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The loc of Pierre de Coubertin: circulation of elites, international relations and institutional production*

FRANCESCO BONINI - VERUSKA VERRATTI

«The re-establishment of the Olympic Games, on a basis conforming to the conditions of modern life, would allow representatives from all civilized nations in the world to congregate every four years, and it is reasonable to believe that such peaceful and ingenious fights would become another means for international alliances»¹.

The subject-matter we are going to explore was clearly defined in the circular letter which summoned the Paris Congress of 1894; we shall develop this subject during the years of the so-called Olympic monarchy – i.e. de Coubertin's long leadership – through three points: the International Olympic Committee (Ioc) establishment and development as a self-recruiting body², the setting up of Nocs, in their great organizational variety (and confusion) and, lastly, the definition of an international institutional system for sports, with the integration of international federations (many of which pre-existed the Ioc itself). This attempt at systematization will allow us to identify pending issues and avenues for additional research to be carried out, possibly, in a coordinated manner.

Self-recruiting body

Modern Olympism is Coubertin's brainchild, but we might define it as an international idea, driven by a Franco-Atlantic effort. This is evidenced by the choice to establish three Commissions for the Sorbonne Congress of June 16-24, 1894, respectively chaired by Coubertin (for continental Europe), Charles Hebert, Secretary of the Amateur Athletic Association (for Great Britain and its colonies), and the third one by Princeton University Professor William M. Sloane (for America): «an unusual geography – as Coubertin pointed out – aimed at fostering propaganda»³. Actually it was not unusual, considering the geo-political set-up which was emerging at that time, which was later defined as the «first globalization».

* In a shared project work Veruska Verratti is the author of paragraphs 1 and 2, Francesco Bonini is the author of paragraph 3.

¹ Pierre de Coubertin, *Le rétablissement des Jeux Olympiques*, in «La Revue de Paris», 15 June, 1894, pp. 170-184.

Atilio Brunialti, *Sull'organizzazione e sui metodi delle Olimpiadi internazionali e intorno ai sui risultati*, Roma, 1909, p. 1.

² Pierre de Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, Milano, Mondadori, 2003, p. 19.

³ «Olympic Review», April 1911, pp. 51-52.

At the Sorbonne Congress there were about 20 foreigners participating, coming from 8 countries and 13 nations (France, Greece, Great Britain, Australia, Belgium, Spain, Usa, the Netherlands, Hungary, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Bohemia).

«A few days after the end of the Congress – Coubertin wrote – we met with Sloane and Callot at Vikelas's home in Paris, in rue de Babylone»: it was an internationalism which was mostly founded on *élite* relations, built through several circuits, first of all academic and diplomatic circles, with a remarkable aristocratic presence. «Around the middle of summer, the Ioc was actually established»⁴.

The first members of the *Comité International des Jeux Olympiques* – which would later be called *Comité International Olympique* in 1897 – define that circuit. Demetrius Vikelas, Vice President of the Society for the Development of Studies on Ancient Greece and member of the Pan-Hellenic Society of Gymnastics, was appointed President: Coubertin «[...] cherished the idea of a revolving Presidency to which the nationality of the next Olympiad would rightfully be entitled»⁵. Baron Pierre Frédy de Coubertin, who was Secretary General of the Union of French Societies for Athletic Sports, kept the post of Secretary General to himself and designated Ernest Callot, former President of the same Society, as Treasurer. The other members were: General Aleksey Dimitievic Buoutowsky, attaché at the Directorate of Russian Military Schools, Jiri Guth, secondary school teacher in Klatony (Bohemia), Commander Viktor Gustav Balck, Professor Emeritus at the Central Institute of Gymnastics in Stockholm, Leonard Alberto Cuff, Secretary of the New Zealand Amateur Athletic Association, William M. Sloane, Professor at Princeton University, Doctor José Benjamin Zubiaur, Rector of Uruguay's National College, Charles Herbert, Secretary of England's Amateur Athletic Association, the English nobleman Lord Ampthill (Baron Arthur Oliver Russel), Franz Kemény, Director of the Eger Royal School (Hungary) and Count Ferdinando Lucchesi Palli, deputy Italian Consul in Paris and Coubertin's friend⁶, who temporarily held the post (he would be Ioc member between 1894 and 1895) that the Duke of Andria (who had actually taken part in the 1894 Congress) would accept in September and keep until 1898⁷.

The list of invitees to the Sorbonne Congress, in addition to sportsmen and sports institutions, also included a number of key players in the initial development of international institutions, such as the Interparliamentary Union and the International Peace Bureau; a well-known connection was the one with the international expo organization, which actually provided the container for the first editions of the Games. The system of relations was also extended to other interlocutors: it is worth mentioning the two meetings Coubertin had with Popes

⁴ De Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, cit., p. 17.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ «Bulletin du Comité International des Jeux Olympiques» («Olympic Review»), October 1894, No. 2.

⁷ Brunialti, *Sull'organizzazione e sui metodi delle Olimpiadi internazionali e intorno ai suoi risultati*, cit., p. 1.

Pius X and Pius XI at the beginning and at the end of his Presidency, in February 1905 and April 1923. In that case, he gave proof once again of his remarkable spirit of initiative and farsightedness⁸.

During the second Congress, which was held in Le Havre between July 23 and 31, 1897⁹, only six Ioc members attended, confirming the structure based on «[...] three concentric circles: a small core of active and enthusiastic members; a pool of members of goodwill who were susceptible to improvement; a facade of more or less useable people whose presence was meant to satisfy national ambitions and also provide some kind of prestige to the whole exercise»¹⁰.

In addition to the institution's final name, the Congress settled another important issue: the principle Coubertin pushed the Congress to accept in 1894 provided for the Presidency to be passed on every four years, with the condition that the venue for the following games would have to be established beforehand. Sloane, who was offered the Presidency by Coubertin in view of the following games to be organized in the Us, at the same time put forward his own proposal for a stable and extended Presidency. Hence, with a ten-year mandate, the «olympic monarchy» came about, on which Coubertin himself ironically remarked that «[...] it was born from a proposal made by a citizen of the most democratic republic of them all»¹¹.

During this time, Coubertin had his most frequent exchanges with Sloane, Jiri Guth and Victor Black, as can be inferred from the Ioc archives. Sloane¹², Philosophy of History Professor, had met Coubertin for the first time in the Usa in 1889, and met him again in the Us in 1893 where Coubertin had returned for the second time invited by Sloane himself, the only man who supported his promotional campaign in American Universities.

Jiri Guth met Coubertin in Paris in 1891, after having been introduced to him by a common Czech friend; a scholar of the French education system and Professor of Philosophy, when the Republic of Czechoslovakia was established, he became the Head of the Czech President's protocol office. Secretary general of the Ioc since 1919 and Executive Board member since its establishment in 1921, he actively contributed to the drafting of what would later be called the Olympic Charter in 1908. Victor Black was a former military officer and member of Stockholm's Central Institute of Gymnastics between 1866 and 1870; he later worked as an assistant in the Institute before becoming its Director in 1905. Founder of the Noc and Ioc Vice President, he contributed to the establishment of several sports Federations, in particular, the (powerful) International Skating Federation, where he acted as President between 1893 and 1925.

In Le Havre, where the second Ioc Congress took place (between July 23 and 31, 1897), the future Secretary General was co-opted: the Italian Count Eugenio

⁸ De Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, cit., p. 15.

⁹ *On the development of Olympic Congresses*, «Olympic Review», September-October 1981, No. 167-168, pp. 516-520.

¹⁰ De Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, cit., p. 19.

¹¹ *Idem*, p. 169.

¹² John Lucas, *Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the formative years of the modern International Olympic Movement 1883-1896*, Ed. D. diss. University of Maryland, 1962, p. 166 and following.

Brunetta d'Usseaux. The nobleman from Piedmont had met Coubertin during the 1889 Universal Expo in Paris, which he also attended as a representative of the Rowing club; later, he was also the Italian government representative at the Expo which hailed the beginning of the new century and during which the 1900 Olympic games took place – although they were quite marginal – until he officially became the Ioc Secretary General in 1908 until his death in 1919.

This close institutional commingling, which figures so prominently in the biographies of the Committee's main characters, emerged also during the Bruxelles Congress, which was scheduled for 1904 and postponed to 1905, also thanks to the help of a French diplomat; on that occasion, the Belgian Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, who had been co-opted in 1903, made his debut as organizer.

Germany, Sweden and the Us called for a consolidation of rules; the Federations' clout started to emerge while the Ioc members' inadequate technical background began to emerge in dealing with the confusion between Olympiads and «ordinary international championships»¹³. At the 1905 Congress, the proposal was to entrust Federations with competitions' practical and logistical aspects, and the Ioc with strategy and moral control. 15 out of 28 Ioc members were present and three Nocs: 205 participants representing 21 countries with delegates from 14 governments, 54 sports organizations and 9 universities. The organization was described as exemplary, a clue to the the Ioc's growing sphere of influence. The Olympic Diploma was awarded for the first time since its creation in 1901: the recipient was Us President Theodore Roosevelt, who had also received the Nobel Peace prize that same year for his mediation in the Russian-Japanese conflict. The coincidence between both awards was quite remarkable.

This showed, yet again, the circular nature of relations which was so peculiar to Olympism; at the same time, the complexity of the international sports sytem started to emerge, with Federations and Nocs acquiring greater relevance for the organization of sports at national level.

In December 1908, new members were elected into the Ioc through «a single ballot»¹⁴. These developments were summarized in the Stockholm Session's motto: «All games, all nations, all men»¹⁵. At the Budapest Session, in May 1911, the Ioc included 43 members from 31 countries: «it had acquired its final form»¹⁶. The Congress summoned in Paris to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Games' establishment, before the wartime interruption, proclaimed the end of Olympism's initial development as a tool for national integration, international

¹³ Ioc Historical Archives, *Ioc Congress*, Bruxelles 1905.

Between the last Congress before the outbreak of World War I (Paris 1914) and the first Congress after the war (Lausanne 1921) a liaison Commission would be formed chaired by the French Count Clary: this would include the three key figures of the Paris Congress (Reichel, Muhr and Rousseau, the Secretary who would resign on June 7, 1922 during the Paris Session because of the many issues which had not been addressed during the 1921 Lausanne Congress and were left unresolved).

¹⁴ The names are in de Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, cit., p. 87.

¹⁵ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the 14th Session of the Ioc*, (Stockholm, July 1912).

¹⁶ De Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, cit., p. 102.

openness and social and cultural cohesion, in countries where the ruling elites had to deal with the rise of democracy and the early development of mass society. Representatives from 32 countries and nationalities attended; on that occasion, the decision was made to allow only internationally recognized countries to participate.

In the meantime the Ioc's structure had finally consolidated, after many years in which it had been identified with Coubertin himself, assisted by a Secretary General. Coubertin's own homes in Paris and Lausanne were the Ioc and Secretariat headquarters, as was the case with many other sports and humanitarian organizations between the 1800s and 1900s.

The transfer from Paris to Lausanne, imposed by the war, was underscored by Coubertin's choice, who enlisted in the armed services as a volunteer, to designate as interim President Baron de Blonay in January 1916 (Coubertin's mandate would be over in 1917)¹⁷. Ioc member for Switzerland, an architect belonging to Vaud's high nobility, he had been appointed Ioc Treasurer to replace Callot¹⁸ and had been designated by Coubertin as his anointed successor¹⁹.

War entailed a number of disruptions: in addition to the departures caused by the death on the battlefield of the Ioc German member, Venningener, by the passing of Count Brunetta and Wendell and Ballif's resignation, who was replaced by the Marquis de Polignac, in 1918 three North and South Americans were also elected.

The organization of the military Olympics by the victorious allied armies caused a rift which was later settled after Antwerp.

To begin with, the need for a renewal of the Olympic institution was deeply felt by a number of members, including de Blonay himself, who was increasingly irked by Coubertin's autocratic approach: he suggested the creation of an intermediate organization which might cater to the needs of international Federations and Nocs, and also implement decisions made by the Congress. Apparently, he was referring to an Executive Board: a typical administrative structure which would be created soon after. In the meeting of June 6, 1921, upon President Coubertin's initiative – who linked the proposal to the impossibility for him to take care of the Olympic institution during his trip to South America –, the Ioc decided that «[...] during the President's absence, an Executive Board had to be created»²⁰. The new body's initial members included de Blonay (as President)

¹⁷ For the period between the last Congress before the war and the first one in the after-war period a bridge Commission will be created under the Presidency of the Earl Clary including the three main protagonists of the Paris Congress (Reichel, Muhr e Rousseau, secretary who will resign on June 2, 1922 during the Paris Session at the light of the so many problems discussed but not solved at Lausanne.

¹⁸ The profile has recently been reassembled by Patrice Cholley. See "List of Ioc members 1894-1994" by Karl Lennartz, Patrice Cholley et al., in volume 2 of *The International Olympic Committee one hundred years*, Lausanne, Ioc 1995, pp. 215-231, hereafter abbreviated to *Ioc history 1995*.

¹⁹ In a confidential letter of June 27, 1910 de Coubertin mentioned him as his heir (Muzsa being Secretary and Bertier Treasurer). Bertier will answer with a letter on January 25, 1911 rather claiming the need of a creation of a well-organized and well-behaved office.

²⁰ Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, *Pierre de Coubertin: L'épopée olympique*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1966.

and Guth-Jarkovsky; they were soon joined by Baillet-Latour, Edstrom (whom, as Iaaf President, had first-hand knowledge of the Federations' situation) and de Polignac: all five members had thirty years of particularly active experience within the Ioc and had held – or were currently holding – posts as Presidents or other prominent positions within the Federations or Nocs. The Executive Board was supposed to be unanimous in its ideas and decisions: Coubertin underlined his great wish to preserve consensus, while he probably did not foresee the new entity's development which became a new center of power within the Ioc, ultimately able to influence and run any activity of the institution, to the extent that he did not envisage any role for his own self within the new body.

The first meeting of the Executive Board was held on November 7, 1921 in Paris²¹, in the French National Olympic Committee headquarters: neither de Blonay (although he had a house in Paris as well as Lausanne), nor Guth-Jarkovsky attended, because of the excessive distance. Reverend Coucy Laffan attended instead, since he was traveling through Paris, although he was not an Ec member²². Coubertin, Baillet-Latour, Edstrom and de Polignac were also present. In addition to writing down the rules and regulations, Baillet-Latour was appointed Vice President and de Polignac Secretary (instead of Edstrom). The temporary headquarters were established in Paris. It was also decided that the Eb would meet at least twice a year although, in actuality, it would rapidly get into the habit of meeting in Lausanne for three days in the Fall, to look at current affairs and work on the preparation of Ioc Session agendas²³.

Very soon the Executive Board would start managing finances and replying to the mail, dealing with the archives and with the proposal to set up the Olympic Museum – which had been described as an urgent necessity – in addition to a broad range of structural and functional issues, thus becoming an indispensable part of the Olympic machinery. Between its foundation and the 1925 Prague Congress, the Eb – which would be named Executive Board in English – met seven times to talk, discuss, suggest, decide and make policies.

The Executive Board would eventually deal with a number of issues such as relations with International Federations (managing them directly), Ioc member candidacies and frequent co-optation problems (during this time the co-optation of members for Germany and Austria were discussed) in agreement with regulations, the recognition of new Ncos (Ethiopia etc.), Game venue candidacies and transfers (Los Angeles), Game program and amateurism, for which 15 questions were selected to be analyzed during the Prague Congress. Women's

²¹ Norbert Müller, *One hundred years of Olympic Congresses; 1894-1994*, Lausanne, Ioc, 1994, pp. 93-101.

²² Yves-Pierre Boulougue, "The Presidencies of Demetrius Vikelas (1894-1896) and Pierre de Coubertin (1896-1925)", in Raymond Gafner (ed.), *1894-1994 - The International Olympic Committee - one hundred years: the idea - the Presidents - the achievements*, International Olympic Committee, 1994.

²³ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Sessions*.

²⁴ Müller, *One hundred years of Olympic Congresses*, cit., pp. 93-101.

²⁵ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*. «Bulletin du Comité International des Jeux Olympiques» («Olympic

participation in the Games and the protection of the symbol – Olympic emblem (initially just the word Olympism) were also discussed during Executive Board proceedings²⁴, and several amendments were introduced to the program of the Pedagogy Congress that had been suggested by President Coubertin.

In the 1922 Session and Paris Congress reports, for the first time information is found on the role played by the Eb²⁵; Blonay himself wrote the report and this shows the slight change introduced in the statutes to make the Eb, which from then on would move its headquarters to Lausanne, more independent. The aim was to give the Ioc its senatorial role back and to engage the technical bodies more closely in their common work, assigning them the right share of power and responsibilities. The establishment of the Eb allowed Coubertin to bounce back, handing over to the new body the most awkward problems – requests from Federations in particular – thus avoiding clear closures which would have immediately generated further conflict while, at the same time, preserving the prerogatives of the Ioc under its statutes.

The first four years were like an experimental phase for this new - and more robust - structure of Olympism, during which the emerging issues concerning the Eb's own role and stabilization and its relations with the Ioc President could be addressed; the solution was soon found: Coubertin's successor, Baillet Latour, would also be the President of the Eb. Blonay would only keep the post of Vice President. Hence the Eb really became something very similar to an Ioc Board of Directors. Furthermore, the Charter's version adopted in Prague stated that the Eb would choose the Vice President among its members and that he would replace the President in case of his absence, resignation or death; it also defined the duration of Eb members' mandates, which had not been defined in 1925, and was now established at four years.

Between 1921 and 1925 tension had been mounting regarding the Executive Board's role and authority, as well as its President's independence. Blonay accused Coubertin of excessive interventionism and the latter replied stigmatizing Blonay's rigidity.

By the way, as Coubertin himself would recall in a letter dated January 23, 1922, the Executive Board had been set up – by Coubertin himself – «[...] to run the Ioc during his absence, and not to reform it».

In the mean time, in 1919, Coubertin had regained control of the Ioc. At the Lausanne Session²⁶ – celebrating the Ioc's 25th anniversary – only nine members participated, all of them having homes or living in Europe; thirtyfour countries now had one or more members in the Ioc. Australia and New Zealand each had their own member, after their separation from Australasia; Poland too now had one member, unlike Germany, Austria and Hungary who had no members in the Ioc. This provided the justification for the exclusion of defeated countries from

Review»), April 1895, No. 4.

²⁶ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*. «Olympic Review», January 1902.

²⁷ A list of participants was drawn, excluding those countries without a representative in Ioc. It was a pretext and a double mistake being true that because of death and resignation there were some absences but Hungarians were not dead nor

the first post-War Olympic Games in Antwerp. At this difficult juncture, Baillet-Latour's directorial and, at times, dictatorial activity became apparent, when he involved the highest institutional members in the organization and abruptly settled, although arbitrarily, the thorny issue concerning country invitations²⁷. Coubertin's opening speech at the Antwerp Session, which took place on August 17, 1920²⁸, celebrated the independence not only of the Olympic movement but of sports in general. Several Ioc members took part, including a number of strong men, such as Black, Laffan, Blonay, von Rosen and Guth-Jarkpovsky who became the new Secretary. He replaced Brunetta who had died in mysterious circumstances²⁹.

The changes introduced to the Ioc statutes, in addition to the establishment of the Executive Board, concerned the official language (French), Secretariat and the curtailment of the presidential mandate from ten to eight years.

«The Ioc is a permanent body. It recruits its members through the election of appropriate personalities, upon condition that they are able to speak either French or English and have their nationality and residency within a country having a Noc recognized by the Ioc. Ioc members are the ones who act as the Ioc's representatives in their respective countries and not their country's delegates within the Ioc. They cannot accept any mandate from any government, organization or entity which might result in any commitment on their part or hamper their freedom to vote».

It was an original arrangement, which was bound to live through a century of major changes, conflicts and significant expansion of the global sports system. Personalities such as Ioc members – unchangeable and indestructible over time, even unmovable – clearly show the peculiarity and success of the French Baron's initial intuition and untiring work.

Internal mobilization processes, together with the new pattern of international relations which developed within the Alliance and later in the meaningful – albeit short-lived – experience of the Society of Nations³⁰, opened new avenues also for the development of international sports institutions. Once the circuit of personal and elite relations which had characterized Europe and the Euro-Atlantic region for two centuries unraveled, there were no longer opportunities for a new interaction amongst institutions, although some contacts were attempted between the Ioc and the Society of Nations.

The new Ioc President elected during the Prague Session was Baillet-Latour³¹. De Coubertin, who had garnered quite many votes, thus requiring a second ballot, was acclaimed as «honorary President of the Olympic Games» and

resigning. Pierre de Coubertin, *L'organisation olympique*, in «Olympic Review», Juillet 1903; I. Vind, *Le Comité International Olympique et les Comités Nationaux Olympiques*, in «Olympic Review», September 1968, pp. 425-429.

²⁸ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*. N. Müller, *Coubertin and the Olympic Congresses*, in «Olympic Review», September-October 1981, No. 167-168, pp. 516-520.

²⁹ Cristina Bianchi, Franco Carminati, Gianfranco Colasante, «Il Conte Eugenio Brunetta d'Usseaux (1857-1919)», in Giovanni De Luna (a cura di), *Alle radici dell'olimpismo italiano*, Torno, Toroc, 2005.

³⁰ Ioc Historical Archives, *Notes*.

³¹ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*. «Bulletin du Comité International Olympique» («Olympic Review»), 1958 November, No. 64, pp. 59-62.

would continue to focus mostly on the educational and cultural aspects of Olympism and on the development of a new pedagogy. He actually ended up creating the *Union pédagogique universelle* in Lausanne in 1925, but both died in 1937.

In the meantime, after the birth of the Eb, the overall administrative structure was developed as well around the Chancellor. The post was held by Fred Auckenthaler between 1922 and 1925; his successor was A. G. Berdez³². In 1926 the first Secretary was hired, on a part-time basis: her name was Lydia Zanchi, and she would later work as a full-time Secretary from 1946 to 1966.

National and international: the Nocs

The idea to establish Nocs is usually traced back to 1894 itself: as a matter of fact, the second issue of the Ioc bulletin stated that «[...] in every country, a National Committee shall be set up to ensure each country's participation in the Olympic Games until its turn comes»³³. The following issues of the «*Revue Olympique*», in addition to a section dedicated to the «*nouvelles des comités*»³⁴, often devoted a specific column to «*la formation du nouveau Comité*» starting from No. 4, which was dedicated to the *Comité Hellène*³⁵, (obviously) one of the first committees to be established after the French Noc³⁶, which had been set up in 1894 itself. At the end of the Coubertin Presidency, they would be thirty-two.

Six Nocs were established and recognized by the Ioc already in 1895: in addition to France, also Greece, Australia, Germany, Us and Hungary joined that year. Later, before World War I, when in addition to new European Nocs, Canada, Egypt and Japan also joined, all five continents were represented³⁷.

In 1903³⁸, Coubertin himself published a lengthy article in which more specific indications concerning Committees' features, make-up and duties can be found.

«In order for Nocs to be more effective in their action, they should never originate from the main Federations or Sports Societies or Clubs and even less from the Ioc and, by way of principle, they should be able to handle the internal problems which are found more or less everywhere. Furthermore, they should always be above internecine disputes, which occur practically everywhere: hence, they should be made up of knowledgeable personalities, who are unquestionable and above any kind of shenanigans»³⁹.

He declared his support for permanent Nocs, so that each might meet during

³² Ioc Historical Archives, *Meeting of Executive Board*, 1926, p. 19.

³³ «Bulletin du Comité International Olympique» («Olympic Review»), October 1894, No. 2.

³⁴ «Bulletin du Comité International Olympique» («Olympic Review»), January 1895, No. 3.

³⁵ «Bulletin du Comité International Olympique» («Olympic Review»), April 1895, No. 4.

³⁶ «Olympic Review», January 1902, No. 5.

³⁷ In 1909, there were 12 Nocs recognized by that: 10 in Europe, 1 in Africa, 1 in North America.

³⁸ Ioc Historical Archives, *Coubertin's Archive*.

³⁹ De Coubertin, *L'organisation olympique*, cit.; Vind, *Le Comité International Olympique et les Comités Nationaux Olympiques*, cit..

the time between two Olympic Games, but such meetings should not be «long nor frequent», not to interfere with countries' sports activities. It was always the same fear: «Federations would not be happy to see their prerogatives eroded in that way»⁴⁰.

The first Committees were all set up on a temporary basis, since their only task was to organize the teams that each country was supposed to send to the Olympic Games. During the controversial Athens Session in 1896⁴¹, which took place without de Coubertin and only few members attended, the German delegate Willibald Gebhardt suggested that each country should organize its own permanent Noc⁴².

The first one was actually established in 1904 (and was chaired by General Graf von der Asseburg), converting the Committee for the participation to the Olympic Games founded in 1895⁴³. Next was the British Olympic Association, organized by Reverend Courcy Laffan, which would be used as a model by several other countries⁴⁴ and contributed to «offset the German Noc's power», exactly during the years in which competition between both powers was escalating.

In this respect, the Noc's legitimizing function became evermore relevant: suffice to mention the situation not only of the Bohemian and Finnish Nocs, but also of Serbia's national committee⁴⁵, supported by the Russian Prince Ouroussoff, who asked to have one of its members accepted into the Ioc; after a long debate the request was granted since the Serbian candidate was endowed with the necessary requirements.

At the Buxelles Session in 1905⁴⁶, only three Nocs attended (as had been the case in the 1901 Paris Session); in Berlin, four years later, only Bohemia, Sweden, Hungary, Great Britain and Germany could claim to have well-organized Nocs.

In view of the 5th Olympiad (Stockholm, 1912), the number of Committees was sufficiently high⁴⁷ so that their delegates could be entrusted with the drafting of the Olympic Games' final program.

The list of active Committees before World War I outlines a network of international relations, national ambitions and geo-political reality. Let us try and

⁴⁰ Müller, *Coubertin and the Olympic Congresses*, cit..

⁴¹ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*.

⁴² «Bulletin du Comité International Olympique» («Olympic Review»), 1958, No. 64 p. 59-62. Scherer, *75 Olympische Jahre. Eine Dokumentation über die olympische Bewegung in Deutschland 1895-1970*, Munich, Nok für Deutschland, 1970; Karl Lennartz, *Geschichte des Deutschen Reichsausschusses für Olympische Spiele*, 3 brochures, Bonn, 1981-1985. Brochure 1: *Die Beteiligung Deutschlands an den Olympischen Spielen 1896 in Athen*, Bonn 1981; Brochure 2: *Die Beteiligung Deutschlands an den Olympischen Spielen 1900 in Paris und 1904 in St. Louis*, Bonn, 1983; Brochure 3: *Die Beteiligung Deutschlands an den Olympischen Spielen 1906 in Athen und 1908 in London*, Bonn, 1985.

⁴³ *The Olympic Encyclopedia Part I: The Nocs. The history of each National Olympic Committee and its sports and personalities*, Lausanne, Ioc, 1994.

⁴⁴ In «Bulletin du Comité International Olympique» («Olympic Review»), 1957, No. 59, p. 43.

⁴⁵ P. Arnauld, A. Wahl (dir.), *Sport et relations internationales*, Metz, Centre de Recherche Histoire et Civilisation de l'Université de Metz, vol. 19, 1994.

⁴⁶ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*.

⁴⁷ Pierre de Coubertin, *Mémoires Olympiques*, Comité International Olympique, Lausanne, 1979, p. 75.

define this list: France (1894, permanent since 1911), Us (1894, permanent since 1921), Austral(as)ia (1895), Greece (June 13, 1895), Germany (December 13, 1895, permanent since 1904), Hungary (December 19, 1895), Bohemia (1896, later Czechoslovakia since 1919), Norway (January 26, 1900), Canada (1904), Great Britain (May 24, 1905), Denmark (October 29, 1905), Sweden (November 2, 1905), Belgium (February 18, 1906), Italy (June 10, 1907), Finland (December 2, 1907), Monaco (1907), Austria (1908), Turkey (1908), Iceland (1908), Portugal (October 26, 1909), Egypt (1910), Philippines (1910), New Zealand (November 22, 1911), Japan (1911), Netherlands (September 11, 1912), Luxembourg (1912), Chile (1912), Portugal (1912), Switzerland (1912), South Africa (1912), Rumania (1914). There are several discrepancies between the Nocs' establishment date and their recognition, as it has been pointed out time and again, and also concerning the way in which the different institutions actually worked: more in-depth research would be needed on this point. However, this list can provide a foundation on which a network of relations can be sketched out⁴⁸.

In issue No. 90 of the «Olympic Review»⁴⁹, the rules and regulations of the Paris Congress were published and they would become a landmark for the international sports system's future development. The Congress included Ioc members, delegates from recognized Nocs and from countries with no recognized Nocs. Recognized Nocs were entitled to a maximum number of delegates which was indicated in a detailed list in which the highest ranking Nocs were: Germany, England, Us, France, Italy and Russia with 10 members; followed by the others with 6, 5 and 2 members respectively. The pecking order of power is evident. Ioc members could not act as delegates for their Nocs since they already had voting rights of their own. Countries with no Nocs could only send three delegates presented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and could only play a consultative role. Once again we find this close commingling with diplomacies, which had already occurred in 1894. The rules and regulations specified the organization of Congresses, deliberations and discussions, authorized languages (French, English and German) and issues to be addressed (sex, nationality, amateurism, compulsory and optional disciplines, technical regulations, juries and remunerations, etc.). The Nocs' main task was to select and prepare the list of athletes taking part in the Games. It is worth mentioning that Coubertin, on that occasion, also specified the duties of International Federations: an issue that had already emerged in 1905.

A the 6th Ioc Congress, which took place in Paris in 1914, only Ioc members and Noc delegates basically attended, 29 out of the 32 recognized⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ D.B.Kanin, *Sport and international relations*, Illinois, Stipes Publishing Company, 1978.

⁴⁹ «Olympic Review», June 1913, No. 90, pp. 83-95.

⁵⁰ Even though the birth of some Committees is after 1914 – Spain, Bulgaria, Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Serbian Republic, on the contrary the call of the Congress had Chile, Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Turkey and Monaco. It is not an isolated case. The correspondence with Ioc reveals that only Monaco had declared its will not to send delegates to the Congress, Egypt and Portugal wanted to participate, no reference to Chile and Peru; Documents of the Noc of Mexico were present since 1932 and the ones of Turkey since 1926.

After the divisions caused by the war, in October 1923 the Ioc forwarded a document to all Nocs: it was the first time Coubertin asked Nocs directly to spread Olympic ideals and principles. In line with the outcome of the Rome session⁵¹, at the eve of the 1924 Games, he stated that the attention of all Nocs should be focused on the need to take action to correct the «negative spirit» which was being promoted in sports clubs, in order to put an end to events which «jeopardize the ideals of sports».

Recognized Nocs were entrusted with the exclusive right to organize and enroll Olympic teams and verify their athletes' amateur status. Furthermore, international Federations were given the right to ensure technical control over competitions. From that moment on, in order for Nocs to be officially recognized, they had to be established either by their countries' Ioc members, or at least following their approval.

Nations fighting for their independence chose the Games as an international stage on which they could present their case as independent entities: this happened with Bohemia, Finland and Ireland. When the Ioc recognized new Nocs, it indirectly conveyed international legitimacy. Hence, the request to recognize new countries' Nocs became one of the first foreign policy steps made by countries after achieving national independence, freedom from colonialism⁵² or selfrule.

The Ioc's 21st Session, which was held in Prague in May 1925, systemized this development process: the Ioc met together with the 24 recognized Nocs and 17 international Federations: an Olympic Congress on pedagogy was held at the same time. In 1925, 35 countries all gathered under the five-ring Olympic symbol⁵³.

Federations in the Olympic system

The Ioc, in its new and final Swiss headquarters (opened on April 10, 1915⁵⁴), obviously reiterated its role, while processes were increasingly becoming supra-national in scope; however, it had to come to grips with the structure of the international sports system which largely depended upon Federations⁵⁵.

The establishment of international Federations had characterized the development of several sports already at the end of the 1800s, even before Coubertin's proposal; this applied, in particular, to the broad gymnastics system, which was quite popular in the Western part of central continental Europe, and to the sokol movement, typical of the Slavic area. The latter sport would prove to be incompatible with the sports system's ensuing evolution whereas, for gymnastics, a difficult settlement would be found only in the 1910s.

⁵¹ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*.

⁵² «Olympic Review», January, 1921; Ioc Historical Archives, *Ioc Session*, Roma, 1923.

⁵³ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*. Amd Krüger, *Forgotten decisions: The Ioc on the eve of World War I*, in «Olympika. The International Journal of Olympic Studies», 1997, Vol. VI, pp. 85-98.

⁵⁴ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*. Krüger, *Forgotten Decisions*, cit..

⁵⁵ Ioc Historical Archives, *Minutes of the Session*.

The issue of relations with Federations had already emerged in 1905, as we have already seen, concerning competition rules and regulations, as was the case with 1920: Federations had not been invited to the 1914 Paris Congress, but now they could not be ignored any longer. Concerning relations with national Federations, Coubertin would always stick to the (often repeated) principle that the Ioc could not be of great help; but Federation members sitting in Nocs could have the opportunity to express their views and opinions in that forum (rather than directly with the Ioc). Between 1919 and the following year, Blonay called for independence between Nocs and national sports groups – i.e. Federations. On April 15, 1921, Coubertin specified that national Federation delegates could be chosen outside the Nocs, but they could not hold two posts at the same time, one in the Federation and one in the Noc⁵⁶. Of course this did not erase the substantially persistent antagonism towards the Ioc: tension endured and several (not always successful) attempts were made to redefine roles and responsibilities and correct the ambivalence of decisions being made (national Federations had to ensure their athletes amateur status and Nocs had to vouchsafe for this).

Already during the Antwerp Games, national and international Federations had shown their dislike at the idea of cooperating with the Ioc and for the first time proposed to establish a Union of Federations⁵⁷. The 1920s were characterized by growth and changes amongst the institutions involved in the Olympic movement's development and implementation. After the war, the future of the Games was actually discussed for the first time in 1919 and then during the crucial Lausanne Congress in 1921 which, for Federations, had become the place where they could claim and exert their greater independence.

Paul Rousseau, from the International Cycling Federation, became the most vocal advocate for Federations' claim to count more and, on the occasion of the Ioc Session in Lausanne, he proposed a preliminary meeting on May 31 and June 1, 1921, in which delegates of International Sports Federations took part with the idea to establish some kind of Superfederation or Interfederal Federation Council, which would anticipate a formalized institution. Certainly, the establishment of the Documentation and Information Bureau brought for the first time a semi-united front before the Ioc⁵⁸. Leading powers in the various sports included in the Olympic program, Federations by now had become vital organizations: the Games had become so complex that the Ioc had to rely on the assistance and experience of other organizations to ensure their success. The Ioc acknowledged the real function performed by Federations, many of which still considered the Olympic Games as the best place to promote their own development.

The Ioc had to plan the next Games, discuss the issue of a special event reserved to winter sports, but mostly solve a primary problem: give answers to the need of Nocs and, especially, of international Federations to count more within the international sports movement and, therefore, within the Olympic movement.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Ioc Historical Archives, *Bulletin of International Sport Federations*, No. 1.

The time had finally come for coordination to be achieved between the Federations – which had actually become the Olympic movement's main players – and the Ioc. Thus, the institutional production process that had been triggered and legitimized by the Ioc was finally completed.

15 out of 19 Federations took part (they would be 17 at the 1925 Congress in Prague). Edstrom, the President, would act as a bridge between the two players of the Olympic movement by chairing the Congress and therefore the debate on the «modification of the Olympic program and the conditions to take part in the Games», assisted by two Vice Presidents representing respectively international sports federations and Nocs. In addition to this, the establishment of three consultative commissions concerning amateurism, Game organization and the gymnastics Olympic program was supposed to generate ideas and suggestions for the debate during the Congress, whose agenda would prove to be so busy that only a few items could actually be discussed. First of all, Federations fighting for their autonomy reiterated the point regarding the distinction between compulsory and optional sports, some of which had actually disappeared – so they argued – from the Olympic program. The international Federations' right to be in charge of competitions' technical control was recognized.

At the same time, it was decided (and this decision would be formalized in 1923) to accept in the Olympic games only those sports that had fully functioning international Federations: in 1921 the international Wrestling and Horse-riding Federations were established; the following year, the Motor-boating Federation and, in 1924, Canoe, Skiing, Table tennis and the *Fédération Internationale de Hockey sur Gazon*, a clear and definitive sign of the extraordinary influence exerted by the Olympic movement.

During the 1926 Ioc Congress, it was agreed to organize regular meetings between international Federations and the Ioc Executive Board, and this actually happened starting from 1930.

But already during the 21st Ioc Session, which took place in Prague in May 1925 (as had been specified in the invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs presented in Rome two years before), the development process was systematized: representatives from 24 recognized Nocs met together with Ioc members. It was the last Congress of the Coubertin Presidency whom, ever since the origins of the Olympic movement, had defended and associated Bohemia to the movement and would allow his faithful friend and aide Jiri Guth-Jarkovsky – the only representative left of the initial group of members – to testify to his gratitude and affection. Amongst the new members we find Count Alberto Bonacossa, Baron Schimmelpenninck for the Netherlands, Secretary of State Lewald for Germany, Doctor Haudeck for Austria and Mister Nyholm for Denmark.

During the 29th Session in Berlin (1930), the decision was made to set up a (basic) *Bureau Permanent des Fédérations Internationales Sportives* headquartered in Paris⁹⁹, thereby dispelling any alternative drift with respect to the

⁹⁹ Francesco Bonini, *Le istituzioni sportive italiane: storia e politica*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2006 *passim*.

Olympic movement. The fact that Coubertin took part in the first meetings did not happen by chance⁶⁰. The Bureau, that published its own bulletin and to which the Ioc declared to be happy to grant decision-making powers concerning its sustenance, for sure relieved the Ioc of the cumbersome responsibility of dealing with technical matters.

In 1926, during the Lisbon meeting, the «rights and duties of the Ioc, Nocs and Isfs» were written down. Federations, who were entrusted with technical control over competitions and the choice of referees and Appeal Juries, decided the number of competitions for each sport – following a prior agreement with the Ioc Executive Board –, established the number of athletes for each competition etc.⁶¹. Federations were given more specific and detailed technical tasks concerning their respective disciplines: this partly reduced the Ioc's responsibilities and workload.

A truly international sports system finally emerged, which was defined as being matrix-based⁶², in which the Ioc's role was coordinated with the role played by Federations, due to their inherent inconsistency: the former essentially remained a competition organizer while the latter actually became pure sports entities, Ngos of different kinds, since they grouped together other entities within a federal structure. However, it was within the Ioc that Federations would achieve their legitimacy and institutional systemization. The Ioc's original structure emerged evermore clearly and became able to respond to the new needs of a more structured and diversified sports movement, which was becoming increasingly relevant also from the political and cultural standpoint. And had also become a full-fledged player within the international system.

⁶⁰ «Bulletin officiel du Bureau permanent des Federations Internationales Sportives», April 1925, No. 5.

⁶¹ «Olympic Review», April 1926, No. 2.

⁶² M. Ferrara, *L'organizzazione dello sport*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2003, p. 25 and following.