

The contemporary Relevance of Pierre de Coubertin: sports “experienced” between communication and education. Introductory note

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Abstract

Pierre de Coubertin is a polyhedral figure that had played a significant role between the end of nineteenth and early twentieth century: the paper studies his contribution about pedagogy of sport and pedagogy of body starting from communication and education.

Keywords

pedagogy, education, body, sport, Olympic Games

1. *The antinomies of Pierre de Coubertin*

The multifaceted character of Pierre de Coubertin has been rediscovered in the last decades on a national and international level, not only because the relaunching of the Olympic Games in the modern era is the fruit of his intuition and obsession, but also because an analysis of his ideas allows one to read sports through an inter-disciplinary lens, interpreting both its meanings and pedagogical possibilities. From his ideas, one can grasp an understanding of the roles that education and instruction contribute to the construction of the subject. He has therefore passed on to the twentieth century a “ritual” that has gradually become a “myth” – yes, a sports event, but more so a media and commercial event – yet at the same time it has drawn attention to the importance of sports activities for the construction of the subject.

The sense of “myth” that has enveloped the Olympics during the 1900s also characterized the figure of the French baron: common opinion placed greater emphasis on “participating” rather than “winning”, thus trivializing the message; at the same time in the cultural and academic sphere, it was brought to light de Coubertin’s principle interest in the involvement of the “masses” - a relevant concept for his era: one thinks of the analyses by José Ortega y Gasset, theories on communication, and Sigmund Freud’s reflections on the psychology of the masses – in sports activities, an objective which is democratic in its intent. De Coubertin underlined in a particular way, an almost “visionary” idea that sports, as similiarly practiced in Ancient Greece, take on a role as promoter of a form of truce – in Ancient Greece the *ekecheiria* was a temporary suspension of conflicts between city states, often in constant

disagreement – thereby providing a “space to come together” and engage in a cultural dialogue through sports. However, the myth risks overshadowing or silencing some limitations that characterize de Coubertin. In fact, he could be represented as an antinomic character.

Firstly, one can take notice of how de Coubertin moved between innovation and preservation: he is, as already stated, a visionary for his prophetic intuition that, in an era characterized by major international conflicts, was necessary to create an international and cosmopolitan dialogue capable of going beyond tensions, as well as compare customs and cultures, not because one dominates the other, but so that each culture becomes enriched and enriches the others in exchange. He was therefore an interpreter of the culture in which he lived, in a critical and reflective manner, succeeding in both diagnostic and therapeutic intentions: that is in identifying the problem and tracking down signs to look for to offer “treatment strategies”. But this push to the future was also balanced by a rootedness in concepts, judgments, and typical visions of his era: he was, in fact, a “man of his time”, perfectly inserted in his historical moment, in his culture, and in his social class. Therefore, he carried with him some visions that cannot be fully actualized and that highlight obvious limits.

De Coubertin’s inevitable “historical importance” allows one to move to a discussion of a second antinomy regarding not only his political outlook, but also his social class. It has already been noted that among his goals was the dissemination of sporting practices within all social classes, an objective that can be considered democratic in intent and would embody the values that characterized the 20th century. Nevertheless, this progressive push must be contextualized in de Coubertin’s political vision, which is so far from democratic that he was called a “republican baron”: as an aristocrat, he was interested in the education of the masses (also through sports), but more importantly as a strategy to make the masses “manageable” and more controllable for the ruling *élite*. Therefore, the objective was non so much to promote greater equality between parties, but rather to preserve order in an era characterized by social tensions and internal rebellions.

A third antinomic aspect that can be highlighted pertains to an apparent openness in de Coubertin’s vision: on the one hand, he is interested in a sport for the masses that involves everyone and becomes a vehicle for self-education and self-betterment, on the other hand, his idea of olympism “forgot” about women. The forgetfulness of women, or better yet, conscious exclusion of women, could be the result of “misogyny” and a strict loyalty to the olympic tradition of ancient Greece, although the principle cause probably lies in the fact that he was a “man of his time”: just think that universal suffrage, which provided women with the right to vote, was achieved in France only in 1946, after the United States in 1920, in the United Kingdom in 1928, and in Italy in 1945.

Ultimately, another antinomy can be observed regarding the relationship between mass culture and elite culture: within a debate that recurrently cha-

acterized the 20th century, especially in respect to communication technology, Pierre de Coubertin interpreted sports as an instrument capable of taking man out of isolation, which is typical of mass culture, but at the same time he continued to consider sports as a practice that remained tied to the élite, noble or aristocratic. Additionally, for as much as olympism acted as a carrier for the promotion of sports activities, it increasingly spread sports as a event “to watch” (and enjoy as a spectator), rather than something to be actually “experienced” (in other words interpreted in first person).

2. *Pierre de Coubertin and education*

Many authors have already considered Pierre de Coubertin’s pedagogical thinking on an international level in the last few years. In particular in the Italian sphere, the conventions organized in Italy by the Italian National Olympic Academy (which reached their twenty-seventh meeting in 2016) and the analyses by Gaetano Bonetta, Franco Cambi, Rosella Frasca, Antonio Lombardo, Alessandro Mariani, Nicola Porro and Daniela Sarsini have brought attention to important aspects that emerge from the French Baron’s numerous writings (for instance, from *L’éducation anglaise* in 1887, to *Notes sur l’éducation publique* in 1901; from *Le respect mutuel* in 1915, to *Pédagogie sportive* in 1922, just to cite a few) and that reveal him as a pedagogue, as well as a philosopher of sports and education. A summary of his model of sports pedagogy proposes – at the end of the nineteenth century in a prophetic way, as previously stated – to radically renew the French educational system. His ideas must be put in an international context that considers sports in terms of hygienic and health objectives (one thinks of the Scandinavian model), militaristic objectives (one thinks of the German model), but also social objectives (if you consider the English model). At the same time, he lived in a era characterized by positivism that, in a pedagogical sense, was also characterized by *humus*, which brought theories of activism. De Coubertin, always in an antinomic way, moves like a pendulum between these instances, formulating an idea about sports as a fundamental resource for the subject according to three dimensions: individual, social, and cosmopolitan.

On an individual level, one can note how the Greek model inspired de Coubertin to revive the ritual of the Olympics and at the same time, he was incredibly fascinated by the pedagogical model of the typical hellenistic body that is founded upon the psychophysical unity of the individual, which considers the inseparable nature of body and mind. For the baron, the body is therefore a device that needs to be educated and that participates – or better yet, it is impossible for the body to not participate – in realizing and continually developing one’s self-identity, internalizing experiences, as well as acquiring and building knowledge. On an interdisciplinary level, a reflection that precedes these analyses is that in the course of the twentieth century they identified the human body as a “deep matrix” of all culture and as a sign of the individual’s connection to the world.

On a social level, de Coubertin adopted the typical Anglo-Saxon model of public schools in which physical education and simple sports activities are substituted for sports designed as a game, as a “race”, and as a “party”, as a type of learning that respects a series of rules and is valid in a certain social context. It is not by chance that many authors have referred to the birth of sports thinking of the English example, tying this phenomenon to industrialization and rationalization. As in ancient Rome, the character of *ludus* was perceived as a metaphor for games and their social roles, likewise, sports activities in British colleges were believed to be fundamental for understanding the play of relations between each other, in which the subject experiences the ethics of communication and the ethics of responsibility: therefore, the school must cultivate internal sports practices to ensure that students not only experience personal growth, but also to ensure that they become “citizens” with civic and moral values. It is at Rugby school where de Coubertin met Thomas Arnold and subsequently became fascinated by Arnold’s methodologies in self-management and self-control in the practice of sports games. They are educational models regarded as highly significant - and in his opinion, models to “be exported” to France - because they guide students to participate actively and responsibly in civic life. These models favor reciprocal collaboration and respect among the students that encourage them to communicate in an authentic and ethical way, as well as build themselves as men and as citizens.

On a cosmopolitan level, de Coubertin became a promoter in a prophetic way by creating an international dialogue. As Frasca has already noted, olympism was identified by him as a solution capable of maintaining balance between cultural, social, ethnic, and religious differences, between universalism and relativism, and encouraging the construction of a dialogue and peace among all people. They are reflections independent from workers internationalism and christian universalism that spread alongside each other in the same years: the values of de Coubertin’s olympism can be attributed to a feeling of belonging to a “common homeland of humankind”, which has its roots in the classical era and in the Renaissance and that found a relaunching in the twentieth century. In the public opinion in fact, a few decades after the first writings by de Coubertin, these observations became increasingly widespread, also due to mass communication that increased the possibility of sharing symbols, meanings, information, and myths regardless of the presence of individuals in the same place and therefore emphasizing the potential of civilization and the emancipation of modernity. Returning to the French baron, his model of olympism, even if it was the object of some criticism and was indicated as ill founded on a theoretical level, today it can be connected to the intercultural model: that model, after taking note of multi-culture (namely of the coexistence of many cultures within a context), proceeds to the construction of opportunities to meet and engage in dialogue, and aspire to mix diverse ethnicities together rather than integrate according to the dominant culture. The baron noted that sports have the capacity to create a “bro-

therhood” and to become aware of the common characteristics of humankind (a humankind that will be referred as “planetary” from now on), promoting through the Olympic ceremony a meeting between diverse people, the recognition of otherness, tolerance, and the building of relationships based on respect and on dialogue.

These three dimensions, central in de Coubertin’s model, show how sports, if really experienced, can form an individual that is *fortius* (in other words, stronger thanks to physical activity), *citius* (thanks to literary and scientific studies), and *altius* (through the cultivation of one’s spirituality, not necessarily religious, according to a vision that distances the baron from father Didon). An individual that exercises control over themselves and in their relationships with others, gives life to a more balanced and peaceful personality and helps to build community on a psychological, sociological, and political level.

His pedagogical thinking can be summed up by the expression *religio athletae*, not coincidentally identified by Frasca as a key concept to understand her sports pedagogy: de Coubertin’s reference to the “religion of the athlete” is “laic” and is founded on the recognition of balance as an educational objective to be pursued through sports. Religion, etymologically “binds”, “unites”, and “puts in order” the spirituality of the athlete that represents a vehicle for both education and personal education because it means a balance between body and spirit, it means balance in social relationships that characterize the life of the individual. It also means an ethical balance, that is the capacity of the individual to grow pursuing ideals and authentically educational values. At the basis of olympism is therefore an ethic of responsibility, founded on “mutual respect”, which considers respect as a “rule” to follow and as a “value” to be pursued.

3. *Pierre de Coubertin and communication*

From one side, the figure of Pierre de Coubertin has been investigated several times from a pedagogical point of view, yet one of the most significant aspects of his multifaceted personality is represented also by his capacity to manage communication. One can in fact note how the link between communication and education in de Coubertin are both central and inseparable: communication is the determining factor in every process of education, for it is with every communicative act that education can proceed. De Coubertin soon realized that a communication tool capable of reaching living rooms and the most important political offices was fundamental for realizing his dream to relaunch the Olympics in the modern era. As was previously done for the pedagogical aspects, one can pinpoint three distinct dimensions of de Coubertin as a communicator: as a publicist, as a politician, and as “only a man”.

In terms of his role as publicist, he became aware that his ambitious idea of olympism was feasible only if the public is made aware and he therefore

decided to take action on multiple levels. Firstly, he took action through trips, conferences, and social relationships that put him in contact with the most influential people in the cultural sphere at that time, from quite a young age: his first relations cultivated with the purpose of reviving the Olympic Games seem to date back to 1889 when he was just 26 years of age, he finally succeeded in his attempt to realize the first Olympic Games already at 33 years of age. It is within this period that he wrote many volumes, which were translated into multiple languages. Of fundamental importance for relaunching the Olympic Games was the establishment in 1894 in Paris – precisely at the end of a conference held at the University of Sorbonne – of the CIO, *Comité International Olympique*, with the function of organizing the first Olympic Games in the modern era two years after Athens. The committee also had the aim of ensuring that the organizational system for the Olympic Games could establish simultaneously an evaluation and monitoring process for the values of olympism that would be continued moving forward. After the Greek Demétrios Vikélas left his position as the first president of CIO, de Coubertin took his place and remained president until 1925. In various contexts de Coubertin acted as a “popularizer”, he understood the importance of the art of rhetoric and furthermore of persuasion, conscious of his ability to convince others thanks to his dialectical method and consequently, he aspired to reach the general public by informing and educating them. He believed that it would be possible to transmit more authentic messages about olympism by appealing to the public and by creating public awareness. As noted on the occasion of the first organizational meeting in Greece before the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 and as stated in the *Memorie Olimpiche* edited by Rosella Frasca: “luckily I was already used to this kind of undefined audience that needs, according to the components, flattering, taming, shaking up”¹.

A second central communication dimension for de Coubertin is political. He, as already said, succeeded with ease in finding the most influential people and cultivating relationships with them in order to get into the most important salons of Europe, demonstrating himself as an expert in social, political, and organizational relations. At the basis of this approach is definitely his education, which took place at the *École Libres des Sciences Politiques* and was characterized by close readings of authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alexis Clérel de Tocqueville, Auguste Comte, Le Play, Hittolyte Taine. In 1889 he participated in the Paris World Fair from a “privileged position” and then it was precisely in 1892 in front of the most important members of the French aristocracy in the great amphitheater of Sorbonne at a meeting of the *Union des société françaises de sports athlétiques* where he spoke and announced his intent. As noted in *Memorie Olimpiche*, “As to my intervention, I had decided to conclude in a sensational manner by announcing the decision to restart the Olympic Games. Come on, let’s do it! And, naturally, I could have pre-

¹ P. de Coubertin, *Memorie olimpiche*, edited by Rosella Frasca, Milano, Mondadori, 2003.

dicted everything, except what really happened. Opposition? Protests, irony? Or, even, indifference? ... None of these. Applause, approval, congratulations for a great success, but no one understood anything. Then began a complete and absolute misunderstanding².” Two years later again at Sorbonne, the previously mentioned congress aimed at reviving the Olympic Games took place: this initiative involved 79 delegates representing 14 countries and 49 sports clubs. In this situation and others, as in his writings, de Coubertin manages to combine form and content in his communication through original and brilliant strategies and above all to ensure that his communication has a global reach.

The third dimension of communication refers to a paradox that reconnects to the antinomies previously mentioned: one can in fact talk of a certain “solipsism” in de Coubertin, yes he is a popularizer and a politician, but he is also “only a man”. As one can read in *Memorie Olimpiche*, in reference to his contemporaries, he saw that they were not able to grasp his thoughts and to realise this “forgotten” value of olimpism. For him, the Olympic Games should not be a re-enactment of the past, but rather an event able to imprint itself in the present and at the same time project itself into the future. Therefore, the games should not have been celebratory, but rather put into a historical and cultural context to ensure that participants and spectators seize their potential in the present and take advantage of it to build new forms of citizenship.

At the basis of de Coubertin’s reflections on communication there is the recognition of the potential it possesses in connecting to sports: if today there is an inseparable link between sports and communication – as much on a professional level as an amateur and youth level – then one can infer that de Coubertin merits recognition for his intuition in understanding the educational and communicative values of sports, already at the end of the nineteenth century. The bond between sports and communication is an idea that de Coubertin had probably identified in ancient Greece when the Olympics were a rite yes, but they were in all respects an event that could be defined as “multimedia”. As Rosella Frasca has noted, an Olympic athlete was a multimedia character who was not only praised by poets (one thinks of Pindar), but also was assigned with the task of transmitting behavioral models and lasting ethical values through their own corporeality and conduct. The same intuition of the link between sports and communication takes place in those regimes that in the first half of the twentieth century utilized physical activity and especially sports activity, as a tool for Nation building: the idea of corporeality is, in fact, founded on the ideology of the healthy man, strong and able to prevail over the others.

De Coubertin realized that at the end of the nineteenth century – as had happened in Ancient Greece – sports can communicate in a very effective way, not only between the participants and therefore among the protagonists

² Ibid., p. 5.

of the sports event, but also between spectators and more generally within the culture. Oppositely, with a militaristic vision of sports and physical activity, he believed that enhancing the individuality of the champion could help counteract the tendency of nationalists to use sports results in an ideological way. The Olympics, communicating on an international level and therefore planetary level, can act as a tool for the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of communication; they can become a vehicle for values, principles, and ideals, provided they are accompanied by a constant reflection and organization of sports activities according to solid theoretical models.

4. *Olympism and the Olympic Games today*

To introduce a reflection on the current values of Olympism today it would be most effective to start from the words of Pierre de Coubertin reported in *Memorie Olimpiche*: “We are asked to specify the nature of our endeavour. Our thoughts, in reviving an institution that had disappeared for so many centuries, is as follows: athletics has acquired an importance that is growing year by year. Its role seems to be so substantial and durable in the modern world as it was in the ancient world; it reappears however, with new characters: it is international and democratic, appropriate to the ideas and needs of the present time”³. Essentially, the French baron noted that, beyond the attention to physical activity and sports, it is necessary to decline this passion with an educational objective. It is also necessary to ensure that sports activities result in a “gym of social relations” based on mutual respect, on the encounter with otherness and the construction of a dialogue, but also promote the education of the subject based on the body as much as the mind, as much on emotions as reason, and on as much the personal dimension as the public dimension.

It can be argued that education and communication can now be represented as two keys for interpreting the Olympic phenomenon today in modern times, and furthermore to interpret it in an antinomic and dialectical way. Starting, for example, from communication, one can see how the Olympics and sports in general are today immersed in a frantic flow of communication: sports have received much media attention and have become sensationalized. They have become increasingly “talked about”, “narrated”, or “represented” and less experienced. The values described by Pierre de Coubertin in terms of the spirituality and religiosity of the athlete seem far removed from his professionalization in the present time. Not so much for making himself an icon, which was already a characteristic of the ancient Greek athlete and has increasingly been recognized since the first modern Olympics. Rather it is the inclusion of the sports event within the logic of the market that could worry those interested in the diffusion of the athlete’s spirituality and “religiosity”, “decoubertinly” intended, in experiencing sports.

³ Ibid., 30.

Beyond this “drift” or “deflection” (as Fabrizio Ravaglioli has called the tendency toward an extreme spectacularization of the sport), one can note how communications has been at the center of the last three editions of the Olympics. A paradigmatic example is represented by the opening ceremonies of the last three editions. In 2008 at the Beijing Games, the American film director, Steven Spielberg, was initially chosen to act as an artistic advisor, but a few months before the event, he decided to boycott the event as an act of protest against the Chinese government’s attitude regarding the humanitarian disaster in Darfur. The position of artistic advisor then fell to another noted film director, Zhang Zimou: the spectacle was realized with approximately fifteen thousand extras and was followed by about two billion people. It was treated as a media event with great communicative and political potential for China, which decided to show an intertwining of cultures and a variety of Chinese arts both traditional and more recent, in order to convey its identity in the world. Also the ceremony for the London edition in 2012 was entrusted to a well-known film director, Danny Boyle, and it also assumed significant communicative and cultural relevance, with a multimedia narrative that passed from pastoral to cosmopolitan England, blending folk culture with that of pop culture, then going from Peter Pan to the World Wide Web. Even if the ceremony for the Brazilian Olympics of 2016 was characterized by greater simplicity, one can note that at the center of the choice to scale back costs is a communicative assessment: the film director Fernando Meirelles, who worked in collaboration with the Italian executive producer Marco Balich, argued that it would be an unsustainable waste to spend the same amount as the London edition in a country that lacks adequate hygienic and health services in many places and hoped that these resources be used towards education.

One can note that the communicative capacity perceived by Pierre de Coubertin has found a huge sounding board in the media representation that takes place on a planetary scale, offering for the host country a moment of openness to the rest of the world and an opportunity to open a dialogue that goes beyond the sports event itself.

The representation that passes through modes of communication has been steadily increasing over the past decades: think of the television that, with the transition from analogue to digital, has been able to rely on a multiplication of frequencies that has allowed an event to be followed with widespread coverage, but also from social networks and new media that amplify and allow the sporting event to become even more cross-media. In this way, the Olympics are made as an “imaginative phenomenon” that enter in every nation in a widespread manner, providing the opportunity (as happens with many other sporting events) to strengthen the identity of the citizens as the inhabitants of a state. Again in reference to the 2008 Beijing edition, China identified sports as a tool to open itself up to other states, but also as a way to strengthen its image, both internally and externally, and therefore aimed towards a strengthening of sports federations as well as a widespread

dissemination of sports among young people. Thus, we return to the use of sports – and in particular Olympic sports – with the ideological aim of strengthening national identity.

5. *The educational value of sports, from the Olympic Games to youth activities*

The Olympic Games in the present era build an environment in which sports – all, regardless of their wealth or the celebrity status of their performers – communicate and therefore the races and sports practices, amplified by the media (as mentioned, not only through traditional media such as television and radio: it can be significant to identify the rise of *post* sports within the major *social networks* during the course of the Games), come to the mass of spectators that during the four years devoid of the Olympic Games almost ignored the existence of these sports. Again in this case one can grasp the ambivalence surrounding the Olympics: on one hand an event that immerses sports in the market and in the professionalisation, between sponsors and controversies related to doping, and on the other hand it is a moment of openness and sharing, which can convey the audience's love for sports that are not so rich and are not so "media-hyped".

The media, in fact, has the power to promote psychological projection and encourage spectators' self-identification through the athletes. For as much as sports become spectacularized and sponsored, the Olympic sports can also act as a vehicle for self-education by bringing the subject-viewer to discover the emotions of the athletes' activities which can then characterize his own life, if only so amateur or semi-professional. Precisely with regard to education, it may be useful to question whether it is still a central aspect of the Olympic Games today. By speaking of personal education as a "taking shape" of the subject through a free assimilation of cultural forms in which it is immersed, one can see that the aspect of education is still present in the Olympic Games. However, this is found to be in "small doses" and so one realizes that within the Olympic Games, there is huge untapped educational potential to be recovered and valued.

Reference was made to the possibility for undervalued sports that receive less media coverage to be brought to the forefront by way of the Olympic stage: in fact, there are no shortage of narratives that can bring out how sports can act as a "rule" and as an educational tool far from the screen and the pages of the newspapers, through a discovery of one's limitations and possibilities. The Olympic Games can therefore still be a moment for personal education, even for the athletes themselves. Beyond the media spotlight in which they are immersed, the athletes can live the experience of the Olympic village. The days spent in preparation for their sporting event is like a moment to share their passion and to experience it with others of various nationalities and of other disciplines, promoting a spirit of participation, collaboration, and responsibility. It would be desirable that these values and this potential were to recei-

ve higher praise by raising awareness that relates to the audience, especially young audiences. This would lead to an understanding of how the Olympics are not only a sports and media event, but are also a moment of encounter and dialogue. And these are the aims that the simple transmission of an event through the media can reach with difficulty.

Instead, it is desirable that the sports associations, educational agencies, sports clubs (and their managers, coaches, trainers, and educators), and the institutions make themselves interpreters of Olympic values at a local level. Furthermore, they should ensure that those values based on respect, responsibility, and participation are transmitted in all sports activities conducted at a young age. Thus, they should promote the obligation for instructors who work with children and young people to carry out an educational model that not only concerns technical aspects, but also psychological and pedagogical aspects. It is also imperative to support parents and invite them to perceive sports not so much as a way to fame and celebrity, but rather as a moment in which the child or adolescent can relate with peers, they learn to move within the rules and, in fact, they become formed.

On a local level there is no lack of significant experiences, even in Italy. In Florence, one can consider the experience of the Piaggeliadi, which was established in 1994 in one of the most problematic neighborhoods in the Tuscan capital by the initiative of Marco Borri, with the proposed aim of transmitting a passion for sports and Olympic values among young people. The hope of this event, held in collaboration with the schools and founded on the values of celebration and responsibility, just like de Coubertin's Games, was to ensure that the boy, after having had the opportunity to try sports at no cost and after entering into relations with other young people, would then have a stimulus to find activities which he is good at and which he can continue in the future on his own. Again in Florence starting from 1959 by the initiative of Don Mario Lupori in the neighborhood of Soffiano, the Youth Community of Saint Michael was founded as a Christian association that proposed to promote recreational, cultural, and sporting activities for young people. The use of the word "community", which occurs in the religious sphere, in this context refers directly to the role of sports as a tool capable of creating relationships and promoting sharing among its members. In this sense, the experiences that – like that mentioned by the Youth Community of Saint Michael – start from the inseparable link between sport and culture (analyzed by Bausinger and analogous to that treated by Huizinga between play and culture) promote the use of sports as a vehicle for the education of young people. Such experiences can act as interpreters – and active interpreters – of the values identified more than a century ago by de Coubertin, creating encounters and dialogue at the local level, as well as promoting sports as an activity aimed at discovery of self and the other. This points to a mutual respect that can become a democratic horizon of contemporary ethical education, "to which sports radically contribute and that is based on respect of beliefs, the conventions, the conditions, but especially of individuals, giving depth to an 'alerted' consciousness,

precisely of the élite, but that must and can be for all, and is an educational paradigm for all”⁴.

However in the field of sports played at a young age, there is always a high risk of falling into patterns of bad behavior that characterize adult models and professionals (just to illustrate a few examples: a state of exasperation because of the results, doping, pushy parents, and scenes of violence). It should be left to pedagogical reflection, to the schools, and to the sports federations to ensure that educational and pedagogical reflections are promoted in parallel to sports practices. So that by doing so, each athlete becomes an “athlete philosopher”, according to the definition suggested by Emanuele Isidori and Heather Reid. That is to say that an athlete is capable of grasping the autotelism of sports, which is based on “internal assets” before “external assets” (according to the distinction made by MacIntyre) and its central role is to allow the subject to explore himself “in”, “with”, and “through” the sense of limits. The athlete, if he or she succeeds in being a philosopher (which means being reflective), can look to sports as a chance to learn about himself as a person, can take responsibility for his actions and his attitudes, and can also understand the values of his sports community and try to preserve them.

If agonistic sports and professionals generally offer few opportunities for athletes to develop a reflective attitude towards these values, then olympism – meant more as a value than as a sporting event itself and cultivated according to the mentioned principles outlined by de Coubertin – can ensure that sports, at its base, find its educational roots and bind itself to philosophy and reflection, and contribute effectively to the education of each subject. A personal education which occurs at multiple levels: at an individual level, for self challenge, for taking care of oneself, and for the exploration of one’s own limits; on a social level for the discovery of the other and for the ethical exercise of responsibility and communication; on a cosmopolitan level, for the possibility of using sports as a cross-cultural tool. Three levels that, as previously said, represent the pedagogical paradigm of sports according to de Coubertin and on which educators, trainers, coaches, and managers of sports societies that deal with youth activities should reflect upon, considering them as the framework that allows them to define their role. A role which is not only technical and instructive, as already mentioned, but also pedagogical, and therefore educational. As such, those in the field of youth sports can take action and try to reach four, equally important objectives: Firstly, remove the climate of exasperation from youth sports activities (which happens as a result of the game, the performance, or of individual protagonism). Secondly, combat the phenomenon of the increasingly widespread “sports dispersion”⁵.

⁴ F. Cambi, *La pedagogia sportiva di Pierre de Coubertin*, in R. Frasca (edited by), *Religio athletae*, Roma, Lancillotto e Nausica, 2014, p. 98.

⁵ Surrounding this theme, research was conducted by CONI Provinciale di Firenze, coordinated by Alessandro Mariani, in 2015-2016.

Thirdly, enhance sports' relationship to several important aspects. This includes an enhancement of the relationship between sports and art (and therefore promote it as an aesthetic experience), between sports and the rule (reflecting on rules and figures, like a referee or judge, called on to enforce them), and between sports and the game (valuing the playful aspects and rediscovering the "pleasure" and well-being involved in "play"⁶). Lastly, as the fourth and final objective, give value and centrality to authentic communication and make it the ethical principle to be lived by daily.

One wonders if de Coubertin, today, would be happy to assist in a contemporary edition of the Olympic Games or a youth game involving team sports. Hypothesizing an "antinomian" response, in accordance with the information presented in these pages, one can think of opposing feelings. On one hand, he would feel a sense of betrayal for "his" ritual's immersion in the logic of the market and the misunderstanding of his messages (after all, for him every edition would have to be the last). But on the other hand, he would likely be pleased by the fact that the torch continues to remain alive for more than a century after its ignition and many people strive to keep it lit, thus passing on to the French baron a strong revenge over the skepticism that surrounded him for years. Finally, the Olympic ritual – although transformed, spectacularized, and even betrayed – continues to be the undoubted testimony of de Coubertin's thoughts in addition to being the prophetic vision of the values on which he founded his "obstinacy".

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⁶ It is no coincidence that in English the verb *play* is used in reference to the exercise of a sport or the use of the noun "player", especially in the case of team sports, regarding the person who practices a sport.

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