
The International Olympic Academy



aron Pierre de Coubertin was unquestionably a visionary and a pioneer. These qualities were instrumental in his revival of the Olympic Games and in his ability to sway both his close associates and society, which were preoccupied with more material interests at the time.

Jean Ketseas of Greece and Carl Diem of Germany, pedagogues by training and by conviction, joined forces to create an educational vehicle which provides an important complement to the thought, work and actions of the IOC's creator. The two co-founders of the International Olympic Academy (IOA) were cast in the same mould.

Pierre de Coubertin's ideal was to create a method of moral fulfilment through the education of the body and the mind. Reviving the Olympic Games was only part of his project: in order to complete it he needed an institution that would serve as a centre for discussion of the spiritual values and educational objectives of the Olympic Movement.

It was thus that the IOA was born. Its roots date back to the Classical period: at the apogee of Greece's cultural past, the "nomophylakes" were an elite group who acted as the protectors of the ethical and religious aspects of the Olympic Games and of their laws. During the ten months preceding the Games, these learned men taught the high cultural value of the sporting contests to the "hellanodikai" (technical judges), who came to stay in Elis.

Hoping to ensure that the movement which he had revived would continue, in 1931 Pierre de Coubertin began discussions with German educator Carl Diem. In a letter he wrote on 18 March 1937, a few months before his death, Coubertin described the future IOA in the following terms: *"I believe that a centre for Olympic studies would help more than anything to preserve and build upon my work and to protect it from straying from its course".*

In 1938, the International Olympic Institute, created that year in Berlin (GER) by Carl Diem, suggested to the

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Hellenic Olympic Committee that it create an academy; and in June 1939, the 39th IOC Session in London (GBR) acknowl-

edged that an "Academy of Sports" had been created in Olympia (GRE). Jean Ketseas, then secretary general of the Greek NOC, persuaded the 41st IOC Session, held in 1947 in Stockholm (SWE), to establish a centre for Olympic studies. In April 1949, the plan of action for the Olympic Academy presented by the Greek NOC was unanimously accepted at the 44th IOC Session in Rome (ITA).

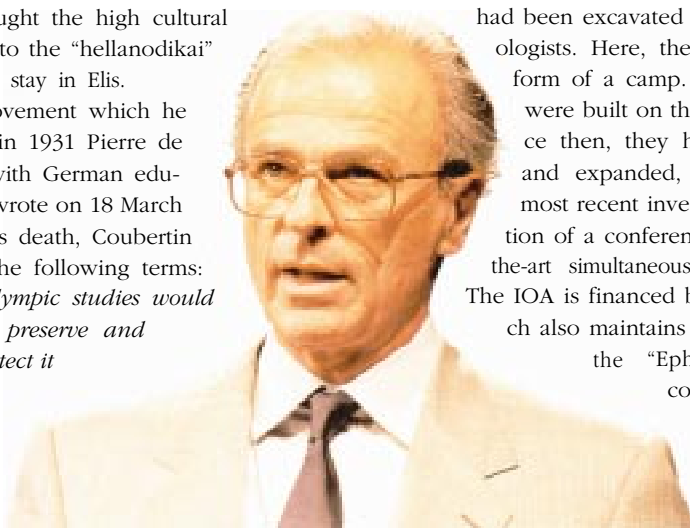
Coubertin's idea, translated into actions by Diem and Ketseas, had come a long way. After a lengthy gestation period, which it had spent seeking support from the IOC's governing bodies, the Academy could now start its work. Its beginnings were spartan: the first session, held on 16 June 1961 in Olympia, resembled a boy scout camp, where participants were housed in tents.

AN EDUCATIONAL VEHICLE

After years of intense and bitter negotiations, the Greek NOC's efforts were rewarded. In 1961, it began to assemble the necessary materials and lay the financial foundations for its project.

The government approved its use of a site in Olympia not far from the ruins of the ancient Olympic stadium which had been excavated by a group of German archaeologists. Here, the infant IOA was built, in the form of a camp. The first permanent structures were built on the same site in the mid-60s. Since then, they have gradually been improved and expanded, and the Greek government's most recent investment was to finance construction of a conference hall equipped with state-of-the-art simultaneous interpreting facilities.

The IOA is financed by the Greek government, which also maintains its buildings. It is governed by the "Ephoria", a management board comprising the IOC members in Greece, four representatives of



Fernando Serpieris,
President of the IOA.



Aerial view of the IOA buildings and grounds.

the Greek NOC and three persons appointed by the NOC who have made an outstanding contribution to the Olympic Movement in Greece. Its patron is the IOC, and it receives annual grants from Olympic Solidarity. These funds finance the IOA's regular programme of activities: annual sessions for young participants sent by their NOCs from all over the world, seminars for representatives of IFs, NOCs and national academies, sports journalists and broadcasters, coaches, Greek educators, sports teachers and physicians.

The IOA also has a permanent administrative department run by a dean and support staff who supervise use of the facilities, which are open to the Olympic family between May and October every year.

Apart from the university-style accommodation built in 1967 and the private rooms that were added later, there is a swimming pool, basketball and tennis courts, an athletics track and a football pitch, which allow participants and conference delegates including IOC members and many Olympic champions - to put into practice the principles they discuss in their conferences, working groups and cultural activities.

The themes of the annual sessions introduce young people from the five continents to the history of the ancient and modern Olympic Games, the fundamental guiding principles of sport, sports education, training and movement theory, and also the current problems of sport and Olympism: commercialization, doping, internationalization and media involvement. The proceedings of the debates and the participants' recommendations are included in an annual report. Each year, the IOC President attends the official opening of the annual ses-

sions on Pnyx Hill, opposite the Parthenon, in Athens, and this reflects the IOC's commitment to the educational aspect of the Olympic message. At the 35th session in 1995 he reminded the participants and other assembled dignitaries that "the Olympic Movement is essentially a pedagogical movement".

For many people, participating in an IOA session in Olympia is an unforgettable experience which is both intellectually and socially stimulating. Often, it is their first contact with the Olympic Movement, and the experience can have a strong influence on their lives afterwards, inspiring them to become ambassadors of the Olympic ideal in their country.

The IOC's Commission for the International Olympic Academy has acted as an intermediary between the Academy and the IOC since 1977. In 1994 it became the Commission for the IOA and Olympic Education. It is chaired by Nikos Filaretos, one of two IOC members in Greece.

Like the IOC, the IOA has had seven presidents to date:

1962-1965: Jean Ketseas (Greece)

1965-1970: HRH Prince Georg Wilhelm of Hanover
(Germany)

1970-1974: Epaminondas Petralias (Greece)

1974-1976: Athanios Tzartanos (Greece)

1976-1986: Nikolaos Nissiotis (Greece)

1986-1992: Nikos Filaretos (Greece)

1992- : Fernandos Serpieris (Greece)