

History of Physical Culture in the German Democratic Republic, 1940-1980

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The German Democratic Republic presently is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary as a politically independent state. Over that time period, the subject of physical education has been an important one in the process of crystallization of a state philosophy and the shaping of a political-economic unity. From the very beginning, the party and government leadership was concerned with a near total integration of this educational tool, termed physical culture, into the entire educational institution. It served as a catalyst for the furtherance of a political ideology of state capitalism thus far unexperienced by the population. It further was considered as a basis for the realm of leisure and recreation pursuits, militaristic preparation, regeneration of the physical and mental capacities of each individual for the establishment and progressive continuation of an economically and politically collective unity, and most decisively for the national and international sports field.

International political tensions, e.g. the Cold War period, and the drive for unification by the conservative government of the Federal Republic of Germany, spurred their interest for a sound physical culture program that became intertwined with other educational subjects. The need to create an "East-German identity" for successful competition on the international economic market fostered the manifestation of a structure of physical culture, serving the political-economic strive for recognition and prestige.

This paper will provide a historical presentation of these thirty years of physical education and physical culture programs in the German Democratic Republic. Simultaneously, the author will attempt to analyse the influences of national and international political and economic developments, as well as the state philosophy in order to provide an understanding of the present state of physical culture in that particular society.