

# 100 YEARS IN THE SERVICE OF WORLD PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The Fédération Internationale d'Éducation Physique et Sportive  
Scandinavian roots of FIEPS and FIEPS in Europe  
Historical Overview  
Author: Ms. Airikki Pousi

## I The preliminaries

The idea of creating an international organization for Physical Education appeared for the first time at the International Conference for Physical Education, which was held in Paris in 1900. The International Technical Committee for P.E was constituted by 16 different countries, including following members:

- chair, Dr. Motto, Italy
- Demery, France
- Cabecas, Chile
- Kier, Denmark
- Chryssafis, Greece
- Törngren, Sweden

The purpose of the committee was targeted to scientific research in physical education, and education of physical education teachers at the universities. It was mainly during the International Conference held in Odense Denmark in July 1911 that the framework of what may be truly considered as the FIEP ancestor first appeared. <sup>1</sup>

## L'Institution Internationale de L'Éducation Physique in 1911

The Board was constituted as follows: chair Prof. Sellen, Head of Stockholm Central Institute, vice-chairman Dr. Philippe Tissié, France, secretary general Prof. De Gens, Belgium. They represented the "Swedish School", according to the classification in use at that time. The aims written down in statutes were:

1. *To improve the science of Physical Education and its practical applications by centralizing the results of studies and experiments made all over the world to lead the way for new research.*
2. *The inculcation in people's minds of the principle that physical education must co-operate with intellectual and moral education.*

## II The development of the organisation

### The Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique Educative (La FIGE) (IFEG)

It is convenient to recall here that, originally FIEP, at the time of its creation in Brussels in 1923, was named "the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique Educative". However, due to objection from the head of the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (Gymnastique Olympique), in 1930, to avoid confusion, it changed its title to "The Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique Ling" FIGE. It was at the Congress in Istanbul in 1953, that the current title "FIEP" was adopted, to emphasize the universal character of our Federation and its doctrinal independence. FIEP was established in 1923 by following members; chair General Lefebure (Belgium), vice-chair Colonel Nerman (Sweden), secretary general Mr. de Genst (Belgium)

#### 1st Article:

*IFEG is founded grouping Federations and Associations of all nationalities which base the physical development of their youth on educative gymnastics in accordance with those scientific principles of which P.H. Ling was main originator.*

## 2nd Article:

*The Federation aims at:*

1. *To develop international co-operation between the different associations.*
2. *Using its influence with public authorities, universities, schools, public opinion, by means of conferences, lectures etc, to ground youth P.E. on scientific bases.*
3. *Contributing to the study and spreading of educative gymnastics through periodical and occasional international competitions.*

From 1923 to 1930 there were conflicts between "Swedish trend", of which P.H. Ling was the main originator, and the French "Union of Societes d' É.P. et de Préparation Militaire".

IFEG title was changed to the "International Federation of Ling Gymnastic".

## The Scandinavian influence

What explains the remarkable Scandinavian influence on the FIEP? There was a common feature in the movement culture in Scandinavia based on the ideology and scientific principles of Per Henrik Ling's (1776-1839) learned from teachers and leaders studied them in many generations. Stockholm was the cultural centre in Scandinavia and especially in science of physical education. The Royal Central Gymnastic Institute was founded in 1813, and where Per Henrik Ling was the first director (1813-1839). University level physical education teacher programs started for men in 1834, and for women in 1864 at the Royal Central Gymnastic Institute. About fifty years later, university level PE programs started in other Scandinavian countries – in Finland 1882, in Norway 1870 and in Denmark 1885. The Royal Central Gymnastic Institute was well-known in whole of Europe, and in Latin America in the beginning of 1900s.<sup>2</sup>

## International Federation of Ling Gymnastics IFLG (1930-1953)

During this period, the Federation was mainly run by Sweden, under the Colonel Nerman's direction.

Chairman: Colonel Nerman 1930-1935

Secretary General: Berg von Linde 1930-1939

Chairman: J.G. Thulin 1935-1958

Secretary General : O. Kragh 1939-1958

In the General Meeting in 1949 in Stockholm, following sections were formed:

- Scientific section
- School section
- "Sport for all" section

## Finnish women gymnastics

- *Based on the laws of harmony from antique Greek*

In the early 1900s, Elin Kallio (1859-1928) "Mother of Finnish women's gymnastics" wrote that the task of gymnastics is *to make the body an obedient and skilled servant to the soul*. There must be harmony between soul and the body, as well as between the different parts of the body. "To achieve this goal, gymnastics movements must be selected according to the influence we know they have. The movements must be done purely starting from the start position and coming back to start position. Between movement groups a break long enough must be held, so that the exercise can be done until the end." So, from the very beginning, Finnish women's gymnastics aimed at total education. Finnish women's gymnastics have never been the imitation of men's gymnastics as in so many other countries. It is the women themselves who have been in the leadership of this tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Elli Björkstén (1870-1947) realized that gymnastics must be mobile and rhythmic with whole personality. There came rhythmical cycles of waxing and waning energy, tension and relaxation, focusing and dispersing energy. Instead of Ling's isolated and isometric exercises, there were dynamic centre movements and expressive total movements.

### **Modern Finnish women gymnastics – A methodological interpretation of Ling's principles**

In the beginning of last century, the system which was used in gymnastics for women in Finland was Swedish Ling's system. But Elli Björkstén (1870-1947), the head teacher of educational gymnastics at the University of Helsinki (1916-1938), found Ling's system too limited, too stiff and too formal. "It was not for a living person", as she put it. She herself was a fire-souled and artistic personality and inspiring educator and teacher. She insisted that every gymnastics lesson should be stimulating experience. She laid great stress on how the teacher used her voice as projecting her personality. The teacher had to create certain mental images in the minds of the gymnastics. For instance, when she wanted speed, fluency and a very well stretched posture in marching, she could say: "Girls, now we go as we had a diamond on our forehead."

Elli Björkstén renewed the Ling's system for women. The results aimed for were the improvement of posture, developing strength and endurance, certain skills, etc. However, these results could and should be obtained through movements, which were rhythmical, soulful and feminine. The basic physiological principles of Ling were kept unchanged. Gymnastic exercises as conceived by Elli Björkstén were quite different. They were rhythmical, mobile and expressive. Instead of Ling's isolated and isometric exercises, there were dynamic centre movements and expressive total movements using music.<sup>4</sup>

The system for women was also developed by her student Hilma Jalkanen, head teacher of women's gymnastics at the University of Helsinki (1938-1958). Their influence on the evolution of "Swedish gymnastics" happened contemporarily with Josef Thulin's work. Main issues discussed were similar, as can be recognised by comparing the original information and scientific studies connected to the evolution of the Ling's gymnastics, made by Dr Antonio Leal Oliveira<sup>5</sup>, the successor of Thulin as the FIEP president (1958-1970), Dr.(H.C.) Elna Kopponen<sup>6</sup>, Eija-Leena Wuolio<sup>7</sup> and Dr. Liisa Heinilä, FIEP International Vice-President.<sup>8</sup>

### **Voluntary Gymnastic Associations in Scandinavia**

In cultural and national politics, women are well represented in Scandinavia. Finnish women were the first ones in Europe and the second ones in the world to achieve full political rights. The first gymnastic club for women was founded in 1876 by Elin Vaenerberg-Kallio, one year later than the gymnastic club for men.

The Swedish Gymnastic Association was founded in 1905 and the Nordic Gymnastic Federation in 1919 (members of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland). The initiator was probably the president of Swedish Gymnastics Association, Colonel Nerman, the president of FIGE 1924-1935. J.G. Thulin was the president of the Swedish Gymnastics Association 1915-1933, and president of the Nordic Gymnastic Association 1931-1952. They organised congresses, courses, sport camps, publications and co-operations with other Nordic organisations. The Scandinavian Association for women was founded in 1921, and Elli Björkstén was the president in 1921-1939.

The development of the Association and co-operation between them and FIGE-FIGL-FIEP advanced quickly in the 1930s thanks to activity of Agnes Holmström, Elin Falk, J.G. Thulin, Erns Illa in Sweden and Elli Björkstén, and Hilma Jalkanen in Finland.

## FIEP achievements and activities

During the “Swedish period”, FIGL was constantly organising various international activities including conferences and courses in different European countries. Particularly worthy of note have been the World Congresses, which brought congressmen and large groups of gymnasts together to demonstrate new ideas and methods.

J.G. Thulin was also a great theoretician and scientist, and he founded the “The FIEP Thulin Prize” for the promotion of scientific study. Already, the general meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1939 had agreed in principle on the creation of an “International competition of literature on Physical Education theory.” However, this project was not carried out. The general meeting held in Madrid 1966 took up the idea in new rules. First FIEP Bulletin appeared in Swedish and in French in February 1931. <sup>9</sup>

## III Fédération Internationale d'Éducation Physique FIEP

Istanbul August 1953 FIEP. The main principle was grounding of physical exercise on science, and the necessity to evolve with it (Ling's principles).

chairman: Dr. Leal d'Oliveira (Portugal) (1958-1970)

1. vice-chairman: Dr. Louis Bisquerett (Chile)

2. vice chairman: Prof. Dr. AsmuDssen (Denmark)

chairman: Dr. Pierre Seurin (France) 1970-  
(several names)

From 2021 the name is: **the Fédération Internationale d'Éducation Physique et Sportive - FIEPS**

### The FIEPS Presidents

- General Lefebure, Belgium 1923-1930
- Colonel Nerman, Sweden 1930-1935
- J.G. Thulin, Sweden 1930-1958
- Dr. Leal'Oliveira, Portugal 1958-1970
- Dr. Pierre Seurin, France 1970-1983
- John Andrews, Great Britain, France 1984-2000
- Liisa Heinilä, Finland, International Vice President 1984-2002
- Dr. Manoel Tubino, Brasil, 2000-2008
- Almir Gruhn, Brasil 2009-
- Prof. Dr Branislav Antala International Vice President 2008 -

## FIEP INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES 1930-1960

3.-13. May 1930 Stockholm, Sweden	International Conference, organised by the Swedish Gymnastik Federation, C.G. Thulin 200 participants from 18 countries, exhibition -groups with 11.0000 participants from Sweden and Finland
9.-13. May, 1931 Venice, Italy	C.G. Thulin
10.-13. August 1932 Lund, Sweden	Malmahed, Organisers: Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Island. C.G.Thulin

14.-20. August 1933 Malmahed,	C.G. Thulin 2nd International camp for top gymnastics Organisers: Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, England, Irak, Scotland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, USA.
21.7.-4.8. 1939 Stockholm, Sweden	C.G. Thulin 1st Lingiad 7300 participants from 37 countries
7.-12. July 1947 Lisbon, Portugal	Leal d'Oliveira 140 participants from 9 countries
27.July-13 August 1949 Stockholm, Sweden	C.G.Thulin 2nd Lingiad 1450 delegates from 27 countries exhibition groups of 13 000 participants
9.-20. August 1952 Bordeaux, France	1st Latin Conference, P. Seurin 490 delegates from 11 countries 268 exhibition participants from 4 countries
9.-19. July 1953 Nivelles, Belgium	C.G.Thulin 70 delegates
2.-9. August 1953 Istanbul, Turkey	World Conference The official title "FIEP - International federation of Physical Education" was adopted 150 delegates from 29 countries
15.-19. June 1956 Madrid, Spain	2nd Latin Conference 200 delegates from 12 countries 1140 exhibition participants
22.-31. July 1957 Strasbourg, France	International Conference, 180 delegates, from three countries
1958 Brussels, Belgium	World Conference, Leal dÓliveira 800 delegates from 35 countries 500 participants in the exhibition teams from Finland and Sweden
6.-16. July 1959 Bordeaux France	165 participants from 11 countries
10.-16. August 1959 Helsinki Finland	International Conference, under the patronage of UNESCO

4.-13. August 1960 Lisbon, Portugal	80 delegates from 10 countries
-------------------------------------------	--------------------------------

## WORLD CONGRESSES FIEPS

Year	Dates	City	Country	Coordination
1923 1 <sup>st</sup>	11-12 July	Brussels	Belgium	
		Foundation of FIEP		
1924 2 <sup>nd</sup>	22 July	Paris	France	
1930	9-13 June	Stockholm	Sweden	C.G.Thulin
1931	9-13 May	Venice	Italy	
1932	10-13 August	Lund	Sweden	C.G. Thulin
1933	13-20 August	Malmhed	Sweden	C.G. Thulin
1939 3 <sup>rd</sup>	24-27 July	Stockholm	Sweden	C.G. Thulin
		1st Lingiad		
1953 4 <sup>th</sup>	2-9 August	Istanbul	Turkey	Pierre Seurin
1958 5 <sup>th</sup>	5-12 July	Brussels	Belgium	Pierre Seurin
1960 6 <sup>th</sup>	8-10 Sep	Roma	Italy	Pierre Seurin
1966 7 <sup>th</sup>	12-18 Sept	Madrid	Spain	Pierre Seurin
1969 8 <sup>th</sup>	5-13 July	Strassburg	France	Pierre Seurin
1973 9 <sup>th</sup>	1-8 July	Brussels	Belgium	Pierre seurin
1978 10 <sup>th</sup>	1-6 August	Mexico	Mexico	Manoel Guerreiro
11 <sup>th</sup>	Falta data		Tunis	Almir Gruhn
1988 12 <sup>th</sup>	10-17 July	Porto	Portugal	John Andrews
1991 13 <sup>th</sup>	7-12 Jan	Foz do Iquacu	Brasil	Almir Gruhn
1992 14 <sup>th</sup>	2-5 Sept	Nabul	Tunis	John Andrews
1993 15 <sup>th</sup>	28 March	Natanis	Israel	John Andrews
1994 16 <sup>th</sup>	18-24 July	Asuncion	Paraguay	John Andrewa
1995 17 <sup>th</sup>	9-13 Jan	Foz do Iquacu	Brasil	Almir Gruhn
2000 18 <sup>th</sup>	9-13 Jan	Foz do Iquacu	Brasil	Almir Gruhn
2000 19 <sup>th</sup>	29-20 Dec	Nuevo Leon	Mexico	Almir Gruhn
2008 20 <sup>th</sup>	12-16 Jan	Foz do Iquacu	Brasil	Almir Gruhn
2008 21 <sup>st</sup>	6-10 Aug	Vierumäki	Finland	Airikki Pousi
2013 22 <sup>nd</sup>	12-16 Jan	Foz do Iquacu	Brasil	Almir Gruhn
2014 23 <sup>rd</sup>	6-9 Aug	Vierumäki	Finland	Almir Gruhn
2014 24 <sup>th</sup>	14-17 Nov	Morelia	Mexico	Manoel Guerreiro
2015 25 <sup>th</sup>	12-15 Nov	Rabat	Marocco	Branislav Antala
2016 26 <sup>th</sup>	9-12- July	Asuncion	Paraguay	Júlio Vera Torres
2017 27 <sup>th</sup>	14-18 Jan	Foz do Iquacu	Brasil	Almir Gruhn <sup>i</sup>
2017 28 <sup>th</sup>	20-23 Nov	Ciudad de Mexico	Mexico	Manoel Guerreiro
2018 29 <sup>th</sup>	26-29 Sept	Istanbul	Turkey	Branislav Antala
2019 30 <sup>th</sup>	27-29 June	Barcelona	Spain	Enric Sebastiani Orbator
2020 31 <sup>st</sup>		On-line		
2022 32 <sup>nd</sup>	25-27 August	Vierumäki	Finland	Airikki Pousi

## REFERENCES

Ahonen, Sirkka - Rantala Jukka (ed.) 2001. Nordic Lights. Education for Nation and Civic Society in the Nordic Countries, 1850-2000.

Andrews, John, C. 1999. Editorial. FIEP Bulletin, 1999, vol. 69, 2, 3-4.

Heinilä, Liisa 2000. Major C. G. Thulin and other Scandinavian influence on FIEP. A historical overview. FIEP Bulletin 2000, vol 70, 1,2,3, 12-26.

Heikel, Viktor 1916. Voimistelun teoria. Suom. Uuno Suomela. Porvoo.

Heikkinen, Antero 1992. Voimistelun läpimurto. Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen . Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131. Helsinki, 65-80.

Hentilä, Seppo 1992. "Lingin voimistelujärjestelmä on konemaista ja ikävystyttävää puuhaa." Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen . Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131. Helsinki, 68.

Jalkanen, Hilma 1930. Uusi naisvoimistelu. Helsinki, Otava.

Kisakenttä 1920. Matilda Aspin nekrologi.

Kopponen, Elna 1970. Gymnastique féminine finlandaise moderne. (Modern finnish women's gymnastics.) FIEP Bulletin, 1970, 3-4-, 9- 13.

Kopponen, Elna 1984. La gymnastique féminine finlandaise moderne. (Modern finnish women's gymnastics.). Finnish gymnastics for women. FIEP Bulletin 1984, vol 54, 1, 49-51.

Laine, Leena 1992 Ruumiinharjoitusten monet muodot. Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen . Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131. Helsinki, 183-214.

Meinander Henrik 1992. Elin Kallio (1859-1927). Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen. Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131, 93. Helsinki.

Meinander Henrik 1992. Hilma Jalkanen (1889-1964). Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen . Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131. Helsinki, 207.

Meinander Henrik 1992. Warpaille y-lös, kyykkyy a-las. Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. . Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen . Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131. Helsinki, 81-100.

Meinander, Henrik 1992. Koululiikunta etsii paikkaansa. Teoksessa Suomi uskoi urheiluun. Suomen urheilun ja liikunnan historia. Toimittanut Teijo Pyykönen . Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 131. Helsinki, 283-302.

Olivieira, Leal Antonio 1978. "Le system de Ling, sa naissance, son evaluation, sa diffusion. (Ling system its birth evolution and its diffusion. FIEP Bulletin 1978, vol 44, 4. 29-38.

Seurin, Pierre 1973. Editorial. Fifty years of F.I.E.P. activity. FIEP Bulletin, vol 43,3, 3.

Seurin, Pierre 1973. History of F.I.E.P. FIEP Bulletin, vol 43, 4, 5-21-

Seurin, Pierre 1974. FIEP: Fifty years in the service of world physical education. FIEP Bulletin 1974, vol. 44, 4, 21-63.

Wuolio, Eija-Leena, Jääskeläinen Leena. 1993. Kyykkyy - ylös. 150 vuotta koululiikuntaa. Liikuntatieteellisen Seuran julkaisu nro 136.

Zainos, Manuel Guerre 2016. History of Congressis World FIEP. FIEP Bulletin. Vol. 86 1-2, 118-122.

---

<sup>1</sup> Seurin 1974, 25; Seurin 1973, 5-21; Andrews 1999, 3-6.

<sup>2</sup> Meinander 1994, Heinilä 2000 13-14; Seurin 1973, 5-21; Heikkinen 1992, 67-68. Heikel 1916.

<sup>3</sup> Meinander Henrik 1992. Elin Kallio (1859-1927); Kopponen, 1970, 9; Matilda Aspin nekrologi. Kisakenttä 1920, 131; Wuolio 1993, 54-55, 56.

<sup>4</sup> Kopponen 1970, 9; Hentilä 1992,68.

<sup>5</sup> Olivieira 1978, 29-38.

<sup>6</sup> Kopponen 1970, 9-13, Kopponen 1984, 42-50.

<sup>7</sup> Wuolio 1973, Wuolio 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Heinilä 2000, 18; Laine 1992, 203-208; Jalkanen 1930.

<sup>9</sup> Meinander 1994, Wuolio 1993, Heinilä 2000; Ahonen – Rantala 2001; Meinander 1992, 207. Seurin 1973. 5-21; Seurin 1974, 21-44. Heinilä 2000, Zainos, 2016.



