



# Impressions of the International Olympic Academy

by Virgil Ludu

*The 14th Session of the International Olympic Academy, to be held from 19th July to 3rd August 1974, is approaching. It seems appropriate to reintroduce this traditional cultural event of the Olympic movement.*

*The most positive means of doing so are to publish the impressions of a participant; we are printing below those drawn up by Mr. Virgil Ludu after attending last year's Session.*

*Mr. Virgil Ludu, a Rumanian writer, is also a physical education teacher. He was national and Balkan 400 m. hurdles champion.*

Resembling an ancient theatre in the setting of a natural amphitheatre surrounded by hills, cypresses and oleanders, the Academy established in 1960 is watched by the old city of Olympia and the Sun God.

Somewhere upstairs are the dean's office, the library and the lecture halls, then coming down the white marble steps one reaches the dormitories and the alleys overlooking miniature palm-trees.

One leads a Spartan life here. No luxury, no comfort. Four bunk beds in each room. Of course, the showers are modern as are the courses and sport, but the environment is three thousand years old, as is immortal Olympia nearby.

The participants come from all continents. They practise all sports, speak all languages. But they have one faith in common, the Olympic spirit, Olympism.

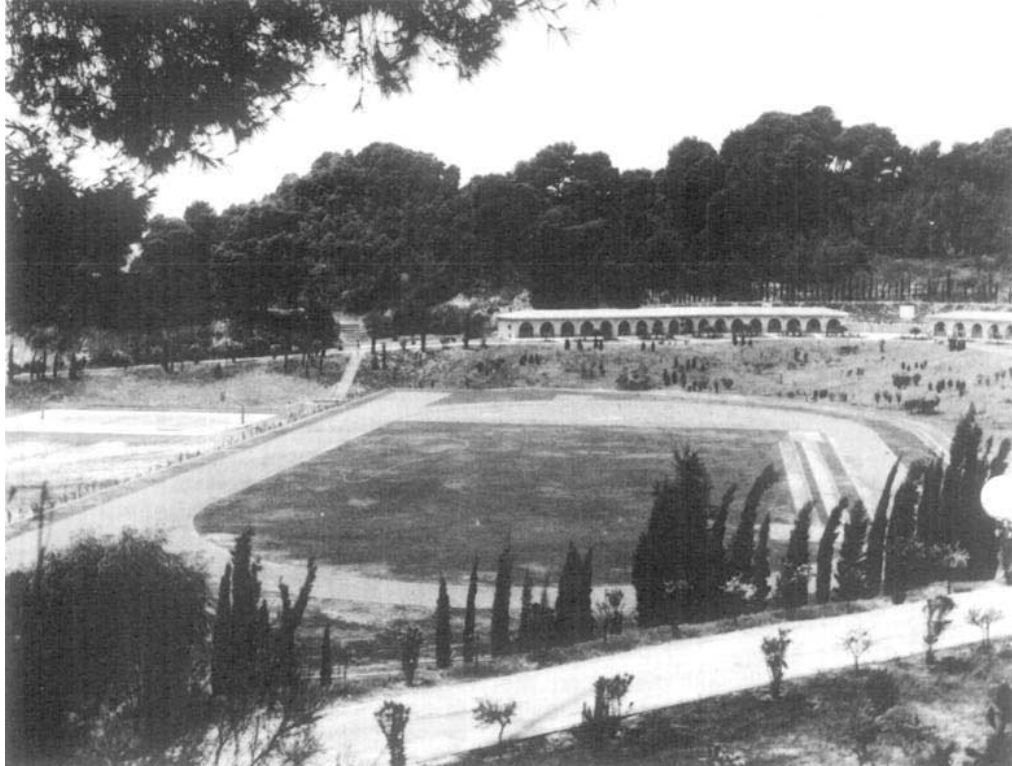
What is Olympism? Sport for all the peoples of the world, the idea that means health, strength, beauty, joy.

The sports and leisure grounds are few: a 330 m athletics track with a grass covered football ground, four bitumen covered grounds for volleyball and basketball, a 25 m swimming pool with water blue like the sea. Is it too little? No, because here people know how to respect the time and space of others.

In the morning, on the dew wet grass, the world's youth greets the sun rise, at noon they swim in the pool with blue water like that of the Aegean Sea. In the evening, in the sea breeze coming from far off, from 30 km, they play volleyball and basketball, they sing in all languages and dance.

From sunrise till sunset, in the beam of the floodlights at night, three flags — the Olympic, the Greek, and that of the Academy — wave serenely and gently.

Three thousand year old Olympia is a few hundred meters away. Here are all the continents, the youth of contemporary world. But over everything, like a powerful god, like Zeus, or Apollo or Hermes, the Olympic spirit rules.



The themes of the 13 sessions of the Academy were interesting and useful, and this year's theme "The contribution of the intellectual world to the Olympic movement", was generous in its expectations.

Visits were made to the three museums of which Olympia is very proud: the Museum of Archaeology, the Museum of the Ancient Olympic Games and the new Museum of the Modern Olympic Games.

In the evenings I watched with pleasure and great patience the Olympic films of Athens 1896, Paris 1900, Stockholm 1912, Antwerp 1920, Los Angeles 1932.

I was thrilled to watch the heroes of the Games: Jesse Owens, Fanny Blankers-Koen, Emil Zatopek, Bikila Abebe.

And a surprise: the film of the 1960 Winter Games in Squaw Valley. Then Rome 1960, Tokyo 1964, and the highly artistic colour film, really overwhelming, Sapporo 1972!

But let me return to the Academy... The panoramic landscape and the alleys of the Academy are as inviting as in the classical peripatetic school, so called because of Aristotle's habit of walking while teaching, to reflection and action.

After all, what is life, our passing but useful existence, if not meditation and action. The Greek philosophers said it, Goethe said it in Faust, and Pierre de Coubertin always believed it.

And so, of course, in order that he remain forever linked to this concept, after having for many years travelled over the whole world and achieved his wish, his heart should rest in Olympia, in the park of the Academy.

Here, in this circle of cypresses and white and red oleanders, under this scene of Hellenic beauty, Coubertin's heart goes on beating for the Olympic idea and the Olympic Games.

V.L.