

The Finnish Play Movement: Nationalism, Citizenship and Women's Resistance

In this article I focus on the ideological and socio-political facets of play in Finland. I describe the origins of the play movement from its beginnings in Swedish Lingian gymnastics to its transfer to Finland by women gymnasts. I review the notion of 'play' as a political strategy and give examples of adapting play as counter-strategy to competitive sport. Through the lens of women's politics, I examine the creation of social and ideological practices around the concept of 'play' and other non-competitive physical activity. I show the unique manner in which play was applied to create good citizens, to widen the scope of women's physical education, and to provide an alternative activity between gymnastics and competitive sport.

At the turn of the 20th century competitive sport was introduced to Finland. However, its acceptance into Finnish society was not assured. Seen as a brash foreign intruder, the sporting movement challenged traditional values and was viewed with suspicion. However, Finland's success at the Stockholm Olympic Games (1912) generated some support for competitive sport which appeared to offer Finland a way to unite her people and win political recognition abroad, despite emphasising individualism and contradicting the neo-humanistic values, beliefs, and social mores of Finnish society.

The neo-humanistic ideology emphasised collective response, character development, and the importance of moral thought and action. According to its advocates, neo-humanism supplied a solid foundation for all social activity – including sport and physical exercise. The founders of the Finnish women's gymnastics movement in particular embraced its principles; they believed neo-humanism instilled in female youth the qualities necessary to become upstanding citizens, employees, and educators. These women played a decisive role in establishing and promoting a non-competitive sport movement in Finland and in resisting its competitive counterpart. Of extraordinary interest is their adaptation and evolution of 'play' as a foundational construct.

WOMEN GYMNASTS CHALLENGE COMPETITIVE SPORT

When the Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation was founded in 1896, it became the first national organisation in Finland in the area of physical culture. It was not until 1900 that the first male-led national sports federation was established. This was due, in part, to the political situation in the country. Finland existed as an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia and since the 1890s, new repression politics started by Russia restricting the right to organise. Different kinds of mass organisations, such as *Kansanvalistusseura* (People's Education Society), and youth and temperance organisations were involved in national defence, with the goal of saving and developing the Finnish culture. The political and cultural struggle to save the autonomy of the country also played a pivotal role in the development of organised physical activity in Finnish society during the first two decades of the 20th century.¹

However, the development of a modern physical culture and of sport provoked different, even antagonist views concerning the goals and forms of the physical exercises as well as concerning a range of social, political and gender issues. And, the Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation rejected competitive sport totally. Similarly, four years later, the new Finnish Language Gymnastics and Sports Federation promulgated the idea of non-competitive sport. The following years saw an intense struggle between the yet unorganised promoters of modern competitive sport and those loyal to the ideology of non-competitive physical activity. The latter argued that competitive sport challenged traditional human values by promoting individual advancement rather than collective need – an idea largely shared within cultural and political spheres in the country.²

In 1906, during a short relaxation of Russian control a new organisation, The Gymnastics and Sports Federation of Finland (SVUL) was formed that encouraged Finland to open her doors to the emerging genre of individual competitive sport. Within a few years, competitive sport had become a commonplace popular activity. As Finnish sportsmen gained international success public resistance and predictions waned and critics were silenced, as sport was seen as a tool of resistance against Russia. Structured alternatives to the competitive sporting practices all but disappeared. The Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation remained the only national organisation to challenge the ideological foundation of competitive sport and to offer a practical alternative.³

Through the Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation, women gained autonomy from the mainstream sports movement. It developed a model for women's physical education that embraced healthy, non-competitive activity. The goal was to promote forms of physical activity accessible to all women. With membership consisting of professional women and gymnastics teachers, the goals of the federation reflected an in-depth understanding of physical education. Several members had passed gymnastics teacher training examinations at the Royal Gymnastics Institute in Stockholm, and adapted the world famous system of Swedish gymnastics (or Lingian gymnastics, after its founder, PH Ling). The federation introduced Swedish gymnastics in Finland.⁴

The federation focused on enhancing women's professional education, self-development, sense of social responsibility, and commitment to citizenship. This emphasis on social

responsibility through physical activity was not new; since the 1880s, women gymnasts in Sweden, Finland, and Denmark had used gymnastic exercise to address the physical and social needs of working-class women and it followed that when in 1906 the women of Finland became the first in Europe to gain political emancipation, the Women's Gymnastics Federation began to provide working-class women with leadership training in gymnastics.⁵

Through the work with working-class women and children, the federation identified social action, rather than women's individual duty or the developing of the domestic sphere, as the appropriate means to resolve contemporary social issues. Emphasising social responsibility, the women of the federation (along with similarly-minded male colleagues) rejected and challenged the key tenets of social Darwinism, the survival of the fittest, believing that Finland's strength as a nation depended on establishing healthy and enlightened citizens.⁶ This ideological foundation influenced the type of physical activity offered by women's gymnastics clubs. As competitive sport gained popular acceptance, even among women⁷, the women's gymnastics federation responded by creating non-competitive activity schemes and alternative training programmes for women. Grounded in neo-humanistic ideology, a women's play movement emerged. By providing practical alternatives to competitive sport, the Women's Gymnastics Federation gave Finnish women a unique opportunity to create, explore, and develop play as a foundation for physical activity.

THE CONCEPT OF PLAY

A brief linguistic discussion will help to illustrate the complexity of the concept of play in the Finnish context, and in the context of the Women's gymnastics movement. At the beginning of the 20th century, neither Finnish nor any other Nordic language had specific words equivalent to the English word 'game', nor did any word denote an English understanding of 'play'. In Swedish, *spel* was adopted as a loose translation for 'game'; in Finnish, the word *pele* became the accepted alternative. Linguistic similarities evident between Swedish and Finnish translations were also apparent in the adaptation of the word 'play'; Swedes used *lek* to denote 'play', and the Finns substituted *leikki*. However, despite a theoretical demarcation between 'play' and 'game', Finnish linguistic practices frequently blurred the boundary between these imported sporting conventions.

During the early years of Finnish sport development, *leikki* was generally used in reference to games as well as to play activities. Ivar Wilskman, founding father of Finnish sport and teacher at the Institute of Gymnastics (University of Helsinki), used the word *leikki* to refer to the emerging genre of competitive games or sport.⁸ The linguistic specialisation resulted when modern sport practices were standardised and competition accepted as an integral component of games. At that point, play (*leikki*) was repositioned linguistically and culturally within the domain of childhood. However, linguistic redefinition notwithstanding, the notion of 'play' (*leikki*) also developed political significance; the women's gymnastics movement used the concept of play to counter the ideological manifestations of competitive sport.

A THEORETICAL MODEL: THE SWEDISH PLAY MOVEMENT

The Finnish women's gymnastics movement evolved from Swedish Lingian gymnastics. According to Swedish sports historian Jan Lindroth, the term 'play' (*lek*) was used to denote physical activity ranging from the self-directed, spontaneous movement of children to competitive sport. Consequently, play was often invoked as a synonym for sport.⁹ However, the discipline and regulation required by institutionalised sport, and its subservience to international trends, exceeded that of 'play'; Lindroth asserted play to be "process-like, national, and spontaneous." Since the 1880s, the inherent nature of sport, and of play, caused intense debate among physical educationalists of Sweden. Orthodox Lingians resisted the introduction of sport and play into the discipline of gymnastics, which instead focused on systematically organised exercises based on physical needs.¹⁰

Lindroth describes how a play movement independent from Lingian authorities developed in Gothenburg (Western Sweden) in the 1890s. At that time, Gothenburg was the main centre for the sports movement in Sweden. A focal point for the movement was provided by the *Sällskapet för friluftsslekar i Göteborg* (Society for Outdoor Play in Gothenburg), a famous institute located at Nääs just outside Gothenburg. Local elementary and secondary schools also organised outdoor play activities. Lindroth considers the movement representative of a novel emerging physical culture, inspired by physical programmes from other countries (in particular, the playground movement in Germany).¹¹

The institute at Nääs had already gained international recognition for its pedagogical innovation in woodwork education, the so-called *slöjd*. However, in the mid-1890s the institute furthered its reputation when it used ideological concepts specific to the play movement to underpin courses on 'play'. These pioneering courses were well attended; and many female Finnish physical educators made the trip to Nääs, including the founder of the women's gymnastics federation, Elin Kallio, in 1903, and her close colleague Anni Collan, in 1904.¹²

The Gothenburg Society for Outdoor Play was unique in Sweden. With financial support from the city, the society maintained playgrounds for its schoolchildren and working population. It initiated various types of organised physical activity and structured competitions (especially ball games).¹³

The leaders of the Swedish play movement, notably teacher John W Åkermark, were critical of competitive sport. Involving only a select number of players, lacking a local-traditional (*folklig*) foundation, and promoting physical exercise as an end in itself, competitive sport appeared antithetical to play. Åkermark introduced to Sweden *friluftsslekar* (outdoor play); an independent form of exercise that he situated on a continuum between "time honoured but ossified" gymnastics and the potential danger of competitive sport.¹⁴

From a pedagogical perspective, play developed the personality and encouraged initiative. Unlike the regimented collectivity of gymnastics, play promoted individualisation, nurtured responsibility, courage, and justice. Play was associated with the notion of a free, but law-abiding, society. However, while pedagogues employed play as an educational strategy, the construct was also perceived as a natural activity, a reflection of young people's innate instinct for physical activity.

The inherent joy of play was believed to promote positive psychological effects. As a social activity, play was considered an uplifting ingredient of community-based leisure events, providing a dignified alternative to the gymnastic/sport displays of popular festivities – with the added advantage of keeping the young out of the taverns. The benefits of play were also represented in physiological discourse. The physicality of play was believed to benefit both the heart and the lungs.¹⁵

With evidence of physical, pedagogical, social, and psychological benefits, the Swedish play movement attracted the attention of Finnish female gymnasts. Both the ideology of the play movement, and Swedish methods of applying its principles, were adopted by women of the Finnish gymnastics federation. However, the Swedish play movement was not the only programme of physical activity to influence the fledgling play movement in Finland. Germany, the original homeland of the playground movement, had a profound impact on Finnish practices. England, and later the United States, also influenced the development of play in Finland.

THE INTRODUCTION OF 'PLAY' IN FINLAND

With reference to sport¹⁶, the first collection of a range of play activities appeared in print as a booklet, *Lasten leikkejä* (Children's Play), published by E Wilponen in 1879. The author described outdoor forms of play from foreign origins, such as those initiated by German national H Wagner. The Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation also exhibited a renewed interest in play, inviting discussion amongst its members. Concurrent with this dialogue, some members of the federation started to collect and publish popular play activities, folk dances, and play activities accompanied by song (singing play). Initial renderings of the work were patriotic in intent. Among the first publications was Elin Kallio's *Kansan lasten leikkikirja* (Playbook for Folk Children) in 1903. In the same year, Olga Lönnbohm published a collection of singing play activities and Ivar Wilskman produced a booklet, *Palloleikkejä* (Ball Play), which actually focused on Finland's newly acquired sporting games.¹⁷

Gymnastics teacher Anni Collan (1876-1966) was especially active and skilled in collecting popular folk dances and traditional forms of physical play. She published several anthologies that would become sought after and highly regarded.¹⁸ In 1904 Collan also founded *The Helsingin Naisvoimistelijat* (Helsinki Women Gymnasts-club), the heart and initiator for activities that would become known as the 'women's play movement'.¹⁹

Elin Kallio (1856-1927) was a gymnastics teacher. She founded the Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation and acted as the organisation's president from 1896 to 1917. Influenced in her conceptualisation of play by a German model of political youth work known as *Spielbewegung*, she also sought direction from the Swedish play movement, and was inspired by Danish agricultural colleges for youth. Kallio's promotion of play activity took place during the height of confrontation between advocates of competitive sport and its opponents.²⁰ Popular movements, such as the temperance movement and agrarian youth movement, willingly promoted physical exercise of 'national origin' and were therefore somewhat resistant to competitive sport. In this context, play provided a useful alternative to sporting activities. Scattered by Kallio, and other leaders of the gymnastics federation, the ideological seeds of play were planted in fertile ground.

THE FINNISH WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS FEDERATION AND THE PLAY MOVEMENT²¹

It was not until the 1910s that the triad of gymnastics, play, and sport were reflected in the activities of the Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation (SNVL). The initiatives of *Helsingin Naisvoimistelijat* (Helsinki Women Gymnasts or HNV) played a pioneering role in promoting different forms and adaptations of play.

The play movement first appeared on the agenda of the Finnish Women's Gymnastics Federation festival in 1899. Asking "Can anything be done to promote 'free play' in our country?", physical education teacher Ida Nyström addressed the convention. Nyström's use of the Swedish term, 'free play' (*fria lekar*) indicated the importance she placed on the Swedish play movement. As the concept of free play was as yet unknown in Finland, Nyström had to rely on examples from foreign countries to communicate her vision for a Finnish play movement. With reference to the Nääs institute in Sweden, Nyström proposed a leading role for women in the organisation of play courses in Finland. At the end of the convention, the women's gymnastics federation decided to introduce free play into the programme of the next festival. Additionally, the convention's publication urged member societies to acquire a copy of JW Åkermark's guidebook which introduced "appropriate play activities, from folk play to basketball."²²

In the same year Finnish professor Natta Kavaleff Mankell, a former gymnast who had immigrated to the United States, introduced a basketball game to her former homeland. Known to gymnastic women as a play activity, the basketball game was an early version of American basketball with rules modified for women.²³

Modern sporting games were still relatively unknown in Finland. In comparison, the Finnish federation's counterparts in Sweden (for example, Stockholm's Women's Gymnastics Club (*Stockholms Kvinnliga Gymnastik-förening*) offered out-of-doors activities such as football and tennis, in a non-competitive form, besides gymnastics.²⁴

The 1901 and 1904 festivals of the SNVL featured demonstrations of play activity alongside gymnastic performances. In 1903, the president of the SNVL Elin Kallio suggested the federation cooperate with the temperance movement in order to provide Finnish youth – both male and female – with play, gymnastics and sport activities. She had previously persuaded the largest of the Finnish temperance organisations *Raittiuden Ystävät* to organise courses in play leadership. With instructors provided by the SNVL, the first of these instructional programs was held in 1904. Kallio led the four-week programme encompassing gymnastics, play, and temperance work. In 1906, she toured Denmark where summer courses for agricultural colleges for youth and elementary school teachers provided her with a model on which to base similar activities in Finland.²⁵

However, despite the well-intentioned commitment of women such as Kallio, the play movement in Finland remained an insignificant force. Instead, sports clubs and other organisations promoted competitive sport for women. As early as 1909, the Finnish gymnastics and sports federation organised the first national sports competition for women. Strongly opposed to this development, the SNVL conducted a survey in 1910 to establish its members' attitudes towards sport and competition. A narrow majority of respondents opposed all competition;

almost half of the respondents considered competition held without prizes and records as an acceptable activity.²⁶ Despite the slim majority, the SNVL used the survey results to justify its exclusivity policy of non-competitive sport; but significantly, the practical application of this policy remained unspecified.

Members of the HNV, however, continued to broaden their understanding of play, searching for information abroad and organising independent play activities and sports. The club presented a discussion of the German play movement in 1910; and one year later, the leader of the HNV's girls' section visited England to study municipal playgrounds and British facilities for sport and recreation.²⁷

At the annual assembly of the SNVL in 1911, Anni Collan challenged federation members to address the stagnated state of the Finnish play movement. She proposed the introduction of competition into the play movement. Collan asked the SNVL to endorse competition in the context of popular play, folk dance and "singing play".²⁸ Convinced that play activity could be invigorated by other measures, such as introducing one compulsory play activity in the programme of the next festival, the federation demurred. In contrast, the assembly eagerly debated the socio-hygienic aspects of gymnastics. It was evident that the diversity and potential of the play movement had not yet been realised by the federation.

THE POPULAR MOVEMENTS ADAPT PLAY

In the summer of 1911, the HNV took part in the music and sport festival of *Kansanvalistusseura* (People's Education Society). The programme included 'competitions in play', applied to folk games and folk dances. A report of the event was published in the new women's gymnastics periodical *Kisakenttä* (Playground) which first appeared in 1911. The author criticised the SNVL for its negative attitude towards competitive play, "Why all this fear?", she asked.²⁹ The article suggested that training for competitive play might disseminate to the larger population the concept of physical activity as "uplifting experience." It suggested that, if embraced by popular education, play activity could keep youth involved in innocent pursuits. Joyful play, asserted the author, should be included in the programme of every outdoor festival in the country.

Despite the reluctance of the SNVL to endorse competitive play, the play movement gained a following in other organisations that targeted the needs of children and young people. Several youth and temperance organisations offered courses in play leadership. In one instance, a female teacher on an instructional course declared that play would "save a young person from many temptations, if she is directed in time from corner dances and idle pursuits to pure, ennobling, and beautiful games." In 1911, The Association for Friends of Finnish Folk Dances organised play courses for children during the Christmas holiday. Folk dances, singing play activities, and other interpretations of play activities were promoted by the association.³⁰

The head of the Gymnastics Institute at the University of Helsinki, Viktor Heikel gave an important positive signal. He supported introducing play among (male) sports by participating in a leadership course at a Swedish language sports club, *Kamraterna*, that included both sport and play in teaching programme. Heikel was an active opponent of the now dominant competitive sports movement.³¹

Thus, the play movement in Finland was imbued with a pure Gothenburgian spirit on Finnish soil. The play movement was based on national and local tradition, it provided an alternative to competitive sport, it was educational, healthy and joyful, it kept the young out of mischief; and it brought a morally uplifting tone to popular festivals.

APPLICATIONS OF THE PLAY MOVEMENT: SOCIAL PLAYGROUND WORK

The women's gymnastics periodical *Kisakenttä* continued to promote the play movement, concentrating its efforts on the dissemination of information relating to playground activity. In 1912, Anni Collan published an article in the periodical entitled "Is there anything that could be done better in physical education in Finland?"³² Collan drew her readers' attention to a proposal by the Swedish national Board of Education that would make play and sport compulsory subjects in Sweden's schools. Collan outlined the activities of Germany's national board for the promotion of folk and youth play, *Zentralausschuss für Forderung der Volks und Jugendspiele*, and she described the work carried out by 'playground associations' in North America. Young people everywhere, she argued, should be provided with free opportunities for physical exercise. Communities, supported by the state and municipalities, should build playgrounds and gymnastic halls for their youth populations. Collan presented a detailed proposal for introducing play into both elementary and secondary schools, and she asserted that such opportunities should also exist for young people beyond school age. It called for purpose-built, pleasant, and safe facilities lacking at the time in Finland.

In 1912, Anni Collan provided an in-depth discussion of the American playground movement in another issue of *Kisakenttä*.³³ A typical American playground consisted of a sandpit for the smallest children, a well-equipped play area, and an adjacent sports ground. Programmes included activities adapted for various age groups, and offered a diverse range of sports, contests, debates, songs and music play, hobbies, crafts and handiwork activities. Collan described the American concept of continuing education during school holidays by utilising playground facilities.

At first, the objective of such programmes had been simply to keep children off the streets. However, it was soon realised that the provision of playground programmes had an inherent educational value and positive medical consequences. Consistent with the dictum 'laziness is the mother of crime', guided playground activity kept children busy and was believed to improve the manners, teamwork skills, social cohesion, sense of responsibility, and initiative of participants. Thus, Collan viewed the playground movement as preventative social work. Municipal playgrounds, where youth, school children and children of working class citizens could spend their spare time, was an example of social action which emerged from the play movement.

In 1911, the leader of the HNV's girls' section, Anna-Lisa Petterson, wrote in *Kisakenttä* of the free time activities publicly funded by municipal authorities in London. She noted that, in Britain, the public had access to large parks that had been divided into sections for different activities with fields for various sports, and separate activity areas designated for boys, girls, and toddlers.³⁴ British playgrounds were well-supplied with play equipment, and located in

pleasant surroundings. They provided the Finnish play movement with a model for 'green building' in modern cities.

Members of the HNV were greatly encouraged by these international examples of organised play activities. In the spring of 1913, the HNV requested funding from the city of Helsinki to provide "sporting events mainly for the working women of the city." Funds were received, and the following summer play activities were organised for women and children at three different sport fields around the city. The adult participants were mainly factory workers, print workers, and saleswomen. The children came from working-class families, many of them left alone while their parents worked. The programme consisted of non-competitive track and field athletics, play activities, gymnastics, swimming training, and recitals. With the exception of unwanted "intruding spectators", the experience of both participants and instructors was overwhelmingly positive. The HNV proposed to the city elders that the programme continue in order to further develop "socio-hygienic salvation work."³⁵

The Gymnastics Teachers' Association continued the work started by the HNV and extended its scope to cater for boys as well. The HNV broadened its outreach to include playground activities for adult women and older girls. In the years that followed, playgrounds were established in several other towns. The playground activities of Viborg, a lively industrial and marketing town on the Russian border, were especially noted for their enthusiasm and positivity. The local women's gymnastics society collected money to hire leaders and equipment. In this way, Viborg provided play opportunities for children unable to go to the countryside during the summer. Singing play, a variety of ball games, and folk dances were also organised for youth over the age of fourteen. Within a few years, the number of children and young people participating in the Viborg programme exceeded eight hundred.³⁶

Buoyed by the success of such programmes, municipal authorities began to take responsibility for providing play activities for the youngest children – a provision that still exists in today's society. Such was the popularity of the playground movement that, in 1917, it was even extended beyond the boundaries of Finland into Reval, Estonia.³⁷

PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF PLAY

Kisakenttä published both theoretical analyses and practical interpretations of the play movement. In one article entitled "The Nature and Tasks of Play", the author reviewed the works of theorists such as Spencer-Schiller, Groos, Froebel, and Mall. The article discussed different elements of play and outlined instinctive, social, cognitive, and moral facets.³⁸ Play was considered necessary for healthy physical, social, and moral development and was believed to develop in its participants such desirable characteristics as faith, obedience, and discipline.

In another article, GE Johnsson interrogated the association between different forms of play and the age of participants.³⁹ Many pedagogues and educators engaged in such discussions, and the practical development of play activities were enhanced by dialogue. In addition to curricular requirements, kindergartens and schools began to offer opportunities for play during free time. New forms of singing play, in particular, were emphasised.

Yrjö Hirn, an internationally acknowledged cultural historian specialising in play traditions, expressed concern at the degree of influence pedagogues had over the play movement. Hirn was afraid that “the touch of adult” would destroy the ancient, elemental nature of children’s play. He warned that the use of “educational play” in kindergartens might have negative consequences for traditional play activities. Hirn spoke warmly of Anni Collan’s work, regarding her publications as the positive promotion of a play tradition.⁴⁰ In line with Hirn’s views, *Kisakenttä* published a translated article that alerted educators to the dangers of applying artificial play to patriotic songs.⁴¹ Its author argued that contrived play activity might smother the play enthusiasm of young children.

Some sports leaders applied the ideological tenets of the play movement to popular movements. In 1916, teacher Vilho Reima published a booklet *Leikki kasvatuksen* (Play as a Tool in Education). The publisher was the Association for Upbringing. In addition to the general importance of unstructured play, the author emphasised organised play where children could learn punctuality and cooperation. Once again, Anni Collan’s work, specifically *Koululaisten leikkikirja* (Playbook for Schoolchildren) was highly recommended. Furthermore, the writer identified singing play as having a positive application both at school and at home. Emphasising the order, beautiful movements, and delicate behaviour invoked in singing play, the writer also advocated an outdoor context for play. Painting a disturbing picture of dirty streets and cramped rooms, the author used widely propagated examples of municipal playground work in Chicago to present play as salvation. In the article, several ‘national’ weaknesses are identified in the Finnish people; frailties that might be addressed by the play movement. Instilling efficiency and organisational ability, promoting cleanliness and purity, play was presented as an antidote to the stresses of modern life. Purity of heart was depicted as equally important to bodily cleanliness and play was presented not only as a pathway to physical well-being but also as a vehicle for moral cleansing. In summary, play was viewed as imperative to national cohesion, paramount to socio-hygienic health, and as an integral component of cognitive and educational development.⁴²

PLAY COMPETITIONS: CHOICES FOR WOMEN IN COMPETITIVE SPORT

In 1912, the HNV renewed its efforts to enlarge the sphere of physical activity in women’s gymnastics. In conjunction with other women’s gymnastics clubs, a ‘women’s sports badge’ was introduced. Based on the Swedish model⁴³, the sports badge was intended to provide a non-competitive avenue to promote women’s participation in physical exercise. The principle was to obtain a minimal standard of performance in certain central gymnastic skills and sports such as track and field, skiing, swimming, cycling, and rowing. The standards for these badges corresponded to a normalised physical condition attained through regular exercise.⁴⁴ Sports badge training and testing became the principal form of non-competitive sport for Finnish schoolgirls and women and the scheme was to retain this status for several decades.

With the sports badge gaining quickly in popularity and public acceptance, Anni Collan continued to develop her ideas for women’s competitive play by publishing several articles on the topic in *Kisakenttä*, using North American literature. In 1914, she undertook a study

excursion to the United States where she immersed herself in the movement.⁴⁵ Collan was convinced that, when properly organised by qualified instructors, *leikkikilpailut* (play competitions) had the potential to awaken a dormant predilection for physical exercise. It was with intent that Collan even in this context systematically used the term *leikki* (play) rather than *pele* (game). According to Collan, play competition required the participant to adhere to a training schedule thereby promoting diligence, industriousness, and physical fortitude. She noted the positive effect of play competition on femininity; and its role as an instructional catalyst to prepare women in social life by encouraging self-control, obedience, and collective action.⁴⁶

Collan suggested that competition could be organised within a single club, or perhaps between different clubs (communities) of a single town. Teams should be selected spontaneously, and competition should be characterised by respectful, kind, polite, and silent behaviour. Collan's conceptualisation of women's play competition was influenced strongly by her experience of women's team competitions in the United States. Developed by physical educators in American schools and universities, the strict criteria for participation in competition was viewed as necessary if women were to maintain gender appropriate standards of ethical, moral, and social behaviour.⁴⁷ Both the ethics and the educational objectives of men's sport had to differ from those of women.

In the spring of 1914, the administrative board of the HNV proposed a group competition between the women's gymnastics clubs of Helsinki. The stated purpose of the event was to attain "mutual understanding and camaraderie between women." Consisting of twelve members, teams from the capital city participated in a *koripalloleikki* (basketball play). *Kisakenttä* reported the competition, and at the completion of the tournament a discussion forum was organised. This gave Anni Collan an opportunity to explain her views and to give an account of similar events in North America.⁴⁸

After other experimental play competitions, Anni Collan was convinced that competitive play contributed positively to women's physical education and, consequently, she formally proposed the establishment of a Finnish women's sports association in 1915. Despite Collan's impassioned overture, it was decided that the women's gymnastics federation would retain control of all women's physical education activity. However, in 1917, the federation was rebranded as the *Finnish Women's Federation of Physical Education*. The new federation promoted play and non-competitive activities for women on a large-scale.⁴⁹

THE SPREAD OF THE PLAY MOVEMENT 1915-1917

Kisakenttä continued to regularly publish the latest news of play occasions of different localities within Finland. Play was integrated into gymnastics and sports courses organised by the federation. In 1915, special courses for play education led by gymnastics teachers were organised in more than thirty different localities. The National Board of Education carried the cost of providing educational programmes for elementary school teachers. Focusing on gymnastics, sports, and play activities, the instructional meetings gave teachers an understanding of the pedagogical value of physical activity.⁵⁰

Special courses in play application lasted from several days to a fortnight. In the summer of 1917, such programmes were organised for both female and male youth all around the country, but were especially prevalent in rural areas. Local people already carried some responsibility for the initiative; frequent instigators of play courses were daughters of local farmers, community temperance societies, or youth clubs.

In several areas, the course leaders complained about the critical attitudes of the local peasant people. In these communities, play was commonly seen as a time-wasting, even sinful, pastime. Different responses between social classes were remarkable: for example, farmers' daughters did not want to engage in play with servant girls or female farmhands. The strict adherence to social boundaries generated social comment from outsiders, which was not well-received by course participants.⁵¹ However, the tensions may have, in part, reflected the wider, intensified class-political confrontation in Finland in 1917.

On many courses, the number of participants exceeded one hundred, indicating a positive response to the programme. The main message of the play movement was that play formed an integral part of the physical, and civic, education of youth. Play was depicted as a tool in the fight against indecency. At the same time, it promoted a collective conscience as youth participated together in healthy physical exercise. Aspects of national identity were also woven into the fabric of the play movement: Large-scale political and social movements acknowledged the beneficial possibilities of play and were able to harness the momentum of the movement to promote their own causes. The Women's General Morality Meeting, held in Helsinki in 1917, proclaimed that gymnastics, play, and sport were means by which to attain true physical health. Play was even part of the programme at meetings of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The participants might play together before or after the discussions. Play was one form of being together, and a place to demonstrate patriotic thought.⁵²

Play competitions were still organised, albeit with increasing rarity. 'Play evenings' featuring sporting and ball play were organised in some places, often by women's gymnastics clubs, though sometimes by women's political organisations.⁵³

The women's play movement continued to evolve during the years 1916-17, with its progress documented in *Kisakenttä*. However, the civil war of 1918 marked a turning point in the development of Finnish women's sport. After the war, organised competition for women (for example, the Finnish track and field championships) was banned by the SVUL. On the other hand, the play movement – including play competition – continued to prosper in women's gymnastics clubs all over the country.

THE IMPACT OF THE PLAY MOVEMENT UPON FINNISH WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

The international model of the play movement was adopted and developed further by the Finnish women's gymnastics movement to fill the gap between gymnastics and competitive sports, and to create a persuasive alternative to rapidly spreading competitive sports. The ideology and models of the play movement were instrumental in bringing about the women's sports badge as well as social actions based on physical education, such as organised

playground activities for children. The play movement itself was realised in several forms, which included traditional folk games as well as modern sport games, folk dances, singing play and even structured competitive play activities.

Women used the term *leikki* (play) to refer to all these activities. The gymnastics-related term could be used as a cover under which to make bolder experiments and exceed the limits of gymnastics. On the other hand, the play movement formed an alternative to physical activity, where the term play represented a direct opposition to sport. The play movement was created by women, for women. These were genuine women's activities which were not just imitations or adaptations of male-created physical activity models. Resistance was inherent in the play movement advocated by women. This resistance was shared with some male physical educators and activists in the patriotic popular movements, but here it is suggested that their role as developers and inventors was more invisible, and has remained in the shadow of the male-led competitive sports.

CONCLUSION

Play was a multi-faceted political tool during the early 20th century in Finland. While originally used to address the social problems confronting working-class children and youth, play also highlighted national culture and identity. In Sweden, the play movement countered the tenets of competitive sport and presented an alternative to the formality and order of Swedish gymnastics; whilst in Finland, play enabled female physical educators to reach out to a large section of society. Through structured play events, a safe environment was maintained for women interested in competitive sport.

Nationalism provided the play movement with inspiration in several ways: ideological figurations presented play as crucial to the development of healthy youth and establishing 'good' citizens. Moral education contributed to this process, as removing youth from the streets and engaging them in productive physical enterprises was integral to the play movement. In rural areas, the play movement was used to mediate uncontrolled "corner dances" previously organised by youth themselves. Promoting new forms of singing play and folk dances, the play movement cleansed popular culture of erotic/sexual elements. Newly written words of singing play projected wholesome thoughts, clean values and patriotic ideals.

For the women's gymnastics movement, play (and the associated play movement) represented a patriotic and social responsibility to the Finnish population. However, it was also more than just an act of social service. Through the play movement women hoped to shape an alternative culture resistant to the hegemonic values of male sport. Through the play movement, women sought to name themselves and their way of viewing the world; and unwittingly, perhaps, the women of the play movement were competing with the dominant and antagonistic world of male sport.

- 1 See Leena Laine, *Vapaaehtoisten järjestöjen kehitys ruumiinkulttuurin alueella Suomessa 1856-1917, I-II* [The Development of the Voluntary Organisations in the Area of Physical Culture in Finland I-II] (Helsinki: Liikuntatieteellinen Seura, 1984), Chapters 4-5.
- 2 Laine, *Vapaaehtoisten*, Chapters 4 and 6.
- 3 Laine, *Vapaaehtoisten*, Chapters 7 and 12.
- 4 Leena Laine and Aino Sarje, *Suomalaisen naisvoimistelun maailmat* [The Worlds of the Finnish Women's Gymnastics] (Helsinki: Naisvoimistelun Tuki ry., 2002); Leena Laine, "Women's Gymnastics – Knowledge about Body, Women and Power", in: *Moving Bodies*, (Tema: Gymnastikk, dans og kvinnelighet, 2006) Vol 4(1) . Oslo: Norges Idrettshøgskole, 17-34.
- 5 Leena Laine, "Women Gymnasts as Civil Actors: Experiences in a History of a Women Gymnasts' Society", a paper presented at the 9th ISHPES Congress, Cologne, Germany, September 2005 (in press); Laine, "Women's Gymnastics", 2006.
- 6 Compare Henrik Meinander, "Discipline, Character, Health: Ideals and Icons of Nordic Masculinity 1860-1930", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22(4) (July 2005), 600-617. Meinander does not name the special field of play and its advocates e.g. in Sweden (also see his discussion of the Swedish ideas on play).
- 7 See Leena Laine, "What happened to the Early Queens of Sport? – Problematizing the Discontinuity and Breaks in Women's Sport", in Jürgen Buschmann/Gertrud Pfister (eds), *Sport und Sozialer Wandel/Sport and Social Changes/Sport et Changements Sociaux*. Proceedings of the ISHPES Congress 1998, Bulgaria. Publications of the ISHPES, Vol. 8. (St. Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2001), 42-52.
- 8 See e.g. Ivar Wilskman, *Palloleikkejä* [Ball plays] (Porvoo, 1903).
- 9 See Lindroth, Jan, *Gymnastik med lek och idrott: För och mot kroppsövningar i det svenska läroverket 1878-1928*. (Stockholm: HLS Förlag, 1993), 21.
- 10 Lindroth, Chapters 4-6.
- 11 Lindroth, p. 185-186. Then the Lingian term 'fria lekar' (free play) was substituted by the term 'friluftsslekar' (outdoor play).
- 12 Lindroth, p. 186-187; see also Roland Renson, "The Roots of the Game of Korfbal – A Genealogy", in F Troost (ed.), *"...and I went on voyage to Sweden"* (Utrecht: Royal Dutch Korfbal Association), 13-69.
- 13 Lindroth, 1993, 190-191.
- 14 Lindroth, 189.
- 15 Lindroth, 190-191.
- 16 See Atle Wilskman, "Bibliografi öfver i Finland tryckt idrotts – och sportlitteratur" (A Bibliography on Sports Literature Printed in Finland), in Ivar Wilskman,(ed.) *Idrotten i Finland IV* [Sports in Finland IV] (Helsingfors: Förlagsaktiebolaget Helios, 1906),I-XXVI.
- 17 Wilskman, A.
- 18 Anni Collan, *Suomen kansan leikkejä* [Finnish popular play]. Porvoo 1904; *Suomalainen Kisapirtti* [The Finnish Playhouse] (Helsingfors 1905), etc. These and many other of her publications were followed by several revised editions. One of her latest guidebooks on play, published in 1925, and including play programmes for elementary schools, still used the term 'play' systematically. Here the use of the term 'play' was meant to direct the teachers (and children) away from the ideology of sport towards the ideology of play.
- 19 See Leena Laine & Pirjo-Liisa Vilenius, *Ilo on asunut salissamme : Helsingin Naisvoimistelijat 1905–2005* [Joy was Always There. Helsinki Women Gymnasts 1905-2005]. (Helsinki: Helsingin Naisvoimistelijat, 2005).
- 20 Laine, 1984, 248-251;328-329.

- 21 For this part, see also Leena Laine, "Gymnastics, Play and Sport: An Alternative Model of Women's Physical Culture in Finland in the 1910s", in Annette Hofmann and Else Trangbaek (eds), *International Perspectives on Sporting Women in Past and Present: A Festschrift for Gertrud Pfister* (Institute of Exercise and Sport Sciences: University of Copenhagen, 2005), 111-125.
- 22 *Finska Kvinnors Gymnastikförbund II – Suomen Naisten Voimisteluliitto II*. "Den 2:de Gymnastikfesten 1899 i Åbo – 2: nen Voimistelujuhla Turussa 1899" (Helsinki, 1900), 23, 35-36; Presentation of Åkermark's guidebook: "Ut till lek II. 44 friluftslekar för flickor", pp. 78-79.
- 23 *Kisakenttä 1927/6-7*, 212-220. Kavaljeff Mankell was in correspondence with Elin Kallio. (Elin Kallio's Collection, Correspondence, *The Sports Archives of Finland*, Helsinki). About women's basketball, see e.g. Reet Howell (ed.), *Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthology of Women in Sports* (West Point, N.Y: Leisure Press, 1982), especially articles by Janice Ann Peran, "The Story of Six-Player Girls' Basketball in Iowa", pp. 552-561; or Lynne Emery, "The First Intercollegiate Contest for Women: Basketball, April 4, 1896", pp. 417-423.
- 24 See Amelie Zethraeus, "Kåserande historik över Stockholms Kvinnliga Gymnastik Förening", *Föreningen GCI: s årsbok* (Stockholm: 1927).
- 25 Laine, 1984, 248-251; 328-329; Heli Kurvinen, *Elin Kallio: Suomen naisvoimistelun äiti* [Elin Kallio: 'Mother' of Finnish Women's Gymnastics] (SNLL:n julkaisu no. 34, Helsinki: 1959), 417-423.
- 26 Laine, 1998; Laine, 1984, 466.
- 27 For example, a German book, *Spielmitage*, written by H Raydt, was presented at a discussion meeting. (The Minutes of the Discussion Meeting of HNV, 16.2.1910, *The Archives of Helsingin Naisvoimistelijat* (HNV), *The Sports Archives of Finland*, Helsinki); *Kisakenttä 1911/11*, 153-154.
- 28 *Finska Kvinnors Gymnastikförbund, VII Gymnastikfesten i Tammerfors år 1911. II Häftet, II bandet*. (Helsingfors: 1912), 46-48 ("Borde täflingar i lekar ordnas vid våra fester"), and pp. 37-38 (Protokoll fördr vid FGKF:s VII allmänna diskussionsmöte den 3. Juni 1911); Laine, 1984, 467.
- 29 *Kisakenttä 1911/7-8*, 101-103.
- 30 *Kisakenttä 1911/ 7-8*, 125-126; *Kisakenttä 1911/12*.
- 31 *Kisakenttä 1911/7-8*, 125-126; Laine, 1984, 514-515.
- 32 *Kisakenttä 1912/1*, 1-4.
- 33 *Kisakenttä 1912/1*, 6-11.
- 34 *Kisakenttä 1911/11*, 153-154.
- 35 The Minutes of the General Meeting of the HNV 16.1.1913; Council Meeting of HNV 27.5.1913; Annual meeting of HNV 15.9.1913, with Appendix: Report of the Summer Activities. *The Archives of HNV, The Sport Archives of Finland*, Helsinki.
- 36 *Kisakenttä 1917/7-8*, 183.
- 37 *Kisakenttä 1917/9*, 238.
- 38 *Kisakenttä 1915/6-7*, 124-129.
- 39 *Kisakenttä 1915/6-7*, 130-146.
- 40 Yrjö Hirn, *Leikkiä ja taidetta [Play and Art]* (Finnish translation from Swedish by JV Lehtonen). (Porvoo: WSOY, 1918), 65 and 298-299. From Collan's publications Hirn mentioned *Kansanlaululeikkejä [Play with Folk Songs]* (1907); *Kurssikaikuja [Courses' Echoes]* (1914); *Laululeikkejä [Singing Play]* (1908; second edition in 1909; third, revised edition in 1913); and *Suomalainen kisapirtti* (1-3, in 1905, 1907, 1908).
- 41 M Radziwill, *Laululeikeistä [About Singing Play]*, translated into Finnish by Lyli Lautela, an enthusiast in promoting play movement in Finland. *Kisakenttä 1914/6*, 130-133, and *Kisakenttä 1914/10*, 207-211. Also many of those in favour of folk dances (as Anni Collan) were critical of the habit of modifying folk dances into singing play activities.
- 42 Vilho Reima, *Leikki kasvatuksen välikappaleena [Play as a Tool in Education]*, *Kotikasvatusyhdistyksen julkaisuja* No. 2 (Porvoo: WSOY, 1916, 4th edition).

- 43 A first suggestion of a sports badge for women was made in Sweden in 1911, but the final model (without track and field exercises) was only adapted in 1916. In Helsinki, Finland, the first worker sports club founded in 1887 had developed a first version of the sports badge at the end of the 19th century.
- 44 Laine and Vilenius, 2005, 35-37.
- 45 Collan published a report *Ruumiillinen kasvatus Pohjois-Ameriikan Yhdysvalloissa* [The Physical Education in the USA, North America] (Porvoo: WSOY, 1916), with wide-ranging descriptions of the playground movement and the physical education in schools and high schools.
- 46 *Kisakenttä* 1914/4: Leikkikilpailut” (Play Competitions), written by “AC”.
- 47 See e.g. Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport* (Harvard University Press: 1995), 23-27.
- 48 The Minutes of the HNV Council Meeting 14.1.1914 and the Minutes of the Discussion Meeting of HNV, “Säkenet” Club and “Naisylioppilasvoimistelijat” Club 11.3.1914 (The Archives of HNV); *Kisakenttä* 1914/3, 65.
- 49 Laine, 1984, 473-476.
- 50 *Kisakenttä* 1917/6, 155-157.
- 51 *Kisakenttä* 1917/2, 43 and 1917/7-8, 180-181.
- 52 *Kisakenttä* 1917/2, 43; 1917/7-8, 84 and 177-178.
- 53 *Kisakenttä* 1917/7-8, 84.

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