ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC ACADEMY FOR THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

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Abstract

The International Olympic Academy, which marked the 50th anniversary of its operations in the dissemination of the Olympic values and development of Olympic education, presents the main focus of this article. Based on scientific research and historical context, it is trying to determine the significance of the International Olympic Academy for the Olympic Movement. The significance of the International Olympic Academy is reflected in its definition as a multicultural and interdisciplinary scientific and educational centre aiming at studying and teaching Olympism in its widest forms of existence. The foundations of the International Olympic Academy are recognized in the Ancient Greek ideal inspired by the ancient gymnasium, which formed the Olympic ideal, through balanced cultivation of the body, will and mind.

Key words: Olympism, National Olympic Academies, Croatian Olympic Academy, International Olympic Committee, sport, history

Introduction

The date taken as the official beginning of operations and the foundation of the International Olympic Academy (IOA) is 16 June 1961 (Georgiadis, 2011, p. 21), when the first Session for Young Participants was held, but the roots of the Olympic idea and the program determination of the IOA go back to the distant past, to the ancient times. The ancient idea spurred the revival of the Olympic Games and found its direction within the Olympic Movement through Olympism, which presented the pedagogical, moral and educational component of the Modern Olympic Games, introduced by Pierre de Coubertin. The International Olympic Academy is closely associated with the original ancient Greek idea, and this association is still fostered today and particularly evident in the program part of the IOA’s work. Besides the program association, the ancient and Greek orientation of the International Olympic Academy is clearly recognized in its external signs, especially symbols, and the location of the IOA headquarters in Ancient Olympia, Greece, not far from the archaeological site, over which the spirit of the Ancient Olympic Games still hovers. The International Olympic Academy is a part of the Olympic Movement, and while the Olympic Games, featuring the world’s best athletes, who present their achievements, are held throughout the world every four years, one must point out that the IOA is an institution founded with the goal to implement and promote the educational and intellectual context of the Olympic Games, that is, Olympism.

It was Coubertin, who, when reviving the Modern Olympic Games, defined sport as a means of forming physical, moral and intellectual abilities in young people, closely associating it with Olympism as a philosophical and educational determinant, as well as with the then gentleman value system and moral qualities defined by the term religio athlete as a new platform, which would find its determination in the term Olympic education. On that note, Coubertin wrote: „Olympism can become a school for moral nobility and purity as well as physical endurance and energy, but this can happen only if you continually raise your concept of athletic honour and impartiality to the level of your muscular ability“ (Müller, 2000, p. 560). This is how one can refer to Olympism as a link between Coubertin and the International Olympic Academy, because Coubertin set the pedagogical and educational guidelines of the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) work, introducing sport as a means of development, during his time as IOC President, and especially through the Congresses in Le Havre in 1897, Brussels in 1905, Paris in 1906, Lausanne in 1913 and Prague in 1925 (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 21). The mentioned orientation introduced by Coubertin and his ideas can be regarded as the cornerstone of the future International Olympic Academy, the foundation of which he didn’t live to see, but he certainly made a major contribution, which hasn’t been forgotten. It was also officially recognized on 1 January 2013, when the whole world marked the 150th anniversary of Pierre de Coubertin’s birth. Besides Coubertin, Ioannis Ketseas and Carl Diem also played a very important role in the foundation of the International Olympic Academy. They strongly advocated its foundation, which legally took place in 1955 (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 25).

Although founded in 1955, the year of 1961 is considered to be the beginning of its operations, when the first Session for Young Participants took place and the first informal guidelines for its activities were set (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 25); they defined the International Olympic Academy as an „international cultural centre in the sacred place where the idea of athletic contests was born and developed, so its aim shall be to maintain and spread the Olympic idea and its
Work Program of the International Olympic Academy

The International Olympic Academy implements its educational program through sessions, which take place at the IOA headquarters in Ancient Olympia, Greece, every year. Lecturers vary from eminent university professors coming from throughout the world to Olympic Movement officials and famous athletes. The work program of the International Olympic Academy is adopted annually and sent to the International Olympic Committee, National Olympic Committees, National Olympic Academies and other stakeholders of the Olympic Movement. Although the work program and the number of educational programs implemented by the International Olympic Academy have changed throughout history, one needs to distinguish between the IOA’s international and national programs. Over the years, however, five of them have established themselves as the most important international educational programs: The Session for Young Participants, The Session for Educationists, The Session for Officials of National Olympic Committees and National Olympic Academies, The Seminar for Sports Journalists and The Olympic Studies Seminar for Postgraduate Students, among which The Master’s Degree Program on Olympic Studies holds a special position (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 192).

The International Olympic Academy program that has been going on for the longest time and has included the most participants is the Session for Young Participants. It presents the International Olympic Academy’s multicultural character and its role in today’s world in the best way: based on its ancient roots, it connects nations and people through sport, but it also uses sport as a means of connecting it with education, culture and art, spreading the message of peace and tolerance in modern society. National Olympic Academies from throughout the world send young people to the Session for Young Participants to learn about the Olympic Movement and Olympism through educational programs. The program lasting two weeks includes classes and lectures, but also „discussion groups, educational trips, guided tours, art workshops, sports activities and social events are held, with the presentation of their individual cultural features by the participants” (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 192). The Session for Educationists is an International Olympic Academy program, which started as a local program in 1970, only to develop into an international program in 1973, including a large number of international participants and presenting a new orientation of the IOA and a greater step towards the area of education.

The Session for Officials of National Olympic Committees and National Olympic Academies is an International Olympic Academy program, which includes representatives of National Olympic Committees and National Olympic Academies. Besides lectures by eminent experts and professors on Olympism and various other topics, it includes annual work reports of each National Olympic Academy. The mentioned program is „an international forum for the exchange of views between representatives of the Academies, the encouragement of their collaboration, and the promotion of the setting up of more throughout the world” (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 194), and it has become one of the primary goals of the International Olympic Academy, especially because of the significantly increased number of National Olympic Academies over the years, which can be seen as a result of the IOA’s efforts and the fact that the International Olympic Committee and National Olympic Committees have recognized the importance of Olympic education.

The Seminar for Sports Journalists is a step towards spreading the interest area of the International Olympic Academy to more social areas after detecting the need to spread the knowledge on Olympism and Olympic ideals among various professions. The Session for Educators and Officials of Higher Institutions of Physical Education presents a stronger involvement of education and the promotion of Olympism among a larger number of sports officials, especially lecturers involved in the issues of Olympism, and it touches upon the area of higher education and an exchange of opinions and experiences among participants from the whole world.

The Olympic Studies Seminar for Postgraduate Students is an International Olympic Academy program intended for experts with a degree in various areas. It lasts one month and includes university professors coming from throughout the world, who hold lectures on sports in Ancient Greece in the first module, on the history of the Modern Olympic Games and modern Olympic Movement in the second, on the sociological context and phenomenology of the Olympic Games in the third, and on the philosophical approach to the Olympic Games in the fourth. At the end of the seminar, all participants must write a paper to the topic they have selected with their mentor and make a public presentation of the conclusions of their work.

It is also necessary to recognize the new international educational program titled The Master’s Degree Program on Olympic Studies, started by the International Olympic Academy in cooperation with the University of the Peloponnese in 2009; with it, the IOA achieved the objective of founding an „Olympic University“ (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 189). The program is based on three main determinants of the Olympic Movement and Olympism: education, sport and culture, and it provides students with specialization in the field of the research of Olympism and Olympic education. The program is open to international and Greek graduate students, especially officials of National Olympic Committees, National Olympic Academies, the International Olympic Committee, European Olympic Committees and experts with a degree in kinesiology, economics, media and similar areas.
As an indicator of the IOA’s work – besides the advances in quality – one must also take into account the quantitative data demonstrating the scope of its work. It is evident that 1,124 lecturers (of whom 976 men and 150 women) participated in it between 1960 and 2005. They held lectures on various topics, from the history of the Olympic Games, the Olympic idea, the history of the Modern Olympic Games and sport, the philosophy of sport, the influence of sport on fine and liberal arts, moral principles of sport, to those in the fields of kinesiology, medicine, biology, and similar. (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 235).

The Role of National Olympic Academies

National Olympic Academies (NOAs) present an integral part of the International Olympic Academy and the Olympic Movement, and their foundation and activities are stipulated by the Olympic Charter as one of the tasks of the International Olympic Committee and National Olympic Committees (The Olympic Charter, 2013, p.17, 57). The foundation of National Olympic Academies resulted from the need that emerged as the IOA’s work spread and intensified. The goal was to provide assistance in the implementation of educational programs dedicated to disseminating the fundamental and educational principles of Olympism. Their original names were Olympic Studies Centres, but they were renamed to National Olympic Academies after 1976 (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 268).

Today, 46 years after the foundation of the first National Olympic Academy – the Spanish Olympic Academy in 1968 (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 274, Naul, 2008, p. 67) – the task of National Olympic Academies is „the cultivation and dissemination of the Olympic Ideal, together with the study and application of the universal pedagogic and social principles of the Olympic Movement, as defined in the Olympic Charter, through Olympic Education programmes, within the boundaries of the national and cultural zone in which each is active, in collaboration with the International Olympic Academy and the International Olympic Committee“ (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, pp. 268-269, Karaiskou, 2012, pp. 4-5). As the task of each National Olympic Committee is to ensure the introduction of the Olympic principles to the public and their implementation in schools and educational institutions, each National Olympic Committee in each country – according to the provisions of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Charter – must find the National Olympic Academy and enable its work (Koulouri, Georgiadis, 2011, p. 271).

The importance and scope of the tasks of each National Olympic Academy are stipulated in detail by the International Olympic Academy, with a special focus on six major areas encompassing 33 most important programs (Karaiskou, 2012, p. 5). The significance of National Olympic Academies is also seen in the fact that 144 National Olympic Academies from all five continents are members of the International Olympic Academy today (Karaiskou, 2012, p.13). The Croatian Olympic Academy is also a part of the Olympic family; it was founded „at the 58th COC Council meeting in Zagreb on 27 June 1996“ (Jurkin Lugović, Jajčević, Drpić, 2006, p. 71) with the goal to promote cultural values, sports staff training, fair play and moral principles of the Olympic idea. It is necessary to point out that National Olympic Academies are the extended arms of the International Olympic Academy; they promote the values stipulated by the Olympic Charter, especially by implementing Olympic education, but their task is also to promote participation in sports „among all social and age groups and promote the idea of sport as a fundamental human right“ (Karaiskou, 2012, p. 5).

Conclusion

The significance, importance and role of the International Olympic Academy for the Olympic Movement is maybe best described by the words of one of the world’s leading researchers in the field of Olympism and the IOA’s activities, Professor Norbert Müller. „There are no other institutions which can be more compared with the IOA and its teaching methods. The mixture of recognized academics from basic specialized areas, well known sports scientists, practising athletes and top Olympic officials have extended the IOA clearly beyond the framework of other types of scientific congresses. No sports university or institute and no academic seminar has a similar, permanent framework and none is as meaningful: nowhere else can modern sport be discussed against such a stimulating backdrop as that of the Stadium in Olympia“ (Koulouri, Georgiadis 2011, p. 252). On that note, one can say that the International Olympic Academy was founded as an academic and educational centre for studying and teaching Olympism with a strong international and multicultural orientation focusing on the promotion of the Olympic ideal based on research and scientific and academic context.

One of the main goals of the International Olympic Academy is to increase the number of National Olympic Academies and their educational activities, especially Olympic education. As the International Olympic Committee provides strong support to the International Olympic Academy operations – and consequently to National Olympic Academies – further development of the Olympic Movement based on humanism and educational context presents the IOA’s core area of activities and the „intellectual network of the International Olympic Academy in cooperation with National Olympic Academies is of outmost importance for the propagation of these ideas world wide“ (Karaiskou, 2012, p. 8). In line with that, it is necessary to point out that connecting culture, arts, education and sport will continue to be an important area of activities of the International Olympic Academy and National Olympic Academies, with a special emphasis on the fact that the International Olympic Academy and National Olympic Academies, through their activities, will continue to play a leading role for the Olympic Movement, especially in the field of the „fundamental moral principles of respect for others, fair play, equality, democracy and peace in the world“ (Karaiskou, 2012, p. 8).
References