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**THE INFLUENCE OF ATHLETE ROLE MODELS ON YOUNGSTERS, IN  
TERMS OF MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN SPORTS**

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Ευχαριστώ πολύ!

## SUMMARY

Anastasia Gkiknouri: THE INFLUENCE OF ATHLETE ROLE MODELS ON YOUNGSTERS, IN TERMS OF MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN SPORTS

Under the supervision of: Konstantinos Georgiadis, Professor

The purpose of the present study is to present the importance of the role of the elite athletes, specifically those who participated in the Olympic Games or excelled in championships and world championships for young children for their involvement in sports. It aims to investigate the relationship that is created between athletes and younger generation and what is the impact of the victories of those athletes for children and their future choices. Are the achievements of an athlete that make him stand out among thousands of other athletes? Is it the behavior that an athlete shows during the game in the sports field that can have an impact? Is there any correlation between the so called heroes of the ancient time athletes and the today's athlete role models? This paper work has tried to answer questions like these, by conducting a research as part of the master's degree thesis. The study was carried out through interviews of twenty six Greek athletes and the results were rather unexpected according to researcher's first belief. The analysis of the results showed that there is indeed a good correlation between the athletes who inspire and the involvement of young children in sports, but not such a strong link that can affect them and / or influence them on which sport they will choose to practice. Of course, for safer results and more accurate data, deeper research (for example PhD) is suggested for data-based arguments.

### Keywords:

Olympism, Role models, Olympic Education, Athletes, Youth

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## ABBREVIATIONS

I.	FSFI	Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale
II.	IOA	International Olympic Academy
III.	IOC	International Olympic Committee
IV.	NOA	National Olympic Academy
V.	NOC	National Olympic Committee
VI.	OVEP	Olympic Values Education Programme
VII.	YOG	Youth Olympic Games
VIII.	YPS	Young Participants Session



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The modern Olympic Games enjoy the admiration and appreciation of people of all ages throughout the duration of the Games, before and after. The feeling of excitement and happiness and the enjoyment of wonderful moments from great victories or defeats of dear athletes in the masses are the emotions that create memories that make people wait for the next Olympic Games. The emotion is almost the same as in ancient Games and there are the same reasons for watching the Games. But it could never be an absolute revival of the Olympics as in antiquity, as it would be probably no longer so appealing to the new data of the time. A comparison between ancient and modern Olympics would probably have shown some different points that exist also in the following chapters of this text, but this will not be analyzed further. Nevertheless, the main difference/ innovation of the modern ones is analyzed, "Olympism". The term Olympism, coined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Baron Pierre De Coubertin, was intended to find a philosophy that could change the lives of people around the world. The goal of Olympism to "create a better world through sport" has added a principle that is valued and appreciated and attracts people to participate in sport. The educational mission of the Olympic Games and Olympism is not seen by a large number of people, but this is a mission that motivates people inside and outside the Olympic Movement to complete it. Through the Olympic Games, the values of Olympism are spread all over the world consciously or even unconsciously.

Athletes play a very important role in this, as they can be seen or reached by everyone. Their difficult moments, their medals, their courage, and their efforts for excellence are admired by all people and all ages. Athletes are often admired by young children and encouraged to reach the professional level of the athlete they admire. Some athletes stand out and their fans admire them either for their achievements or for other well-known reasons. Many athletes have written history with their records or because of the character they have shown. The media have a lot of power today and it can be said that they can even influence public opinion and even help to promote the aforementioned athletes. The title of "role models" has been shaped from time to time and has been given to different athletes for different reasons. Athletes have been regarded as role models for excellence in their sport, for the character they have shown in the field of sport and off the field, and are considered as an example of positive or negative influence.

This theory has been considered very interesting for the researcher and this study aims to investigate whether or not these elite athletes can motivate the next generations to participate in sports activities. Many theories have been developed not only in the field of sports but also in social and theoretical studies in which children are influenced by specific people or to what extent they contribute to the formation of their character during adolescence. Given these theories and also that athletes are among those people to whom children seek inspiration or guidance, it was created this theoretical question of the influence of athlete role models on youngsters, in terms of motivation and involvement in sports. The approach of the interviews was considered familiar for the perspective of the athletes and for the execution of the purpose. Of course, there were limitations and limits to completing the study that did not allow us to conclude at final results/ unshakable arguments and is subject to change by any new theory or more detailed research. However, the role models and their power are worth considering, as it is very important that the people who represent these values and already participate in the Olympic Movement are the ones who know their role and realize how much impact they can have on societies. Their contribution completes Pierre De Coubertin's vision for educational reform through sport and can contribute to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) missions. As explained by Georgiadis (2017, pp70-71), "the athlete-models constituted a good example in the process of learning, in the personal inspiration of young people, and in the development of social progress and—above all—peace in society" and "via this educational process, young people become aware of the values of community and life".

## **1.1 Olympism**

"Olympism refuses to make physical education a purely physiological thing,... It refuses to catalog the knowledge of the mind,... Olympism refuses to accept the existence of a deluxe education reserved for the wealthy classes,... Olympism is a destroyer of dividing walls. It calls for air and light for all, trimmed with manly courage and the spirit of chivalry, blended with esthetic and literary demonstrations, and serving as an engine for national life and as a basis for evil life. That is its ideal program. Now can it be achieved?" (Olympism, 2000).

By these words, Baron Pierre De Coubertin the founder of the modern Olympic Games is expressing once again the notion of the ideology of Olympism that is more than

sports games and that those are the elements that distinguish simple sports contests from the Olympics.

The reason why Olympism constitutes one of the most innovative concepts of the modern era, - is because it is not based only on the revival of the Olympic Games, but it is an effort to bring into reality values deriving from ancient Greece as a way of life. Solidarity, brotherhood, nondiscrimination, fair play. Values that are absolutely important during and after the games. Many scholars and philosophers have tried to interpret the meaning of Olympism.

## **1.2 What is Olympism? The Philosophical Concept of Olympism**

For Coubertin, Olympism should undergo for every person regardless the age, the race by blending physical education with values, and everyone should have access to this right, as it is stated also among the fundamental principles in the Olympic Charter (2019, 4):

“The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity, and fair play”.

Olympism is a spiritual attitude that comes from the intrinsic values of sport and the education that derives from them. Olympism has been one of the most controversial concepts that have engaged a big number of philosophers and academics for explaining its meaning and since its founder presented it to the world it has been receiving different perceptions and approaches.

For instance, Segrave (Torres C.,2012, p.296) thinks that “Olympism places sport in the service of an enlightened humanity”, while Parry (2007, p.59) believes that “is a social philosophy which emphasizes the role of sport in world development, international understanding, peaceful co-existence, and social and moral education”.

Universalism and values are the links among so many different cultures and perspectives. According to Jim Parry, Olympism as a theory has more than one dimension. Educational, philosophical, social, ethical, historical and heritage are some of them that

make them worldwide accepted. Georgiadis (2007, p.25) views it as an educational idea that "... is a life experience. Olympism is the practice of theory, not the theory of practice. The contest in the context of Olympism is the educational "path" to form man's virtues thus leading to the ideal of "kaloskagathos". All of these perceptions coincides with the formulated text of the Olympic Charter promoting the ethics that penetrates sports. On the other hand, Torres (2012) argues that "values such as holistic human development, excellence, peace, fairness, equality, mutual respect, justice, and nondiscrimination among others are repeatedly emphasized".

As it is stated in the Olympic Charter (2019) among fundamental principles (p.1):

"Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles".

It is a philosophy that combines education and ethics through sports in a humanistic approach (fundamental principles p.2):

"The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity".

The Olympic Movement complies with the Olympic Charter through the three main constituents of it, the International Olympic Committee ("IOC"), the International Sports Federations ("IFs") and the National Olympic Committees ("NOCs") (Olympic Charter, 2019) aiming to promote Olympism throughout the world.

On the other hand, Sigmund Loland (1995) condenses the stable elements of Coubertin's point of view in Olympism through the years in four main pillars:

1. Olympism can educate and cultivate the individual through sport, where sport has an outstanding part and the idea derives from Greek ancient time's philosophy.
2. Men (not women) should cultivate the relation between them in society for mutual respect.
3. By cultivating the relationship among nations, sport can promote international understanding and peace.

4. The modern Olympic Games should have as a new religion, the worship of human greatness and possibility.

While Cesar Torres (2012) in a humanistic view, argues that Olympism can be used as an instrument for chasing moral values. In the same spirit Coubertin underlines the balance that the athlete should manage between successful sporting achievements and developing morality through sports:

“In the modern world, full of powerful possibilities and yet also threatened by perilous decline, Olympism can become a school for moral nobility and purity as well as physical endurance and energy, but this can happen only if you continually raise your concept of athletes honor and impartiality to the level of your muscular ability. The future depends on you.” (Olympism, 2000, p.560).

What is missing from the Olympic Charter is the concept of virtue, according to Georgiadis as the concept of Olympism is a practice of universal principles (2015, pp. 191-195). Certainly, the concept of Olympism is multifaceted and is very much related to the social existence of the athlete in society, as he was an Olympian in antiquity. It seems that the concept of Kalokagathia and Olympism are more related to each other than we think.

### **1.3 Youth Olympic Games in service of Olympism**

“The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) are an elite sporting event for young people from all over the world.” “Away from the field of play, the education programme uses a variety of fun and interactive activities, workshops and team-building exercises to give the participating athletes the opportunity to learn about the Olympic values, explore other cultures, develop the skills to become true ambassadors of their sport, and improve their training methods and performance.” (Olympic.org/news)

At a glance, the achievement with the creation of YOGs can be recognized, given that sport and education are combined in a framework of values, as it is presented on the Olympic website (2009). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) aimed at bringing together talented young athletes aged from 15 to 18 from around the world. The idea was initiated by the IOC President Mr. Jacques Rogge with the vision that the Youth Olympic

Games will inspire young people around the world to participate in sport and adopt and live by the Olympic values (2008) and the mission to organize an event to educate, engage and influence young athletes, inspiring them to play an active role in their communities. First editions were held until today starting with the first one in summer 2010 (Singapore) and winter 2012 (Innsbruck). The very recent one, the sixth edition in a row was in Lausanne, the Olympic capital (9/1 – 22/1/2020).

The reason why it is so important to host youth Olympic Games can lie in the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter and on the goals of the Olympic movement:

To build a better and peaceful world through sports by educating youth about the values of mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity, and fair play.

The YOGs serve the Olympic Movement at the promotion of a blend of “sports, education and culture” for “encouraging young people to play an active role in their communities” (IOC, 2010, p. 4). An international multi-sport event that included the innovation of mixed-gender and mixed-nationality teams was not initially accepted as a proposal but eliminated all the doubts when it pledged and managed to spread the Olympic values at its core and engage the youth. IOC President J. Rogge stressed at the inauguration of the YOG in 2010 that “The main goal is not a competition as such. The main goal is to give the youngsters an education based on Olympic values” (as cited in Parry, 2017, p. 172). YOG’s vision was much more than the pure competition which could be what Coubertin envisioned as Olympism. The Youth Olympic Games achieved to bring the teenagers close to the values that Olympic Movement spreads and within sports, they contribute in building their character through interaction with the same age people from different cultures, beliefs, backgrounds reaching a mutual agreement in a festive mood. The Culture and Education Programme (CEP) was one of the successful elements and the key component of the YOG, creating a unique experience for young athletes.

In order to involve the youth in a learning process of the Olympic values, update them for several issues, and activate them in their own communities, the CEP worked on five main themes:

- **Olympism,**
- **Social Responsibility,**
- **Skills Development,**



- **Expression**
- and **Well-being & Healthy Lifestyle** (IOC, 2011, p.31).

A variety of activities that IOC created for bringing Olympism and youth close, assisting young people to take responsibility for global topics like environmental issues, preparing them for their future career as athletes, celebrating the Olympic spirit within a festival atmosphere, and promoting healthy habits leads in educating the young athletes for contributing in the future development of the societies. The five themes included seven activity formats that aim to involve not only the athletes but also other young people from the host country.

The seven activity formats:

- Arts and Culture
- Community Project
- Island Adventure
- World Culture Village
- Discovery Activity
- Exploration Journey
- and Chat with Champions

taught valuable lessons for life. Two more programs - Young Reporters programme and the Young Ambassadors programme- had been offered to non-athletes for encouraging involvement in sports. Another innovative programme for engaging young athletes with future perspectives is the Athlete Role Model programme (ARM), in which Olympic medalists and World Champions can come into contact with the young athletes and share their experience and their point of view in the workshops, solve questions, inspire for practicing values that only true Olympians would serve. A unique chance for the youth to meet their role models, get inspired by their example and seize the opportunity to learn the difficulties might face and opportunities that the Olympics offer.

An achievement of the Games is that from the very beginning the women's participation in both summer and winter YOG was equal to men.

#### **1.4 Olympic Education, ethics and their relationship with the athletes as role models**

...We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. (Martin Luther King Jr., February 1947)

The Olympic Education is yet unclear as a general framework and vague concept since it presents many aspects and can be implemented through different structures. Similarly to Olympism, both terms have not been settled globally, because they cannot be included under a strictly specific rule, but it needs to be understood in order to get applied. The two terms are intertwined and they create one of the best educational proposals with pedagogical foundations based on values from the nineteenth century until today. The term Olympic Education belongs to the Modern Games and Movement. Since the 1970s, when the concept of Olympic Education appeared, many efforts have been done in order to develop it and establish it, promoting a positive image of the IOC as a movement. The educational aspect of sports through athletes was the idea that Coubertin encouraged IOC to promote. The founder of it, of course, was Pierre de Coubertin who had as his priority to reform the French educational system through sports and the Olympic Games. Apart from his first target to revive the Olympic Games, he constantly worked on the educational purpose that sports and athletes ought to fulfill. With the physical activity and sport at the center was aiming to achieve a pedagogical transformation. “The reform that I am aiming at is not in the interests of grammar and hygiene. It is a social reform or rather it is a foundation of a new era that I can see coming and which will have no value or force unless it is firmly based on the principle of a completely new type of education” (Muller, 2000, p. 748). Through the IOC and the Olympic Movement established, values and ideals had to be spread to the young people. His goal was to apply the educational ideas in a permanent base, like that of the school curriculum, instead of just Olympics, whose revival had an educational direction, as a sports festival every four years. For de Coubertin the importance of athletes’ participation in the Olympics was that they were the role models who would inspire the young generation (Girginov V., Parry S.J., 2005).

After many approaches on the definition of the Olympic Education, it was in 2000 that during the 5th Session of the International Olympic Academy (IOA) for Directors and Presidents of National Olympic Academies (NOAs) was given a clear explanation: “Sport is at the core of this education whose aim is to elevate young people so that they can

become citizens who are mentally and physically balanced [...]. Olympic education should permit individuals to acquire a philosophy of life through which they will make a positive contribution to their family, their community, their country and the world” (Georgiadis, 2007, in IOA 2018, 14th Joint International Session For Presidents Or Directors Of National Olympic Academies And Officials Of National Olympic Committees, pp 66-67). “The main goal of Olympic Education is to show how the principles of sport and Olympism can be applied in practice during teaching” (Georgiadis, 2007, 1st International Session for Olympic Medallists 2007, p. 26).

His influence for the educational initiatives was a combination from none other than the ancient Greeks and their athletics mentality of combining body and mind for achieving the victory, a “delicate balance between mind and body” (Coubertin (1894), 2000, p. 532). The dualistic idea of Kalos K’agathos of the ancient Greeks contributed to the philosophical conception of education, which means a moral person inside with a beautiful body outside. Professor Hans Lenk (1964) stresses that “Many representatives of the Olympic movement combine these values together to form a picture of the human being harmoniously balanced intellectually and physically in the sense of the Greek ‘Kalos k’agathos’ ” finding Nissiotis to agree with “The Olympic Idea is that exemplary principle which expresses the deeper essence of sport as an authentic educative process through a continuous struggle to create healthy and virtuous man in the highest possible way (‘kalos k’agathos’) in the image of the Olympic winner and athlete.” (Girginov and Parry, 2005). Ancient gymnasium and its educational role for young men was the concept that he aimed to revive. He was interested in “reawakening the gymnasium of antiquity as a modern cultural factory for the harmonious and holistic education of young people” (Naul, Binder, Rychtecky, Culpan, 2017). Coubertin in his attempt to combine the Olympic Games with his social and educational purposes and to underline the strong bond between them, says that practically only during the Olympic Games even though it is a periodic event, people of any nation could work together and participate only for the greatness and glory as in Classical Antiquity. It didn't even have to reinvent a new one, as the Olympics could combine both physical activity and social skills. (Chatziefstathiou, D., & Henry, I. (2007).

Secondly, Thomas Arnold (1795- 1842) was the great inspiration for Coubertin's efforts to transform the school educational system as Arnold did by introducing athletics for building characters and personalities through sport activities and maintaining physical training. During his travels in the USA and UK in the 1880s, Coubertin was impressed by the "athletic education" of the English Public Schools, which he tried to implement by himself as well in French Secondary schools.

Thirdly, another great inspiration for Coubertin sharing the same passion for sports and education was his friend Father Henri Didon. "Didon's view was that chivalry was an essential element of sport and that sport was educational. If de Coubertin gave Didon a fresh outlook on developing society, the monk gave to him a spirituality that strengthened his resolve." (Miller D., 2003). Credits for the official Olympic motto (since 1894) "Citius, Altius, Fortius" (Faster, Higher, Stronger) have been received by de Coubertin, but in fact, it was Dominican Father Henri Didon who coined it in an address delivered March 7, 1891, in the first athletic championship of the association of the Comité pour la Propagation des Exercices Physiques (Miller, 2003). After Athens Games (1896) in 1897 at Le Havre Olympic Congress, Father Didon referred to the "moral influences of athletic sports" (Naul, 2008).

It is very interesting fact that Coubertin did not use the term "Olympic Education" as we do. He referred to "sporting education" (Pédagogie sportive) in his book in 1922 (Müller, 2010), he used the terms 'l'education athletique', 'l'education Anglaise' and 'l'education sportive'. After 1925 the word "Olympic" was used more often for his educational endeavors.

Coubertin, in 1935 recommended the five principles of "religio-athletae", "equality", "knighthood", "truce" and inclusion of ceremonies, art and poetry as elements of the Olympic Games celebrations as an educational philosophical foundation of modern Olympism.

- "Religio-athletae": It should be noted that this term, even though it is used to attributed to Coubertin, it belongs to Alfred Arthur Lynch a great writer with diversity on the subjects that he deals with in his published books. Both Lynch and Coubertin agree that as the concept of religio athletae was considered the holy mass of Olympic Games for antiquity (Krüger, 1993). As he referred several times in the above term , Coubertin felt that he must explain it in an essay for the reintroduction of the "Oath of the Athletes: "The true religion of the athlete of antiquity did not consist in sacrificing solemnly before the altar of Zeus; this was

no more than a traditional gesture... A participant in the Games must be in some manner purified by the progression and practice of such virtues. Thus were revealed the moral beauty and the profound scope of physical culture” (Coubertin, 1966/1906, cited in Parry, 2009). Parry (2009) distinguish two terms: “religion of the athlete” and “religion of athletics” (or “religion of sports”), by the first are expressed the moral principles and virtues that the athlete pursue and practice and by the second term are underlined the intrinsic moral values that every sport has and are revealed by practicing them. Arguing in 1935 that athletes already practice the ideal of a religion of sport, his vision was that they will start practicing it in a conscious way. “The ideal of a religion of sport, the *religio athletae*, was very slow to penetrate the minds of competitors, and many of them still practice it only in an unconscious way. But they will come round to it little by little” (cited in Parry, 2009). Roesch counting “religion” in a more strict content express his contrast on considering ‘Olympism’ as a religion: “Religious life and cultic expressions take part in other forms and contents, such as gesture, attitude, ritual dance, prayer, speech, and rites. The individual athlete, no matter what his religion, denomination or ideology, lives and acts, according to his religious conviction as a Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Jew and so on ... Olympism' can't take the place of that” (Parry, 2009). On the other side, Patsantaras (2008, p. 50) supports that “Coubertin’s «*religio athletae*», the athletic-religious idea promoted by the Olympic movement, cannot be understood exclusively from a religious perspective, not of course with the strict theological meaning, but should also be considered from an anthropocentric dimension”. The core meaning for Coubertin of this term was mainly the personal effort of the individual for excellence in performance within the fair play content and in harmony between physical and intellectual courage (Krüger, 1993).

- “Equality”: Olympic education as an ideology that discusses about universal values without excluding any human being, seeks equality and motivates each individual in pursuing the best of himself, striving for better results not on the basis of breaking records, but in the internal willing of self-improvement. Following the principles of “*citius, altius, fortius*” namely “faster, higher, stronger” athletes achieve physical, intellectual, and cultural development for their own education. (Naul, Binder, Rychtecky, Culpan, 2017).

- “Knighthood”: Athletes would create “an aristocracy, an elite” that would “also be a knighthood” – “‘brothers- in- arms’, brave energetic men united by a bond that is stronger than that of mere camaraderie” (Coubertin in Beamish & Ritchie, 2006, p.29). The principle of “knighthood” was important for the kind of games that Coubertin envisioned because athletes would compete under a chivalric code of brotherhood and fair play and “would serve as a model for others both in terms of his athletic prowess, and also as a model of behaviour and good conduct” (Gleaves & Hunt, 2015, p.11). Coubertin appreciated the physical feats that athletes achieved but his goal was to avoid the materialism of his project and instead to revive ideals of chivalry and honor to the young people of France through a modern physical education program.
- “Truce”: Olympism is connected with the principle of “truce”, referred to the idea of “rhythm”, which means every four years celebrating the Olympic Games and “the temporary cessation of hostilities, disputes and misunderstandings” (Naul, Binder, Rychtecky, Culpan, 2017). The idea of the Olympic Truce exists since the ancient Olympic Games and contains the fundamental values of peace and mutual understanding. Plutarch says: “the idea of the Olympic Truce is the invention of a gentle and peace-loving man” (cited in Georgiadis, 2009). The truce encourages mutual respect, peacemaking, safety, dignity, dialogue and results in the participation of all athletes in the Games without any discrimination.
- The last principle of the inclusion of ceremonies, art and poetry as elements of the Olympic Games celebrations comes to complete Coubertin’s belief that the aesthetic part lies to a beauty and an eurhythmy which contributes to harmonious development in education. The modern Olympics is not often associated with poetry or literature, but from 1912 to 1952 the Olympics included an arts competition in which medals were awarded to competitors who created the best sports-inspired art in categories such as music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature. Even Baron de Coubertin himself submitted a poem “Ode to Sport” under the twin pseudonyms Georges Hohrod and M. Eschbach and won the gold medal at the first literature competition. History also was considered by Coubertin integral part of Olympism: ‘To celebrate the Olympic Games is to lay claim to history. History is also the best guarantee of peace’ (Naul, Binder, Rychtecky, Culpan, 2017, p.14).

Olympic education is representing the values and the principles that a society should

enclose and through sports the individuals and society can adopt ethics like respect, mutual understanding, fair play etc as an everyday lifestyle in order to achieve development personally or collectively. Top athletes can inspire and communicate the moral values that could cultivate a better world which can have as a result to view them as role models for next generations and adults. Olympic medalists nowadays are receiving big publicity and they work whether they wish or not, or either they should or not, as ambassadors of these principles in the competition field or outside. Children often want to look up to someone, sharing the same interest or passion and elite athletes are among them. This is not always mutual from the athlete's perspective, since they do not consider themselves as role models for the coming younger generations nor that they should have the responsibility to behave in certain ways in their everyday life according to the expectations deriving from the professional career, in order to please the fans. For instance, a good example for this is the U.S.A., National Basketball Association player, Charles Barkley, who refused the label of the role modeling saying: "I am not a role model... The ability to run and dunk a basketball should not make you God Almighty. There are a million guys in jail who can play ball. Should they be role models? Of course not" (Wellman, in Clifford & Feezell, 2010, p. 104), while his teammate Karl Malone distinguishes that it is not athletes by themselves who choose to become role models, they can only choose if they will create a positive or negative impact (Wellman, in Clifford & Feezell, 2010, p. 104). The most important according to Clifford & Feezell (2010) is for the athletes to conduct themselves as athletes and play respectfully, because is the way to externalize the intrinsic values of the sports. Respecting the opponents, respecting your teammates, respecting the rules of the game and the officials creates an exemplar that is worth imitating. The fact that Olympians can address to a mass population, has the advantage of inspiring and empowering children for involvement in sports or motivating them to continue. Professor Cameron Myler (IOA, NOAs & NOCs, 2018) argues that the positive impact on children and the sports industry can be accomplished from any Olympic Athlete, not only from the most popular ones.

The IOC understanding how much valuable and effective is the close collaboration with the top athletes for spreading the Olympic Values and for connecting with the youth, organized the "Athlete Role Models" programme which was included in the first edition of Youth Olympic Games. It will be discussed further later in the YOG section.

At this point of the time, must be noted also the IOC's successful initiative of the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT), in which athletes competed in Rio Olympic Games (2016) under the Olympic Flag first time ever. The team of the refugee athletes sent strong message of inclusion and hope to the world. This action with a humanistic spirit inspired the world in the midst of a global social and economic crisis that principles like respect, tolerance and equal chances are human rights that everyone should enjoy.

Nicole Girard-Savoy, Head of Finance and Promotion of Olympic Values Unit, Olympic Solidarity (IOC) presents at the 14<sup>th</sup> Joint International Session for NOA's and NOC's (2018) the programme "Refugee Athlete Support", Olympic Solidarity 2017-2020 Plan for supporting a limited number of refugee athletes to give hope for a better world.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1894, was founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC) by Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrios Vikelas as its first president. Since then this non-governmental sports organization is responsible for organizing the modern Summer and Winter Olympic Games, as well as the Youth Olympic Games (since 2010) and bears the responsibility of governing the Olympic Movement. As guidelines of the activities of the IOC and in order to promote the educational objectives of the Movement, Coubertin created the Olympic Charter by writing the first one in 1898. (Olympics.com)

'The Olympic Charter is the codification of the Fundamental Principles, Rules and Byelaws adopted by the IOC [International Olympic Committee]. It governs the organization and operation of the Olympic Movement and stipulates the conditions for the celebration of the Olympic Games.'

(Zakus, 2005, p.3)

The main aims of the IOC's activities written in Olympic Charter were directed in hosting Olympic Games blended with educational ideas (Olympism):

1. Promoting the development of those physical and moral qualities which are the basis of sport
2. Educating young people through sport in a spirit of better understanding between each other and of friendship, thereby helping to build a better and more peaceful world
3. Spreading the Olympic principles throughout the world, thereby creating international goodwill
4. Bringing together the athletes of the world in a great four- yearly sports festival, the Olympic Games.



Jim Worrall, IOC member from Canada in 1982 took initiative of the Commission for the Revision of the Charter and since then only few changes have been made (Naul, Binder, Rychtecky, & Culpan, 2017). In the last updated edition of the Charter (26 June 2019) the Fundamental Principles of Olympism are stated:

1. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will, and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of a good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.
2. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.

Among the mission, role and responsibilities of IOC are:

1. to encourage and support the promotion of ethics and good governance in sport as well as education of youth through sport and to dedicate its efforts to ensuring that, in sport, the spirit of fair play prevails and violence is banned
2. to encourage and support initiatives blending sport with culture and education
3. to encourage and support the activities of the International Olympic Academy (“IOA”) and other institutions which dedicate themselves to Olympic education.

(Olympic Charter In force as of 26 June 2019)

#### **1.4.1 IOA: Its educational role**

In 1961, the International Olympic Academy (IOA) was founded in Olympia, Greece, at a very close distance from the ancient stadium and a beautiful landscape, surrounded by hills and reflecting the moral and educational values of Olympism. Among trees in a peaceful grove visitors can find the heart of Pierre de Coubertin resting in a white pillar. From the very beginning (1961, Article 1) were decided the aims of the IOA: “The Olympic Academy shall be an international cultural centre in the sacred place where the idea of athletic contests was born and developed. Its aim shall be to maintain and

spread the Olympic idea and its ideals, thus contributing to the education and exercise of youth through the study and application of the pedagogic and social principles of sport; furthermore, a scholastic foundation for the Olympic idea in accordance with the principles laid down by the ancient Greeks and the revivers of the modern Olympic movement, on the initiative of Baron de Coubertin.” (Georgiadis 2007, p.51).

Moreover, in Article 2 it is stated:

“The creation of an international spiritual center in Ancient Olympia which shall cater for the conservation and spread of the Olympic Spirit, the study and application of pedagogic as well as social principles of the Games and the scientific foundation of the Olympic Ideal comprise the goals of the International Olympic Academy.” (Filaretos,1987, p.28)

The first attempt of establishing an International Olympic Institute was in 1938, a year after Coubertin’s death, in Berlin, but closed in 1941 because of a bomb attack during WWII. Carl Diem, the Secretary-General of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games Organizing Committee was the head of the Institute. Thanks to his cooperation with the Greek IOC member Ioannis Ketseas, both with Diem made the IOA a reality.

In an effort to explain his “Olympic education” ideas Coubertin refers to “permanent factories” that need to establish for achieving Olympic pedagogy. “The Olympic factory for the ancient world was the gymnasium. The Olympiads have been renewed, but the gymnasium of antiquity has not- as yet. It must be. (Coubertin, 2000, p. 217). Geßmann (1992, p. 33) points out that “the Olympic idea cannot be understood, without an understanding of its educational mission”.

Numerous Sessions took place in IOA since 1961, contributing to a long lasting and continuously educational role. The primary function of the IOA is in the promotion of Olympism and the Olympic Education based on the same core values of the Olympic Movement, on the idea of the unity of mind, will and body in the development of human individuals throughout the various sessions and the educational activities that take place every year.

To be more accurate:

- The 59 International Sessions for Young Participants (1961-2020)
- The International Sessions for Educators of Higher Physical Education Institutes
- The International Sessions for Directors and Officials of Higher Physical Education Institutes

- The Joint International Sessions for Educators and Officials of Higher Physical Education Institutes
- The International Sessions for Members and Officials of National Olympic Committees and International Federations
- The International Sessions for Directors of National Olympic Academies
- The Joint International Sessions for Presidents or Directors of National Olympic Academies, Members and Officials of National Olympic Committees and International Federations
- The International Postgraduate Seminars in Olympic Studies
- The International Seminars for Sports Journalists
- The International Sessions for Olympic Medalists
- The International Olympic Master's Programmes in "Olympic Studies, Olympic Education and Management of Olympic Events" (2009-2020)

Prof. Georgiadis, honorary Dean of the International Olympic Academy refers to it and its sport and educational mentioned activities as the "ideas tank" of the Olympic Movement at the Young Participants Session for the 50 years (1961-2011) of operating as a worldwide Center of Olympic Studies. Among the main goals of IOA since its establishment is to become the place where ideas for the development of the Olympic Movement will be implemented with free expression, bringing together different people (youth, educators, athletes, scientists, etc) from different backgrounds (athletic, cultural, social, etc), serving and promoting the ideals of Olympism, gaining knowledge and experience in the IOA for promoting them in their respective countries through the cooperation with their National Olympic Academies (NOA) or any other educational institution in order to enhance the contribution of Olympism to humanity (Georgiadis, 2011, 9th International Session For Educators and Officials of Higher Institutes of Physical Education).

From the sessions and activities that have been organized until now the results are more than satisfying as people get inspired from their time and experience in IOA to do the same back in their countries, to work on values of the sports which they promote them to younger generations and maintain contacts for further worldwide initiatives. The great number of young people who are often hosted at the IOA premises more than once, become ambassadors of the values and principles of Olympism and expand the circle of

Olympic Family worldwide. The IOA's educational work until today is the prominent service to the world accomplishing the vision of Coubertin for a permanent "factory" of Olympic Studies. This Master's Programme "Olympic Studies, Olympic Education, Organization and Management of Olympic Events" has been an innovative international postgraduate Master's that boosted the educational role of the Academy. The IOA has established itself as the cradle of Olympism, philosophy, research, and Olympic Studies Center with a great impact not only on young men and women during their visits, but also on professors, scientists, athletes, educators, representatives of higher positions in sports, politics, education and in culture.

#### **1.4.2 OVEP: An educational Program as a tool for sports**

The Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP) implemented by the International Olympic Committee is one of the best educational projects. Designed for children and the youth and targeting to develop more educational programmes, has been a useful tool for educators, teachers, coaches, and educational authorities to spread the Olympic values and principles. OVEP was launched in 2007 aiming to use sport for understanding Olympism and its positive impact on everyone through social interaction and happiness. When athletes compete in Olympic Games agree that they share the same values, the "Fundamental Principles" are named on Olympic Charter and National Olympic Committees from their side agree to promote them in their respective countries. The OVEP using the core values of Olympism: Excellence, Respect and Friendship and the benefit of sport and physical activity for positive impact on individuals for well-being and youth development, has launched a programme package of activities and guidelines on how to implement the Olympic values on everyday life and the young children to experience them, get inspired and promote healthy, positive behavior (Delivering OVEP, 2016). "OVEP is a tool to maintain young people's interest in sport, encouraging them to get moving, and promoting the Olympic values Olympic education is not a stand-alone area, and mainstreaming it into different fields and curricula is key" (IOC 2010 in Chatziefstathiou, (2012), p.395).

The official resource for the project and the knowledge base for the delivery of OVEP has four sections: A sports-Based Programme exploring the Fundamentals of Olympic Values Education, a practical guide to Olympic Values Education, Activity Sheets for exercise to support Olympic Values Education and the Resource Library.

The benefits of implementing OVEP on the individual and collective level are:

- Individual
- Physical
- Behavioral
- Emotional
- Social
- Educational

(IOC, Delivering OVEP, 2016, p. 12)

For the Olympic Movement is a priority that athletes during Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games will implement the values of Olympism. In order that athletes will compete with excellence, respect and friendship, OVEP highlights five Educational Themes for the learning process:

1. **Joy of effort** (the importance of motivating young children to get active in sport activities within a sport or activity where they find joy, happiness within the struggle for development of the skills, shaping character, working on great ideals such as peace)
2. **Fair play** (a sports- related concept that need to be applied beyond the sports field, learning the value of integrity in life)

*“Fair play does not only mean adherence to written rules: rather it describes the right attitudes of sportsmen and sportswomen and the right spirit in which they conduct themselves...”*

*International Fair Play Charter*

3. **Practising respect** (one of the human rights that need to be applied for creating a peaceful world through the mutual international understanding in a diverse world, where humans have rights and responsibilities at the same time)
4. **Pursuit of excellence** (striving for excellence teaches the young people how to make the right decisions, what qualities of character are important and how to try for being the best of themselves whether it has to do with sports or not)
5. **Balance between body, will and mind** (Embracing Olympic values can help young people achieve a well-balanced approach to life (IOC, The Fundamentals of Olympic Values Education, 2017, p. 113). Physical activity is of great importance for the development of the body, of the mental health and of the spirit from a very young age for ending up as a complete, mature, balanced adult.

(IOC, The Fundamentals of Olympic Values Education, 2017)

Address to children and youth from five to eighteen years old, there is a variety in the teaching methodology used for understanding and diverse material support according to the age target group. There are used pedagogical methods teaching and learning in order to create a positive experience that students will enjoy and will engage them in the meaning of Olympism. The educational reforms that Coubertin attempted in France had as a result in linking Olympism with education, because according to him education is “the key to ‘human happiness’” and that “Olympism as an educational tool would tackle the problems of his time” (Chatziefstathiou (2012), p. 387). Many scholars e.g. Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012, 2009) defend that the two contents are inseparable and Olympism can be taught to young people “for a way of life based on values that claim to enhance their lives” (Chatziefstathiou (2012), p. 389).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Sports Athletes as Role Model: Definitions and meanings

The expression “athletes are at the same time role models” is quite often used over the years. But what is crucial before the use of it is to define what it is a role model. The topic has been controversial among academics. While the Olympic motto *citius, altius, fortius* expresses the human striving for going faster, higher, and stronger it seems that this can have different perceptions. For example, technology and drugs can also lead to this result in the high demand of winning an Olympic medal. But the question is if this is aligned to the values deriving from Olympism and sports. In this case who would be the athlete role model, someone who takes advantage of the chance to use these methods? Or someone who even though he has the possibility of using drugs or the technology he chooses to strive for excellence only by his own efforts?

According to Georgiadis (2007, p. 26), a hero who is a role model is “The individual who has cultivated his qualities through participation and contest and has gone beyond the limits in any area of life will become a small or a great hero. These heroes are role models; they give a good example and their feats (objectifying behavior as a result of a psychosomatic process for the benefit of society) are the constants that guide humanity on its evolutionary course.”

Considering that the ultimate goal for every athlete is the medal and particularly when it comes to Olympics, there is something more than the tangible of the medal, which makes them write a different chapter in the sporting history and that is, the moral excellence. Michael Austin (2012) argues that “There is no doubt a form of greatness in such achievements, but I believe that a greatness of truly Olympic proportions includes more than mere athletic excellence. The truly great Olympians also display moral excellence”. Sport gives the opportunity to practice virtues such as fair play, respect for the opponent and the rules on an everyday basis. This can lead to shaping a character that will use these

traits in favor of himself and the society.

By the word “role model” is defined someone that can affect other people’s lives, make an impact on them e.g. on their mentality -in the way of thinking- regardless the age, the culture, the language, the country coming from, the religion, the social – economical environment or if he/ she belongs to the close environment. He/she is a person who inspires other people to fight for the best not only for himself but also for the benefit of others or the society where he/she lives in.

Usually, role models for children are people who come first from the family environment, parents, older siblings, or any other familiar person they admire. Second in a row comes the teachers as they play a significant part in shaping their character and giving direction on what choices they will make in the future. And the third factor on this comes to the sport athletes. From a big cistern of athletes they choose specific ones, they single out those on whom they see something more than an athlete, more than a sport, more than a feat. What do they distinguish between them? The answer is rather difficult or multiple.

So when it comes to athlete role models there are two sides of the coin. Those who realize their influence and “power” to the youngest generation and try to motivate them in positive ways, they share positive messages with the public, show good will such as charities, donations etc. And on the other side, there are also athletes who do not realize -either if this is positive or negative- how much they can influence regardless of what they are doing in public.

By in this survey, we will try to identify particularly in the age of young children what are the role models of the era, what are the reasons of admiring the specific athletes, and what are the values that children distinguish on specific athletes among so many worldwide.

First of all, it is necessary to consider the fact that nowadays specifically the young people they can have big influence from many aspects mostly from the society that promotes other ways of living rather than sports, effort and values. It is almost difficult to involve all of the students in physical education even during school hours since technology has blossomed to such an extent that it occupies a large time of their everyday time. Low participation in sports it is an issue that is worrying more and more people in the sports movement. Especially when it comes to gender, it seems that worldwide the participation of girls is much less than that of the boys at the same age. It is a goal of the IOC not only to increase Olympic Education but also to minimize the big gap between the genders on



their involvement in sports.

This is why it is important to clarify all these issues among them in order to focus on the specific concept of the athletes as role models at this study case. A lot of questions are arising, such as: what is the correlation of elite athletes or non-elite for becoming a role model to be followed by many young people? Is it gender centralized the choice of admiring an athlete? Is the popularity that effects also at the choice of a favorite athlete? What about Olympic and Paralympic athletes? Is there any distinction?

## **2.2 What does it mean to be the athlete a role model?**

For Coubertin athletes who deserve to be at the Olympics are distinguished by their personal achievements and consist of the elite that has "... moral and social responsibility to act as a role model, stimulating interest in the sport for the masses." referred by professor Stephan Wassong (Olympic Perspectives, 2017). The philosophy of top athletes as Olympic role models for the development of sport and the application of its educational values has been a good way for motivating a bigger population for involvement in sports and physical activities. Coubertin's vision of a role model was an athlete of good sporting virtue, displaying an honorable attitude and ethically responsible behavior towards elite level performance (Wassong, S., 2013, p.289). Fair play is one of the core values that has been represented by the ideal Olympic athlete.

Various approaches have been formulated regarding the definition or on whom we refer as a role model. In general, a role model is someone who is worthy to be emulated by others, sets an example, can influence his/her behavior, especially younger people. To name a few scholars for example Savickas (2013) stressed that "the choice of role models is indeed a decision about self-construction and the character one prefers to enact in life's drama", while Gibson (2004) argues that role models have been chosen according to the similarity of skills, achievements and so on and the probability to increase this similarity, because they are "cognitive constructions based on an individual's needs, wants, and ambitions" (Ronkainen, et al, 2019). Albert Bandura developed in 1977 the social cognitive theory by which he tried to combine the traditional learning theory of behaviorism with the cognitive approach of the involvement of the mental factors in learning process (Connolly, 2017). He based on the fact that by observing the learning process can be achieved, so he highlighted four processes that take place: the attentional process, the retention process, the motor reproduction process, and the motivational

process (Connolly, 2017, p.26). Bandura's social cognitive theory has illustrated the importance of observing the positive role models in the learning process, imitating their behavior for improvement and which types are the right ones to imitate. Bandura supports that "modeling has always been acknowledged to be one of the most powerful means of transmitting values, attitudes and patterns of thought and behavior" (1986, p:47). The four processes of observational learning can be a useful tool for coaches of youngsters to teach acceptable athlete behaviors. Children and teenagers are a large population that professional athletes can influence as they accomplish the goals that they seek to achieve, they can make comparisons and they set the standards for the techniques they want to copy.

### **2.3. Athlete role models today and athlete role models in antiquity**

Heroes and role models- Two different notions

Heroes and role models, should not get confused as their meanings are different. Heather Reid (2016) has questioned that athletes are role models for children or even for athletic adults, arguing that this maybe could make sense for professional athletes, not for the rest of people. Many other philosophers also are doubting the argument that athlete role models serve in society as heroes as well, starting by the values promoted by them characterized as fascistoid, morally instrumental, undesirable (Reid, 2016). Sporting altruism is a value that is exemplary but not aligned with the term hero. On the other side, the Olympian through Olympism is faced as a "virtuous wholeness", a person who is pursuing virtues like bravery, wisdom, justice, prudence, who contributes to social peace and represents a good example of self improvement and self perfection for a harmonious development of body, mind, and soul (Georgiadis, 2015, pp. 190-19).

The date that has prevailed for the first Olympic Games in antiquity is 776 BC. Although, there are scholars and researchers who have doubt this date and the excavators of the site in Olympia based on archaeological evidence have suggested an even older date (Christesen, 2010). Hippias of Elis produced the first complete list of Olympic victors and based on him was decided the date of the first Olympics. Koroibos of Elis was the first Olympic victor. Athletes who won in the Olympics were considered of a great honor and apart from the olive crown they were getting value- prizes since Homers era such as tripods and bowls and great amounts of drachmas. The amount of prizes and honors

received by the Olympic athletes shows that these athletes after the victory were distinguished people of the society and were considered an example for the next generations and for the rest of the world.

#### Sports and Religion:

Games were always interconnected with religion in the Olympic Games since ancient times. To be precise, the Olympics of antiquity were within the context of a religious character, they were festivals in honor of Zeus to whom athletes were praying before their competition and to whom they were dedicating goods, statues, etc. for their victory. "Religion was at the center, and sport expanded around it" (Kyle, 2015). Professor Donald G. Kyle notes that "Athletics were only part of the festival to Zeus at Olympia. A regular gathering for worship, sacrifices, prayers, feasting, and convivial celebration took place at the same site every four years" (2015). While both authors Young and Kyle, do agree regarding the award that was an only olive wreath, despite the fact that a victory in Olympic Games implies value-prizes, going back home, and receiving great honors, Professor Stephen Miller points to disagree with that. He rather supports that the competitions were taking place in order to win a prize "athletic was not simply about competition; it concerned winning a prize. Sport for sport's sake was not an ancient concept" (2004).

In contrast with ancient Olympic Games, the modern ones have nothing to do with religion. Although, religion is not the reason for which are games held, nowadays can create obstacles in participating. Most of the time is directly linked with women and gender inequality issues. Despite of the IOC's efforts on promoting gender equality and inclusion several beliefs and traditions can make things difficult on technical and ethical issues, for example, the hijab in the Islamic religion. It is a characteristic paradigm the incident of the prohibition on Iran's women's football team to participate in the Summer Youth Olympic Games in Singapore (2010), as the Islamic dress code did not align with the FIFA's original standstill which allows only the goalkeeper to play in headwear under law four (Mackay, 2010) and the IOC's principles. Eventually, the ban was lifted when FIFA accepted the proposal of a new Islamic dress without breaking the rules of football. Similar to this case, they have been detected by other athletes as well making it for them or for their team a hard decision to make between faith and sport. Religion and practicing sports have not always been easy choices.

## **2.4 Women in sport as role models**

The influence that have role models on the construction of the personality of athletes especially during adolescence, has concerned various scholars who tried to find out if and how much they relate and the motivation they give to the next generations for involvement in sports. A distinguished characteristic in all this research has been found on the differences among the genders. Young girls and women have much fewer options on choosing their role model in comparison to boys and men. This is a reason that explains also why women in neuralgic positions lack of inspirational role models. Another explanation is given by Hargreaves (2000) particularly for female elite athletes for 'gendered heroism' (Vescio et al., 2005, p.157). Many times the meanings of role models and heroes are interlaced and considering the structure of the notion 'hero' which is aggressiveness, competitiveness and strength, the same characteristics have been identified at elite male athletes. Respectively the elite female athletes, have been identified with characteristics of caring and kindness, features that do not attract attention of media or young people.

A study by Biskup and Pfister, (1999) showed that between the ages of 9 and 12, gender played a major role in the choice of the role models, which was based on perpetuating stereotypes. Boys on the one hand, selected superiority, strength, aggressiveness and bravery, while girls preferred models with appearance and positive social behavior (Vescio et al., 2005, p.157). In a more recent study by Ronkainen, Ryba, Selänne (2019) was found that gender doubts are yet existing, for example, female role model athletes who combine motherhood and sport are rare or the chosen role models for men where only men, while for women were both genders. Except for sport role models were found family members also as a second category (e.g. parents) and the top athletes were preferred by male participants rather than similarities among athletes and students (Ronkainen et al, 2019).

This survey is not far away from the reality of today. For instance, a woman's first torchbearer was ever chosen in the history of the modern Olympics at the very recent Olympic Games of Tokyo 2020. The Greek shooter Anna Korakaki became the first woman in history to launch the Olympic Torch Relay. That in itself should make us think critically.

### **2.4.1 Women's placement in sports during ancient time**

“...Here, too, is where women could participate if this is felt necessary. Personally, I do not approve of women’s participation in public competitions, which does not mean that they should not engage in a great many sports, merely that they should not become the focus of a spectacle. At the Olympic Games, their role should be above all to crown the victors, as was the case in the ancient tournaments”(International Olympic Committee, *Olympism*, 2000, p.583).

We can see on the above text only a small part of the opinion that Pierre De Coubertin had for women’s participation in sports. While he came up with the great idea of Olympism and at the same time he revived something so spectacular as Olympic Games, it seems that the position of a woman in sports did not change much since ancient times. Obviously, the noble education that he received and the prejudices of the era of that time cannot be assimilated into the ideas of universalism and Olympism. Despite all the innovations and the great efforts that he did in order to revive the modern Olympic Games, women yet they do not have any place at the Olympics. Many expected arguments were arising against their participation from the societies that have been constructed by men for men. Among them that their body will get destroyed, will change in a way that will not remind females anymore and that the motto of *Citius, altius, fortius* (faster, higher, stronger) is not meant for women. There was no comparison between a woman and a man in a competition that needs muscles and endurance like that of running.

In order to understand this argument we need to go back at the ancient Olympics and make a small comparison on how much did things changed from that time the to modern Olympics until today, more than a century after the revival of the modern Olympics. To start with, we should consider that no women were allowed to participate in sports events with a slight tolerance on being a woman owner of a racing horse in equestrian. The role and freedom of women in ancient times were very strict. There was the glorious exception of Spartan women who were more active compared to the women of the rest city-states of Greece. So it is not a wonder that the first woman to win in the ancient Olympics was Kyniska from Sparta in 396B.C at the four-horse chariot race.

“The kings of Sparta are my fathers and brothers. I, Kyniska, winning with my chariot and swift horses, have set up this statue. I declare that I am the only woman from all Greece to take this crown.”(Young D., 2004)

“It was not long, probably less than three decades after Kyniska’s

success, before Euryleonis, another Spartan woman, won an Olympic victory. This time it was in the two-horse chariot race; her statue, too, was enshrined at Sparta.” (Young D., 2004)

A distinguished local athletic event for women in ancient time was Heraian games where women could participate in the honor of Hera, the Goddess among the 12 Olympians Gods of mountain Olympus.

Only women of Sparta could enjoy more freedom in their lives and could participate in physical activities in order to give birth to strong child (Young D., 2004).

In general, the role of women in society was constructed since ancient times, and seems that has not changed much. It was not earlier until 1967 that Kathrine Switzer became the first woman to take part in the Boston Marathon disguised as a man. The decade of 1970s' was crucial for changing things for women in sports at an international level. The physical activity starts getting accepted as a benefit for them and not as an obstacle for their future life and does not make their body ugly as it was used to refer to in order to prevent women's participation in sports.

A key date in the involvement of women in sports was made by IOC, not earlier than in 1991 when it was decided that “Any new sport seeking to be included on the Olympic programme had to include women's events” (olympic.org). In 1995, the IOC established a Women and Sport Working Group to advise the Executive Board on suitable policies to be implemented in the field of gender equality (olympic.org).

It is a great contrast that the founder of the modern Olympic Games with the ideals of a unified and peaceful world was excluding a big part of the population and while he was communicating the nondiscrimination value, he was already doing by himself a great discrimination such as that of the gender.

Women are missing from the world of the sports since ancient time and almost until the modern Olympic Games and World War II. It is characteristic that IOC included women for participating in Olympic Games to certain sports not before 1928, and under the pressure of Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale- FSFI (1921). It was under question if the sports were “effecting” the female reproductive system.

The situation seems not to have changed much from the beginning of the games to today. The participation of male and female athletes in the sport industry and the games shows a big gap among the two genders. The percentage of female participation, recognition, involvement in physical education and the promotion is much less than that of male, making the difference uneven. Even when women athletes participation it occurs, they are rather seem as sexualized and objectified in media. Below will be discussed regarding the difference in coverage between the female athletes and male athletes. Regardless the increasing number of women participation, the focus on them is rather limited. The London Olympic Games were characterized as the “Year of the Woman”. The 45% of the athletes were women since every national delegation sent women athletes (Fink, 2015), while in Tokyo 2020 is expected the percentage to reach 48.8% (olympic.org). Comparing to London 1948 Olympics, the female participation that was only 9.5%, there is undoubtedly a great progress but yet there is a long way to go. The position of women in sports has been developed since 1900, when they took part in Olympics for the first time in modern era, with the IOC’s initiative in collaboration with the International Federations (IFs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the Organizing Committees. Simultaneously, the IOC included women in administration and projects that deal with women’s involvement in sports. In March 2017, IOC launched the Gender Equality Review Project in order to “push gender equality globally” with “action-oriented recommendations for change” (Factsheet 2018) for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls.

Although, there is a big gap yet for gender equality in sport’s participation, involvement, training, managing and coaching, on the other hand there is a great effort from the side of the IOC of promoting gender equality and from sports that were considered traditionally as men’s field like football they present improved actions. UEFA’s latest report in 2017 regarding the period 2012/13 until 2016/17 displays an increase in the below groups:

- Increase in the number of female professional and semi- professional players from 1,303(2012/13) to 2,853 (2016/17) into double.
- National teams (including youth) were increased from 173 (2012/13) to 233 (2016/17) and National Academies for girls from 10 to 20.
- Women’s youth teams in 2012/13 from 19,771 became 34,194 in 2016/17.
- Number of youth leagues (U6–U23)from 164 to 266.

Moreover, it is encouraging that the interest in female's participation has been boosted from both sides, athletes and the other stakeholders:

- At least in six countries (Belgium England France Germany Netherlands Ukraine) the number of spectators have been risen within five years (2012/13 – 2016/17) at national team matches.
- The social media and the TV are getting more interested in covering matches and campaigns for women's football.

(Women's football across the national associations 2016/17)

The position of women in society and in sport still consists of almost the same characteristics dominated by antiquity, weakness and beauty, as opposed to the aggressiveness, violence and competitiveness that must characterize men. But this undervalues the effort that has preceded it and creates a trap for conclusions after success or failure, such as the contribution of the luck, a strong male influence, or emotion (Fink, 2013). On the other hand, media using their power display the other side of the female personalities, emphasizing on their sexuality during the competition. One of the best examples in the sports field for this is the beach volley. While camera is making focus on different divisions and in field of view for men, opposed to women that the focus lies on their body, particularly on chests and buttocks (Fink, 2013).

#### **2.4.2 Women athletes as role models for the youngsters**

Today, especially with the big impact and influence that media has on an athlete when he achieves a big successful record he gets a lot of attention. But when records break and at the same time, the same athlete makes a generous action or a humble one or anything with a positive social impact the attention that she/he gets from media is even bigger. It is common that this category of athletes they get characterized as role models as they influence with or without their intention mostly young people/ children. One way or another, it could be said that media have now led to form what were known as the so called "athlete role models". But this is not something new nor an innovation of the modern games. It was existing since ancient times. The question is: was the Olympic athlete of



ancient games a role model or the similar definition of a role model as it is today? Were there or not athletes as role models for the youngsters?

The philosopher H. Reid, argues that: “By creating challenges that demand such virtues as courage, self-control, respect, justice, and wisdom, we enable athletes and spectators alike to get a taste of what their ancestral heroes went through- not only the suffering, but also the sense of strength, achievement, and even joy that comes from the great achievements” ... “ On this model, the athlete is not so much a role model as the (temporary) embodiment of the cultural ideal.” (Reid H., 2016)

From this perspective, it does not prove the meaning of the athlete in the same definition as it is common used today. At the same article it is mentioned the difference that exists between the two different eras for the social responsibility that a victor of the games have. Every individual has to bring the best of himself to benefit not only himself but the community where he lives.

“Feezell argues that famous athletes should be regarded as luscious objects, that is, examples of athletic achievement we would like to obtain, rather than moral exemplars, which would make them models of general morality” (Reid H. , 2016).

Two concepts that are not very different but with their own perceptions. Stephen G. Miller (IOA 2018) examines the status of an ancient athlete after his victory in Olympia or in the other three sites where were held panhellenic (open to all Greeks) games: Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea. An athlete who was the winner of the races not only wins the crown but also he was enjoying a great honor and respect from other people and especially from the habitants of his hometown. The highest honor was when an athlete was a victor at least once, at each of the four games (periodonikes), “circuit winner”. Miller characterize them as celebrities and role models that the fame of some of them reaches until today.

The best example could be Diagoras from Rhodes. Having three sons and two grandsons, all of them victors in Olympia and other games, accomplished arête and reached at the peak of the virtuousness when his two sons, both winners, took in their shoulders their father for the joint victory lap. Diagoras is until today an exemplar of the ultimate honor for a mortal who tasted the greatest happiness of all.

On the other side, Dr. Sam Ramsamy (IOC Member in South Africa) (IOA 2018) specifies the role model as “a person whose behaviour, example or success can be emulated by others especially by younger people” and “should demonstrate to young people how to live with integrity, optimism, hope, determination and compassion” (IOA 2018, p. 90). It should be taken into account also that “role models can have positive or negative impacts on the younger generation and on society as a whole”.

Based on the above definition, we could use a well known paradigm of modern times Oscar Pistorius (athletics and para-athletics) a Paralympic champion and the first double-leg amputee to participate in the Olympic Games with a successful sporting career who committed murder. This turn on his life changed everything not only his career but also his reputation.

## **2.5 Paralympic athletes as role models for the youngsters**

A mass number of the population, such as the Paralympic athletes were not included in the biggest sports event in the world, that of the Olympic Games until their recent history.

First of all, it is needed a throwback at the beginning of the Paralympic Movement. Dr Ludwig Guttman was the founder of the Stoke Mandeville games in 1948, an archery competition for wheelchair athletes, which became an annual event. With 16 patients participating, on July 29, 1948 (opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games) were held the first Stoke Mandeville games that they were the inspiration for the today's Paralympic Games.

The first official Paralympic Games was not held until the 1960 in Rome. Since then the number of 400 athletes from 23 countries has been grown to 4,328 athletes and 160 countries, according to the official numbers from Rio 2016 overview (Paralympic.org). The development of the movement led in the constitution of many different organizations, such as the International Stoke Mandeville Games Committee (ISMGC), the International Sport Organization for the Disabled (ISOD), the Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association (CPISRA) etc.(IPC Handbook, June 2006, Preamble, Section 1) that created the need of a main institution who would coordinate all the above. So, in 1989 was found the International Paralympic Committee

(IPC), an international non-profit organization which supports athletes in striving for excellence, leading the Paralympic Movement for “making an inclusive world through Para Sport” and it is stated in the official website of the IPC as their vision.

The etymology of the word Paralympic (Greek root of “para” meaning beside, alongside and “Olympics”) represents the perception of the parallel route with the Olympic Games (IPC Handbook, June 2006, Preamble, Section 1). However, Ian Brittain(2009) notes that the words Paralympics and Paralympian were associated with the definition of “faulty”, “abnormal”, “associated in a subsidiary or accessory capacity” which might “disempower elite athletes with disabilities”.

At the beginning of the movement the social value of Paralympics was overlapping the sporting identity of the games (Brittain, 2009). This changed soon when in 2003 the IPC adopted the vision to “Enable Paralympic Athletes to Achieve Sporting Excellence and Inspire and Excite the World” (IPC Handbook). In 2019, the IPC completed 30 years since its establishment and they revealed a new strategic plan for the next years, 2019-2022 by setting five priorities:

- Strengthen the effectiveness of the Paralympic Movement at all levels
  
- Enhance the Paralympic Games experience and further its reach as a celebration of human diversity
  
- Drive a cultural shift through Para sport for a truly inclusive society
  
- Continuous pursuit of excellence in what we do and how we do it
  
- Develop and deliver a new brand statement that globally positions our vision and mission (Paralympic.org website)

The IPC President, Andrew Parsons, underlines that:

*“The first step in this positioning has been the development of a refined vision and mission for the IPC to better reflect its purpose in using sport as a catalyst to create a better world for all.”(IPC | Strategic Plan, p.5)*

The Paralympic movement is moving towards a new era of positioning in the world as a top sporting organization, which works for transforming the society into an inclusive world through para sports and to enable Para athletes to achieve sporting excellence. The IPC an athlete centered organization promotes values through sport, such as courage, determination, inspiration and equality.

Disability in past times was perceived as illness and the individual was seen as a “problem” for himself, the family and society. People with disabilities were (are?) restricted by the social barriers instead of their own medical impairments.

Even though the appearance of Paralympic Games took place since 1960, the visibility of their athletes started in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Media interest in covering the games, studies, researches made the athletes show up for their sport achievements. Millions of people watch sports on TV and follows the sport matches, allowing mass media to influence the modern civilization (Boyle & Haynes, 2009, in Kim et al, 2017). The first televised Paralympic Games were held in Barcelona in 1992 and since then the number of audiences has only increased. Despite the bigger attention that Paralympics got over the years, the difference between broadcasting Olympics and Paralympics remains extremely big. For example, in London 2012 there were 758 Olympic news shows broadcasting, while for Paralympics only 28 (Kim et al, 2017).

## **2.6 Media and the athletes as role models. How does the media promote the role models?**

The Olympic Games are the number one sports event in the world, which attracts an enormous number of people and a great number of athletes participating in. Of course, an event of this magnitude cannot lack of media coverage, from the beginning of the media development. Billions of people watch on their television the opening and closing ceremony and the games going on. The cooperation between Olympic Movement and the media is close enough in order that both sides are win to win. On the one hand, media and advertisement are covering a big amount of expenses of such an event, but on the other

hand, are not always promote the values that penetrate the Olympic Movement, and athletes work on them. For instance, the three main Olympic symbols (a) the five rings symbolizing the five continents, (b) the motto "Citius-Altius-Fortius" (Faster-Higher-Stronger) and (c) the flame are being advertised, however, at the same time can be commercialized in a way that they lose the deeper meaning of each of the symbols. Also, while can be demonstrated a great moment of human feat excellence by an athlete, can be focus on a doping incident or corruption.

The Media have been accused of commercialization and other accusations like this in which among them is also the distinction that they create among men athletes and women. The discrimination that takes place against women has two parts. Firstly, it is not the same attention given to both genders. Much less time is provided for promoting women in sports, advertising their achievements, advance their participation in sports than men. And secondly, when that happens is for the wrong reasons. It is not their athletic feat that they focus or the great record that was broken, but the attention is more in their appearance so the conversations regarding them are for the wrong reasons. Most of the times are viewed as sexual objects with an attractive body than athletes. So the interest is not exclusively in athleticism and has consequences and what messages they promote to young children and what kind of role models they create for them.

In 1997 the Federal Institute of Sport Science organized a workshop in which it was mentioned that "80 percent of the respondents stated that they were interested in female sports because of the eroticism and only 20 percent because of the achievement" (Biskup, C., & Pfister, G. 1999). "Victory was not enough: on the contrary, women had to 'look good even after tremendous effort, radiate charm and exude eroticism (Biskup, & Pfister, 1999). Years later and the results are the same when it comes to women participation: coverage of female athletes often highlights their sex appeal and femininity instead of their athletic accomplishments (e.g., Bissell & Duke, 2007).

The IOC in an effort to promote gender equality and empower women's participation and after launching the Gender Equality Review Project is implementing the 25 recommendations from the five themes. There are three recommendations related to Portrayal:

- ❖ Balanced media portrayal of both genders.
- ❖ Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs).

❖ Communication Partnerships.

(IOC Gender Equality Report, 2018)

The IOC claims for fair and equal portrayal of all sportsmen during the Games, sport media representatives and decision- making women in the competitions.

Nowadays, media is widely used very easily by everyone, which is the result of their rapid growth. The Olympic Movement is working on how to use the new technology to its benefit and at the same time how to be protected from the chaotic accessibility through the internet and the dangers it occurs.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

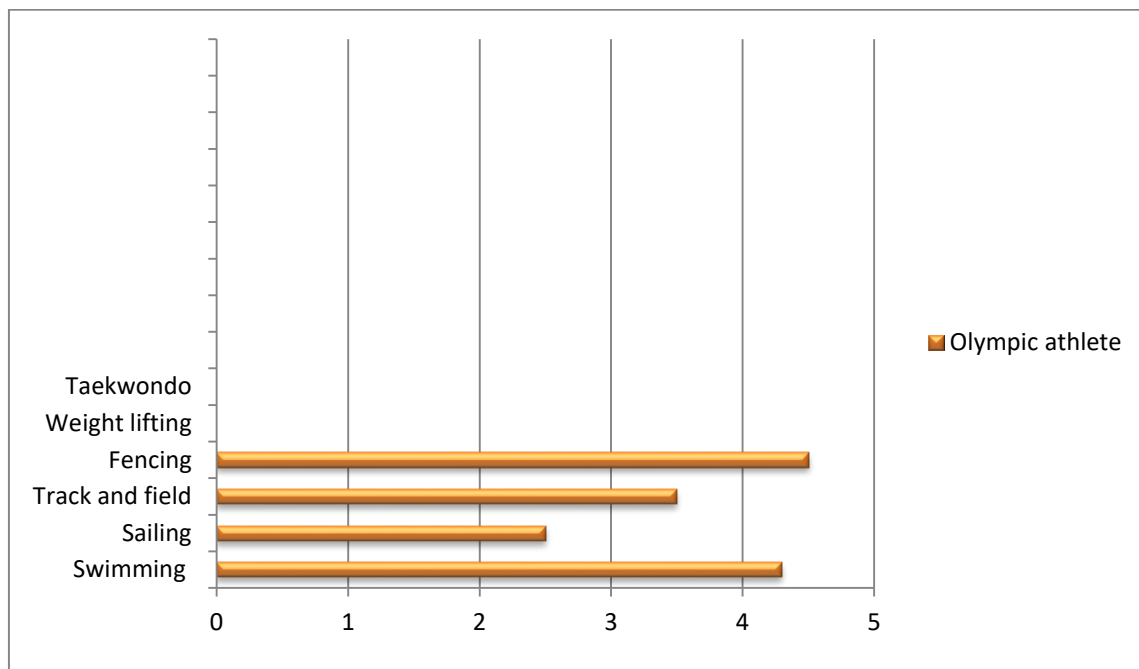
#### **3.1 Sample**

The sample that was used for the research aimed to be as objective as possible. There is almost an equal number of men and women who participated, i.e. 11 men and 15 women athletes, 26 in total. They were all Greek athletes. Age was not a particular limit, as a variety of both women and men between the ages of 18 and 70 were accepted for participation in the study. The 26 athletes were selected based on the following criteria :

1. Athletes who won medals in Olympic Games or Paralympic Games
2. Athletes who took part in Olympic or Paralympic Games
3. World Champions
4. International and National Champions
5. Athletes who are currently active in their sport or have retired as athletes, but work in sports from different fields
6. Athletes who have all the above criteria and are involved in educational programs for children, they are active in promoting Olympism and Olympic values with children

On the following charter it is represented the variety of sports of the interviewed athletes:

Figure 1: The sports of the athletes who participated in the interview



### 3.2 The aim of the research study

The present case study aims to discuss about role modeling as Olympic athletes interpret the meaning through three pillars:

1. What does Olympism mean to them?
2. What does it mean being an athlete role model? What elements compose an athlete as a role model?
3. Do athletes bear (or must bear) the responsibility to act as role models for the youth?

It was chosen qualitative approach, based on the particular topic for research and the research questions discussed. These questions replies on "why" and "how" and not on "how many". The answers to the following questions clarify which is the most suitable for the certain one:

- a) Am I concerned with the individual's views or explanations of what is happening?
- b) Do I think that the "truth" is different for each individual, and I cannot develop scientific 'laws' of behaviour?



Moreover, basic characteristics for qualitative research are used:

1. Smaller sample of population or cases (elite athletes) are used for the approach.
2. The case study is not relied only on numeral analysis (in contrary to quantitative research with numerical data)
3. Data is subjective and abundant in content
4. It is considered the social reality and that is subjective to change from time to time
5. The researcher is the one who collects the data
6. The case study has interpretative approach

(Gratton, Jones, 2004, p.23-28).

### **3.3 The process of data collection**

Since it is decided to explore the reasons and interpretations of the sample population for the research questions, the best option considered to be interviews and have been used as the main tool for collecting the necessary data.

### **3.4 Data Analysis -Analysis of the interviews**

For selecting the row data were used different ways of communication and media. The first approach was network, i.e. through a common person who could bring us in contact or a direct approach where the first step was to introduce the researcher herself and explain the reason of approaching.

For the communication and interview, were used phone calls, e-mails and electronic platforms such as Skype according to the availability and the internet access of the interviewee. The research questions were recorded, saved and transcribed. The interviews were anonymously taken and only when approved by the participant, will be used the names of the interviewee. Taking interviews for the specific research was considered the most appropriate method for the following reasons:

- 1) As a primary research method, the qualitative interview is “a construction site of knowledge” according to Kvale (1996) in Marshall & Rossman (2016)
- 2) Semi-structured interviews provide different insights into people's perceptions and can be analyzed in many ways. (Newton, 2010)

A meeting was then scheduled if the athlete had first agreed to participate. Again in an agreed and comfortable time for the respondent, the phone call (most of the time) was made in a friendly environment, so that the interviewee felt comfortable talking. After the first greeting, the researcher once again informed the athlete he interviewed about the procedure in detail and that the questions would be recorded. After the end of the instructions, the athlete was asked about any questions, if not, they could move on to the interview. The researcher informs each time the recorded button was activated and at the end when it was off. Usually, the interviews did not take longer than 10 to 15 minutes, of course with more or fewer time exceptions, depending on how much information the respondent would share. The order of the ten questions could change during the oral interview, depending on the ongoing discussion. In some cases, if the athlete preferred the alternative of the questions to be shared in advance of the interview so that the answer was better prepared or so as she/he knew the questions and take as much time as they wished for answering them. In other cases, only written answers were preferred to oral ones. However, face-to-face interviewing is preferred as it gives a picture of the athlete's perspective and the research aims to understand. Newton (2010) notes that "any particular interview can be placed somewhere between 'unstructured' and 'structured'" with differences in qualitative and quantitative approach of the interview.

After the completion of the recorded call, athletes had to sign a statement of consent to participate in the survey (see in the appendix) for the confirmation of the recording interview on the one hand and on the other hand for the safety of the researcher that will keep the anonymously of the interview and the personal data of the interviewee.

The amount of data collected was more than enough, so the information had to be more specific. The large sets of data were reduced into smaller points.

### **3.4.1 Interviews with Elite athletes and Olympians**

Specifically, to the question: "What does Olympism mean to you?"

Figure 2: What does Olympism mean to you?

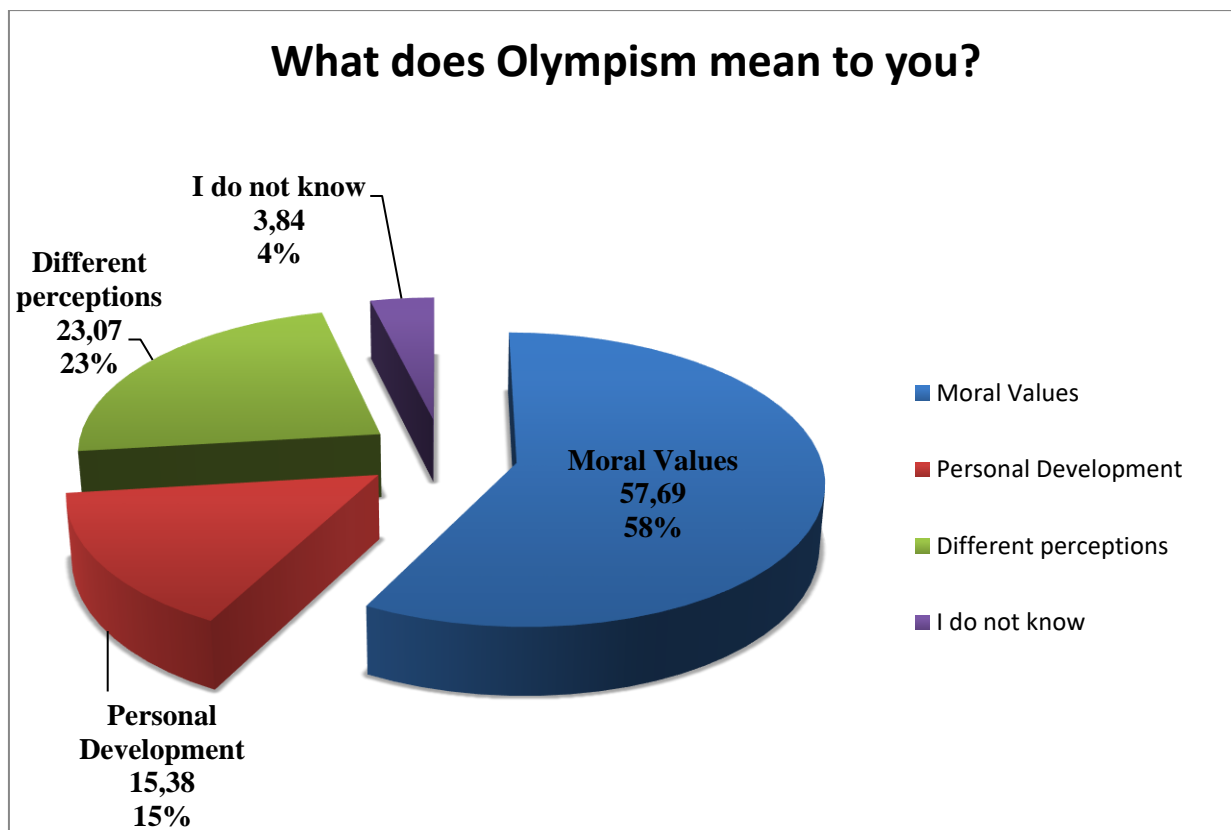


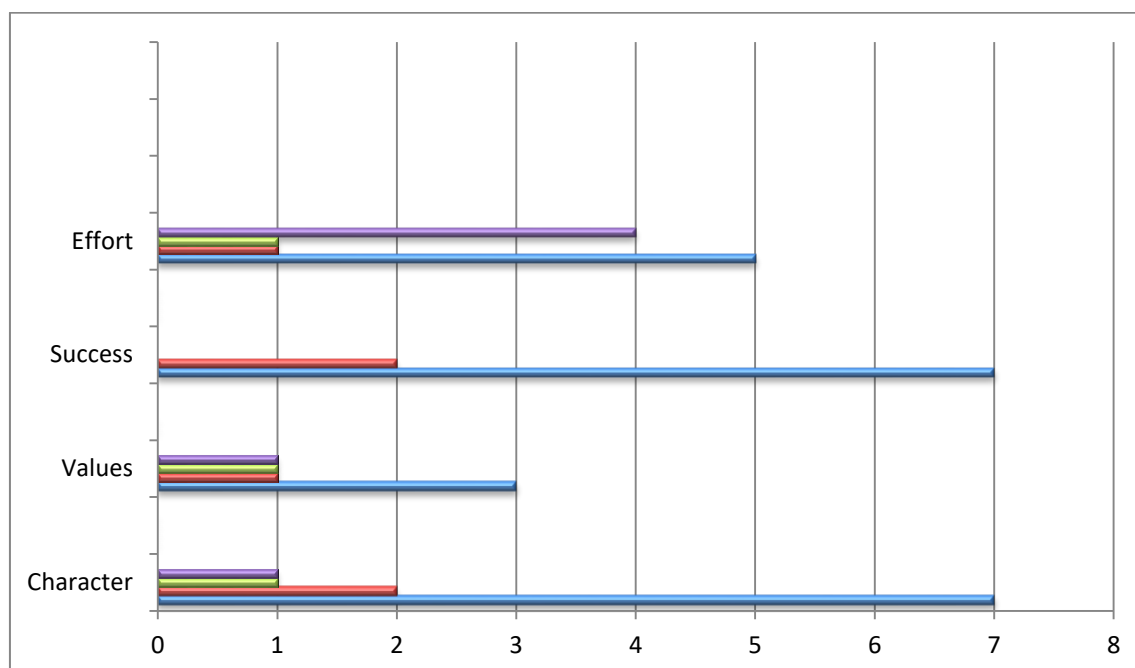
Figure 2 shows that most of the sample perceives Olympism as a set of moral values. In particular, respect, honesty, peaceful coexistence, equality, the principles of peace and fair play are some of the values that the athletes referred to, to explain their point of view when they hear about Olympism.

A smaller part, believes that Olympism contributes in the personal development of the individual during competitions but also in the everyday life.

The smallest sample was unfamiliar with the concept of Olympism, while a percentage had different understandings separately. To be more specific, one of the participants connects his understanding of Olympism with “the participation in Olympic Games and the ideology that follows the organization of Olympic Games” and another believes it is “a sports idea, which derives from ancient Greece and is adapted to modern era”.

Moving on to the second research question "What does it mean to be a model athlete and what elements compose an athlete as a role model", the following figure 3 can give an idea of the personal interpretations of the athletes in the relevant question.

Figure 3: Evidence for evaluating an athlete as a role model

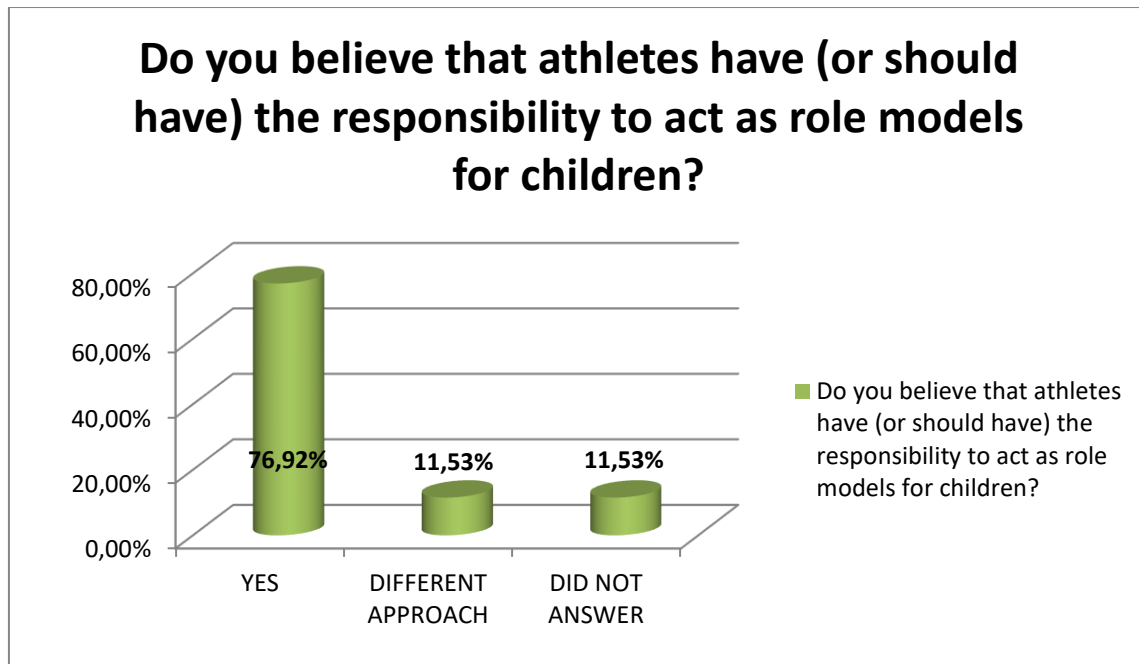


The variety of items considered important according to each participant's interpretation could be a long list, but there was a selection among all the elements that made us create four core groups, including similar data.

- ❖ Most of the participants consider the **character** of the athlete that distinguishes them as role models and explain it in forms of behavior in their sport, in their social behavior, in their personality, in the confidence they have as personalities.
- ❖ Second in line, they believe that a successful career and long-term **success** are important to make them stand out as role models.
- ❖ The **values** that an athlete pursues, such as respect, devotion, self-improvement, the values of Olympism and the way of thinking are enough to make children admire them more than others.
- ❖ Last in line is the **effort** an athlete makes to get a medal and succeed. Struggle and hard work are appreciated, also giving a little credit in talent and setting goals.

The third research question whether “athletes believe that they have (or they should have) the responsibility to act as role models for children, finds the majority in agreement on their responsibility to define a positive role for children (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Do you believe that athletes have (or should have) the responsibility to act as role models for children?



Almost 80% (76.92%) of the participants believe that athletes who are considered role models should also have the responsibility to act in this way. While 11.53% of the participants see the relationship between the model and public responsibility towards the new generation with a different approach. For example, one participant believes that this responsibility should be inherent and personal responsibility, regardless of whether he/she is considered as a role model or not. Finally, there is also 11.53% of participants who did not answer this question at all.

This study is conducted by using methodology in order to be reliable for future use by students or academic. Starting by a question which is the main concern and consequently there are a literature research and review in order to count the followings as reliable.

Beginning with the main sentence- problem (“athletes as role models for youngsters”) it was developed the research. The first step was to start conducting the literature review of the methodology. After a research, the conclusion was that of conducting a qualitative research. Various reasons explain why it is considered for the certain one the best way of this study. Books, articles, websites were useful tools for the making decision on the

methodology that should be used.

First of all, it is necessary to define what do we mean by referring to a research: “Research is a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge”. (Gratton and Jones, 2004). But most important is for the researcher to find the answers he/she is looking for. In order to achieve this result will be needed to follow the steps following:

1. The decision of which question/questions should he attempt to answer and why this one/those ones. It should be decided the objectives of the research.
2. How will this research be developed, what will be the plan for implementing it.
3. Collecting the data, using the research methods that is/ are decided.
4. Data analysis of what has been collected and the theoretical framework of this research.
5. Conclusions and findings from the research and what will be delivered from this case study in public.

The investigation area was always an attractive part of the science. The same it applies in the area of sports research. By the growth and development of sport activities in the International level, it shows new needs which are to be satisfied in the maximum grade it should be done prior to the relevant researches at the each topic.

The development of sports and their avocation in a bigger number of people, created bigger antagonism that in a result the federations, the government operators, the scientific centers of athletic studies, the coaches, etc. they are aiming in the improvement of their breaking record and their results. This creates a broader research area. The physiology of activity, psychology, the history, the sociology are some of the domains that have created the interest of the researchers.

“Research is reiterative – it is based on previous knowledge, which it aims to advance, but it may also develop further research questions” (Gratton, Jones, 2004, p.5). Even though when we refer to research the first thing and most common is that it is only a part of it. There is a process of ending up to the research question and planning how the data will be

collected prior to. Also, the analysis of the data and the report are important for the completion.

The traits (characteristics) of the collected data may distinguish the research into a quantitative or qualitative approach. This case study can be noted as inductive, qualitative research, as there are not used non-numerical data, it is associated with the interpretation approach, the sample is smaller, the data is subjective and the approach is flexible. This means that the information collected has to deal with “values, beliefs and behaviours”, thoughts and personal interpretations (Gratton, Jones, 2004, p.24-25).

The purpose of this research was to discover the interpretations of the elite athletes, Olympic and Paralympic medalists regarding the main sentence- problem (“athletes as role models for youngsters”) and the three research questions of interpreting Olympism, the influence that role model athletes have on promoting the Olympic ideals/values and if they have the responsibility (or must have the responsibility) for acting as role models for the youngsters. Subsequently, this study will then explain in particular which methodology was used, to whom it was addressed, the population selected for the survey and which tool was used for data collection.

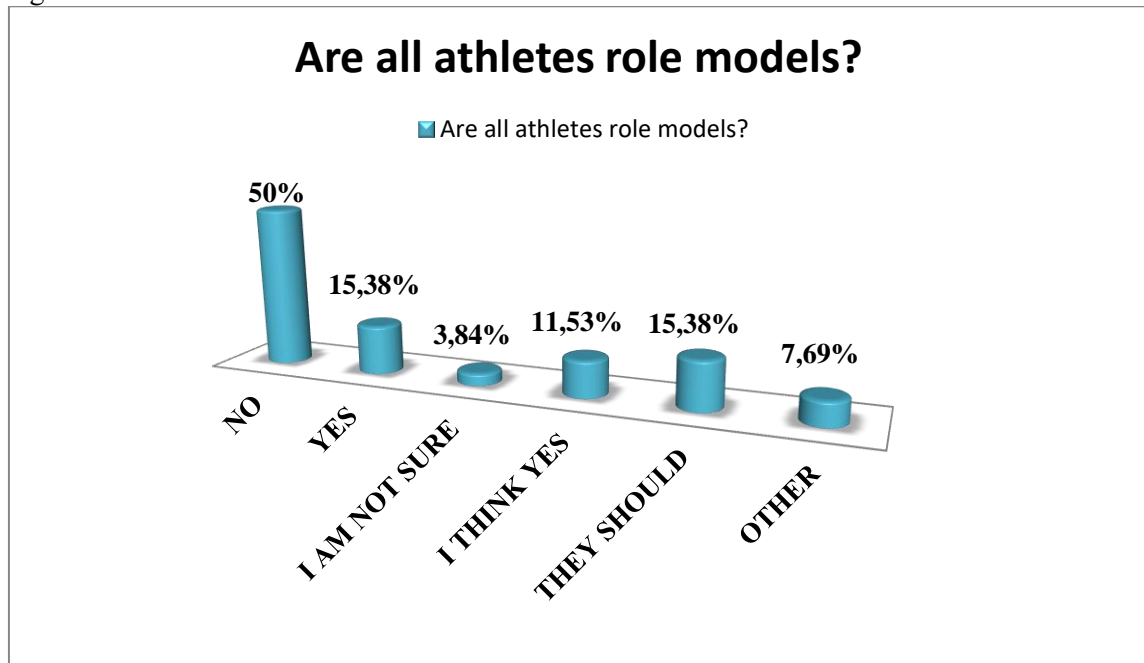
## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter is dedicated to analyzing the findings of this research and exploring the results. In connection with the previous chapter of the methodology, the above statistics will be analyzed in detail and will be presented.

Figure 5 shows the percentages for the question of whether all athletes are standard or not.

Figure 5: Are all athletes role models?



The answers to this question are more than one, creating different views on it. In practice, there is a very large percentage of participants who agree that not all athletes are role models (50%). After this sample, the other participants are divided into different answers. The same number of two groups of participants believe that all athletes are role models and that if they are not, they should be. This can be interpreted in two ways. Either, there is a doubt about the fact that the athlete is equal to the role model, so it is not clear "yes" but a sense of responsibility that it should be. There is the approach of differentiating the athlete as a professional and the athlete while living with social life. These theories can be discussed in detail in the next chapter of course. Also, some of the people who answered these questions clearly show their doubts and are more skeptical about athletes



and role models as a label. For example, one's response was that he could not state that all athletes are necessarily role models, but if one is considered as a role model, then that is a shred of evidence for him/her and not proof. Following this pace and almost the spirit, a small percentage answered with doubt the same question as "I think yes" and "I'm not sure".

The answer to this seemingly easy question seems to confuse the respondents or creates doubt for the answer they give. To go a little further, the answer of a participant who responded to a different perception can clarify this:

The participant in the question if all athletes are role models, answered this:

"I do not like to blame my teammates, I have learned in my life to look only at myself and try to be myself a role model athlete".

Also, the fact that half of the athletes who were asked agree that not every athlete can be considered a role model shows that young people make a choice about who stands out. This can of course be related to the elements that athletes consider as unique to calling an athlete a role model.

For example, one participant said that "A model athlete is an athlete who makes his dreams come true and every day he tries hard to achieve these goals always through noble rivalry", while another distinguishes the athlete from the champion and she says that "Every person / athlete aims to improve their quality of life and this is important to exist as a model in our society and especially among young people. But the goal of a champion has other facts. Strict, demanding, with deadlines and daily challenges that lead to excellence or failure. For me, role models in this category are the champions who can be described as "complete champions" in their lives, when they feel balanced!".

It is worth taking a closer look at the fact as shown earlier in Figure 3 that among all the elements considered necessary, character and success are the ones that are highly valued and are very close to statistics. Championships and medals are almost on the same scale as the personality and character of an athlete on and off the field.

This humanitarian approach justifies the complexity of this "title", otherwise it could only be given to the athletes who won the Olympic medal. A set of variables creates the synthesis of the role model.

On the contrary, regarding the responsibility (or not) of athletes to react as role models, there are surprisingly many respondents who believe that they have or should have the responsibility to behave in this way.

A common phrase that came up with more or less the same words in many athletes was: "Not always, but they must have the responsibility to act as a good example" and can reinforce it with the response of another athlete who specifically says that "of course they have, even more so when there is an Olympic title it is a title with great responsibility". Another one says that "I believe that not only athletes (but not all) some other people or some artists, people of spirit. or after all the people who have to offer for the kids, they have to act as role models".

And while there is another part of the population that was asked the same question and gave different answers, such as "yes and no", this result should not be confused with whether they motivate or influence children to participate in sports or not.

Goodwill to motivate and to set a good example does not guarantee that this will be followed or actually achieved.

Finally, the idea of Olympism does not seem to be much clear to each individual. This can be supported by answers like "Olympism it is something deriving from God" or "Olympism for me is passion, will, struggle, effort! The feeling of participating in the top event in the world is something special and unique!"

On the other hand, it is very encouraging when athletes referred to values such as respect, fair play, tolerance, equality, a peaceful environment, the humanitarian and cultural value of sport, excellence and friendship. The concept of Olympism is difficult in itself, so it is even more when the athlete has not come into contact with the educational aspect of this idea.

Comparing the variables of the three research questions, a comprehensive idea of the athletes' interpretation of the topic discussed is given. Possibly, the results of these research queries should also be considered for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This last chapter will discuss whether the purpose of the study met the results described in the previous chapter and to try to identify the pros and cons of the research and the methodology used for it.

Concerning the influence of athlete role models on youngsters, in terms of motivation and involvement in sports, after the research that was conducted for the master's thesis purpose, it could be said that the correlation between athlete role models and youngsters is not so interrelated for motivating them in the future for participating in sports. The overall research, conduction, and results lead to the following conclusions, which are worth noting:

1. The methodology chosen for the research questions was qualitative, as the aim of the research was to understand and have an interpretive approach to the research. The analysis of different theories through a bibliographic list aimed to explore existing information and approaches and to present the background of research questions.
2. The interview was considered the most relevant and useful data collection tool for the success of research objectives. However, at the end of the interview and after the results were conducted, there were significant advantages and disadvantages that should be noted.

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of using the interview as a methodology

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Interview provides more information than just numbers  The answers are honest	Written answers reveal important information that may be omitted during the oral interview  The interview contains a lot of information that may not be useful

Many questions were open so that the respondent was free to answer - the researcher does not lead the answers

Interviews are time consuming

The interview has depth and provides useful insights

There was no limit to the answers or information provided or restrictions on wording

The language was understood by everyone as both interviewer and interviewee were communicating in Greek - without language restrictions

The researcher can make clarifications before, during and after the interview

There is an interaction between the researcher and the respondent

3. The concept of Olympism does not seem to be understood by some athletes and this raises questions about how much impact can have to the athlete in an effort to pass it on to young children if they do not initially understand it. Or it could be said that there is no clear interpretation of the concept of Olympism, it is rather vague for them. This could also be an interesting question for future research, i.e. among the most successful athletes in the world, how many of them relate to or understand the meaning of Olympism. These qualitative researches and also quantitative surveys are good opportunities to realize where the ideals and values of Olympism and the Olympic Movement meet the reality of the athletes, who are the connecting link between the movement and the masses.
4. Overall, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive idea and sought to cover all aspects of the topic under discussion. To break it down, Chapter 1 dealt with the concept of Olympism which is fundamental to the approach and discussion about the impact of role models on young people. The main points of Olympism were explored in relation to Olympism, and to mention them, we refer to the Youth Olympic Games, Olympic education, the IOA's educational role in teaching Olympic values, and the dissemination of the philosophy of Olympism. And last but not least, the OVEP Program, which is a necessary tool for all those who participate in the Olympic Movement from any position they serve. Chapter 2 dealt with athletes as role models from different perspectives to cover the issue from as many perspectives as possible. Describing the definitions of "role

modeling" and exploring it from three different perspectives, the study investigated women in role modeling, Paralympic athletes and role modeling, and media involvement in promoting role models. There was also an attempt to compare current role models with the heroes of the Olympic Games of antiquity. The results of the study led to two different concepts that may seem similar at first but represent different interpretations.

Chapter 3 was used for the methodology used to conduct the qualitative research of semi-structured interviews. Interviews with elite athletes provided a useful insight into existing theories.

In general, it could be said that role models are athletes who represent ethics such as fair play, respect, and cooperation.

Summing up, based on critical thought, "the influence of athlete role models on youngsters, in terms of motivation and involvement in sports" was not met with the researcher's expectations. Athletes who consider role models can have very little impact (if any) on what choices children will make for their future. Young people may admire them or even identify with them when great moments are written in sports history, but this is probably not enough to attract people to a sports career. Taking this as an opportunity, I would say that even if they enjoy great admiration of the fans, that should be used to influence the youth to participate in sports or physical activities in their daily lives. The focus should not only be on elite athletes striving for excellence, but also on those athletes striving for self-improvement, to those that sport is a part of their lives and on those who understand the social and educational value of sport.

The result of the research was a surprise to the researcher himself because it was not consistent with my expectations. Individual interviews with each of the athletes, the time devoted to each personality gave me more than expected information which led the way to the result in a smooth way. I should have used an open-ended question at the end, as it may provide more data, but it created the necessary experience for the next survey. Another point that could be useful for this research would be cross-checking the data I received from athletes with data collected from children so as to compare the two sides of the same coin.

Without a doubt, the results of research and results are subject to change or replacement by new research and/ or data. Of course the same analysis or research could evolve in the future and give us new knowledge.

Throughout this master's thesis, various interpretations were presented by individuals / athletes with different backgrounds for a complete picture of their roles and influence on young people to participate in sports.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I



**UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE**

**FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE  
SCIENCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT**

***“OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION, ORGANIZATION AND  
MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC EVENTS”***

*“The influence of athlete role models on youngsters, in terms of motivation and  
involvement in sports”*

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What is Olympism for you?
2. What does it mean to be an athlete role model? What elements do you think make it up?
3. Are all athletes role models?
4. What role model did you have and why?
5. Olympic Movement and athlete role models. Can athletes influence the younger generation to promote the Olympic ideals?
6. How is sport related to the socialization of children?
7. What would you say to a child who wants to practice sports?
8. Do you believe that athletes have (or should have) the responsibility to act as role models for children?
9. Paralympic Sports in Greece have been developing rapidly in recent years. What new messages or ideals does it convey to children?
10. What message would you send to the children if it could become a reality from tomorrow?

APPENDIX II



**UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE**

**FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT**

***“OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION, ORGANIZATION AND  
MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC EVENTS”***

*“The influence of athlete role models on youngsters, in terms of motivation and  
involvement in sports”*

**Statement of consent to participate:**

I declare responsibly that I have been informed and accept the terms of participation in this research / dissertation and understand that the interview is optional anonymously and any personal information, other than the interview questions for research purposes, will remain secure and not provided to third parties or organizations.

This form serves the communication of the interviewer and the interviewee.

NAME:

SURNAME:

PHONE NUMBER/ EMAIL:

DATE:

I hereby declare that I agree to take part in the research.

Signature

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