

# The European Union and Olympism: "Coubertin Plan" and Youth Olympics\*

By Roland Naul<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Nanjing in China is the setting for the second Summer Youth Olympic Games in 2014. They are the most recent addition to the Olympic cycle and were the brainchild of Jacques Rogge, the immediate past President of the IOC. In the years before he became an IOC Member he was one of the prime movers in the establishment of Youth Olympics in Europe.

In fact, targeting the young was an important part of the work of Baron Pierre de Coubertin himself. His work in developing Olympism on an international basis rather than in a single country such as Greece, England and Germany (cf. Naul, 1997) has been well documented. Coubertin's work as the founding father of the modern Olympic Games is often highlighted by historians and politicians alike. His work as an educator is less well documented. He really wanted to achieve much more than just a four year rhythm in celebration of the Olympic Games. In one of his Olympic letters, letter No. V, published in the *Gazette de Lausanne* in November 1918, he wrote:

*This Olympic pedagogy which I recently said was based at once on the cult of effort combined on the cult of eurhythmmy – and consequently on the love of excess combined with the love of moderation – is not sufficiently served by being glorified before the world once every four years in the Olympic Games. It needs permanent factories. The Olympic factory for the ancient world was the gymnasium. The Olympiads have been renewed, but the gymnasium of antiquity has not – as yet. It must be. (Coubertin, 2000, p. 217)*

Whether the term "factory" is really an appropriate term for the characterisation of an institution of education is open to debate. But Coubertin was not thinking of real factories, just as the ancient gymnasium was not merely a factory for bodywork. Instead he had in mind new "permanent places of education and exercise" beside the Olympic Games to propagate the cult of effort and the cult of eurhythmmy to young people. In letter No. V he mentions "municipal institutions", which "are going to play the foremost part in the world to come" (ibid) after World War I. And indeed, in the 1920s, in many European countries, schools and sports clubs became "permanent

factories" for physical activities and sport passing the educational spirit of Olympism to youth.

In Coubertin's own assessment of the situation, the Olympic Movement did not fulfil his goals for the development of permanent education and training of sports for youth at a local community level. He wanted this to be in conjunction with the well established four year cycle of the Olympic Games. He stood down from the IOC Presidency at the 1925 Olympic Congress in Prague. It was only some months later in early 1926 that he founded the "Union Pédagogique Universelle" (UPU) and the "Bureau International des Pédagogie Sportive" (BIPS) (cf. Krüger, 2009). Coubertin's saw the support for his vision of Olympism as a force for peace in Europe and other parts of the world as insufficient because permanent education of youth in the spirit of Olympism was lacking. In 1935 he made radio speech in which he highlighted both strands of Olympism, one for the culture of the Olympic Games the other the education of Olympic youth. It was in many respects his Final testimony of his Olympism. It set out the five fundamental principles which he described as "the philosophical foundation of Olympism" (cf. Coubertin, 2000, pp.580–583).

## The philosophical foundation of Olympism

The first and most essential principle is what he called the "religio-athletae". Coubertin characterised the athletes who participate in Olympic Games as "ambassadors of modern education" for the civilised countries who share with each other the religious spirit of sports as a means of moral character building.

The second principle is based on the "equality" of all human beings, as a further development of the mission "citius, altius, fortius" as a means of permanent striving for the individual self-perfection of athletes with the "freedom of excess" and the spirit to beat records.



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The second Youth Olympic Games take place from 16 to 28 August 2014 in Nanjing, China. In the name of the Mascot, "Lele" literally means happiness in Mandarin and also refers to the sound of stones banging. In ancient times, people frequently banged stones as a form of entertainment when they quarried or built roads. Hence other than joy and happiness, the word "le" also signifies a pioneering spirit.

Final of the 2000 m steeplechase for girls in the Bisham Stadium, Singapore.

Photo: picture-alliance



The third principle is characterised with the term "chivalry", as the behavioural pattern of men who compete against each other like the knights of olden days in the spirit of comradeship. In other writings Coubertin also used the term "fair play" to explain the meaning of chivalry.

The fourth principle is "truce", with the idea of "rhythm", which implies a specific time frame for the celebration of the Olympic Games, every four years. The idea of rhythm was linked with the desire for truce – to interrupt conflicts between countries and nations so that all athletes might participate in the Olympic Games.

The final fifth principle refers to "beauty", the integration of art and poetry as an element of the Olympic Games celebrations. This principle reflects Coubertin's vision of eurhythmia as another essential part of a harmonious development in education.

If we summarise these five principles we see that there was no clear system of Olympic pedagogy for Pierre de Coubertin. It was a mixture of the intentions of ethical and humanistic values for the development of youth and Olympic athletes as a code of rules for their participation in the Olympic Games and a number of important elements for the ceremony of the Olympic festival (cf. Naul, 2009).

### Five steps of the IOC for the promotion of Olympic Education

When Coubertin left presidency of the IOC at Prague in 1925, he said:

*I would be unwise to attempt to stay on the much beyond this thirty-year period. Above all, I want to be able to use the time I have left to hasten an urgent undertaking, to the extent that I can: the advent of an educational philosophy that produces mental clarity and critical calm. (Coubertin, 2000, p. 558)*

When he stood down as IOC President, Coubertin turned his attention to the establishment of the "Union Pédagogie Universelle and the "Bureau Internationale

Pédagogie Sportive" which focussed on education, youth sport and Olympic principles. In the late 1920s other supporters of the Olympic Movement were at work. The Greek Ioannis Chrysaphis and Carl Diem of Germany began work on setting up a "permanent factory" for Olympism, an "International Olympic Academy" (IOA), based in Greece. However, those early attempts in Greece came to nothing. In 1938 an "International Olympic Institute" opened in Berlin with Diem as its director. It was forced to close in 1943 after one of the many heavy bomb attacks.

The opening of the International Olympic Academy in Ancient Olympia in 1961, may be assessed as the real beginning. This gave Coubertin's ideas substance. (cf. Naul, 2010, p. 64). Since 1961 the IOC took further steps towards the promotion of Olympism and its educational tasks towards youth in Europe and around the globe. Since then, the Academy has held a variety of further education and training seminars for various target groups (such as sports administrators, teachers, coaches and students). Some of these happen on an annual basis and others at regular intervals are held on behalf of the IOC. The activities of the IOA over the last 20 years have also aroused considerable interest for the topic of Olympic Education (cf. Georgiadis, 1995; 2004).

The IOC's promotion of Olympic Education took a further step with its official endorsement of Olympic Youth Camps to coincide with the Games. This idea was initiated as long ago as the 1912 in Stockholm, when King Gustav of Sweden permitted over 1500 Boy Scouts to pitch their tents near to the Olympic stadium. But it was not until the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo that such Youth Camps became a regular occurrence, with the exception of the "Boycott Games" in 1984.

A third arm in the promotion of Olympic Education was signalled by the resolution enacted by the IOC in 1983. This stipulated that each National Olympic Committee, acting effectively as a decentralised extension of the IOA, should found a National Olympic Academy in order to promote the Olympic Idea and encourage and disseminate

Olympic Educational ideals by means of its own activities in its own country. To date there are approximately 140 such Academies all over the world. One of the principal tasks of these National Olympic Academies is to employ a variety of measures to encourage Olympism for young people in the country's schools and sports clubs and to organise appropriate seminars and training courses for teachers and youth coaches.

In 1994, a significant fourth step in the promotion of Olympic Education was taken by the IOC at the Centennial Congress in Paris, when it expressly demanded the long-term promotion of Olympic ideals during the further development of the Olympic Games. From 1994 on, the manuals published by the IOC to assist prospective host cities in compiling their bid books have made a point of stressing the role of education in any planned cultural programmes. Since the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, each applicant city has not only been required to offer an educational programme during the actual Games, but also during the seven years build up to the Games.

On 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007 at its 119<sup>th</sup> Session in Guatemala City, the IOC voted to introduce separate Olympic competition for outstanding young sportsmen and women in the 14 to 18 age groups. This could be described as the fifth element. The first of these "Youth Olympic Games" (YOG) was organised in August 2010 in Singapore for summer sports. The first Winter Youth Olympic Games were staged in Innsbruck, Austria in 2012. (cf. IOC, 2007a).

These Games incorporated a cultural and education programme (CEP) which addressed the Olympic Education of young competitive sportsmen and women

away from the field of play. As an initial step in the promotion of Olympic Education it specifically targeted young people who engage in competitive sports, while the second step comes with the Olympic Value Education programme (OVEP), a range of measures for the promotion of Olympic Education that aims to address all young people, to encourage healthy and active lifestyles and ethical and moral behaviour that conforms to the Olympic ideals (cf. IOC, 2007 b).

### The European dimension of Olympism and youth

Europe had often played a decisive role in the development of the Olympic Movement. The IOC's active promotion of Olympic Education has its roots there. In 1991, the then EOC President Rogge established the First European Olympic Youth Days in Brussels. (This later became the European Youth Olympic Festival.) In doing so he was strongly supported by Juan Antonio Samaranch, IOC President at that time. From the end of the Second World War to the up to the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Europeanization process has embraced many Olympic elements and encouraged cooperation and projects between the IOC, the EOC and the European Council, the EU and EC (cf. Mestre, 2010). This has become another important chapter in the relationship between Olympism and Europe and puts the particular accent on youth.

There is no space here to go into all the details. But the role of sport had already been considered by the European Council and its committees in the 1960s and



All 205 recognised National Olympic Committees took part in the first Youth Olympic Games in 2010 in Singapore.

Photo: picture-alliance

Singapore's football team won the match for third place in 2010 against Montenegro. The gold medal went to Bolivia.

Photo: picture-alliance



1970s (cf. Boniface, 2001). In the troubled summer of 1980, the European Parliament discussed the pro and cons of boycotting the Moscow Summer Games. At the time the sporting boycott was used as a weapon by politicians, and there was a groundswell which supported the idea of a permanent home of Olympic Games in Greece. A decade later in 1989 Europe took a further step. The velvet revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall ended the division of Europe by an "Iron Curtain". The looming war in the Balkans war overshadowed the build up to the first Olympic Year of the new decade, but in 1991 the European Commission made contributions to Olympic organising committees for the first time. Barcelona received 6 Million ECU and Albertville were given 4 million towards the Winter Games. 1992 was declared as "Olympic Year" by the European Parliament. Barcelona followed in the footsteps of Rome (1960), Munich (1972) as a European host city of the Summer Games. Incidentally, the First Olympic Youth Festival received a grant from the EU and has done so ever since.

Another important development in the educational impact of Olympism came in the year 2000, when Samaranch and Viviane Reding (Luxembourg) the European Commissioner of the "General Directory of Education and Culture", agreed to collaborate more closely on the promotion of Olympic values in education. A year later the continental organization of European Olympic Committees (EOC) and the EU became partners when they jointly launched an Olympic Education project entitled "Sport, Schools and Olympic Values in Europe".

In September 2001, only a couple of weeks after his election as IOC President, Rogge, the long standing

representative of the EOC, and Reding signed a contract for this teaching project. This was a joint venture of the three National Olympic Academies from the Netherlands, France, and Italy and ran for a 12 months in 2001-2. One of the aims of this project was to implement and expand the results for the forthcoming "EU Year of Education through Sport" in 2004. In all approximately 150,000 schoolchildren aged 9 to 13 took part in the project across the three countries. Some 6,100 classes were involved in the scheme. The lessons were cross-curricular (e.g. physical education, geography, history, fine arts) and incorporated 10 and 14 values. Each National Olympic Academy offered cooperation to partners in their respective education and sport systems. In all the countries the lessons were linked with extracurricular sport events, such as the Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, and Olympic Week and Olympic Day activities throughout the year 2002 (cf. Doremus, 2002).

Although, at the end of 2002, the results of this network project were regarded as successful by the representatives of all three NOAs, there was no expansion to other EU countries as originally planned. In the EU year "Education through Sport 2004" approx. 185 local projects were supported by the EC to the tune of 12.1 million Euros. Some projects gave a very real concentration on Olympic values in sport such as "Fair Play", "Mutual Respect", etc. (cf. Janssens et al., 2004).

In 2004 EC Commissioner in charge, Viviane Reding promoted the European Education and Olympic Year. Education through sports would, she said, mean a "revival of Olympic ideals." The EU commission for culture and education and the Organising Committee for

the Olympic Games 2004 in Athens (ATHOS) agreed upon a cooperative project. This was to enable 28 promising young athletes from Europe to participate in the Olympic Youth Camp in Greece as "Olympic Champions in Education".

*The strong development of the relationship between Europe and Olympism developed still further from 2006 with four important steps.*

In 2007 the "White paper on sport" was published by the DG Education and Culture and finally adopted by the European Sport Minister Conference. The EU-White Paper on Sport included the words of Coubertin himself and began as follows:

*Sport is a growing social and economic phenomenon which makes an important contribution to the European Union's strategic objectives of solidarity and prosperity. The Olympic ideal of developing sport to promote peace and understanding among nations and cultures as well as the education of young people was born in Europe and has been fostered by the International Olympic Committee and the European Olympic Committees. Sport attracts European citizens, with the majority of people taking part in sporting activities on a regular basis. It generates important values such as team spirit, solidarity, tolerance and fair play, contributing to personal development and fulfillment. (EU, White paper, 2007, p.2)*

If we compare this paragraph of the EU-White Paper on Sport with paragraph 6 of the Olympic Charter, we find many similarities and identical values. The "Pierre de Coubertin" Action Plan of the European Commission highlights eight important areas of forthcoming activities across the EU (EC, 2007, pp.3-10):

The Societal Role of Sport in the EU
1. Enhancing public health through physical activity
2. Joining forces in the fight against doping
3. Enhancing the role of sport in education and training
4. Promoting volunteering and active citizenship through sport
5. Using the potential of sport for social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities
6. Strengthening the prevention of and fight against racism and violence
7. Sharing values with other parts of the world
8. Supporting sustainable development

After the White Paper on Sport another important step was the final ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2007) which came into effect on Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> 2009. It included a paragraph dedicated to "sport" (article 165), which will be documented here:

#### Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty

1. The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

*The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function.*

2. Union action shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States,
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, by encouraging inter alia, the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study,
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments,
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States,
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socioeducational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe,
- encouraging the development of distance education.
- developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen.

3. The Union and the Member States shall foster co-operation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the field of education and sport, in particular the Council of Europe.

4. In order to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article,;

- the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States,
- the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations.

The former IOC President Jacques Rogge hands over the new Singapore flag to the mayor of Nanjing.

Photo: Philip Barker



In that very same year of 2009, the European Olympic Committee opened its EU-office in Brussels as one of the most important stakeholders in sports for the European Commission.

A fourth step was only taken in January 2011, when the EC published the document "Developing the European Dimension in Sport" (EC, 2011) highlighting the societal, economical and organisational role of sport. It is evidence of a convergent development process: It demonstrates how the European Union has become closely intertwined with Olympism and the integration of the European National Olympic Committees with the European Union, both on behalf of the education of youth.

### Five basic assumptions about the relationship of Olympism and youth

In the two decades since those First European Olympic Youth Days, the Olympic Movement in Europe and the European Union have become partners in the promotion of a sound and balanced education through sport, inspired by Olympic virtues and values. Both partners dedicate some of their major efforts and activities to youth. There exist at least five important strands on which these two stakeholders of Europe and Olympism agree. Both focus their activities for the development of sport and youth, both have the vision of Pierre de Coubertin's as major point of reference but both also take account of, but taking also current challenges within the European society and threats to the Olympic Movement.

With common references to the work and writings of Pierre de Coubertin we find three traditional but essential tenets for the education of young people:

1. *Harmonious education of body, will and mind should grow as eurhythmic character building through exercising sports according to their rules. In the words of Coubertin this is identified as his first principle which he called the "religio-athletae".*

2. *Mutual respect is demanded as an inter-personal behavior pattern as a matter of non-discrimination of any gender, ethnical, religious and political based*

*differences among participants and their peoples with the bench mark of fair play for any personal interactions inside and outside the sports ground.*

3. *Poetry, music and fine arts should be a part of the Olympic lessons at school mainly linked with extra-curricular activities e.g. celebrating an Olympic day festival or an Olympic week at school.*

In recent years two other key objectives for the education of young Europeans have also come to the fore.

The concept of the "protection of the environment" with the notion of "sustainability" has become an important educational theme in Europe as well as in some African, Middle and South American countries (cf. Cantelon & Letters, 2010).

In Olympic terms, this idea took wings in the early nineties, first with the Olympic Winter Games in Albertville but more significantly at Lillehammer two years later. The fourth assumption is:

4. *Sustainability and protection of the environment has become a major new theme in the range of Olympic Education objectives since the late 1990s.*

Since the 2000 Olympic Games of Sydney other Olympic cities have sought to actively promote physical activities as part of a healthy lifestyle. This has been a new initiative in response to the increasingly sedentary way of life. It is intended to counter the health problems with being overweight. These can lead to obesity. It appears in Olympic Education and in the Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan of the EC as well as in IOC brochures and text books for the promotion of Olympic Education at Youth Olympic Games (cf. IOC, 2007, a, b).

In the last decade the incidence of obesity has increased in Europe. Meanwhile, the time allocated for physical education and physical active at school has decreased. (cf. Brettschneider & Naul, 2007). Education and development of youngsters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lacks the dimension of physical activity. European surveys made by different stakeholders now asking for new initiatives for promoting active lifestyles, particularly at local community level (cf. EU, 2008; Branca et al., 2007; Westerbeek, 2009). Such demands have now also been incorporated in the "Coubertin plan" The rapid growth of physical inactivity is one of the most challenging demands in the future of European society likewise it is for the future of the Olympic Movement and Olympic Youth Festivals. Therefore, a fifth common strand for the development and education of young Europeans is:

5. *Physical activity with the promotion of a healthy lifestyle at school, in sport clubs and the further development of the environment in local communities.*

## Conclusion

The spread of Olympic Education and the propagation of "Olympic values" has increased in recent years. Countries such as the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Greece, Russia and Ukraine have already incorporated Olympic ideals and principles as objectives of social and moral learning in school sports and physical activities. In almost all EU countries Olympic ideals such as fair play, mutual respect and understanding are linked with physical education. Olympic Education as "value education" has been supported by national, continental and international Olympic Committees as well as by the European Council, the European Union and the European Commission of Culture and Education. In this respect Pierre de Coubertin's vision has become a reality. His ideas have not yet been fully realized. Part of his vision alongside the revival of the Olympic Games, was to create a modern gymnasium for young people in each municipality. There is still work to be done to achieve this in a literal sense and to extend it to a modern, physically active community at large. Healthy children, physically active each day, in a sound community is a necessity across Europe in our 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both European Union and the European Olympic Committee should strengthen their common ties still further to achieve this target for the future education of youth, but also for the future of the Olympic Movement and for the future of the European society itself. ■

<sup>1</sup> Adapted and updated from Europe-Youth-Olympism: historical heritage and current tasks. An address given at the opening of the 2011 European Youth Olympic Festival in Liberec, Czech Republic (Opening address).

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## Come to Baku in 2015

With exactly one year to go, the invitations to compete at the inaugural European Games in Baku were presented at a special ceremony in host city Baku. These were fashioned from a single antique piece of Azeri carpet.

"It is great to see an ambitious young nation place sport at the heart of its development." Said European Olympic Committees President Patrick Hickey. The ceremony was also attended by Azerbaijan Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov.

Baku 2015 will feature 19 sports. Nine will use the Games as qualification events for Rio 2016. (PB)