

ETSGA CREATION: reasons and progression

It is in 2001 that delegates from traditional games federations and confederations, but also from organisms of formation and universities decided to create ETSGA, a tool to the service of traditional games in Europe. This birth was the outcome of about fifteen years of common experiences, but also of a lot of reflections and hesitations.

After the effervescence of the 1970's, the beginning of the 1980's saw several meetings that gradually forged the conviction of the traditional sports & games main actors (TSG) that it was necessary to organize ourselves in order to be more visible and more legible. Through a cultural and democratic movement, traditional games entered in a phase of re-conquest of their identity while starting an exit of the unique thought represented by the sporting spectacle, essentially professional.

It is at the time of several European seminars, in Brittany, Germany, Denmark, that a strategy of rebirth was built with academics as Henning Eichberg, Jean Jacques Barreau or Jørn Møller, all members of IIAC, the International Institute of Body Anthropology. Other researchers, as Pierre Parlebas with the team of the CEMEA, and others again to whom I apologize in advance, worked on the theme of the popular games of tradition as instruments for education and socialization.

This emergence of an awareness of the diversity importance in Europe also came from international institutions. We saw the Council of Europe to co-organize several international meetings, as at Vila Real, Portugal, in 1988; Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1989, or at Louvain, Belgium, in 1990. UNESCO also showed a new approach, with in 1983 its Major Program for Education with 3 levels: Sport, Sport for All, and Traditional Games and Dances, then in 1986 the recommendation for "the protection and the development of the games, dances and traditional sports in the setting of the physical education and sport, as means to preserve the cultural heritage". There was also the meeting of Punta Del Este, Uruguay, in 1999 where was adopted a recommendation asking that every state organizes the "promotion and the preservation of the traditional games".

This new dynamism was going to result in several international gatherings, as the one of the Eurolympiade in Leeuwarden, Nederland, in 1985; those of Guarda, Portugal; San Sebastian and the Canary Islands, Spain; Abadszalok, Hungary, and also Valley of Aosta, Italy, etc. But it is especially the one of Carhaix, April 14-22, 1990, that was an initiating event. Organized by the IIAC, the FALSAB-Gouren and the FILC (A small international federation of traditional wrestling created in Cardiff, Wales, in 1985), with the help of the Council of Europe, it accumulated one week of seminary, another of traditional wrestling course, and a big European gathering of games. Eleven countries were represented by a thousand of players, and it was the opportunity to

send a motion (translated into eight languages) to all European parliamentarians¹.

This meeting had for objective to make a global analysis of the TSG situation in Europe, and also of perspectives that these practices could offer in terms of Education, Animation, Sporting activity linked to culture and tourism. This permitted the gathering of researchers and intellectuals committed in TSG organizations, and it is this marriage of different expertise's that assured its success, giving back confidence to all actors. Several of the future founding organizations of ETSGA were present: the Flemish confederation (today VLaS) and the university of Louvain with Erik de Vroede and Roland Renson; the FENT with Pierino Daudry, future founding president of FIGeST; the Popular Institute (Ildræthshøjskole) of Gerlev with Jørn Møller; the FILC with his founding secretary Guy Jaouen, also future founding president of the Confederation FALSAB².

This gathering of traditional games from Brittany was followed the same year by the one of Louvain, then by many other similar festivals in Belgium, France, Italy, and in numerous Spanish autonomous regions, often accompanied by symposia. Ireland lived a particular situation because traditional sports, organized by the GAA³, are in fact the most popular, taught in all schools of the country. Thus, in the years 1990's, a network was being created and spread itself, helping gradually to discover the local realities and the different existing organizations: the federations in the North of France, in Italy, the traditional skittles gathered in the French FFBSQ, etc., and especially the immense TSG reservoir in Spain.

It is this network and this immense potential of the Spanish regions that were going to act as a stimulus to the creation of ETSGA. After another seminar regrouping many TSG leaders and researchers during one week in July 1999 at Plouguemeau⁴, around the theme: "perspectives and orientations for a coherent politics to the European scale", the idea for the creation of a European organization was clearly put on the table. The organization of an European gathering in Plonéour Lanvern (Fr), then of another one in Santander (Sp) in 2000, the whole in continuity with the UNESCO declaration of Ponta Del Este (Uru), produced the birth of ETSGA at Lesneven (Fr), in parallel to a gathering with 68 games in demonstration, of which 28 different skittle games, and of thousands of spectators.

¹ This action succeeds in 1994 by a recommendation of the Parliament European to the Commission "asking to establish a specific program of promotion for the regional and traditional sports". After other motions in 2004, 2007 and 2011, a specific program to European TSG was adopted in 2013.

² The Confederation FALSAB was created in 1994 in order to welcome all federations and organizations willing to work for TSG.

³ Gaelic Athletic Association, traditional sports confederation in Ireland, also in charge of Irish music and Irish dancing, and theater in Irish language (Gaelic).

⁴ See the PDF book: « Les Jeux Traditionnels en Europe - Education, Culture et Société au XXI^e Siècle »