

Environmental Protection – An Indispensable Pillar of Olympic Education Programmes

Ines Nikolaus (PhD)

International Pierre de Coubertin Committee (CIPC), Vice-President, Delegate for the International Network of Pierre de Coubertin Schools, Lausanne Switzerland/Erfurt, Germany

Abstract

The following contribution focuses on the development of environmental protection as an indispensable pillar of Olympic Education Programmes since the 1990s, which brought about a turning point in Olympic Education.

The article presents successful examples of incorporating the aspects of the environment and sustainability into Olympic Education Programmes by three host cities of the Olympic Games: Lillehammer (1994), Sydney (2000) and London (2012). Not only did they achieve outstanding results at these events, but they also reached large groups of students in their countries and internationally as well as other target groups of the population; thus, leaving a legacy in the host countries and beyond.

The concluding part highlights initiatives by the International Pierre de Coubertin Committee (CIPC) to promote environmental protection and sustainability within the International Network of Pierre de Coubertin Schools and presents concrete examples realised by the author.

Keywords

Olympic education, Olympic values, Olympic Education Programmes, environmental protection and sustainability

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Introduction

The impact of sports on the environment has become increasingly evident over the last several decades. The construction of huge sports facilities, especially ski slopes and golf courses, as well as the boom in so-called nature sports, are causing massive interference with nature, the traces of which are often irreparable (Schantz, 1996).

Starting with the preparation for and implementation of the first (White) Green Games of Lillehammer in 1994, which introduced **environmental protection** as the third pillar of the Olympic Movement (alongside sports and the arts), environmental education also became one of the most important components of **Olympic education** (Nikolaus, 2013).

The first practical implementation of this new element was the incorporation of successful teaching proposals and activities on environmental protection into the three volumes of the official Olympic Education Programme of the Lillehammer Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (LOOC) (Nikolaus, 2013).

Otto Schantz dedicated himself to scientific studies on the subject starting in 1995. He justifies the necessity of environmental education, on the one hand, with the demand of the UNESCO conference of Tbilisi 1977, “to strengthen world-wide the environmental consciousness and the ethical handling of the environment” (Schantz, 1996, p. 76) and, on the other hand, he traces it back to the article “La pollution de la nature par le tourisme et le sport” (“The pollution of the nature by tourism and sport”)¹ published by Coubertin

in the *Révue Olympique* in 1907, which can be regarded as a forerunner to this problem (Schantz, 1996).

The following three parts will present particularly successful examples of integrating environmental education into Olympic Education Programmes from three organizers of the Olympic Games that were able to reach large groups of students and, in addition, other target groups of the population.

Finally, in the fifth part of this article, the author and initiator of a bilingual project on “Sustainable Olympics”, organised for the Schools of the International Network of Coubertin Schools, will illustrate some of the results achieved by students of the 11th grade at the Coubertin Sports High School Erfurt and end with some concluding remarks about young people’s demand to **act now when it comes to preserving nature and practicing sport.**

Lillehammer 1994 - Environmental Education as Part of Olympic Education

“*OL påh jemmebane*” – “*Olympics at our place*”

After the rights were granted to Lillehammer to host the Winter Olympics of 1994, the Norwegians tackled the challenge of developing an Olympic Education Programme that would go down in history as the programme of the first *Green Games*.

The Norwegian authors introduced several innovative aspects to Olympic Education in line with their educational aims and they encouraged the incorporation of new trends

¹ Translation by the author.

² Cf. Nikolaus, 2017, Chapter 4.5.5.

that were clearly related to the Olympic movement. Among others, these involved the following:

- Active protection of the environment
- Consequent fight against doping
- Promotion of cultural awareness (LOOC 1993 b).

In all three volumes of the Programme, education for a close connection to nature, love of the homeland and promoting awareness of the necessity to protect the environment are dominant. In contrast to previous Education Programmes, this one not only calls attention to the negative effects of Olympic venues, for example, but also suggests solutions or even concrete activities, to alleviate harms to the environment, such as the transplantation of early blooming plants that are endangered by the construction of a ski jump to a safe place (Nikolaus 2010). This is in line with Norway's attempt to organise the first *Green Games*.

In accordance with this approach, which is characterised by a close bond to nature, the Norwegians reinvented the Olympic motto "citius – altius – fortius" and translated it to "**smaller – more natural – more reasonable**" (Der Spiegel 2/1994, p. 135).

The authors also do not avoid controversial topics. For example, the third volume discusses the emergence of environmental organisations that threatened to boycott Norwegian products and the Olympic Games because of the practice of whaling in Norway (LOOC 1993b).

Furthermore, in August 1993, the Norwegian State Television began to broadcast school programmes on some of the topics contained in the Education Programme. These were also recorded on videotape and could be borrowed

by schools. One of the 10 topics offered was "Olympic Games and the environment".

In effect, the television broadcasts also reached a wider audience to include other parts of the population interested in the Olympic Games (LOOC 1993, German transl.).

In line with the traditional strong connection to nature, the Norwegians set an example by incorporating the theme of environmental protection into the Programme; thereby, they kicked off a new development in the Olympic educational process (Nikolaus 2017).

Sydney 2000 – the teaching of Olympic values as a long-term project³

A group of Australian authors developed not one but three Olympic Education Programmes specifically related to the Sydney Games (Brownlee 1998 and 2002):

- The Aussie Frog Challenge
- Aspire 2000– Olympic Games Resource for Australian Schools
- Set no limits– 2000 Paralympic Resource Kit.

As an example, "The Aussie Frog Challenge", an integrated programme for elementary schools aiming to incorporate Olympism into everyday life, written by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) shall be explained further.

The general goal consists of two sub-elements with completely different educational objectives. The first element concerns the children's physical activity. The aim of the design was to motivate children to "value

³ Cf. Nikolaus, 2017, Chapter 4.5.8.

life-long, active, regular participation in and enjoyment of physical activity” (NSW DET, 1999, p. 4).

To this end, the Olympic athletes would serve as role models to encourage children to do sports regularly in and out of school. In addition to making a significant contribution to the development of a healthy lifestyle, the idea was to encourage students to explore their performance capabilities and to learn to attain their personal goals.

The second element involves the teaching of environmental awareness to primary school students. Hence the programme aims at developing “awareness, knowledge, understanding and skills vital to improving the quality of the environment” (NSW DET, 1999, p. 4).

The significance of protecting endangered animal species, for instance, is demonstrated to children using the example of an endangered frog species, the Green and Golden Bell Frog (*Litoria aurea*), native to the area around Homebush Bay (the main venue of the Sydney Olympic Games).

The aim here is to convey the principles of environmentally friendly behaviour and to teach children how to develop and responsibly implement strategies to improve their school’s environment. Last but not least, this approach set out to contribute to the declaration of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games as Green Games.

Supported by the programme, the children were encouraged to do their best to improve their own physical well-being and the environment of their schools (NSW DET, p. 8).

By focusing on the development of social competences such as determination, problem

solving and positive interaction, the children were to learn to play a responsible and productive role within the community at their school (NSW DET, p. 8).

In summary, the creators of the Aussie Frog Challenge wanted to provide students a “fun-filled activity program reflecting the Olympic ideals of participation in physical activity in conjunction with a responsible concern for environmental issues” (NSW DET, p. 5).

The design of the programme is flexible and enables the participation of all pupils or individual classes. It can be implemented as a ten-week programme or as a continuous programme.

Documenting project progress is also an important element of the educational process.

According to the NSW DET programme (1999), the following components are utilized in three stages:

- Stage 1: the “Frog Hop Chart” map (poster for the classroom) (p. 7 and 15)

The whole class participates in the project. On the poster, the frog “leaps” from one Olympic venue to the next, the goal being to reach the Olympic stadium. The frog can only be moved once the class has done a sports or environmental activity.

- Stage 2: the “Frog Log” (p. 7)

The pupils document their participation in sports and environmental events in and out of school in their frog diary by colouring the frogs. In addition, they are asked to regularly add personal statements by answering simple questions in the form of frog thoughts.

- Stage 3: the “Frog Journal” (p. 7)

The students define personal goals for athletic and environmental challenges in a four-page frog newspaper. They record their participation with the help of personal statements, reporting on each activity in detail. Activities done outside of school are also noted down. Questions phrased as frog reflections are intended to help students assess themselves in how far they reach their goals and participate in the programme.

In summary, the Australian educators showed unprecedented confidence in introducing a series of novelties to the Olympic Education Programme - ones that cannot be ignored by future hosts of Olympic Games. These include the development of **the first special education programme for the Paralympics** and **the creation of the first interactive programme**.

While a new age of Olympic learning was introduced, the three Australian programmes also serve as excellent examples for teaching Olympic values.

The fact that this development was not just an Australian “flash in the pan” is proven by the materials created in preparation for the subsequent Games in Athens and Beijing. These were of equally high educational value as well as the almost 30-year-old tradition of the Australian Pierre de Coubertin Award (Nikolaus 2013).

London 2012 – Olympic Education goes global⁴

The metropolis of London faced a new challenge in hosting the Olympic Games

4 Cf. Nikolaus 2017, Chapter 4.5.14.

in 2012 for the third time because Olympic Education had not been an issue in 1908 or in 1948.

Already during the bidding process, the organisers focused on the educational component and actively included children and youths into the application process in order to highlight the vision for London 2012:

“To make an Olympic champion takes millions of young people around the world to be inspired to choose Olympic sport. So London’s vision is to reach young people all around the world. To connect them with the inspirational power of the Games. So they are inspired to choose sport.”

Sebastian Coe, 6 July 2005 (LOCOG 2012b, p. 2)

The first novelty of the educational efforts as part of the preparations for the Olympic Games in London 2012 is reflected herein. While a unique programme for the Paralympics called Set no limits was developed for the first time in Sydney 2000, London’s Get Set Programme placed, for the first time in the history of host cities’ education programmes, **equal emphasis on Paralympic and Olympic values** as the core of all educational offerings⁵.

From the very beginning, a significant part of all educational projects were designed as legacy initiatives.

The Get Set Programme

Get Set was the official Education Programme at schools, colleges and local educational institutions, which operated over a four-year period (IOC 2013). It involved 26,000 schools (LOCOG 2012c) and 6.5 million young people

5 Cf. Nikolaus 2017, Chapter 4.5.14.

across the UK. “An impressive 85 per cent of UK schools signed up for this programme” (IOC 2013, p. 6).

The programme’s website provided materials on Olympic Education for children and young people between the ages of 3 and 19. In order to meet the needs of the specific age groups, six different tailored programmes were created (LOCOG 2012a).

In total, *Get Set +* offered more than 36 programmes with manifold learning activities right across the curriculum (LOCOG 2012c).

In addition to information sheets, videos and newspaper articles, interactive games and a set of soundtracks were also offered. The platform focused on the values of friendship, courage, determination, excellence, equality, respect and inspiration (LOCOG 2012c).

London 2012 International Education Programme

In 2011, the London 2012 International Education Programme was launched (LOCOG 2012b). As the title implies, this module of the *Get Set Programme* was developed for all schools from around the world. It was promoted by its designers via NOCs, NPCs and via the school linking programme, called the *International Inspiration Programme*, as well as via numerous partners, including the British Council.

In order to reach a broader target group, it was provided in English (basic and advanced level), French and Spanish. Fortunately, the French and Spanish versions were also used in foreign language lessons by British schools. The option to download the programme from the Internet provided easy access to the document for teachers and students (McCull,

2015)⁶.

This programme was predominantly designed for secondary students aged 11-18. Nevertheless, the authors did not set an exact target group since the age groups might vary depending on whether the programme would be used in the students’ mother tongue or for foreign language learning (McCull, 2015).

Comprising 77 pages in eight chapters, the *International Education Programme* belongs to the category of compact resources on Olympic Education⁷. Chapter 6 (pp. 57-63) is called “A sustainable London 2012 Games” and tackles the following subtopics: Sustainability as a global issue, climate change, waste, biodiversity, healthy living, “Share with your school and community!”.

This London programme is very flexible, enabling quick application without extensive preparation, elaborate additional material or technology. It is suitable for the classroom and for use by a group of pupils in a community, as was done on manifold occasions in the course of the *International Inspiration Programme*, especially in African, Asian and South American countries.

Unlike in the primary school programme, this material provides a series of valuable activities about environmental protection, such as “Get creative for 2012 sustainability”: “Do you have a talent for poetry or song writing? Are you a good storyteller? ... use it

6 51,9532 resource downloads in 156 countries had been counted by September 2012 (LOCOG 2012c, p. 13).

7 London 2012 International Education Programme. Due to missing page numbers, all pages of the document were counted by the author for the purpose of analysis. The introductory page corresponds to p. 1 of the pdf-file. The individual chapters were not numbered by the publishers originally.

to produce something wonderful to promote sustainability at the London 2012 Games” (LOCOG 2012b, p. 63).

Moreover, the task named “Start a sustainable campaign!” incorporates the individual experiences of the children and youths by asking the following questions: “Think of new ways to make your school more sustainable. Could you be using less electricity? How about reducing the amount of waste you produce? Can you recycle more? ...” (LOCOG 2012b, p. 63).

In conclusion, it can be underlined that a special programme intended for international use had been designed for the first time.

International Inspiration Programme

The *London 2012 International Education Programme* was also used in the framework of the *International Inspiration (IIP)*, which was launched in 2007, five years before the London 2012 Games. With this programme, the designers created the **“first ever international legacy initiative linked to an Olympic and Paralympic Games”** (LOCOG 2012d).

Its original and ambitious aim was to “enrich the lives of 12 million children and young people of all abilities in 20 countries around the world through high quality and inclusive sport, physical activity and play” (LOCOG 2012d, 1).

Here, the goal was not just to motivate children and youths to do sports for the duration of the project or to introduce them to sports, but rather **to change their lives sustainably through sport** in order to help them **achieve a better quality of life** and to motivate them for a lifelong engagement in physical activity and sport.

The programme was delivered by UK Sport, UNICEF and the British Council in Great Britain. Internationally, the implementation was supported by the Youth Sport Trust as well as local partners⁸, ministries of education, sport and youth clubs, NOCs and sometimes NPCs (France/Jenkins, 2014, i).

During the selection of the nations, the focus was especially placed on developing countries⁹. According to local needs, tailored programmes were conceived for each of the countries involved.

Twelve sub-themes were addressed by the International Inspiration Programme in the respective countries (LOCOG 2012d, p. 5-7).

The duration of the project varied from country to country, but lasted for at least three years and was continued by half of the participating countries until 2014.

One outstanding achievement related to the sub-theme “Protection and Survival” shall be mentioned here.

In *UNICEF’s Swim for Life* programme in Bangladesh, where floods threaten the lives of thousands of children every year, 13,000 young Community Swimming Instructors

8 E.g. national sport federations, teacher training and sport colleges, various local community-based organisations and schools.

9 In 2007 International Inspiration was started in six countries: the UK, Azerbaijan, Brazil, India, Palau and Zambia. Starting in 2009, Bangladesh, Jordan, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Trinidad & Tobago became involved in the programme. One year later another four countries joined the IIP: Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey. From 2011 on four more African countries participated: Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Ghana. The goal to incorporate 20 countries was thus reached at this point. Finally, Egypt joined the programme in 2012, only some months before the London Games (LOCOG 2012d, p. 8f.).

were trained to give swimming lessons for 400,000 children and youths (France/Jenkins, 2014, p. 79). This indeed can be considered a “learning for life” project! The multiplying effect of teaching swimming as an indispensable life skill surely lasted for another decade or even until today.

The intended objective of the International Inspiration Programme also exceeded expectations in some aspects, as the following figures show:

- Over 25 million children and youths were reached with the programme
- More than 250,000 practitioners (teachers, coaches, leaders) were trained
- 55 national policies, strategies and legislative changes have been influenced
- In 7 IIP countries, 308 safe spaces were created
- 594 schools around the globe were linked to each other and benefited from this relationship
- In 12 IIP countries, 1,025 events for communities were organised etc. (France/Jenkins, 2014, p. iif).

Thereby, this was the most sustainable and far-reaching project on Olympic education to date: “The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games made a strategic shift from the usual routine of Olympic Values Education to inspiring generations through sport globally” (Musangeya 2014, p. 50).

The organisers would like to pass this legacy of sport and the lessons learned to future host cities of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Concrete Examples from Practice: The Promotion of Environmental Protection and Sustainability by CIPC within the International Network of Pierre de Coubertin Schools

Following Coubertin’s idea of peace and friendship among nations, Univ.-Prof. Dr. Norbert Müller, CIPC President from 2002-2017 and famous researcher on Coubertin writings, initiated the organisation of a first international Youth Forum in 1997. The aim was to provide the young generation with an understanding of Coubertin’s Olympic Idea and to let the values of friendship, fairness, respect, and the joy of effort be experienced across borders.

The history of the Youth Forums began in 1997 in preparation for the CIPC Congress “Coubertin and Olympism – Questions for the Future”, which took place on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the 2nd Olympic Congress of Le Havre 1897 at the same location.

Since 1997, 12 International Youth Forums with more than 1,400 participants overall have taken place. The number of participating delegations and countries has risen steadily from an initial number of six delegations from four countries to 25 delegations from 23 countries in 2019. At the same time, the number of schools loyal to the Network has increased continually.

At present, the CIPC is preparing the 13th edition of its Pierre de Coubertin Youth Forums which will be held in Munich in November 2022.

The success of this Network in teaching Olympic values, lies in the close cooperation

between and the great commitment of the headmasters and the teachers, who are responsible for the coordination and implementation of the various educational programmes.

Starting from the very first Youth Forum, contacts between the different schools have developed into a strong support network. In addition to the rich and continuous experience of learning from one another during the biannual Youth Forums, the meetings have also inspired many exchange programmes and joint projects between schools in both sports and the arts (Nikolaus, 2019a and Nikolaus, 2019b).

During the Youth Forums, the competitions for the *Coubertin Award* make up the core of Olympic Education. It covers five different disciplines representing the five Olympic rings (CIPC 2003, pp. 16-25). These five Olympic rings also pay tribute to Coubertin's concept of a harmonious development of the entire human being: an education of the body, mind and will (Müller, 20037, p. 415):

1. Social Performance
2. Olympic Knowledge Test
3. Sporting Performance
4. Cultural Performance
5. Discussions on Olympic Values (Nikolaus, 2019a).

If the participant satisfactorily fulfils all the above categories of the Coubertin Award, he or she will be awarded the Coubertin Medal and a certificate at the closing ceremony of the Youth Forum.

On numerous occasions during these meetings of youths from around the world, students also dealt with the topic of environmental

protection and sustainability. To date, the forum motto was dedicated to this aspect twice:

- At the 4th Youth Forum in Genova-Arenzano (Italy) 2003: "Protection of the Environment as a Significant Part of Olympism" and
- At the 9th Youth Forum in Lillehammer (Norway) 2013: "Youth and the Olympics. Sustainable Development and Closeness to Nature".

In Italy 2003, the Environmental Museum "Muvita", whose structure reflects the shape of a ship, offered the perfect location for the central topic. The forum community not only benefited from the displays and exhibitions at this venue, they also received the chance to get inspired from the surroundings while developing their own ideas.

Prior to the Olympic Winter Games in Turin 2006, students also discussed the impact of various Olympic winter sports on the environment and the steps taken by the Torino Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (TOROC) to organise sustainable Winter Games in the future. They documented their findings in a poster series at the local Environmental Museum.

A small delegation of accompanying teachers had been invited by the TOROC for an excursion to venues of Torino 2006, still under construction at the time. They shared their observations of the ski jump arena in Pragelato, near the alpine ski arena in Sestriere and of the track for bobsleigh, toboggan and skeleton in San Sicario with the participants of the 4th Youth Forum.

Furthermore, the Australian students, under the guidance of CIPC Board member Helen

Brownlee, shared their observations made during the first Green Games in Sydney.



Fig 1: The protection of water – Topic of the cultural presentation by the Italian team

The entire 9th Youth Forum in Lillehammer (Norway) 2013 was dedicated to environmental issues. In accordance with the Norwegian lifestyle, the primary focus was placed on “Sustainable Development and Closeness to Nature”. During an excursion into the mountains, the students took part in several survival activities like making fire without matches, practiced canoeing and learned about the Norwegians’ life in nature.

In addition, the topics of environmental protection and sustainability were part of the Pierre de Coubertin Award. This was especially the case during the discussions on Olympic values, but also in the obligatory knowledge test” (Gausdal Videregående Skole Pierre de Coubertin, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic also influenced the cooperation between the Coubertin Schools of the Network, particularly the preparations for the 13th Youth Forum, planned to be held in Cyprus in October 2021. In order to “keep the Olympic fire burning” for the cooperation of the more than 25 schools and institutions and to strengthen their exchange in the challenging second year of the pandemic, an **international bilingual module** titled

“**Sustainable Olympics**” was initiated.

The planned project will last 18 months, until December 2022, and involves the subjects of English, History, Sports History, Arts and others. The target group are students in grades 10 and 11 (ages 16-17), i.e. potential participants of the upcoming Youth Forum. Following the example of previous Youth Forums, the planned final product is a poster exhibition at each of the schools, in which every student documents his/her findings in one poster. Finally, the best three posters of each school exhibition will be presented at the 13th Youth Forum.

Besides learning English, the aims of this project are to develop a critical analysis of the topics of environmental protection and sustainability in sports, especially in the organisation of Olympic Games, and to develop a critical eye with regard to the negative influences of Olympic Games and other mega-sporting events on our environment.

In an online teachers’ workshop, held in advance, 34 teachers from Coubertin and UNESCO-Schools, representing altogether 18 countries, discussed different ways to approach the topic by using poems, cartoons, video clips of Youth Olympic Games, quizzes or materials prepared by the Olympic Museum Lausanne. The kick-off was celebrated at the **Pierre de Coubertin Sports High School Erfurt (Germany)** in June 2021 in combination with the 5th school-based Pierre de Coubertin Award, which had to be postponed twice because of the pandemic.

During the bilingual project, students trained their language, subject, method, creative and communicative competencies in the following ways:

- Intensive research, especially of English (scientific) literature
- Internet research, use of film material
- Comprehensive self-study before and during the project days
- Search for suitable creative ideas for the presentation of the results
- Creation of high-quality aesthetic posters that deliver a powerful message
- Presentation of the project results during an English lesson (the topic “environment” is an obligatory topic for the A-level exams in most of the countries).

The forty students involved in the project used different techniques to document their results in a convincing way. Some chose digital methods to create their posters, others had much fun in painting, drawing or crafting, even creating three-dimensional posters with “windows” that open.



Fig. 2 Having fun in the creative work

At the beginning of the new school year, during the Tokyo Olympics, the exhibition was shown in the entrance hall of the Pierre de Coubertin Sports High School Erfurt, and the results shared with the whole school community as well as with visitors. Further exhibitions are planned in different public places.

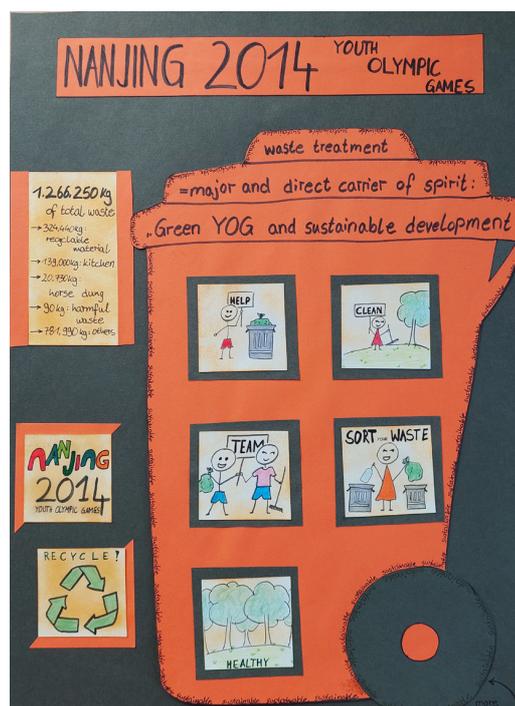


Fig.3 Results of the project “Sustainable Olympics” at Coubertin Sports High School Erfurt.

In summary, this project helped to keep the close bonds between the schools of the Network, providing occasions for exchange and inspiration for a future edition of the Youth Forums organised by CIPC¹⁰.

10 Due to the pandemic, the 13th Youth Forum, planned for autumn 2021, had to be postponed by CIPC for a year and will be held in Munich at the end of 2022.

Conclusion

The examples provided in this article clearly show that **environmental protection and sustainability** have developed into a crucial pillar of Olympic Education Programmes all around the world over the past three decades.

The modules presented, which were well-accepted by children and youths, not only provide many learning possibilities in various subjects, they also motivate the young generation to engage in the field of sport while, at the same time, taking part in the protection of the environment.

They are in line with numerous demands of young people today that it is high time to **act now** and to **make a change in life in order to help save our planet**.

Ultimately, the Olympic sport cannot escape this command and has to rise to this challenge!

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Sources of figures

Fig. 1-3: Nikolaus, Ines

Author

Ines Nikolaus has taught English, French and Russian at the Coubertin Sports High School Erfurt for more than 30 years. She has organised numerous projects on Olympic Education, and, being a CIPC Board Member, has been leading the International Network of Coubertin Schools since 2002. In 2019 she became a Vice-President of the CIPC. Furthermore, she is a member of the IOC's Olympic Values Education Programme II advisory group and organizes regional and international teachers-in-service trainings. Ines Nikolaus studied at the universities of Leipzig, Belgorod (Russia), Erfurt and Jena. In 2011 she obtained her PhD in sports sciences at the Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz. Ines Nikolaus is author of several books and articles translated into seven languages.

She has lectured at IOC conferences, at the International Olympic Academy, at National Olympic Academies, international symposia as well as at the meetings of UNESCO schools.