

PERCEPTION OF OLYMPIC VALUES BY TURKISH ATHLETES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE FIRST YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES

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The International Olympic Committee (IOC) aims to spread Olympic values by promoting fitness and fair play as well as fighting against the dangers of discrimination and doping. The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) has been declared as a platform offering young athletes the chance to experience Olympic values first hand educating them in healthy lifestyle and social responsibility. The athletes who had the honor of participating in the first YOG were considered as active ambassadors of their communities and expected to share Olympic values with their peers all around the world. Therefore the IOC attaches equal importance to the Cultural and Educational Program (CEP) as to the competitions.

This study examines the perception of Olympic values by Turkish athletes who participated in the inaugural YOG Singapore, 2010. Change of their perception before and after the games, and the effect of the CEP were investigated.

Turkish athletes who participated in the inaugural YOG were not informed about Olympic values before the games. They were motivated just about their performances. The YOG as a multi-sports competition provided by CEP young athletes a multicultural atmosphere and was effective to foster Olympic values such as fair-play, friendship, awareness of the fight against doping. Most importantly of all, young athletes had a lot of fun and believe that the CEP should have continued its relationships with the athletes after the games to last its effect.

Key words: Youth Olympic Games, Olympic values, young athletes.

Introduction

As the Olympics have always been associated with youth, health, sportsmanship, peace, education and enjoyment (Loland, 1995), IOC launched the YOG with a vision of inspiring young people around the world to participate in sport and live by the Olympic values (IOC, 2009) and added the CEP to introduce young people to Olympism. In the CEP participants find the chance to actively learn about the characteristics of other cultures (Altenberg & Hofmann, 2012) and this multicultural atmosphere provides young athletes to learn about Olympic values such as respect, friendship, mutual understanding while they are having fun. While an intervention that produces more enticing physical activities for young people is needed (Judge et al., 2009) the YOG represents the notion of engaging young people to play a more active role in sports in order to prevent the spread of obesity and also to create awareness about the danger of discrimination, doping and importance of fair play (Slater, 2009). The YOG is one of the most important ways of IOC to encourage an increase in sports participation and broaden the scope of an education based on Olympic values (Wang, 2011), it emphasizes pillar programs of equal importance that are sport competitions, culture and education (Slater, 2009). The unique feature of the YOG is that its alternative values are more creative, more aesthetic, more exciting in addition to the Olympic *citius, altius, fortius* principles (Brettschneider, 2009). As IOC President Rogge points out that the YOG is about learning and sharing (Shokoohi, 2010), IOC also wants the YOG participants, either they will be future Olympians or not, to go back and embody, promote and share the Olympic spirit and values in their society (IOC, 2009).

The YOG admittedly provides valuable Olympic experience to young competitors as one of their first opportunities to compete in a multi-sport environment before participating in the Olympic Games (Wang, 2011). As performance levels are the main criteria for selection to the YOG, the athletes train hard before the games in order to be successful. Even though IOC attaches importance to sport competitions and emphasizes the value of culture and education, young athletes are nevertheless uninformed about fundamental Olympic values. As the practice of sport is a human right (IOC, 2011), being educated about Olympic values is supposed to be a human right, too. This study assessed the imbalance between the focus of performance and knowledge about Olympic values of young athletes. The perception of Olympic values of athletes and the effect of the CEP during the games were analyzed. In this way this study aimed to locate the knowledge gap about Olympic values of young athletes.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of Olympic values by Turkish athletes who participated in the first YOG. A specific research focus was the transition of their perceptions before, during and after the games, and especially the effect of the CEP. Having this purpose in mind, a case study was conducted following a qualitative research design. Case studies enable to gain an in-depth understanding and interpreting of the educational phenomenon within its real life context (Merriam, 1998).

A seven question semi-structured interview was formulated to assess the dynamic perceptions of Olympic values. Preliminary demographical information such as age, gender, sport experience and branch was obtained in the first section of the interviews. The questions of the interview were designed to elicit detailed descriptions of the perceptions of Olympic values by the Turkish athletes. The responses to the interviews were analyzed with the qualitative method of content analysis which allows thematic categories to emerge from the data itself (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). While analyzing the data Nvivo was used to help the manual studying process.

The content analysis included response review, identification of themes, and classification of responses according to the identified themes. In this study 15 Turkish athletes involved in twelve different sports were interviewed. The overall demographic characteristics of this sample: age 17.4 years (SD=1.11), gender ratio 26.66% female and 73.33% male, sport experience 8.86 years (SD=2.65), and sport experience as a national athlete 4.6 years (SD=1.50).

Contact details of the athletes were provided by contacting their federations, coaches or parents. In the second step, the athletes were contacted and interview dates were arranged. All athletes took part in this research voluntarily and were willing to discuss their experiences. Interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes, were performed in Turkish and audio-taped by their permission.

Results

The research questions were analyzed for the sample as a whole. The column “number of athletes who mentioned” is formed according to the responses to the third question as well as the “percentage” column. The column “theme frequencies” is formed by considering whole interviews and this format is used for each table.

In the first two questions, the Turkish athletes who participated in the inaugural YOG were asked whether they know about Olympic values or have been informed by their coaches, administrators of their federations or Turkish NOC officials before, during and after the games. As all of them were unaware of Olympic values they responded ‘no’. In the third question, they were asked about sport related topics which they had been discussing with their coaches, officials and other athletes (Table 1).

Table 1. Sport Related Topics

Response Theme	Theme Frequencies	Number of athletes who mentioned	Percentage
Performance	41	12	31.57%
Competitions	52	9	23.68%
Success	45	6	15.78%
Future objectives	35	6	15.78%
To support the development of their sport branches in the country	17	5	13.15%

In the fourth question, athletes were asked whether they consider the YOG as mini Olympics: all athletes answered this question with “no”. Then they were asked about their personal view about the YOG’s significance (Table 2).

Table 2. The YOG’s Significance

Response Theme	Theme Frequencies	Number of athletes who mentioned	Percentage
Motivation for the future Olympics	41	15	27.77%
The CEP	39	10	18.51%
Learning about different sport branches	13	5	9.25%
Different competition formats	35	3	5.55%

In the fifth question, athletes were asked whether they were informed about the CEP by their coaches, administrators of their federations or Turkish NOC officials before, during and after the games. Like the second and fourth questions they all responded “no”. Then in the sixth question, they were asked about their personal view about the CEP’s significance (Table 3).

Table 3. The CEP's Significance

Response Theme	Theme Frequencies	Number of athletes who mentioned	Percentage
Cultural interaction	97	13	27.65
Atmosphere never experienced before	26	10	21.27
Continuous activities	37	9	19.14
Having fun	19	9	19.14
Meeting with the famous/successful Olympic athletes	23	7	14.89
Language problem	5	3	6.38

In the final research question, athletes were asked in which aspects the CEP affected their sport life. As all think positive about the CEP, 33.33% of them emphasized that the CEP has a positive effect on goal setting of their future sport life (Table 4).

Table 4. The CEP's Future Effect

Response Theme	Theme Frequencies	Number of athletes who mentioned	Percentage
Positive effect to goal setting of future sport life	39	13	33.33%
Motivation to improving themselves as an athlete	43	11	28.20%
Transferring the experience which they had in the inaugural YOG to the others	17	8	20.51%
Feeling/Learning about the Olympic spirit	24	7	17.94%

Discussion

The first question was asked to assess the athletes' awareness about Olympic values. Even though they were the best athletes in their sports and represented their country in the inaugural YOG, they were all unaware of Olympic values. According to the responds to the second question neither their coaches nor any officials informed them about Olympic values. The lack of awareness could possibly be explained by the fact that people in charge of designing the youth athletes' life focus on their performance which is the shortest way for reaching a medal. It should be stuck in the mind that

most of the coaching education programs focus on fundamentals of training but not on values (Johnson et al., 2011). Whereas the IOC claims that YOG provides a perfect sphere for young athletes to improve themselves and internalize Olympic values, the respondents may also be commented that continuous educational process is needed in order to make athletes aware of Olympic values and adopt them for life as Dewey (1998) specified education being a lifelong process. Unfortunately, most of the countries define the success of Olympics with only considering the number of the medals they have won, beyond Olympic programs are barely integrated in schools (Georgiadis, 2010; Naul & Richer, 2006) and also not in the athletes' educational life.

In the third question, over 65% of the athletes specified the sport related topics that they had talked about were performance, competitions and success which were all related to physical aspects. To be realistic it has to be affirmed that winning is a significant part of youth sports (Judge et al., 2009) however it should not be the only objective (Martens, 2007) while pointing out that Olympic movement is a system of competitive sporting events to propel education (Kidd, 1996).

To the fourth question all athletes responded that they do not consider the YOG as mini Olympics. 45% of them described the significance of the YOG as motivation for the future Olympics, confirming the one of the most important objectives of YOG's which is preparing young athletes for future Olympic life (Slater, 2009). The CEP- the unique feature of the YOG (Wong, 2011)- was also pointed out by 30% of the subjects, which can be interpreted in the way that the CEP as an integral part of sport events took great deal of attention by young athletes besides physical aspects. As Wassong (2006) emphasized the importance of focus on the education of the athletes, it may be interpreted that the CEP had an effect on education of young athletes latently about Olympic values which is favorable with the YOG's "inspire the youths of the world to take part in sports and adopt and live the Olympic Values" vision (Miang, 2011). But it has to be indicated that during the interviews the athletes mostly explained the CEP with the focus of the activities which allowed them to have enjoyable time.

Answering the sixth question, 27% of the athletes described the significance of the CEP as cultural interaction and 21% as an atmosphere never experienced before. IOC Athletes' Commission Chairman Sergey Bubka represented one of the main purposes of the CEP to allow young athletes to build friendship with others from around the world and get the opportunity to experience new cultures (IOC, 2010a). The CEP with continuous activities such as interactive workshops, community projects and exhibitions (IOC, 2010a) aimed to provide young athletes an enjoyable experience (IOC, 2010b). Olympic champions meetings were also designed to encourage them to do their best and enjoy the whole experience (IOC, 2010c).

In the final question, athletes evaluated the future effects of the CEP on their sport life. 33% of them outlined the positive effect on goal setting of their future sport life and 28% of them valued it as a motivation to improve themselves. Because YOG and its special feature CEP have a positive impact on the development of young athletes and preparation for elite level, SYOGOC Chairman Ser

Miang Ng (2010) pointed out many of them are expected to achieve even greater grades in sport in the future. They also added transferring the experience which they had in the inaugural YOG to other athletes and friends in the country. IOC President Rogge described one of the main aims of the YOG as a chance to experience the Olympic values first hand and to share these with peers around the world (IOC, 2009).

Conclusions

Detailed information on the perception of Olympic values by Turkish athletes participating in the inaugural YOG provided a knowledge basis, albeit limited by regional and cultural context, for further investigations on the dynamics of the dissemination process of Olympic values on a more global scale.

Whereas the IOC puts equal importance to the CEP and competitions and claims that the CEP was successful in terms of Olympic values education in Singapore, this study found out that the focus of the athletes was more on physical aspects such as performance, competitions and success than on Olympic values. They also emphasized that YOG and CEP motivated them for future Olympics and improving themselves as an athlete. They admitted that to participate in a multi-sports event was a great experience for them, and that the YOG gave them a chance to bring out their personal potentials.

It has to be indicated that they specified the cultural interaction as a significant feature of the CEP. This perception may be considered suitable with one of the IOC's aims defined as "allowing young athletes to experience new cultures". But the young athletes responded that they were unaware and uninformed about Olympic values. The IOC has to design a continuous and comprehensive education program to overcome such a lack of awareness about Olympic values not only for athletes but also for coaches. To achieve this goal close and sustainable cooperation with sport federations and NOCs has to be established.

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