

# METHODOLOGY OF THE SOKOL PHYSICAL EXERCISES FOR ALL TIMES

Gabrijela Kragujević<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training of the University of Belgrade (retired)

UDK 796.3.41:316.75

---

## SUMMARY

Under the influence of the French bourgeois revolution and the free-minded, educated patriots, many European nations, revolted by the state and position of their peoples, awoke. Strongly influenced by democratism, liberalism and national romanticism, the first national states were created in Europe (Germany, France, and Italy), while in nationally deprived entities there were national leaders of the “revolutionary” movements striving towards national emancipation from the foreign authorities. Under the given social and historical circumstances in the Czech Republic, a gymnastic society was founded with the basic task of a camouflaged struggle for national revival and emancipation. It required the physical power, health, and morale of people, with the contribution of physical exercise with its means and methods. This opinion was the guiding principle for Miroslav Tyrš, MD, and his close associates who established, developed and expanded the Sokol gymnastic system, transformed from the higher national importance to the Slavic Sokol movement and creation of a universal humanistic system of physical exercise. The Sokol gymnastic system was based on democratic liberal ideological foundations, consisting of unique, consistent and coherent elements: organizations, ideologies, systems of physical exercises, socio-educational methods, Sokol dedication, members and Sokol press. The Sokol educational methodology was one of the most important elements of their work, and it could be carried out only in symbiosis and synergy with the Sokol ideology, the system of physical exercises, members and printed material.

---

### Correspondence author

Gabrijela Kragujević  
gabika.kragujevic@gmail.com

---

The Sokol gymnastic system was built on a scientific basis and systematics with its source in philosophical views of Tyrš and his immediate personal experience.

**Keywords:** Sokol, Sokol gymnastic system, physical exercise, ideology, methodology, education, health, morality.

---

## INTRODUCTION

The Sokol physical exercise has over 150 years of experience of good practice, based on the consistent philosophical-theoretical and methodological foundations of the Sokol gymnastic system, whose beginnings date back to 1862 when, in Prague, dr. Miroslav Tyrš, with the wholehearted support of his like-minded Czech patriots, founded the first Sokol society. Its founding was facilitated by social and historical circumstances of the time marked by the post-revolutionary movements of the French bourgeois revolution reflected in democracy, liberalism, nationalism and humanism, and encouraged by the leading ideological thought “liberty, equality, fraternity”, which implies natural human rights! These changes resulted in awakening of national consciousness and thus in creation of national states in Europe (Germany, France, and Italy) and the aspirations of nationally deprived entities for national emancipation. In the newly emerging social and historical context, the importance of an individual, intellectual, enthusiast and patriot-nationalist<sup>1</sup> grows, and his personal initiative and action is desirable. The new circumstances, which prevailed in Austria, were used by the national champions of the Czech people and by founding the Sokol society of Prague started the struggle to consolidate the national consciousness of its people and its empowerment for the upcoming struggle with the foreigners. According to the German “tournament” system of physical exercise, which was a significant factor in strengthening the readiness of the German army and its military victories, dr. Miroslav Tyrš, (1832-1884), a philosopher, aesthetist, gymnastic theoretician, systematizer and pedagogue, guided by this knowledge of physical exercise, gives the significance to physical exercising so it becomes the means to camouflage the intention of physical, health and mental (moral) education and the necessary raising of its national consciousness and combat readiness.

---

<sup>1</sup>The nationalist mentioned here is in affirmative context. It is used for a person who strives for sustaining and progress of his nation, which can be understood as a supreme human ideal.

Dr. Tyrš was a *spiritus movens* and *spiritus rector* of the Sokol gymnastic system, which, from the original ethnocentric pretensions, grew into a massively celebrated gymnastic movement, and finally developed into a unique humanist system in its final phase of development. This transformation was made possible by the fact that the Sokol gymnastic system was open to changes and innovations. The goal that Tyrš wanted to achieve by the means and methods of the Sokol physical exercise was clearly marked by the emphasis on the idea of the movement. Thus, from the original idea: “unification and liberation”, it has been pointed out that freedom can only be achieved through cosmopolitan reciprocity, and, by, for example, the unification of South Slavic peoples into a single Yugoslav state, the goal of the Sokol action was to work on integration of peoples into Yugoslavia, guided by the ideological mind: “One state, one nation, one Sokol movement – the Yugoslav Sokol movement”.<sup>2</sup> As a philosopher, M. Tyrš did not engage in scholasticism. He was a “practical” philosopher, who incorporated all his knowledge, enthusiasm, energy and personal experience into the foundations of this unique, and the last formed gymnastic system known today. Nevertheless, his understanding of the importance of physical exercise could not be the result of a fundamental theoretical knowledge of this problem without being supported by the rich personal experience in physical exercise, which helped him restore his own bad health, and understanding that will, work and health are of the greatest importance for the progress of each individual and society as a whole. By highlighting the saying “Let us be stronger”, he tried to encourage will and effort to empower physical strength and health.

The Sokol gymnastic system consisted of: 1. its organization, 2. ideology, 3. system of physical exercises, 4. socio-educational methodology, 5. professionals, 6. school education and 7. professional printed material.

## **SUBJECT AND AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

The subject of the research is the Sokol methodology of physical exercising as an inseparable part of the Sokol gymnastic system (which is also composed of its organization, ideology, system of physical exercises, professional staff, educational work, Sokol press) with the aim of determining its universal and contemporary value as an expert pedagogical discipline which is not just a pure technology of direct physical exercises (training), but it must be understood as a certain gnoseology and the axiology of physical education.

---

<sup>2</sup>Declaration on United Sokol Movement of the Serbis, Croats and Slovenes. Sokolski glasnik, 1919, p. 1.

## METHODS

The research used a historical method with heuristics as a procedure of collecting relevant historical material. Archival materials, professional publications, monographs, regulations, laws, (unpublished) doctoral dissertations, all referring to the period from 1863 to 1941 were used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Everything points out that the Sokol educational methodology was one of the most important and inseparable elements of the Sokol gymnastic system. Without it, everything else in the System would remain only in theoretical speculation, and through them it was implemented into a practical work so that all the tasks and goals of this system were fulfilled. Its basic foundations were built since the establishment of the first Sokol society in Prague, established by M. Tyrš, until 1941. During this period, it was promoted by numerous methodologists of Sokol physical exercise, including the South Slavs among which the most prominent were: Viktor Murnik, MD, Miroslav Ambrožić, František Hochman, Dragutin Šulce and Miroslav Vojinović, while the greatest contribution in methodical training of professional staff was the work done by M. Ambrožić with a series of texts titled: "The Sokol educational methodology" published in the newspaper "The Sokol Herald" from 1923 to 1931, which he later embedded into a book of the same name. There he presented his methodical attitudes that were sublimating all previous theoretical views of numerous methodologists and his practical experience, thus confirming their value.

In establishing the basis of the new Sokol gymnastic system, it incorporated some elements that would be its *diferentia specifica* in relation to the already existing systems of physical exercise. In the beginning, this was not the specific content of physical exercise, but why and for what purpose they were used and with which specific methodical apparatus.<sup>3</sup>The Sokol physical exercise achieved its purpose with other elements of the Sokol system, especially its ideology, methodology, professional staff and literature

The Sokol gymnastic system emphasized: "Physical, health and mental (moral) upbringing" as the goal of its actions, which indirectly led to patriotic feelings of love for its people and the state. The most important characteristics of the Sokol educational methodology were the principles on which the practical

---

<sup>3</sup>Mrvoš, N.: Pogledi i misli dr Miroslava Tirša. Ljubljana, 1933., p. 24

work was based – physical exercise resulting in the goal, by the previous realization of four basic tasks: hygienic, aesthetic, utilitarian and moral education. It was necessary to ask the following questions: 1. what we want and what means we shall use to achieve this; 2. which general principles we must adhere to; 3. which general principles must lead us; 4. what kind of educational effect we expect from our educational means; and 5. how to make educational resources as efficient as possible.

**Health and hygiene tasks** related to the continuous effort to maintain and improve health status. Having the personal direct experience of the effectiveness of systematic physical exercise on his own health, Tyrš was encouraged by the already established belief that the increase of physical strength improves physical and mental health.<sup>4</sup> It is reasonable to assume that due to his disrupted health, Tyrš paid special attention to the health of the individual, believing that good health gives a sense of power, will for work and satisfaction. All that is embedded in the human will to change the state in the direction of humanism, progress and a better future of the whole society because: “Nothing, not even the most glorious past, but only a healthy and working present, guarantees the future to the nations”<sup>5</sup>, and that only “healthy people are capable to defend themselves”.<sup>6</sup>

**The Sokol aesthetic education** had its starting point in the concept of aesthetics in Tyrš’s education – he was a teacher of aesthetics. He connected feelings for the beautiful with a feeling for the noble. Education should be implemented in correlation with “moral consciousness”.<sup>7</sup> In aesthetic sense, the Sokol education is achieved by: 1. practicing “harmoniously designed physical exercises in terms of their composition and performance” that reflected in their coherence, clarity, diversity, unity, harmony and perfection; 2. Exercising in and on spaces that satisfy aesthetic criteria in terms of shape, color, equipment and its arrangement; 3. Aesthetic shaping and training of the body of the athlete followed by the rules of body proportions.<sup>8</sup> This could be achieved only by systematically trained athletes with a strong will power. In addition to harmonious development, they also had a proper body posture; 4. Beautifully composed dance exercises, dance choreographies and gymnastic compositions; 5. The Sokol insignia and

---

<sup>4</sup>Bučar, F.: Povijest gimnastike, Sokolska knjižnica, sv. 9. Zagreb, 1908. p. 147

<sup>5</sup>Tyrš, M.: Naš zadatak, smer i cilj, Ljubljana, 1930. p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p. 20

<sup>7</sup>Ambrožić, M.: Sokolsko vaspitanje obzirom na lepo, Sokolski glasnik br. V-VI, 1923.p. 140

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p. 145

clothes – flags, badges, emblems, posters, graphic design of papers and books had an important role in aesthetic education.

**The utility task** of the Sokol educational methodology was to enable the man to exercise using his physical strength and skill in all circumstances.

**The task of moral education** was to become aware of personal freedom, freely expressed will and personal dignity in accordance with socially acceptable norms of behaviour, which implied respect, law, ethical principles, and specific rules for achieving the Sokol goals. Moral education included awareness of health preservation as the benefit of both family and the society. The Sokol morale implied that one's own progress in any sphere of life was realized by one's own forces and not at the expense of others; to be unselfish, to help others in distress and sacrifice for others without seeking benefits or glory,<sup>9</sup> to be honest, truthful, not to overestimate oneself or to underestimate others, not to waste their own national property and not to be lazy.

### **Principles of the Sokol educational methodology**

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Sokol gymnastic system were the principles applied in physical exercise<sup>10</sup> which contributed to its distinction in relation to all previous systems to the greatest extent. In the tasks and goals of the Sokol system of physical exercise, the basic principles of the Sokol methodology were based on the principles of versatility, diversity, democracy, perseverance, discipline, boldness and, as the most important one, the principle of individualization and grading.

### **Principle of versatility and diversity**

In applying this principle, it is impossible to assume the physical and spiritual indivisibility of man and the need for diverse physical exercises affecting all human physical, moral, and mental properties in a unique approach, which prevents the influence on the other by neglecting one's property. A versatile and diverse effect was ensured by the use of a variety of exercises covered by the Sokol "Form"<sup>11</sup>, thus making exercises more interesting. Due to the lack of the unilateral development of an individual, the Sokol movement was against monodisciplinarity, i.e. dealing only with one kind of exercising or sport.

---

<sup>9</sup>Ambrožič, M.: Metodika sokolskog vaspitanja, Ljubljana 1934,p. 49

<sup>10</sup>Mrvoš, N.: Pogledi i misli dr Miroslava Tyrša, Ljubljana, 1932,p. 24

<sup>11</sup>Ambrožič, M.: Metodika sokolskog vaspitanja, Ljubljana 1934,p. 108

**The principle of democracy** was implicitly imposed by the Sokol ideology. Tyrš emphasized democracy which implies fraternal relations as an essential assumption of group cohesion, which contributes to the socialization of the participant and learning about democratic relations on the wider plan (family, nation and all people in general). Democracy was reflected in the equality and equality of all actors of the Sokol movement, regardless of their overall diversity and regardless of their position in the Sokol hierarchy.

### **The principle of persistence and discipline**

Persistence and discipline were the preconditions of every success. Many talents did not show their ultimate limits due to lack of work that required greater effort. Tyrš encouraged them to endure with the words, "Just do not give up" and the moment will come, without your knowledge, "when all the troubles will be worth it, because you have gained that benefit for the rest of your life, that you have learned not to give up".<sup>12</sup> While working with a group, he imposed the need to maintain order and discipline, meaning the exercise was to be done in the order of appearance, respecting one's own and somebody else's time, and to do uninteresting exercises according to the coach's wish. Tyrš considered it "a conscious discipline" as a special prerequisite of a harmonious social community. "The discipline that a person imposes to himself enhances the heart and educates character; it makes us capable of self-sacrifice and endurance."<sup>13</sup> The discipline was taught by respecting and adhering to the rules.

### **The principle of individualization and grading**

The introduction of this principle into the Sokol educational methodology is the most obvious confirmation of Tyrš's appreciation and reliance on the natural laws and trends of humanists and philanthropists. This was reflected in respecting the individual diversity of athletes and their classification into categories according to: a) age (children from 6-12 years of age, 14-18 years of age and adults), gender, training level, characteristics of physical structure and psycho-physical abilities, as well as measuring an adequate workload with an exercise that should not be "overloaded, so that it could be done with serious will force".<sup>14</sup> The leader had the decisive role in measuring the right load, and he was asked about the abilities of individual athletes. The precondition for the leader to successfully apply the principle of individualization was his good knowledge about the system of Sokol physical exercises and socio-educational methods, the characteristics of age and gender, anatomy and physiology. He was expected to know that the physical load was greater: 1. if the volume of muscle mass was larger, 2. if the load was more intensive because of the length of exercises, number of repetitions, and the degree of the resistance,

---

<sup>12</sup>Tyrš, M.: Sokolska gesla, Ljubljana 1931. p. 9

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p. 32

<sup>14</sup>Tyrš, M.: Sokolska gesla, Ljubljana 1931. p. 15

3. if the exercise was more complicated or performed in an unnatural position, 4. if the functions of the respiratory or blood systems were endangered due to increased capacity.<sup>15</sup> He also knew that exercises practiced earlier were easier, because they were adopted and athletes knew there was no need to invest more effort to do them.<sup>16</sup>

Considering the anatomical and morphological characteristics in the individualization process, it should be taken into account that: a. a harmoniously built man exercises with more ease; b. a man of a higher weight of the trunk performs exercises on apparatus with more difficulty because of inertia; c. a man with heavy legs (with larger mass and length) performs exercises in which gravity should be overcome with more difficulty, d. a shorter man performs physical exercises more easily, except for running, throwing exercises and jumps, and e. undeveloped respiratory organs and bloodstream are a handicap for endurance efforts.<sup>17</sup>

In measuring the workload of individual exercises, the leader had to bear in mind that: 1. some exercises were easier because of inertia – kinetic energy, such as swinging, run-up and falling; 2. others were more difficult, such as: a. new, unpracticed ones, b. those that were not liked, c. the ones opposed to natural movement, d. those that required fast responses and decisions, e. when the athlete had a sense of fear and h. when they caused fatigue.

In individualized physical exercise, special attention was paid to its age-appropriateness. The Sokol educational methodology makes no distinction between male and female children and the age group up to 14 years of age, and uses the same physical exercises of the same moderate intensity in order to satisfy the natural need for movement.<sup>18</sup> Great efforts for children of this age are harmful, and since they usually invest all their efforts to their extreme limits, they must be vigorously prevented in doing them. Young people between 12 and 16 years of age are equal in their ability, and their abilities become different when they enter into puberty. Boys are more prone to violent activities – exercises of power and competition, while girls are prone to aesthetically shaped, rhythmic and dance activities. Physical exercise of young people of this age should avoid unilateral loads. Adult members are grouped by age, gender, fitness and ability. During the development phase, the exercises of large and unilateral load are not recommended. Higher loads are allowed after 26 years of age.

---

<sup>15</sup>Ambrožič, M.: Metodika sokolskog vaspitanja, Ljubljana, 1934. p. 115

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 117

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup>Ambrožič, M.: Metodika sokolskog vaspitanja, Ljubljana, 1934. p. 125

**The principle of grading exercises** was of particular importance in the process of training. It implied that “the beginning with easier and simpler exercises, and the gradual transition to more difficult and more complex ones”.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From this time distance and the position of the author of the textbook of methodology of physical exercises and someone with many years of practice in teaching the methodology of physical education, it can be concluded that the Sokol educational methodology was fundamentally scientifically founded. The tasks achieved through physical exercise in the Sokol movement were of great human and social significance. Miroslav Tyrš played a decisive role in their formulation and founding of the Sokol educational methodology. Without a doubt, the Sokol educational methodology, based on the broad and deep foundations of Tyrš's general and professional – philosophical education and personal experience in the practice of physical exercise, must become widely accepted, universal civilization value in itself and in the theoretical sense, and especially as an example of good methodical practice. The foundations of Tyrš's methodical construction were based on the sublimation of the most valuable theoretical knowledge and practical experiences of numerous philosophers, humanists, philanthropists, theoreticians, and pedagogues of gymnastics, experiences of the Swedish and German gymnastic system and his personal upgrade with his philosophical views and his own experience. Due to the fact that the Sokol gymnastic system was open to change by innovating new knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, medicine and other relevant sciences in the final phase of its formation (1941), it became an interdisciplinary scientific discipline in which the scientific knowledge from various fields had a synergistic effect, and thus became the permanent timeless value.

## REFERENCES

1. Амброжић, Мирослав: Методика соколског васпитања. Љубљана: 1934.
2. Брозовић, Анте.: Соко Краљевине Југославије. Београд: 1930.
3. Брозовић, Ант.: Соколски Зборник. Београд: 1934.
4. Бучар, Фрањо. "Повијест гимнастике", Соколска књижница, св. 9, 1908.;
5. Гангл, Енгелбер.: Тиршово Соколство, Љубљана: 1931.
6. Гангл, Енгелбер: О Соколској идеји. Љубљана, 1930.
7. Градојевић, Михајло. Београд, 1935.

---

<sup>19</sup>Ambrožić, M.: Sokolska vaspitna metodika Jugoslovenski Soko br. III 1924.p. 35.

8. Илић, Стефан: Историја физичке културе (Нови век и савремено доба). Београд, 1994.
9. Крагујевић, Г. " Соколски гимнастички систем као основа школског физичког васпитања у Краљевини Југославији". Докторска дисертација, Факултету физичке културе у Београду, 1994.
10. Крагујевић, Габријела: Теорија и методика физичког васпитања за учитеље и студенте Учитељског факултета. Београд: Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, 2005.
11. Мацановић, Хрвоје: Спорт – Соколство. Загреб, 1933.
12. Магазиновић, Мага: Телесна култура као васпитање и уметност. Београд, 1932.
13. Мрвош, Никола: Погледи и мисли др Мирослава Тирша. Љубљана, 1932.
14. Министарство војно и морнарице: Настава за гимнастику, Београд, 1920.
15. Основна правила и упутства за наставу телесног вежбања у средњим школама, Државна штампарија, Београд, 1911.
16. Полић, Бранко: Предњачка особеност, Соко бр. 7-8, Београд, 1933.
17. Сперњак, Бранко: Повест гимнастике и Соколства. Винковци: 1928.
18. Стојковић, Сретен: Физичко образовање и његове реформе. Београд: Државна штампарија, 1897.
19. Тирш, Мирослав: Наш задатак, смер и циљ. Љубљана, 1930.
20. Тирш, Мирослав: Соколска гесла Љубљана, 1931.

## МЕТОДИКА СОКОЛСКОГ ФИЗИЧКОГ ВЕЖБАЊА ЗА СВА ВРЕМЕНА

### САЖЕТАК

Под утицајем Француске буржоаске револуције и под утицајем слободно мислећих, образованих патриота, буде се многи европски народи револтирани стањем и положајем свог народа. Под снажним упливом демократизма, либерализма и национал романтизма, стварају се у Европи прве националне државе (Немачка, Француска, Италија), док се у национално депривираним ентитетима јављају национални прваци „револуционарног“ стремљења ка националној еманципацији од туђинске власти. Под датим друштвено историјским приликама у Чешкој се оснива гимнастичко друштво са основним задатком камуфлиране борбе за национални препород и еманципацију. Та борба изискивала је физичку снагу, здравље и морал народа чему је могло да допринесе физичко вежбање својим средствима и методама. Тим мишљењем су се руководили др Мирослав Тирш и његови блиски сарадници кад успостављају, развијају и шире соколски гимнастички систем, који од претензија ужег националног значаја, прераста у свесловенски соколски покрет са епилогом стварања једног универзалног хуманистичког

система физичког вежбања. Соколски гимнастички систем темељио се на демократским и либералним идеолошким основама, а сачињавали су га јединствени, конзистентни и кохерентни елементи: организације, идеологије, система физичких вежби, соколске васпитне методике, соколске посвете, кадрова и соколске штампе. Соколска васпитна методика била је један од најзначајнијих елемената соколског рада, која је могла своје задатке да извршава само у симбиози и синергији са соколском идеологијом, системом физичких вежби, соколским кадровима и штампом. Соколски гимнастички систем грађен је на научној основи и систематици који су свој извор имали у Тиршовим филозофским погледима и његовом непосредном личном искуству.

**Кључне речи:** Соко, соколски гимнастички систем, физичка вежба, идеологија, методика, просвета, здравље, морал.

## МЕТОДОЛОГИЈА ФИЗИЧЕСКИХ УПРАЖНЕНИЙ СОКОЛОВ НА ВСЕ ВРЕМЕНА

### АННОТАЦИЈА

Под влиянием французской буржуазной революции и свободомыслящих, образованных патриотов восстали многие европейские народы, которых волновали вопросы государства и положение нации. Под влиянием идей демократии, либерализма и национального романтизма были созданы первые национальные государства в Европе (Германия, Франция, Италия), в то же время в остальных государствах существовали национальные лидеры «революционного» движения, боровшиеся за национальную свободу от иностранной власти. Под влиянием социальных и исторических обстоятельств в Чешской республике было основано гимнастическое общество, главной задачей которого была завуалированная борьба за национальное возрождение и свободу. Возникшая необходимость в физически сильной, здоровой и духовно-нравственной нации требовала реализации системы физических упражнений, средств и методов. Это стало главным принципом для Мирослава Тырша и его близких соратников, которые основали, развили и распространили гимнастическую систему Соколов, трансформировав ее, исходя из высочайшей национальной значимости, до славянского движения Сокол и создания универсальной гуманистической системы физических упражнений. Гимнастическая система «Сокол» основывалась на фундаменте демократии и либерализма, состоящем из универсальных, согласованных и последовательных элементов: организация, идеология, система физических упражнений, социально-ориентированные методы обучения, сокольская самоотверженность, членство и сокольская пресса. Сокольская образовательная методология была одним из важнейших элементов деятельности, которая могла быть осуществлена только при условии симбиоза и взаимодействия идеологии Соколов, системы физических упражнений, ее членов и печатных материалов.

Гимнастическая система Соколов строилась на научной основе, методологии философских взглядов Тырша и его непосредственном личном опыте.

**Ключевые слова:** Соколы, сокольская гимнастическая система, физические упражнения, идеология, методология, обучение, здоровье, мораль

---

Received on 15.09.2017.

Accepted on 19.10.2017.