

The physical culture academy: People's education through sport in Denmark

By Henning Eichberg

While in formal education the teacher examines the student, there exists an alternative: People's education as a dialogical and mimetic way. This pedagogical way does not use diplomas or other forms of objectification top-down. This has special implications for sport. If human bodily movement is not objectified in order to place a person on a scale of achievement, sport changes its character. The article¹ gives an historical account of education in Danish people's academies and their relation to sports and physical education, from Grundtvig's educational ideas and the early roots of *folkehøjskole* and 'folkelig gymnastics' in the nineteenth century to the current crisis of the people's academies. By their integration into the practice of people's education, gymnastics and sport were transformed from authoritarian discipline to ways of personal development, social interaction, and existential learning. This opened towards new potentials of the human body in non-formal education and in civil society. However, bodily democracy always remains an open process and can never be taken as sure and granted.

Examination from above and from below

In classical formal education, the teacher examines the student. By this educational technique, the teacher exercises power from 'above' – it is him who can grant or withhold certificates and diplomas.

There exists, however, an alternative to this authoritarian structure: Students interrogate the professor. The student wants to know, and the teacher tries to answer or to show – the professor is examined from 'below'. This dialogical or mimetic interaction is the model of *højskole* education in Denmark, of people's education or popular enlightenment (*folkelig oplysning*) as it is practised in the free Grundtvigian people's academy.

That is why there is no grading in people's education, there are no diplomas. Educational evaluation is not subjected to the type of objectification, which makes it possible to transfer 'results' of a certain person in space and time: 'This is what the student is worth.' Instead, evaluation develops in dialogue, by which the student finds out what she or he has achieved.

This alternative view of achievement has its implications for sport, too. Sport in the popular academies is not (or not primarily) a way of objectifying a person's bodily achievement, but a way of personal development and social interaction.

That is why the connections between non-authoritarian education, people's academies and sports deserve some closer examination. It lead back to the historical roots of non-formal education in the nineteenth century's Denmark, the main stimulator of which was N.F.S. Grundtvig.

Historical background: Grundtvig and popular education

The biography of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) was a story of a spiritual quest and inner contradictions.²

Grundtvig began as a National Romantic, writing a *Nordic Mythology* in 1808. In 1810, he experienced a psychic break-down and turned towards Christian fundamentalism. Later he became involved in the pietistic spiritual revivals and took a further step towards an independent position with his main work *Mythology of the North* (1832). Grundtvig's religious position, which survived in the hundreds of psalms and other songs he composed, has been called a 'white' or joyful Christianity, in contrast to the sorrowful or 'black' Christianity of other congregations. "*Man first, then (and thus) a Christian*": This Grundtvigian sentence can be understood as Christian and pagan at the same time, expressing a deeply unorthodox humanism (Auken 2005).

In the political field, Grundtvig changed as well. In the beginning, he was a convinced royalist because he opposed the liberals and distrusted the German-oriented bourgeoisie. In 1848, however, when a peaceful revolution overthrew the Absolutist regime in Copenhagen, he joined the new democracy and became a member of the constitutional assembly in 1848/49. He was also elected to the first Danish parliament in 1850 and served to 1858, then re-elected again in 1866. The name "Grundtvigians" was sometimes given to the farmers' party, but Grundtvig himself functioned rather like a 'comet' outside the established parties. In 1866 he was nevertheless regarded as the – informal – leader of the left-wing opposition, and from 1870 Grundtvigians joined with other groups to form the united left-wing party, *Venstre*.³

Folk, *folkelighed*, *folkelig oplysning* were Grundtvig's central notions – "people", "popular spirit", "people's enlightenment". Just as in Herder's thinking, these folk words had an anti-colonial character. The meaning of *folkelig* was more than political – it was related to what psychologists and sociologists later called identity.⁴

The *folkehøjskole*, Grundtvig's most influential educational idea, was originally considered as part of a broader alternative to the state school system. Grundtvig's opposition to this educational power, which subjected helpless children to public authority and deformed adult people for the service of the state, was in some respect anti-institutional.⁵

When travelling in England in 1829-31, however, Grundtvig experienced that there could be an alternative inside the institutional, inside the world of school itself. The English university colleges created bonds between professors and students. This entered into Grundtvig's utopia of a school for life combining family education and boarding school.⁶

Grundtvig's alternative pedagogy centred on "the living word" between teacher and student. The "school for life" was not based on books, which is fundamental for the "school for death". "Living interaction" arises in the dialogical face-to-face situation. Students interrogate the teachers, not (or not only) the teacher the student. There are no examinations.⁷

Education is related to the question, how to see and describe the world. Grundtvig's answer was the "historical-poetical method".⁸ By describing the world, we create it – this is a mythical process. That is why we have to pay attention to our own myths and to those of other traditions. Myths can contribute to enlightenment, but they challenge us always with the question: *Which myths?*⁹

And: "*Nobody can understand what one has not loved before.*"¹⁰ Knowledge is linked to love. Without emotional engagement, there is no understanding.

Thus, *folkelig oplysning* (popular enlightenment) and *livsoplysning* (enlightenment of life) are connected. There is no people's education without personal development, and no personal development without *folkelig* enlightenment. The human being is not alone in the world.

This was the basis of a pedagogy of experience. It anticipated the German Reform education of the early twentieth century, Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf-pedagogy, the approaches of Célestin Freinet in France, of Paulo Freire (1972) in Brazil and what American educational reformers called 'experiential education'. Similar ideas reappeared in the anti-pedagogy of the 1960s and 1970s, with Ivan Illich (1971) and others.¹¹

The practice of the classical Danish *højskole* was traditionally based on song and lecture, During the twentieth century, this was enlarged by other elements of non-formal education. One of these innovations was bodily activity, starting with gymnastics and later extended to sport, dance and various outdoor activities (Korsgaard 1982, 82 ff and 229 ff.). Another new element was travelling, which was promoted by the Tvind schools as a matter of inter-folk encounter and solidarity.¹² And a third innovation was the study circle, which came from Swedish popular education and gradually replaced the rather authoritarian monologues of lecture by dialogic interactions among pupils and teachers.

The educational approach of the free Grundtvigian schools has strongly influenced the public school system in Denmark. Normally,

state systems of education focus either on general programs for the pupils – by national programs of education, patterns of discipline etc. Or they focus on the qualifications of the individual – individual ‘competence’. The Danish school system tends into a third direction: mutuality. The class is treated as a community of togetherness, like a family, and that is why neither grades nor the threat of expulsion plays any central role.

The free schools are part of Danish *skolefrihed*, “freedom of school” (Bodenstein 1982) People choose ‘their’ academy (or no academy at all). The Danish constitution guarantees this liberty also for general public education. “Freedom of schooling” means the liberty *not* to send one's children to a (state) school: Parents are free to keep their kids at home. Free schools for children and people's academies for grown-ups express the liberty to choose one's own way of being educated.

‘Højskole’ education in practice

The pedagogy of the people's academy is not organized on the basis of defined contents, but based on a certain way of educating. There does not exist any obligatory book or foundation book – not even a book from Grundtvig (The only book used in all people's academies is the blue songbook, *Folkehøjskolens sangbog*, 1894 onwards). Therefore it is difficult to define what Danish *højskole* really is.¹³

Approaching from the outer framework, one sees a residential school where teachers and students live together, normally somewhere in the countryside. The schools are self-administrated, independent of the state, of enterprises and organizations, and they are autonomous in control of their educational contents. But they are financially supported by the state and therefore subjected to certain rules as defined by the Ministry of Education. They do not use term's reports, diplomas and certificates to classify the students, nor do they work with examinations and defined pensum tasks.

Seen from inside, *højskole* is characterized by giving priority to dialogue and the togetherness of life, to the “living word” and mutual exchange. Tolerance and the historical-poetical method mark the approach. *Højskole* pedagogy resembles what in other countries is known as education through experience. In practice, this is expressed by the common morning assembly, joint singing, group work and a general focus on creative activities and arts. Sports and gymnastics are part of this education through experience, both on the general academies and on special sport academies.

Højskole education works on the connection between personal development and community building (team building), between enlightenment of personal life and “popular enlightenment” (demo-

cratic conscience), between articulated conscience and social practice. Because of the principle of living-together, the teacher stands face to face to the students in another way than in other types of education. The experimental process between teacher and student can be compared to the master-apprenticeship, which is practiced in sports, and the same is true for the tradition from one teachers' generation to the other.

Seen from the side of the student, *højskole* is today part of a 'Sabbath' or moratorium period, which the young people place between their secondary and their tertiary education. This period is also used to travel and to earn some quick money, thus tourism and casual labour are actually competing with *højskole*. The students are usually between 18 and 25 years old when joining a course of the academy for a period between three and eight months. 10% of an age-group choose this type of moratorium or rite de passage, while 17% continue directly to the tertiary education, the rest choosing other types of transition. 60% of the students are girls (Andresen 1996).¹⁴ Most of the students of the people's academies are 'strong of resources', and this is also true for the fourth part coming from unemployment or welfare aid. However, there are variations in the social profile of the single schools depending of their profile of education. Academies of sport and of manual-practical activities are more attractive for young people from the 'weaker' social strata.

The attraction of *højskole* as moratorium and the tendency among young people to extend this type of 'Sabbath' has awakened some concern among certain economic experts and interest organizations of employers. Right-wing politicians have talked about 'years idled away'. The young people, however, tell about important gains of their *højskole* stay as: growth in personal maturity, deepening in their respective field, encounter with people from other background and development of social competences.¹⁵

'Højskole' sport: from entertainment to educational idea

The people's academy has historically played a central role for the diffusion of popular gymnastics in Denmark. In comparison with other countries, the close connection between the free academies and sport is particular for the Danish situation. As a space of alternative education, the "school for life" had an important impact on sport as being 'sport for life' and "popular sport" (*folkelig idræt*).

Sport as *højskole* activity is marked by the paradox that the connection between the school and sports was originally unintended and, nevertheless, in the longer run followed a certain educational logic.

This developed in several historical phases.¹⁶ From the 1840s to

the 1960s, the people's academy developed physical activity from being entertainment to being an educational idea.

Phase 1: Gymnastics as academic practice

When the first people's academies were established, beginning in Rødning in 1844, sport had no place in their concept of education. But elements of physical culture were present in their daily practice.

The folk academies were farmers' schools with some features inherited from the religious revivalist movements, from Grundtvig's Nordic Christianity and from national liberal patriotism. The students were taught by lectures and some manual labour. It was more for practical purposes that gymnastics and exercises of the 'Danish' type, similar to German *Turnen*, were here and there introduced – as healthy exercise and compensation for sitting learning, as joyful alternation and entertainment (Korsgaard 1982, 93 and Berg-Sørensen/Jørgensen 1998, 56).

Body movement in academy was not present as a subject of its own related to "popular enlightenment". But it developed in the intermediary space between the 'real' subjects.

Phase 2: "The whole human being" in movement

This changed in the 1880s, when physical exercises became more basically integrated into the ideas of *højskole* education. This process started on the people's academy in Vallekilde under its headmaster Ernst Trier where students in 1884 began to train Swedish Lingian gymnastics, and a group of teachers was sent to Sweden in order to learn this system more in details. Subsequently, Danish people's academies began, one after the other, to introduce the Lingian gymnastics.

This change happened in a time of inner tensions, when Denmark was threatened by a civil war between the majority of the democratic farmers and the ruling minority of aristocrats and landowners. Instead of military confrontation, people's academies and popular gymnastics became part of a peaceful cultural revolution, which finally overthrew the right-wing dictatorship. Lecture, joint singing and gymnastics constituted the characteristic triad of *højskole* education, forming "the whole human being". This program of general formation had, however, at its side some practical subjects from agriculture and handicraft.

Ernst Trier expressed the new Grundtvigian philosophy of gymnastics in a famous speech, which he held at the opening of Vallekilde gymnastic hall in 1884:

Gymnastics shall promote what is divine in the human being – what distinguishes the human being from the animal (Trier 1884).

This vision of education through gymnastics was great and pretentious. However, the real practice of gymnastics was rather poor and stereotypical, being derived from military-like exercises in rank and file.

Both the people's academies and the so-called "popular gymnastics" (i.e. Lingian gymnastics) contributed to the change of political power in Denmark. In 1901, parliamentary democracy became reality. Thus, bodily movement and social movement were linked together in *højskole* gymnastics.

A third element in this combination of movements was the cooperative movement of the farmers. Between 1880 and 1900, a strong network of associations developed in the fields of production and consumption. This cooperative movement – being the economic wing of the democratic revolution in Denmark – got important impulses from the people's academies, from the cultural wing. And *folkelig* gymnastics in the villages became a bodily link between the one and the other, between the idea of *folkelig* self-organization and the practical economic cooperation.¹⁷

From the end of the nineteenth century, the panorama of the people's academies became more varied. There opened a gap between more positivistic and natural-scientific orientations and the more 'mythological' tradition.¹⁸ Also academies on the basis of more orthodox Christian belief (Inner Mission) were founded. And at the beginning of the twentieth century, the rising workers' movement opened its own people's academies (Yde 1984 and 1991).

Phase 3: Gymnastic and sport academies

In the 1920s and 1930s, a new period of *højskole* history began. With the realization of parliamentary democracy in 1901, the democratic agenda of the academies had lost its sharpness. And with the returning of South Jutland to Denmark in 1920, the national agenda was weakened, too. New contents were needed. Important ingredients in this quest of new-orientation were bodily activities and movement culture.

Academies, which were specialized in gymnastics and sports, were established and expressed new currents of educational and cultural reform, first in Ollerup 1920 and Snoghøj 1925, later in Gerlev 1938, Vejle 1943 and Viborg 1951.¹⁹ With gymnastics it happened for first time that a 'special' field of activities was put into the centre of *højskole* education. The sport leader (*delingsfører*, leader of a team) became a social figure of own character, for whom the academy became a place of education. At some academies, this innovation was realized at the disadvantage of the spiritual message, which had been at the centre of the classical *Grundtvigian* *højskole*.²⁰ But other academies tried to combine physical activity with spiritual, democratic

nationalism.²¹

After World War II, sport became a broader and broader leisure activity in the population, but the academies turned generally more towards literature and democracy. In this phase, a gap opened between ‘the book’ and ‘the physical’. Sport did not play any important role in the self-understanding of the popular academies. In their program, sport had the place of a leisure entertainment. The process of specialization, however, continued, and new academies of sport were established in Sønderborg 1952 and Aarhus 1970. On the other hand, the sports organizations started to build up their own system of more specialized courses outside the academies.

Between revolt and specialization

From the 1960s onward, the people’s academy and its educational idea of sport and gymnastics was questioned and became redefined in new and often conflicting ways.

Phase 4: Bodily academy in movement

A new period opened with the youth movement of 1968. The academies were now challenged by new types of grass-root movements from outside and by generational conflicts from inside, and new types of academies were opened. Some of the new *højskoler* were related to certain ideological currents as the ‘red’ academies, the Tvind schools (which were engaged in solidarity work in the Third World) and some spiritual *højskoler* with meditation on the program. Other schools were for special groups as women, elderly people and disabled persons. Further types of academies specialized in certain disciplines as arts, theatre, music or sport (Køng 1978).

Youngsters from new urban milieus, which so far had been distant to the rural academies, began now to enter the *højskole*. Side by side with the long courses of several months, short courses during the summer time became popular; they were often more specialized and appealed more to middle-aged participants. The links between the academies and working life – which had traditionally been of rural character – loosened, and the *højskole* became more leisure-oriented or even an alternative to ‘the world of capitalist labour’.

This educational shift changed the balance between literature – which had been in the focus so far – and the creative arts. The *højskole*, which so far had mainly been teaching young farmers, became an aesthetic academy centred around music and arts. From here, the step towards bodily academy was not so long. The new significance of arts, music, sports and psychology weakened the role of the lecture and the study circle to the favour of the ‘workshop’. Education for life (*livsoplysning*) came near to either leisure education

or critical-alternative education. Under both aspects, sport could find an important place, but was at the same time reinterpreted and changed. Sport entered into a connection with the new “body subjects” (*kropsfag*), which had developed during the 1970s, and with the new social movements of protest and civil innovation. In some schools, the sport of competition became degraded in favour of a sort of ‘sport for life’, which was adapted to the values of popular sport from earlier periods. Body culture appeared as alternative education and personal development.

Phase 5: Specialization, crisis and quest

During the 1980s, the tendency of specialization continued with the founding of new sports academies in Ålborg 1982, Nordjylland 1986, Odsherred 1993, and Midtvestjylland 1994. There were certain tendencies pointing back to disciplinary education. In this period, orientation towards the market was enforced. One talked about ‘individualization’ and disciplinary ‘competences’ and included fashionable sports, as it was the case at the new *højskole* in Oure 1989. The social movements from the seventies, which had promoted the new humanistic innovations inside the academies, were weakened.

Among the 98 academies, which existed in 1999, 31 had a general character, 11 were schools of sport and the rest specialized in other ways. The specialization made it more and more difficult to identify a comprehensive vision of ‘sport in popular education’ – and of ‘popular education’ more generally. Some tendencies tried to adapt the academy curriculum to fashionable sports, propagating a “sport without Grundtvig”, whilst others wished to turn back to ‘the classical Grundtvigian’ *højskole* based on history, literature and philosophy – without body and sport.

After 100 years of development, *højskole* sport after year 2000 is confronted with a paradox, which is the opposite of the one from the 1880s: The activities are now rich and diverse, but the common visions and their educational contents tend to be blurred.

Actual problems: crisis and inner contradictions

The actual crisis of *højskole* sports must, however, also be understood in connection with the general crisis of the Danish *højskole*. During the 1980s, the welfare state had shown a positive attitude towards the people’s academies, supported them by favourable economic privileges and used them for a sort of “parking” of unemployed young people. During the 1990s, the academies were supplemented by so-called day-academies (*daghøjskoler*), which recruited unemployed young people. They took over a remarkable part of the potential academy students. The day-academies were educationally “in family”

with the people's academies, also by their educational use of sports, and there arose a new competition on the educational market. The number of *højskole* students fell during the 1990s with about 30%.²²

This coincided with an identity crisis inside the movement of "popular education". An evergrowing distance arose between *højskole* ideology on one hand and "individual" values on the other. "Free choice", personal growth, self-development, self-realization and individual experimentation became keywords. The academies discussed controversially the contents of "general" vs. "disciplinary" education. And the contradictions between "what the young people want", and what the schools wished. And the academies tried to adapt themselves to the discourses of "competences", "quality development", "evaluation", "quality control", "flexibility" and other values from the agenda of public educational management.²³ But they were helpless up against the task to decide a common position and to match the public streamlining of the educational sector. The strictly local structure of the academies, their dependency of public funding and the weakening of social movements in general contributed to this weakness.

After 2001, shifting political agendas on the national level made it clearer that non-formal education would no longer be recognized in the same way, as it was the case during the twentieth century.

Take a detour. The straight way is the quickest. Who chooses the detour has so lovely much to tell. This slogan was used by the folk academies in the 1980s to advertise for non-formal liberal education, and popular sport could be such a "detour". At that time, the labyrinthine picture had broad appeal. Later, the vision of the curved way of experience was replaced by images of streamlining and competition, of target-orientation – all referring to the sportive race of mainstream sport.²⁴ Under the headline of economically streamlined education, the hegemonic politics would no longer tolerate the way of quest and experience, demanding instead the straight way towards the given goal.²⁵

The problem of popular education was, however, not only added from outside. The *højskole* had also problems in itself. From being a part of social movements, the academies had become an institution and an ideology, dependent on state subventions.

Inside the popular academies, furthermore, some new authoritarian patterns reappeared. The public debate around 2000 about the contents and orientation of the *højskole* was mostly articulated by headmasters, while the ordinary teachers and students of the people's academies who had played a remarkable role during the 1970/80s, remained rather silent. This was not caused by a lack of willingness or engagement, but the stress of everyday-life on the schools has its impact on democratic life inside the academies. Under the press of

economic survival, the theory of *højskole* democracy – “Do it yourself!” – and its real practice tended to fall asunder. What had been a *højskole* “movement” through more than one century, with strong ties to the social movements in democratic civil society, could now rather appear as a headmaster quarrel.

Other problems arose in the concrete meeting between sport and *højskole*. Academies could very well attract youth camps of sports on their ground, but it showed not so easy to get the sports people for instance into the morning assembly, i.e. into the rituals of folk education. Sport has invaded academies – but would the education of academy also invade sports?

Other challenges have developed with the actual tendency of internationalisation. The Danish people’s academy had traditionally been a pillar of popular nationalism, albeit from the very beginning with lively links to the other Nordic countries. As early as in the time between the world wars, the academies opened towards international encounter, and this was enforced, once more again, during the 1990s. Now some academies could suddenly have more foreigners and immigrant students than they had ‘ethnic Danes’.²⁶ Sports academies became the place of International Youth Leader Education since the mid-1990s. This gave new perspectives, for instance on the relation of sport, education and democracy,²⁷ but opened also many new questions of both practical and cultural-political character.

An anecdote from our days may illustrate this challenge. A well-known *højskole* philosopher was invited to give a lecture at an academy, which once had been the most esteemed and traditionally distinguished in the country. How many students would attend the lecture, he asked. We have 75 students at the moment, the headmaster answered. Of these, however, 30 are on a special course of obesity; they wish to have exercise and will not be able to attend the lecture. Among the remaining 35, fifteen are Chinese and do not understand Danish. For the twenty students left, the lecture is voluntary. Seven students attended the lecture.²⁸

The transformation of sport by højskole education

Nevertheless, the connection between people’s academies and popular sport has given sport new profiles. It has made evident, which qualities sport does include – or could include as sport for life and sport for social and personal development.

The qualities of sport: Sport has “enlightening” qualities, which are diverse – dance and expressive activities, fight and competition, concentration and meditative movement, play and game, outdoor life. Each of these implies an own psychology of movement.²⁹ The dialogic principle of Grundtvig’s ‘living word’ is enlarged towards the mimetic

principle of dialogue from body to body.³⁰

Community of action: By popular sports, people develop their common rhythm. The people's academy is a field of common action and voluntary commitment. Sport can contribute to build self-confidence – "I can!" But the condition is that the activity does not assort the "able" and the "disabled" and does not make all losers – except the one at the top of the achievement hierarchy. This is a contribution of *folkelig* sport to living democracy: One body – one "vote".

Joint singing: Danish popular sport is a singing movement, which is connected with the Danish *højskole* as a singing academy. Popular sports (Danish Gymnastic and Sports Associations/DGI) have a songbook of their own, and the same is true for the peoples' academies.³¹ People sing a broad range of genres, from folk ballads, psalms and patriotic songs to pop, rock and international songs (African folk, African American spirituals, The Beatles). Joint singing is usual at the more official meetings of sport associations, at the national festivals of sports, and at the opening of *højskole* lectures. Ever since the beginning of modern democracy, social movements have been singing movements. (Warming 1988 and Eyerman/Jamison 1998)

Wholeness: Popular sport is a practical way towards understanding the social, philosophical, aesthetical and religious dimensions of human life (Korsgaard 1986). These qualities are threatened to be lost in everyday-life, in the routine and stress of associational life. But academy sport is a way to re-establish wholeness, consciousness and practical innovation.

Variety: The students can use their academy stay to test different sports side by side, thus experimenting "the other" type of movement. Specialization is not in the centre. This coincides with some general tendencies among young people to choose "one's own sport" in a more flexible way than it is defined by specialized traditional organizations.

Choice: For a people's academy, the activities are always to disposition. They are never fixed like at the university or in the course plan of sport organizations where one knows, which are 'the real sports'. On a people's academy, you never know this. On the very practical level – which sports for the students – the people's academy has to test and quest the 'market' again and again afresh.

Social encounter: Meeting the "other" sport is connected with meeting the "other" social personality: *Højskole* is a social meeting. The lack of educational hierarchy in the people's academies contributes to this social chance. However, the economic crisis of the academies has tended to narrow the broad social recruiting to some degree.

Culture of health: A recent turn is related to health and fitness. The

actual wave of fitness is not without problems for the cultural and holistic approach of the people's academy. Health, fitness and exercise have to be redefined as cultural project. Just like *højskole* is "school for life" (and not for one special purpose), people's sport can enter into "health for life".

Culture of democracy: The people's academies have an important impact on sport as democratic practice: 'Do it yourself' – and do it together with the others. A key word of people's education is: "*Vil du tænde, må du brænde*" – if you want to set on fire, you must burn yourself. This 'burning' is a driving force of voluntarism and civil society. That is why International Youth Leader Education for students from foreign students, especially from 'young' developing democracies used people's academies as their place – combining bodily movement and learning for democracy.

More generally, Danish sports organizations and sports clubs have always used the *højskole* as educational space for their personal and substantial innovation, especially as place of their leader education (Berggren et al. 1987). This is especially true for the popular sport (*folkelig idræt*) whose organization (now DGI) through generations was characterized by the fact that its president was alternately a *højskole* teacher or a farmer. In the 1990s, DGI established formal cooperation with five academies (Sønderborg, Nordjylland, Gerlev, Viborg, Ollerup): The sports organization funds students who will use their *højskole* stay to become sport leaders. *Højskole* sport had also impact on the development of new sports milieus like martial arts (judo and other budo, capoeira, stunt), traditional games, outdoor life, body therapies, yoga and relaxation, movement communication, body theatre and cricket. But also Danish elite sport has features of *højskole* as soon as elite sport does not see the athlete as isolated producer of sport performance, but as "a whole human being". DIF has near relations to the people's academy in Vejle.³²

Through the changes of history, the people's academies have developed different forms of education through sport. This education was marked by a paradox in relation to physical education and sport in state schools: Physical education in Danish schools was always expected to be a way of education, but it never really succeeded as such. The people's academies, in contrast, embraced sport only for practical reasons, but they transformed it into a way of education, into "enlightenment for life".

Between formal and non-formal education

Through the historical transformations of one and a half century, the Danish people's academies have experienced a lot of change. This concerns especially their relation to formal and non-formal education,

as well as their place between state, market, and civil society (Eichberg 2004a, 59 ff.).

The starting point of the people's academies was *civil society*, the world of voluntary self-organization. And still today, these schools are fundamentally self-organized, following their own self-determined curricula. They are independent of state and organizations.

However, the people's academies have to search their students in competition with other offers of education and entertainment. Without students, there is no survival. This has made the academies enter the world of the *market*. Without becoming directly commercial, they have to balance the budget, launching advertisements, making campaigns of recruiting and searching sponsors.

Furthermore, since the late nineteenth century, the people's academies are funded by the *state*, at least to some degree. This has led to a growing degree of state control. To larger and larger extent, the academies have become dependent of public policies of education.

These changes have influenced the status of the formal and the non-formal in *højskole* education. As schools, the academies are institutions of formal character. And the interest of state policies – connected with the interest of the market forces – presses them more and more towards a formalization of their education. But nevertheless, the academies have continued so far their way of non-formal education, which is based on a high evaluation of informal processes and dialogical interactions.³³

That is also, why the *højskole* is still regarded as an important part of civil society, of non-formal education, and of the Danish type of living democracy from below.

Sport plays a special role in this process. In contrast to other school subjects, sport is not fictive, but practice in itself. Most other subjects are 'about' something. History by reading historical sources is *about* former life (not living in history oneself), geography by using the map is *about* the world outside (not living out there oneself) etc. While education is in high degree fictive, sport is not. Sport is – like music and speaking languages – a way of doing it oneself. As learning by real doing, sport has special status, which makes it especially suitable for 'popular education': Try it yourself – be your own master.

An historical anecdote has often been used in the world of *højskole* to tell about the non-authoritarian, democratic spirit of popular education. When the boats of the Viking Rollo came to the Seine, where there is Paris today, people from the shore wanted to know whom these ships-men were. "Who is your leader," they asked. "We are all leaders," answered the Vikings.³⁴

"Who is the winner", people may ask at a sports event. "We are all winners," is what the *højskole* student answers – or what the academy's student should be able to answer.

However, bodily democracy always remains an open process and can never be taken for granted.

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Noter

The term “people’s academy” refers to the Danish *folkehøjskole* (also called “folk high school”).

¹ This article is based on a chapter from the European report: *Education through Sport: Towards an International Academy of Sport for All*, Copenhagen, 2004.

² Among the many biographies, see: Thaning 1972, Dam 1983, Allchin 1997. Original interpretations were delivered by Engberg 1993 and Reich 2000. Work editions in English: Grundtvig 1976, 1984 and 1991. Collective works about Grundtvig: Thodberg/Thyssen 1983, Röhrig 1991, Sanders/Vind 2003.

³ The political place of Grundtvig, especially in relation to educational politics, is more in details described by Bodenstein 1982. About the diverse political reinterpretations of Grundtvig during the twentieth century: Fabricius Møller 2005.

⁴ About the terms of people, folk and demos – on the line of Herder, Grundtvig and Martin Buber, see Eichberg 2004a.

⁵ Details about Grundtvig’s educational thinking in the context of educational politics: Bodenstein 1982.

⁶ Grundtvig even sent out an outline of an alternative state school, which should be placed in Sorø. He formulated it in 1838 in *Skolen for Livet og Akademiet i Soer* (School for life and the academy in Sorø), which is regarded as one of his basic academy-writings. The king accepted the plan, but died before the project was realized. Some ideas of the Sorø project were taken up by the later *folkehøjskoler*, but these were much

stronger influenced by the farmers' movement and the pietistic religious revivals. See Poul Engberg in: Warming 1983, 49-50.

Another school plan, which never was realized, was Grundtvig's Gothenburg project. He formulated it in 1839 in *Om Nordens videnskabelige Forening* (About the scholarly union of the North). This school should have been an inter-state Nordic university placed in Sweden between the three countries Denmark, Sweden and Norway. And its contents should be alternative to the Latin tradition of the time, namely Nordic and historical-poetical. Text and comments in: Warming 1983.

7 About Grundtvig's view on education in the context of pedagogical thinking: Bergstedt 1998 and Winther 2004a, 119-138 and Winther 2004b.

8 Grundtvig developed and applied this method most comprehensively in his work *Nordens Mythologi*, 1832/70, which had the word "historical-poetical" in the title.

9 A perspective from 150 years later: Warming 1983. And more recently again: Vium Mikkelsen/Thomsen 2004

10 Grundtvig in his song: "*Nu skal det åbenbares*", which was first published in *Gylden-Aaret*, 1834. *Folkehøjskolens sangbog* 1995, no. 461.

11 This congeniality has favoured the international attention to and reception of Grundtvigian school ideas. About Germany: Eichberg 1990 and Röhrig 1991. About the Americas: Christoffersen 1983 and Zöllner 1997. About Eastern Europe: Eichberg 1992 and Kulich 2002. About Africa and Asia: Matsumae 1987, Eichberg 1992, Zöllner 1994 and 1995, *Højskolebladet* 2004.

12 Fabricius Møller 1999. A forerunner of the travelling *højskole* was the people's academy Boberhaus, established in 1926 in Schlesien/Germany. Based on inspirations from the German youth movement, from Grundtvig and from the sociologist Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, the school sent its students on wandering tours to Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Balkans to meet local youth groups there and to engage in village research. See Eichberg 1990.

13 Very different attempts to describe *højskole* in general: Engberg 1940, Rørdam 1980. Historical approaches: Simon 1960 and 1998, Nissen 1994, O. Korsgaard 1997 and 1998. Anthropological approaches from 'outside': Borish 1991 and 1996, Reddy 1997. Collected works about *højskole* and *folkeoplysning*: Warming 1983, Jeppesen 1987, Eichberg 1992, Vium Mikkelsen/Thomsen 2004.

14 Actual figures also in: Holst 2004, chap. 16.

15 Students' voices in: Ettrup Larsen 2004.

16 Historical overviews about the sports academies in Denmark: Worm 1989 and Eichberg 2001. About the body in people's academy: O. Korsgaard 1986, Bøje 1991, Glerup/Nielsen 1998, Lykkegaard 2002. About the specific connection between *højskole* and gymnastics: O. Korsgaard 1982, Eichberg 1996, Madsen 2003. A comprehensive overview of *højskole* history under the aspect of the practical subjects and contents: Holst 2004, chap. 3.

17 Biørn 1992. A direct link between gymnastics *højskole* and technological

innovation in the world of cooperative production was Poul la Cour, the most famous teacher at Askov academy during the 1880/90s. He was engaged in the development of cooperative wind mills on one hand and in the introduction of Lingjian gymnastics to Denmark on the other. See Hansen 1983 and Nissen 1994.

- 18 The most famous case was the change of the people's academy of Askov from mythological Grundtvigianism to the ideas of evolutionism and positivism, which happened in the 1880s under its headmaster Ludvig Schrøder. Askov was regarded as the flagship of Danish people's academies. So far, it had been the Grundtvigian method to tell and interpret Nordic myths (along with Biblical histories) as "learning for life". This was from now on regarded as "romantic", outdated, and confronted with a "realistic" and "scientific" view, which regarded myths not as existential, but as created by historical evolution. In *højskole* education, the telling of myth was replaced by natural sciences, modern literature and social political topics – without recognizing that these discourses are "mythical" as well. If the Nordic myths, later on, were "revived" – as by Aage Møller in the years between the World Wars, they could get reactionary and nationalistic undertones. See Lönnroth 1979 and Ægidius 1985.

With Lönnroth one can, however, distinguish between three different approaches towards mythology: the romantic, the positivistic (or evolutionistic) and the anthropological. The romantic discourse about the myth is about "the original" and "the essential", reading the myth as archaic collective wisdom, which is successively destroyed by modern rationality. The positivistic discourse treats the myth as a "primitive", pre-rational and more or less accidental step on the way of evolution, which has no deeper significance for the present time. The anthropological discourse – like in psychoanalysis and structuralism – is about the myth as expression of some deeper human meaning, which can enter into an alternative cultural vision. Grundtvig began as romantic, but turned later towards a more anthropological concept – it is that what he in 1832 called "historical-poetical".

About the conflict of Askov see also Poul Engberg in: Warming 1983, 59-62.

- 19 Some particular studies or collections exist about individual academies. About Ollerup: Bonde 2003. About Snoghøj: K. Korsgaard 1996. About Gerlev: Andersen 1988 and Ettrup Larsen 2004. About Viborg: Rasmussen 2001 and Agergaard 2004.
- 20 This was critically remarked by a Japanese observer in the 1930s, who confronted the lack of spirituality in Ollerup with the spiritual atmosphere around gymnastics in Snoghøj and Askov: Matsumae 1987.
- 21 This was the case with the connection between the Snoghøj female gymnastics and the *højskole* philosopher Jørgen Bukdahl who regularly lectured on this academy. Bukdahl launched the idea that body culture needed a "point outside", giving movement a deeper meaning. This "point outside" was for Bukdahl the "popular enlightenment" (Bukdahl 1943, 333-335). The "point outside" became one of the most famous keywords in Danish popular sports. About Bukdahl and his philosophy of

- “the popular” in general see Engberg 1991.
- 22 Quantitative development since the seventies and actual figures in: Holst 2004, chap. 16.
- 23 A critical debate of management thinking and people’s academy: Glerup 2000.
- 24 See the book title of O. Korsgaard 1999. It associates the “competitive race of knowledge” with the so-called “society of knowledge” – which in spite of all rhetoric is a new industrial class society. Critical about this point: Glerup 2000.
- 25 One recent step in this process was a committee on the people’s academies, which the Danish right-wing government established in order to describe and discipline the *højskole* in Denmark: Holm 2004.
- 26 Cederholm (1998) og *InterNyt* 1999.
- 27 On the basis of International Youth Leader Education (IYLE): Eichberg 2004a.
- 28 I thank Poul Engberg for this story from real life.
- 29 The attempt of a psychology of *folkelig* sports: Eichberg/Bøje 1997.
- 30 Combining a Grundtvigian approach with the ‘tacit knowledge’ of Polanyi 1966: Jespersen 1999, 2000 and 2002. Also Eichberg/Jespersen: “The recognition of folk practice.” In: Eichberg 2004b.
- 31 *Folkehøjskolens sangbog*, 1894 and later editions. *DGI sangbog*, 2000.
- 32 A comparison between different approaches of popular sport academy and sports training school: Agergaard 2004.
- 33 About non-formal education in popular sports and its fight for recognition in a world of formal education see Eichberg 2004b.
- 34 Ove Korsgaard, at that time headmaster of the Gerlev sports academy, liked to tell this narration during the 1980s. See also Worm 1989, 39.