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OLIMPISM AND OLYMPIC EDUCATION

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Annotation. From the beginnings of the history of modern Olympics, more than a hundred years ago, educational or pedagogical arguments dominated the discourse on Olympism and Olympic games. Today different thinkers, teachers and philosophers did attempts to define, understand and interpret modern Olimpism in the whole world. Pierre de Coubertin was both the spiritus rector and general manager of the modern international Olympics. At first and in general, the main purpose of the IOC was to organize Olympic Games in the rhythm of four years like the Olympians in antiquity, but by contrast to antiquity not always at the same place, but in changing cities of the world. Coubertin intended to create a new "religion" of modern Olympic sport, based on the ideals of antiquity. **Material.** Retrospective analysis of Olimpism understanding change and prospects of Olympic education as major elements of modern education on the whole. **Research methods:** analysis and generalization of scientific literature, historical documents, retrospective analysis. **Result.** Sport competitions are the example of educational possibilities. Olympic games must be work of art consisting of corporal competitions together with music, literature, science, philosophy and history. Games are the symbol of peaceful life in the modern world, that is characterized not only by conflicts, but also dynamism and progress. Education, educating and competition, in sport develop identically, and personality on the whole, her social competences, such as honest game, mutual respect and ability to live in the world with others the ultimate goal of Olympic education, to bring the deposit in the direction of peaceful collaboration of separate persons, groups, people, and states by means of sport competitions. A term "Olympic education" encapsulates the different educational possibilities created by sport on the whole. They are related to ethics of Olympic types of sport and find the expression in practice of sport, and also in the principles. They can be examined as the result of the suggestions and opinions, pulled out by different international experts in the Olympism and Olympic education area. Olympic education plugs in itself concrete and modern conception of social education or social educating, namely voluntarily observance of rules, norms and principles, extending from the ratified rules of sport competitions to more abstract principles of equality and justice. Accordingly, a term »Olympic education" determines education for internationality and universality in the sport area. As in any other sphere of life, the Olympic type of sport became the symbol of universality and internationality. Meeting and peaceful contests in the sport area can assist to strengthening of the peace and mutual understanding between people, if they come true in the sport spirit and fair play. It is a central idea of Olympic education, introduced by Coubertin, that until now it is in the Olympic games and in the Olympic sports and that was nominated by different philosophers and teachers all over the world. Maybe, it also is reason of world enthusiasm for Games. **Conclusion.** Olympic education plays independent and exceptional role in the modern and international system of education. Olympic education comes

true all over the world in the form of the Olympic games. In some countries Olympic education was plugged in the system of national education, because the special projects were created in schools. All this is very important for advancement of Olympic idea and pedagogical aims of the Olympic movement.

Keywords: *Olympic education, Olimpism, Olympic movement.*

With respect to the XXXI. Summer Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro/ Brazil, it seems appropriate to consider the Olympic Games in general, including its history and philosophy. From the beginnings of the history of modern Olympics, more than a hundred years ago, educational or pedagogical arguments dominated the discourse on Olympism and Olympic Games.

Sadly, most people associate Olympic sports and Olympic Games less with moral and pedagogical ideals, and more with show business, doping, commerce and corruption, in other words, less with fair play and more with foul play. Many people bitterly resent and reject the decline of sports in the context of commerce, corruption, and show business. They want and indeed demand integrity and fairness in sport.

Nevertheless, the popularity and success of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and top level Olympic sport in general remain unbroken. The huge commercial and media success of the Games may be interpreted as proving the vitality of the Olympic Games and its underlying concept, despite or even because of the unceasing crisis of modern sport, of which doping, next to cheating and corruption, seems to be the most complicated and serious aspect.

Bearing in mind the history of modern Olympic Games and the apparently growing gap between ideals of its fundamental principles, and the reality, I will firstly attempt to explain in a historical perspective what

Olympism really means, and how its understanding has changed during the last century.

Secondly, I will discuss three perspectives of Olympic education, as crucial elements of modern education as a whole.

(I) What exactly is Olympism?

The first Olympic Games of modern times took place in Athens/ Greece in 1896, nearly 120 years ago. Pierre de Coubertin, a French nobleman, is usually looked upon as the inventor of this new, modern tradition with its respect of antiquity. However, he was not alone. At that time, many educated people of various European nations like Great Britain, France, Greece, and last not least Germany, were full of respect and enthusiasm for classic Greek antiquity, more than 2000 years ago. For them, this period seemed to be the peak of both humanity and humanism, and of cultural development. In modern times, on the eve of the 20th century, the looking back at Greek antiquity was expected to provide the right orientation for the future. Therefore, in Europe, this period is referred to as new-humanism.

Pierre de Coubertin had argued that Olympic Games in modern times should be no more than a revival of the ancient Olympic Games¹. In fact, these events in antiquity were no Games at all but religious ceremonies including athletic contests. In 1894, when Coubertin had invited some influential gentlemen from Europe and the United States of America for a congress on amateur sport, he placed a last top of the agenda: "On the opportunity to reinstall Olympic Games". He used the Greek terms Olympic, athletic, and gymnastic, in order to ennoble modern sports with classic culture. He also distinguished

¹ Coubertin reported several times of the Sorbonne congress, i.e. Pierre de Coubertin, Einundzwanzig Jahre Sportkampagne (1887-1908): (Une campagne de vingt-et-un-ans), with the assistance of B. Wirkus

(Ratingen, Kastellaun, Düsseldorf: A. Henn Verl., 1974), p 74-81, and Pierre de Coubertin, Olympische Erinnerungen, Reprint der 2. Aufl. 1959 (Wiesbaden: Limpert, 1996), p 13-25.

between such modern sports as athletics, gymnastics, swimming, rowing, and horse riding, which seemed to parallel classic disciplines in antiquity and others like ball games, which were not part of the classic tradition of athletics and agonistics. As in antiquity, the single male athlete contesting in athletic competitions should be the star or idol of modern Olympics.

In fact, the congress in Paris in 1894 marked the birth of modern Olympic Games, of modern Olympic sport organizations and institutions, and finally, of a new, Olympic ideal of modern sport. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded, and the first president of this new international Olympic Sports organization was Dimitrios Vikelas, who would organize the first Games in Athens. In fact, Pierre de Coubertin was both the spiritus rector and general manager of the modern international Olympics. At first and in general, the main purpose of the IOC was to organize Olympic Games in the rhythm of four years – like the Olympians in antiquity –, but by contrast to antiquity not always at the same place, but in changing cities of the world. Consequently, president of the IOC ought to be the organizer of the next Games. Meanwhile, the IOC developed into the very powerful and wealthy “world government of sport”, as the political scientists Rittberger & Boekle called it.²

Incidentally, at present and for the first time in Olympic history, a German sportsman, Thomas Bach, is president of the IOC. Despite the complicated relationship of the Germans to the Olympic Movement during history, this fact can be regarded as a clear indication that Germany has finally arrived in Olympia finally. The IOC, as head of the international Olympic family, has succeeded in uniting “all games” and “all nations” (or “all sports for all people”) in the spirit of Olympic sport, as

Coubertin once proclaimed this major aim of the Olympic movement.³ However, the spirit of sport apparently changed over the last century. Whereas the Olympic vision of “all games, all nations” seems to have been achieved, the original Olympic ideals like amateurism have truly vanished.

Coubertin himself not only wished to organize a new international sports event, he wanted more. He intended to create a new “religion” of modern Olympic sport, based on the ideals of antiquity. By working towards this vision, he was well aware of the fact that modern Olympic Games had to be different from those of antiquity, 2000 years ago. They had to confirm to the conditions and needs of modern times. Coubertin wanted to ground modern Olympic Games in an idea beyond athletic or sporting practices. That is what he called Olympism, the Olympic idea or Olympic philosophy, and sometimes even “*religio athletae*”, which means Olympic religion.

It is worth noting that the way, this difference between practical Olympic sport in the stadium and sporting halls on the one hand, and theoretical reflections or concepts in this context on the other hand, was unknown in antiquity. There was no need to legitimize athletic practices in antiquity, although the Olympians had been celebrated for about 1000 years. Athletics and agonistics were a matter of course in the context of ritual and cultic actions during such events. In antiquity, they were part of the ceremonies to praise the Hellenic gods by making various sacrifices.⁴ Authors and philosophers of the antiquity commented and criticized the behavior of single athletes or specific elements of the events, but there is no specific and coherent philosophy of antique Olympians or panhellenic agons, compared to the philosophy of modern Olympic Games.

Coubertin was the first to define the meaning of Olympism in modern times, or perhaps

² Volker Rittberger and Henning Boekle, “Das Internationale Olympische Komitee - eine Weltregierung des Sports?,” in *Olympischer Sport: Rückblick und Perspektiven*, ed. Ommo Grupe (Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1997)

³ Pierre de Coubertin propagated this branding on various occasions, for example in the Olympic letter

XXI, May 17, 1919, p 1, in Norbert Müller, ed., *Pierre de Coubertin, 1863-1937: Olympism* (Lausanne: IOC, 2000); *Selected Writings*, p 551.

⁴ Emanuel Hübner, *Das Olympische Dorf von 1936: Planung, Bau und Nutzungsgeschichte*, Aufl. 2015 (Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn, 2015)

rather what he himself wanted to be the substance and the deeper sense of his new sporting religion. Until today, various thinkers, educators and philosophers all over the world attempt to define, interpret, and understand modern Olympism. Not least, the International Olympic Committee, in its role as heir to Coubertin and owner of the Olympic Games, its labels and symbols, again and again tries to adopt and modernize the basic Olympic message.

In 1896, just before the first Games in Athens, Coubertin published an article in the second Edition of the official journal "Revue Olympique" defining Olympism, or, as he wrote, the "essence of our critical endeavor". He explains: "Our idea to revive such an institution which was forgotten for many centuries, is the following (...). The relevance of athletics is growing year by year. Its role in modern times seems to be as relevant and sustainable as in ancient times. In addition, athletics acquired modern characteristics. It is international and democratic, which means adopted to the ideas and needs of the present. However, today as well as in the past, its effects may be healthy or harmful, depending on the use of athletics and the way we perform sports and athletics. Athletics can produce noble as well as base excitement and emotions; it may develop a sense of honor and altruism, as well as egoism and greed (mammonism). Sports and athletics can be fair or foul, both functionalized to secure peace and to prepare for war."⁵

Coubertin was aware of the fact that sport and athletics are not morally useful and worthy in their own right, but only through the appropriate educational interventions and structures. Modern sport ought to be used as a means of education. Therefore, Olympic sport contributes to a better and more human education in the interests of peace and harmony. Of course, sport and athletics in modern times ought to be exercised fairly, respectfully, in friendly partnership with

others, and in a harmony of body, mind, and will.

Coubertin respected these characteristics which are typical of modern, "democratic societies", as he added: "Noble emotions, culturing a spirit of honor and altruism, fair play, male strength and peace are the first needs of modern democratic societies, irrespective of whether they are republican or monarchic".

Let me shortly explain what Coubertin thought about "male power" or "male strength". He was convinced that the single fighting male athlete should be the idol of modern Olympic sport. As in antiquity, women should not participate in Olympic Games, but praise the athletic male heroes and winners of the competitions. For him, young strong male athletes symbolized progress and the future for both the individual and society as a whole, the nations, and finally the progress of the human race.

Contrasting to the anachronistic understanding of Coubertin, meanwhile the participation of women in the Games are a matter of course. This fact may be one of the most important changes in modern Olympic history. Simultaneously, the growing relevance of women in the Olympic Movement may be one of the most serious errors of Coubertin, next to that of amateurism.

In 1935, one year before the XIth Olympic Games of Berlin 1936, Coubertin tried to explain again, and it was to be his last opportunity to do this, what Olympism means. At that time, the Olympic Games were established in the world, well known and popular in many modern, civilized nations. The German organizers of the Games asked Coubertin to give a speech on world radio for an international audience. This speech on "the philosophical basics of modern Olympism" was given in French, but translated into various languages. Regrettably, I do not know if it was also translated into Japanese – I suspect, because Japan was an established member of the Olympic family. Kano Jigoro had been a member of the IOC since 1909, and in 1912, a

⁵ Coubertin, *Olympische Erinnerungen*, p 27.

Japanese team had participated first at the Games of Stockholm. In Berlin, a major team of 154 Japanese athletes took part, and many Japanese fans visited the Games of Berlin. Tokyo had been elected to host the Games of the XIIth Olympiad in 1940.⁶

Coubertin's radio speech in 1935 can be regarded as a kind of integration of all the ideas, experiences, and reflections about Olympic sports during his long life for the cause of Olympic sport and athletics. He distinguished between four issues, in order to explain Olympism:⁷

1. "The first and essential criterion of both the old and modern Olympism is: to be a religion."

What did Coubertin mean by this notion of Olympism as a religion? In fact, Coubertin was wrong in his assertion that there had been a religion of Olympism in antiquity. In reality, athletics and agonistics were part of religious cults, but athletics for its own sake was unknown in antiquity. However, which sense does *religio athletae* make with respect to modern Olympics and in the present?

There were various ways of understanding or interpreting this strange and, in some respect, blasphemous notion. I think that Coubertin was considering the religious feelings of athletes in antiquity by praising their gods through agons, and comparing these with motivations and emotions of athletes at modern Olympics. They should, he believed, be aware that their actions during training and competition are by no means "just for fun, as they are ambassadors of the message of modern Olympism, prophets or priests of the *religio athletae*, communicating with their body and performance. This message includes a universal idea of education for "democracy

and internationalism", as Coubertin never ceased to point out. Top athletes at Olympics are idols for a new generation and encouraging them for a better world of progress and humanity. They are idols for all, to strive for better achievement, discipline and self-control, in order to foster a peaceful world, characterized by democracy and internationalism.

2. "The second criterion of Olympism refers to nobility and selection, but a kind of nobility which includes complete equality from the beginning. This Olympic nobility is based only on bodily predominance of the single athlete, his progressive bodily variety, and to a certain degree on his will to train and exercise."

This second Olympic principle includes a clear commitment to the principle of achievement and performance. Striving for excellence is essential for Olympic sports. "*Citius, altius, fortius*", faster, higher, stronger, is the official motto of the Olympic Movement. This motto is related to one of the oldest poems of humankind, the "*Ilias*" of the antique writer Homer. "Striving ahead and to be better than the others" ("*Vorwärts streben und besser sein als die anderen*"), was the fundamental principle of life for the old Greeks, and, as some historians assert, the miracle of their high and never again reached level of cultural development.⁸

In this sense, Olympic athletes are idols for all, encouraging them to do their best, to achieve their human potential, in order to contribute to the progress of humankind, based on equality and personal achievement. Competitions are necessary in order to select the best, the Olympic nobility. Competitions are played in the spirit of fair play, a principle not limited to

⁶ See the website of NOC of Japan
<http://www.joc.or.jp/english/> (access 02/11/2015)

⁷ The following quotes are translated from the original transcript of the French speech Pierre de Coubertin and Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin 1936 e.V., *Pax Olympica: Weltsendung des Reichssenders Berlin am Sonntag, dem 4. August 1935 mittags*, with the assistance of Pierre d. Coubertin, and Carl Diem (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Organisationskomitee für die XI. Olympiade Berlin

1936 e.V., [1935]), [Vorolympische Kampagne in drei Sprachen]

⁸ For example Jakob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, 2. Aufl., 13.-15. Tsd, Dtv 6078,4 (München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl, 1982 (Original 1898-1902)) and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, especially in his essay *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Christa Davis Acampora, Homer's contest, Nietzscheana / North American Nietzsche Society 5* (Urbana, Ill.: North American Nietzsche Society, 1996)

athletes and including fans as well. Their applause should only be a response to pure achievement and not for other reasons like nationality, sympathy, religion, birth, race or any other factor.

3. “The idea of peace is an essential element of Olympism as well, similar to the idea of *eccecheiria* in antiquity. This idea is connected to that of rhythm.”

The Olympic Games were to be celebrated every four years, according to the antique tradition. The Games symbolize the “four-year festival of human spring-time”, as Coubertin said. Olympic Games are festivals for the young generation, bearing the hope of a better and more peaceful world in the future. Young athletes build bridges between individuals, nations, and generations, between the past and the future. “How could we give honor to them better” (to the young athletes, MK), asked Coubertin rhetorically, “than through the common demand for peace, at least during the Olympic Games!”

The German sociologist Helmut Schelsky translated the Greek *eccecheiria* as “temporary peace” (*Friede auf Zeit*).⁹ Coubertin himself was realistic enough to see that peace in general is not compatible with human nature. He was not a pacifist, but he believed that Olympic education should contribute to better self-control and, in the long run, to peace, based on strength. Sporting contests are examples of the educational opportunity to learn how to deal with conflicts in a fair and peaceful way. “A man is strong indeed”, said Coubertin, “when he succeeds in both overcoming himself and stopping imperiousness and greed for the property of others.”

4. “Finally, the last element of Olympisms is beauty through unity of art and mind at the Olympic Games.”

The Olympic Games ought to be a total work of art composed of bodily sports and competitions at the center, and supplemented

by fine arts, music, literature, science, philosophy, and history. “To celebrate Olympic Games includes relating to history. The view back to the past and a knowledge of history is the best means of securing peace”, commented Coubertin. He ended his speech with the famous sentence: “Demanding that nations should love each other is a childish utopia. However, the demand for mutual respect is realistic. But people must know each other before they can respect each other.”

In sum, for Coubertin, Olympism was a kind of education for peace by performing Olympic sports in an Olympic setting, during the Olympic Games. The Games are symbols for a peaceful life in a modern world, which is all too full of conflict, but also dynamism and progress.

Olympism today – The IOC and the Olympic principles

The German philosopher Hans Lenk, a former Olympic rowing champion and Gold medallist (eight) of 1960, talked about the ambiguity of modern Olympism.¹⁰ Olympism had never been a clearly defined philosophy of the Olympic Games. Rather, Olympism had to be adapted to the conditions and necessities of the present and future. At its core, Olympism is a pedagogical idea enacted through bodily sports and performance. As with every pedagogic notion, it has to be constantly updated and modernized.

Among others, this process is not least promoted by the IOC, as head of the international Olympic institutions. Compared to the Catholic Church, the IOC can be seen as the Vatican of the worldwide Olympic sports religion. The IOC in Lausanne/ Switzerland not only manages current Olympic affairs and businesses, but also deals with its own Olympic heritage and ideological basics, similar to the department of dogmatic theology in the Vatican in Rome/Italy.

In fact, the contemporary version of Olympism is fixed in the constitution of the IOC, the so-called Olympic Charter,

⁹ Helmut Schelsky, *Friede auf Zeit: Die Zukunft der Olympischen Spiele, Texte + Thesen 30* (Osnabrück: Fromm, 1973)

¹⁰ Hans Lenk, *Werte, Ziele, Wirklichkeit der modernen Olympischen Spiele*, 2., verb. Aufl., *Beiträge zur Lehre und Forschung der Leibeserziehung 17/18* (Schorndorf bei Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1972).

in other words, the bible of the Olympic Movement.¹¹ The latest version of the charter, revised in 2014, includes seven “fundamental principles of Olympism”. The first paragraph argues that “Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole, the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.” The following six paragraphs are related to the contribution of Olympic sport for a “peaceful society” (§ 2), for the unity of humankind and nations by international sport competitions (§ 3), and for a world “without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play” (§ 4). The last paragraphs of these still valid criteria of Olympism emphasize the autonomy and independence of Olympic sports, including the athletes themselves, as well as the Olympic sport organizations, and, finally, the promise to promote Olympic sport “without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

It seems to me noteworthy that the IOC retains classical principles of Olympism like education through sport for a better, fair, and peaceful world without discrimination. The autonomy and independence of Olympic sport and its institutions from any political influences seem to be emphasized more than ever, perhaps by contrast to the reality of more than a hundred years of modern Olympic history, backed by the experiences of thirty Olympiads or Olympic Games. During this era, Olympic Games were permanently in danger of being functionalized by political purposes. In addition, they are more than ever in danger of being consumed by economic constraints and interests.

The contemporary IOC Olympic Charter disclaims the notion of Olympic religion, which was Coubertin’s first criteria for

Olympism. Instead, the first paragraph of the Charter speaks of Olympism as a “philosophy of life”. This claim seems to be modest than the arguably blasphemous claim of Coubertin to be regarded as the founder of a new civil religion of modern Olympic sport.

Preliminary results

Finally, I will try to sum up a common understanding of contemporary Olympism or Olympic education, which seem to be synonymous. My summary is additionally based on numerous discussions on Olympism at the International Olympic Academy (IOA) in Olympia/ Greece.¹² According to these discussions the common aim of Olympic education, achieved by Olympic Games and in general by Olympic sport, is to make people strong personally and in a social context, for their own lives and of society, community, and the state. This aim is by no means limited to top-level athletes, but relates to everyone who strives for better achievements according to the rules and principles of fair play. By doing this in the realm of sports, they improve their character in general. Top-level athletes at Olympics or Paralympics are, or at least should be idols for all. Education, training, and competition in sport develop equally, both the whole personality and social competences like fair play, mutual respect, and – finally – the ability to live a life in peace, both with oneself and with others. This is perhaps the ultimate aim of Olympic education: To contribute towards a peaceful cooperation of individuals, teams, peoples, states, and nations, by means of competitive sports.

(II) Olympic education with respect to universal educational principles

The term Olympic Education encapsulates various educational opportunities created by sport in general. They are related to the ethics of Olympic sport, which find their expression in the practice of sport, and in its written and unwritten principles alike. They can be seen as the outcome of proposals and opinions put

¹¹ www.olympic.org/.../olympic_charter_en.pdf
(access 25/08/2015)

¹² www.ioa.org.gr (access 25/08/2015)

forward by various international experts in the field of Olympism and Olympic Education.

I would like to stress three essential elements regarding as relevant for universal perspectives of education in general.

1. Working on the “self”

Firstly, there is the “will to be better” and the longing for perfection, as the German sport-pedagogue Ommo Grupe described the anthropological essence of the idea of competition in Olympic sports.¹³ This not only holds true for the outstanding performance of some athletes, but for all humans, whether or not they are able to achieve world records. The only thing that counts is the “will to be better”, the will to rise above oneself, even if there are obstacles in the way. The handicapped athletes who take part in the Paralympics, which have taken place directly after the official Games since Barcelona 1992, show in a most impressive manner, how one can challenge the limits set by nature, illness, accidents or fate.

This challenge of Olympic Education is rooted in the ancient, new-humanistic ideal of “Selbstvollendung” (perfection of the “self”) and “Selbstgestaltung” (creation of the “self”), which still prevails in the form of terms like self-determination, personality development or emancipation. “The will to be better” also means not accepting limitations and restrictions, but fighting for changes in the fields of individuality, society, politics, economy and culture.

This idea of progress and perfection in modern sports finds its expression in the Olympic motto “*altius, citius, fortius*”. However, this saying should to be seen critically from a pedagogic standpoint, as the unconditional striving for more might be at the cost of one’s own health or that of partners and opponents. Therefore, any competition should be

structured and restricted by sound and humane rules and norms.

The striving for being better, however, is the exceptional feature of Olympic sport; even if it is not successful in the end. True character becomes only visible when much is at stake. Those who play by the rules, give a chance to their opponents and obey the unwritten rules of fair play in the face of success and failure alike, show true Olympic spirit.

Therefore, as the philosopher Wilhelm Schmid pointed out, the field of sport is ideal for learning “the art of life”, as not only defeat and loss, which are part of every human life, but also winning, success and triumph can be experienced. In no other sphere of life are pride, arrogance or resting on one’s laurels punished as quickly as in sport.

2. Flow

Secondly, the feeling of a complete and energized focus on an activity, with a high level of enjoyment and fulfilment. This element of Olympic pedagogy is closely related to concepts that can be found in Asian, especially Japanese, philosophy and pedagogy. Otto Friedrich Bollnow, a German philosopher and educator, whose works are widely read in Japan, speaks of the “spirit of practice”, which plays a decisive role in Japanese culture and education.¹⁴ This spirit can be observed in the art of archery, but also in learning Japanese script or in the art of ikebana. Kano Jigoro was one of the prominent Japanese educators, the founder of modern Judo, who transferred the Japanese spirit of practice or exercise by concentration and contemplation, to the international philosophy of Olympism.¹⁵ Japanese athletes are not among the most successful in the world, but in the sports where

¹³ Ommo Grupe, “Olympische Pädagogik,” in *Olympische Erziehung - eine Herausforderung an Sportpädagogik und Schulsport*, ed. Rolf Geßmann, 1st ed. (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verl., 2004)

¹⁴ Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Vom Geist des Übens: Eine Rückbesinnung auf elementare didaktische Erfahrungen*, 3., durchges. u. erw. Aufl. (Stäfa, CH: Edition Rolf Kugler im Rothenhäusler Verl, 1991). See also with respect to Japan Karlfried von Graf Dürckheim, *Japan und die Kultur der Stille*, 4th ed. (Weilheim, Obb.: Otto Wilhelm Barth-Verl., 1949)

¹⁵ Andreas Niehaus, *Leben und Werk Kanô Jigorô*: (1860 - 1938); ein Forschungsbeitrag zur Leibeserziehung und zum Sport in Japan, 2., überarb. Aufl., *Sport, Kultur und Gesellschaft* 4 (Würzburg: Ergon-Verl., 2010), Univ., Diss. u.d.T.: Niehaus, Andreas: *Kanô Jigorô (1860 - 1938)*, Köln, 2002 publications that a complete focus on an activity, called “flow”, is not dependent on what one is doing or what one gets out of the activity

they demonstrate outstanding performance, for example in judo or gymnastics, the Japanese spirit, which has become a universal virtue of Olympic sports, is very evident.

Every athlete who wants to call himself “Olympic” and who wants to be victorious, should learn these unique principles and practices.

The American social psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who is of Hungarian ancestry, demonstrated in several publications that a complete focus on an activity, called “flow”, is not dependent on what one is doing or what one gets out of the activity.¹⁶ What is more relevant is the setting of realistic goals for oneself and the constant will to achieve them. This can be learned from Olympic sports. Every athlete has to do this if he wants to be successful; if he does not, he will fail. Financial gains fade into the background in the face of this primarily intrinsic motivation.

3. Social training

Thirdly, Olympic education includes a specific and modern concept of social education or social training, namely the voluntary observance of rules, norms and principles, extending from the written rules of sports competition to more abstract principles of equality, fairness and modesty in the face of success and failure alike. It is extremely important for life in a democratic society that these guidelines be accepted, especially in situations when something is at stake. Fairness should not be a luxury good. The difficulties that arise when this theory is to put into practice can be observed not only in the field of sports, but in any other aspect of life.

Coubertin referred to Olympic sport as a school for democracy; and he regarded the support of democracy and internationalism as

the most important task of the Olympic movement.

Accordingly, the term Olympic Education defines an education for internationality and universality in the field of sport as well as by sport. Like barely any other area of life, Olympic sport has become a symbol of universality and internationality. Even Coubertin stressed the fact that athletes from all over the world should treat each other with tolerance and “mutual respect”.¹⁷ According to Coubertin, these meetings and peaceful contests in the field of sport contribute to peace and understanding among nations, if they are carried out in the spirit of sport and fair play. This is the central idea of Olympic education, introduced by Coubertin, and which can still be found in the Olympic Games and in Olympic sports, and which has been advanced theoretically by various philosophers and pedagogues from all parts of the world. Perhaps this is also a reason for the worldwide fascination with the Games.

There is a link between this point and the pedagogic ideas of one of the most famous psychologists and social scientists of our time. The Genevan psychologist Jean Piaget was convinced that a modern and advanced pedagogy had to prepare children and teenagers for life in a world which is growing together, becoming international or - as we would say nowadays - global. This education for peace does not take place automatically, but has to be based on psychology, namely on the developmental processes in children and young people, as Piaget argued.¹⁸ According to him, these processes can only be regarded as successful if the natural egoism or egocentrism of children (or of humans in general) can be overcome and complemented with actions and thoughts marked by solidarity. As Piaget states, this cannot be achieved by an education

¹⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond boredom and anxiety: The experience of play in work and games*, 2. print, The Jossey-Bass behavioral science series (San Francisco Cal.: Jossey-Bass, 1977); see also in German Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Das Flow-Erlebnis: Jenseits von Angst und Langeweile: im Tun aufgehen*, 8. Aufl. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2000)

¹⁷ Pierre de Coubertin, *Die gegenseitige Achtung*, with the assistance of Hildegard (. Müller (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verl. Richarz, 1988)

¹⁸ Jean Piaget, *Über Pädagogik*, Gek. Dt. Erstausg., BT/ Essay 1 (Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Taschenbuch, 1999), Aus dem Französischen von Irène Kuhn und Ralf Stamm; mit einer Einleitung von Silvia Parrat-Dayan und Anastasia Tryphon

that is characterized by obedience and lecturing - Piaget calls this "internal solidarity" as distinguished from "external solidarity" - but only by activity and experience, meaning "self government", by getting to know each other, through communication, cooperation, social performance, and combined action.

The role of Olympic education in the modern education system

The term "Olympic education" summarizes in a unique way the international perspective of a modern pedagogy, demanded by Piaget; a pedagogy at whose center are peace and solidarity, whose morals cannot only be mediated by reasoning, but also by means of feelings and actions. This pedagogy works by means and methods, which are known, popular and diffused around the world – namely sports. Sport-pedagogy in terms of Olympism does not ignore the minds and bodies of people, but addresses them with the universal language and symbolism of sport. Olympic Education plays an independent and extraordinary role in the modern and international system of education. Olympic education reaches people throughout the world in the form of the Olympic Games. In some countries, Olympic education has been included in the systems of public education, as special projects have been established in schools. All of this is very important for promoting the Olympic idea and the pedagogic goals of the Olympic movement. The most important thing however is that the pedagogic message be transported in a credible manner by the Games themselves. It is in this respect that I see the greatest dangers for the future of Olympism. Nowadays, many people relate the Olympic Games to a lesser extent as education than as commerce, show business, doping, television, scandals and the like – in short, to things that have to be regarded as negative, harmful, and un-educational. Olympic sports are often perceived as elements of international commerce and of the entertainment industry and not as a means of

sophisticated education and culture that is diffused globally.

Pierre de Coubertin left an important legacy as the president of the IOC, when he addressed the IOC-members in his farewell speech of 1925 in Prague. Today, the words he spoke seem more important than ever. Coubertin said, "Marketplace or temple, sportsmen have to choose. They cannot have both, but they do have to agree on one thing. Sportsmen, make your choice!". For Coubertin this was not a dilemma. He decided in favor of the temple: "The temple will stand forever, everything else will fade away."¹⁹

No doubt, Olympism continues to be a very ambitious concept for education, culture, and the world as a whole. However, this philosophy of Olympic sport apparently contrasts with the reality of the Olympic Games and Olympic sport. The gap between ideal and reality threatens to destroy the credibility of the Olympic movement. However, this diagnosis is not new. Olympic crises have accompanied Olympic history from the beginning, according to Willi Daume, the great German Olympic thinker, former Vice president of the IOC and organizer of the Munich Olympics of 1972.

Despite scandals like doping, extreme commerce, and corruption, the popularity of modern sports and Olympics are unchallenged. "Everyone knows that the Games are more popular than ever before, that billions of people are fascinated by them, and that the Games have achieved an incredible amount in all areas," commented Daume in 1990, and his statement is still valid today. "And it is for sure," he added, "that the Olympic Games themselves are the basis of the mysterious phenomenon known as the 'Olympic idea'. The Games are, however, more important than the idea".²⁰

This sentence was formulated in 1989, when the world had to face radical changes and the

¹⁹ Pierre de Coubertin, *Der olympische Gedanke: Reden und Aufsätze* (Schorndorf b. Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1967), p 115.

²⁰ Willi Daume, "Haben die Olympischen Spiele und die Olympische Idee (noch) eine Zukunft?," in *Kulturgut*

oder Körperkult? Sport und Sportwissenschaft im Wandel, ed. Ommo Grupe, *Studium generale* (Tübingen: Attempto Verl., 1990)

uncertain future of sports, of the Olympic movement and of the Olympic Games. In the era after the Cold War, which was marked by the dynamic process of globalization, the Olympic Games became one of the few unifying elements of global culture.

Today, the Olympic Games are not only one sports event among others, they are the most important event in the field of sports. However, the Olympic Games are more than an 'event'. They are the embodiment of a worldwide idea of modern sports. In spite of the fact that commercial advertising is not allowed in the context of the Games, companies are eager to profit from the positive effects generated by the Olympic Games. Media groups pay incredible amounts of money for the rights to broadcast the Games and to report on them. Hardly any other event in the world is watched by so many people. Even though these people speak many different languages, they all comprehend the message delivered through the Games: "Achieving one's best by means of strong commitment in a fair and rule-based competition, where no competitor is discriminated against; that is what lies at the heart of the idea".²¹

The Games are more important than the idea behind them because actions speak louder than words; this is how one should surely understand Willi Daume's statement. The Olympic idea may be interpreted in different ways by philosophers and ideologists of all shades in all parts of the world, but its true message consists of the Games and the sports themselves. The language of the Games and of sports is international and universal. It is and it can be understood even by those who have never read a single line about the Olympic idea and who have never heard a speech on

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Olympism, but who simply watch and experience the Games and who are filled with enthusiasm by them.

Those who perceive Olympic athletes as examples, who practice sports themselves and who want to act according to the Olympic ideals outside the world of sport, are inspired even more by aspects like: the will to exert oneself, the will to progress, fairness towards others, giving everyone a chance, not excluding anyone who obeys the rules.

It is very important that this message be regularly disseminated and made visible by the Games. The Games are inaugurated and closed with ceremonies. These events have developed into total art works that include music, movement, dance and stagecraft. In the course of these events, famous artists of the host country perform, who present its art and culture. Each NOC is represented by its own flag and national anthem. The athletes take a solemn oath. During the presentation ceremonies, the victorious Olympians are awarded their medals and their respective national anthems are played in honour of them. I would like to close with the famous words of Avery Brundage, president of the IOC at the Olympic Games of Munich 1972: "The Games must go on." Despite all problems, despite murder and terrorism – like in Munich 1972 –, despite doping and commerce, despite political constraints, despite war, crime, discrimination, and injustice, despite all the bad things of this world, "the Games must go on!" And according to Willi Daume: The Games must go on because the Olympic message cannot be understood without the Games.

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