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Youth Olympic Games and Brazilian Initiatives: the dissemination of Olympic Values

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The idea of promoting sports for children and youth is not a recent one. Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), the 'renovateur' of the Olympic Games and an educator *par excellence*, had in mind the dissemination of values through sports (DaCosta, 2006). He had learned from modern sport in England and, in particular, from public school education at Rugby, that the moral strength of young people can be critically developed through the individual experience of sporting activities and then extended to their adult life. Coubertin wanted to make modern sport part of the school routine and through it introduce sports education which would comprise body and mind. Coubertin spoke of what he considered to be "sporting education", which was the title of the book he published in 1922, *Pédagogie Sportive* (Müller, 2008).

Coubertin wanted to reform the French system of education using modern sport to reach his final goal. To him, the success of the first Olympic Games marked the internationalization of his educational visions (Müller, 2008).

Following Coubertinian tradition spread around the world through the Olympic Games, it is possible to observe that there is a tendency to associate the development of Olympic values and principles in children and adolescents to the school context they attend through sporting activities. Today's "Olympic Education" promoted by the IOC, the NOCs and the NOAs in many countries is a one-hundred-year legacy originated in Coubertin times.

In Brazil, since the foundation of the Brazilian Olympic Academy in 1989, there has been some research concerning children's participation in sport and their development of values, particularly related to the school environment. The results of the studies are presented during the Olympic Forums (NOA of Brazil), where there is appropriate space for the discussion of Olympic values, especially fair play.

Recent examples of research that can be pointed out include a study done by Gomes (1999), who investigated honesty and solidarity from the fair play point of view among high school students. The results showed that the sporting practice and values of sport can have different meanings to the different social groups children belong to. Through observation of handball games, application of questionnaires and interviews, Turini (2002) drew a comparison related to fair play between two groups of elementary school students: the first group followed the practice of 'their own' fair play and the second one followed the rules of the Charter of Fair Play from Oeiras, Portugal. The results showed that the instructions from the Charter were unfruitful while the establishment of their own rules of fair play among the young players proved to be much more effective, following the "sports education" propagated by Coubertin, which included sport in people's search for the '*expérience personnelle*' (Müller, 2008).

Brazil also has examples of sport events for the youth. Secondary students had their national games in 1960s as the last stage of local school competitions (state and municipal). The Jogos Estudantis Brasileiros (Brazilian Students Games - JEBs) were created in 1969 and, in the following years, took on proportions of very large events with yearly games in many Brazilian cities bringing together an average of 5,000 participating athletes. The JEBs lasted until 1975, when names and organization were modified bringing them today to their 25th edition. It has been estimated that the 2003 event had around 1 million students of secondary level participating in municipal and state competitions for the selection of the 2,400 athletes that represented the 27 Brazilian states in the final competitions. Recent evaluations have revealed that the success of the JEBs in the past and their present legacy were due to the sense of continuous improvement of coaches, directors and athletes, added to regional self-esteem. This sense of actualization influenced Brazilian sport so positively as a whole at that time that today it is asking for the retrieval of its memory (Thompson, 2005).

Furthermore, in 2003, the Secretaria de Educação do RS (RS Secretary of Education) promoted the School Games of Rio Grande do Sul - JERGS, aiming at students from 10 to 17 years of age registered in the public and the private school systems. This event had the participation of 497 municipalities, 10,300 schools and approximately 1,700,000 people involved as assistants or in activities that would provide support to the Games. Actually,

according to DaCosta (1996), school games in Brazil appeared first in the 1930s, becoming important sports events during the 1950s. Today, these games are located in five States of the Brazilian Federation with status of mega-events despite being disconnected from Olympic Education.

Recently, the Social Service of the Industry in Brazil, SESI, has also begun a very special sports project for the Brazilian youth: the Project Athlete of the Future (PAF). This program is being conducted in some States and will very soon be spread nationwide. PAF is a social-educational program done through a variety of sport disciplines and cultural activities, which are attractive to children and adolescents from 7 to 17 years of age, in particular those participants whose parents and/or relatives are connected to the Brazilian industry. The participation of the youth is systematically done on a permanent basis stimulating the development of values through sport (Olympic values) and helping the young participants develop optimal culture related to sports as the final aim of PAF is to privilege sport, education and culture, with reflections within the communities in which they live (SESI, 2008).

PAF currently caters for 74,000 young participants, but it wants to reach as many children as possible. Every two years some SESI regional units stage a Festival for the Youth, in which the young people who are already engaged in PAF from several small cities and towns are brought together in healthy competitions, celebrating their young talents for sport as well as the values and other lessons learned. In addition, every July, annual competitions called 'Young People in Action' add to the enthusiasm of the participants, preparing them for the larger festivals.

Since Coubertin started preaching his principles of 'Pédagogie Sportive', linking children, adolescents and their educational environment to sport, it has not been very easy to separate the youth who do sports through schools from the youth who do not attend school as education is mandatory for all. It is therefore important to keep in mind that despite the fact that some investigations can be conducted in clubs and sports associations, the researcher has to always consider the influence of sporting education upon the sport competitive school environment. This rationale is one of the key points to be considered when we all are facing the challenges of Youth Olympic Games – starting in Singapore, 2010 – which implies in promoting Olympic values – not mentioning Olympic Education - in top level sports competition for young athletes.

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