

Open letter to a friend

We often talk about youth in everyday life for a number of reasons. The word “youth” is also a choice ingredient which we add to all political sauces. During my youth, we found happiness in the Scout Movement which enabled us to learn to live in a community, use ‘Morse code’ as a means of communication, play all kinds of games and team sports, and above all, travel. “Jamborees” were great parties for youth which were not to be missed. Today’s youth, at least those who have the opportunity, are growing up with computers and mobile phones, have a choice of a number of television channels to watch and new sports to practise. I am not sure if the Scout Movement still has the same attraction.

Apart from the Scout Movement, there was the Young Men’s (or Women’s) Christian Association (YMCA/YWCA) which has supported the initiatives of Pierre de Coubertin and Olympism since its beginnings, and has created hostels for young people over the different continents. Youth and sport matters have now become state affairs, generally grouped together in one youth and sports ministry. The true value of this governmental promotion at a cabinet level is appreciable. For the ministry for youth and sports, be it in industrialized countries or developing ones, is still the government’s poor relative. The Olympic Movement’s involvement with young people occurs above all on sports fields, and through the organization of a youth camp during the Olympic Games. But, spurred on by IOC

by Fékrou Kidane



President Juan Antonio Samaranch, and through Olympic Solidarity, young people aged between 15 and 18 now benefit from grants which enable them to receive training in a sport of their choice. Young people, like adults, have their own non-governmental organizations and are very active in the humanitarian, social and environmental sectors. They are often the first to offer their services as volunteers for social tasks. Nevertheless, until now there had been no direct link between the Olympic Movement and youth and students organizations, as is the case with the United Nations system. The IOC has remedied this shortcoming thanks to its cooperation with the United Nations and by creating a youth unit within its secretariat.

Traditionally dealing with sports ministries, the IOC also had to become involved in this sector. This is why, from now onwards, a theme on sport and leisure activities will feature on the programme of the World Youth Forum, organized regularly by the UN. What is even better is that the

IOC is in charge of planning, consulting and promoting the theme and the participation. The other topics are: education; employment; health and population; famine and poverty; the environment and human population; juvenile delinquency; substance abuse; the culture of peace, tolerance and resolution of conflict; politics, participation and rights; women and girls; information and communications technology.

National, continental and world organizations are managed by young people aged between 18 to 24 (a category established by the United Nations), who are competent and dynamic and capable of dealing with all issues regarding socio-economic problems. These are young people who have distinguished themselves on the social scene and university campuses, and are ready to defend social justice, human rights, education and health for all. These organizations, the members of which are nearer than others to their fellows, are able to contribute to the drafting of a youth policy. Society is faced with scourges such as AIDS, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, violence and racism. Sport and the Olympic Ideal can contribute efficiently to the campaign to eradicate these scourges and serve, to a certain extent, as a remedy and a solution.

It is for this fundamental reason that cooperation among the National Olympic Committees and youth organizations is strongly advised so that they work together on the social dimension in favour of the national community.