

# The Impact of the Le Havre Congress on physical education in schools in Germany and some selected European Countries?



## The Academic Programme of the Congress

Norbert Müller has explicitly analysed the congress in Le Havre in his creditable work about the Olympic Congresses. For this purpose he has collected important documents from archives and the daily press.<sup>1</sup> According to his research, three central topics turning around the question of physical education in school constituted the academic programme:

1. Gymnastic exercises at French grammar schools should be supplemented with athletics and sports according to the English model of public schools.
2. The renewal of French gymnastics (la methode amorosienne) by Swedish gymnastics according to the Ling-Törngren-system to improve health and physical fitness.
3. The contradiction between the aims of physical education when implementing both, the Swedish and the English model.

Discussing these three topics, the congress in Le Havre dealt exactly with the central and current questions of school physical education about the turn of the century and previous to that, items of the discussion in France, which are proved in the works of Gibert Andrieu (1990, 1996).

The further expansion of physical education in French grammar schools was supported by the principal speakers Didon and Courcy-Laffan. Dr. Tissie, the most important representative of the Swedish method of physical education in France in those times (besides Lagrange who did not take part in the congress), demonstrated

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Müller 1983, 33-44.

Swedish gymnastics with a group of pupils. The Frenchman Dumontier gave the participants of the congress insight into the traditional French teaching of gymnastics according to the „methode amorosienne“ with a demonstration lesson. Victor Balck, member of the staff at the Central Institute for Gymnastics (GCI) in Stockholm, also informed the audience about the Swedish way of educating gymnastic teachers.

Many years before, on the occasion of the Parisian World Exhibition in 1889, he was in charge of a Swedish physical education group that had demonstrated its system in France and made it popular. His early contacts to Coubertin resulted from that time.

Finally - according to Norbert Müller's statements - it was a certain Dr. Gibert who, as a listener, pointed out the incompatibility of the Swedish physical education's system and its aims, with English sports and with the building of character. Swedish physical education and English sports combined - the two main items of the congress - should achieve a renewal of the French physical education: the Swedish system should physiologically improve the whole body with a variety of posture exercises as an inter-curricular renewal of the physical education lessons by the teacher; the English system with athletics, football, and rowing as an extra-curricular completion of the lessons in small self-organised student groups, should improve the spirit and build character.

It must be mentioned that both of these requests for the renewal of physical education at school in France, made during the Le Havre Congress, were not really new because since the 1880s there had been two movements of reform in several places in France (e.g. Bordeaux, Paris, Lyon) and Coubertin, himself, and his numerous friends and committees, had eagerly been trying to widely spread this development.<sup>2</sup>

In the following I will examine how far this renewal programme, which was planned and adopted in the Le Havre congress, has affected other countries like Germany, Greece, Sweden and Austria-Hungary, more or less supported and upheld in these countries also by their representatives in the IOC (Balck, Bikelas, Gebhardt, Guth-Jarkovsky, Kemény), who, except Bikelas, had all been present in Le Havre.

### **The Situation in Germany**

Already in 1890, at the Reich school conference, which the young emperor Wilhelm II had convened after taking over the governmental powers from chancellor Bismarck, the renewal of physical education and its special support via youth games was eagerly discussed. Eitner, a passionate admirer of the games and sports movement in Germany demanded the improval and extension of the physical education lessons to 4 lessons a week, from which one lesson should be reserved for games and sports only.<sup>3</sup> But the administrative decision by the Prussian Ministry of Culture, Education and Church Affairs sounded different. In 1892, the obligatory physical education lessons in German grammar schools was increased from two to three lessons per week. But all three lessons had to be reserved for the German physical education with its order exercises, free exercises, and apparatus exercises according to the Spieß/Maul-system. Furthermore every fortnight a so-called „game afternoon“ was offered, which the pupils should join voluntarily. One responsible teacher should be in charge of it. In addition, in many German grammar schools for boys pupils' clubs were founded, which were very active on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons when there were no school lessons. While everywhere in Prussia, pupils' gymnastic clubs were prevailing, there were many more pupils' football clubs in the Rhine Ruhr area.<sup>4</sup> There, as well as in the north and the east of Germany, many

2 Cf. Arnaud 1991; Molaro 1993; Andrieu 1993.

3 Cf. Breyvogel & Naul 1985, pp. 82-86.

4 Cf. Jonischeidt & Winkelmann 1988.

rowing clubs existed which were run by the pupils themselves, but one teacher, elected by the pupils, functioned as protector.<sup>5</sup>

With numerous initiatives this game and sports movement at schools had idealistically and materially been supported since 1892 by the „Central Committee for Youths' and Peoples' Games“ which had been founded one year before.<sup>6</sup>

According to representative statistics from 1894, 1,629 middle schools and types of grammar schools existed altogether in the 14 provinces of the state of Prussia and in the 25 other German states including Bavaria, Saxony, etc.

In his representative study, Woikowsky-Biedau (1895) reported that 1,352 schools (89%) already taught in-school games in 1894. In 923 schools (57% of all German secondary schools) games were taught in extra-curricular time and in 20% of all German secondary schools, a sport club had already been founded and self-organised by students of the school. 34% of these sport clubs were devoted to English games, in particular football, cricket, and lawn tennis.

The Swedish teaching method of physical education, apart from the early phase between 1847 and 1863, only became popular in Germany because of doctor Ferdinand August Schmidt, who visited the Central Gymnastic Institute and the elementary schools in Stockholm between 1899 and 1900.<sup>7</sup> The installation of Swedish apparatuses and exercises into the German schools' physical education did not start before the discussions for reforms on the „congresses for educating arts“ in 1905. But before World War I, the influence of Swedish gymnastics at German schools only remained marginal.<sup>8</sup> Nobody seriously wanted to replace the approved German system by the Swedish one, not even those gymnasts like Eckardt (1908) who strongly pleaded for a reform.

The above mentioned doctor, Ferdinand August Schmidt, who had recommended the Swedish physical education in Germany as a supplement to German gymnastics, was a strong opponent of the international Olympic Games. That the powerful „Central Committee for Youth and People's Games“ strictly turned down an invitation from the Greek Olympic Committee for the German participation in the 1895 Athens Games can be attributed to his activities. This association commented on an interview of Coubertin printed in the Parisian newspaper „Gil Blas“ and called it a militant German hostility which led to its printing in many German daily newspapers.<sup>9</sup> The reason was not the English sports, which Schmidt faced open-minded and thoroughly liberally, but the Olympic programme and the rules of competition which violated the real antique ideal of the Olympic Games.

Let us sum it up. The game and sports movement following the English public school model had already got much private and national support to improve physical education in Germany many years before the congress in Le Havre. In particular the concept of optional pupils' sport clubs found much support, because they were regarded as a pedagogical and sporting prevention from the abuse of tobacco and alcohol for the older pupils. The Swedish gymnastics was at the same time no challenge for the German physical education.

Which part did the German IOC-member Dr. Willibald Gebhardt play in this connection?

In these years, 1895-1904, all leading persons of the two strong German associations were against Gebhardt, the German gymnasts and the Central Committee.<sup>10</sup>

All important associations for gymnastics, games and sports resented Gebhardt's plans for the participation of Germany in the international Olympic Games. As Gebhardt was completely isolated in Germany, he had no influence over the ministries or other national institutions for the support of games and sports at schools. He also

5 Cf. Winkelmann 1986.

6 Cf. Hamer 1989.

7 Cf. Schmidt 1900

8 Cf. Naul 1988.

9 Cf. Schmidt 1895.

10 Cf. Naul 1994.

did not, comparable with Balck, Guth-Jarkovsky or Kemény, work professionally as a teacher or lecturer for physical education, but did research work for phototherapy as a scientist with a very small budget - just enough to live on. According to my knowledge, Gebhardt first commented on questions about an Olympic education in schools at the International Congress of Hygiene in Nuremberg, 1905, but with perspectives reaching far beyond any of the discussions in those times.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the Le Havre congress had no effects in Germany, because the games and sports movement had already been established and institutionalised much earlier. Up to 1904, this movement was an open affront to the activities of Coubertin, his committee and its representative in Germany: Gebhardt.

### The Situation in Greece

As mentioned above, the president of the IOC who still held office, the Greek Bikelas, did not take part in the congress in Le Havre. But Bikelas had been a supporter of the English sport movement in his country at the latest since 1891. He pleaded for the introduction of athletics, football, and rowing in Greek schools. Besides the older sources of de Genst (1949), we are grateful to the dissertation of Minas Dimitriou (1995) for precious insight into the development of physical education and of sports at Greek schools. According to his study of Greek archives and literature, the Olympic Games of Athens in 1896 influenced the spreading of sports at schools and in clubs in a very special way. Nevertheless the influences of the English sports had already been well-known in Athens and in some other towns before the Olympic Games. Also Swedish gymnastics for physical education found an important supporter in Chryssafis from 1893 onwards. He wanted to reform the rigid gymnastic lessons at elementary and high schools. However, physical education at Greek schools in the middle of the 1890s followed along the lines of Spieß/Maul. Even the wooden wand exercises, popular in Germany, according to Jäger<sup>12</sup> had found their place in the Greek physical education lessons. But these physical education lessons were even emphasised in their paramilitary function by drill exercises from the system of Amoros which determined the curriculum. So one special German-French mixture characterised the official curriculum for the Greek physical education at the time of the Olympic Games in Athens.

Already in January 1897, subsequent to the Olympic Games, the „National Greek Association for Gymnastic and Sport Clubs“ (SEAGS) was founded, as a first national association for physical education, which especially supported the introduction of athletic exercises and of games at schools and which contributed to the regional spreading of gymnastic and sports events for pupils. Consequently a renewal and extension of the national education of physical education teachers was demanded. The royal government directly supported physical education at schools after the Olympic Games with a first decree. Then, in 1899, more decrees fixed the games as a compulsory subject, including swimming and, at grammar schools, also rowing. For the Hellenic school and the grammar school the physical education lessons, with games and other sports, became an important main subject with 5 compulsory hours a week. But until 1909, German gymnastics remained the central element of physical education at school until it was replaced by the Swedish teaching method. So the school competitions of the youth, first organised in the ancient stadium of Olympia in the Alphaios-valley, describe the typical situation of the Greek physical education at the turn of the century: free exercises with wooden wands and clubs according to the German system.

Let us go back to the initial question: the congress in Le Havre did not play a part in the development of physical education in Greece because the Olympic Games themselves gave the lasting stimulus. Also the discussion held in

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Naul 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Großbröhmer & Winkelmann 1985.

Le Havre had already been well-known at that time in Greece and had found in Bikelas himself the early protagonist of the muscular Christianity, as in Chryssafis, the Ling of Greece.

### The Situation in Sweden

As early as 1877, the leader of the Central Gymnastic Institute in Stockholm, Törngren, travelled to England to find out more about the public school system there. Only three years later, his colleague Viktor Balck also watched how the pupils of Public Schools rowed, played football and took part in running competitions. Already in 1883, Balck founded a „Society for the Support of Free Games for the School Youth“ in Stockholm, to support games and sports for pupils of High Schools in this city.<sup>13</sup> Törngren also recommended „Free Games“, but for him they were rather the traditional folk games. In Sweden, in the 1880s, the first wave of a games movement started in schools, which, according to Jan Lindroth<sup>14</sup>, showed strong parallels to the early German „Gymnastic and Games Movement“ at schools at that time<sup>15</sup>, and which was influenced by it. But from 1890 until about 1905; there was clear opposition to the Swedish gymnastic teachers who, comparable to many German teachers of those years, thought the English sports with its idea of competition and individual records did not fit into their concepts of education. In 1895 a new curriculum for physical education existed, and the free games had been adopted, but only as an optional subject.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Germany, there was no development of a strong games and sports movement in the extra-curricular time including athletics, football and rowing at the grammar schools. But in Stockholm, in 1895, the pupils' sports association, called „Idrottsförenigen Kamraterna“ was founded, which was later joined by more and more pupils' sport clubs from all over Sweden.<sup>17</sup> At the same time an initiative for the support of school games was formed in Gothenburg.<sup>18</sup> The hygienist and school doctor Silfverskiöld confirmed the poor physical condition of regional pupils and recommended the introduction of youth games according to the German example. And the Gothenburg association of teachers actually sent a representative to Germany, to gather information about the organisation of youth games at schools. In autumn, 1894, games were already organised for older pupils of Gothenburg and since 1895 those games could take place regularly on the playground, built by the community.

In June, 1895, a game course for teachers, lasting for four weeks, was organised under the supervision of director Solomon, in Nääs. In these courses both German games (slingball and bar run) and English games (football and cricket) were taught. Let us come back to our initial question.

Neither the Olympic Games of Athens nor the congress of Le Havre gave any stimulation for the special support of English games and sports in Sweden. The concept of Muscular Christianity had long been well-known and the establishment of game afternoons and pupils' sports events had also existed before 1897. This movement could only stand up against the strong lobby of Ling/Törngren-system of physical education here and there, e.g. in towns like Gothenburg. Viktor Balck himself had to face a great phalanx of pure Lingian gymnasts in Stockholm, at his work in the GCI and many grammar schools, which could largely prevent an integration of the game and sports movement into school until the Olympic Games in Stockholm, in 1912.

13 Cf. Lindroth 1993, pp. 116-154.

14 Lindroth 1994, p. 270.

15 Cf. Jonischeidt 1996.

16 Cf. Fouqué 1997, p. 36.

17 Cf. Meinander 1994, p. 74.

18 Cf. Akermark 1897.

## The Situation in the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy

On the 15th of September 1890, a decree for the support of youth games was published for the imperial and royal monarchy, by the Minister of Culture, Education and Church Affairs, Baron Gautsch of Frankenthurn. Three years later, in a following decree, the headmasters were allowed to charge a certain amount of money in order to pay rent for the playgrounds and to pay for the acquisition of apparatus, as well as to offer payment to the teachers for these extra-curricular activities. In this way a good foundation for a successful development was laid.

Thus, Glas, a physical education teacher in Vienna, reported in the Olympic year 1896, that in 146 out of altogether 158 grammar schools and secondary schools in German-Austria there had already been regular game lessons, of course also in Bohemian and Moravian towns like Prague, Brno, Ceske Budejovice, Usti, Cheb, Olomouce, Jihlava etc..

Not only were the German gymnastic games maintained, but boccia, cricket, croquet, football, rugby, and lawn tennis were also common. In Vienna as well as in Prague there had also been football-, cricket-, and lawn tennis matches between the school teams of the grammar schools and the English club teams resident in these towns.<sup>19</sup> A school doctor, called Schuschny reported of the kingdom of Hungary, in 1897, the year of the Olympic congress in Le Havre, that in more than 100 of the altogether 185 Hungarian secondary schools games were introduced, above all, according to the German examples slingball and stickball. Since 1893, games lectures were organised for teachers by the grammar school professors Szigetvari and Otto, after the national Hungarian administration of education had sent both of the gentlemen to Germany and Switzerland to gather information.

What part did the two Bohemian and Hungarian members of the IOC: Guth-Jarkovsky and Kemény play in the support of athletic exercises and sports at schools?

Both IOC members were professional teachers. Dr. Guth-Jarkovsky was a grammar school professor in Prague, Franz Kemény, headmaster at a secondary school in Budapest. After the games of Athens Guth-Jarkovsky reported about his impressions of the journey and the ceremonial programme of the Olympic Games in the „Journal for Austrian Grammar Schools“ (1896). At the end of his report he emphasised that the games of Athens would indirectly support physical education at secondary schools in Austria-Hungary as well as the ministerial decree of the Minister for Culture, Education and Church Affairs, Gautsch of Frankenthurn, from 1890, because both events had „[...] the support of physical education as their aim“.<sup>20</sup>

Only a few weeks before the congress in Le Havre, Franz Kemény published an essay with the topic „The meaning of Olympic Games for the physical education of the youth“. He quoted from Guth-Jarkovsky's article and suggested how the Olympic Games should affect education at secondary schools.

But he also committed that „the reforms of the preceding years had already taken that course independently in former times“<sup>21</sup>. In the Olympic discus throwing and relays he saw an enlargement of exercises for physical education in the Hungarian schools. The athletic „pre-school“ of the later participants of Olympic Games should not start at university but should be shifted to secondary school. Therefore he recommended the formation of pupils' sport clubs. Further, subsequently to the international Olympic Games, an Olympic national tournament of all secondary school pupils and their clubs should be organised as a national festival at which the whole youth of the host country would meet. Obviously, Kemény also wanted to discuss that under the third item „sports“ on the agenda in Le Havre, although Coubertin did not recall that theme in his „Olympic memories“<sup>22</sup>.

19 Cf. Glas 1896, pp. 91-92.

20 Cf. Guth-Jarkovsky 1896, pp. 973-974.

21 Kemény 1897, p. 139.

22 Coubertin: Olympic memories, 1936, p. 49.

In the Donau-Monarchy the grammar and secondary school teachers Guth-Jarkovsky and Kemény engaged themselves in broad support of youth games and sports, which - as both of them admitted - had started independently of the Olympic movement and also earlier.

In the sports programme of the Games at Athens they saw elements which could enrich the school sports in their country. Both gentlemen did not want Olympic Games for pupils, but the support of the Olympic idea and the sportive encouragement of the pupils as a preparation for the Olympic Games. The Grammar and Middle schools should become „pre-schools“ of the future Olympic participants. Completely going along with the idea of a „pre-school“ was the suggested competition tournament of all pupils from higher educational establishments of the host country, subsequently to the international Olympic Games. Swedish physical education did not play any part in Austria-Hungary or in Germany before the turn of the century. The aim was rather - above all in Bohemia and Moravia - to strengthen their own Slavic physical education movement, separated from the German school gymnastics, but in connection with the Sokol-association.

## Conclusions

In Austria-Hungary, in Sweden, as well as in Greece and Germany the purpose of „Muscular Christianity“ for education had long been well-known and had already been connected with a game and sports movement at schools before the Olympic Games were opened in April 1896 in Athens. Only in Greece the Olympic Games gave a clear impulse for the following support of school sports, maybe also in parts of Austria-Hungary, where the influences of the English physical education could hardly be established before. But the Le Havre congress had no influence at all on the development of the school sports in those countries examined closer here. The reason may have been, as we have seen, that the gatekeeper for improvements and changes to school physical education in the examined countries were different people from those representatives being present at the congress. But maybe the congress could have given a new impulse for the development of the Olympic movement for the school sports in Germany, Sweden, Greece and Austria-Hungary, at least literally, if the topics on school physical education had been dealt with, which Kemény was interested in above all, in the third part of the congress in Le Havre: school as „nursery“ of the Olympic Games with a national festival movement for all pupils in their countries. That, indeed, would have been new and innovating. But Kemény sometimes thought, as Coubertin wrote in his „memoirs“ about the Le Havre congress, „liberal“ - for the baron obviously too liberal. Therefore, my message about the Le Havre Congress in 1897 is: there was no impact by what had been discussed on school physical education in the countries under investigation. However, what had not been discussed there 100 years ago might have become important for the further development of physical education in European schools.

## The Congress: useful but not necessary

For de Coubertin the Olympic Congress was - as he writes in his book „twenty-one years of sports campaign“ - „useful but not necessary“<sup>23</sup>, „There was no reason which justified the congress [...] there was no real purpose“<sup>24</sup>.

But those quotations only reflect one side, namely Coubertin's subsequent content, because the preceding main reason for the calling up of the congress had been outstripped by daily politics (Greek-Turkish war).

23 Coubertin: Einundzwanzig Jahre Sportkampagne (1887-1908), p. 107.

24 Ibid.

So, for Coubertin, luckily a serious point of controversy was settled by which - according to Coubertin - the IOC threatened to be broken: the wish of the Greek Committee to permanently organise the Olympic Games in Athens: That had been the point of controversy in the committee, since the closing ceremony in Athens, which needed solving, if the Olympic Games - planned by Coubertin to take place in Paris - would not be endangered by other committee members.

Bikelas, who was at the bottom of this development, could not take part in the congress in Le Havre because of the turmoil of war.

Gebhardt, the German representative who supported the idea of setting up panhellenic as well as pangermanic games in change with international Olympic Games, left affronted after the opening ceremony, and Balck was the only one from this side who complained that this most important question of the congress was an item on the agenda, but was not discussed.

Coubertin himself hardly took part in any of the meetings after the opening ceremony due to illness: Without a prosecutor there is no judge, as a German proverb says. So by doing nothing, exactly what Coubertin had wanted was achieved: international „wandering games“ and the next ones favourably in Paris, in 1900, as it was originally planned by Coubertin at the Sorbonne congress in 1894, and not again in Athens in 1898, as national panhellenic games.

Considering this development, Coubertin was right in his point of view, when he said that the congress had not been necessary, or to be more precise: for the Games in Athens in 1896 it had not been necessary at all because the events of the Greek-Turkish war, themselves, had shelved these efforts. But apart from this, for Coubertin the congress had also been important to emphasise the intellectual and the philosophical character of his efforts, as he wrote in his „Olympic memories“ many years later.<sup>25</sup> After the congress had lost any explosive effect related to the decision about the development of national Olympic Games, the items „pedagogy“ and „hygiene“ could be discussed and argued academically in peace, generously relaxed by many excursions and celebrations. The congress danced, pardon: discussed and dined with the French president. That was - who could deny this in light of the holding of the next Olympic Games in Paris - really „useful“.

<sup>25</sup> Coubertin: Olympische Erinnerungen, 1936, p. 47.

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## Résumé

### L'Éducation physique à l'école au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle

A l'appui de sources littéraires l'étude analyse ici de quelle manière le Congrès olympique du Havre en 1897 a permis de mettre un accent sur l'évolution de l'éducation physique scolaire dans différents pays comme: l'Allemagne, la Grèce, la Suède et l'Empire austro-hongrois. Le choix porté sur ces pays semble bien fondé car d'éminents représentants au Congrès du Havre venaient de ces pays comme: Gebhardt, Bikelas, Balk, Guth-Jarkowsky, Kemény. Les résultats des conséquences du Congrès furent assez négatifs. Les exercices d'athlétiques et différents sports venant d'Angleterre figuraient déjà aux programmes d'éducation physique des établissements supérieurs des pays mentionnés plus haut.

La gymnastique suédoise, elle aussi, était déjà connue, bien que ne figurant encore au programme d'éducation physique à la fin des années 90 du siècle dernier dans les pays comme l'Allemagne, la Grèce et ceux de l' Empire austro-hongrois. Dans un sens le Congrès du Havre a beaucoup moins encouragé l'éducation physique scolaire dans les pays cités ci-dessus car plus que d'autres personnes et institutions sur place que les représentants nationaux du CIO et leurs organisations en furent les promoteurs. Dans ces pays le mouvement olympique, après le Congrès du Havre jusqu'à la fin du siècle, à l'exception de la Hongrie n'exerça que peu d'influence sur l'éducation physique scolaire.