



# Local rooting, national identity, and global belonging in World Scouting

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**(Academic contribution)**

Many scholars, opinion-makers and politicians believe that strengthening the sense of global belonging weakens national identity, and vice versa. While that position is certainly rooted on the nationalistic perspective, many promoters of the cosmopolitan vision assume as well that to educate in national loyalty inextricably leads to values that contradict the idea of global citizenship, and that only through some sort of national disaffection can we create a true sense of global belonging.

Contrarily, my position<sup>1</sup> is that a citizenship education based on civic and inclusive values that promotes national commitment can reinforce rather than debilitate the sense of global belonging. And furthermore, I believe the case of World Scouting shows that, even more, national identity and sense of global belonging could be synergic.

A deep and multidisciplinary analysis of World Scouting shows how this non-governmental, worldwide educational movement with a local-based activity and national commitment, has continuously promoted the sense of global belonging among its members ever since its early days, using a model of citizenship that combines both the republican civic values of liberal-democratic nationalism and the values of cosmopolitanism.

Clichés, rather than scientific analysis, have been the main source for opinions on the Scout movement. It is often said that Scouting was founded by a British colonial army officer, but nobody stops to ask why it enjoys such great prestige nowadays in the former colonies in Africa and Asia. It is stressed that the sense of belonging to a worldwide community, as is the case of Scouting, is not extraordinary because this happens with many religious organizations too. However, there are not taken into account the potential conflicts that may arise in a movement that deals with citizenship education, national loyalty and world understanding while bringing together individuals representing a very wide spectrum of national identities, religious confessions and cultural traditions<sup>2</sup>.

Actually, what today we know as Scouting, came about following a methodological idea for leisure-time training of boys in the British Empire in 1908. Its initial spark was the book Scouting for Boys, written by Robert Baden-Powell, an army officer and colonial war hero.

<sup>1</sup> This contribution is based on part of my research "Global Citizenship Education: Study of the ideological bases, historical development, international dimension, and values and practices of World Scouting" (PhD dissertation, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, October 2007 - Thesis Committee chaired by Prof. Federico Mayor Zaragoza). <http://www.escoltes.cat/research>

<sup>2</sup> "Because of its diversity, the [World Scout] Movement is one of the biggest multicultural and multiconfessional networks for education and joint action with youths, within the fine-tuning of a culture of peace, tolerance and solidarity". 'Scouting, a Culture for Peace: Address by Federico Mayor Zaragoza, Director-General of UNESCO, to the 8th European Guide & Scout Conference'. Salzburg, Austria, April 1995.

Although Robert Baden-Powell had not intended to create a movement, the book was so well received that the idea became a success, surprising even its author. Groups of youths calling themselves Scouts began to crop up around Great Britain. But what exactly was “being a Scout” about? Basically, it was an imaginary element of self-identification: the feeling that they were taking part in a big game.

In September 1909, twenty-one months after the book was published, the book’s publisher sponsored a rally at London’s Crystal Palace after spotting a burgeoning business opportunity in the initiative. To the surprise of its organizers, led by Baden-Powell, 11,000 boys who considered themselves Scouts turned up at the rally. Baden-Powell described this spontaneous growth at the BBC in 1937:

“Boys were writing to me telling me how they had started Patrols and Troops and had got men to come and act as their Scoutmasters. So we had to start a Headquarters office in a tiny room to deal with correspondence and supply equipment. ... In that year, 1909, I arranged to have a meeting of the would-be Scouts at the Crystal Palace on a certain day. And when I got there, my wig, there were a lot of them. Rain was threatening, so we mustered them inside the Palace and arranged a March Past and counted them as they entered at one door and went out at the other. There were 11,000 of them – 11,000, who had taken it up of their own accord! That is why I say that one didn’t see the start: Scouting started itself”<sup>3</sup>.

As a consequence of its instant success, and after a process of conceptualizing an organization from what it was a sporadic movement, a British association was established for boys in 1909 (Boy Scouts Association), with an astonishing 108,000 members, and another was set up for girls in 1910 (Girl Guides Association). There are three probable reasons for the rapid success of Scouting. Firstly, its historical opportunity. The idea came about when the concepts of ‘youth’ and ‘leisure time’ emerged in the West and when the countryside and living with nature were favoured over life in industrial cities. Secondly, the project had the thorough complicity of institutions with social and political authority in Great Britain, i.e. the monarchy, school, the church, and the army – a complicity that would be replicated in many other countries. And lastly, the civic proposal of Scouting for Boys, the work of reference in the early days of Scouting and throughout its history, was heterogeneous and relatively ambiguous; this heterogeneity not only encouraged a wider acceptance, but also paved the way for the later international expansion of the idea.

The references to “God” and the “King” in the texts of the Scout Promise and the Scout Law in Scouting for Boys – texts that became the main ideological reference of the movement, need to be read in the context of Britain at that time: a religious society with no dominant church that, at the end of the 18th century, had established the independence of its Parliament from the monarchy – thus creating a democratic structure: “If the service which was required of the boys was for God, it was for the God of a multi-confessional and tolerant society; if loyalty to the King was asked for, it was faithfulness to a monarch who reigned rather than governed”<sup>4</sup>.

As it has been showed, Baden-Powell had not intended to create an organization when he published Scouting for Boys. However, just as it had spread across England, Scouting and, to a lesser degree, Guiding, began to expand quickly and immediately to the rest of the British Empire and the entire world. In fact, the heterogeneity of the original idea and the various ways in which it can be interpreted also help to explain how a product designed to revitalize the British Empire could have such a successful immediate reception in societies as diverse as Chile, France, Malaysia, and Japan. Nonetheless, both in Britain and abroad, its propagation was accelerated by the implication of government institutions acting on their commitment to the service of citizens, given that these values of order were held in high regard by society.

3 Robert Baden-Powell (1937): ‘Be Prepared’ (interview). The Listener, British Broadcasting Corporation-BBC (January 1937).

4 Laszlo Nagy (1967): ‘Report on World Scouting/Étude sur le Scoutisme Mondial’. Geneva: Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales (cyclostyled): p. 17.

Not only did Scouting spread to the British Empire<sup>5</sup> (Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and India, between 1908 and 1909), but also to Chile, Denmark, the United States, and Russia (1909), Brazil, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, and Holland, (1910), Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Sweden, Malaysia, and Singapore (1911), etc<sup>6</sup>.

During World War I, under the moral authority of Baden-Powell, the movement came upon currents of educational renewal. The educational ideology of Scouting, therefore, came about after its emergence, during a militarizing period and in opposition to this trend, independently of its origins. Hence, in parallel to the development of active learning, Scouting takes the form of a type of training for citizens that is mainly educational, though it does not rule out elements of patriotism and religious commitment.

The educational role of Scouting was stressed in the years prior to 1914, when the accusations of militarism multiplied. Moreover, it was around this time, between 1911 and 1914, that England received the influence of the modern ideas of the Italian educator Maria Montessori and her “learning by doing” philosophy, very similar to the method that Scouting was intuitively developing. The ideological link between Scouting and the innovative liberal currents of educational renewal was quickly pointed out. At the same time, the impact of the devastating effects of the World War I, parallel to the international spread of Scouting, led Baden-Powell to the inseparable commitment of Scouting to the ideals of peace, understanding between countries and universal fraternity. The war showed him the first-hand effects of a full-scale conflict on young people.

As Sica explains<sup>7</sup>, Baden-Powell did not regard the international proliferation of Scouting as a ‘strange coincidence’, as though it were a mere generalization of an institution with a social purpose. In fact, he refused to patent the term for the exclusive use of British Scouting and gradually abandoned the idea of producing citizens of the Empire in favour of a more internationalist discourse. It also evolved in this direction because Baden-Powell had travelled to many countries – and continued to do so – with a Liberal vision that represented a stark contrast to the expansionist nationalism of continental Europe, preoccupied with its frontiers.

The aims and ideology of Baden-Powell had then changed radically between 1908 and 1920. Firstly, there was the link to the active learning discourse, particularly in relation to the educational Montessori method and the rejection of militarism. Secondly, more emphasis was placed on the need to develop one’s own criteria while the notion of obedience was relativized<sup>8</sup>. Thirdly, it had a patent international vocation, related to the ideal of the League of Nations. Lastly, and closely related to the previous point, was the permanent commitment to peace, also a consequence of the profound impact of World War I.

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5 In the 1920s, the British Empire had a population of five hundred million people – almost a quarter of the world’s population – and covered 37 million km<sup>2</sup>, a quarter of the earth’s surface

6 An untrammelled growth both in extension and name that went hand-in-hand with the spread of Scouting for Boys: by the end of the 1920s, two decades after it was first published in London; it had already been published in twenty-six countries – not including editions printed in the British Empire.

7 Mario Sica (2006): ‘Baden-Powell and International Peace: An Introduction’, in: Robert Baden-Powell: Citizens of the World: Selected Writings on International Peace, compiled and edited by Mario Sica. Roma: Fiordaliso: pp. 16-17.

8 “And so it is in almost every problem of life; individual power of judgment is essential, whether in choice of politics, religion, profession, or sport, and half our failures and three-quarters of our only partial successes among our sons is due to the want of it. We want our men to be men, not sheep”. Robert Baden-Powell (1912): ‘The Other Fellow’s Point of View’. Headquarters Gazette: June 1912.

Although these elements were the foundations for the formalization of World Scouting in 1920, we should remember that many countries set up associations based on the early British model. This meant that there was an ambiguous tension in many countries between the early British model of 1909 – supportive of the military sector and based more on discipline with various levels of nationalism – and the model that Baden-Powell promoted in 1920 – civic, socially committed, with an emphasis on the education of the individual, clearly internationalist, and focused on working towards peace. The paradox: both visions were based on texts by Baden-Powell.

In August 1920, Baden-Powell organized in London a rally to commemorate the end of the war, attended with 8,000 Scouts from 21 independent countries and 12 British dependencies. It became the first world Jamboree. On that event it was settled to create an international organization, the 'Boy Scouts International Bureau', and Baden-Powell was proclaimed "Chief Scout of the World". For the new international Scout organization, a permanent secretariat was established (the Bureau)<sup>9</sup>, along with an International Conference (a governing body formed by the national associations, which had six votes each) and an International Committee (an executive body, formed by individuals elected by the Conference). The structure was very similar than the one adopted one year before by the League of Nations.

Although Scouting was an educational idea in 1907, and despite the fact that there were many associations using the name 'Scout' outside England before and after World War I, we can only say World Scouting did exist as a subject after the Boy Scouts International Bureau was set up in 1920. It was the first time a democratic international organization led the movement (under the moral leadership of Baden-Powell) providing constitutional coherence, and with the doubtless aim to educate citizens both in national loyalty and with a sense of international belonging, emulating and formalizing in Scouting the ideals and operation of the League of Nations. The same occurred with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) for girls, which also began activities in 1920 and was formally constituted in 1928, under the guidance of Robert Baden-Powell and the leadership of his wife, Olave.

The institutional evolution of World Scouting since 1920 up to nowadays is remarkable, but both the principles and the structure have remained practically the same, for what matters to the point of this contribution. This is why I will escape its historical evolution and proceed to analyze the tension in Scouting between its identity as a movement and its organization.

#### Movement vs Organization: apparent hierarchy, actual network

Based on its constitutional texts, we could define World Scouting as an educational movement for young people, independent and self-governed, non-partisan, voluntary, and open to everybody regardless of origin, nationality, race, or creed. Its aim is to educate individuals as citizens on the basis of its shared principles and its own method.

Even from the outset of the Scout international organization in 1920, the sense of 'movement' stressed by Scouting's founder, Baden-Powell, was to be maintained, which meant that more importance was placed on the principles and method than on the organization. What it had been true at the British level, was even more important internationally: since a set of standard principles was being established beyond which Scout recognition would not be given, a great deal of care was taken to restrict the centralizing and controlling tendency of the world organization. As its first Director pointed out in 1922, "[the Boy Scouts International Bureau] possesses no executive authority whatever and in no way controls the different Scout Organizations which constitute its members"<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> There was a confusion with terms because the new world organization took the name of the "International Bureau", which was also the name adopted by the permanent secretariat of the organization.

<sup>10</sup> "Report on the Activities of the International Bureau 1920-1922", typed document presented to the International Committee in 1922, Pg. 1. World Scout Bureau Archives (Geneva).

World Scouting is thus first and foremost a movement. Robert Baden-Powell's early reluctance to formalize it into an organization never really disappeared, even after the creation of the British association and world organization, and that is the reason why the concept of Scouting as a 'movement' has greater force today than the concept of Scouting as an 'association/federation'. According to Nagy, although Baden-Powell's hatred of bureaucracy held him back in the creation of a world organization, he realized that coordination was the key to ensuring that the Scout "name" was not used for corrupt or, worse still, damaging programmes<sup>11</sup>.

'Scout Movement' and 'Scouting' are therefore used to define what is involved in the activity carried out by millions of boys and girls around the world with a set of shared values, and not to define the organizational and legal corpus that supports this movement:

"The word Movement means a series of organized activities working towards an objective. A movement thus implies both an objective to be achieved and some type of organization to ensure this"<sup>12</sup>.

This distinction between 'movement' and 'organization' is very significant because it suggests that Scouting could ideally exist without the need for an organization, as was the case in many countries, particularly before the world organization was created in 1920. The distinction is also made in order to underline the fact that the organization is subject to the movement, not the other way around.

In fact, the name of the Boy-Scouts International Bureau, which was established in 1922, was not changed to 'World Organization of the Scout Movement' until 1973. The name used up to that point suggests that the organization had a low profile because the real subject was the 'movement' – made up of those who participated in it – regardless of whether there was a world office or bureau that acted as its permanent secretariat<sup>13</sup>. Nonetheless, the combination of 'movement' and 'organization' adds to its intensity because it gives Scouting the flexibility of movements while affording it the security of organizations. In its movement sense, Scouting has a very significant margin when it comes to implementing the lines of the world and national organizations at local level<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, as a 'Scout organization', it maintains its principles and method over time, with occasional adaptations, which affords it stability.

Being institutionally organized is not trivial for Scouting. An educational movement of its size, with its substantial flexibility and ability to adapt and a presence in such diverse and distant social and cultural contexts, needs to have a point of reference to establish the minimum requirements for forming part of it. This is one of the main functions of the movement's democratic institutional organization:

"What protects the Movement when it is threatened by outside forces is the fact that its nature and specific identity are internationally defined and agreed upon by all Scout associations. For example, challenges to the Movement's fundamental principles in any particular country can be defended on the basis of conditions of membership of the World Movement"<sup>15</sup>.

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11 Laszlo Nagy (1985): 250 Million Scouts. London: Dartnell; p. 82.

12 WOSM (1992): 'Fundamental Principles'. Geneva: World Scout Bureau: p. 2.

13 Nagy (1985), op. cit.: 158.

14 The Scout group is the basic unit in the structure of the Scout Movement and the only level where we can see the general Scout educational programme being implemented directly.

15 WOSM (1998): 'The Essential Characteristics of Scouting'. Geneva: World Scout Bureau: p. 31.

Scouting is a movement that operates in a network where, using Castells' definition, the components are both autonomous and dependent on the Scout network and often share membership and goals with other networks<sup>16</sup>. Of the two characteristics of the network described by Castells, connectedness and consistency, the former has played a rather limited role in World Scouting until recently: the development of information and communication technologies has allowed the masses to instantly contact an unlimited number of people all over the world. Nonetheless, the effects of limited connectedness have been assuaged by the innumerable international meetings of young people in the form of Jamborees, Moots, international exchanges, conferences and seminars, pen-pal correspondence between Scouts in different countries, or Jamborees on The Air (virtual international meetings of radio buffs). The second characteristic (consistency), the extent to which the goals of the individuals and Scouting coincide, has been essential for strengthening the voluntary personal commitment of many generations of citizens around the world.

The voluntary and unpaid participation of leaders is essential to explain Scouting's network operation system. Moreover, the strength afforded to the movement by its ideological consistency contrasts with its impossibility to structure a system that would allow guidelines to be implemented hierarchically; that is why it's impossible to ideologically control scout groups beyond the shared principles<sup>17</sup>. And that is as well how scout groups could survive even in case of illegalization, with no organization behind them at all.

The organizational structure of Scouting would appear to be the opposite of the network model: world organization and defined decision-making processes, national organizations, people in charge at different points, right up to local level. But the existence of an organizational structure does not mean that what is planned on a worldwide scale is automatically applied locally or nationally. The role of the organization is to give historical continuity and coherence to the movement, which operates as a network. In the words of the former Chairman of the WOSM Constitutions Committee, John Beresford,

"the World Scout Conference, the [World] Committee and the [World] Bureau are in fact living within this network, facilitating the quality of communications within the network, sharing knowledge throughout the network, but not controlling with hierarchical powers"<sup>18</sup>.

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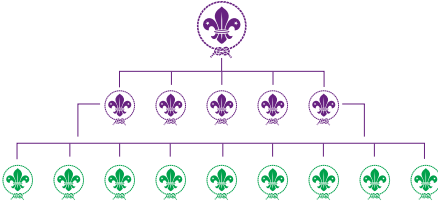
16 "The components of the network are both autonomous and dependent vis-à-vis the network, and may be a part of other networks, and therefore of other systems of means aimed at other goals. The performance of a given network will then depend on two fundamental attributes of the network: its connectedness, that is its structural ability to facilitate noise-free communication between its components; its consistency, that is the extent to which there is sharing of interests between the network's goals and the goals of its components". Manuel Castells (2000): *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. I: *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd edition). Oxford: Blackwell: p. 171.

17 In the past, for example, when countries with authoritarian regimes banned Scouting and replaced it with government-controlled organizations, voluntary membership was replaced with compulsory membership, the people in charge were hired (rather than being unpaid volunteers), and individuals were indoctrinated with enforced principles as a group, instead of calling attention to the education of the individual. There are many well-known cases of this: communist Russia, fascist Italy, fascist Spain, Nazi Germany, the communist countries of Eastern Europe, and the People's Republic of China.

18 "Actions that speak louder...". issue of "The Bottom Line": [Consulta: a series of documents on the World Scout Foundation, June 2002. [http://www.scout.org/wsf/docs/20bl\\_wosmstrat\\_e](http://www.scout.org/wsf/docs/20bl_wosmstrat_e).

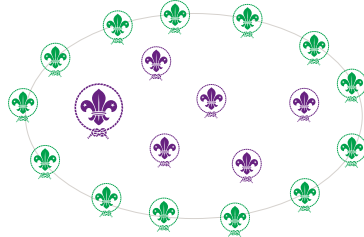
The document in which Beresford writes this statement includes two very understandable organization charts (Figure 1 and Figure 2):

Figure 1



Apparent operation

Figure 2



Real operation

Source: World Scout Foundation, 2002

The first illustration (Figure 1) shows what World Scouting appears to be because of its structure: an international organization, below which there are national associations, below which are local Scout groups. And though this seems to describe the actual organizational structure, the real structure is in fact closer to the second illustration (Figure 2), in which the diverse actors interact in ways that cannot be controlled. For instance, many changes made to the methodology or operation of national associations have been the result of contact with other associations, which have given them ideas that they have then implemented themselves. The same has happened at local group level, and this has allowed, e.g., secular groups to be part of religious associations, or very informal groups to form part of very formal associations, etc.

This central characteristic of the operation of World Scouting puts it in a very good position vis-à-vis the everchanging network society. The development of the Internet, e-mail, websites, and other means of communication is also having a major impact on the organizational system of Scouting, by reinforcing and encouraging network relationships between members at all levels of the movement with no filters other than language limitations and access to tools.

The tension mentioned earlier relating to the ‘movement’ aspect of World Scouting and its ‘organization’, dictates the need to strike a balance in which neither is more important than the other. In words of Jacques Moreillon,

“[i]t is true that when we become too much of an organization we run the risk of killing the spirit of Scouting. But if we are too much of a Movement, we go in all directions and lose the coherence and unity of purpose and principles that allow us to call ourselves Scouts. For this is the primary objective of “organising” World Scouting: to give worldwide coherence to our Movement, to ensure that all those who are officially recognized as “Scouts” have the same purpose, base themselves on the same fundamental principles and use the same Scoutmethod”<sup>19</sup>.

But beyond its shared purpose, principles, and method, the fact that Scouting is a 'movement' also avoids the use of a model that would encourage ideological control. A world organization of the size and presence of Scouting, the purpose of which is to educate citizens, could raise a similar interest to that mentioned earlier – the many cases where authoritarian and colonial regimes have tried to use Scouting as a tool for the ideological control of entire countries. According to Malek Gabr, the Deputy Secretary General of WOSM, the structure of World Scouting makes this impossible:

“There are those who once thought that it was possible to control the Scout Movement from one central point, to create a bureaucratic ‘organisation’ – but our founder, Baden-Powell, quickly stopped that thinking – we are a movement, not an organisation!”<sup>20</sup>.

The adoption of joint strategies and lines of work, therefore, take the movement as a whole in the same general direction, not through coercion, but through shared projects. In this sense, the world democratic decision-making system is essential for giving legal validity to the decisions made.

### **The ‘Glocal’ Component of World Scouting**

The Scout movement is certainly a global movement, nationally organized and locally rooted. As Ulrich Beck has noticed, the local-global nexus plays a central role in corporate strategies: multinationals’ executives stress that the point of globalization is not building factories everywhere, but becoming a living part of each respective culture<sup>21</sup>. This has been since its beginning the key for Scouting’s success: being part of each one of the many societies where it is rooted.

The inseparable local-national-global dimension of World Scouting respects the diversity of national frameworks locally implemented while maintaining a set of common minimums established democratically for everybody worldwide. This combination is not only a constitutional condition that World Scouting has established for all its members: the international nature of its vast network is also part of the educational action carried out by Scout associations in order to achieve it.

Providing that Scouting’s education of individuals as citizens combines national loyalty with the sense of global belonging, through the establishment of a legitimate world organization and the experiences that promotes, then membership to the world organization, or international “recognition” of an association, involves much more than the straightforward authorization to use the name ‘scout’. For an association that considers itself a Scout association, being “recognized” involves accepting shared authority, being subject to the world organization rules, rights and duties, and participating in their renewal, as well as taking part in the international experiences that stimulate the sense of global belonging, instead of limiting itself to formulating these as an abstract idea.

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19 ‘Meaning and Relevance of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. Address by Dr. Jacques Moreillon, Secretary General of WOSM, to the

Submit Meeting of the 20th Inter-American Scout Conference’. Guadalajara, Mexico, 21 March 1998.

20 ‘Actions that speak louder...’, issue of “The Bottom Line”: a series of documents on the World Scout Foundation, June 2002. [http://www.scout.org/wsf/docs/20bl\\_wosmstrat\\_e](http://www.scout.org/wsf/docs/20bl_wosmstrat_e).

21 Ulrich Beck (2000): *What Is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press: p. 46. That concept was called ‘glocal’ by Roland Robertson, on his chapter (1995): ‘Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity’, in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson: *Global Modernities*. London: SAGE, 25-44

Paradoxically, the local group needs the global belonging to fully educate in the sense of global citizenship. In Scouting, global citizenship education is both descriptive and aspirational rather than normative: first, it describes how citizens all over the world are affected by issues that extend beyond the borders of their countries; and second, it aspires to a republican idea of citizenship in which citizens are also aware of their global rights and duties. The values of global citizenship promoted by World Scouting are implemented in practices carried out locally by thousands and thousands of Scout groups. We can confirm the coherence between values and practices analyzing many cases in four main aspects of global citizenship: peace culture and human rights, environmental commitment, development cooperation, and the legitimation of international institutions<sup>22</sup>.

But a 'glocal' perspective of citizenship education combines local, national and global involvement: besides local action and national initiatives, at world level there are also initiatives coherent with the movement principles, like the several declarations of WOSM Secretary General and WAGGGS Chief Executive, together with other CEOs of youth associations, of what was called "Alliance of Youth CEOs". The first declaration made by the Alliance (1997) was aimed at raising the profile of the concept of non-formal education, previously defined by UNESCO, and to ask governments to extend their educational policies beyond school; the second (1999), was to request long-term national youth policies; the third (2001), to promote the role of women with a view to establishing an equal-opportunities society; the fourth (2003), to launch an initiative for Africa to unite against aids, which has since been put into practice, and the fifth (2005) dealt with the participation of young people in decision-making processes in order to foster a democratic culture that starts with the younger generations.

Local rooting, national identity, and global belonging are the three inseparable dimensions of the Scout movement, as well as source of contradictions, key of citizenship success and element of hope for a better future.

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22 Several case studies of local and national actions of Scouting on these areas have been analyzed in my research "Global Citizenship Education" (2007, op. cit.).