

Pre-modern games in a modern world: A case of public festivals as rational recreation in 19th century Finland

Lauri Keskinen

Modern sport is often seen as a record-chase and something to be regarded with profound seriousness. Thus it differs significantly from pre-modern games that were accompanied by laughter, merriment, (religious) rituals and carnivalism. This study focuses on 19th century Finnish public festivals that aimed to educate the lower social classes by incorporating play and games. It was revealed that laughter and merriment could be used in a highly modern way as an instrument for furthering political agendas.

Introduction

Our education begins at home, continues at school and lasts for a whole lifetime. Ever marching under the flag of truth is the school youth with which we will conquer the world. Teachers are the sowers of the future. We should always respect them and thank them for their burden of self-sacrifice! There is no greater or more subservient mission in our country than theirs. (Topelius 1981 [1876], 402.)

The passage above is from a book – *Maamme kirja* (Book of Our Land) – that was published in 1876 by Zachris Topelius (1818–1898), a Finnish author, poet, historian and rector of the University of Helsinki. It captures well the dominant European ideas of the time as well as Topelius' personal views. The Age of Enlightenment and positivism had paved the way for a new kind of pedagogical and educational philosophy that emphasized the importance of educating common men. Educational theorists, among whom can be included utopian socialists like Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, envisioned a brighter future in which education would play a key role in stabilizing society, eradicating evils such as crime, greed and alcohol abuse, and helping men achieve their full – especially moral – potential (Bowen 1981, 375–385). Combined with nationalism, education within nations was seen as an asset to be used in the rivalry between nations as well as – if successful – a favorable sign from The Almighty. One of the focal German philosophers of idealism and education was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), whose ideas were highly influential among Finnish philosophers and statesmen – among them Topelius. In Hegel's view, representative government was an essential agency of national education, and the goal of education was to produce ideal citizens, who would – as in the passage from Topelius – strengthen the nation as a whole and hence insure its continuity. This prac-

tically utopian belief in the profound effects of education was to offer a background to the reforms planned by Topelius. It was combined with concern for the deteriorating morals of common men brought about by social problems caused by the shift from an agricultural society to an industrialized and urbanized society.

Finland in the 1800s, then a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, was fertile ground for ideas on nationalism, all-round education for the masses and the emerging civic society. However, these continental ideas reached only the Finnish elite, who were literate and had the necessary contacts abroad: the academics, the gentry and a portion of the bourgeoisie. It was this Swedish-speaking upper class, and mainly the academics, who were the forefathers of *kansanvalistus* (popular enlightenment). The plan was to use the language of the masses – Finnish – to educate the people so that they might achieve their full potential. Popular enlightenment was also about re-ordering the Finnish nation on the foundation of a shared language and culture (Kantasalmi & Hake 1997, 353–374). Finland had been ruled by Sweden for some 600 years until becoming annexed and incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1809. This, in turn, provided a basis for nationalistic aspirations.

Since the Industrial Revolution had begun to separate leisure time from the working hours of employees and leisure was often spent at the pub – amateur educationalists and philanthropists belonging to the middle classes began to devise ways of turning the attention of the masses towards something constructive and educational. This was especially apparent in the United Kingdom, the birthplace of industrialism. In the opinion of educationalists, the rising class-consciousness of the working class and the threat of socialism were also problems that could be managed by the co-operation of upper and lower classes in voluntary associations and forms of educational entertainment, such as public festivals. The masses were considered a patriarchal responsibility of the enlightened upper class. However, the situation in Finland concerning industrialism differed substantially from the likes of the UK, Germany and France. The 1860s are usually considered to be a decade that saw the beginning of change from an agricultural nation into an urbanized and industrialized nation. The class of industrial workers began growing rapidly as late as the 1880s and 90s. This is important to note since in this paper I use the word “worker” as contemporaries used it. Thus, in addition to industrial workers, it refers to servants, peasants and other social classes of low social standing. Topelius, for example, used the Swedish word *arbetaren* (worker) in this manner (Rehumäki 2008, 147 – 149). However, since Topelius worked as a reporter in the capital of Finland, Helsinki, he often wrote from an urban perspective. This meant that his conception of a worker – specifically a man, as was usually the case – was more urbanized than was actually the case in mostly agricultural Finland. In one article Topelius stated that 70 percent of the population of Helsinki belonged to “the masses”, and that these were the people that would benefit the most from public festivals (Helsingfors Tidningar 25.6.1844).

The aim of this paper is to examine the educational aspects of Finnish public festivals. As part of the European rational recreational movement, festivals were a form of social control exercised by the bourgeoisie to combat undesired behavior and the spreading of social movements, such as socialism, among the lower classes. The writings of Zachris Topelius are examined in detail since they offer insight into the changing roles of games and laughter, which were to be an integral part of the festivals. Attention is also given to the writings of utopian socialists because they had a marked impact on the educational views of Topelius. Topelius, although being strictly anti-communist, even sketched his own utopian land, Victoria (Rehumäki 2008, 143; Helsingfors Tidningar 17.2.1844). The educational

themes of this paper are studied against the backdrop of evolving modern sports, rising Finnish nationalism and the Fennomanic movement. My ambition here, however, is not to unpack the educational philosophy of Topelius, but to examine the use of pre-modern games and laughter in a modern and educative way.

Public festivals: joy and education combined

Public festivals, which originate in the rational recreation movement of Victorian Era England in the 1830s and 1840s, are a form of entertainment provided by the gentry and the bourgeoisie to offer the lower classes an alternative to pubs, circuses and other morally questionable forms of entertainment. In the view of the upper classes, the need for rational recreation had its roots in the concern that the sudden expansion of working men's leisure time would lead to deteriorating morals and social upheavals caused by leftist movements such as Chartism and communism. The perceived problem was especially pronounced in England, the birthplace of industrialism: Despite the fact that England was a leading nation in industrialism and commerce, its workingmen were poorly educated, politically unstable and in desperate need of social improvements (Lehtonen 1994, 52; see also Bailey 1987, 177–188). Topelius, as an enthusiastic young reporter for the newspaper *Helsingfors Tidningar*, was well informed of the latest fashions from continental Europe and Great Britain and he actively informed the public readership about them. Certainly he was aware of the previously mentioned utopistic writings of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen about whom a series of articles appeared in a newspaper in Turku in the beginning of the 1840s (Rehumäki 2008, 137).

From these writings, Topelius' contemporaries could deduce two essential messages that are relevant for this article: First, socialism, a movement that was closely related to industrialism and the ill fortune of working men, had evolved from an idea to an actual threat to societal stability; second, if education could further the utopists' agenda, it could also be used to combat the rising threat of socialism. At the time, education was perceived to include not only formal schooling but also leisure time. In the words of the British journalist and historian Cooke Taylor in the 1840s, "it was the great but neglected truth, that moral education, in spite of all the labors of direct instructors, is really acquired in hours of recreation" (Bailey 1987, 49). Thus reformers and educationalists felt obliged to extend social control – or "moral education" as contemporary usage has it – to the time that was previously left unsupervised; the leisure time.

In order to fully understand the educational context in which Topelius and other Finnish educationalists operated, it is necessary to briefly view the dominant educational ideas of Europe in the first half of the 19th century. In this writer's view and considering the subject of this article, educational ideas were most explicit in the works of German philosopher, psychologist and educationalist Johann Friedrich Herbart (1176–1841). In the scientific Herbartian model of education, psychology determined the means of education and ethics determined its ends. His four-step pedagogical methodology accentuated, inter alia, critical thinking, content assimilation and using the acquired content to form moral precepts. (Bowen 1981, 232–240.) According to Herbart, when the whole of mankind had been instructed in the same ideas and sentiments, mankind would form one society with "one soul", and an age would begin in which conflicts diminished, benevolence governed men's actions and men attained perfection. (Compayré 1907, 140.) Like Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Herbart saw men attaining fullness only through becoming citizens. Education was the key for this transformation from Individuality, the unique potential of every child, into

Character, the accumulated values of (Western) civilization. (Blyth 1981, 70.) At the time of his death in 1841, Herbart's pedagogical views were still only in limited academic circulation. Beginning in the mid-19th century his views found a footing in Germany as well as the United Kingdom, the United States and France. (Blyth 1981, 77.)

Topelius, in addition to his English colleagues in the field of rational recreation, expressed views with considerable resemblance to the key educational philosophy of Herbart. Topelius stated that it was "the main objective of mankind and every individual to strive towards *jalostunut ihmisyys* (ennobled humanity) and Christian justice" (Jaakkola 2011, 128, 139), meaning a set of moral values derived from Christian doctrine. In Herbart's view, intellectual and moral education were inseparable, meaning that "[w]hoever forms enlightened men, forms at the same time moral and virtuous men. Thinking rightly is the source of acting rightly." (Compayré 1907, 82.)

In 1845 Topelius became the first to suggest hosting public festivals that would offer the common man games, theater and other recreational entertainment. A year later he wrote, that since the Brits have their boxing, the Spanish have their bullfighting and almost every other European nation has a popular game of its own, the Finns should come to embrace rowing as a sport. Rowing, which became immensely popular after Topelius' article and for which the long coastline and thousands of lakes of Finland provided the perfect setting, was the wholesome sport of public festivals. Other forms of entertainment comprised speeches, fireworks, target practice, sailing and games for boys. In this respect, public festivals had their origins in carnivals, circuses and harvest festivals. But what Topelius suggested next was to drastically demarcate public festivals from all previous forms of public entertainment.

Joy and happiness were to be the key ingredients of public festivals, according to Topelius. In 1885 he reminisced that in the first half of the 19th century, a worker could expect attention only from the police and possibly the clergy. A barrel organ, a parade and a funeral procession were the only entertainment offered to the poor. (Hirn 1986, 36.) In 1845 he wrote:

One of the greatest mistakes of our time is that one doesn't appreciate the meaning of joy to life, to morality, to the well-being of the people and hence to the prosperity of the nation. Even from the private sphere of our lives we should come to learn that when a man is joyous, he is also ultimately good. And even when the brief moment of joy has vanished, does it ease the pains of life and continue to provide well-being and comfort. That's why the working-class has an acute need, which the legislators should be wise to acknowledge and enforce. (Helsingfors Tidningar 25.6.1845.)

He also added that Finns were not as accustomed to taking part in games and other activities as, for example, the French or other nationalities of Southern Europe. This was something that the Finns would have to learn, and what better way to entice the public to take part than to offer it games and sports. Showing surprising insight and psychological eye for his time, Topelius stated that the forms of entertainment should arise naturally from the masses and be genuinely enjoyed by the people. In this Topelius was following European debate of the time, chiefly British, in which the conclusion had been reached that "popular recreations were to be improved, not through repression, but through the operation of superior counter-attractions" (Bailey 1987, 177). In Topelius' view, festivals were to offer a working man a chance to relax and to rejuvenate – activities earlier confined solely to pubs

(Helsingfors Tidningar 25.6., 31.5., 2.7., 16.8.1845, 6.6.1846, 15.9.1852). After Topelius a number of other newspapers picked up the story and in unison praised the beneficial nature of the festivals: they raised the level of all-round education of citizens, they brought together different social classes and they offered refreshment for the mind and body. The social classes that met each other were the bourgeoisie and the working class – the Finnish gentry, however, had its highly exclusive parties and balls to attend. Many of them also spent their winters in Europe and only came to stay in Finland for the summer.

The educational portion of the program was usually a speech delivered by an academic, clergyman or teacher. Realizing that the masses came only for the fun and games and not the speeches, the organizers made the speech the opening act. In this way, festival participants had to sit through the speech in order to “earn” the right to enjoy the rest of the program. According to one journalist, speeches were to be incorporated into the programs of public festivals for the following reason: “Entertainment should always be connected with education; the latter makes the former alive and useful. Entertainment and fun are only the grease in the wheel of progress, and they might run out, if they are excessively used. For a knowledgeable person mere fun is void of meaning.” (Lehtonen 1994, 156.) A speech, although always educative, could be given on almost any subject, for example “The Finnic peoples and the common good”. Some speeches were clearly given to impress the public and convince it of the sophistication of the speaker: “The lives of Ancient Egyptians”, “General history of Greece”, “The Crusades” and “Differences between the Ancient and the present-day civic situation in Greece”. (Lehtonen 1994, 286–287.) Even the festival decorations were carefully and tastefully chosen to invoke a sense of beauty in the masses.

Naturally, combining games and sports with educational objectives was nothing new. Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), a Swiss pedagogue and mentor of Herbart, was one of the first to point out that an all-round education of a child should also encompass physical education. It was not solely the skills that one got from physical education – for example jumping, climbing and swimming – that were important, but the traits of character that were believed to develop from exercises: briskness, bravery and determination. (Suomela 1944, 158.)

Finnish educator and clergyman Uno Cygnaeus (1810–1888), the father of *kansakoulu* (a system of state-supported primary schools) that was established in 1866, incorporated Pestalozzi’s ideas in the newly formed school system, which would educate Finnish school children for the next hundred years. *Fennomaanit* (Fennoman movement), which was a national movement aimed at improving the position of the Finnish language as the basis of national identity quickly realized the potential of games and sports in improving national awareness and health. (Kantasalmi & Hake 1997, 360.)

For example, the people living on the coast were encouraged to improve their physique, since the coast was the first line of defense against an invasion. The young, victorious Germans of the war of 1870–71 against France were chosen as an example for the Finnish youth. (Meinander 1992, 87.) But defending the nation and building support for a Finnish speaking Finland were not the only benefits that the educators of the Fennoman movement had in mind. A more practical and economic benefit was the improved work efficiency that was believed to result from the rejuvenating effect of physical exercise. Besides the self-satisfaction they would gain from the knowledge that they were helping to raise national awareness and military potential, educators could also congratulate themselves on sobering up the public and giving them a dash of entertainment.

The work of the educationalists and the Fennoman movement they represented predicated the question of motive: Were they working for the good of the nation or to offer them-

selves the self-satisfaction of helping the less fortunate? Swedish author and journalist C.J.L. Almqvist (1793–1866) speculated that “the joy of the working class will ultimately guarantee a better life for the wealthier folk” in 1839 (Almqvist 1972, 38). The fact that Finland was a strict class society up until the beginning of the 20th century suggests that public festivals were one of the first instances in the nation’s history to offer the gentry and bourgeoisie a chance to extend their help to the working class across the class divide. Even though the motives were with great certainty patriarchal and patronizing, the ideas of nationalism and all-round education were beginning to take effect, thus moving the focus from personal gain to common good. A civic society was beginning to take shape in place of a rigid, class-based society. Public festivals of the latter half of the 19th century were seen to offer the classes a chance to work together. However, a society that was not controlled by class division was hard to imagine and nearly impossible to make a reality.

Laughter for the masses

Joy and merriment were not the only attributes Topelius wished would be associated with public festivals and more precisely the games that were played during them. As a child of his time, he saw laughter as an essential part of the whole game and play experience. This is not surprising since laughter had always accompanied pre-modern games and random feats of physical strength. These were by definition casual and without strict rules, and the whole concept of training for an event was unheard of. A particularly popular category of Finnish games resembles modern day dodge ball. Team games were not so much about the final result but more about the process of socializing with other members of the community. Games were also played because they offered a chance to meet the opposite sex and flirt. (Kärkkäinen 1992, 33.) Some games were so large that a team might consist of the population of a whole village. This, in turn, shows that teams as well as other standardized aspects associated with modern day sport could vary significantly in pre-modern games. Henning Eichberg, a leading researcher on the connections between sport and laughter (Eichberg 1990, 123–134) defines pre-modern games not as the forerunners of modern sports, but as a different type of social interaction altogether. He adds: “They [games] were at the bodily core of popular festivity, thus being another type of social practice than modern sport. And laughter is an indicator of these fundamental differences”. (Eichberg 2008.)

In order to study the reasons behind Topelius’ decision to focus on laughter, it is imperative to first look at the ways in which he encountered laughter in the context of physical activity. During the 19th century, foreign physical entertainers, such as jugglers, wrestlers and *taitojuoksijat* (so-called skilled runners) regularly visited Finland and especially the southern cities of Helsinki and Turku. Skilled runners made their living by running a set distance within a publicly announced set time, such as in a newspaper advertisement. Since they ran alone, it was not a race *per se*; instead it was a runner’s speed that was supposed to astound the public. To offer the paying public some entertainment other than swift running, runners would dress in silly costumes, run backwards or do flips. In 1848, a Berliner named David Hassé ran in Turku dressed as an Algerian escaped slave that was bound in chains from his neck and hips to his hands and feet. Hassé’s running was slow going since he decided to collect fares while running. (Vettenniemi 2006, 83.) In 1844 Topelius wrote about Carl Giese, a renowned runner who had performed all over Europe. Giese had supposedly run the distance between Paris and Brussels, some 260 kilometers, in 21 hours. In

1844 in Helsinki he settled to run 50 times between two buildings that were along the same street and a few hundred meters apart. A large crowd came to watch him, and among the crowd was Topelius, who wrote:

The man of wonder appeared in the most humorous costume that can be thought of and began his promenade backwards, which ended with a rapsal-lion tripping him over and tumbling. The experiment was renewed as was the tripping. The unfortunate fellow was so unfortunate that he was forced to a slower run – to the police station. (Helsingfors Tidningar 18.9.1844.)

The performance was clearly meant to evoke laughter in the crowd, and the crowd was only to view the performance and not to participate. In this sense skilled runners were similar to a circus act. In Eichberg's view, runners played the part of clowns. Eichberg went on to add that: "while sport occupied the terrain of seriousness, circus shaped its own realm. Both phenomena were specifically modern. Both displayed in some way bodily excellence and 'acrobatic' skill. But one of them – the circus – kept the clown as a central role while sport excluded this figure" (Eichberg 2008, 7.) Coincidentally, circus, in addition to carnivals, was one of the institutions to raise interest in physical exercise in Finland. The distinctive quality of circus acts was that they did not allow the public to participate, to join in on the merriment. This and the fact that Topelius was a keen observer of skilled runners suggests that he got the idea for public festivals, a chance for all to participate, from the culture of simply observing physical feats instead of taking part in them. As was stated earlier in this paper, Topelius had observed on his trips abroad that the French and other southern European nationalities were accustomed to taking part in public festivals and this was something the Finns should also learn. However, Topelius was not an advocate for serious sport; he did not see "the point" of running sprints. His viewpoint is understandable, since running in public places in the middle of the 1800s was frowned upon; it was only allowed for skilled runners, whose livelihood depended on it, and for young boys (Helsingfors Tidningar 5.7.1848; See also Vettenniemi 2006, 85–86.) Instead of sports, public festivals were to endorse games that had their origins in the old agrarian culture.

One of the very first public festivals to have a rational and educative function was arranged in August of 1864 – some twenty years after Topelius' first newspaper articles – by a factory owner William von Nottbeck (1816–1890), who was of German descent. The festival took place in Tampere, where von Nottbeck's cotton factory was situated. All the employees, their spouses and the city's gentry were invited; in a similar festival held in 1869 some 4000 people were in attendance. (Lehtonen 1994, 57.) A newspaper article described the entertainment of 1864 as follows: "There was lots of entertainment: youngsters were dressed in sacks and the prize awaited the best runner at the finishing line. There was also a prize at the top of a pole." (Sanomia Turusta 26.8.1864.) Climbing a pole that was covered in soap and had a prize at the top – for example a silver ruble – was one the most common forms of entertainment and it was also an illustrative example of a game that was never transformed into sport. The festival of 1869 saw the usual game of a sack race, but also an ordinary sprint with ten boys competing. According to a newspaper article, after just a few steps, half the boys were tumbling, "which was rewarded with the laughter of the crowds." (Tampereen Sanomat 17.8.1869.) Either the boys were knocking each other down, which would point to the uninhibited violence associated with agrarian games, or they fell intentionally to make people laugh. Either way, the object of the race was not to take an overwhelming victory, but to finish after a tough race or even offer the crowds something to laugh about.

The connection between laughing and running a race in the 1860s and 1870s needs to be addressed with a few extra words. As already mentioned, grown men and women were not supposed to run in public, and crowds were accustomed to laughing at skilled runners. However, grown men could take part in a race, if it was especially organized for that purpose, but even then they might have been greeted with laughter. This was the case in Teisko, a small village near Tampere in June 1878. The length of the race was 240 meters, which the winner completed in 33 seconds. Accompanying the results, a newspaper article also described the crowd's reactions: "The crowd was laughing as the boys' hair and pant legs were flapping like leaves caught in the wind. Women didn't take part in the race since they were afraid they would be laughed at." (Tampereen Sanomat 29.6.1878.) Thus, running at that time can be seen as a process of grotesque, as Eichberg suggests of mock fighting and tug-of-war, as well as races organized for Jews, common women and cripples (Eichberg 1987, 32.) The importance is not in finding a winner, but the process itself – the process of becoming the source of amusement for an audience (Eichberg 2008, 4.).

The educative portion of von Nottbeck's festival was the speech, which in 1867 was about the importance of the examples set by superiors. The speech concentrated solely on the workplace and the example set by higher management, but it was not difficult to read the message between the lines: A factory and the society surrounding it are by nature patriarchal and thus the superiors and the gentry are in a position to exercise control over the lives of working men and women. This lesson was repeated when it came to more practical festival arrangements; bleachers were divided into three compartments, for the owners and managers of the factory and the gentry, for the lower management and skilled workers, and for the ordinary workers. Not only was the festival educational, it also served another important role: workers were kept happy and their morals high in order to prevent socialism from spreading into the community. (Lehtonen 1994, 56–57.) This must have been a tangible concern for the higher management, who were almost exclusively English and therefore knowledgeable about the influence of utopian socialist Robert Owen (1771–1858), Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) in their native homeland.

A mixture of laughter, educational content and the ideals of the Fennoman movement were also apparent in a public festival organized in the town of Alavus in 1874. Funding came from the gentry and the festival itself was intended for common men. Present at the festival was Konrad Stenbäck (1847–1918), a reporter and an avid supporter of the Fennoman movement. To accentuate the role of the Finnish language, Stenbäck later changed his Swedish surname into a Finnish one: Kivekäs. Stenbäck was pleased to note that the festival was intended for all – "old, young, poor and rich, men and wives" – and without a fee. He was not pleased, however, to find out that the entertainment committee consisted entirely of the gentry, but by choosing peasants as sports referees the situation was rectified. The festival included sports in addition to speeches, dances, pole climbing, and target practice. A sprint was apparently intended only for boys and girls since no adults participated. There was also a sack race that elicited amusement. According to Stenbäck, five or six boys got into burlap sacks so that only their heads remained outside the bags. Then the bags were tied shut around their necks. The boys were to hop the 15-meter course to a finishing line that was represented by a log – this had to be crossed by jumping over it, which Stenbäck called "a thing to laugh about." (Uusi Suometar 28.8.1874.)

The Fennoman ideas of a united and Finnish-speaking nation without the dominance of a Swedish-speaking upper class were apparent in Stenbäck's newspaper article. Of the contestants of target practice he had the following to say: "A man's name, class and wealth are

all irrelevant here. The only thing that matters is whether the man has sense and skill, and in addition to that, prizes can't be won with money, but skills and merit." He also emphasized that the winner's name and fame would spread like wildfire from house to house and mouth to mouth. (Uusi Suometar 28.8.1874.) Coming from the pen of a man belonging to the gentry, this was radical for the time. It was unheard of to proclaim that a single feat of strength or skill could allow someone from the lower classes to claim superiority over the upper classes. It was also unprecedented that a person from the upper class would subject himself to the possible laughter and ridicule of the lower classes in the event of defeat. This is exactly why Eichberg considers laughter a matter of social class. According to Eichberg, during the Middle Ages and up to early modernity, people from the upper classes joined in on the world of popular game and festivity, often as patrons, but also as players. However, in the 17th and 18th centuries, they retreated to their own festivities, such as quasi-archaic tournaments, geometrical carousels and horse ballets. Laughter was excluded from these events, and thus it became a class issue. (Eichberg 2008, 6.) This was also the case in Finland, where going to spas and promenades, sailing, hunting for sport and horseback riding, were considered the monopoly of the gentry up until the middle of the 19th century (Heikkinen 1992, 43–54).

Organizers of public festivals were immensely imaginative when inventing with new games and forms of play. Most of these incorporated elements would evoke laughter, since the thrill of the race or the skill of a competitor were not enough to entertain the crowds. In one of the games contestants tried to catch a loaf of bread covered in syrup with their teeth. A sprint called 'the six-man race in two pairs of trousers' must also have been humorous (Suomela 1944, 234.) A 'Swedish-Norwegian race' organized for 1883 but canceled, suggests serious sport, but in fact it pitted egg and spoon-carrying contestants racing against each other (Uusi Suometar 14.9.1883).

The era of comical games was coming to an end with the beginning of the 20th century. Long after that games continued to entertain people especially in the countryside, but the first critical statements concerning them were voiced in the year 1900. The games of a certain public festival were then called "ordinary and outmoded" (Uusi Savo 28.8.1900). Erkki Vettenniemi, a Finnish historian, acutely describes this change in the character of sports: "The stopwatch and the record sheet were to set the pace and define the nature of sports instead of laughter" (Vettenniemi 2006, 149.) Or in Eichberg's words: "Sport combined enjoyment and entertainment with streamlining after the patterns of industrial strain – avoiding the carnival-like elements of popular games" (Eichberg 2008, 7).

Socio-political gain and laughter

What was it exactly that the educationalists and the supporters of the Fennoman movement hoped to achieve with public festivals? Goals varied between years depending on the ideologies of the organizers. However, there were five goals that were in some form or another relevant in the public festivals of the latter part of the 19th century. According to previous research, these are as follows (in no particular order):

1. Reducing the alcohol consumption of the lower classes

This was believed to happen for two reasons. First, lower classes, which usually spent their free time in the pub, were offered inexpensive and alcohol-free fun at the festivals. Second, the refined example set by the upper classes was to work as an inspiration. (Lehtonen 1994, 51–58; Sulkunen & Alapuro 1987; Rehumäki 2008, 148–149.)

2. Improving work efficiency

Rejuvenating entertainment, especially physical entertainment such as games, was considered a welcome break from the hard and often dangerous workplace (Lehtonen 1994, 55).

3. Preventing social and political upheaval

Factory owners, especially, were convinced that by bringing together the owners, the management and the workers, the latter would be unlikely to form unions, go on strike or hinder productivity. (Rehumäki 2008, 137–149.)

4. Preventing the ‘infection’ of socialism

Socialism and communism were certainly familiar to management, given that Finland’s biggest industrial companies had mostly foreign managers. In order to keep peace in the workplace and the cost of labor low, management tried to meet the workforce half way, and public festivals offered just the right setting for that. (Lehtonen 1994, 56–57.)

5. *Kansanvalistus* (popular enlightenment)

The concept of popular enlightenment was twofold: first, it was understood as all-encompassing, meaning it consisted of all previously mentioned goals; second, it was understood as the actual educational portion of the festival, such as a speech. For the Fennoman movement the main educational message was that all men are created equal and that the Finnish language – instead of Swedish – should be the language of government and culture. (Liik-anen 1987, 132–133; Kantasalmi & Hake 1997, 353–374.)

Public festivals were to offer seemingly harmless and innocent fun without political affiliations yet they still contained strong socio-political undertones. Political and reformist aspirations were hidden behind the façade of carnivalistic activities that were planned in such a way as to offer an enticing alternative to alcohol and idleness. To influence workingmen’s leisure time the reformists were compelled to push the formal educational content to the background and emphasize the entertainment they believed was of interest to workingmen – however lowbrow the entertainment might have seemed to the organizers. The following quote from a newspaper article published in 1879 exemplifies the interplay of entertainment and education well:

These festivals and forms of entertainment are tailor-made to uphold national and patriotic aspirations and to spread them to the masses. Nothing excites a man more in these noble aspirations than the knowledge and the feeling that he is not alone but has many likeminded supporters standing with him. (Kaiku 30.8.1879.)

The message was clear: national and patriotic unity could be achieved with the help of games and entertainment. Put in another way: social control that was extended to the formerly unsupervised realm of leisure was understood to produce societal balance and prosperity for all social classes. The paternalistic view of upper classes towards moral education was founded on the point of view that even though workingmen as a relatively new and distinctive social class was a fact that had to be accepted, their revolutionary aspirations towards social reforms and movements were to be firmly subdued for the sake of the greater good.

The fact that Finnish public festivals were to produce joy as well as laughter is made clear in one of Topelius' first articles dealing with festivals. When describing pole climbing, he uses words such as 'funny' and 'absurd'. He ends the section by writing: "The game is crudely absurd, but extremely comical [...]". The choice of words – especially 'crude' – is revealing. Earlier in the article Topelius states that games are the most popular form of entertainment that suit large and somewhat uneducated crowds. (Helsingfors Tidningar 44/1846.) It becomes clear that uneducated crowds, the working class, were to be offered crude games, which were filled with merriment and simple enough to master. They were to be the entertainment, which drew the crowds in and required no previous know-how or general education -since these were the exclusive right of the upper classes. However, neither the highest education that was associated with the Swedish-speaking gentry was deemed suitable for the masses. Ultimately, public festivals were about the 'right' and 'true' all-round education and culture. For the Fennoman movement true culture rose from the Finnish-speaking agricultural population with the help of highly educated Fennoman nationalists, who were, ironically, usually Swedish-speaking.

The distinction between right and wrong all-round education is described well in an article by Konrad Kivekäs. He begins by asking the reader: What has corrupted and made notorious the otherwise beautiful and decent national equality and liberty? He goes on to answer: Upper class education that is highly theoretical and that creates a false sensation for the person to believe that he is somehow better than everyone else. True and good all-round education, however, "is like gold that can be found from the clear waters of Lapland as well as in the luminous hills of the south." (Ahti 20.4.1878.) Even though the quote itself does not say much, there is plenty of information between the lines. The quote makes a clear distinction between education that resides in the mansions and ballrooms of the Swedish-speaking upper class and the native culture of agricultural Finland. A distinction is also made between the culture of the governing class and those who are governed.

Conclusions

Zachris Topelius might have been the instigator of public festivals with pre-modern games and educational content, but it was the Fennoman movement that added the socio-political aspect. However, Topelius' idea of offering crude games to crude people in order to achieve societal improvements was to remain in use until the era of sports in the beginning of the 20th century. And by that time physical culture, mainly sports, had been widely accepted as the main attraction for workers' associations, volunteer fire departments, temperance societies and other forms of voluntary organizations with an agenda. What was truly special about the public festivals beginning in the 1860s and 1870s was that they used pre-modern games in the same fashion as modern sports were later used and that, according to Eichberg, should not have been feasible at the time. In Eichberg's view, games were never about gain and profit, and they were never used to further a cause. Instead, they were about community, entertainment, laughter, leisure time and the thrill of the race. Public festivals, on the other hand, were conceived at a time when sports were already in existence, but were not mainstream culture, and when games still had high entertainment value. The true value of games – at least for the educationalists – was not in the entertainment or laughter they provided but the way in which they could be used to bring in the crowds. After the fun and games, speeches were the mode of education. In a Herbartian view everything learned induced moral growth. From this point of view, all the content of public festivals had an educative function whether it was physical, moral or instructional.

Public festivals were a product of their time in two ways. First, by using games for the profit of a political movement, in this case the Fennoman movement, public festivals embodied ideas of the Industrial Age and capitalism: A worker was a commodity that would retain its value better if it were given a chance to rejuvenate from time to time. Festivals were also preventive against unionization and socialism, which had the possibility to raise the price of labor and therefore decrease profit. Second, festivals served the purpose of educating the masses and spreading nationalism. For the first time in history, public education was seen as an asset instead of an expense for the nation. An educated nation was a nation that could have a significant impact on world history. Education was naturally a cultural battle, too. The Fennoman movement tried to push aside the old Swedish-speaking elite and replace it with a newly emerged Finnish-speaking middle class. This was mainly achieved with the new school system, but public festivals were also involved in spreading Fennomaniac values and nationalism. Above all else, education was about bringing up citizens that were ready for the already emerging civic society; a society that needed educated people instead of nobility and gentry.

By examining the roles of education and physical exercise within a society and as historical phenomena, it became possible to see the project of nation building and nationalism in a completely new light. The ability to use pre-modern games in a modern way was to reveal how important a part games and sports can play and how they are affected by the passage of time.

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Lauri Keskinen is a post doctoral researcher of Cultural history at the University of Turku, Finland.