

INTRODUCTION

This book comprises a number of cultural-historical and ethnographic studies of the history of sport in Scandinavia. The studies examine the contribution made by sport to the development of Scandinavian nationalism in the nineteenth century, and analyze the ways in which sport became interwoven with the social life of citizens in the various Scandinavian countries in the twentieth century. The main focus of this volume, therefore, is not on the organizational history of sport, nor is it on society vis-à-vis sport – i.e., sport as a reflection of a certain societal constellation. Rather, what is of interest is sport in society, and therefore the book aims to illustrate the ways in which sport has been used and has served to help explain and understand Scandinavian society types.

This endeavour is also related to the history of the social classes. In the nineteenth century, while both sport and nationalism were primarily of importance to the bourgeoisie and – in part – the aristocracy, in the twentieth century both sport and nationalism became a matter for wage-earners and salaried employees. It could be expressed as follows: Nationalism – the strongest “ism” of all the political “isms” in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – succeeded, through the medium of sport, in reaching all levels of Scandinavian society in the twentieth century. Sport was at the service of nationalism, but the opposite was also true. Sport also made its own contribution to nationalism: It peacefully and symbolically played a significant role in helping to close the gaps that existed between the social classes in Scandinavia, with working class and peasant being able – through sport – to demonstrate their equality with the other classes in society. In this way, it can be said that sport has also contributed to democratizing the Scandinavian nations.

On the whole, Scandinavian countries were stable and solid societies in the twentieth century. This was, above all, due to the circumstance that they were all characterized by a strong democratic tradition that resulted in part from a sympathetic reform monarchy, and in part from the “association autocracy” that was created in the second half of the nineteenth century. Here people were schooled from childhood in democratic leadership principles, whereby – thanks to the elastic membrane of dialogue and practical

problems that had to be solved – much potential dissatisfaction and rebellion were directed into politico-cultural channels, where people had a sense of influence and joint responsibility.

Secondly, in all Scandinavian countries – in both city and countryside – peasants and workers cooperated to a certain extent in forming the so-called “red-soil alliance” (*rod-muldsalliance*). In Denmark, a coalition government existed between the Social Democrats and the Radical Left since 1929, the latter being a consensus-based middle-class party that also represented certain agricultural circles. In Sweden, the Social Democratic Party governed together with the Peasant Party since 1932. In Norway, the same thing happened in 1935, when the Workers’ Party sacrificed its traditionally distinctive working-class politics and became a paternal, “nationally responsible” government party. In Finland, the Social Democrats were given a place in the “red-soil” government that Aimo Cajander formed in 1937, a time when the governments were otherwise dominated by academics, peasants and the business community. This consensus form of politics was epitomized by the Swedish concept of *Folkhemmet*, which, with an apparent Scandinavian prototype in P.A. Jensen’s textbook from 1863, had been elaborated already around the year 1900 by the socially conservative professor and right-wing politician Rudolf Kjellén, but which in the 1920s was reinterpreted in the direction of a national social democracy. It did not leave much room for radical solutions for either the right or left wing and formed the basis for a nationalism which, as “welfare nationalism”, stood in sharp contrast to the fascists’ and Nazis’ “war nationalism”.

Sport and the culture of the body played an essential role in this Scandinavian form of democratic and nationalistic “welfare nationalism”, but with regard to sport this support was directed more towards the national aspect than towards democracy as such. It would be hasty, therefore, to credit sports activists – and perhaps even the implementation of the culture of the body in outdoor life – with having played the most important role in democracy. Alone they could not have made this achievement possible, but they did help in the creation of a solid foundation. More important for democracy was the organizational framework of the sports activists. In this respect it must be presumed that the association activities – which also included the sports organizations – and the culture of

the body in Scandinavian sports, contributed actively to this – if by nothing else than by weighting equality, mutual dependency and consensus as a form of communication.

Within research into nationalism and democracy a distinction is often made between two paths: a West European and a German-East European path (cf. below). The argument is, first of all, that the Scandinavian trend cannot be unequivocally placed within any of these two spheres. In other words, Scandinavia follows a special path, a *Sonderweg*, that is partly characterized as being a mixture of the two transitional paths. Second, the argument is that the culture of the body and sport play an important role in the Scandinavian trend, in that they contribute to toning Scandinavian political culture in the direction of a certain popular conformity and equality that encourages consensus rather than conflict. However, it is not argued that sports activities and physical experiences have in themselves played any decisive role in the development of Scandinavian democracy. Athletics and sport alone create only silent and mute experiences. These experiences are influential only when they are put into a functional context, i.e. when contextualization takes place in the form of an interplay between economic, social and political factors.

It has been said that democratic populism is the Scandinavian gift to the modern world (Slagstad 2003: 72). This aims at the particular Scandinavian version of democracy as a combination of national statehood and populism – the national being popular, and the popular national. In Scandinavia, the state government has considerable authority and legitimacy, but due to the fact that the distance between state and society is narrower than in so many other places in the world, the tolerance of state interference in the civil life of its citizens is greater in Scandinavia than, for instance, in Germany and France, and also in the UK and Italy, which are traditionally less accustomed to this. Not only is there a difference between Scandinavia and Western Europe, but a difference also presents itself in respect to Eastern Europe: A situation such as that which took place in Poland from 1980-83, when Solidarnosc became a political power factor as a result of the illegitimacy of the state and the sense of an insurmountable threshold between state and society, would never happen in Scandinavian countries (Törnquist

Plewa 1992). Here the state is characterized as being both a home, where the patriarchs take care of their citizens, and an authority that determines and guarantees the rights of its citizens; in other words, the state comprises both emotions and reason in establishing what is right and wrong (Østerberg 1997: 248). It is difficult to conceive of the history of Scandinavia without Hegel.

As part of this hybridization of state and civil society the idea of state-supported general education has played an important role. It has involved steadily increasing popular access to the cultural and political capital of the traditional ruling classes, as well as the popularization of highbrow culture. The sizeable coalition between the bourgeoisie and peasants in the second half of the nineteenth century was followed by a later and larger coalition in the first half of the twentieth century, namely, cooperation between peasants and workers in the precarious 1930s, when the romantic-expressive nationalism of peasant culture was united with the national folk socialism of the working class. By virtue of this hybridization between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between tradition and modernity, and between country and city, the right-wing forces in the political landscape had difficulty getting a word in edgeways. Culturally speaking, the space was already occupied, and the social demands that fascism could assert were advanced in Scandinavia by the social-democratic workers' movement, which from the mid-1930s had become a popular movement. All this resembles a clever political master plan that appealed to citizens and not obedient subjects (Slagstad 2003: 77).

But a movement has taken place not only from above and downwards, but also from below and upwards, where particularly sport and the culture of the body have played a role. The special status that popular culture has in Scandinavia as opposed to the rest of Western Europe is linked to this (Kayser Nielsen 2003). Contrary to the situation in Germany and England, football, for instance, has never been a distinctly working-class phenomenon in Scandinavia, but a popular-national sport that not only includes the bottom but also the top – and, above all, the population at large. Likewise, the gymnastics that the Danish peasants introduced as their own at the end of the nineteenth century have since been elevated to a sport for the entire country. Similarly, skiing – that in the first decades of

the twentieth century was merely a parade exercise for loggers from the periphery of Norway, Sweden and Finland – is now a national icon. Just think of Vasaloppet, Holmenkollen, and the scandalous abuse of doping in Finnish skiing that tugged at the heartstrings of the Finnish nation.

One of the reasons for this is that sports organizations, and therefore also clubs and associations, have benefited from state support (Kayser Nielsen 1989). Sport – the noblest arena for the cultural development of the lower classes on a mass level – was both a civil and a state forum – i.e., an actual national enterprise. Here one could, as part of the desire for “perfection” so central to Scandinavian educators (Slagstad 1998: 79 f.), endeavour to mould both soul and body.

One of the main objectives of the book is thus to illuminate the relationship between *sport and nationalism*, and in particular to show the role performed by sport in Scandinavian nationalism: both the patriotic nationalism of the nineteenth century and the democratic, welfare-based nationalism constructed in conflict with fascistic forces in all the Scandinavian countries during the interwar period. The other main objective is to bring into focus *differences and similarities between the Scandinavian countries*. Scandinavia is often considered a unity, but upon closer examination considerable differences become apparent. Yet, just as often, when these differences have been elucidated, one can observe the common character and sense of community that does exist.

At least this is my experience. I lived in Sweden for a number of years in the 1970s, and found it most agreeable. There was more space than in Denmark, which at the time was dominated by a poor domestic political climate. The social debates were fiercer in Sweden, even though Denmark understood capital logic better and had closer connections to the fertile German cultural criticism. For several periods in the 1990s I worked as a visiting professor and supervisor at the University of Helsingfors. I felt very much at home and became so familiar with the city of Helsingfors that today I consider it “my” capital more than Copenhagen. Furthermore, from around 1975 until 1995 my family and I spent every single summer holiday in the Finnish skerries, my wife being Fenno-Swedish (we met each other on the Icelandic volcanoes).

These experiences have resulted in my intimate connection with both Scandinavian everyday life and Scandinavian cultural history. I am captivated by Scandinavia's special combination of magical light summertime nights and friendly wintertime darkness, as well as the collective Scandinavian mentality with its special mixture of melancholy, guilt, cultivation of consensus, and obstinate independence. And as a result of my Scandinavian contacts I have seen plenty of sport throughout Scandinavia. It all started in the summer of 1968, when I was an upper secondary school pupil and received a scholarship to attend school in Sweden, where I saw my first Swedish football match. This took place in the late summer in Uddevalla. This was followed by a trip to Reykjavik in 1972, where I saw Allan Simonsen's debut against Iceland. Later I went to the ice hockey rinks in Umeå ("heja Löven") and Vasa, Finland on numerous occasions in the 1970s, as well as in Helsingfors in the 1990s. In the 1980s, I visited Göteborg and especially GAIS, whose website – the best in Scandinavia – I continue to visit. And of course I should not ignore my sports experiences in Denmark, with AGF and Aarhus Stadium at the top of the list. Old love dies hard.

For these reasons – which primarily concern silent, bodily knowledge – I wanted to write a book about sport in Scandinavia in a comparative light; a book that should, at the same time, communicate the fact that sport is at issue, rather than literature or architecture, for instance.

This book is neither purely chronological nor purely thematic in structure, and so its individual parts can be read separately. The short chapter on the 1912 Stockholm Olympics is the pivotal point as far as the subject matter is concerned, and is a good place to start if one does not intend to read the book from cover to cover. The book has four sections: the first one focuses on the state, nation and education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the second concerns the new bodily awareness that manifested itself from 1900 to 1914; the third is dedicated to the interwar period, and finally the book deals with the political significance of the body, the way in which sports halls contributed to sociality, and the special consensus thinking and conformity that, for better or worse, are Scandinavian hallmarks.