

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GYMNASTICS AND (SCHOOL) PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

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Historical article

Abstract

*The paper discuss relation of gymnastics and Physical education (PE) in schools in Slovenia in the period 1869-1941 while for the decade after the World War II. (WWII) we only present general situation after the political changes in Yugoslavia. In the period until World War I. (WWI), gymnastics as a new form of physical activity was introduced in schools. With the new school legislation of 1869 it became an obligatory school subject. This called for the establishment of curricula and hiring of professional staff, which was influenced also by the development of gymnastics in the civil society. The school subject was initially named "gymnastics" (as translated appropriately to German *turnen* and Slovenian *telovadba*). However, the term PE started to be used soon, until it ultimately replaced the previous name after WWI. PE was supposedly a broader expression that covered the educational aspects of this activity as well, while gymnastics was supposedly a narrower term, related solely to the physical aspects. In view of its previous development in the relevant societies as well as schools, gymnastics was the central activity in the context of PE. In the Slovenian case it involved exercises with or without gymnastics equipment, games, as well as certain martial arts elements or disciplines. With the paper we also want to encourage comparative analyses of similar situations especially between regions under former Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslavia as they share the common legislation and school milieu with cultural diversity.*

Keywords: *gymnastics, physical education, school curriculum, Sokol movement, Slovenia.*

INTRODUCTION

Gymnastics as a modern activity and an extensive system of exercises (with or without gymnastics equipment, games, as well as certain martial arts elements or disciplines) with the aim of ensuring a comprehensive workout asserted itself in the society with the onset of the age of enlightenment. In the 19th century, several systems of gymnastics, developed in the

context of gymnastic societies, had already been formed. In the Central Europe, the so-called *Turnverein* societies – German gymnastic societies – and partly also the Swedish gymnastics prevailed, while the Sokol organisation was prevalent among the Slavs. In the German lands, the *Turnverein* societies were established as early as in the first half of the 19th century, while in the

Habsburg Empire they were not implemented until the democratisation of the Empire after 1861. In the 19th century, simultaneously with the development of gymnastics in the dedicated societies and the onset of pedagogical philanthropy, the demands to permanently introduce gymnastics into the school curricula as an obligatory rather than merely an optional subject asserted themselves during the formation of the modern state and public education. In the Austrian Empire government or Ministry for Education accepted gymnastics or new system of physical exercises and activity in the school curriculum after March revolutions in 1848. Implementation was facultative, students could visit or practiced it according to principal's approval as gymnastic courses were organised outside schools or on another school or on private. For example in Ljubljana, at the time the capital of Carniola, the first courses according to school approval were organised by Štefan Mandič, who also had seminars for citizens – for example from a group of gymnastic amateurs came an idea to form the first gymnastic society in 1862. Mandič's gymnastics was not attractive and already in 1851/52 his students had abandoned him. But the facultative opportunity of the gymnastics remained and students could visit seminars organised by private persons or school teachers' gymnastic amateurs. We can find similar tensions in Trieste/Trieste, Celovec/Klagenfurt and Maribor. In Ljubljana in 1860 professor Jan Vavru, a Czech by nationality, who taught classical languages in gymnasium, took over gymnastic seminars. He also wrote a manual *Gymnastic Exercises for the Gymnastic Society of the Ljubljana General Upper Secondary School/Gymnastische Übungen für die Turnanstalt am k.k. Gymnasium zu Laibach/* (1861) and the gymnasium also purchased some gym apparatus, while Vavru had to obtain gym grounds. In Maribor the teacher Markl was an important organiser of gymnastic seminars, similar seminars also took place in Celje and Ptuj. In this period, organisers or gymnastic

teachers were good improvisers as schools did not yet have gym grounds at school nor any gym halls. The first school gym hall in Ljubljana was opened in 1874. (Stepišnik, 1974)

In the second half of 19th century gymnastics by establishing gymnastic societies spread throughout the Austro-Hungaria. On the territory of present-day Slovenia, two gymnastic societies, i.e., the German Turnverein and the Slovene Južni Sokol (South Falcon), were established in Ljubljana in 1862 and 1863 respectively. In the period before the First World War, a mass national and liberal Sokol movement was set up. In Slovene society, the Sokol societies brought about a new profession, which was spread and developed with the help of courses for instructors. The first professional works such as *Science of gymnastics (Nauk o telovadbi)* were published as early as 1867 (free exercises) and 1869 (pole and apparatus exercises) - the second edition was also accepted in schools in some parts of Slovenian territory. For the Sokol professional development, courses for instructors organized by Viktor Murnik after 1896 are important. They were based on Tyrš's Sokol system, which became the basis of work in societies and professional work as well as the basis of contacts with Sokol movements in other regions/countries. (Pavlin, 2013)

Gymnastics in school before World War I.

Although we saw the first attempt of introducing gymnastics into schools after 1848 March revolution, new era in forming school gymnastics begun with 1869, when a school act was passed regulating primary schools and introducing a new curriculum with 2 hours of gymnastics for boys and needlework with housekeeping for girls. Later, girls were allowed to take part in gymnastics, the situation could be different in the Slovenian regions, but after 1883, this was again limited and allowed only if approved by their parents on the condition there were enough candidates. In 1870, the state introduced gymnastics into secondary

schools – first into natural science secondary schools and teacher training secondary schools. In grammar schools, gymnastics was optional at first and became obligatory in the 1909/10 school year. For educational needs teacher Janez Zima 1872 publish professional publication *Gymnastics in the primary schools (Telovadje v ljudskej šoli)*. On the other side Sokol in Ljubljana already in the 1860s organised gymnastic seminars for school students. The attendance at seminars depended not only of the professional knowledge of teachers or professionals but also of the national consciousness of students or their families. (Stepišnik, 1978)

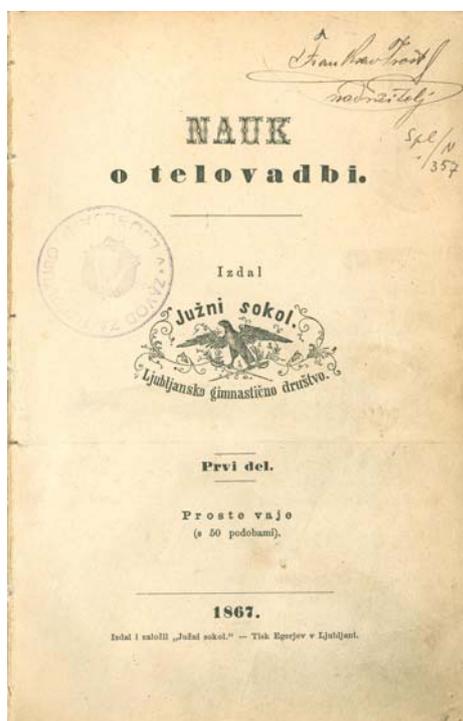


Figure 1. The cover page of the first professional work in slovene language Science of gymnastics/ *Nauk o telovadbi* (Faculty of Sport).

In school system the methodology of Adolf Spiess prevailed and the subject was based on free exercises and marching drills, pole exercises, apparatus exercises and games popular in schools. Sticking to Spiess's methods resulted in the rejection of gymnastics and in students being absent. For this reason, the »game afternoons« (*spielnachmitags*) were introduced in 1890

by educational government and were organized as after-school activities; in a number of places, they became on one side centres of increasingly popular English sports and on the other centres where secondary school students themselves organized sports activities. »Game afternoons« introduced disciplines of athletics/track and field, football, swimming, in winter skating and other activities. Already in 1895 in Ljubljana students competed in an antique pentathlon and at the end of the century football was also mentioned. Later, several student football clubs were formed; for example, among Slovenian students in the Ljubljana club *Hermes* and in the Gorica club *Yugoslavia*, both in the 1908/09 school year. In Ljubljana since at least 1910 there was also an action to organise rowing for students since in 1907 *LSK* (Ljubljana sport club) was established, with sections for rowing, tennis and sledging. Some *LSK* members also started with skiing, which after World War I. became very popular. An important fact when organising rowing was that students had to be good swimmers so the inclusion of rowing also influenced the growth of the swimming sport. (Stepišnik, 1974; Pavlin, 2005)

According to the preserved curriculums (*učni načrti/Lehrplans für Volksschule*) for primary schools (stored in Slovenian school museum and transcribed by Kompara & Čuk, 2006), we see gymnastics was in this period the fundament of curriculums. The purpose of gymnastics as school subject was strengthening the body, enhancing self-confidence, improving of motion and attitude to good body and mind and to enhance or keep in good condition body and mind and reinforcing bravery. Similar purposes we can see through curriculums in 1880s for girls: to strengthen the body and bravery, to enhance skills and flexibility, to improve or to enhance body and mind. Gymnastic lessons in these period in general based on free exercises (*proste vaje/frei übungen*) and marching drills or group free exercises (*redovne vaje/ordnungsübungen*), rope climbing and jumping, exercises with

bat and stick, apparatus exercises: pole, rings, ladder, balance beam, skip rope, parallel bars, pommel horse and games: gymnastic games and popular folk or child games and among them also ball games, but that were not sports, as sport was only introducing in the daily life. As we stressed above, sport found place in »game afternoons« in 1890s. With gymnastic festivals and on the other side sport events and Olympics arised questions about matches, races or competitions. In the Instructions for 1911 it was for example stressed that gymnastics were from the point of harmonically progression (combining body and mind) indispensable part of education and lessons; further on Instructions stressed gaining of force and influence on virility, discipline and mutually respect. We also see that competition was tolerated but not forced as Instructions mentioned it as “artificial gymnastics”, which goal is only competition.

The organisation and implementation of gymnastics as school subject had quite a few difficulties as in 1869 not one Slovenian primary or secondary school had gymnastic grounds not to mention a gym hall. Another problem was lack of gym apparatus. The situation slowly improved and by 1880 37 gym halls were arranged on Slovenian territory or in the lands within Austria with a predominantly Slovene population; that were Carniola, southern Carinthia, southern Styria, Gorica region, Trieste region with the Karst and northern Istria. The situation was different from region to region: in Carniola 4 schools had a gym hall, in Carinthia 8, in Styria 10, in the Gorica region 1, in the Trieste region 14; in Carniola 31 schools had arranged gym grounds or workout facility outside school, in Carinthia 60, in Styria 132, in the Gorica region 23 and in the Trieste region 4, making a total of 251. A decade later in 1890 the situation was similar. The number of halls increased in Styria (13) and Carinthia (13). In 1891 in Carniola among the 298 primary schools only 8 had a gym hall, but on the other hand in 1874 a unique gym hall of the secondary (non-classical)

school (*realka*) was built, becoming the first modern school gym hall in Ljubljana and Slovenia. State educational policy dictated the building of gym halls in every new secondary school, which was harder to implement in practice. In the period before WWI, beside the »realka« gym hall, new secondary school gym halls were built in Maribor (1887 and 1888), Ptuj (1890), Kranj (1899), Idrija (1902), Ljubljana (1899, 1905, 1907), and Trieste (1912). (Stepišnik, 1978)



Figure 2. The school garden in one of the primary school in southern Styria with some gym facilities, around 1890 (Slovenian school museum).

Inclusion of gymnastics or physical activity in curriculums raised also a question of a new profession: gymnastic teacher. According to the decree of the Ministry of Education (1870), the candidates who wanted to get qualifications in gymnastics or later Physical education (PE) had to pass an exam in front of the commission appointed for this purpose. In 1871, the first professional two-year course was organized in Vienna followed by a theoretical and practical exam. The candidates gained a detailed insight into the development of gymnastics, pedagogic principles, they became familiar with gymnastic systems, gymnastics terminology and they were trained in practical matters. The emphasis was also laid on human anatomy, physiology and biology. Many Slovenes from different parts of present-day Slovenia also enrolled on the courses. Among them

was also Franc Brunet, who taught gymnastics in Ljubljana and published a reference book in Slovene Gymnastics in elementary schools with five classes and with fewer than five classes (*Telovadba v petrazrednih in manj kot petrazrednih ljudskih šolah*), in 1900 reprint in 1907. (Ulaga, Knez-Bergant, 1992).

Gymnastics and PE in the Yugoslav state

By the end of WWI and decline of Austro-Hungaria Southern Slavs established the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, from 1929 on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Similarly in the middle of 1919, Slovene, Croatian and Serbian Sokols merged into a uniform Yugoslav Sokol Union. On the founding general meeting they also discussed the relationship with school in new geopolitical space and time. The general meeting laid down a principle called »Sokol and schools« emphasizing the fact that the Sokol and school should be connected reciprocally. The Sokol movement had had a nation-forming task for over 50 years and in the new state, it should therefore penetrate all national schools with its spirit and take over PE in schools. Sokol teachers should also be PE teachers and vice versa. The Sokol movement should play a leading professional role in resolving issues concerning PE as well as within the framework of the authority structures from the lowest to the highest ones at ministry or government level. (Pavlin, 2013)

New authorities already in 1919 introduced two hours of gymnastics into schools but in contrast to the Austrian school system, Yugoslav one did not adopt game afternoons. Schools in the territory of present-day Slovenia took on a Slovenian character with so called process of Slovenianisation. Proces was important from the national and cultural points of view and it pushed out of schools Germanism. The process included also PE, where Sokol movement played important professional and cultural role. As we stressed above, the Sokol already at the general meeting in 1919 discuss new school situation and laid

down a principle. Obviously it was taken into account since in January 1920, the government ordered that school gymnastics should be carried out in accordance with the Sokol system. (Pavlin, 2013) By coming into schools and by introducing Sokol gymnastics and national education, Sokols were – in the catholic part of the country (Slovenia, Croatia and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina) – confronted with the traditional educator, i.e., the Catholic Church, and its intention to use the principles of the catholic Orel in this part of education. This led to an eruption of the cultural fight between the Sokol and Orel movements which had a political liberal and catholic background, what was presented in our older paper (Pavlin, 2013; Dolenc, 1996).



Figure 3. Example of Sokol's free exercises, 1920s (Faculty of Sport).

The professional situation of school gymnastics or PE, which became the main expression in period 1918-1941, confronted the continuing lack of halls and gym

grounds and the lack of academic and scientific recognition of the subject, which means it was further on recognised as a skilful profession. In Slovenia in 1938 there were 871 primary schools and only 5.6% of them had a gym hall. Comparing to Austro-Hungarian time, when the 4.8% of schools had gym halls, shows that there had been no impressive development of the subject. A similar story applied to gym grounds. The conditions were relatively better in secondary schools but still not promising. So in this case in some places schools could PE situation save by *Sokols* gym halls and grounds. The professional basis of school gymnastics or PE was a *Sokol* gymnastics. Favourising of *Sokol*'s gymnastics and also participation in *Sokol* societies blockade introducing of some sports in schools so sport, especially football, spread around primarily through civil society. In Slovenia there were good facilities for the development of winter sports. In 1925 the school authorities allowed the introduction of skiing. (Stepišnik, 1978) The permission positively influenced on organisation of skiing sport. Skiing was also more and more included in *Sokol* gymnastics and in the 1930s *Sokol* began with its own skiing sections and competitions.



Figure 4. Photography of first gym hall in Ljubljana from 1960s, still in function (Slovenian school museum).

The purposes of curriculums in 1920s stressed physical strengthens, improving motoric, developing self-confidence, physical and mental health, determination,

distant and nice behaviour. After 1929 the political changes on state level brought into daily life *Sokol* of Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In 1932 followed new school law, which according to the political changes explicitly stressed the *Sokol* gymnastics and system in school PE. The curriculum purposes or goals in 1930s were harmonically (body/mind) development and body strengthening, upright body posture and fine moving or motoric improvement, agility and self-confidence, endurance, socialising, self-esteem and discipline. These goals were in years expanded with strengthening of breath and blood circulation from the view of health, cheering up nerves by singing, developing of sense for nature, environment and homeland. In all period 1918-1941 the basic activity of PE were gymnastics, in the 1930s explicitly *Sokol* gymnastics. The PE hours in the whole period were composed by free and group exercises, exercises with stick or other instruments, skipping rope and some apparatus as balance beam, ladder, pole and games. In 1930s it was expanded with swimming and rowing, where it was possible, in the winter skating and skiing and especially in second half of 1930s shooting as the geopolitical relations in Europe by growing Nazism were becoming strained; the curriculum included also camping, as it became also part of *Sokol* system, and competition. We also cannot neglect the fact that the *Sokol* system tended for physical and symmetric improvement of whole body and appropriately to that favorised all-round exercising instead of specialisation, what in today modern gymnastics is omitted (Bučar et al., 2016).

Sokol also took care of the professional basis and their 1921 general meeting made an appeal to the Ministry of Education for organizing courses for gymnastic teachers and for employing gymnastic teachers trained according to *Sokol* principles in all teacher secondary training schools in the country. They also made an appeal to the authorities for special supervisors for PE and proposed that a department of PE should be established in at least one faculty of arts – in cooperation with the faculty of

medicine; lecturers should be established Sokol experts. The Ministry of Health should awarded grants to young doctors skilled at physical exercises who could specialize as physiologists and develop the physiology of PE. However, the demands were because of world economic crises too radical for new authorities and in practice, the education of staff based on Sokol professional courses (in Ljubljana, a one-month training course for Sokol instructors was organized already as early as autumn 1919; it consisted of 10 lessons every day covering theoretical and practical aspects) which were also recognized in schools as appropriate for teaching PE. At the end of November 1920, Yugoslav Sokols met with the Czechoslovak Sokols in Ljubljana and in a solemn declaration, they stressed, among other, the tendency towards the creation of a new and complete type of a Slav who would strive to achieve human completeness. One of the central points of Sokol work was a physical rebirth of a nation and education of young generations that is why both Sokol organizations demanded that the states should pay attention to these issues and they would help them. They also stressed the fact that among the goals are the commitment to reforming schools and army according to Sokol principles, an obligatory law on PE of all citizens and the establishment of a college of PE either in Czechoslovakia or in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Actually, a six-month Sokol school was organized in Prague in the late 1920s, where also Yugoslav Sokols were trained. This training, however, was carried out primarily in a civil society manner. On the basis of Sokols' initiatives, the Yugoslav state got involved in solving the problems regarding professionalism in PE in the late 1920s. In June 1927, it introduced a one-year course in PE for PE teachers in secondary schools. At the same time, Sokols emphasized that PE teachers and professionals in the field of civil PE should study for two years either at university or teacher training short-cycle College until a suitable short-cycle college of PE was established (Pavlin, 2014).



Figure 5. Secondary school students in group free exercises on the occasion of 1. festival of Yugoslav Sokol 1922 in Ljubljana (Faculty of Sport).

In order to calm a tense political situation in the Yugoslavian state in the 1920s which culminated with the shooting in the parliament in Belgrade in the middle of 1928 causing the death of two leading Croatian politicians, King Alexander staged a coup, established a dictatorship and dissolved the parliament and political parties on 6 January 1929. The Yugoslav Sokols met with King Alexander in March 1929 and prepared a memorandum with a law draft dealing with school youth PE and a law draft concerning a PE military school, which would mean that Sokol PE extended to include the military. They emphasized the general need for PE and claimed that history taught us that great cultures prospered as long as PE was a component part of general education. If a country wants to popularize PE among all strata of the nation, it must take care primarily of professionalism and suitable infrastructure in schools and in the army as well as of material and moral support of the Sokol movement, which promotes PE in the civil sphere. The memorandum included a plan for a three-year study programme comprising six semesters and 108 theoretical and practical lessons. The curriculum included 22 theoretical and practical subjects as gymnastics, games, athletics/track and field and sport, fencing, gymnastic systematics and theory, methodology of physical exercises, history and literature of physical exercises, aesthetics of physical exercises, general pedagogy, physics, biology, anatomy and histology with practical

classes, anatomy of the appearance of a human being, general physiology with practical classes, general and special physiology of physical exercises, general hygiene, school hygiene and hygiene of physical exercises, physical development and hygiene in pre-school period, anthropometry, orthopaedics, massage and medical exercises, first aid with practical exercises, the building and equipment of gymnastics and gymnastic facilities. (Memorandum, 1929)

At the beginning of the 1930s, the Sokol movement, which made an appeal for a school for professional staff, was joined by the Association of Sports Associations and by sports organizations in general that were organized independently of gymnastic organizations. While civil organizations kept demanding and emphasizing the need to establish PE studies, the latter already existed in many other countries. As a result of numerous initiatives and pressures and probably also as a result of the Slavic examples in Czechoslovakia and Poland, the Ministry of Physical Education of the Nation finally responded and in 1938 the Short-cycle College of Physical Education was established in Belgrade. Apart from the finished secondary school, a medical check-up and an examination in physical abilities and personal sports history were the requirements for enrolment. (Pavlin, 2014). With including Gymnastics into school and strong intentions for a school for professional staff we would also like to open the question of teaching methodology or teaching styles, but contrary to actual researches - for example Santana et al. (2015), there is a problem of relevant sources.

Post-war restoration of PE

After the end of World War II and liberation the school system undergone restoration as well as political and ideological treatment. The restoration was based on the values of the antifascist/anti-Nazi fight for liberation and post-war sovietisation. The 'new school' according to new political and economic system would

have to bring equality for students and expand education in all spheres of society and country. But in practice some 100 schools were war damaged and many others needed to be repaired. Another problem was the staff. Even though there was less teachers than before World War II., the new authorities combed the teachers and dismissed teachers suspected of unsuitable behaviour or acting during the war. To compensate the lack of staff authorities organised one-year specialist courses (Gabrič, 2005; Okoliš, 2009).

So PE after the war shared the circumstances of the war damage, restoration and political and economic situation. We must also stress that by the end of the 1940s the politico-economic situation in Yugoslavia become harder because of the Cominform conflict between the Soviet Union and its allies and Yugoslavia. PE in the new Yugoslavia after the first decade slowly acquired a new social and political position as it had to become part of general education of full value with important social aims and tasks. But that was harder to implement as in school milieu was strong stereotype of PE as non-scientific subject. The number of hours of PE in schools ranged from 1 to 3, depending of the type and grade of school or classroom rank. From the point of infrastructure in 1951 there were 1334 primary and secondary schools and only 166 had gym halls that allowed year-round practice of PE independently of climate conditions. During the 1950s some new gym halls were being built with citizens self-contributions but still there was a lack of PE staff and infrastructure. Schools were also included in the all-round competitions for the so-called ZREN acknowledgement (from acronyms For Republic Ahead/ Za Republiko Naprej), which started after 1946 on the state level, while after the Cominform dispute in 1948 the curriculum also included pre-military education. The introduction of a monthly sports day as an obligatory part of school education in 1953, intended to promote spare-time sports activities among the youth, was an

important step. In accordance with the “physical culture” policy (with sovietisation “physical culture” became the umbrella term for physical activity with the subsystems of *physical education, recreation* and *sport*) the PE curricula in the first decade after WWII generally strove to unify the pre-war polarisation between gymnastics and sports. Although gymnastics remained a basic activity, unlike the pre-war years the curriculum was now expanded with a variety of sports. In the long term, in Slovenia this eventually led to the renaming of the subject to “Sports Education” (in 1990s) and today “Sports”. And on the other hand, was or was not the “sportization” the beginning of “gradual disappearance of gymnastics» in curriculum like in some cases in Spain (Ramos et al., 2016)?

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