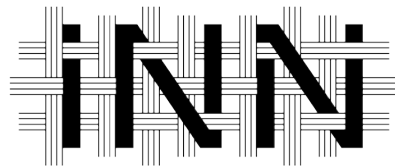


Pierre de Coubertin and the Olympic Winter Games

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Inland Norway
University of
Applied Sciences



Today: World Para Snow Sports Championships Lillehammer 2021





„Isn't it true that the top
of Mount Olympus is
covered with snow?“

The Revival of the Olympic Games

- «Founding Father» Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863 – 1937), french educator and historian
- Inspired by the Ancient Olympic Games held in Olympia, Greece, between 776 BC and 393 AD
- Wanted to reform the French School system in regard to the educational facilitation of Sport, found inspiration in Great Britain and America
- Created the idea of modern Olympic Games based on educational objectives with their underlying philosophical foundation of «Olympism»
- Inaugural congress at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1894 and establishment of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)
- First Olympic Games of the Modern Era 1896 in Athens



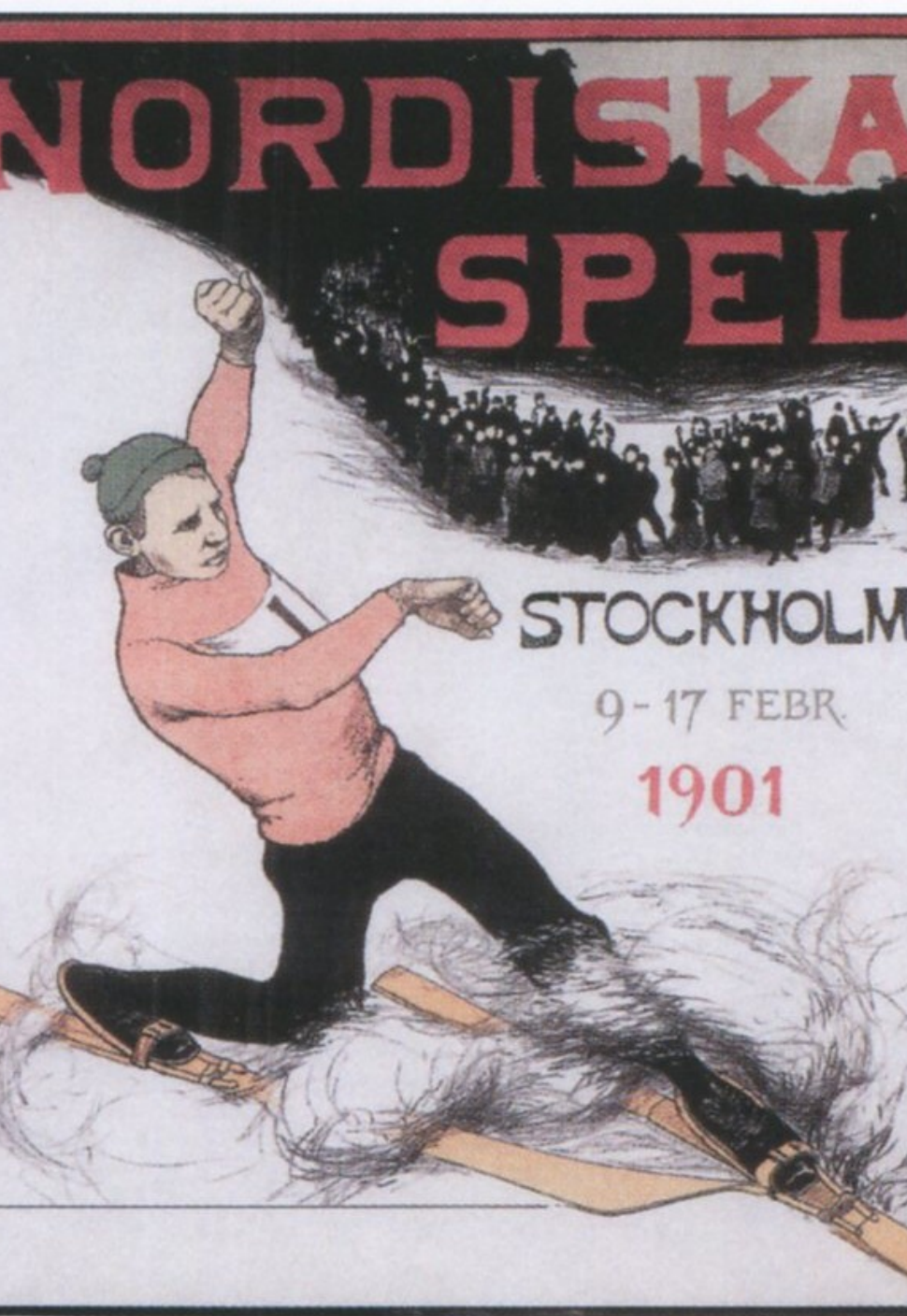


Viktor Balck (1844-1924)

- “The Godfather of Swedish Sports”
- Met Coubertin at the Congress for Physical Exercise during the World Fair in Paris 1889
- Became close confidant and friend of Coubertin
- Was among the founding members of the IOC and belonged to the inner circle for more than 30 years
- President of the International Skating Union (ISU) between 1893 and 1925
- Proposed “Winter Games” in Stockholm to Coubertin as soon as in 1897
- Creator of the “Nordic Games”



The Nordic Games 1901-1926



- First international multisport event for Winter Sports – clearly influenced by the revival of the Olympic Games
- Contained many different events, had festive cultural framework
- Were intended to strengthen the Swedish-Norwegian Union, initial idea to alternate between Stockholm and Kristiania (Oslo)
- Coubertin reported favourably about the Nordic Games in the «Revue Olympique», based on Viktor Balcks reports



„Winter Sports were included in the fundamental charter of the Olympic Games in 1894 with the same treatment as other types and, since then, I’ve tirelessly pursued their practical introduction into the programme, not without recognising the material difficulties which would have to be overcome to achieve this“



Olympic Games of London, 1908.

IV INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIAD.

UNDER THE PATRONAGE
OF
HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY THE KING.

Calendar
OF THE
WINTER GAMES,
OCTOBER 19-31.

FOOTBALL,
HOCKEY,
LACROSSE,
BOXING,
SKATING.

BRITISH OLYMPIC COUNCIL,
108 Victoria Street, London, S.W.

Chairman :
The Right Hon. THE LORD DESBOROUGH OF TAPLOW, K.C.V.O.
Hon. Sec. : Rev. R. S. de COURCY LAFFAN.
Assistant Sec. : Capt. F. WHITWORTH JONES.

Telephone : VICTORIA 2945.

Telegrams : PANKRAT LONDON."

Winter Sports in the Summer Games

- Ice Skating was –in theory- on the Olympic Programme from the very beginning in 1894 «wherever possible»
- ISU had been arranging international Championships since 1883, for figure skating since 1896
- For the first time featured in the London Games in 1908 as part of separate «Winter Games» section which took place three after the other competitions had ended



Coubertin and the Winter Games



- What do we know?
- Most of his texts in this regard are written in retrospective, «knowing the outcome»
- In general, he wrote very little on winter sports – lack of interest? Not necessarily...
- Had other priorities; namely the inclusion of the Modern Pentathlon and the Art Competitions into the Games programme
- Did emphasize to build the Olympic project «step by step», without wanting too much at once



Coubertin and the Winter Games

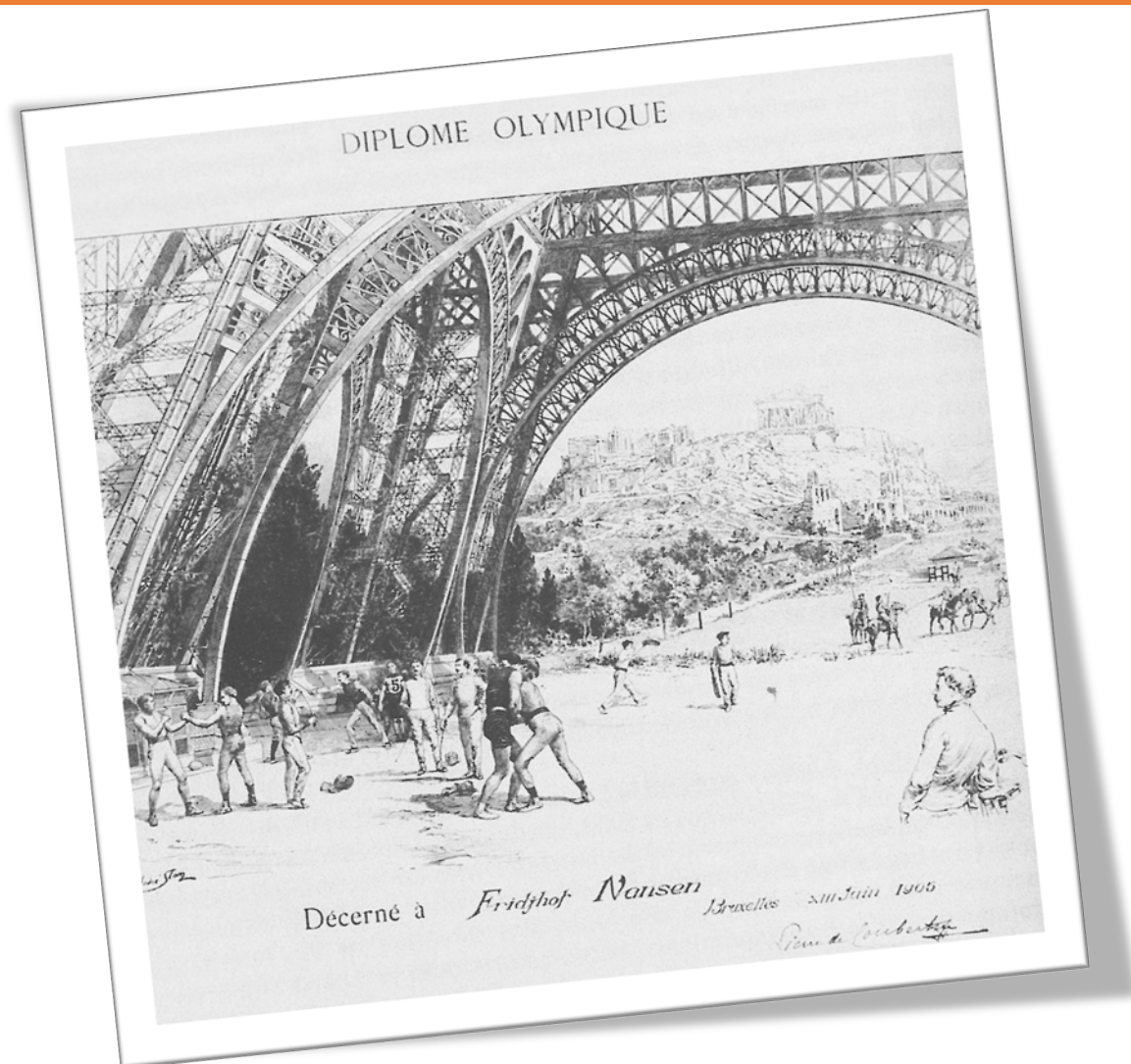
- His thinking regarding the fit and relevance of winter sport evolved over time
- Did certainly like some winter sports better than others: while he considered some «completely useless» (luge, toboggan and bobsleigh), he criticized alpine skiing for being elitistic, touristic, commercialised, and for «fêtards» (fun seekers)
- On the other hand, some winter sports had clearly desirable attributes, such as ice skating (for the pursuit of the «perfect» aesthetic movement) and Nordic Skiing (Cross-Country) for its purity and the strive of man against the elements
- Nonetheless, Coubertin did not actively encourage organizers of the Games to include any of the winter sports



Fridtjof Nansen
Febr. 11 1897.
107, Regent Street,
London W.



Fridtjof Nansens Crossing of the Greenland inland ice sheet in 1888/1889



Stockholm 1912

- During the IOC Session in Berlin in 1909, Stockholm was chosen as host for the 1912 Games. Coubertin highlighted the Model of the Nordic Games as proof the ability of Swedish organizers
- At the IOC Meetings in Luxembourg in 1910 and Budapest 1911, discussions arose on the inclusion of Winter Sports – which Viktor Balck denied with reference to the Nordic Games to be organized in 1913
- A proposal to link the Nordic Games with the Olympic Games was also turned down by the Swedish
- The Olympic Games took place «in the country of Winter Sport», but did not involve any of them. Balck was supported by Coubertin in this regard - «Gentlemen's agreement»



JEUX OLYMPIQUES
~ STOCKHOLM 1912 ~
LE 29 JUIN — 22 JUILLET

A. BÖRTZELLS TR. A. B. STOCKHOLM



Count Eugenio Brunetta d'Usseaux (1857-1919)

1916 – The first«Winter Games» that never happened

- At the IOC Session in Stockholm, the Olympic Games for 1916 were awarded to Berlin
- The organizers planned for a Winter Sports Week to take place at Feldberg in the Black Forest i February 1916
- The Norwegian delegation to the Olympic Congress i Paris in 1914 formally proposed to make this an official Olympic event - the only time a Scandinavian country ever voted in favour of the establishment of Olympic Winter Games. The proposal was resolved with huge majority
- The outbreak of WWI spoiled the plans and what probably could have become the first Olympic Winter Games
- The decisions of the Congress in 1914 in regard to winter sports were not followed up after the end of the war

Why was de Coubertin reluctant to follow up on the 1914 decisions?

- The Olympic Movement was still premature and the early years up to Stockholm 1912 had been quite challenging
- Major changes (i.e. moving the headquarters of the IOC from Paris to Lausanne in Switzerland)
- prioritized to solidate the regular organization of the Summer Games after the war instead of introducing new Winter Games
- The Scandinavians, with the «intermezzo exception» of the Norwegians in 1914, strongly opposed Winter Games in fear for their own events (Nordic Games, Holmenkollen Ski Festival)
- Viktor Balck's opposition in particular, who had supported Coubertin and helped him to realize important goals at the Stockholm Games
- Coubertin's doubts regarding the usefulness of many winter sports, in particular bobsleigh and the «elitist» alpine skiing
- And again: Other priorities (Paris 1924)



Antwerp 1920

- Figure skating and Icehockey on the programme of the Summer Games
- IOC took up the question of winter sports again
- Scandinavians again unified in their opposition against Winter Games
- But growing number of IOC members in favor, in particular from France, Switzerland and Canada





Towards Chamonix 1924

- Important milestone for Olympic winter sports at the IOC Session in Lausanne in 1921: Winter Sport Week to be arranged ahead of the Paris 1924 Games
- Viktor Balck, the strongest opponent of Olympic Winter Games, retired from the IOC
- He was succeeded by Sigfrid Edström, who was more amicable towards the idea of Olympic Winter Games
- Edström mediated and secured Scandinavian participation in the Winter Sport Week in Chamonix upon condition that these Games were not to be called «Olympic», that there were own medals and diplomas



However...





"Winter sports are amongst the purest and that is why I was so eager to see them take their place in a definitive way amongst Olympic events."

(Coubertin's closing speech at Winter Sports Week in Chamonix)

«We showed the world the winter way»

- The success of the Winter Sports Week led to a decrease in the resistance from the Scandinavians. The Norwegians took pride in «having shown the world the winter way» by their results in the Winter Sports Week
- Viktor Balck died in 1924
- At the IOC Session in Prague in 1925, it was decided to assign the Winter Games their own cycle
- At their 1926 meeting in Lisbon, the IOC decided to announce the Chamonix Winter Sport Week 1924 “1st Olympic Winter Games” retrospectively and to award St. Moritz the 1928 Olympic Winter Games
- The Nordic Games, which arguably had delayed the start of Olympic Winter Games, lost both their appeal and their primus motor and ceased to exist after their final appearance in 1926

And what about today? Are the Olympic Winter Games as relevant as the Summer Games?

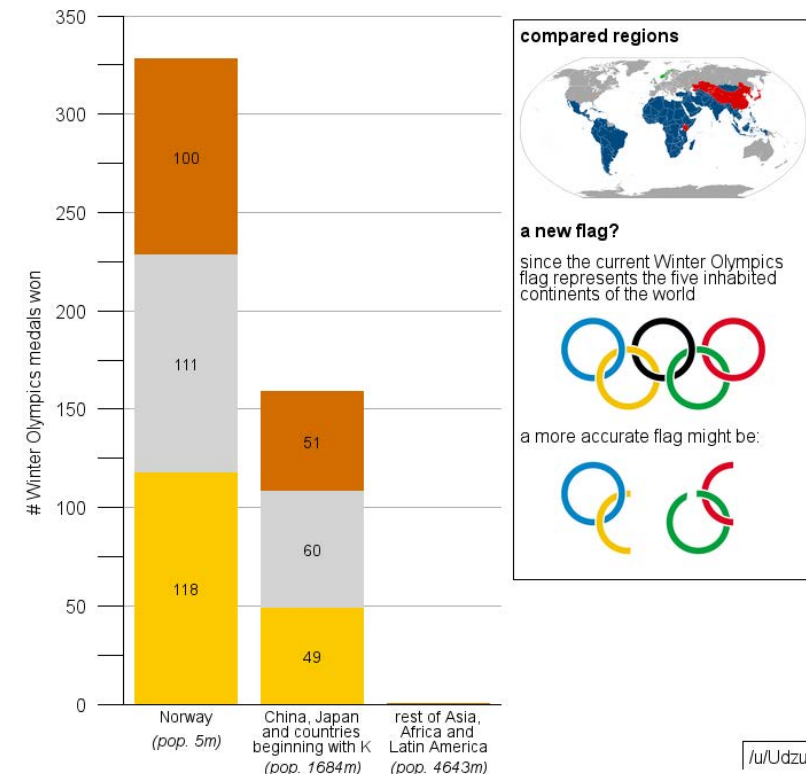
- The vast majority of countries worldwide do not provide natural conditions to practice winter sports

- Reflected in the number of participating NOC's:

Beijing 2022: 84 participating nations
Tokyo 2020: 206 participating nations

- Still more evident: The distribution of Winter Olympic medals
- Are winter sports as universal as summer sports?
- Environmental issues

WINTER OLYMPICS MEDALS geographic distribution across selected regions





*„Isn't it true that the top
of Mount Olympus is
covered with snow?“*

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