovich 1999, 106-111). The United States sought to build a hemispheric system capable of addressing economic, security, and political challenges. While the Good Neighbor Policy offered a break from formal interventions, informal pressure and influence persisted for nearly a generation (Rosen 2008, 31). This moment arguably marked the only period in U.S. history when the terms "Americas" and "Americans" were used to project a vision of a united family of twenty-one republics (Sadlier 2012, 2; Grandin 2012). In this spirit, the Roosevelt administration approved the abrogation of the Platt Amendment in 1934 and withdrew U.S. Marines from Haiti.

As tensions in Europe escalated, the Inter-American Conference on Inter-American Solidarity and Cooperation was held in Buenos Aires in 1936. The central theme was hemispheric security and the need to counter fascist influence and potential German and Italian interference in South American affairs (Friedman 2003). Beyond promoting "the cause of permanent peace on this Western continent" (Roosevelt 1942, 92), the conference resulted in the Declaration of Principles on Inter-American Solidarity and Cooperation, affirming democracy as a shared cause. The declaration also acknowledged the power and economic imbalances between the United States and other American republics and explicitly prohibited direct or indirect intervention in internal or external affairs of the Western Hemisphere Countries (Shifter 2002, 86-88). The Buenos Aires Conference consolidated pre-existing relations as mentioned below, particularly in the economic sphere, which had gradually developed over the course of successive Pan-American conferences held since 1889

The Good Neighbor Policy was multifaceted and far-reaching. As Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace stated in 1939: "We are challenged to build here in this hemisphere a new culture which is neither Latin

sought to unite the Americas through shared Latin and Hispano-American ideals. See, among others, Funes (2006, 206-215).

American nor North American but genuinely inter-American Undoubtedly it is possible to build an inter-American consciousness and an inter-American culture which will transcend both its Anglo-Saxon and its Iberian origins" (cited in Pike 1992, 273). The Good Neighbor policy was a response to the widespread anti-American sentiment caused by decades of military interventions (McPherson 2014; Patel 2016, 10-44). The United States promoted Pan-American ideology to draw Latin America's southern region —especially its European-leaning segment— toward values like political democracy and the free market. This ideology stood in stark contrast to the nationalist, fascist, and corporatist ideologies then spreading from the Old Continent.

President Roosevelt elaborated on this vision during Pan-American Day on April 12, 1933: "The essential qualities of a true Pan-Americanism must be the same as those which constitute a good neighbor, namely mutual understanding, and through such understanding, a sympathetic appreciation of the other's point of view. It is only in this manner that we can hope to build up a system of which confidence, friendship and good will are the cornerstones" (Roosevelt 1937, 130).

Between 1933 and 1942, a dense network of inter-American interactions developed. In addition to regular Pan-American conferences held every five years (Montevideo 1933; Lima 1938), there was the 1936 Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace (Buenos Aires) and three annual meetings of the foreign ministers of American countries during the early years of World War II (1939-1942) (Whitaker 1954, 144-150; see also Salvatore 2016).

Pan-American institutions began to emerge during this period. While proposals for a League of American Nations and an Inter-American Court of Justice, presented at the Lima conference in 1938, were not approved (due to opposition from both the U.S. and Argentina), other initiatives succeeded. These included the establishment of the Inter-American Financial and Economic Institute in 1938 and the Provisional Inter-American Commission in 1941, created during the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Havana. Despite attempts to spread Pan-American ideals —especially the free-market economy and democratic governance— their success was uneven (Shifter 2002; Scarfi 2017).

Reactions from Latin American countries to Roosevelt's hemispheric initiatives were mixed. Some, like Mexico, feared these moves were rhetorical devices meant to impose U.S. dominance. Others, such as Argentina, preferred to maintain foreign policy independence during a period of relative freedom. These debates played out during Pan-American conferences, starting in 1933. It was evident that the matters discussed during intergovernmental meetings among the States+àààà of the American hemisphere had profound implications for domestic political affairs. Accordingly, the stances adopted by the respective countries were, to a certain extent, influenced not only by international diplomatic considerations but also by internal political dynamics.

During the 1930s, the United States aimed to shield the Western Hemisphere from European influence. This goal was reflected in Secretary of State Cordell Hull's rejection of a proposal to invite non-American nations or institutions (such as Spain, Portugal, and the League of Nations) to the next Pan-American Conference. In this regard, the forms of cultural rapprochement and international policy initiatives undertaken by European countries toward Latin American nations must be taken into consideration (De Lima Grecco and Pereira Gonçalves, 2022; Fotia, 2019). Conversely, a 'universalistic' definition of Pan-Americanism began to take shape. As Argentine Foreign Minister José María Cantilo stated at the 1938 Lima Conference:

> We feel in close solidarity with Europe because of the immigration we received from it [...] for the European capital that financed our agriculture, railroads, and industries. [...] The universalist, ecumenical spirit is the tradition of the homeland of the one who, one day in Washington, presented as the motto of Argentina's international politics: 'America for humanity'.[6]

He referred to Roque Sáenz Peña's address at the first Pan-American Conference in 1889 (one in which the so-called "American zollverein" was

[6] Discurso de José María Cantilo en la Sesión Plenaria de la VIII Conferencia Panamericana. Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto (Argentina), VIII Conferencia Panamericana, Anexo II, 54-55. On this see also Rapoport (1988, 29-40).

proposed). In 1938, Argentina viewed itself as a significant global actor with a universalist outlook (Scarfi 2017, 160-168).

World War II ultimately catalysed a shared vision of the Americas. Although the 1936 Buenos Aires resolutions may have appeared ineffectual at the time, they laid the groundwork for the 1939 Declaration of Continental Solidarity. Gradually, it became clear that excluding European influence from the Western Hemisphere also meant preventing the spread of 'subversive ideologies' counter to inter-American ideals (Halperin Donghi 2003, 167-173).

These 'subversive ideologies' largely referred to nationalist and corporatist worldviews inspired by anti-liberal European critiques (Bayly 2018, 90-93). What began in the cultural realm soon transitioned into political activism. As Patricia Funes observed, "Toward the end of the 1920s, and especially after the impact of 1930, [that moral-magisterial space] appeared insufficient, and many [nationalist] intellectuals turned to the political arena, more traditionally understood" (Funes 2006, 35). Merely diagnosing the nation's decline was no longer enough; active political intervention was deemed necessary. Liberal ideology and institutions — especially representative democracy and capitalist trade— were seen as having eroded the national community's unity. These two liberal pillars were precisely what Pan-Americanism represented (Cándida Smith 2017, 94-136). Nationalist movements viewed it as a threat, a "Trojan horse" that introduced foreign values into Latin America. This perception fuelled the rhetoric of the "internal enemy", then prevalent in the region (Zanatta 2008).

In this complex interplay of political, economic, and security concerns, organizing the Pan-American Games became a highly ambitious undertaking. Sport symbolized the promise of a continent striving to overcome years of setbacks, misalignments, and misunderstandings. As Barbara Keys noted, sport "was part of broader currents of Americanization [...] reaffirming deeply rooted convictions that the United States was a model for the rest of the world and a force for peace in international affairs" (Keys 2006, 89).

III. Organizing the First Pan-American Games

The new direction in U.S.–Latin American relations also paved the way for significant support in the realm of sport. In this context, a proposal by Alexander J. Hogarty —an American consultant who collaborated with several Latin American National Olympic Committees between the two World Wars— sought to organize the Pan-American Games in Havana in 1940. As César R. Torres has pointed out, proposals were made in April 1938, but the cancellation of the 1940 Olympic Games in Finland gave greater momentum to the idea of organizing hemispheric games (Torres 2011).

At the same time, the Argentine Olympic Committee attempted to involve the U.S. Olympic Committee, particularly through its representative Avery Brundage, by submitting Buenos Aires's candidacy for the first Pan-American Games. In 1939—before the official cancellation of the Helsinki Olympics—Juan Carlos Palacios, president of the Argentine Olympic Committee, wrote that these "alternative games" would be well received by all peoples of the Americas. They would serve "an original purpose" and, while stimulating public interest in sports, contribute "to a greater and better knowledge and understanding among the peoples", fostering a shared ambition for the broad progress of sport[7].

Palacios also wrote to Henri Baillet-Latour, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), underscoring the connection between the proposed Pan-American Games and the failure to hold the Finnish Olympics: "The Argentine Confederation of Sports–Argentine Olympic Committee […] decided to organize a Pan-American Games for the month of November 1940, in which all Hemispheric Nations would participate and whose realization would be subordinated to the suspension of the XII Olympic Games" in Finland[8].

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[7] Juan Carlos Palacios to Avery Brundage, 27 September 1939, Avery Brundage Collection (hereafter ABC), Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", University of Illinois Archive (hereafter UIA).

[8] Juan Carlos Palacios to Henri Baillet- Latour, 5 December 1939, Correspondence of the Noc of Argentina, 1923-1966, Folder "Correspondence 1923-1949", IOC Historical Archives (hereafter IOC HA), Lausanne.

Palacios's words may be read in light of a broader political discourse, such as that of Foreign Minister Cantilo at the opening of the 1938 Lima Conference. Palacios shifted the idea of "America for Humanity" into the realm of international sporting relations by promoting the hemispheric games as a response to the suspended Olympics. Both declarations shared a common worldview: to demonstrate the values of the American hemisphere to the rest of the world.

Thanks to Avery Brundage, Palacios's proposal reached the level of U.S. diplomacy. Brundage wrote to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, who expressed tepid governmental support for organizing the Pan-American Games. Hull responded:

> I need hardly assure you that the Department is interested in any initiative seeking to underscore the friendly relations already existing between this country and the other American republics, and I am pleased to note your interest in the improvement of inter-American relations in the field of athletics. I have from time to time received suggestions that inter-American athletic contests be held and believe that there is a definite place for friendly athletic competition in our relations with the other countries of this hemisphere. The organization of such events must, of course, be left to private initiative, as the role of the Department in this field is one of coordination and cooperation; that is, it serves as a central bureau working in harmony with and acting as a clearing-house for private organizations which strive to improve cultural relations.[9]

This response reveals a certain ambiguity: while the U.S. government offered coordinated support, it refused to assume responsibility for organizing the Pan-American Games, which would remain a private initiative.

Despite this ambiguity —and fuelled by the cancellation of the 1940 Olympics— the organization of the hemispheric games moved forward, supported by the idea that, from a political perspective, "through inter-

[9] Cordell Hull to Avery Brundage, 2 October 1939, quoted in Supplementary report of Avery Brundage on the First Pan American Sport Congress, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA.

American sport competition there must inevitably arise a new friendliness, a better understanding, and a greater desire to travel among nations of the Western Hemisphere"[10]. These sentiments were echoed by Juan Carlos Palacios at the opening of the First Pan-American Sports Congress in 1940: "The regular contact of the peoples of the continent will end up making their inhabitants true brothers. The democratic characteristic of sport, will allow people from a different social class to live together, with the consequent advantage of being able to really remove all differences between one another"[11].

Beyond these ceremonial expressions, two key political ideas emerged. First, there was a recognition of two distinct Americas, defined by cultural and political differences: a northern, liberal, Protestant hemisphere and a southern, Catholic, Latin one. Second, there was an urgent call to unify these two parts through a shared universe of values. The First Pan-American Games were seen as a symbolic vehicle to promote this vision, as they "symbolize the crystallization of a wish, long hoped for by the most illustrious men of our hemisphere: the unity of a powerful and vigorous America"[12]. In this light, the Pan-American Games sought to bring together what seemed divided — an idea echoed in the official poster for the event, created by Argentine artist Failer Tótaro[13].

Others further emphasized this spirit of continental unity. The Games were hailed as "a lesson of behaviour and good will taught by the youngest continent on earth […] union, peace, and friendly understanding are still the bonds that link these new nations"[14]. They were also described as "a very

[10] Sport… creator of Good Will, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA.
[11] Memoria y balance General – Balance (1 de octubre 1939 – 20 de septiembre 1940), in "Publications, annual reports and Bulletins of the NOC Argentina, 1935-1966", IOC HA.
[12] J.C. Palacios, "A Greetings to the Sportsman", in Boletín de los Deportes. Publicación Oficial del Comité Organizador, (1) 1941, p. 1.
[13] Boletín de los Deportes. Publicación Oficial del Comité Organizador, (1) 1941, p. 8.
[14] Boletín de los Deportes. Publicación Oficial del Comité Organizador, (3) 1941, p. 6. These are Eduardo Souto's words. Souto was Assistant Secretary to the Executive Committee of the First Pan-American Games and delegate of the Argentine Federation of Chess.

tangible aspect of continental solidarity", offering American youth the opportunity to build mutual acquaintance, thereby reinforcing the "Good Neighbor" spirit[15].

The notion that the Western Hemisphere differed fundamentally from the Old World was rooted also in the legacy of the Monroe Doctrine. At the same time, it emphasized the unity of the Americas —no longer divided in two— as Judge Jeremias T. Mahoney, a key figure in the U.S. Olympic movement, argued during a banquet honouring Francisco A. Borgonovo, a delegate to the Organizing Committee[16].

Alongside its political and cultural dimensions, Pan-Americanism also had an economic aspect. Benjamin F. Nazar Anchorena —an industrialist and member of the Arbitral Tribunal of the Argentine Sports Confederation–Argentine Olympic Committee— argued that "friendly understanding in the field of sports [would be] an excellent medium for better understanding in terms of commercial economy, that is, the prosperity of America"[17]. This connection, discussed in Pan-American conferences, also surfaced on the sporting field: the Pan-American ideal had an economic *côté* as well.

There was thus an attempt —led particularly by Avery Brundage— to legitimize the hemispheric games within the framework of the Good Neighbor Policy and Roosevelt's transformations in inter-American relations during the 1930s. It was a complex and often ambiguous process, complicated further by the contradictions and limitations of Pan-Americanism during the critical years of 1941–1942. These tensions ultimately contributed to the failure of the first Pan-American Games.

[15] Boletín de los Deportes. Publicación Oficial del Comité Organizador (4) 1941, p.6. These are Miguel Dasso's words. Miguel Dasso was president of the National Sports Committee of Lima, Perù.
[16] *Ivi*, p. 7. On Mahoney's political figure, see Lucas 2008.
[17] *Ivi*, p. 5.

IV. The First Problems with the IOC

In the Olympic sphere, Henri Baillet-Latour immediately sought to clarify the distinction between the IOC and the organizers of the Pan-American Games. These games could not claim the status of "Olympic Games". Writing to Ricardo C. Aldao and Horacio Bustos de Morón —both IOC members— Baillet-Latour expressed strong objections to what he called "the usurpation of the title 'Olympic'", noting that the games had initially been labelled the "First Pan-American Olympic Games"[18]. Yet shortly afterward, in a letter addressed to all IOC members, Baillet-Latour adopted a more conciliatory tone, stating that although the Pan-American Games "are not Olympic, [they] will serve the Olympic idea and will bring greater participation from overseas countries in future Games. We cannot but rejoice"[19]. This more favourable position was also publicly reaffirmed in the second issue of the *Boletín de los Deportes*[20].

Nonetheless, the IOC's ambiguous stance reappeared repeatedly. For example, when representatives from American countries met at a gathering convened by the Argentine Confederation of Sports–Argentine Olympic Committee, they agreed to create the Pan-American Sportive Committee to oversee the organization of Pan-American Sportive Games every four years, starting in 1942[21]. Avery Brundage was named president of the committee and soon became one of the Games' strongest advocates, alongside the Argentine Olympic Committee.

Although war soon engulfed Europe, the IOC —under Baillet-Latour's leadership— expressed appreciation for the Pan-American initiative. Given

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[18] Henri Baillet-Latour to Ricardo C. Aldao, 19 december 1940, in "1ers Jeux Panaméricains à Buenos Aires en 1942 (non celebrés) en 1951: Correspondence, bullettins officiels, compte-rendu et bulletins d'information", Folder: Correspondance, 1940-1942, IOC HA.

[19] Henri Baillet-Latour to Members of IOC, 1 January 1941, IOC President – Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Circulares Escrites par HBL, 1926-1941", IOC HA.

[20] Boletín de los Deportes. Publicación Oficial del Comité Organizador (2) 1941, p. 4.

[21] First Pan American Congress – Summary of Resolutions, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA; Avery Brundage to Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Correspondance de HBL (President) 1939-1945, Folder "Correspondance 1940-1941", IOC HA.

the war conditions, the IOC president instructed the American countries to communicate directly with Brundage, rather than through the IOC's Swiss headquarters[22].

Brundage also assured Baillet-Latour that the Pan-American Games could improve the IOC's public image in the United States. As he explained: "Here in the United States too, from time to time, radical, disgruntled, and ignorant journalists and malcontents voiced vicious criticism of the Games and the IOC. We will probably have our hands full after the war in bringing the Olympic machine back into smooth working order. However, I feel that the people of the world, disillusioned with politics, will turn with relief to the high ideals of the Olympic Movement. I trust that this day will soon arrive"[23].

Thus, until early 1941, the organizers of the First Pan-American Games —especially the Argentine Olympic Committee— sought to legitimize their efforts within the broader Olympic community.

V. The Collapse of the First Pan-American Games

From the outset, the organization of the First Pan-American Games was marked by a series of critical challenges, particularly within the sporting and Olympic spheres. A widespread perception prevailed that the presence of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in the Western Hemisphere was limited, and that National Olympic Committees in the Americas enjoyed excessive autonomy from the IOC — an issue considered detrimental to the long-term future of the Olympic movement (Torres 2008)[24].

[22] Henri Baillet-Latour, 1 January 1941, IOC President – Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Correspondance from Henri Baillet-Latour (President) to the Ioc Secretary General, Mr. Albert Berdez (1938-1941)", Folder "Baillet/Secr. Gén. 1940-1941", IOC HA.

[23] Avery Brundage to Henri Baillet- Latour, 17 December 1940, IOC President – Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Correspondance de HBL (President) 1939-1945, Folder "Correspondance 1940-1941", IOC HA.

[24] Pedro Jaime de Matheu to Henri Baillet-Latour, 1 January 1940, IOC President – Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Correspondance de HBL (President) 1939-1945" Folder "Correspondance 1940-1941", IOC HA.

As early as 1941, Avery Brundage emphasized the need to identify members in Central America capable of acting beyond personal interests, while also noting the greater complexity of the South American context, due to political instability. He remarked that although Latin American countries were formally defined as republics, the actual forms of government — despite persistent references to democracy— were often closer to dictatorships or semi-dictatorships. In most cases, little could be accomplished without governmental support, and amateur sport was no exception. In Argentina, Brundage observed, sport organizations appeared relatively independent from political power, whereas in other countries, such as Brazil, sport was entirely politicized, to the point that two different groups claimed IOC representation[25].

This assessment was reinforced by IOC delegates Joaquín Serratosa Cibils (Uruguay) and Julio Gerlein Comelin (Colombia), who confirmed the prevalence of similar tendencies throughout the region. According to them, "there are strong tendencies in that direction in a number of Latin American countries. […] As a matter of fact, in many of these countries little will be done for many years to come unless the government does it. This is a subject which will merit most serious consideration by our Committee": in that sense, there was the hope that "there will be no outside interference with our plans", referring above all to the repercussions that the events of World War II could have for countries with such large numbers of European immigrants[26].

Beyond the issue of the politicization of Olympism, another sports-related conflict emerged that jeopardized the organization of the First Pan-American Games: nationalist rivalries. In October 1941, Brundage noted that Colombia had decided to postpone the Central American Games — originally scheduled for early 1942— to the end of the same year. This new timeline clashed with the Pan-American Games. As Brundage pointed out, it was not the first time national interests disrupted regional sporting events

[25] Report written by A. Brundage and sent to Henri Baillet- Latour, 1941, IOC President – Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Correspondance de HBL (President) 1939-1945, Folder "Correspondance 1940-1941", IOC HA.

[26] Avery Brundage to Henri Baillet- Latour, 5 September 1941, Avery Brundage, Box "Correspondance 1937-1951, Folder "Correspondance 1937-1949", IOC HA.

(see Sotomayor 2016, 94–101). "Whether this conflict in dates was deliberate or accidental, I do not know. Colombia was not represented at the Pan-American Sport Congress which I attended in Buenos Aires and there may be some hidden reason for its action"[27]. This conflict worried not only the IOC and its President: this scheduling conflict not only concerned the IOC but raised fears that the Pan-American Games would become a solely Latin American event, excluding North and Central American nations — a risk that became reality just one month later. IOC Acting President Sigfrid Edström declared unequivocally that the outbreak of war involving the United States rendered the organization of the Latin American Sports Games unrealistic[28].

In this sense, it is not only the difficulties of Pan-Americanism (mencioned above) that hinder the realization of the Games, but above all other issues related to international politics, such as the entry into the war of certain countries in the American hemisphere. Political considerations further influenced the cancellation of the Games. The entry of the United States into World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor marked a turning point in the history of the Pan-American Games. Brundage sought to avert cancellation by appealing to Nelson A. Rockefeller, then Coordinator of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA 1940–1945), an agency tasked with advancing U.S. cultural diplomacy across Latin America. The CIAA aimed to promote hemispheric unity and resistance to Axis influence through various soft power initiatives (Sadlier 2012).

Brundage urged Rockefeller to recognize that Latin American audiences, far from viewing the cancellation as a demonstration of wartime resolve, might interpret it as a sign of American vulnerability. In his view, a symbolic gesture —such as the deployment of a military aircraft to deliver a small U.S. sports delegation to Buenos Aires— would instead project strength and reinforce regional solidarity. He pointed out that Germany had

[27] Avery Brundage to Henri Baillet- Latour, 10 November 1941, IOC President – Henri Baillet-Latour, Box "Correspondance de HBL (President) 1939-1945", IOC HA.
[28] Cicrulaire, 24 January 1942, IOC President – Sigfrid Edström, Box "Biographie, Arrticles de Presse, Lettres circulaires et discurs de S. Edström, 1940-1964", Folder "Circulaires 1940-1962 ", IOC HA.

continued to promote sports activities in wartime Europe, involving both neutral and belligerent athletes[29]. Brundage framed participation in the Pan-American Games as a strategic diplomatic tool to strengthen inter-American alliances and counter fascist influence. He also warned that Argentina, which had often adopted a nationalistic and ambivalent stance toward the United States, might interpret American absence as a deliberate slight, exacerbating already delicate political tensions: "The Argentineans being a proud, suspicious, and nationalistic people" Brundage remarked: they "will certainly take it as a deliberate slight if we are not there, a reprisal for the Rio Conference and a delicate situation will be further strained"[30].

Rockefeller's response, though prompt, was unequivocal. While he expressed general support for inter-American sports initiatives, he stated that current intelligence assessments suggested such programs would be counterproductive under wartime conditions. Moreover, official authorities had advised against participation, making U.S. involvement unfeasible: "at the present time, reports from experienced observers in the American Republics have convinced us that the harmful effects of attempting to carry out an active inter-American sports program, no matter how limited its scope, would over-balance those resulting from withdrawal in this field. Further, official authority by whose opinion we must necessarily to a large extent be guided has pronounced unequivocally against participation at this time"[31].

Meanwhile, Argentine organizer Enrique Palacios attempted to sustain momentum by writing to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, appealing to ideals of hemispheric solidarity and highlighting the contradiction of a Pan-American event held without its "elder sister" nation[32]. Yet neither Brundage's diplomatic efforts

[29] Avery Brundage to Nelson A. Rockefeller, 14 April 1942, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA.
[30] Ibidem.
[31] Nelson A. Rockefeller to Avery Brundage, 18 April 1942, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA.
[32] Juan Carlos Palacios to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 7 April 1942, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA; Juan Carlos Palacios to Sumner Welles, 6 April 1942, ABC, Box 202, Folder "I Pan American Games and Congress, 1940-46", UIA.

nor Palacios's advocacy succeeded in reversing the U.S. decision. By the end of April 1942, the United States formally announced its withdrawal, effectively postponing the First Pan-American Games until after the conclusion of the war. Although the United States maintained its cultural diplomacy efforts toward Latin America in various fields (such as film production and radio broadcasting), these did not extend to the sports sector (Cramer and Prutsch 2012).

The failure of the Games was the result of two intertwined failures of legitimation. From the standpoint of international sports governance, the effort to establish a pan-American event faced resistance due to the politicization of sport, persistent distrust among national Olympic committees, and a moment of institutional fragility within the IOC itself. Concurrently, the global realignment caused by the United States' entry into World War II shifted the priorities of U.S. foreign and inter-American policy, even if other initiatives aimed at promoting Pan-American cultural integration continued to be pursued. In the end, neither the efforts of Brundage nor those of the organizing committee were sufficient to overcome these obstacles, and the vision of hemispheric unity through sport had to be deferred. Consequently, it was the other two critical factors that played a decisive role in the decline of the 1942 Pan-American Games.

VI. Conclusions

The failure of the First Pan-American Games cannot be attributed solely to the entry of the United States into the Second World War. In fact, the U.S. government continued to promote a variety of cultural initiatives aimed at preserving continental unity and countering the influence of Axis powers. The cancellation of the Games was instead the result of three structural issues that extended far beyond the wartime emergency.

The first critical issue concerned the very concept of Pan-Americanism. As César Torres has argued, the collapse of the First Pan-American Games revealed the inherent limitations of Pan-Americanism itself (Torres 2011). These limitations, upon closer examination, were rooted in both its conceptual complexity and its ideological ambiguity. As demonstrated in this study, diverse interpretations of Pan-Americanism emerged across

North, Central, and South America. On one hand, a hemispheric vision prevailed, while on the other, a universalist interpretation took hold. Though both versions converged around the shared opposition to Axis powers during the war, they nonetheless differed significantly in cultural terms.

Using the Argentine case as an example, and adopting the lens of cultural history, Cándida Smith (2017) has shown how relevant distinct political and cultural orientations converged in the early 1940s in support of Pan-Americanism as an anti-Axis platform. In this context, the simplistic, often imperialistic interpretation of Pan-Americanism gave way to a more multifaceted political culture — one that carried with it models of political and economic organization, social representations, and, importantly, new international alliances. These diverse visions gained traction thanks to the multilateral framework promoted by the Good Neighbor Policy.

However, focusing on the outbreak of the war and the contradictions of Pan-Americanism does not fully explain why other U.S. cultural diplomacy initiatives were strengthened, while that of the Pan-American Games was set aside. This evolving understanding of the beginning of the World War II in the Americas and of Pan-Americanism introduces the second structural issue. To conceive Pan-Americanism as a universe of shared values was to define a principle of unity for the Western Hemisphere. It involved, in effect, the construction of a continental identity — one that differed from the traditional tripartite division of the Americas into North, Central (including the Caribbean), and South. In alignment with this geographical framework, the IOC had already proposed the creation of regional competitions in the Americas during the 1920s. It had sponsored the Latin American Games in Rio de Janeiro in 1922 (involving Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil), as well as the Central American and Caribbean Games from 1926 onward[33]. Within this context, the Pan-American Games emerged not as a singular initiative but as one among several competing regional sport models. They must therefore be interpreted as part of a broader ecosystem of regional blocs that reflected the growing influence of

[33] The Central American and Caribbean Games began in 1926 in Mexico City and they are still organized. See URL http://www.odecabe.org/inicio.aspx [accessed 25 March, 2020].

nationalism across much of Latin America — nationalisms that, by this time, had begun to receive institutional and political support.

The third and final structural issue pertains to the status of the Olympic and sporting movements in Latin America during the period in question. The planning of the Pan-American Games played an indirect but meaningful role in both the creation and recognition of several national Olympic committees. Countries such as Argentina (1923), Mexico (1923), Chile (1934), and Venezuela (1935) saw their Olympic committees recognized by the IOC in the same year they were established. In other instances, however, significant delays occurred between the formation of a national committee and its formal recognition by the IOC. The Brazilian Olympic Committee, for example, was founded in 1904 but not officially recognized until 1935; the Peruvian committee was created in 1923 but only acknowledged in 1936; and Colombia's committee waited more than a decade before being recognized (1936/1948). This gradual and uneven process of institutional development unfolded in tandem with two additional dynamics: first, the persistent difficulties in professionalizing sport in a political environment marked by strong nationalist sentiment; second, the sudden death of IOC President Henri de Baillet-Latour in January 1942, which added further uncertainty to the international Olympic movement[34].

While the outbreak of war and the shifting international context constituted immediate causes for the postponement of the First Pan-American Games, they were not the only —or even the principal— reasons. The deeper, structural causes lay in the limitations of Roosevelt's Pan-Americanism under the Good Neighbor policy, the internal contradictions of the Pan-American ideal itself, the rise of nationalist political cultures across Latin America, and the institutional fragilities of the Olympic movement in the region.

[34] A similar process in Latin America has occurred with regards to football. See: Brizzi and Sbetti (2018, 35-57); Armus and Rinke (2014).

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