

# Cases in Innovative Nonprofits

**Organizations That Make a Difference**

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## CHAPTER 16

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# The YMCA

## A Pioneer of Organizational Innovations

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### INTRODUCTION

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**O**nce upon a time there were no summer camps for youth, no gyms, no basketball, and no volleyball. There were no international youth conferences, no military canteens, no refugee aid, and no international development cooperation. There was neither ecumenism nor interfaith dialogue. Why? Because the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) had not yet been born.

The YMCA has been a pioneer in many social activities, organizations, and practices that we regard as self-evident today. The YMCA is perhaps the oldest (founded in 1844) and largest (45 million members today) of contemporary youth organizations, and it has been a laboratory of youth work methods, like youth clubs, youth centers, gang work, youth camps and international youth assemblies—as well as basketball and volleyball, interconfessional and interfaith dialogue, and work for victims of war.

The organization has been either a mother or a midwife to many large nongovernmental organizations, such as Boy Scouts, American United Service Organization (Muukkonen, 2002, pp. 340–344; USO, 2012), World Council of Churches (Rouse, 1993b, p. 327), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Holborn 1975, p. 124f). As these organizations emerged, they got their leadership, as well as their working methods and practices, from the YMCA.

In this chapter, the author focuses on the interplay between the ideology of the YMCA and the new challenges that led to new organizational and programmatic innovations

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<sup>1</sup>This article is an excerpt from the author's dissertation, *Ecumenism of the Laity—Continuity and Change in the Mission View of the World's Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1855–1955*, which was written mostly on archive materials found in the archives of the World Alliance of YMCAs in Geneva, Switzerland.

during the first hundred years of the YMCA. The author first gives an overview of the birth and the ideology of the YMCA and then focuses on four aspects of YMCA innovations: organizational models, physical education, youth work, and services for the victims of war.

## THE YMCA IDEOLOGY

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Human beings do not see events or things “as they are” but always filter their observations through their previous experiences and beliefs. Ulric Neisser (1976) uses the concept of schema to describe this. According to him, schema directs our observation and, thus, we see what we want to see. Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian (1959, pp. 58–79), while arguing on emergent norms, emphasized the impact of past experiences and beliefs on new situations. Therefore, in the same time when the challenge is described, it is important to describe the basics of the belief system that directs the interpretation of the identified problem.<sup>2</sup> Thus, below these two themes are intertwined.

### The Birth of the YMCA

The first YMCA emerged in London in 1844. Although there had been older associations in Germany, it was the London YMCA that gave a name to the movement and was the *primus motor* in its spreading.

In the beginning of the 19th century, the emergence of youth as a recognized age group (Ariés, 1962; Gillis, 1974) brought forth the special needs of this age group. London was crowded with young people: 80% of migrants from English villages to London were 15 to 25 years of age (Gillis, 1974, p. 55). The problem of this vast in-migration was solved like social problems were traditionally solved in British society: by local parishes, private philanthropy, and voluntary associations rather than by state action (Thane, 1996, p. 5ff). At its beginnings, the London YMCA was just one peer group of young shop assistants who aimed to better the lives of its members. Their connection to the business world gave the London YMCA an important resource that saved it from being just another shooting star like many other previous similar organizations. These young businessmen knew the importance of fundraising, and therefore many YMCA activities (like libraries, reading rooms, and various courses) required either an entrance or annual fee. When they matured and had more influential positions in their companies, they found wealthy sponsors and spread the idea of the YMCA through their business networks (WConf, 1855, p. 67f; Shedd, 1955b, pp. 30ff, 42, 68; The YMCAs of the World, 1958, pp. 28, 39, 138, 197.).

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<sup>2</sup>Other scholars that have emphasized the influence of past practices and way of thinking, are Paul David (1985) and Brian Arthur (1989) who argued on “path dependency” and Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1972, pp. 55-58, 113-122) who speak of “routinization of thinking.”

### ***The YMCA Mission***

The major factor that directed the path of the YMCA and its innovations may be found in the ideology expressed in the Paris Basis statement and in the North American YMCAs' Triangle Principle. Therefore it is necessary to understand *what* YMCA leaders aimed toward before trying to understand *what* and *how* it happened.

When the YMCA leaders met in Paris during the World Exhibition in 1855, they established the World Alliance of YMCAs and accepted a statement that was a manifestation of their faith that defined the identity, ideology, and the mission of the movement. It is known as the Paris Basis, and it stated:

The delegates of various Young Men's Christian Associations of Europe and America, assembled in Conference at Paris, the 22nd August, 1855, feeling that they are one in principle and in operation, recommend to their respective Societies to recognize with them the unity existing among their Associations, and whilst **preserving a complete independence as to their particular organization and modes of action**, to form a Confederation on the following fundamental principle, such **principle to be regarded as the basis of admission of other Societies in future**:

The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and saviour according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men.

This fundamental principle being admitted, the Conference further proposes:

That **any differences of opinion on other subjects**, however important in themselves, but not embraced by the specific designs of the Associations, **shall not interfere with the harmonious relations of the confederated Societies**. (Muukkonen, 2002, pp. 93–106)

The Paris Basis laid the rails for the further organizational development of the YMCA in several ways. First, the "independence clause" in the Preamble (presented in bold), was probably due to American, German, and Swiss hesitancy to adopt the British and French "mother association model" in which local associations were just branches of the one in the capital and without decision-making power (Shedd, 1955b, pp. 56, 77, 94–97; WConf, 1855, 52, 77). The accepted structure of independent local associations was originally based on the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* (1530) and its article VII, where local variety in ceremonies is approved. Thus, the federal structure that emerged was a manifestation of the movement's basic beliefs. This independence clause had a significant impact on the future plurality of the movement.

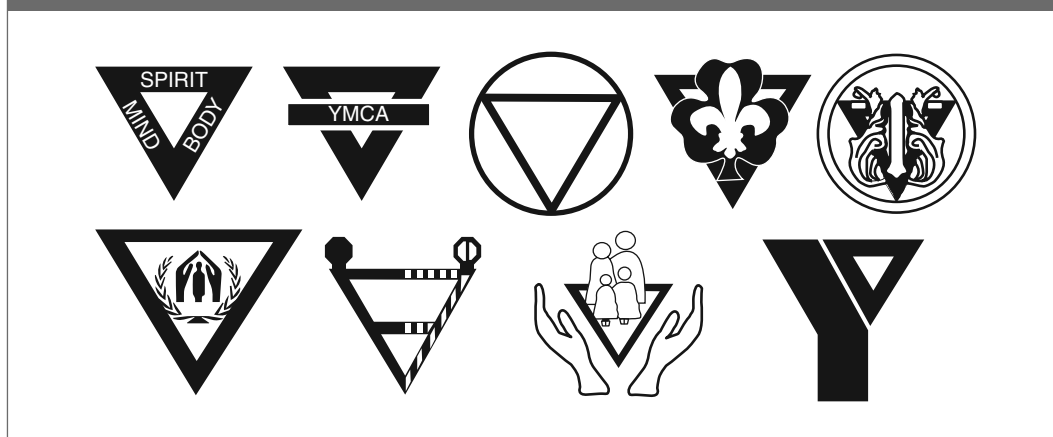
A second influence was the requirement that future associations adopt the Paris Basis. In this way, the Basis, which, following anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1973, p. 93) terminology, was a *model of* the YMCAs in 1855 and became a *model for* the future associations. Although the interpretation of what is "according to the Paris Basis" was left to the local level, this expressed unity in diversity enabled both the flow of innovations in the YMCA and mutual help in the times of troubles. Moreover, the basic YMCA model gave institutional respect to new YMCAs when they started to work.

A third factor arose from the Basis' Fundamental Principle, from which the movement developed its "open membership—Christian leadership"—principle, that enabled the YMCA to serve people of other faiths and thus promote interfaith dialogue. The fourth influence stemming from the first proposal (which later was adopted as the Second Fundamental Principle) promoted neutrality on issues not mentioned in the Fundamental Principle. This guideline gave the YMCA the possibility to serve, for example, prisoners of war and refugees across frontiers as a neutral agency.

Some associations used the Paris Basis as a personal statement that an individual member had to sign, and others used it as a basis for the association. However, some national movements, like the North American YMCA, developed their own bases and saw the Paris Basis as a bond between national YMCA movements. Accordingly, North American associations have been free to make their own definitions of their purpose (Muukkonen, 2002, p. 179f).

While the Paris Basis presented the ideology of the YMCA, the anthropology of the YMCA was crystalized in the symbol of the Red Triangle, which Luther H. Gulick (1918) proposed in 1889. It states that a human being is a totality of body, mind, and spirit. During World War I, this triangle with the YMCA initials became the best-known YMCA symbol throughout the world. Sometimes the triangle is surrounded by a circle and then it is equivalent to the Four-fold Programme (= triangle – principle + society). There are hundreds of modifications of the Red Triangle because different activities have developed their own logos to symbolize both their attachment to the YMCA and their special activity (see Figure 16.1).

FIGURE 16.1 Examples Of Ymca Logos



First row: (1) Triangle with explanations; (2) Standard triangle; (3) Four-fold Programme; (4) YMCA scouts; (5) YMCA choir/orchestra.

Second row: (6) YMCA refugee work (modified along the lines of UNHCR logo); (7) Partnership; (8) Development cooperation; (9) Mainly Anglo-Saxon Y-logo



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## THE INNOVATIONS

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### Organizational Innovations of the YMCA

In the middle of the 19th century, World Alliance of YMCAs emerged from the correspondence between local associations. As noted above, a federal model was a matter of faith for the World Alliance. Contrary to many other organizations, the YMCA never created a strong central office. The emphasis is, as the Paris Basis declares, on the local level.

However, there were practical hindrances in applying this ideal in the middle of the 19th century: railways were still in their infancy; sending messages across the Atlantic meant letters, and crossing the ocean was done mainly with sails. These slow means of communication explain the development of numerous “International Committees” (Red Cross, Olympic committee, YMCA) that emerged in the 19th century—they were the only way to organize effective work since attending executive meetings was not possible for those who lived far away from the headquarters.

After the First World Conference in 1855, the London YMCA acted as a center of correspondence, but it did not have any power over other national YMCA movements. The board of the next host of the next World’s Conference served as the planning committee of the conference (Muukkonen, 2002, p. 237f).

Later, when the world “grew smaller,” the development of the World YMCA structure followed on with the new developments in communications. When the main railway network in Europe was ready, the YMCA established its Central International Committee (CIC) in 1878; a headquarters was located in Geneva, and the first World’s Secretary was appointed. This advance in transportation changed the YMCA from a network of loosely attached associations to an international organization. However, because of the fear of centralization, the CIC was never given enough resources to enable it to take leadership in the movement. Moreover, when most members of CIC resided outside Switzerland, one can only imagine how difficult the decision making was via correspondence, even when the YMCA eagerly utilized the new innovation: the telegram (Muukkonen, 2002, p. 238f).

Without previous models, and in a rapidly changing world, the CIC developed and tested new organizational models that could best implement the YMCA idea of global unity and local independence. Because of the distances, especially between North America and Geneva, there was continuous tension between efficiency needs and democracy needs. As a resolution to this tension, the YMCA created a yearly plenary system of CIC (Muukkonen 2002, p. 239).

In 1955, with the emergence of relatively fast airplane connections, the system was restructured again. World Conferences were replaced with the World Council, which meets every four years, and the Executive Committee whose members meet each year (<http://www.ymca.int/who-we-are/structure/>).

The expansion of the movement led to the founding of several Area Alliances (<http://www.ymca.int/who-we-are/structure/ymca-area-alliances/>). Their purpose has been to facilitate such international activities in various continents for which the global body is too distant.

## Innovations in Physical Education

Howard C. Hopkins (1951, p. 12f) notes that rapid urbanization of the 19th and 20th centuries increased crime in industrialized countries and argues that the Temperance Movement, reform movements, Tract and Bible societies, and other similar organizations were reactions to this negative development. In addition, urbanization brought the fear that “middle-class boys were growing weak and effeminate,” as David I. Macleod (1983, p. 44) put it. Along with the later uniform-dressed religious organizations (like the Boys’ Brigades and Scouts), YMCA physical education answered the need of strengthening growing boys’ masculinity.

Because the negative attitude toward amusements was based on theological doctrines of Calvinism, Pietism, and Methodism, this positive attitude toward physical education had to be based on theological arguments as well. This support was given in 1858, at the Second World’s Conference of YMCAs in Geneva by John H. Gladstone from the London. He argued that associations should offer good recreational programs to young men and defended his thesis mainly with historical examples and some biblical quotations (Shedd, 1955b, p. 157; WConfPrep, 1858).

When the recreational activities got religious legitimacy, Americans developed the philosophy of the triangle principle mentioned above. It had its biblical roots in Luke 2:52 (KJV): “And Jesus increased in wisdom [mind] and stature [body], and in favour with God [spirit] and man [society].” Another frequently cited verse that legitimated physical education was 1 Cor 6:19 (KJV): “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.”

In the 1860s, the Triangle Principle gave rise to the Four-Fold or Character-Building Programme, which saw man as a physical, social, spiritual, and intellectual unity. Physical activities were seen as an extension of the social work of the YMCA and as one method in the “post evangelization” work (i.e., offering good activities to those who have converted during the revival meetings) of the association. This program became the flagship of the North American YMCA (Johnson 1979, pp. 27–42; Macleod, 1983, p. 73).

Along with religious justifications, the character-building program developed was legitimated by popular psychological beliefs that the mind is “composed of several major faculties: intellect, emotion, will, and sometimes conscience” (Macleod, 1983, p. 30). These elements could be trained, like muscles, through exercise. This idea of a link between muscles, brains, and even soul legitimated the YMCA emphasis on physical education as a method of Christian youth work. When the gymnasium had gained legitimacy within the North American YMCA, the idea spread rapidly (Macleod, 1983, p. 30).

The positive economic consequences of providing gymnasiums for associations helped the diffusion of the idea, as well. Mayer N. Zald (1970) argues that traditional collections and donations “did not provide much financial stability” (p. 43ff) and that both residences and gymnasiums stabilized the economic status of YMCAs.

Along with the physical education emerged boys’ clubs, camps, student conventions, international youth meetings, and the like. As L. Wilbur Messer noted in his report to 1898 Basle World’s Conference, the aim of the Four-fold Programme was “to spiritualise the secular” (WConfPrep, 1898, p. 8). However, as Kenneth Latourette (1957) mentions, the coaches and teachers of secular subjects “tended to leave the ‘religious work’ to secretaries

who began to be appointed as specialists in that field” (p. 28). Thus, unfortunately, the means became ends in themselves and often this led to situations where people wondered where is the “C” in associations’ activities.

## Youth Work

The growth of youth work—or Boy’s Work, as it was then called—after the Geneva Conference in 1858 was both spontaneous and rapid. Gladstone’s presentation gave legitimization to “amusements,” and this provided the possibility for the YMCA to develop various recreational activities where physical education played a major role.

The boys’ work is nothing without stories, and therefore it would be proper to include here a short story on how U.S. Hi-Y (High School YMCA) clubs began:

It was a tough life for a schoolboy back in the horse and buggy days of the last century in the American West. Still feeling the wounds of a bitter civil war, the young nation was in full spate of pioneer development, and the comforts of daily living were few mushrooming communities along the frontier.

These were thoughts that must have passed through the mind of science teacher D.F. Shirk as he sat in his empty classroom in Chapman, Kansas, one day in 1889. His class had just left after the day’s lessons, yet many of the 137 boys in school could not go home—they lived over a scattered area in Dickinson County, and lack of transportation prevented some of them from getting home even at weekends. In their behaviour, Shirk noticed the effects which the absence of the helps, restraints and disciplines of settled home life was having.

So he decided to form a club for his schoolboys. Soon after he got it going he asked the YMCA for assistance. The YMCA responded—and thus was born the first YMCA schoolboys’ club with a continuous existence until the present day. (*World Communique* May–June, 1964, p. 4)

The idea spread and became a model for U.S. YMCA work in schools. The purpose was “to create, maintain and extend throughout home, school and community, high standards of Christian character” (*World Communique* May–June, 1964, 5).

In Britain, the leaders of the Junior Department of the English National Council took an active part of starting their own model for Boys’ Work: scouting. The first experimental camp was held in 1907, and R. S. S. Baden-Powell gave his first presentation on scouting at the Birkenhead YMCA in January, 1908. Although the Scout Movement was formed as an independent movement, the YMCA gave Baden-Powell a channel to distribute his ideas. In many countries YMCAs started Scout groups and formed their own National Scout Associations for YMCA Scouts for cooperation. At the international level there were International YMCA Scout Camps and meetings of Scout leaders (Macleod, 1983, pp. 97, 140, 146; Strong, 1955b, p. 623; Warren, 1986, p. 388).

When the Boy’s Work in Europe spread, French-speaking leaders of work among boys gathered in 1893 in Geneva. They founded the ‘Central Commission of French-speaking Boys’ Associations’ which became powerful actor in propagating Boys’ Work in Belgium,

France and Switzerland. Paul Des Gouttes, the president of the World Alliance (and the secretary of International Red Cross), referred to it later as the first international body for Boys' Work. A year later the total membership of this body was 1720 with 165 voluntary directors (Shedd, 1955a, p. 323f).

In 1913, 'the First General Assembly of Association Workers with Boys of North America' met at Culver, Indiana, US. Besides the delegates from North America, there were also participants from 12 countries from all other continents save Africa. The next year, 'the First World's Conference of YMCA Workers with Boys' took place in Oxford, England. In that conference there was an agreement that Boys' Work should be an integral part of every Association (Strong, 1955a, 616f).

After that, the model was locked in and the idea spread rapidly. The contribution of the World Alliance of YMCAs was to bring youth workers together in international conferences. This, in turn, enabled locally developed new methods to spread rapidly when activists and professionals shared their experiences.

The YMCA youth work has given its contribution to science as well. Perhaps the first international survey of the life of youth was first presented to the Helsingfors [Swedish name for Finland's capital Helsinki] World's Conference in 1926. In the same conference, there was also another novelty: the use of group work as a conference method (WConf, 1926, 2f).

The methodology of the work both reflected and modified the YMCA's mission among boys. The study outline for the Third World Assembly of YMCA Workers with Boys (Toronto 1931), *The Technique and Methods of YMCA Work with Boys*, states that the starting point is the Paris Basis, and from it arises more detailed principles: message principle, curriculum principle, personality development principle and crusade for a cause principle (WConfPrep, 1931, p. 5f). In other words, there was a message to be delivered to youth; this message was to be delivered systematically; this delivery is best done with "learning by doing"; and finally, youth should be given a purpose for their lives.

These principles were then carried out on three levels: work dealing with individual boys, work with small groups, and work with large masses. This endeavor was, again, legitimated with theological argumentation. Ralph G. Cole, in his presentation to the Toronto Boys' Workers Assembly in 1931, recalled Jesus as an example:

Surely in Him and in His way of working with people we can find a useful technique for modern YMCA work. We find Him repeatedly using the individual or personal work method. No finer illustration of group work is given us in history than that of Jesus and His disciples. His faith in mass or larger group work is illustrated by his frequent meetings and experiences with the crowds. (BWConf, 1931, p. 22)

The methodology in these levels differed from each other and it was mainly the task of the large movements and the World's Alliance to collect, develop and distribute adequate methodology for each level. Cole made a distinction in methodology among different ages as well.

A further study into the methods of our Lord shows a different technique with different ages. He called the little children to His arms and blessed them. He asked the boy with the fishes to help Him by the gift of them. He challenged the young man to “go and sell all and give it to the poor.” He commissioned His disciples to “go into all the world and preach the Gospel.” (BWConf, 1931, p. 22)

Although the focus was on methodology in different ages, the general task of the YMCA can be seen in this presentation. On every level, the YMCA aimed to teach boys and young men to take such responsibility as they can. Boys learn responsibility when they are asked to help. Young men can be challenged to take their faith seriously, and trained laymen can be given responsibility for the work.

By the end of WW II, the Four-fold Programme had been accepted worldwide, and the challenges of political movements (especially Nazism and Communism) had forced the YMCA to deal with ethical and political issues as well. This can be seen in the decisions of the 1950 World Consultation on Boys’ Work at Green Lake, Wisconsin, USA. Although the ultimate goal, to “bring the boy closer to God” (BWConf, 1950, p. 16), remained, the focus had changed from the association’s goals to the boy’s needs. Instead of knowing what would be good for the boy, the movement now asked, like Jesus, “What do you want Me to do for you?” (Luke 18:41). When compared to the old approach, where the preacher knew both the problems and the cure without asking the boy, this was a fundamental change. This new attitude led, according to the YMCA Work with Boys, “to a great development of work amongst handicapped and anti-social boys” (BWConf, 1950, p. 17). In the conference resolutions we can see that the idea of the general welfare of boys has replaced the task of evangelizing them. This does not mean that the “C” was dropped from the message. On the contrary, the fundamental task was “to reach out a hand to the boy, accept him as he is with all his needs and problems” and to “lead him to a full understanding of and loyalty to God and the Christian way of life” (BWConf, 1950, p. 20).

The pioneer stage of the YMCA boys’ work ended during the 1950s. Although the YMCA continued its boys’ work, after that the work and methods diffused to churches and to other youth organizations and became standard work methods.

## Serving the Victims of War

Already during the First World’s Conference in 1855, the tensions felt in North America led the American delegate Abel Stevens to deliver the First Additional Proposal (see above) of the Paris Basis (WConf, 1855, p. 19f). When the Civil War broke out, it had direct consequences for the YMCA work. An American representative, Stephen H. Tyng, talked to the London YMCA in 1862 about the beginning of the work with armed forces as follows:

As soon as it broke out, our Young Men, in all parts of the country, flocked to the army; they were removed from our influence and the influence of the Church, and we were obliged to follow them . . . As the army has spread the work has gone on, and last winter a conference of all the associations was held at New York, for the

purpose of uniting the different efforts and of forming a Christian mission, the object of which is to evangelize the army. (Quoted in Shedd, 1955a, p. 164; see also Morse, 1913, pp. 60–65; Hopkins, 1951, pp. 84–98)

Besides spiritual guidance, the work of the YMCA in the Civil War also included nursing and carrying messages home. However, at this stage the work could be described merely as a temporary project. The work among soldiers obtained its permanent place in the U.S. YMCA during the Spanish-American War in 1898 (WConfPrep, 1902, pp. 7–10), in Britain in 1902, in India in 1907 (David, 1992, p. 132), and in Germany in 1914 (Hjelt, 1918, pp. 4–6). The earliest records from Switzerland are from 1856 (AFCons, 1960, p. 11). Before the First World War, young men in armies were served by the national YMCAs in all major wars on both sides of frontiers (Strong, 1955a, p. 546n).

The Franco-Prussian War in 1870–1871 also had a direct effect on the YMCA. The war was the first real test of the YMCA's unity. Christian unity was, unfortunately, suppressed under nationalistic emotions, and the relationships between German and French YMCAs were as bad as the relationships between these two peoples in general. After the war, relations between these two movements were chilly. When emotions were calmed, the Amsterdam World's Conference in 1872 unanimously resolved that the first proposal of the Paris Basis be added as a Second Fundamental Principle along with the original Fundamental Principle (Shedd, 1955b, p. 190; WComPle, 1953, p. 4; Willis, 1972, p. 4).

The two World Wars affected the YMCA as well, although not as directly on the Paris Basis as the Franco-Prussian War. On one hand, the World Wars reduced normal activities, but on the other hand, they created needs for new ones. Governments needed the services that the YMCA gave to armed forces (on literature, see Muukkonen, 2002, p. 17n. 2–4). These included canteens and other recreational services that helped keep up the morale of the troops. The YMCA practically took care of the whole canteen service for soldiers in the United States and Britain.

The World Wars directed the YMCA's mission to develop other activities as well. The work for Prisoners of War (POWs) was a natural continuation of the work with armed forces (because POWs were also part of armed forces). During the First World War, the Prisoners Aid of the World Alliance YMCAs ran recreational and educational projects in POW camps on both sides of the frontier. In these countries, the YMCA POW work secretaries were from neutral countries. In nonbelligerent countries such as Denmark, Holland, Japan, Sweden, and Switzerland, similar services were given to internees (Strong, 1955a, pp. 546–559).

Most of the work was on a reciprocal basis—all prisoners were helped in the same way on both sides of the frontier. Exceptions to this rule were the Soviet Union and Italy, which did not give the YMCA permission to work in their territory, and thus, Russian and Italian prisoners were excluded from receiving help. At last, as Hugo Cedergren (1969, p. 73f), GS of the Swedish YMCA tells in his memoirs, out of sheer pity many of the camp commandants in Germany urged the YMCA to send supplies to the Russian POWs as well. Although War Prisoners' Aid was not allowed to work in Italy, it served Italian POWs in Allied countries (Strong, 1955a, pp. 562, 573).

There was a mutual understanding regarding cooperation between the YMCA and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The burden was shared in a way that the YMCA took care of educational, recreational, cultural, and spiritual activities of prisoners, and

the Red Cross concentrated on holding camp inspections, organizing a central information agency with mail facilities, handling of all shipments, and distributing all materials sent by the national Red Cross Societies (Cedergren, 1969, 70; Strong, 1955a, p. 557f)

After both World Wars there was a huge refugee problem, and the YMCA found its new niche among them. The former POWs became refugees and YMCA work amongst POWs turned to work among refugees and displaced persons—in the same camps with the same people (Strong, 1955a, pp. 572–578). After WW I YMCA worked with the Russian emigrants (Anderson, 1963 pp. 27–78; Latourette, 1957, pp. 374–382; Rouse, 1993a, p. 605; Zernov, 1993, p. 661f) and after WW II with European and Palestinian refugees and displaced persons (DPs) (Kilpatrick, 1955).

Refugee work grew to be the widest activity of the World Alliance of YMCAs for decades. It was done mainly in Europe but also in Palestine (Palestinians), in India (DPs of the separation of Pakistan from India), and in the South Eastern Asia (Vietnamese boat refugees). In its refugee work, the YMCA has maintained close working relationships with most intergovernmental agencies, churches, YWCA, Red Cross, and other voluntary movements (Kilpatrick, 1955, p. 608f). When the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) started its work after the WW II, the first and largest agencies that gave assistance were five denominational agencies and the YMCA (Holborn, 1975, p. 124f).

## CONCLUSIONS

The YMCA has been a successful organization during its history. It has been able to carry its mission and even diffuse its ideas and working methods to other organizations, such as churches, youth and sports organizations, and so on. Actually, the whole concept of youth work is a YMCA invention. It was the YMCA that first appointed youth workers, first created professional training for them, first raised youth centers and camp centers, soldier homes, and so forth. Today these programs are self-evident for us.

The impact of the YMCA youth work has been in two main areas. First, it developed and tested new working methods that other youth organizations—as well as older institutions like churches and schools—adopted. In this sense, the YMCA has been a laboratory of both religious and general education.

Second, the YMCA has been a field of “practical training” for many leaders of the ecumenical movement and INGOs. Even today, when one visits Geneva and talks with staff of various international organizations, he or she may be surprised by how many of them have YMCA background.

Thus, the first lesson for any organization is: cooperate. Don’t compete with such organizations that might do part of your work and may serve you as a test field of new ideas.

The second lesson is that all nonprofit organizations must make sure that they have credibility. An organization with good reputation always has better access to resources than a marginal one, and governments are willing to delegate some tasks (as well as resources) to it. In the case of the YMCA, the whole work for the victims of war would not have been possible without credibility. This reputation can be achieved by getting support of the leading members of the community, as did the founders of the YMCA, and/or being

part of a larger and respected network. Organizational mortality is extremely high in cases where a project is kept only local and without leaders of the community on its board.

Third, an association leader must always remember the difference between membership and clientele. Without committed members' "flame of the spirit," the intensity of the work remains low and the organization becomes just one more bureaucracy among others. Thus, as St. Paul advised:

Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless. (1 Thess 5:19–23 RSV)

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What we can learn from the interplay of ideology and context from YMCA history?
2. What can we learn from the effects of networking in YMCA history?
3. What can we learn from applying the existing models from YMCA history to new situations?

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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World Alliance of YMCAs: <http://www.ymca.int>

YMCA of the USA: <http://www.ymca.net>

Wikipedia article on YMCA: <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YMCA>

Martti Muukkonen's Dissertation *Ecumenism of the Laity* [http://www.epublications.uef.fi/pub/urn\\_isbn\\_952-458-207-4/urn\\_isbn\\_952-458-207-4.pdf](http://www.epublications.uef.fi/pub/urn_isbn_952-458-207-4/urn_isbn_952-458-207-4.pdf)