
Defending Women's Rowing, Soviet Sport or the Latvian Identity? The International Career of Daina Šveica

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Résumé

Daina Šveica competed as a rower for the Soviet Union. She was raised in the Latvian SSR and trained at Dinamo Riga. Between 1963 and 1967, she won five medals in the double sculls event at the European Rowing Championships. In 1969, she was invited by FISA president Thomas Keller to join the Women's Commission and help develop women's world rowing events; the commission consisted of only five members.

As Claire Nicolas, Georgia Cervin, and Florys Castan have demonstrated, international federations long operated as boys' clubs, composed of men from social elites with conservative, often anti-communist values(1). How, then, does one become a female leader within such a federation? And how does one find a place there while belonging to a despised regime, holding a minority nationality, and coming from a Soviet Socialist Republic?

The study of multiple sources-including articles from *Sovetskij Sport* and film newsreels, a retrospective semi-structured interview with Daina Šveica, and private archives-allows us to reconstruct her trajectory.

The example of Daina Šveica illustrates how Soviet leaders both supported women's participation in competitions and instrumentalized it, both within the International Olympic Committee and in sporting federations. This served as a means to assert gender equality on highly visible public stages. However, the internationalization of Soviet sport at this level was contingent on selecting individuals compatible with the conservative milieu that populated international sports federations. Through her mastery of foreign languages, familiarity with bourgeois social codes, and belonging to the technical-scientific intelligentsia, Daina Šveica represented a reassuring figure for FISA leaders.

(1) Florys Castan-Vicente, Georgia Cervin, Claire Nicolas, " Women in Sport Organizations: Historiographical and Epistemological challenges ", in Georgia Cervin, Claire Nicolas (dir.), *Histories of Women's Work in Global Sport. A Man's World ?*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 17-48.

Mots-Clés: USSR, International organizations, gender equality, women's commission.

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