

The World Gymnaestrada – a Non-Competitive Event

The Concept 'Gymnastics for All' from the Perspective of Ling Gymnastics

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Abstract

During the twentieth century, large, non-competitive Gymnastics festivals were held in Europe. An early festival of this kind was the 1939 Lingiad, which was held in Stockholm and based on the principles of Ling gymnastics. A later variation that is still going today is the World Gymnaestrada, which is based on the principle of 'Gymnastics for All'. The aim of this study is to highlight the concept Gymnastics for All and, above all, to examine whether it contains any elements of Ling gymnastics. Three pairs of opposing concepts, general–elite, collectivism–individualism, and modesty–ambition, have been used for this task. The study is based on twenty group interviews and eighty-seven observations. The results show that one similarity between the two forms of gymnastics is their non-competitiveness, and another is the view of collectivism and general, namely that gymnastics should be performed together and the idea behind both gives everyone an opportunity to participate. The major difference between the two can be linked to the increased individualization of society during this period. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that many of the participants, young people under the age of twenty-five, despite their participation in the Gymnaestrada hold individual competitions in higher esteem than group display.

Key words: Ling gymnastics, Gymnastics for All, general–elite, collectivism–individualism, modesty–ambition

Introduction

An international gymnastics display, with 7 399 participants from twelve countries, was held in Stockholm in 1939 to commemorate the centenary of the death of Per Henrik Ling (1776–1839), the founder of Ling gymnastics. This so-called Lingiad was a success and described by contemporaries as a triumph for gymnastics. That gymnastics was able to build bridges between people and assemble idealists and enthusiasts from all over the world to meet and learn from each other was also applauded. The Lingiad enabled the participants to experience a celebration comparable to the Olympic Games. There was a difference between the two, however. Whereas the Olympic Games were—and still are—based on competition aimed at the elite in every form of sport, the Lingiad was based on non-competitive display. In both form and idea, the Lingiad was based on Ling gymnastics and objectives related to physical exercise for everyone, and not just the best (Holmström, 1939).

A tribute to the Lingiad and the ideas it promoted also included a critique of sport elitism, which, according to supporters of Ling gymnastics, could mean that those who wanted and needed to take up gymnastics or exercises were excluded. At that time, sport was regarded as a phenomenon that was separate from gymnastics, i.e. it stood for something different and abnormal—something that did not follow the norms or ideals of physical education. Advocates of Ling gymnastics, which required physiologically correct and sensible exercises and collective participation, distanced themselves from the emerging Anglo-Saxon sport. They maintained that it was based on a general interest in classical Greek culture with its ancient contests rather than pedagogic ideas about physical education (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2003). The collective practice of gymnastics promoted health, control, and precision, while sport was aimed at developing individuality (Trangbæk, 1987).

However, although the Lingiad and gymnastics displays were a success, it was competitive sports that gained a foothold in Sweden and Europe as a whole and usurped this form of gymnastics (Eichberg, 1995; Bonde, 1991; Lindroth, 1974). Thus, sports with competition as an important component took priority over Ling gymnastics and its display format (Ljunggren, 2003; Lindroth, 1987). Nevertheless, international gymnastics festivals based on non-competitive displays are not a thing of the past, but live on in the form of, for example, the World Gymnaestrada, one of the world's largest non-competitive sporting events. The

aim of this study is to highlight the concept Gymnastics for All, which is found in the World Gymnaestrada, and, above all, to examine whether it has any elements of Ling gymnastics. Since sport and its competitive element have had such a huge impact, we feel that it is of great interest to highlight other forms of organized physical activity, but also to examine them from a historical perspective. One advantage of a historical approach is that it is not only able to identify elements of an older phenomenon such as Ling gymnastics, but also pinpoint what has changed. In that way, we acquire not only knowledge about whether an older form of physical activity has lived on in today's society or not, but also in which way it has done so, i.e. history is being used as a raw material for studying and understanding the present.

Ling Gymnastics, a Swedish export product

Different forms of kinetic culture were developed in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ling gymnastics was one of these cultures, and 'Turnen'¹ in Germany another (Pfister, 2003; Eichberg, 1995). Ling gymnastics has been described as one of Sweden's biggest cultural export products. The Royal Central Gymnastics Institute (GCI) in Stockholm,² founded in 1813 with the aim of developing Ling gymnastics, started to send gymnasts abroad as early as the 1830s, and, by the turn of the twentieth century, was admitting foreign students to its courses.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ling gymnastics had become popular in many different countries, and especially in Sweden among researchers and teachers at the GCI, doctors, and physical education teachers in schools. The educated public also regarded Ling gymnastics as superior to other forms of physical exercise (Kirk, 2006; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004; Meckbach & Lundvall, 2003; Pfister, 2003; Lindroth & Renson, 1979).

Ling gymnastics also gained a foothold in schools in a number of other countries, such as Denmark, Norway, England, Belgium, Portugal, and the USA. Its popularity was helped by the fact that Ling gymnastics was legitimized by physiological principles supported by medical

1 The German Friedrich L. Jahn was the founder of 'Turnen', which had practical roots, was disciplined, and involved apparatus exercises, games, fencing, swimming, and wrestling. See Pfister (2003).

2 Now the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences (GIH).

discourses (Barker-Ruchti, 2006; Kirk, 2006; Bloomfield, 2005; Pfister, 2003; Augestad, 2001; Kennard, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Renson, 1991; Trangbæk, 1987).

The aims and development of Ling gymnastics

The aim of Ling gymnastics was, with the aid of specially designed movements, to exercise the body in as balanced and holistically harmonious a way as possible. This also applied to the body's internal organs and inner soul. The idea of holistic harmoniousness originated from Per Henrik Ling's understanding of the philosophy of nature that everything was interconnected. As individuals consisted of a number of different parts, they could not be regarded as completely whole. Rather, wholeness was dependent on how the different parts related to each other. In short, it was thought that harmony led to good health, while disharmony created ill-health (Bloomfield, 2005; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004).

Alongside Ling gymnastics, which, in Sweden, was mainly practised in the public sphere (e.g. at the GCI, in schools, and in the military), a voluntary kind of gymnastics—in gymnastics clubs—developed in parallel to the growing sports movement at the end of the nineteenth century. The gymnastic forms practised here, for which the Swedish Gymnastics Federation eventually assumed responsibility, were developed to include both males and females (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2003). This club gymnastics was also performed at different gymnastics festivals (Olofsson, 1989). In 1891, the fifth Swedish gymnastics festival was organized in Stockholm (Kihlmark, 1988).

The Swedish Gymnastics Federation agreed with the Ling gymnasts' view of competition and regarded the simple and everyday exercise programme as the most important. However, club gymnastics continued to be developed and several forms of gymnastics existed side by side: school gymnastics, children's gymnastics, and female and male fitness gymnastics. Individual competitive gymnastics and team gymnastics also developed as alternative forms. In terms of gender, however, the actual practice and form of gymnastics remained separate (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2003).

Gymnastics Festivals for All – From Lingiad to the World Gymnaestrada

Gymnastics festivals are not solely a Swedish phenomenon, however. The first known gymnastics festival was held in 1832 in Aarau, Switzerland. At the beginning of the twentieth century, national gymnastics festivals were also organized in Norway, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, and most of them invited foreign guests. The 1939 Lingiad was an international gymnastics festival that attracted several thousand participants (7 399) from twelve countries. When the event was repeated ten years later, in 1949, it attracted more than 14 000 participants from fourteen countries. The Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) also decided to arrange its congress in conjunction with the 1949 Lingiad. Here, the matter of introducing an international gymnastics festival was raised by a Dutch delegate (Sommer). This idea was approved, and, one year later, at the meeting in Basel, Sommer introduced both his idea and its name—the *World Gymnaestrada*. Sommer proposed that the name be based on *Gymna-*, which comes from the word gymnastics; *Estrad-*, the word for the stage/tribune for recreational sport; and *Strada-*, which stood for the long road that was already laid down by the gymnastics clubs and was still being followed. The first World Gymnaestrada organized by the FIG was held in Rotterdam in 1953 with 5 000 gymnasts from fourteen different countries (FIG, 2009; Pfister, 2007; Kihlmark, 1988). Since then, the World Gymnaestrada has been held every four years³ and it is the only worldwide Gymnastics for All event. The World Gymnaestrada is a non-competitive Gymnastics for All event and participation is open to all genders, ages, races, religions, cultures, abilities, and social standings (FIG, 2007). The thirteenth Gymnaestrada was held in Austria in July 2007 and attracted 21 158 gymnasts from fifty-three federations. According to the FIG, the aims of the World Gymnaestrada include the following:

The World Gymnaestrada aims at making the value and versatility of *Gymnastics for All* known all over the world and at awakening people's interest in movement and sports activities. *Gymnastics for All* brings to-

3 Rotterdam, 1953 (5 000 gymnasts); Zagreb, 1957 (6 000 gymnasts); Stuttgart, 1961 (10 000 gymnasts); Vienna, 1965 (15 000 gymnasts); Basel, 1969 (9 600 gymnasts); Berlin, 1975 (10 500 gymnasts), Zurich, 1982 (14 200 gymnasts); Herning, 1987 (17 300 gymnasts); Amsterdam, 1991 (18 400 gymnasts); Berlin, 1995 (19 200 gymnasts); Gothenburg, 1999 (20 800 gymnasts); Lisbon, 2003 (21 600 gymnasts). See 'about GFA' (Gymnastics for All) at www.fig.com.

gether gymnasts from various cultural backgrounds in order to contribute to a better understanding between the people. It aims to promote health, fitness and global solidarity (FIG, 2007).

A number of elements from Ling gymnastics can be discerned in the Gymnastics for All concepts, and they also permeate the World Gymnastrada. Gymnastics for All is a separate form of gymnastics within the international gymnastics family, which also includes men's artistic, women's artistic, rhythmic, trampoline, aerobic, and acrobatic. Gymnastics for All activities 'contribute to personal health, fitness and well being – physical, social, intellectual and psychological'. The focus of Gymnastics for All is the four Fs: fun, fitness, fundamentals, and friendship. This form of gymnastics can be performed with or without apparatus, gymnastics, and dance. 'It offers aesthetic experiences in movement for participants and spectators while providing the opportunity to focus on items that are of particular interest in a national and cultural context' (www.fig-gymnastics.com). Both Gymnastics for All and Ling gymnastics emphasize the accessible nature of gymnastics, in that it is designed to promote the health of the population as a whole, and it can bring participants together from different countries in order to build bridges and learn from each other.

A Conceptual Foundation—A Model for Analysis

Ling gymnastics can be studied from different perspectives. One perspective deals with how Ling gymnastics relates to other kinds of contemporary physical exercise. A second would include examining the physical and character-related qualities that Ling gymnastics sets out to develop. In this study, we have chosen to focus on the conceptual content of Ling gymnastics evident in the type of Gymnastics for All performed at the World Gymnastrada. We are thus going to compare two different things: on the one hand, the ideology, and, on the other, the practice. The reason for this is that, first of all, we know so little about the practising of Ling gymnastics. Preserved photographs and film sequences of Ling gymnastics or from the two Lingiads are not sufficient source materials. Secondly, with regard to Gymnastics for All and the World Gymnastrada, there is very little written down about their ideological foundations. Nevertheless, to make a comparison possible, we have tried to capture the ideology of Gymnastics for All based on what we have

been able to observe and the participants' statements. For this purpose, an analytical framework is, however, required, which, in turn, calls for a closer examination of the idea behind Ling gymnastics.

The concept of Ling gymnastics was formed in relation to modern competitive sport. Even though Per Henrik Ling, active long before competitive sport was established at the end of the nineteenth century, was critical of performance and competition, much of Ling's guiding principle in matters relating to physical exercise was caution. He warned of overexertion and specialization, particularly when this prevented the development of the body as a harmonious entity. He also referred to the original Olympic Games and contemporary acrobatics as opposite poles to the ideals of Ling gymnastics (Lindroth, 2004).

Ling's negative approach to competition and achievement served as a point of departure for a later critique of competitive sports. Even late-nineteenth-century Ling gymnasts criticized the fact that sport had not taken the harmonious bodily ideal into account. Other arguments were also aired. One of these was based on the democratic or collective perspective that, while Ling gymnastics was designed for all and performed in groups, sport focused on individuals and their best possible capacity to achieve. In other words, attention and care were focused on the individual and not on the group. According to Ling gymnasts, an emphasis on competition was incompatible with a more general participation. Furthermore, if competition was necessary at all, it should be collective, i.e. conducted in teams composed of parishes, school classes, or companies. In essence, Ling gymnasts were opposed to the ranking system of competitive sport and the ostentation in terms of grandiose events, prize-giving ceremonies, pride, playing to the gallery, and exhibitionism. They preferred unsophisticated, resolute everyday activities that everyone could take part in. Displays like this were acceptable, however (Lindroth, 2004; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004).

The view of gymnastics as unpretentious and sport as spectacular also continued into the twentieth century, although, as the position of competitive sport in Sweden had now been considerably strengthened, this became more difficult to deal with. The only type of sport that Ling gymnasts could accept, or were forced into accepting, was team sport. Working together as a team was regarded as contributing to the individual being pushed into the background; the individual had to give way to something greater. In addition, they maintained that it was not the ability to perform that was the most important, but honesty, openness,

comradeship, and modesty. They did, however, remain fiercely critical of individual competitive sports (Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004).

By way of summary, the content of Ling gymnastics, at a conceptual level and in relation to modern competitive sport, can be described in terms of three pairs of opposing concepts: general–elite, collectivism–individualism, and modesty–ambition.

General–Elite

The idea that everyone—the young and the old, men and women—could and, for health reasons, ought to participate is central to Ling gymnastics. Moreover, the exercises should not only contribute to an all-round exercising of the body, but also to the improvement of one's morals. A gymnastics programme that trained the entire body, and where the individual was part of a group, meant that moral training, in which courage, obedience and discipline were key words, was also part of the package. In other words, the main objective was the physical and moral training of the entire population as a form of general participation.

Advocates of Ling gymnastics, which required physiologically correct and sensible exercises, distanced themselves from emerging Anglo-Saxon sports with a focus on elite or competitive activity. As Ling gymnastics was not based on elitism, contests, and competition, it thus followed that the concepts of competition and sport were not automatically incorporated into Ling gymnastics as a whole (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2003; Olofsson, 1989).

Collectivism–Individualism

Ling gymnastics paid homage to the group. An individual could neither be better nor worse than the group: the skilled and capable were not allowed to shine at the expense of others, but in the group the individual would learn to step back for the common good.

The ideals of Ling gymnastics could only be upheld by means of selected movements deemed necessary to align the body to the prescribed model. The gymnastics exercises were taught with the aid of commands and meant everyone doing the same exercise at the same time. In effect, the individual was a cog in the wheel and was subordinate to the collective. This contrasted with sport, in that, here, individual achievement was emphasized in a completely different way in individual competitive sports as well as team sports. The individual who succeeded in a competitive context was spotlighted and rewarded with attention and status,

and, perhaps, even financially (Lindroth, 2004; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004).

Modesty–Ambition

Supporters of Ling gymnastics were critical of ambition, pride, and exhibitionism, which they regarded as being part of competitive sport and an unnecessary emphasis on achievement, record breaking, competition, and prize giving. In Ling gymnastics, the male ideal not only included physical strength, but also courage, drive, and a simple lifestyle without show or opulence. Discipline, obedience, and physical mastery were highlighted too. Female gymnastics, on the other hand, was characterized by an emphasis on graceful movements, health, non-competitiveness, and a lack of physical contact. Ideas about rivalry and efficiency were also significant aspects of the modernization process that came to show an important difference between Ling gymnastics and sport. In Ling gymnastics, the physical exercises were sufficient in themselves, which is why no competitive aspects were included and the modest, simple, and pure were emphasized. In terms of performance, its main feature was display (Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004; Lundvall & Meckbach, 2003).

Now, the three pairs of opposing concepts do not work completely since those parts, which we associate with Ling gymnastics can be found in sport, which in turn can, of course, be conducted at a general, collectivist, and modest level. The point is that these three levels were the very foundations of Ling gymnastics, which was not to contain elitism, individualism, and ambition; if it did, it was not Ling gymnastics. This is something that was accepted within sport.

The Design of the Study

The three aforementioned concept pairs of general–elite, collectivism–individualism, and modesty–ambition have been used to both capture and compare the elements of Ling gymnastics evident in the World Gymnaestrada concept *Gymnastics for All*. The advantage of these pairs is that they facilitate a comparison between the almost two-hundred-year-old phenomenon of Ling gymnastics and the modern-day expression of *Gymnastics for All*. It should be emphasized that these are crude simplifications of a complex phenomenon, simplifications that are, how-

ever, supported by previous research (Lindroth, 2004; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004; Lundvall & Meckbach, 2003).

To capture the ideology of *Gymnastics for All*, we have chosen the qualitative method and used interviews and observations in order to be able to describe what people say and do in the context they find themselves in (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The study is based on twenty group interviews with a total of fifty-three gymnasts and eighty-seven observations carried out during the 2007 World Gymnaestrada held in Dornbirn (Austria). With regard to the interviews, the selection was partially targeted and the focus was on young people (girls and boys up to the age of twenty-five) who were participating. In order to facilitate a comparison between competitive and display forms, it was expected that the interviewees should be taking part in competitions. A representative national sampling was also deemed important, and the selected interviewees thus represent eleven countries from four continents.

The interviews were semi-structured, with eight set questions formulated based on the three concept pairs. How they perceived such an event and what they thought was positive and negative about the display form in relation to the competitive form are examples of the questions posed. The interviewees' responses then formed the basis of a number of varied and open questions for clarification purposes, for example to ascertain the number of group members, and their respective skill levels. The interviews were recorded in Dornbirn and then transcribed verbatim.

The observations comprise a number of displays and aim to give a 'living' picture of what *Gymnastics for All* represents. With the help of running records, the five following areas, which had been noted in advance, were observed and recorded: *what kind of performance* (group performance/large group performance), *the character of performance* (gymnastics and dance, hand apparatus, apparatus, acrobatics, mixed), *costumes/dresses*, *the quality of the performance*, and *the general impression of the performance* (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). With running records, observations are continually made and activities and what is going on are described in one's own words. Notes made during the observation scheme were, after each performance, summarized in the records, which were arranged under the three pairs of opposing concepts: general–elite, collectivism–individualism, and modesty–ambition.

Taking the 295 different group and large team appearances as the point of departure, a selection was made that included all five continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, and Oceania). European

gymnasts dominated with 218 teams from some thirty countries, North America was represented by 25 teams from three countries, Asia participated with 22 teams from seven countries, South America was represented by 14 teams from five countries and, finally, there were 8 teams from three African countries and the same number from two Oceanic countries. The study includes 87 displays (29 per cent) out of a total of 295 group and large team displays, where at least 5 per cent of the teams from the respective continents have been analyzed. Also, the majority of the observations were conducted by the same person.

The analysis puts the focus on what qualitatively different types of answers the interviewed participants gave to the various questions and the qualitatively different types of performance. The point of such an analysis is more to show they reason about Gymnastics for All and their participation in the World Gymnaestrada (i.e. in what qualitatively different ways they reason) than how many people say one thing or another. Correspondingly, the point of observing the various performances is to qualitatively describe what is being observed and not in terms of how many of this or that.

Findings

The findings are presented, based on what is created (the observations) and said (the interviews), under the three three pairs of opposing concepts: general–elite, collectivism–individualism, and modesty–ambition.

General–Elite

One example of everybody being able to participate in a form of general gymnastics was demonstrated by a Portuguese club. Its programme was introduced by young men (about eighteen years of age) performing gymnastics of a high standard. The young men were then succeeded by women in their fifties and sixties, with less intensive and more exercise-based content with an element of dance. A group of children then took to the stage, followed by young women (16–18 years old) whose display was dominated by advanced gymnastic exercises and dance steps performed to music. The programme was rounded off by older men doing Portuguese folk dances—not always in time to the music. The purpose of the display was to highlight the diversity of activities in the club as a whole, rather than singling out the cleverest or best performer. This was

in line with the motto ‘everyone just shows what they can do and does their best’.

Advanced gymnastics, performed by competitive rhythmic gymnasts or teams, was also included. Different skills and abilities were also apparent here—one example being a group of Israeli girls. While the older girls obviously took the lead, they melted into the background somewhat and allowed the younger girls to be in the spotlight.

Like the Portuguese example outlined above, several gymnastics teams included both male and female gymnasts of different ages and varying degrees of ability, i.e. everything from general to advanced gymnastics. A Swedish team with gymnasts ranging from seven to over seventy years of age was a good example of this. In contrast to the Portuguese display, its programme had a definite theme that was emphasized through the choice of costume, music, and stage settings. The gymnastics performed ranged from simple exercises to very advanced somersaults, jumps, and acrobatics.

The gymnasts seemed to appreciate the mix of both participants and levels. Firstly, this meant that novice gymnasts could also be included:

Yes, the fact that I’m not the best in the team has meant that I haven’t been able to take part in many competitions. Training hasn’t been very much fun and I haven’t been all that motivated.
... But in the displays everyone is regarded as an equal (Sweden).

Secondly, the mixture of general and elite meant that the World Gymnaestrada was not as achievement oriented as competitions, which contributed to the good atmosphere that, according to the participants, characterized the displays:

It’s more relaxed, of course. It’s more about having fun, concentrating on what you’re doing and being relaxed ... everyone likes each other (Germany).

You can get really nervous in competitions, which means that it’s easier to make mistakes. The end result can be that you perhaps make things worse for the team and that’s not very good ... In displays, it’s a matter of sort of doing the best you can and ... that’s good enough, you can’t do better than that (Sweden).

But despite the good atmosphere and the fact that more people were able to take part, the majority of those interviewed said that they preferred

competition to display. One reason for this was that competitions give a definite verdict: points and medals are proof and acknowledgement of how far you have come as a gymnast. Simply focusing on displays

... would make the whole thing so boring, especially when there's nothing to gain. In competitions, you can win medals and suchlike, which is a sign that you're really good and making an effort (Sweden).

While the applause after the display can be seen as some kind of evaluation, the marking awarded at competitions is regarded as much more professional: 'At displays, the audience doesn't know when to applaud, but they do at competitions' (Denmark).

This type of display can be summed up as the reward the teams receive for the glory and satisfaction of performing their composed programme in front of an audience—an audience that shows its appreciation by applauding, whistling, and cheering. Standing ovations were also a common expression of appreciation of a group's excellent style and timing. The large, appreciative and enthusiastic audience was regarded positively by the participants. According to five Danish gymnasts, this type of display was a plus, in that:

... there's a great deal of excitement about whether it will actually work. There are a lot of costume changes ... will everything run smoothly in front of so many people. And when it's the Nordic Evening and you go on stage and think "My God, what a lot of people!" you can't help but smile (Denmark).

However, the fact that the World Gymnaestrada is non-competitive is not entirely without its problems. Some participants actually regard the World Gymnaestrada as a competition, in that it has a serious motto and is a kind of competition where you simply compete in a different way:

... If you compete, there must be something that you are competing for, like doing something from your experience—from yourself. Expressing your feeling for what you feel about what you're doing. And what you're doing now is like competing for the country ... because we're competing for this trip to Canada (South Africa).

Collectivism–Individualism

In the performances observed, and in terms of the relationships between individuals and the collective, it is the collective's achievement that is most central. In the programme, it is the performance as a whole that is most important. The individual is part of the dance, the somersaulting, or the acrobatics. The individual is like a building block in the entire composition of the performance. Even if the programme consists of different sections with different groups, the performance often ends with a 'grand finale', in which every gymnast takes part. The group as a whole also takes its final bow, and together it receives the audience's applause.

Several groups consisted of gymnasts of different ages and both sexes, in which the parts made up the whole and where collectivism was the main focus of the programme. A group of girls and boys and men and women from New Zealand performed a gymnastics programme that included exercises that everyone could participate in and perform. Here, more solid gymnastic apparatus was alternated with hand apparatus in movements performed to jazz dance and theatrical dance music. Every individual gymnast was blended into and accommodated in a collective group programme.

The dominance of the collective was not completely clear-cut, however. An example of this was the Estonian performance given by three different groups in which female gymnasts performing a jazz-based gymnastics programme were subsequently replaced by male gymnasts (over forty years of age) performing an action-packed rhythmic gymnastics programme. The third group consisted of very advanced individual rhythmic gymnasts who demonstrated individual expertise and went on to do a relay in a well-composed ribbon programme. The three groups' different performances were well composed and ended with a grand finish in which all the gymnasts were included in a joint gymnastic finale. Although the individual element was visible, the choreography made it seem as though everyone was part of the whole.

A Japanese group performing the theme 'dynamic and smooth' consisted of female and male gymnasts aged between eighteen and forty. The male gymnasts wore T-shirts and jeans, while the female gymnasts wore traditional gym outfits. There was no scenery and no floor apparatus. In this display, the individual appearances of elite gymnasts were included in the overall group performance. Here, individual performances were alternated with dynamic collective gymnastic exercises in the form of floor exercises and somersaults.

How did the gymnasts themselves see the individual–collective relationship? Well, just as in the approach to competition and display, the view of the group versus the individual was divided. According to interviewees from Finland, the display form accentuated the group:

... It's nice to be together ... the spirit in the group. We have a really good spirit in the group and we are all friends (Finland).

Some of the Mexican gymnasts went as far as stating that the collective element was the very reason they took part in the World Gymnaestrada:

... In Mexico, we are individual gymnasts but when we saw that the World Gymnaestrada was another kind of gymnastics, and very cool too ... we decided to take part (Mexico).

In other words, the display form was regarded as highlighting the collective in a positive way: being together in a team signified solidarity and fellowship. On the other hand, when asked to compare display and competition, the same people who emphasized the importance of solidarity and fellowship also drew attention to the importance of being assessed as an individual. When ‘you win something, it somehow shows that you are good ... and sort of making an effort’. In short, the interviewees recommended both collectivism and individualism and deduced that the display format underlines the former and competition the latter.

Modesty–Ambition

When it comes to modesty versus ambition, opinions are divided. On the one hand, there is the spartan element of the participants being accommodated in school classrooms, and, on the other, the ostentatious elements of the actual event, like beautiful costumes, magnificent scenery, and stunning sound and lighting arrangements. None of the interviewees, however, highlight the more modest elements, such as living together in classrooms, as any great problem:

I think it [the accommodation] is working very well ... the only thing that is a bit of a pain is, of course, for example when another club around here has a stomach bug or food poisoning which starts do the rounds; you see, these things are a drain. Still, it has worked very well for me, but, of course, people find out from their friends who say, “Boy, did you snore a lot last night”, or something along those lines (Sweden).

Although there are no record attempts and prize-giving ceremonies, there is no getting away from the fact that the World Gymnaestrada is a grandiose event that encourages showing off and exhibitionism in terms of both performance and costumes. The Finnish group exemplified this, in that costumes were given top priority, i.e. they had kitted themselves out with monster masks and clothing to imitate the Finnish pop group Lordi, which won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2005. Although the performance level was not particularly high, it was clear that form overshadowed content.

The very large South African group demonstrated a different relationship between form and content, in that their performance was based on traditional African folk dance and very simple costumes. In this case, there was a harmony between content and form: folk dances performed by a large number of gymnasts dressed in simple folk costumes. In this case, the form enhanced the already good content, which, in turn, contributed to the overall impression of splendour and magnificence.

Trinidad was another, similar example. In their programme, the gymnasts performed basic and simple exercises and were dressed in brightly coloured costumes that matched the movements. In relation to the display programme, their simple clothing made it appear as though the gymnastics was the focus of the entire group, not a stage, clothes or artefacts.

An English team consisting of disabled youngsters who, over a period of several years, had used gymnastics for exercise and health also emphasized simplicity. Both male and female gymnasts were included in the group; they were simply dressed in traditional leotards and with scenery that enabled the gymnasts to orientate themselves. Their programme included both floor exercises and a shorter programme with hand apparatus. At times, the spotlight was on one gymnast, and sometimes on several gymnasts together. It was clear that many people in the audience were both moved and delighted by these disabled gymnasts performing a programme that emphasized basic skills and simplicity—a gymnastic performance whose very simplicity underlined that gymnastics really was for everybody.

In terms of problematizing simplicity in relation to glory (appreciation/praise) in a more positive sense, several of the groups used movements, clothing, scenery, and choreography as ways of gaining the audience's attention and appreciation. Certain teams had based their programme on gymnastic simplicity, with proficient and well-coordinated gymnasts

and costumes and without the need for scenery or lavish clothing. Other teams had chosen a more complicated programme, with difficult exercises, designer clothes, a variety of hand apparatus, and specially designed scenery.

By way of contrast, some of the teams demonstrated advanced apparatus gymnastics with difficult exercises and a high tempo mixed with floor exercises and dance. In these performances, the audience's applause and appreciation were expected when the exercises reached 'dizzying' heights.

At one point, the arena was filled with different apparatus: a double set of parallel bars, mats, and trampolines. Male and female gymnasts filled the arena and performed to the theme of 'fire world'. The gymnasts were very proficient and performed difficult and intense exercises at top speed on the apparatus. A challenging choreography was intermixed with apparatus exercises and drama, dance, and floor programmes. The more dance-related elements were enhanced by the use of large balls, small gymnastics balls, skipping ropes, ribbons, and acrobatics included in the composition. A grand finale with razzmatazz, pulsating music, and harmonious movements brought the programme to a close.

Concluding remarks and discussion

The aim of this study has been to highlight the World Gymnaestrada and its concept Gymnastics for All and, above all, to examine whether it has any elements of Ling gymnastics. Clear similarities and differences between these two gymnastics concepts have been identified. If we begin with the similarities, one feature they both have in common is the view of collectivism and general: gymnastics should be done together and should be available to all. There is a difference in ideological motives, however, with regard to both the group and diversification. Those taking part in the World Gymnaestrada expressed delight at being part of a group, and that being involved in a group is something that the individual participants have chosen themselves. However, the more obligatory elements and disciplinary incentives—that both Swedish and international research (Baker-Rauchti, 2006; Lundquist Wanneberg, 2004) has pointed to regarding the function of the group in Ling gymnastics, i.e. the drill, appear to be missing. Although the FIG has decided that Gymnastics for All and the World Gymnaestrada should be based on

‘values of mass participation’, this is accompanied by values, such as ‘fun, fitness and friendship for all ages’ (FIG, 2007). This differs from Ling gymnastics, which is based on self-discipline and character formation.

The same ideological difference is discernable when it comes to the term general gymnastics. The idea behind *Gymnastics for All* gives everyone, regardless of their performance level, an opportunity to participate in the World Gymnaestrada. In Ling gymnastics, on the other hand, the term general is seen as a form of defence against the emphasis on individual performance that the supporters of Ling gymnastics were so critical of. This ideological difference is not very surprising, however, in terms of the individualization that was adopted by the Western world after the Second World War. From a long tradition of collectivist civic education, the individual was given more and more space at many different levels: from the private to the public, and from family life to work and education. This development has continued and, today, we even talk of the hyper-individualized society (Togeby et al., 2003; Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gersheim, 2001).

Increased individualization can also help to explain why the majority of participants, despite their feelings of joy and solidarity at taking part in the World Gymnaestrada, prefer competition rather than display work. We can only interpret this as the marks and the ranking being regarded as the most important aspects of gymnastics for those involved in both displays and competitions. The fact that the only gymnast interviewed who preferred displays to competitions was not considered good enough to be included in the team speaks for itself. In a study of Dutch elite sport, Stokvis (2000) maintains that a clear shift towards individualization has taken place during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In his analysis, he uses the concept of a We–I balance, originally formulated by Norbert Elias (2001) in order to show the changes in self-perception, attitudes, and behaviour over a long time period. Elias believes that even if the main focus has shifted to the I-side, the relationship between an individual’s I-identity and we-identity is not set in stone but is context dependent. Stokvis believes that even the focus of elite sport has shifted to the I-side of the balance, a change that, in turn, can be linked to globalization and commercialization—societal changes that have, of course, also influenced gymnastics and sport. In this study, we can talk of a shift in the We–I balance between attitudes and the self-perception associated with Ling gymnastics and *Gymnastics for All* in so far as there is a stronger emphasis on the I-identity in the latter. However, the we-identity has

not disappeared, but strongly features in the emphasis on the importance that everybody should be able to participate and the joy of being part of a group.

It should be emphasized, however, that some participants maintained that competitive elements were included in the World Gymnaestrada. It is interesting that those making these observations were non-Europeans from Hong Kong and South Africa. Might it be the case that the Western world's definition of competition is not fully subscribed to?

One possible answer to this question can be found in relation to modesty versus ambition. There is no doubt that the Gymnastics for All on which the World Gymnaestrada is based is consistent with the Ling view of downplaying things like achievement, record attempting, competition, and prize giving. But, in reality, the World Gymnaestrada is anything but modest. The number of participants and some of the teams' costumes, scenery, not to mention audience participation and enthusiasm, suggest something quite different. Linked to the above argument about the World Gymnaestrada's competitive element, it could be the case that gymnasts from non-Western sports cultures associate the importance of the event with competition.

It can be noted that there are both differences and similarities in the ideological content of Ling gymnastics and Gymnastics for All. There are differences in content, which can, to some extent, be explained by structural changes with regard to the view of the individual versus the collective. But in terms of the approach to the type of display and an emphasis on diversity, the basic principles are the same.

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