

The Significance of the Eleventh World Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden, 1981

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The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded in 1894 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin for the express purpose of assisting Greece in hosting the first Modern Olympic Games and planning future quadrennial festivals. Interest in the Games grew fitfully, but by World War I there were several dozen National Olympic Committees (NOC's), each charged with the task of preparing their nation's athletic youth for the Olympic Games. Simultaneously, international sport federations, several of them older than the IOC itself, were growing in number, prestige, and power.

Bright from the beginning, Coubertin recognized that the success of his Olympic dream was directly tied to the capacity of the IOC and the willingness of the NOC's to work closely and harmoniously together. Even so, such a relationship would not work at all unless sporting federations as diverse as yachting, archery, water polo, soccer, wrestling, track and field athletics and many others were to talk to one another, for each of them to work harmoniously with the National Olympic Committees, and all of them to cooperate with the IOC and its Olympic Charter of rules and regulations. From the beginning it did not, and the Tripartite concept was only a dream in the mind of the resolute Coubertin.

The success of the Olympic Movement was directly related to the harmonious dialogue between the IOC, all NOC's, and all sport federations. Pierre de Coubertin called meetings or congresses of representatives from the three groups in 1894 (Paris), 1897 (LeHarve), 1905 (Bruselles), 1906 (Paris), 1913 (Lausanne), 1914 (Paris), 1921 (Lausanne), and 1925 (Prague), 1930 (Berlin). Almost irreconcilable difficulties, extraordinary world tensions, and the death of Coubertin in 1937, resulted in no Olympic Congress until 1973—a hiatus of 43 years. The Varna, Bulgaria, Congress of 1973 was extremely important in laying the groundwork for significant changes in the modern Olympic Charter and the future of the Movement. Serious problems of inflation, excessive commercialism, boycott and terrorism threaten the very existence of the Games. The Olympic Congress of 1981 in Baden-Baden, West Germany, will address all these issues, and has the capacity to be the most important of the eleven international gatherings,