

25 years of cooperation in the CIPC's International Network of Pierre de Coubertin Schools

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“To ask different peoples to love one another is mere childishness. To ask them to respect one another is not utopian, but to respect one another they have to know one another.”¹

Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) exclaimed this almost 90 years ago. And even today, so much truth lies in this statement.

By reviving the Olympic Games and the meeting of young athletes, who would participate in peaceful and fair competitions, he hoped to provide a crucial contribution to world peace.

Following Coubertin's idea of peace and friendship among nations, the former CIPC President and famous researcher on Coubertin writings, Prof. Dr. Norbert Müller (1946-2022), initiated the organisation of a first international Youth Forum in 1997. The aim was to provide the young generation with an understanding of Coubertin's Olympic idea and to let the values of friendship, fairness, respect, and the joy of effort be experienced across borders.

The history of the Youth Forums began in **1997** in preparation for the CIPC Congress “Coubertin and Olympism – Questions for the Future”, which took place on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the 2nd Olympic Congress of **Le Havre** 1897 at the same location.

Similar to the Youth Camps during the Olympic Games, for the first time six Coubertin Schools from four countries were invited to an international youth meeting close to Mirville Castle, the Coubertins' family residence.

It was there, in Coubertin's native region of Normandy, where the competitions for the *Pierre de Coubertin Award* were introduced as the core of the week's activities.

The **Coubertin Award** covers five different disciplines representing the five Olympic rings. These five Olympic events also pay tribute to Coubertin's concept of a harmonious development of the entire human being: an education of the body, will and mind:

1. Social Performance
2. Olympic Knowledge Test
3. Sporting Performance
4. Cultural Performance
5. Olympic Values.²



During the first Youth Forum, 120 pupils enthusiastically vied for the “Carnet Coubertin” (a badge with a certificate) in the spirit of Coubertin and displayed the results of their work during the Closing Ceremony of the Congress.

The success of the first Pierre de Coubertin Youth Forum initiated the adoption of a resolution in the congress members' final declaration to organise such a Youth Forum every two years in the future.³

In the following Youth Forums, the prize was changed to the *Coubertin medal*. The front of the medal, designed by Karlheinz Oswald, displays a portrait of COUBERTIN and COUBERTIN'S motto “voir loin, parler franc, agir ferme (see afar, speak frankly, act firmly)” is engraved on the back. (photos: CIPC Archives)

¹ COUBERTIN, P. DE: “The Philosophic Foundation of Modern Olympism”, in: MÜLLER, N. (Ed.): Pierre de Coubertin. Olympism. Selected Writings. Lausanne 2000 [1935], 583.

² See NIKOLAUS, I.: The CIPC's International Network of Coubertin Schools – A Sustainable Model for an Olympic Education. 2nd, updated and completed edition: Keeping Olympism alive 365 Days a Year. Comité International Pierre de Coubertin. Lausanne 2019, 26-28.

³ MÜLLER, N. (Ed.) : Coubertin et l'Olympisme. Questions pour l'avenir. Niedernhausen, Strasbourg, Sydney 1998, 295.

Since 1997, 13 International Youth Forums with more than 1,500 participants overall have taken place. The number of participating delegations and countries has risen steadily from an initial number of six delegations from four countries to 25 delegations from 23 countries in 2019. At the same time, the number of schools loyal to the Network has increased continually. Aside from collaborating in preparation for subsequent Youth Forums, the schools actively cooperated on various projects during the interim two years and contributed to strengthening the Network with numerous ideas and initiatives. As a consequence, a fully functional Network of Coubertin Schools, which place great value on the holistic education of Coubertin as well as on Olympic education within the scope of many school subjects, has developed in the meantime.



Participants of the 2nd Youth Forum in front of the Historical Museum in Much Wenlock (photo: I. Nikolaus)

Let us take a look at the history of the Youth Forums once again: In **1999**, the small town of **Much Wenlock**, the cradle of the British Olympic Movement, hosted the 2nd Youth Forum, in which seven delegations from five countries participated. Much Wenlock, like any other Youth Forum site, offered many possibilities to discover the country and get to know its people alongside the competitions for the *Coubertin Award*. Thus, the participants received the opportunity to follow Dr. Brookes' footsteps and feel the history of the Wenlock Games, initiated by him in 1850, simply by strolling through this picturesque town. During a visit of the neighbouring Ironbridge, for instance, they learnt about the start of the Industrial

Revolution and dove into the 18th century in "Blists Hill", a living history museum. Finally, the youths enjoyed walking through the idyllic Shropshire mountains with their new-found friends.

Two years later, in the autumn of **2001**, ten delegations from eight countries convened at the Olympic capital **Lausanne**. For the first time, not only European teenagers were among the participants since the winners of the *Australian Coubertin Award* also took part in the event. Aside from the sport, artistic, and Olympic knowledge competitions, a visit to the Olympic Museum and the IOC as well as an excursion to the Swiss Alps were the programme's highlights. Unfortunately, the Australians' hope to discover the first snow on one of the peaks could not be fulfilled.



Participants of the 3rd Youth Forum in the Swiss Alps (photo: CIPC Archives)



Students writing their Knowledge Test at "Muvita" in 2003 (photo: I. Nikolaus)

In **2003**, **Arenzano** near Genova, hosted the 4th Youth Forum with participants from 12 schools, from ten countries overall. A new theme "The Olympic Games and Environmental Protection" was introduced at this meeting. For this purpose, the Environment Museum "Muvita", whose structure reflected the shape of a ship, offered the perfect location. Prior to the Olympic Winter Games in Turin in 2006, students also discussed the impact of various Olympic winter sports on the environment and steps taken by TOROC to organise sustainable Winter Games.

Furthermore, they expressed their own ideas on this important topic in a creative way, producing collages and a poster collection.

The 5th Youth Forum in **2005**, which took place in **Radstadt**, Austria, will remain unforgettable for the young people from 12 countries due to the first-time participation of representatives from the Kipkeino School in Kenya. The Network now spanned across three continents. Under the direction of the CIPC honorary member Dr. Herrmann Andrecs and the motto “Making the Olympic Principles Work in the Life of Youths”, the participants became more involved with the preparations and organisation of the meeting right from the beginning. Since then, all results of the Youth Forum are documented in a *Forum Report*.



The School Orchestra performing their own composition of an Olympic anthem (photo: Forum Press Centre Radstadt)



A medieval evening with friends (photo: Forum Press Centre Tábor)

With representatives from South Korea and China, the Gymnázium Pierra de Coubertina **Tábor**, Czech Republic, welcomed youths from 17 countries and four continents overall at the 6th Youth Forum in **2007** under the motto “The Reality of Olympism in Schools. Think Globally, Act Locally”. Highlights were not only the perfectly organised sport competitions, but also the excursion to the capital Prague. The last evening, especially for the non-European participants, will remain a wonderful souvenir: The dinner in a medieval mill and a lot of fun while watching and trying out exciting games from this era.

Two years later the representatives of 19 Coubertin Schools met in **Ancient Olympia**, Greece, in **2009**. The participants had the unique chance to celebrate their 7th Youth Forum on the campus of the International Olympic Academy, not far from the



Ancient Olympic Stadium.

This was the ideal place to

teach young people from around the world about history as Coubertin had always wished for and about the Ancient Olympic Games. The youths enthusiastically tried Ancient Olympic sports, learnt Greek dances and enjoyed the arts competitions.

The whole forum community spent their last two days

in Athens. The Acropolis, the Olympic Stadium of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, as well as a visit to the ancient village and the Museum of Marathon made up particular highlights of this trip. All the participants were deeply impressed by the numerous historical sights, which allowed them to experience the flair of antiquity and surely made their stay an unforgettable one. (photos: CIPC Forum Press Centre Olympia)



A particular challenge was the 8th Youth Forum in **2011**, which took place outside of Europe for the first time with a record attendance of 22 teams in the Olympic city **Beijing**. Under the direction of the CIPC's honorary member Robert Marxen, the event was successfully carried out under the motto “Youth, Cultural Diversity in our World, and Common Values”. Given Mexico's involvement, participants from five continents were now represented.

In Beijing, a new event was introduced: The Mini-Expo, where each delegation presented their school, their region and the country they come from.



The Mini-Expo in Beijing (photo: A. Schöpke)



Since then, the Mini-Expos have become an ideal opportunity to learn about different cultures, customs and traditions during the Youth Forums.

Unforgettable

moments for all participants will remain the visit of the Forbidden City, the Olympic venues of 2008 and the excursion to the Great Wall. (photos: A. Schöpke)



In **2013**, the youngest Coubertin School, the **Gausdal** videregående skole Pierre de Coubertin, near Lillehammer, hosted the 9th Youth Forum. In accordance with the Norwegian lifestyle, the primary focus was placed on “Sustainable Development and Closeness to Nature”. Beside survival activities, the visit to the Olympic sites and the Paralympic Day with Norwegian Paralympic athletes were very well received by the teenagers.



(photos: Hans Krugenberg)

The 10th Youth Forum of Coubertin Schools in **2015** was exceedingly well organised by the Gymnásium Pierra de Coubertina **Piešťany**, Slovakia. A novelty during our anniversary forum was the holding of an art competition consisting of 10 international art workshops in the areas drama, pantomime, painting, dance and music. This event appealed strongly to the participants and accompanying teachers because it constituted a new additional type of encounter between the pupils. Another novel component was the parade of delegations in their traditional costumes through the town, ending in a dance festival in front of the local audience.



During the Parade in Piešťany (photos: Forum Press Centre Piešťany)

Host of the 11th Youth Forum in **2017**, where we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the International Network of Coubertin Schools, was **Ülenurme** Gümnaasium in Estonia. This long-standing partner school, welcomed 24 delegations from 23 countries representing all continents.

For the first time, participants from India, Spain, Poland and Ukraine joined the international forum community. The perfectly organised meeting of youths still remains fresh in our memories.

This year the motto of the Youth Forum held in the heart of the Baltic Republic was “Kalokagathia - the harmony of body, will and mind!”. Following the IOC President’s demand in the Agenda 2020 to increasingly promote sports among children and youths and “to get the couch potatoes off the couch”, the participants discussed ways of how to convince peers to get actively involved with sports. In preparation of the forum, they created a poster series reflecting their ideas, which were displayed in the



The tree of Olympic Values (photo: Elvira Ramini)

host school. During the week, each participant placed a leaf with an Olympic value he/she considered the most important on the “Tree of Olympic Values”.

Besides the competitions for the Coubertin Award, a tug-of-war event, being a popular sport in Estonia, was one of the highlights during the week.



◀ The tug-of-war event



▶ Paralympic Sports

(photos: J. Rauch)

On the occasion of **Nelson Mandela’s 100th birthday**, the International Pierre de Coubertin Committee in collaboration with the Foundation for Sport, Development and Peace (Republic of South Africa) and the South African Coubertin Committee, under the direction of Prof. Dr. Marion Keim, organised the first **African Pierre de Coubertin Youth Forum** in Cape Town/Robben Island in **September 2018**.



Group photo on Robben Island (photo: Duncan van der Merwe)

20 delegations, coming from different regions of South Africa as well as from Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mauritius and Namibia, took part. The motto of this meeting was: “The Power of Sport and Peace: Be the Legacy in Sport and Life”.

Robben Island, the very place where Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned for more than 18 years, was not only an excellent choice of venue, but also an extraordinary emotional experience for all boys and girls as well as for their teachers taking part.

In August **2019**, the forum returned to Coubertin’s home country, at the Centre Omnisports **Mâcon** in **Burgundy**.

In cooperation with CDOS 71, a successful 12th Youth Forum was organised. There the highest number of participants ever was welcomed: 25 delegations from 23 countries.

Besides excellent sports and arts competitions and a wonderful excursion to Cluny, especially the Mini-Expo became an unforgettable meeting of youths from around the world.



Forum participants in Cluny (photo: S. Kamhawi)

Unforeseen challenges arose in preparation of the **13th Youth Forum of Coubertin Schools** planned for 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which made travelling and meetings of large groups impossible, it had to be postponed for a year.

In order to keep the Olympic fire burning and inspiring the cooperation among the Network's schools, a bilingual module on "Sustainable Olympics" was initiated. Furthermore, the CIPC President, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stephan Wassong, set a Lecture Series on Coubertin and Olympic topics on track to provide a monthly online meeting for the teachers of the more than 30 Coubertin Schools and members of CIPC.

Finally, in **November 2022**, the 13th edition of the CIPC Youth Forums could be held, which coincided with the **25th anniversary of the International Network of Coubertin Schools**.

For the first time the forum was organised in Germany, in the **Olympic City of Munich 1972**, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the XXth Olympiad.

There, 19 delegations of young participants coming from 18 countries and representing four continents were welcomed by CIPC.



Outstanding moments besides the competitions for the Coubertin Award were the Mini-Expo, International dances and a visit to the Olympia Tower and Olympia Park of Munich.



(photos: S. Kamhawi)

Long-term studies of the CIPC over the course of nearly two decades show, the "learning institution" of the Network of Coubertin Schools has contributed to a considerable extent to the qualitative and quantitative improvement of Olympic education both during the Youth Forums and at the Network's schools themselves.

On many occasions, the Coubertin Schools became role models for Olympic education in their region by initiating and organising countless Olympic activities, whether in the form of international school Olympics in Estonia, major sports events in Piešťany, or the development and holding of a school-based Pierre de Coubertin Award in Erfurt.



CIPC Bronze plaque donated to engaged Coubertin Schools

(Created by Karlheinz Oswald, photo: I. Nikolaus)

As a result of these achievements, the Network of Coubertin Schools now represents a model of Olympic education, recognized both by the IOC and internationally, that focuses on long-term impact.

In a world shaken up daily by shocking news from crisis areas, unfortunately also from terror attacks on peaceful major cities, Coubertin's idea of peace is more relevant than ever. To offer young people from all over the world, from diverse cultures and religions, a place to learn peaceful coexistence, such as during the Youth Forums, so that teenagers experience international friendship and return as ambassadors of peace to their native countries – that is the right way! A way that is worth fighting for!

So let's continue to give the Coubertin students from around the world a place to meet, to mingle and to get to know one another. After the forum is before the forum! For 25 years more to come!



Participants of the 1st Youth Forum in Le Havre 1997 united by the Olympic rings (photo: N. Müller)