

# A View of the Sport Organizational Structure: The French Gymnastics Federation 探討法國體操總會的結構組織

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## Abstract

This article presents a descriptive overview of the organization of the sport of gymnastics, specifically artistic gymnastics, in France. French artistic gymnastics since the last decade has been obtaining stable and better results at competitions in the international arena. The Junior European Championship title in the late 90s and recent medals in the last Olympic Games, make it interesting to study the organization of this sport in France and the changes it has gone through. This research was done with the permission of the French Gymnastics Federation that facilitated access to the documents and allowed interviews of its members. The characteristic of this research is qualitative in which document analysis, interviews, personal communications and observations made it possible to gather the information (e.g., Biklen & Bogdan, 1992; Burgess, 1982; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The article is divided into three parts, it starts with a general view of the sport in France. Later it continues with an introduction to the French Gymnastics Federation as the national body of this sport, its membership, general and technical structure. Later it presents the organization of four groups of members: administrators, coaches, judges and gymnasts. It concludes with a section in which interviewees share their views about the key elements and obstacles for French artistic gymnastics performance.

## 摘要

本文旨在探討法國體操總會的結構組織，透過文獻、面談及觀察等質性分析法了解其結構組織的特點，並從行政者、教練、裁判員和運動員的多層面去尋找影響體操發展的要素及障礙。

## Introduction

This article is presented as a descriptive review of the artistic gymnastics organization, specifically looking towards elite gymnastics and its structure. To obtain information about internal structures of national bodies and to have access to their members is not an easy task, that is why it is believed that this information can be of value to other people who will be interested in studying the development of sport from another perspective. This research is qualitative in nature and it was based on document analysis,

semi-structured interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted with members of the organization involved in elite gymnastics, specifically: administrators, coaches, judges and gymnasts. The voices of the interviewees are introduced, in terms of their perspective of the key elements and obstacles that have faced the elite level of artistic gymnastics in France.

The organization and structure of sport in some countries have been studied from the macro level in which there is a general view of the national sport organization. There are many

studies related to training systems, coaches education schemes, technical program analysis and technical divisions in specific countries. Not very often general information about how some sports, especially non professional, are organised and administered is found in the literature. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the particular documents of the national governing bodies cannot be easily found in data bases. The documents of any national sport body are not easy to get access to, without specific consent. Another reason is that being bodies that are heavily based on volunteers, there is not easy access to archives or any basic research addressing the way the sport is managed. It has been easier to find information about training systems in gymnastics or coaches education, but very rarely is information found about the internal structure of particular Federations. This is an area worthy of exploring as there are many causes that can influence the performance of a sport.

France has a distinctive original mixed system in sport combined between state intervention and private participation. The Minister of Youth and Sport, created in 1965, is in charge of the development of sport. It has a central administration, decentralised and external departments; additionally, the inspections branches report directly to the minister. The Federations are under the supervision of the Minister of Sports that provide them with funding and personnel to develop the sport (Camy, 1996). The development of sport activities and elite sport is the responsibility of the State and the Federations with the support of the territorial communities, corporate sector and social institutions. The central administration of the Ministry of Youth and Sport is comprised of: Directorate for sport; Directorate for youth and associations; Directorate for general administration and Directorate for training schemes. (Remans & Delforge, 1997). State intervention in French sport is omnipresent at all levels. The Minister of Youth and Sport, through the National Sport Directorate and the National Technical Directors is present in the organized bodies that are funded by the government. This combination has given it impetus and unique character.

The National Sports Committee founded in 1908 and the French Olympic Committee in 1911 merged in 1972 to create the French National Olympics and Sport Committee (CNOSF), (Michel, 1996). It is charged with coordinating sport federations and contributes to the preparation of French elite athletes; it is affiliated to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Most of the sport facilities are the property of the local authority. Town councils, departments, and regions get funding from the state. Sport is funded by the National Fund for the development of sport created in 1979; sport lottery (Loto sportif)

which since 1985 has given 80% to mass sport and 20% to high level sport (Malenfant, 1989). In general it can be said that the funding comes from government budget, private companies, public sector, advertising and sponsors. The sport law (1945) has gone through several modifications, especially after the 70s, in order to update it according to the needs and trends of sport, and society (Michel, 1996, 1998).

The National Institute of Sport and Physical Education (INSEP) was created in 1975 by the merger of the National Institute of Sport (1946) and the Teachers College of Physical Education (1933). It provides: education, training, medical attention for high level athletes and continuing education for coaches, administrators (Douyin, 1988) through four main departments: Top Level Sport; Training Department for Athletes; Medical Department and Research Department. There are four National Institutes. Another structure is the Regional Centre for Public and Sport Education (CREPS) that together with the National Institutes are devoted to training, research and education; they have financial autonomy and their directors are appointed by the Minister of Sport (Michel, 1996).

To summarize the situation of sport in France and of its organization, we are certainly in possession of an original model which gives the public authorities, States and Communities an exceptionally important role (Camy, 1996, p. 57).

## French Gymnastics Federation

### General Information

The Fédération Française de Gymnastique (FFG) - French Gymnastics Federation was created in 1942 (Fédération Française de Gymnastique [FFG], 1997). However, its foundation goes back to the 19th century in 1873 when its first president M. Eugène Páz baptised it "Union des Sociétés de Gymnastique de France" (USGF), and it grouped just male clubs. Later in 1912 "l'Union Française des Sociétés de Gymnastique Féminine" was created; in 1916 the "Federation de Sociétés Féminines Française et des Sports"; and late in the same year the "Federation FÈminine Française de Gymnastique et d'Education Physique" (FFFGE) were created. In 1942 the USGF and the FFFGE fused to create the Fédération Française de Gymnastique. Jacques Rey is the 37th president of the Federation (Barrull, 1984; FFG, 2000a, 2000b).

The Federation was formed by sport groups, individuals (accepted by the Board), donors/sponsors and benefactors. The Federation cannot deny affiliation to a Sport Group constituted to practise the discipline(s) unless its organization and objectives are against the FFG's statutes.

The Federation, through the Associations, has as an objective to provide young practitioners the opportunity to practise physical activities and develop themselves physically and morally. The FFG sets the Regional and Departmental Commissions, publishes the periodical bulletin, supervises the organization of all the activities related to gymnastics, as well as courses addressed to the different disciplines and members of the organization.

The resources of the Federation come from: annual fees, donations, merchandise, agreements, retributions, subventions from the state, territorial collectivity, and public establishments, and any other means allowed by law. It can be summarised in three big groups: fees paid by the members, the sponsors and the French government. By 1999 the FFG employed 43 people and the Ministry of Youth and Sport had 47 staff members at the service of the Federation (interview with one French Administrator).

The FFG includes Olympic disciplines and non Olympic disciplines. Since March 1999, trampoline and sport acrobatics became members of the FFG (FFG, 2000a). It has 92 paid technical staff for elite sport (FFG & Commission Nationale du Sport de Haut Niveau, 1999).

The internal regulation/statute is prepared by the Directive Committee and passed by the General Assembly. It has to be submitted to the Minister in charge of Sport and the Internal Minister, or their representatives. The administrative documents and accountability have to be presented to the Minister in charge of Sport as well as the Internal Minister or any of its officials. The annual financial report has to be sent to this Minister as well. They can visit the establishment set by the Federation and check the reports. By 1998 the FFG was in the 10th place of the National Federations that received support from the Minister of Youth and Sport (FFG, 1998a).

## Membership

All the groups and individual members have to pay the annual fee established by the National Assembly. Every member must belong to an Association. The members are gymnasts, judges, coaches and administrative members. The managers can be classified in two categories: Administrative or Technical, but they cannot have both qualifications at the same level. The Federation is formed by 29 Regional Committees, and 97 Departmental Committees (FFG, 1997). The FFG has more than 200,246 members, divided into 1,598 clubs (FFG, 2000b).

The Government/State Technical Staff must have individual memberships (license) unless the regional general assembly authorizes

that they can be included in the membership of the club. The individual members of the Federation are those who do not belong to any association or establishment affiliated with the Federation. They have to submit the requisites to be a member through the Regional Committee closer to where they live, which will forward it to the Federation.

An honorary membership can be given to a person for their exceptional contribution to gymnastics or after being in the same position for two consecutive cycles. It is awarded by the Directive Committee after being proposed by the Board and approved by the General Assembly. "L'Officiel du Gymnaste" is the official bulletin of the Federation and is freely distributed to all members of the Federation, sponsors, benefactors, clubs, departmental, regional and interregional Committees and National Sports Centres (FFG, 1997).

The members of FFG can participate in the different courses for coaches, judges and a variety of gymnastic disciplines such as: Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG), Men's Artistic Gymnastics (MAG), Rhythmic Sport Gymnastics (RSG), General Gymnastics (GFL), Sports Aerobics, at different levels. The FFG has four big programs: General Gymnastics, Gymnastics - Shape - Recreation, Performance, Elite Level (FFG, 1998b).

## Structure

There is an Administrative Council that is the Directive Committee and a small committee that is the Bureau. The Directive Committee is formed by 34 members and the Board by 11 members. The juridical structures recognised by the Federation are the Regional Committee and Departmental Committee. So it is in this order: Department - Region - Federation. At a lower level is the club and there is another intermediate structure between Region and Federation that is called inter-region; they re-group 4-5 regions in order to form the teams for training and trials for the competitions, so that not everybody goes to the National level. There are five big regions that are called zones but these are not juridical structures, but instead are structures of concentration for the Federation.

The Federation has regional, departmental bodies and clubs. There are about 3 to 4 departments per region. The clubs can form a Regional or Departmental Body if they are all members of the Federation. With prior acceptance from the Ministry in charge of sport and notification to the National Olympic Committee, the Federation can also have national bodies to manage other discipline(s) attached to the Federation. All these bodies must have a Board or an Administrative Council according to the

rules of the Federation. The regulations/statutes approved by the Minister in charge of Sport and the National Olympic Committee establish the conditions for all the members of the Federation (FFG, 1997).

For administrative purposes and according to the legislation, France is divided into sport regions. In each sport region there is a Regional Committee. This acts as the liaison between the Federation and affiliated Associations of the region. In each department, there is a Departmental Committee, which is the liaison between the Federation and the Associations of the department. They can also be organised into Interregional Groups, and the President could provide a delegate. The president could listen to the opinion from the regional presidents affected and these can also consult their departmental presidents.

The Regional Committee groups the departmental committees from its region on technical and administrative matters. It is the body that assures the liaison between the Federation and the departmental commissions. The members are elected by the clubs affiliated (votes vary according to the number of their members) for a period of four years. Their statutes have to be submitted to the French Federation and the other official bodies. The Regional Committee submits to the Federation the membership and affiliation fees.

The Departmental Committee groups (technical and administrative matters) the clubs from the department. It is the representative body of the Regional Committee and it organises, manages and develops the gymnastics practice according to the statutes and regulations established by the Regional Committee. The members are elected by the Associations, from its department, for a period of four years.

A club, constituted according to the 1901 law, in order to be affiliated to the Federation, has to do it through its Departmental Committee which will forward it to the Regional Committee and this one will forward it, later on, to the Federation. Any communication sent by the club to the Federation, has also to be sent to the Departmental and Regional Committee (FFG, 1997).

The General Assembly is formed by the groups affiliated with the Federation. The representative has to be elected from the Departmental Assembly and must be a member of the Federation. The vote is determined by the number of members (affiliated) that the Department has. The scale is: 1 vote for 300 members or a fraction of it (FFG, 1997). The General Assembly defines, guides and controls the policies of the Federation. They also receive and approve the financial and ethical reports. The decisions and financial report are published in the official bulletin.

The Honorary Presidents, Federal Doctor (not member of the Directive Committee), Administrative Director and National Technical Director have a consultative voice in the Board Meetings. The Directive Committee appoints Commissions that are established by the Ministry in charge of Sport. At least one member of the Committee has to be in each of the Commissions. The commissions are formed by elected members, paid staff and members paid by the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Every Commission is chaired by the President of the federation or a representative.

The National Medical Commission is formed by six members: The Federal Doctor who is the delegate of the Federal President; one member of the Directive Committee; a Doctor; the Federal Kinesiotherapeutic Masseur; General Technical Delegate; and the National Technical Director or his/her Representative. They coordinate all the medical and paramedical aspects of the federation. The National Legal and Ethical Commission is formed by six members: Two members of the Directive Committee of the Federation; four members of the Federation who are not members of the Directive Committee and are not bound by contract. They are appointed for four years by decision of the Directive Committee. They are also in charge of the elaboration of the regulations and disciplinary affairs, as well as responsible for their application by all its members. They also propose the annual list of the receivers of federal distinctions (FFG, 1997).

The Disciplinary bodies of the Federation are divided into three levels. Bodies in First Instance: Disciplinary body of the Club; Departmental Committee; Regional Committee; Federation (Federal Disciplinary Commission). Body of First Appeal: Regional disciplinary body. Body of Appeal: Federal Body of Appeal which is the National Legal and Ethical Commission. Each of the bodies is formed by six members and the majority cannot have a relationship with the Directive Committee.

The Directive Committee appoints a Commission in charge of representing the young, under 26 years of age. The National Commission of Younger than 26 years old is formed by eight members: President of the Federation or representative; Vice President in charge of Federal practice; Federal doctor or representative; Representative of the youth; four young gymnasts (one per discipline). They are consulted at least once a year about organization of competition, modification or creation of programs and any other matters of their concern. Since 1999 this commission was enlarged to 11 members in order to include more representatives of gymnasts of the new disciplines that the Federation has now embraced, so in total there are seven young gymnasts, one per discipline: MAG, WAG, RG, Trampoline, Sport Acrobatics, Sport Aerobics, and General Gymnastics (FFG, 1999c).

## Technical Organization

The National Technical Directive Structure comprises the National Technical Director, national coaches and technical counselors that work at the disposition of the Federation; they are all staff members of the French government. The National Sport Directive is an operational body of FFG responsible for the management of the sport policies at the national level. It is formed by 19 members: Federal President or representative; Federal Doctor; National Technical Director or representative; 11 Technical Members in charge (proposed by the National Technical Director); five representatives from the Federal Technical (elected by the General Assembly). In 1999 some changes were made, principally the National Sport Directive was increased to 24 members. The modifications were the following: an increase to 13 technical members by proposition of the National Technical Director; and an increase to eight elected Federal Technical members (by the General Assembly). At the Directive Committee the technical representation is assured by the compulsory position of a Federal Technical member per discipline (eight disciplines) plus a Federal Technical member elected from the judges' sector (FFG, 1999c).

In each region, as well as in each department, there is a technical committee per discipline. Each technical committee is responsible for the organization and development of technical activities. The President of the Regional Committee must be informed of every activity by the President of the Departmental Committee.

There are structures that have been established to support the development of elite sport. The Federation and the Ministry of Youth and Sport agree to develop the National Centres for Elite Sport (Pôles) and Hopes (Pôles Espoir). They have their own statutes and regulations that must be abided by. Regional Committees can also advise the Federation of their willingness to open a Regional Centre. The Federation will accept this under the condition that it is with the purpose of enhancing gymnastic training and that the socio-professional development of the gymnast is included. All the centres have to follow the directives set by the National Sport Direction. The FFG has, for the development of elite artistic gymnastics, nine National Centres and 14 Pôles Espoirs - Young talents (see Table 1). There are three different structures that work in conjunction towards achieving high level performance: The club works as a detection centre, the "Pôles Espoir" as a specialised continuous training for young talents and the Pôle France is the place to get perfection in performance and results at high level (FFG & Commission Nationale du Sport de Haut Niveau, 1999).

## Members of the Organization

### Administrators

The FFG is administered by a Directive Committee of 34 members in which there must be at least: one doctor; one legal judge; a young person less than 26 years old; a Technical Federal representative per discipline (seven in total); a Technical Federal representative of the judges (none of them could be State Staff); a graduate sport pedagogue. The Feminine and Corporate representation should also be in the Committee. The high level active athletes: one woman and one man are also members of the 34 members Directive Committee. Until 1998, it used to consist of 30 members but it was increased to 34 in 1999. The Committee constitution follows some of the legal laws of the country (FFG, 1997, 1999c). The Bureau is formed by: the president; seven vice-presidents, a federal secretary; a treasurer and a general technical delegate. Six members, including the president, must be present in order to have a valid meeting. The Directive Committee meets three times a year and the board meets any time that is necessary (*ibid.*), the National Technical Director has a consultative voice.

The managers can be classified into two categories: Administrative or Technical but in no way can they have the two classifications at the same level of elected position in the Gymnastics organization. The requisites to be a board member refer to French citizenship, having no record related to severe sport sanctions; no legal problems; and membership of the FFG. They are elected for a four-year period and can be re-elected. The president cannot be an administrative delegate, general director or manager of any club with affiliation to the FFG.

The Directive Committee is elected by the General Assembly formed by the presidents of the Department. The voting rights vary according to the number of members per department. The members of the Committee and individual members can attend the Assembly with a consultative voice; the staff of the Federation can also be present given previous authorization from the President. From the election of the Directive Committee, the GA elects the President. Later, the Directive Committee elects among them the Board (Bureau) members.

The networks are those established by the different compulsory National Commissions established by the Minister of Youth and Sport. The National Sport Direction is an operational body that works with the sport policies and it is formed by members of the Directive Committee; State technical Staff; Technical members elected by the Assembly and the National Technical Director.

## Coaches

In order to become a coach, the candidate must be accredited and be a member of the FFG. To participate in the courses it is necessary to: Be a member; "Gym technic" subscriber; have a certificate of the previous level; have the right to register. Coaches must register and pay a fee once a year to get their card membership (FFG, 1998b).

The French Gymnastique Federation has been recognised since 1993 as a body for coaches training education (FFG, 1999c). According to the education scheme there are three levels of coaching (see Figure 1), some of the conditions are: Only one qualification in a year; From the Federal monitor level the education is by module; A candidate can keep the qualification of a module for 4 years; At the Initiator level the minimum age is 16; At the Federal monitor level the minimum age is 17; Federal Coach level, minimum age is 18. There is a Training-Education department (dèpartment formation) at the National Sport Direction that is in charge of the coordination of basic courses and updating for the coaches, judges and administrators. There are 3 ways to get the "Brevet of artistic Gymnastics Sport Educator" BEESAG: Federal affiliation; Professional affiliation; University affiliation (see Figure 2).

Technical representation at the National Sport Direction is assured by the 8 Federal technical members and at the Directive Committee by the compulsory position of a Federal Technical member per discipline (seven disciplines) plus a federal technical member elected from the judge sector (FFG, 1999c). The National Technical Director is on the staff of the Minister of Youth and Sport and is assigned to the Federation (FFG, 1998b); the director has at his/her disposition State Technical Staff and represents coaches, judges and assistants at the Federation (FFG, 1997).

## Judges

Anyone who completes the courses (see Figure 3) established by the FFG can become a judge, one requisite is to be 15 years of age. Judges must pay an annual registration fee. Judges have to attend the competitions and have a book to record the competition. The education scheme comprises five levels, including the international level. There are no compulsory updating except for the International judges who have an annual meeting (FFG, 1998b).

The judges receive a small economic contribution for judging, but all the expenses are covered, this information was obtained from the interviews. For small competitions the club pays their

expenses; most of the judges are attached to a club. Agreement between presidents of clubs is necessary if the judge is going to participate with another club. If the judge does not attend a competition in which he/she was required, and does not provide on time a justification, then the judge can be fined or the team (if a club) is not allowed to participate (*ibid.*).

The network is via the National Judges coordinators; there are two, one for international and the other for national judges. For National finals competitions judges are chosen by the National Sport Direction, Judges Coordinator. (FFG, 1998b). At the Directive Committee there is one place for a judges' representative.

## Gymnasts

The gymnasts have to pay an annual fee for registration. There are two streams in France: The Federal level (general participants) and the High Level (talents or Elite). In the Federal level there are six categories given by age criteria (Poussin, Benjamin, Minime, Cadet, Junior, Senior) and in the High level four divisions (Formation - development, Espoir, Junior and Senior) given by age and technical criteria (M. Boutard, personal communication, February 2000). Permanence in the High levels categories varies and has to be renewed: Elite category can last for two years; Senior or Junior. The category 'Reconversion' is for those who had previously been in the Elite category or have been for four years in Senior, and no longer fulfill the requisites to be included in those categories. The membership has to be renewed every year and it is for a maximum of five years in this category (FFG, 1998b).

The "POLES" or National centres for elite athletes (High level) are classified into two categories: The POLES for Hopes: they group gymnasts in order to improve their technical level in order to become later on member of POLES France; the recruitment is in zones. The POLES France: it groups the members of the National Team or Junior team. The recruitment is national. The POLES have an annual evaluation. One is done by the Youth and Sport Regional director, with the directors of C.R.E.P.S. (Regional centers for Physical Education and Sport), directors of national schools and the I.N.S.E.P. (National Institute of Sport and Physical Education) director. There is also an evaluation by the National Technical Director who can make decisions about the centres including opening new ones, closing down if necessary, also grading centres on their results. The Technical Director has to be in permanent contact with the Sport and Youth Regional Directors. The gymnasts must have a career plan which has to look at the possibility of including the gymnast in a gymnastic POLE closer to their home. This will allow

a better adaptation because it addresses the issues of preserving family contact and reducing transportation expenses. It also validates the technical, psychological and intellectual aspects; provides a relationship with the association of her/his origin; and valorises the regional and departmental bodies (FFG, 1998b).

The high level gymnasts in order to participate in competitions must have a Medical certificate of the type "performance"; it must be validated every year. The FFG has as a requisite, a compulsory annual medical certificate according to specific parameters, that the gymnasts must fulfill; for the gymnasts who are not involved in high performance it is type "C" (FFG, 1998b).

The network is through the National Technical Director; there are representatives on the Directive Committee; and on the Commission of Younger than 26. The gymnasts are classified according to results in international and national competitions. All the gymnasts that have not qualified to High level due to the results of the previous year, must go through a qualifying phase organised according to the national plan.

## Obstacles and Key Elements

In late 1999 eight members of the FFG were interviewed; they belonged to four different groups: two coaches, two administrators, two gymnasts and two judges. Most of the interviews took place during the 1999 Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, all the interviewees were involved with elite artistic gymnastics. The semi-structured interviews were performed after a number of the research documents were received and codified, so the interviews were an excellent chance to confirm the information obtained and to look for more existing documents. The interviewees were asked, what in their opinion have been the key elements of the French gymnastics success. Later they were asked about the obstacles that have prevented them achieving better performance internationally. Their answers are categorised in Table 2 using the same terminology they used.

In the interviewees' answers there is evidence of several variables such as governmental support, individual work, team work, and organizational aspects. Eight different variables that have contributed to its success in gymnastics were mentioned (Table 2). These variables could all be summarised by the words organization and planning. In this respect one administrator commented "after 15 years not just gymnastics but sport in general has got more support from the government. They have made elite sport a good structure. This has been the combination of the government (Ministry of Youth and Sport) and the Federation".

The French interviewees in general were unanimous in identifying the importance of organization and structure. They pointed out that their mixed system and cooperation between State and Federation "has provided the conditions to work in better conditions. So with an organization that is well structured and precise then good results are possible" (judge). The interviewees expressed the importance of management and regulations without being asked directly about this aspect.

In France, sport law has been modified on several occasions in order to fit the demands of high level sport (Michel, 1996, 1998); there is a commitment from the government to support this level of sport, for instance by: the creation of a National Committee for top level sport, the compulsory requirement to have the appropriate accreditation to coach and teach, and the rules for the affiliation of athletes to the State Health Insurance Plan (ibid.). Malenfant (1989) also emphasised the fact that a considerable amount of sport clubs have increased the number of sport participants, that facilities are the property of the local authorities, and the growth of state intervention has helped French sport. The benefits of the particular mixed system in France are also acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Camy, 1996; Michel, 1996; Remans & Delforge, 1997).

In terms of the obstacles that have prevented them achieving better performance it is interesting to mention that some interviewees indicated that they had none because they were satisfied with the conditions they had to work in, e.g., I don't think we have any. The results in competitions could be high or slow, it depends on the number of teams" (gymnast). Later the same interviewee will refer to the key elements and said that they had good conditions to work in, "the gymnastics structure, the French sport system, the Federation, coaches. We have good structures, good coaches, good elements" (gymnast).

The interviewees did not indicate any problem related to the structure or management but rather to the life style, education and the demanding characteristics of this sport. In relation to the culture an interviewee commented: "in France, it is not because I'm French, but we like the easy life, not to work too hard. Maybe that's an explanation of why we do not do better" (coach). On the other hand, the interviewees also mentioned the demanding characteristics of the sport and the fact that there are many other leisure sport and recreational activities that young children can do, e.g.,

*"Living standard is very good, people live well and comfortable. Gymnastics is a very demanding sport and we have a lot of sports that are for recreation and pleasure, so it is difficult to keep a gymnast in gymnastics"*

while there are all those opportunities outside that are easier ones. There are many people who like to watch gymnastics" (judge).

Another interesting element that was mentioned was the difficulty of combining education (school system) and the demanding characteristic of this sport that includes long hours of practise in the gym in order to achieve high performance at a young age, e.g.,

"Paradoxically in France ... the education system makes it too hard to practise gymnastics at high level and combine it with studies, it is also part of the mentality of the society in which studies are extremely important ... It is too difficult to follow the education system and to practise gymnastics at high level, the gymnasts who remain in gymnastics is for the love and passion they have towards gymnastics" (coach).

It is interesting to indicate though, that the problem of combining education and training is not only faced by French elite gymnastics, but also by many other nationalities as well (e.g., Lòpez de D'Amico & O'Brien, 2000). This is an element that has to be considered by the international body of this sport. Gymnastics can lose many of its practitioners at elite level, who may choose another sport that allows them to study and train under less stressing conditions.

## Conclusion

Sport in France is a mixed system; the FFG is a private organization and has the support of the government (Ministry of Youth and Sport). Due to this characteristic, they receive economic support to organise and develop the activity and also they have at their service staff that are paid by the government to work in gymnastics. The FFG also has had the sponsorship of France Telecom for about 10 years. All this combined has allowed them to build their high performance structure in which the coaches are paid and they can gather the best gymnasts. The training centres are also controlled by the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

France has been affiliated to the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) since 1881. Its first participation in the Olympic Games was in 1900 and in the World Championships in 1903 (Barrull, 1984). According to Sport Law in France, elite sport is a source of enrichment and human progress; it plays an important role in the socio-cultural national level (Ministere de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 1984).

The interviewees were very positive about the gymnastics administration and management. It is interesting to mention that in a comparative research about organization and regulations in six national gymnastics federations, the French interviewees' perspectives towards their organization was the most positive one (Lòpez de D'Amico, 2000). Perhaps, the fact that there is participation of different members of the community (e.g., coaches, judges, gymnasts and administrators) in the decision making area makes them feel more included in the organization. On the other hand, the combination of government support, private sector and the combined management in the organization is an element indicated by all the interviewees as the key element for French gymnastics success. The most important element for the author to add in this section is that in general there was a feeling of understanding and support among the members of the organization, this was perceived during the interviews and in observations of the team in three international events. It is very important that they all feel they are working together towards the same goal in a sport that, in the international standards, is very hard to master and demands so much from its followers, specially gymnasts and coaches!

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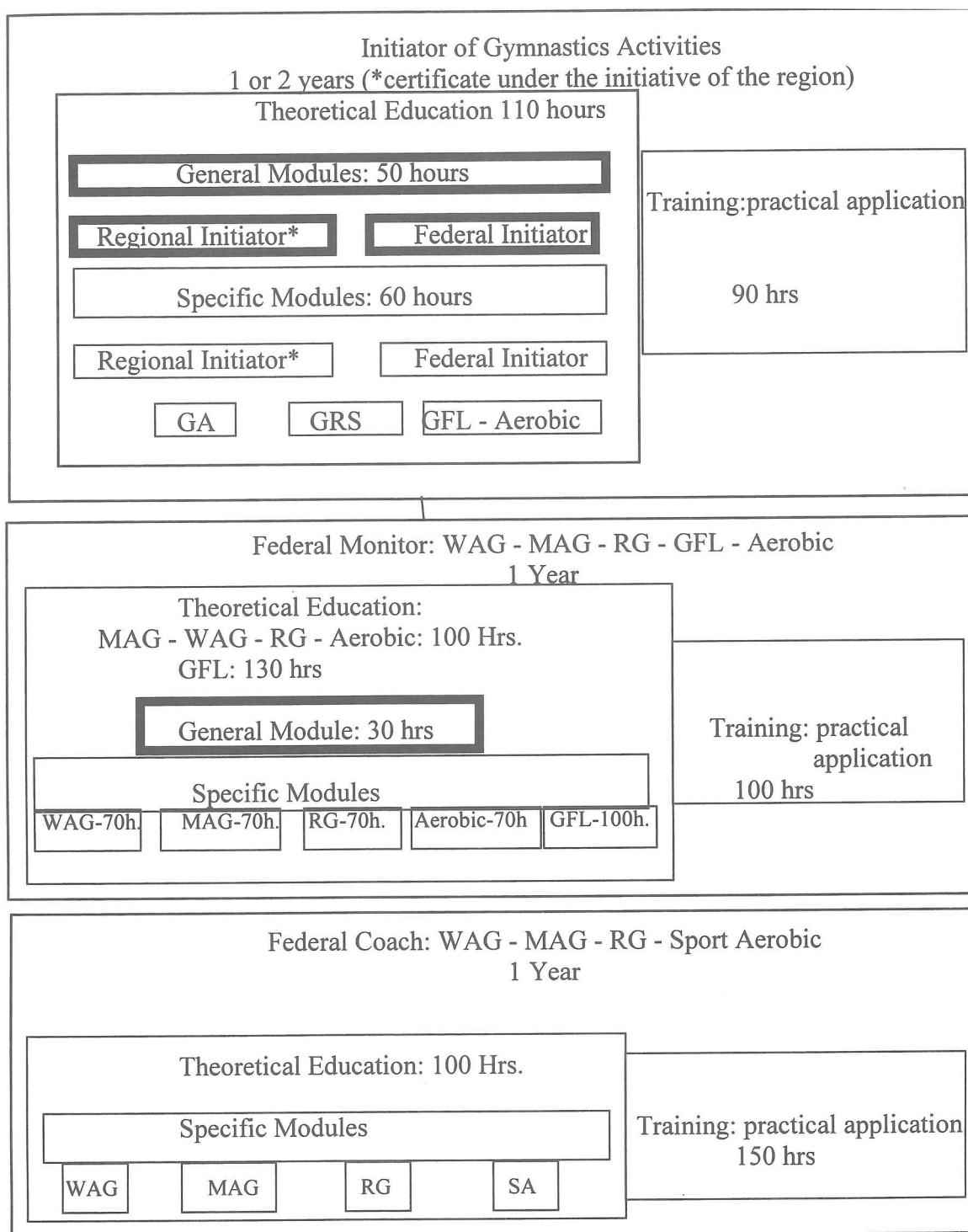


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Figure 1. French Federal Coaches Education Scheme.



Source: Fédération Française de Gymnastique, 1999a, p. 12

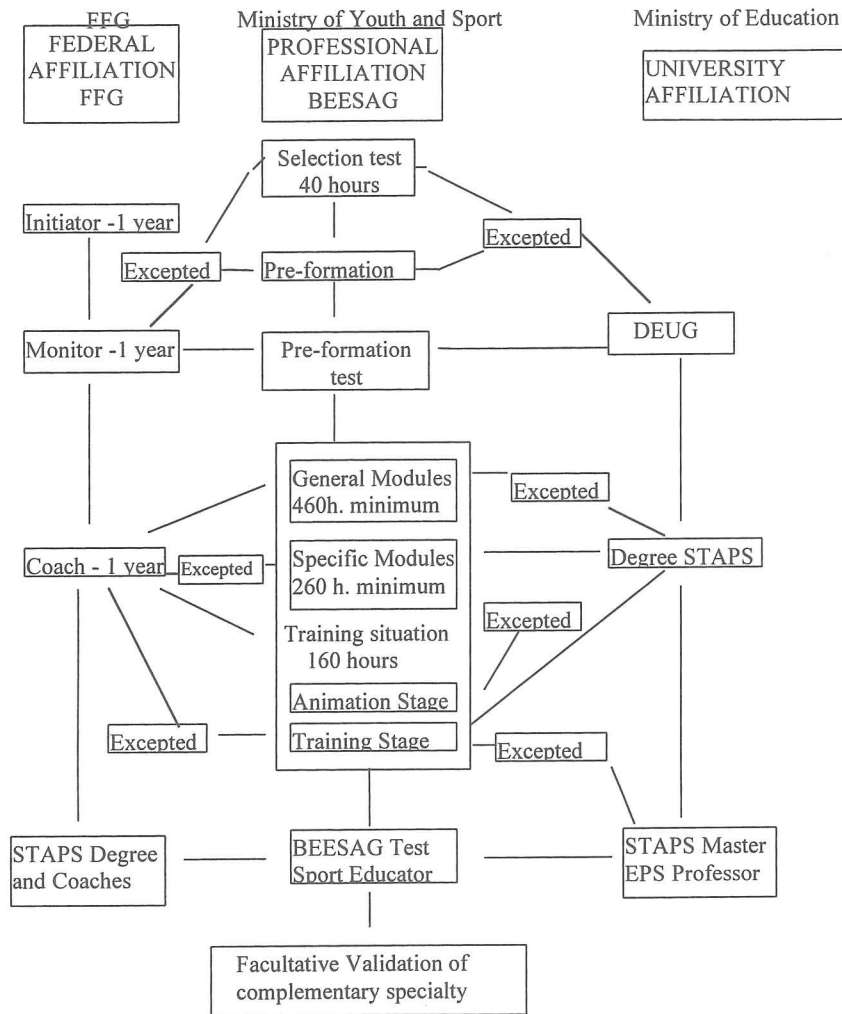
MAG: Gimnasia artística femenina

WAG: Gimnasia artística femenina

RG: Rhythmic Gymnastics

GFL: Gymnastics, form and leisure

**Figure 2. French Structure Showing the Different Ways to Get the “Brevet of Artistic Gymnastics Sport Educator” (BESSAG : Brevet d’Etat Educator Sportif en Gymnastique Artistique).**



Note:  
 DEUG: Diplome d’enseignement Universitaire général  
 STAPS: Sciences et Techniques des Activités Sportives  
 Source: FFG, 1998b, pp. 42; 1999b, p. 10

**Figure 3. France-Judges.**

COURSES	TEST	LEVEL
Department and Region (10h)	Regions	Level 1 2 judging compulsory
Regions (10h)	Regions	Level 2 2 judging compulsory
Zones (10 h)	Regions	Level 3 2 judging compulsory
Zones (10)	National	Level 4

Source: FFG, 1998b, p. 39

Table 1. National Training Centres in France.

Structures (Centres)	France Pôles (PF)	France Pôles Espoir (PE)	Observations
Cycle 92 - 99	9	14	For: MAG - WAG - Trampoline and acrobatics sports (TAS)
New 99 - 2004	1	8	MAG: 1 WAG: 2 RG: 1 Sport Aerobic (SA): 1 Mix: 3
Total	10	22	MAG: 2 PF + 7 PE WAG: 2 PF + 5 PE RG: 2 PF + 4 PE TAS: 2 PF + 2 PE MAG/WAG: 1 PF WAG/RG: 1 PE Mix: 2 PE

MAG: Men's Artistic Gymnastics

WAG: Women's Artistic Gymnastics

RS: Rhythmic Gymnastics

TAS: Trampoline & Sports Aerobics

Source: Fédération Française de Gymnastique & Commission Nationale du Sport de Haut Niveau, 1999, p. 14.

Table 2. Key Elements and Obstacles That Have Affected the Performance of Artistic Gymnastics in France.

Key Elements		Obstacles	
1) FFG organization	100%	1) French life style	50%
2) Mixed system (private/government)	75%	2) Education	50%
3) Sponsor (FT)	37.5%	3) Individualism	25%
4) Professional coaches	37.5%	4) None	37.5%
5) Combination: study / training	25%		
6) Communication	25%		
7) Foreign coaches	25%		
8) High Performance program			
9) Publicity			

Note: Eight participants. The lack of percentage (%) values is due to the fact that particular issues were only mentioned by one interviewee.

FT: France Telecom