

TEN YEARS ON. THE YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES (YOG)  
THROUGH THE EYES OF AUSTRALIAN ATHLETES

By Suzanne Grayson OLY

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Approved by the Professor body:

1<sup>st</sup> Supervisor: Ian Culpan, PROF. UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY, NEW ZEALAND

---

2<sup>nd</sup> Supervisor: Konstantinos Georgiadis, PROF. UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE,  
GREECE

---

3<sup>rd</sup> Supervisor: Kristine Toohey, PROF. GRIFFITH UNIVRSITY, AUSTRALIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine some of the claims of the Olympic Movement through the eyes of Australian athletes at the latest summer Youth Olympic Games (YOG) of 2018. The dissertation takes a different approach from most previous scholarship that has largely concentrated on the peculiarities of the YOG, like the new sport event formats, legacy aspects related to the athletes, and the educational programme. It discusses the role of the athletes themselves, which is rare in the literature and non-existent in terms of Australian participants who have represented their country at all the games. As well as an academic interest in the subject, I also have a personal interest as a former Olympian. I represented Australia in the marathon at the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996, some years before the YOG existed.

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## GLOSSARY

AOC	Australian Olympic Committee
AYOF	Australian Youth Olympic Festival
CEP	Cultural and Education Programme
CYG	Commonwealth Youth Games
EOC	European Olympic Committees
EYOD	European Youth Olympic Days
EYOF	European Youth Olympic Festival
IOC	International Olympic Committee
JCC	Jewish Community Centre
NOC	National Olympic Committees
SOCOG	Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games
TOP	The Olympic Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WWC	Working With Children
WYG	World Youth Games
YOG	Youth Olympic Games

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

It is debatable, to say the least, that the introduction of the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) has been, or ever could be, an antidote to obesity or inactivity in the young. By definition, these youthful athletes are neither obese nor inactive. In theory, this elite group could be a role model for the youth of the day, but the public's general ignorance of the YOG, as we will later note, makes this unlikely. Adolescents are more likely to be inspired by the lifestyle and achievements of a LeBron James than by any YOG participation.

The purpose of this study is to acquire a greater understanding of Australian athletes' perspectives of the YOG. Do the YOG inspire young athletes to learn through sport? If so, how?

By further understanding how the YOG will educate young athletes, through the philosophy of Olympism and the incorporation of Olympic values into their lives, this research aims to add to previous scholarly literature, adding data specifically from Australia, where no previous research has been conducted. Can the games provide the inspiration, knowledge and education envisioned by the IOC, to act as a catalyst in creating a healthier global society? Or are the Games another high-performance event along the pathway to achieving the Olympic Dream?

In 2007, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Jacques Rogge identified the widespread decline in physical activity, the disappearance of open spaces in the cities and the rise of a computer culture, as factors associated with the increase in obesity among youth (IOC, 2007a, as cited in Judge, Peterson, & Lydum, 2009). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) had previously issued a warning that a "sedentary lifestyle could very well be among the 10 leading causes of death and disability in the world" (WHO, 2002, p. 1). WHO's Director-General, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, called for action and a move for health, amongst individuals, families, communities, governments and policy-makers. Recognising the benefits of physical activity, which include lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, breast and colon cancer, together with the positive effects on mental health, maintenance of a healthy weight and delaying the onset of dementia, a need for a global policy was addressed. To improve prevention and treatment of non-communicable

diseases WHO Member States agreed on a voluntary global target of a 10% reduction in the prevalence of physical inactivity by 2025.

The introduction of the YOG in 2010 was not only a response to the call for action from global health organizations but also to avoid losing an important target group from within the Olympic Movement. In order to become “more attractive, younger and fresher” Rogge acknowledged the need to “engender the interest of young people in the thrill of the sport” (Schnitzer, Brandsetter, Lang & Kopp, 2014, p. 138). It is the IOC’s ability to adapt to such changes in global market trends that the vision of the YOG would be to “inspire young people (in the 15-18 age group) around the world to participate in sport and adopt and live by the Olympic Values” (IOC, 2011, p. 7).

Ten years since the inauguration of the YOG, it is questionable as to whether the multi-sport event has made an impact on the global obesity crisis. Most recent data of worldwide trends suggest not. The global target, to reduce physical inactivity, has been slow and still rising in high-income areas and amongst women (Guthold, R, Stevens, G.A., Riley L.M., & Bull F.C., 2018). Whether athletes have been inspired to promote the philosophy of Olympism or to increase participation, it is difficult to ascertain, yet the YOG appear to be embedded within the Olympic Movement, for now.

Australian athletes have participated in each edition of the YOG since their inception in Singapore in 2010, with 10% of total participants until 2016 continuing on to represent Australia at an Olympic Games. (Refer to Table 1)

**Table 1. Australian Representation at the Youth Olympic Games**

Youth Olympic Games		Athlete Total	Australian Team Members	Olympic Games Representation	Individual Medal Tally		
					G	S	B
2010	Singapore (Summer Games)	3524	100	13	8	15	9
2012	Innsbruck (Winter Games)	1022	13	4	-	-	2
2014	Nanjing (Summer Games)	3759	89	4	3	3	14

2016	Lillehammer (Winter Games)	1067	17	1	-	4	1
2018	Buenos Aires (Summer Games)	4000	88	-	4	8	4
2020	Lausanne (Winter Games)	1788	33	-	1	-	-

*Note.* Data for 2010 from the Australian Olympic Committee [AOC] (2010), for 2012 and 2014 from AOC (2014), for 2016 from AOC (2016), and 2018 from AOC (2018). Data for Olympic Games representation provided by the Australian Olympic Committee, personal communication, March 9, 2020.

Despite claims by Rogge, that the YOG are not mini-Olympic Games, due to its innovative sports programme, giving the event its own identity, some scholars argue that the same opinion is not held by the athletes (Krieger, 2012). The IOC has presented figures indicating that from the Singapore 2010 Games, 193 former YOG athletes competed in London 2012, 64 at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games and almost 500 at Rio in 2016 (Kristiansen, MacIntosh, Parent & Houlihan, 2017).

### **The Youth Olympic Games**

When the first YOG took place in Singapore 2010, the programme included 201 events within the 26 official Olympic sports that were to be presented at the London 2012 Olympic Games (IOC Factsheet, (4) Sept 2018). Flexibility within the events, to generate more appeal to a younger audience, led to the inclusion of mixed gender or international teams, and half-court 3 on 3 basketball, were some of the innovative changes made by the IOC. The YOG were to be used as “an incubator for innovation for the International Federations (IF) (IOC, (2), 2018, p. 1). Similarly, the winter editions of the YOG have continued to feature new medal events and mixed gender and/or mixed National Olympic Committee (NOC) teams. The first winter YOG at Innsbruck 2012, featured, women’s ski jumping, snowboard slopestyle and ski halfpipe, all new to the Olympic programme. Validation of these new events having audience appeal is evident with the inclusion of 3 on 3 basketball at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

The inclusion of new sports and new disciplines has not only provided an opportunity for the IOC to test new events and harness the appeal of a youth audience, but also to attain gender balance. The YOG in Buenos Aires 2018 featured full gender balance across the

programme for the first time in Olympic history, a key focus point of Agenda 2020 (IOC, 2018, 19<sup>th</sup> Oct). The introduction of an innovative two-wave organisation system in Lausanne for the 2020 games boosted the hosting capacity of the games, once again allowing for equal gender representation (IOC, 2019, 24<sup>th</sup> Sept). With this expanded schedule, Australia sent its largest-ever winter YOG team of 33 athletes to Lausanne, almost doubling the size of the previous winter team (Rowbottom, 2019).

By providing a parallel to the Olympic Games' summer and winter programmes the intentions of the YOG were to create a positive sporting experience specifically for adolescents (Judge et al., 2008, as cited in Judge et al., 2009). Keeping some of the familiar Olympic symbols such as the podium, the values, and the flame, Rogge believed there was no need to mimic the Olympic Games. Of equal importance to the sports events, the inclusion of a Cultural and Education Programme (CEP), renamed Learn and Share after the 2012 YOG, would aim to educate the youth around the traditional values of the Olympic Games; the pursuit of excellence, respect and friendship, while having fun (IOC 2015).

The Cultural and Education Programme (CEP) for the inaugural YOG in 2010, was developed by the IOC with support from international groups such as the World Organization of Scout Movement and was based around five themes;

1. Olympism
2. Skills Development
3. Well-being and Healthy Lifestyle
4. Social Responsibility
5. Expression

(Torres 2010, IOC, (1) 2015, p. 3).

The blending of sporting, educational and cultural activities has now been promoted as the Compete, Learn and Share experience, with the focus at the 2018 YOG Games in Buenos Aires on three central themes:

- Athlete Performance,
- Protect the Clean Athlete
- The Athlete Beyond Sport

(IOC (3), 2018, p. 2).

It is both education and culture that were at the core of the development of the YOG as a means to not only complement the Olympic Games but to provide the younger generation, between the ages of 14 and 18, (now 15-18) education based on values (IOC News, 26 April, 2007). By offering this unique experience to young athletes and local youth, the IOC's vision of building a better world through sport moves a step forward when the "participants return to their communities as ambassadors for sport and Olympism" (IOC, 1, 2015, p. 3).

### **Background of the Problem**

Research on the YOG has been limited. Even before the first edition in 2010, some scholars had labelled the games as "The Best Kept Secret" (Judge et al., 2009, p. 173). The low level of personal and public awareness of the YOG among administrators, sports leaders, coaches, athletes (Judge et al., 2009) both in America and Greece (Judge, Kantzidou, Bellar, Peterson, Gilreath, & Suber, 2011) raised concerns for the games' future and highlighted the need for effective messaging in advertising campaigns. The need for future research, outside the United States, was recognised early as a means to attain a global perspective that will provide greater data about the actual outcomes of the YOG as opposed to the intended outcomes that have been suggested by the IOC (Judge, Peterson, Bellar, Gilreath, Wanless, Surber & Simon, 2012).

Kristiansen's (2015) research of the Norwegian Olympic Youth Team's experiences of the first winter YOG in 2012, concluded: "future research is needed to examine if the IOC's intentions to make this a different kind of competition will succeed both at an organizational level and all the way down to the athletes' perceptions" (p. 40). There have been rare works of scholarship based on athletes from Norway, Germany, Canada, together with some broad cross-sectional studies of participants. While the IOC's intention to reduce the importance of competition by offering cultural learning opportunities outside the competitive programme, the decision invoked criticism from within the Olympic Movement (Wong, 2012) and notably the perceptions of the athletes from the Singapore 2010 YOG were in contrast to documents presented by the IOC (Kristiansen, 2015).

Notably, since the YOG were launched, significant research has focused on the CEP, the event format and ethical considerations relating to the young ages of the athletes. Parent, Kristiansen and MacIntosh (2014) have observed, that in sports events, researchers have been

focused on marketing and sponsorship, risk management, volunteers, spectators, management/governance and more recently legacies.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Australia has been represented at all summer and winter YOG since 2010, yet to date, there has been no research directly related to Australian youth participants who have participated at the Games. (Refer to Table 1)

The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) granted permission to conduct a quantitative study with team members of the Australian 2018 Buenos Aires YOG team. Team members could be accessed at a camp in Sydney prior to their departure and then again on their return, as per the most convenient means due to an athletes' place of residence.

This research investigates whether the YOG can provide an experience that will foster and empower young Australian athletes in both their sporting career and beyond. Their perceptions, understanding, and experiences of the 2018 YOG will be attained over two interview sessions.

### **Research Question**

The primary research question was based around the following research statement:

- The Youth Olympic Games provide the platform to inspire participants to become ambassadors of the Olympic values.

This leads to the research question:

- Do the Youth Olympic Games inspire young athletes to learn through sport? If so, how?

### **Limitations**

First-round interviews were conducted face to face in a dedicated interview room. Except for one participant, second round interviews were conducted by Skype. Whilst these interviews were pre-arranged, to be conducted at a convenient time for each participant, the absence of similar interview conditions of the first-round may have impacted on the author being able to establish rapport and ensure each participant was engaged in the conversation.

The age range of the Australian team was 15 to 18 years, with the 15-year age group accounting for only 6.8% of the team total of 88 participants. (See Table 2)

**Table 2. Age Breakdown of Australian Team Members at the 2018 YOG**

<b>Age of Team Members</b>	15 years	16 years	17 years	18 years
<b>Number in Team</b>	6	21	37	24
<b>% Team Total</b>	6.81	23.86	42.04	27.27

Whilst the author purposively selected a group of 16 athletes (8 male and 8 female) who were between the age of 15 and 18 years, one methodological limitation that arose was the availability of participants for the sample group. Non-acceptance to participate and a busy schedule of activities during the pre-departure camp resulted in no 15 or 16-year-olds being available for interviews during the time frame. The final five participants included four 17-year-olds and one 18-year-old, of which three were female and two male. It is possible that responses may differ, given the age, gender and competitive sports experience of the athletes.

Future research could aim to expand the study group to include a cross-section of participants from all age groups, evaluating possible age or gender differences, thereby strengthening research in this area. In addition, longitudinal studies would provide information to analyze the sport participation pathways of YOG participants, which could be of interest to national sports federations and Olympic committees.

### **Summary**

The inclusion of the YOG into the Olympic programme was the IOC's action to introduce Olympism and the Olympic values to youth, in the hope of turning the tide on rising obesity and the growing rate of inactivity, particularly amongst teenagers.

Existing research has predominantly focused on aspects such as the CEP and the innovative sports formats. Ten years and six editions later, this qualitative study aims to add to the rare works of scholarship that is country-specific, by examining Australian participants at the 2018 YOG, in terms of their perception, understanding and experiences drawn from the global multi-sport event.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following review of literature presents a critical analysis of information pertaining to the YOG and to sporting festivals for youths that are of significance to this thesis.

#### **Olympism**

The Olympic Charter (2019) states that modern Olympism was conceived by Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the International Olympic Committee in 1894. His vision ultimately led to the realization of the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 and the creation of one of the greatest global multi-sport events.

Listed as Fundamental Principle 1, the Charter defines Olympism as “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” (IOC, 2019, p. 11).

Whilst there were both contradictions and inconsistencies within de Coubertin’s writings, his perception of Olympism was governed by religion, peace and beauty, with education being the tool for promoting his ideology (Loland, 1995). A distinguishing feature of Olympism is the pursuit of moral values through sport, with the main goal to educate the mind, body and soul of the individual (Loland, 1995). Parry argues that Olympism in sport is linked to international understanding, social and moral education, global culture and peaceful coexistence (Parry, 2006).

Despite de Coubertin not articulating a clear and concise definition of Olympism, Torres (2006) maintains that values which have been repeatedly emphasized in discussions include excellence, peace, justice, mutual respect, holistic human development and non-discrimination.

Olympism has been described in numerous ways. According to Loland (1995), de Coubertin’s Olympism could be interpreted by having four key objectives: (1) to educate and

cultivate the individual; (2) to cultivate the relationship between men and society; (3) to promote international peace and understanding; (4) to worship human greatness and possibility (p. 63-65).

The educational rationality behind Olympism suggests that the pursuit of moral values can be shaped by sport, specifically the Olympic Games. With the quest for victory and commercial benefit amidst the highly specialised entertainers, otherwise known as Olympic athletes, Loland (1995) suggests the values of friendship and mutual respect seem to be unimportant. Besides, efforts for peace-promoting functions have been questionable. Concerns of commercialisation and gigantism have become a major problem for the Olympic Movement with Olympism being “overshadowed by controversial perceptions on hosting the Olympic Games” (Prüschenk & Kurscheidt, 2017, p. 357). The Olympic Movement has worked at redefining Olympism in contemporary times, with the YOG as the centrepiece aiming at “fostering the bridging capital of Olympism, notably amongst youngsters” (p. 374).

Rogge’s vision of the YOG was that it would provide education based on Olympic values, which originated from the concept of Olympism (Judge et al., 2009). This closely aligned with de Coubertin’s pedagogical philosophy for the modern Olympic Games, which emphasized sport as a means of educating people, creating international understanding and a peaceful co-existence. His five Olympic pedagogical principles of fair play, the pursuit of excellence, respect, peace, and universality would serve as a guideline for the behaviour of participants in sport (Schnitzer et al., 2014).

Prüschenk and Kurscheidt’s (2016) data revealed that under 30-year-olds and value-oriented respondents appreciated the YOG, thereby possibly providing the Olympic Movement with an opportunity to shift the perception of Olympism and foster the Olympic values, particularly amongst the youth. Their study was, however, linked to the Sochi 2014 Games and not an edition of the YOG (as cited in Schnitzer, et al. 2018).

Criticism of the ideology of Olympism has been centred on the absence of universal ideas and its elitist, exclusionary and racist nature that were inherent in the early years of the Olympic Movement (Chatziefstathiou, 2011). While de Coubertin spoke of universal ideals, the very nature of amateurism excluded working classes from sport, contrary to the “sport for all” focus of Olympism post World War I.

As Wamsley (2004), who in general is a sceptic of the Olympic Movement, suggests, “Olympism remains the marker of distinction, a deified space once shared only by the notion of amateurism” (p. 231). Olympism may have had “the greatest impact on the lives of ordinary men and women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Loland, p. 66) but it “may no longer be considered as providing a vision of social change” (Prüschenk & Kurscheidt, 2017, p. 355).

The exclusion of women from earlier editions of the Olympic Games and the provision of a podium to celebrate “physical masculinities in contradistinction to other masculinities” raises questions with critics such as Wamsley (2004) about the universal ideals of Olympism (p. 235).

Olympism and the Olympic Movement have long been labelled Eurocentric, which cannot be denied when the Olympic Games were developed in the “cradle of Western civilization in Ancient Greece” (McNamee, 2006, p. 177) and the IOC has its headquarters in Switzerland. Eichberg (1984) noted that Olympism was more than an ideology. It is a social pattern, “which forms everyday life above and beyond sport – the everyday culture of the western (and east European) industrial society” (p. 97). Furthermore, Eichberg (1984) and other scholars have highlighted the non-recognition of non-Western sports within the Olympic Games programme.

By the end of the nineteenth century, as sport was growing in popularity, de Coubertin viewed sport as a means of contact and communication. To Parry (2003) sport was universalisable, a Kantian principle referring to an activity that was accessible for everybody. Although Olympism seeks to be universal in its values, which then, in turn, become universal general principles, for Parry this seems a “fond hope and a naïve optimism” (p. 5) The differing conceptions of Olympism, as identified by Parry (2006), suggest that there is no universal idea, as the principles of Olympism will change and be interpreted with “different expressions in time and place, history and geography” (p. 191).

For de Coubertin, the objective of Olympism, “was to prepare man, to prepare humanity, for the new demands, for the challenges of the twentieth century” based on physical, moral and intellectual education (Schantz, 2015, p. 4). As Schantz (2015) suggests, Olympism has been interpreted, modified, re-interpreted or ignored by Olympic stakeholders. As the Olympic movement has faced technological and societal change, many aspects of de

Coubertin's ideology are now obsolete and not appropriate for the twenty-first century. With its humanistic traits, Davis (1997) views the concept of Olympism and humanism as ambiguous and as vague as each other (in Schantz, 2015). However, it is this difficulty to describe and define Olympism, along with the adaptability of the concept that Schantz also concedes is a reason for its global success, and draws optimism for the future.

The Olympic Games represent the platform of the Olympic values of respect, friendship and excellence. However, as a result of organizational changes to both the IOC and the Olympics as a sport mega-event, scholars believe the socio-political environment that has been created is detrimental to conveying Olympic values (Allison, 2004; Fusetti, 2011 as cited in Prüschenk & Kurscheidt, 2017).

Lenskyj (2012), a strong opponent of the Olympic Movement, criticises the “unquestioned value of Olympism as a key tool in character-building and moral education” (p. 265). Whilst both curriculum and pedagogy are desirable outcomes, the tainted history of the Olympic Games and the reliance on both the sport and athletes “to transmit moral and ethical lessons to children and youth” is to her a flawed initiative (p. 266). An industry that has failed to represent fair play, international harmony and equal opportunity is hardly the values-education message that fits within the Olympism model. Lenskyj (2012) also draws attention to the systemic problems of corruption, drug use, bribery, commercialism, and gender discrimination that have plagued the Olympic industry.

Furthermore, Lenskyj (2012) questions how academics in the specialised field of education can build a curriculum with no evidence-based research and rely on the dated foundations of de Coubertin's nineteenth-century writings.

Maguire, Barnard, Butler and Golding (2008) concluded that the contradiction between the ideals of Olympism and the realities of the modern Olympics is that the legacy of modern Games is consumption. “The media/marketing/advertising/ corporate nexus is concerned less with the values underpinning Olympism per se and more with how such values can help build markets, construct and enhance brand awareness, and create ‘glocal’ consumers/identities” (p. 2042).

A key feature of the YOG initiative was the IOC's attempt to de-emphasize the competitive aspect of sport via the inclusion of the CEP and thereby introduce young people to Olympism and the Olympic values. Without an official medal tally and records to break, the move away from a competitive programme resulted in an initial decline in interest, especially among the athletes (Wong, 2012). Whether the educational aims will match the sport ambitions of elite youth in the future or the educational programme will have the necessary appeal to reignite the somewhat tarnished public perception of the Olympic Games, will continue to be an area for further research.

### **Sporting youth festivals prior to the YOG**

The introduction of the YOG in 2010 by the IOC was not the first new, global multi-sport event since the 1924 winter Olympic Games. In 1991, Jacques Rogge himself, who at the time was president of the European Olympic Committees (EOC), had already launched the European Youth Olympic Days (EYOD) (Wong, 2011) that aimed at engaging young people with sport participation. It was renamed the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) in 2003, to give the event a cultural theme. The first summer edition was conducted in 1991 in Belgium with the winter version in Italy in 1993. This continued the biennial multi-sport programme of the Olympic Games themselves. As some scholars have seen with the YOG, the EYOF has gained a reputation as a platform for the development of future champions and potential Olympians (Wong, 2011).

As a legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) initiated the Australian Youth Olympic Festival (AYOF) Aimed at providing elite sporting opportunities for young people it was part of the financial legacy obtained from the Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Game (SOCOG) for the preparation of future Olympic teams. The festival incorporates Olympic protocols including an athletes' parade, an opening and closing ceremony lighting of a festival flame and the raising of the Olympic flag. This IOC sanctioned multi-sport event was held biennially between 2001 and 2009 and since then every four years. The switch to a four-year cycle was the result of both an overcrowded global sporting calendar, for the 2010 YOG was due to be held just before the AYOF, and the increasing financial cost of organizing the event. President of the AOC, John Coates, announced in 2009 that due to the popularity and prestige of the AYOF the programme had increased from 10 sports in 2001 to 17 sports in 2009. Mirroring this increase, the cost of organizing the festival had also increased from \$2.1 million in 2001 to be budgeted at \$4.6

million in 2009. Being fully funded by the AOC, with the IOC providing a solidarity grant toward the balance, it could not continue to operate biennially (Wong, 2011).

Together with the accomplishments of the EYOF and AYOF, it was no coincidence that the IOC's YOG were built on the same model, as Rogge shifted to the presidency of the IOC in 2001. Despite the positive spin that the YOG attempts to deal with obesity and to increase youth participation in sport, the initiative has been plagued with conflicts and tensions. Some scholars have criticized the model as being an elite sporting contest that is dominated by excessive competition (Wong, 2011). Among other potential negatives, some critics have noted that in an already crowded sporting calendar, the YOG target only the top one per cent of athletes, that they have a detrimental effect on smaller regional sports competitions, and that they increase costs for NOC's and IF's. Wong (2011) voiced concern that the YOG could become "just another sport spectacular in a crowded sports programme" (p. 1845). We shall see that some scholars have voiced the same criticisms against the YOG.

Acknowledgement of a crowded global calendar resulted in the IOC accepting the repositioning of the YOG to a non-Olympic year. Recommendation 25 of the Olympic Agenda 2020 states that the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the summer YOG "to be postponed from 2022 to 2023" (IOC, 2014, p.19). However, during the 132<sup>nd</sup> IOC session in February 2018, it was announced that the date had been changed back to 2022, with the host city later being confirmed as Dakar, Senegal (IOC, September, 2018).

Future studies are needed on the impact of the YOG upon the global calendar, specifically whether it will diminish the need for the EYOF and the AYOF, as a result of its wider global reach. This question, however, lies outside the scope of this thesis.

The Maccabiah Games, which claim to be the third-largest sporting event in the world according to the number of athletes who participated, was first held in Israel in 1932. Although many nations compete, it is limited to Jewish athletes and any resident of Israel. It came under the auspices and supervision of the IOC in 1961. Held thereafter every four years in the year following the Olympic Games the multi-sport event includes a junior division for young athletes aged 15-18 (Caplan, 2015). Recognising all 28 current Olympic sports there is provision for accepting new sports, provided there are at least four delegations to take part.

These have included sports such as chess, netball, cricket, and karate and have not had the innovative flair as seen in the YOG to date.

The JCC Maccabi Youth Games were first held in 1982 for Jewish teens between 13-16 years and include a selection of Olympic sports. Whilst the games are held each year in North America, more than 120,000 athletes from across the globe have participated in recreational and athletic activities ([www.jccmaccabigames.org](http://www.jccmaccabigames.org)). Similar to the YOG these games provide opportunities for cultural and social engagements as well as athletic events. Sometimes like the YOG, they include mixed teams if a delegation is unable to field a complete team.

In September 1994, in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Olympic Movement, Russia hosted 38 countries at the Olympic Youth Games with a programme of events from fourteen sports (Kofman, 2012).

These games were closely followed by the Moscow Winter Games of Olympic Hope in March 1995, with over 1.3 million school children and students participating for awards in ten different sports. Among the participants were representatives from Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Sweden, Hungary, and 32 Russian cities (Kofman, 2012). In October 1995, building on the success of the two Russian games, a model program for a large-scale competition for young people was presented to then IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch.

The IOC endorsed this proposal for a competition for young people to be held in Moscow during the summer of 1998. Whilst the Olympic flag could be raised at the different venues and the Olympic Charter would govern the rules and regulations, the word “Olympic” could not be used in the competition name. It was decided that the festival, which would not extend for more than nine days, be named the World Youth Games (WYG).

A total of 7842 participants from 68 countries took part in 15 Olympic sports and 32 demonstration (non-Olympic) sports, at the WYG in Moscow from 11-19 July 1998. During these games, there was an extensive cultural program for children and youth while showcasing Moscow’s reputation as one of the largest cultural centres of the world. The games’ motto of “Moscow is an open world for childhood” highlighted the focus on youth with an International Forum, “Youth-Science-Olympism,” held in conjunction with the games

(Kofman, 2012, p. 33).

The vision and context of the 1998 WYG together with the supporting cultural program closely reflects Pierre de Coubertin's concept for the modern Games, "not only to be celebrations of athletic excellence but cultural events including elements of art and beauty as well" (Loland, 1995 p. 62). Coubertin believed, that the arts could enable and elevate modern sport. His "goal to educate and cultivate the individual through sport", (Loland, 1995, p. 63) was similarly recognized within the diverse programme of the first WYG.

A second WYG in Moscow did not eventuate. A more modest version modelled on the WYG-98, that included the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, Baltic States and regions of Russia in 2002 was conducted in Moscow, attended by the newly appointed IOC president Jacques Rogge. Perhaps the WYG provided further evidence as to the need for the development of teenage sport within the Olympic Movement and can be viewed as the forerunner of the 2010 YOG.

The Commonwealth Games Federation introduced its version of an international multi-sport event for athletes aged 14-18 in August 2000. The Commonwealth Youth Games (CYG) are held no more than once in each quadrennial and since 2008 not in the year of the Commonwealth or Olympic Games. Participation is open to territories of the Commonwealth and has included a selection of 7-10 Olympic or Commonwealth Games sports in each edition. Australia has participated in all six CYG (Commonwealth Games Federation [CGF], n.d.).

### **The Youth Olympic Games**

Firstly, we will evaluate the actions and reasons behind the inception of this international multi-sport event for teenagers and its relationship to the Olympic Games. Then, we will examine research that relates specifically to understanding the athletes' perspectives of this unique sporting experience. Scholars have analyzed the YOG from different perspectives, focusing on the educational programme, the new sports format, stakeholder/network relationships and legacy aspects related to the athletes. Some research has been conducted on Olympism, the Olympic Values and Olympic Education in the context of the YOG with documentation of the athletes' perceptions. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no data published specific to Australian youth athletes, even though a



representative team from Australia has participated at every edition, both summer and winter, since becoming a feature of the IOC's international sporting calendar. We intend to address the gap in this thesis.

### **Aims, objectives and vision of Olympism as it applies to youths**

Drawing on the activities of the Olympic Movement, the IOC focused on reaching the youth communities of the world to introduce Olympism and promote the Olympic values (IOC, 2011, as cited in Schnitzer et al., 2018). When Jacques Rogge was elected as IOC President in 2001, he pledged “to bring the IOC closer to society through innovation” (Clarey, 2010, as cited in Wong 2012, p. 140). It had been perceived that the Olympic Movement had largely neglected the needs of young people, motivating Rogge to present a case for the implementation of the YOG. It has even been suggested that the boycotts of the Moscow games in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1984 were the catalyst for funding the YOG, although we might add that this is open to debate (Barker, 2018). It is noteworthy that a reoccurring theme of the Olympic Games has been to “call upon the youth of the world ” during the closing ceremonies. As early as 1924 a day of sports for younger children was included in the Olympics (Barker, 2018).

Judge et al., (2009) who published findings before the first Youth Games, conducted interviews with 268 participants consisting of coaches, athletes, administrators/sport officials and parents from six different sports, ranging from youth to professional. The participants were representative of the United States geographic and socio-economic diversity. They concluded that the YOG would achieve Rogge's goal of sharing the Olympic values and increase youth participation in sport. We will see later how accurate their forecast was.

Aligning with Pierre de Coubertin's vision of an educationally focused sport festival that targeted the student youth of the world, Rogge believed this sport event would address the needs of today's society (Krieger, 2012). As the founder of the modern Olympic Games, it was de Coubertin's educational interests that were clearly evident in the aims of the original 1908, Olympic Charter (Binder, 2012, p. 280). Among other items, its aim was:

- To educate 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.

These concepts are still relevant in the Olympic Charter.

“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” (Olympic Charter, 2019, p. 11).

The common thread of de Coubertin’s educational philosophy was evident at the XIII Olympic Congress in Copenhagen in 2009, when the three aims for the newly conceived YOG were presented:

- to provide a platform for elite athletes aged 14 to 18 (later changed to 15) in all Olympic sports and introduce to them the Olympic spirit at a younger age;
- to combine the sports event with an educational programme linked to important issues such as the fight against doping and healthy lifestyles;
- to reach out through young people worldwide on the basis of appealing and using powerful communications initiatives that allow young people all over the world to benefit from the sports and educational programme offered to the athletes and the public at the YOG (IOC, 2010, as cited in Parry 2012, p. 140).

Parry (2012) adds further clarification by distinguishing two central aims of the YOG. Firstly, its vision was “to bring together some of the most talented athletes from around the world to participate in a high-level multi-sports programme, with the view to promoting the values of ethical sports participation” (p. 141). This is synonymous with the aim of Pierre de Coubertin, as we have seen. Secondly, there was to be a Cultural and Educational Programme (CEP) within the sporting competitions that would support learning and provide educational experiences. We will discuss the relevance of the CEP to the YOG and this thesis in more detail later in this chapter.

Furthermore, Parry (2003) rightly points out that the focus of interest is not just on the elite athlete but also on everyone, a central feature to the philosophy of Olympism. The values of participation and co-operation provide a developmental influence on social life and contribute to forming desirable characteristics of an individual’s personality (Judge et al., 2009). Accordingly, through the doctrine of Olympism, the YOG could support and promote teaching values and life skills (Judge, et al., 2012).

With the central goal being to provide youth education based on the Olympic values: which are typically considered to be, tolerance, peace, solidarity, democracy, brotherhood and universality, the YOG would parallel the Olympic Games in format, but would present as a platform for education, rather than purely for competition (Judge et al., 2009).

For the IOC, the YOG would demonstrate the Olympic Movement's commitment to young people, not by creating a mini Games, but by emphasizing the importance of educating young participants on core Olympic values and the role of Olympism in society.

When the proposal for the YOG was approved in July 2007, in Guatemala City, President Rogge's comments summarized the IOC's intentions:

"The World Health Organization estimates there are one billion obese people in the world. Children are walking and cycling less, playing fields are disappearing because of real estate pressures and the technology boom is limiting the amount of time kids are devoting to sport - we need to adapt! The YOG will arrest the alarming number of children dropping out of sport. The education component will focus on the Olympic values and the environment and YOG will pay enormous attention to the prevention of doping" (IOC Newsletter, 2008, as cited in Ivan, 2014, p. 56).

The vision of the YOG was to find a means to engage young people in active sport participation, to counteract the rising youth obesity and the increasing drop-off rates in participation while at the same time educating the youth to become sports ambassadors of the future. The main focus of the YOG is "to deliver an experience on and off the field of play which provides skills to the athletes both for their sporting career and beyond sport" (IOC Factsheet, Dec 2015, p. 1).

Not only was there a need to improve health and re-establish interest in Olympic sports among the world's youth (Nordhagen & Fauske, 2018), but Rogge also suggested, one of the main tasks of the Olympic family was to promote Olympism, by transmitting the Olympic values and internationalism (Krieger, 2012). The YOG would provide the catalyst for not only a sporting competition but also educational and cultural initiatives for young people.

Based on research from the 2016 YOG, MacIntosh, Parent and Culver (2019), found that the athletes were not able to recount the Olympic Values of excellence, friendship and respect, despite having 33 Learn and Share activities available to partake in during the Games. However, more importantly, these athletes were able to discover the values through formal and informal learning opportunities that were embedded in the uniqueness of the YOG's sport and learning programme. Allowing athletes the chance to self-educate and make judgments relating to high-performance sport was important, for them to develop their sense of self within the environment of the Olympic Movement.

To sum up this section of the chapter we note that the IOC stated that the objectives of the YOG were to:

- (1) bring together and celebrate the world's best young athletes;
- (2) propose a unique and powerful introduction to Olympism;
- (3) innovate in educating and debating Olympic values and societal challenges;
- (4) share and celebrate the cultures of the world in a festive atmosphere;
- (5) reach youth communities throughout the world to promote Olympic values;
- (6) raise sport awareness and participation among the youth;
- (7) act as a platform for initiatives within the Olympic Movement and
- (8) organize an event of the highest sports international standards (IOC 2011, in Wong, 2012 p. 141).

### **Criticisms of the YOG**

As was hoped by the IOC, the YOG raised the concept of national pride in the first host country of Singapore, as one might expect in a small nation. The effect, however, was not large and was more specific to the segment of the population who were young, highly involved in sport and of the male gender (Leng, Kuo, Bayse-Pee, & Tay, 2014).

Yet, on the other hand, some scholars have viewed the introduction of the YOG to the Olympic Movement as a modernization process, to counter the growing criticism of the gigantism of the Summer Games (Chappelet, 2002, in Schnitzer, Walde, Scheiber, Nagiller & Tappeiner, 2018). We will comment more on modernization and innovation below. Anita DeFrantz, a United States IOC member, argued at the time of the inception of the YOG that targeting youth was unnecessary when there was a greater need in providing access to sports

facilities, particularly for the youth from developing nations and third world countries (Wong, 2011). In addition, there have been other criticisms.

#### *Excessive costs*

Even though the YOG are considered a second-order sports event, requiring less financial and infrastructure commitment as compared to an Olympic Games, the cost of organizing the games has been criticized. Singapore's winning bid was more than two and a half times the recommended cost of \$30 million US, which had been suggested by the IOC. Jorgen Pettersson, the chairman of the biennial International Island Games a mini-Olympics for international small territories and island communities of Europe, which hosted a similar number of competitors to the YOG, voiced his concerns (Wong, 2011). The budget for the YOG was at least 25 times more than the Island Games, where athletes funded their board and travel. Pettersson believed "There's something to be learned from raising your own funding" (Wong, 2011, p. 1841).

Moreover, the Singapore 2010 YOG budget increased threefold past original estimates to \$289 million US (Wong, 2011). The fear of further expansion of the YOG raises concern for its sustainable development and if the continued growth will diminish the need for the European Youth Olympic Festival and Australian Youth Olympic Festival, both of which are sanctioned by the IOC.

IOC member from Indonesia, Rita Subowo (2009), questioned the IOC rationale for introducing the YOG when so few participants are involved. Highlighting the fact that whilst the Olympic Charter conveys Sport for All as one of its main goals, \$61 million US is allocated to the preparation of a small number of athletes who will participate in international competitions like the Olympic Games. While only \$2.2 million US is budgeted for Sport for All programmes, targeted at developing activities for the remaining world population. Directly related to participation rates, Subowo expressed concern with the limited number of only four team sports in the sports programme and with over 200 NOC's participating at the Singapore 2010 YOG, only six teams would be represented.

#### *An inferior competition*

While the IOC's aim was to inspire the youth of the world and increase sporting participation, staging the YOG is a high-performance event for a few privileged athletes.

Some contestants at the first YOG in Singapore did not consider this festival as their most important competition of the year but used the event as a means to showcase their sporting excellence (Krieger, 2012). Similarly, Séguin, Ferrand and Chappelet (2014) noted, that some of the best young athletes did not compete in the first editions of the Games due to conflicting schedules, perceiving other major competitions as more important.

Retrospective research conducted by Kristiansen et al. (2017) of former Norwegian YOG participants, from three editions of the festival (2010, 2012, and 2014), found that not only were the YOG a positive experience, for some it was a “significant motivating factor for staying in elite-level sport” (p. 73). With regards to the sport competition being a beneficial step on the high-performance pathway, the researchers noted while there was no statistical evidence, some athletes reported that “being successful at the YOG increased their self-confidence and belief in what they felt they could accomplish” (p. 83). In contrast, a few athletes from the study group viewed the YOG as the peak of their career, signalling an end of their elite sport participation.

#### *Age groups*

Krieger and Kristiansen (2016) expressed concerns that the change of age groups from the initial 14 to 18 range to 15 to 18 may be perceived as placing a greater emphasis on the elite aspects of competition rather than the idealistic principles and educational intentions as claimed by the IOC that would be transferred via the CEP. The exclusion of 14-year-olds at the YOG is in stark contrast to the IOC’s policy of combining sport and education. Krieger and Kristiansen (2016) also noted that their findings from interviews with German and Norwegian athletes from the Singapore 2010 summer YOG and the Innsbruck 2014 winter YOG, indicated that the CEP was targeted towards the younger athletes and it was, in fact, these athletes who enjoyed the educational activities the most.

In other discussions, the age debate focused on the fact that in the Olympic Games, sports such as diving, gymnastics and figure skating were events that tend to be won by athletes in the YOG age group (Brennan, 2007; Kristiansen, 2015). Was there a need for another Olympics, considering many teenagers had dominated both the summer and winter Olympic Games in these sports? Some international sports federations have set minimum age requirements for participation at the Olympic Games, yet the YOG would override these specifications.

Wong (2011) questioned that by showcasing youth in what is fundamentally a global elite competition raised concerns of the vulnerability of young athletes in terms of stress from premature exposure to media, the pressure to perform, burnout, and the risk of injury to bodies that are still developing. When the pursuit of winning overshadows the sense of play, Wong questions whether the IOC is violating children's rights to play by providing a sporting model that is composed of elite sporting contests. This is contrary to the Olympic Charter, which is embodied by human rights principles. Criticisms of the IOC and youth performing at a young age also extended to youths from developing and third world nations, who are excluded from receiving elite level training as a result of social and economic disparities, and therefore categorized as not "good enough" to compete at the world-class level.

Similarly, concerns of early specialization, burnout, cheating (potential drug use) and an overemphasis on winning, were identified as potential drawbacks of the YOG by 21% of participants in research conducted by Judge et al. (2009).

Whilst young athletes have always competed at the Olympic Games, Lucidarme and Parry (2011) believe that the YOG not only reinforce the practice of early specialization and early talent identification but represent a "step towards the systematic distribution of elite sport into the child population" raising serious ethical risks (p. 170).

### *Mini Olympics*

Rogge claimed that the YOG "should not be seen as a mini-Olympic Games" (Krieger, 2012, p. 712). Yet Krieger's research of the perceptions of athletes, who took part in Singapore, shows that they likened it to the "real Olympic Games". These results are at variance with the rationale claimed by the IOC. The format of the sports programme in Singapore so closely anticipated the 26 sports to be held in the London 2012 Olympic Games, that it is difficult not to see the connection with high performance and elite athletes.

In addition, the elimination of participants aged 14 sparked suggestions that the IOC wanted to increase the competitiveness and level of competition amongst the athletes (Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016).

John Coates, President of the AOC, acknowledged that whilst the AYOF has become a stepping-stone to the Olympics, “this will happen on a world scale with the YOG” and “enhance the Olympics, not detract from it” (Wong, 2011, p. 1844). While IOC president Jacque Rogge reinforced the view of many, that the YOG was very much a stage for competition in his opening remarks of the Singapore YOG that “This evening marks your entry to the Olympic world. You will test the limits of your abilities and push past them. Many of you will compete at future Olympic Games” (Weinreich, 2010). On the other hand, a study of young Australians suggests that youth sports do not necessarily develop Olympic champions (Gould & Carson, 2004).

Krieger and Kristiansen (2016) also noted that in IOC Olympic Games related publications, the YOG are “continuously referred to as *preparation* for the Olympic Games” (p. 1514). The sporting success of young athletes has been celebrated and referred to as “graduates” from the YOG has been notably tracked and publicized on the IOC website. At the 2012 London Olympic Games, a total of 23 athletes from the 2010 Singapore YOG won a total of 25 medals across 11 different sports. This number of successful graduates increased to 80 medals at Rio, with two thirds from athletes who competed at Singapore and the remainder took part in the 2014 Nanjing YOG. Overall, YOG athletes won medals in 19 different sports. Moreover, it was noted that Australia was the most successful nation among the YOG prodigies, winning 10 medals to finish ahead of Russia and Italy (International Olympic Committee, 2016).

In summing up these results, the IOC website acknowledges the importance of the YOG in the development of talented athletes, being that it may be used as a platform for greater achievement at the Olympic Games.

Whilst sporting success is definitely tracked, there appears to be no follow-up on how the athletes have performed as sports ambassadors in their community, a key feature of the YOG vision. While the IOC maintains that the skills learnt through unique workshops, as part of the CEP, would “allow the participants to return to their communities as ambassadors for sport and Olympism” (IOC Factsheet, Dec 2015, p. 3/4).

*Health and fitness*



Richard Pound, one of the leading members of the IOC, was critical of the fact that the IOCs youth initiative appeared to have been designed with no consultation or coordination with other global agencies in response to the escalating crisis of morbid obesity and diabetes. The YOG were aimed at young people who were already in the sport system. The question he posed, with justification, was “How would the YOG get a single couch potato to take up sport and physical activity?” (Pound, 2008, p. 9). In his opinion, a far more effective programme could have been developed by the IOC, which applied an outreach perspective and developed programmes to entice youth at high risk of disease into healthier lifestyles.

Ironically, two of The Olympic Programme (TOP) sponsors for the first editions of the YOG were Coca-Cola and McDonalds, known for their calorie-dense beverages and food (Dickson & Schofield, 2005). McDonald’s ended their 41 year-long Olympic sponsorship in 2017, three years short of their contract term with the IOC, amidst criticism from public health campaigners who questioned the association with an event that promotes health whilst trying to combat global obesity through the platform of the YOG. Dickson and Schofield suggested that the IOC and its sponsors were in fact “contributing to globesity – the worldwide epidemic that is obesity” while most athlete’s dietary needs are the antithesis of the products provided by these major sponsors (p. 170).

At the time it was also noted by Dickson and Schofield, the World Health Organization had announced, “Major non-communicable diseases accounted for approximately 60% of all deaths and 47% of the global burden of disease. In developing countries, 79% of deaths were attributable to non-communicable diseases” (p. 172). Accelerated changes in diet and physical activity, particularly in the past few decades, had contributed to changes in overweight and obesity statistics globally. By engaging and educating youth to play a more active role in sport, the YOG was going to address this issue. Yet as noted by Wong (2012), Olympic sponsors - Coca Cola and McDonald’s, were granted exclusive access to “promote diets with a higher proportion of fats, saturated fats and sugars to young people from 204 NOCs” (p. 146). This questions the IOC’s intention of delivering educational experiences to the athletes while addressing the global issue of obesity.

#### *Doping, cheating, overspecialization and more*

Brennan (2007) suggested that the YOG would draw further attention to negative aspects of youth sport: cheating, increased dropout rates, overtraining, and overzealous

coaches who put the athlete's health at risk. While Digel (2008) noted that hyper-commercialism and doping could be unintended consequences of the YOG (Judge et al., 2009). It did not take long before doping was discovered in the 2010 games with two athletes failing drug tests and being disqualified from the competition (Hula III & Grayson, 2010).

Parry (2012) echoed a similar view, that the YOG present the risk of “reinforcing the practices of early talent identification and early specialization” if NOC's take winning medals at YOG as seriously as Olympic Games (p. 146). Parry believes the young athletes are open to exploitation. With parents and coaches projecting their ambitions onto their young athletes, “achievement by proxy syndrome”, young athletes will find themselves drawn into malpractice. The risk of burnout as a result of elite competitions and violating children's rights to play raises concern when the Olympic Charter is articulated around human rights principles (Wong, 2011).

#### *Trickle-down effect*

Although the IOC believes the YOG have the potential to impact youth participation at community, national and international levels, with little research on the impact of sports mega-events the “trickle-down benefit” remains to be proven (Wong, 2011). The main premise of the trickle-down effect is that people will be inspired to participate as a result of elite athletes (sport stars and personalities), athlete performances and major sport events. On the contrary, other scholars believe that the trickle-down effect cannot inspire those who have not previously participated in sport to take up a sport. “Weed, Coren and Fiore (2009) concluded that there is no scientifically valid evidence of the effectiveness of the trickle-down effect of major sports events on participation” (as cited in Wicker & Soritiradou, 2013).

#### **The Culture and Education Programme (now known as Compete, Learn and Share)**

This is an important aspect of the YOG that will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Pierre de Coubertin's vision of the modern Olympic Games was closely linked to literature, culture, science, music, architecture and especially education. The difficulty faced by the Olympic Movement was how to keep these educational principles at the forefront of national, political, commercial and media interests to support de Coubertin's original idea for the Olympic Games (Schnitzer et al., 2014). By developing the cultural and education agenda, the YOG provided a pedagogical step back towards de Coubertin's ideology and the true essence of the Olympic Idea. For scholars such as Roland Naul, the introduction of the

YOG was a positive step for the IOC by recognising a return to the Olympics' educational mission and providing the platform to promote Olympic Education (Schnitzer et al., 2014).

The inclusion of the Culture and Education Programme was an integral part of the IOC's philosophy for the YOG, endorsing the importance of combining education and sport (Krieger, 2012). IOC Executive Director of the Olympic Games, Gilbert Felli, noted that the CEP would provide the young athletes "the chance to interact with each other and learn about different cultures and other topics such as Olympism, environment, health, career planning and social responsibility" (Schnitzer et al., 2014, p. 1178).

The CEP would be an avenue to meet the YOG objectives and by engaging in the extensive programme the IOC envisioned young people would:

- (1) learn about important global and sports topics;
  - (2) contribute to the environment and society;
  - (3) interact and build friendships with other young people from around the world  
and
  - (4) celebrate the Olympic Movement and the diverse cultures of the world
- (IOC, 2011 as cited in Wong 2012, p. 141).

Yet, Ivan, Vidoni and Judge (2008), highlight the fact that the IOC had not placed any real criteria for the CEP during the selection of the first host city, even though the candidate cities did pay attention to the components underpinning the YOG: cultural and educational programmes and the athletic competition. It was noted that the details presented during the announcement speech, which heavily emphasized the CEP, were ignored by the Evaluation Commission's assessment. "The educational component turned into a 'vague term' immediately after its original conception" (Ivan, 2014 p. 59). At times the only mention of the educational programmes was in relation to budgetary and operational reports.

The CEP events at the Winter Games in Innsbruck were based around six programmes and workshops: Media Lab, Sustainability Project, Competence Project, World Mile, Arts Project and Olympic Youth Festival 2012 (Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016). In addition, international organizations including the United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, and the International Federations of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were involved in conducting sessions for the young Olympians on topics

like social responsibility (Kristiansen, 2015).

In an attempt to reach out to the global youth, and to raise awareness of the importance of sport and activity, local youth were integrated into the CEP. Students made booths at the World Culture Village in both Singapore and Innsbruck, to represent each of the participating nations at the YOG (Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016).

Prior to the 2016 Lillehammer YOG, the CEP became known as Learn and Share activities, offering interactive workshops and forums based on five themes: Olympism, Social Responsibility, Well Being and Healthy Lifestyle, Skills Development, and Expression (IOC Factsheet, Dec, 2015). The IOC maintained that the skills learnt through these unique workshops would “allow the participants to return to their communities as ambassadors for sport and Olympism” (IOC Factsheet, Dec, 2015, p. 3/4).

#### *The reaction of athletes to CEP*

In keeping with the premise of educating the youth, Krieger (2012) noted that documents of the IOC and the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee (SYOGOC) demonstrate that the intentions of the organizers were not based on high-performance competition. The vision of the 2010 YOG was to “inspire young people around the world to participate in sport and adopt and live by the Olympic values” (p. 712). These values would, of course, include cultural and educational elements.

As early as 2009, a study of the youth movement in the United States was conducted by Judge et al, who interestingly published findings before the first youth games had taken place. They conducted interviews with a substantial number of participants consisting of 268 coaches, athletes, administrators/sport officials and parents from six different sports, ranging from youth to professional. The participants were representative of the United States geographic and socio-economic diversity. They concluded that the YOG would achieve Rogge’s goal of sharing the Olympic values and increase youth participation in sport. We will see later how accurate their forecast was.

Yet can an event such as the YOG support such a vision of the IOC? The results of a study by Krieger (2012) of eight German athletes competing at the 2010 Singapore YOG, cast doubt on this ideal. While the IOC claimed that the YOG were the most important

competition, for the participants, the athletes themselves did not perceive it as the main sporting event of the year for them. A discrepancy lies within the IOC vision to inspire people around the world and stage a high-performance event, claiming sporting excellence, albeit for a few privileged athletes, as we have mentioned previously.

As regards the CEP, Krieger (2012) reported that although the IOC claimed that it was popular with the athletes, there was no evidence or indication of the measurements of athletes' feedback. Data gained through Krieger's research indicated that some contents of the CEP were not perceived entirely positively, in as much as the activities were not suitable for the age of the athletes. The IOC claimed the cultural exchange was achieved primarily through the CEP; however, the athletes in Krieger's research felt they learned more about other cultures as a result of the staging of the YOG itself. The author argued, that by simply being at the games and in the presence of athletes from other continents and countries, insights into the Olympic Movement and learning via Olympic Education were experienced, but not through the organized and planned activities within the CEP. For some, "it was the unplanned activities and the unguided meetings between athletes that shaped their international experience at the Games" (p. 715).

Krieger questions the claimed popularity by the IOC of the CEP, arguing that the athletes participated in the CEP because it provided entertainment for them during the compulsory two-week stay at the Youth Olympic Village. However, the informal experiences were an important outcome as internationalism and the peaceful exchange of cultures was one of the main intentions of Pierre de Coubertin's revival of the Olympic Games (Loland, 2014). De Coubertin believed, that through the practice of a common activity, sport, the opportunity to meet others and therefore have a better understanding of each other, would contribute to international peacemaking (Martínková, 2012).

Schnitzer, Peters, Scheiber, and Pocecco (2014) conducted a study of athletes' expectations and perceptions of the CEP activities during the 2012 Innsbruck winter YOG using a mixed approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The authors completed a survey of 662 young athletes, which represented 64.8% of the total number of participants, covering 60 of a total of 69 NOC's that had sent athletes and conducted six focus groups with 43 athletes from 17 different nations.

From the sample, 297 athletes rated the CEP activities, while the remaining 361 athletes who completed the questionnaire, stated, “I don’t know” or “not relevant” when answering questions relating to CEP activities. In the 297 cases, 84.9% of the sample rated the CEP as excellent or good. Schnitzer et al. (2014) concluded that whilst participation in the survey was rather low, those who had taken part in the CEP activities had perceived them positively.

The poor level of participation in CEP activities at Innsbruck could be attributed to the lack of information given to athletes, coaches, NOC delegates and others, prior to the Games, together with organizational constraints that didn’t allow enough time as a result of the competition schedule and the long travelling distances between venues. The focus groups gained further insight and revealed one of the main reasons the athletes had come to Innsbruck, was for the competition. The CEP did provide a chance to meet athletes from other countries and was viewed as a nice alternative to competing. The results, therefore indicated that after two editions of the YOG, the goal of ensuring CEP held a high level of importance at the festival, had yet to be achieved.

During the same Innsbruck 2012 winter Games, Kristiansen’s (2015) research examined the CEP experience of nine Norwegian Olympic Youth team members from a psychological perspective. The sample represented both genders, who participated in several different events, across different venues and included both medal winners and non-winners. The nine interviews were grouped into three collective narratives according to the competition schedule and the total load of activities accessible to them. This included 27 activities within an extensive cultural programme that was designed for athletes to share experiences, learn together and celebrate the values of Olympism (IOC Factsheet, Sept 2018).

The narratives of the contestants were categorized as, extensive, balanced or limited, according to the extent of the athletes’ competitive programme. Athletes engaged in the extensive programme at the games, encountered multiple organizational and competitive stressors. As attaining sufficient rest was a priority, there was limited time to be involved in CEP activities.

Athletes with a balanced programme had time to experience some of the cultural input, while those with a limited competitive programme felt the time frame was too long for

being engaged in cultural activities. For those athletes with an extensive and hectic competitive schedule, taking part in the structured CEP may be perceived as an organizational stressor.

The results suggest that, while the CEP had not remained in the shadow of the competitive events, some athletes did question the learning aspect. Similar to Krieger's (2012) research, the popularity of the CEP programme could be argued as being more of entertainment value during the almost two-week compulsory stay in the village. It was the international atmosphere, alongside the competitive events, that had made the biggest impression on the athletes. Whilst the competition itself was not identified as the main stressor, it was the main focus of the Norwegian athletes in Innsbruck. Interestingly, aspects of the new and innovative format of the games were presented as possible stressors particularly for the athletes who were paired with an athlete from a different nation who did not speak the same language.

Consistent with Krieger's (2012) research, the athletes who were interviewed demonstrated little awareness of the cultural mission of the games. Kristiansen acknowledges the potential limitations of their research with only three collective narratives being presented but that knowledge attained may contribute to previous scientifically based research. As with Judge et al. (2009), a degree of caution should be taken when "assuming ideals about the benefits of youths competing in the Olympics" (Kristiansen, 2015, p. 40). Kristiansen concluded at the time, that future research is needed to examine if the IOC vision of making the YOG a different kind of competition, will be successful from both an athlete and an organizational perspective.

### *Social learning experiences*

In a study at the Lillehammer 2016 YOG, conducted by MacIntosh et al. (2019), 36 athletes from 14 sport disciplines, representing 24 NOCs from all continents were interviewed on average for 13 minutes. The purpose of the study was to examine the young athletes' perceptions of the games through their experiences and learning derived from participation. The key aspect from the results related to the sports competitions and the athletes' development. Central to the athletes' sport experience was "striving for a personal best and a good finish" (p. 13). Achieving a good result was a primary motivator for continuing the pursuit of elite level sport.

The results also indicated that social spheres were an important aspect of the Games, being “a place to foster friendships with others (teams and competitors both in and out of the athletes’ sport)” (p. 14). In addition, meeting new friends nationally and internationally was also of great interest for the athletes, although the researchers noted this could be for a short-term period.

Parent, Kristiansen and Macintosh (2014), obtained similar results from a study of Norwegian and Canadian athletes during the 2012 Winter YOG in Innsbruck. It was noted that the international atmosphere, created in the athletes’ village, provided an environment for the participants to make friends from all around the world, learn about different cultures and share experiences. The athletes preferred the informal process, to the structured CEP, that was made easier with the use of the social media tool, the YOGGER.

### **An innovative programme of the future**

The IOC labelled the YOG as an “ideas laboratory” for both the IOC and International Federations (IOC Factsheet, Dec 2015). It is recognized as “a catalyst for innovation and an incubator for new concepts such as the testing and validation of new sports and competition format” (IOC Factsheet, 2018, p. 1). The innovative programme of the YOG, which is intended to target Olympic values, consists of the same sports as in the summer and winter Olympic Games, with fewer disciplines and events along with some significant modifications. This creative approach to the sport programme has included different types of relays that combine different sports, genders and/or different nationalities (Parent et al., 2014).

These new events have not been limited to the summer editions of the YOG. In Innsbruck, fourteen new events were introduced to the competitive programme (Kristiansen, 2015).

In the 2018 summer YOG in Buenos Aires, new medal events included kite-boarding, BMX freestyle, break-dance, beach handball and sport climbing. While the most recent edition of the winter games in Lausanne 2020 included big air, ski mountaineering and 3 x 3 ice hockey (IOC News, 13 Sept 2017). With a focus on innovation and flexibility, and in response to the new flexibility provided by the Olympic Agenda 2020, the Organizing Committee for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games has introduced five new sports into the



programme: 3 on 3 basketball, surfing, karate, sports climbing, skateboard and a return of baseball/softball. 3 on 3 basketball was first introduced into an Olympic programme during the first edition of the YOG in Singapore in 2010. Plans for staging the skateboarding and sports climbing in urban settings during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games mark a historic step of reflecting the trend of urbanizing sport and bringing the Games to young people (IOC, 2016).

As the concept of sport has evolved due to historic and social changes, Bretttschneider (2009) believes that young people do not have a single, standard perception of sport. Sport and subsequently the YOG can no longer be solely characterized by the Olympic principles of *citius, altius, fortius* (faster, higher, stronger) but it is complemented by alternative values of being “more creative, more aesthetic, more exciting” (p. 64). It was this creativity that introduced 3 on 3 basketball in the inaugural games in Singapore and was viewed to be more inclusive and more facilitative of “play” among young people (Wong, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

It has been noted that the desire to revive the primal Olympic idea in public opinion has resulted with the new format of the YOG, that is in stark contrast to its much larger counterpart (Prüschenk & Kurscheidt, 2017). With the format still in an infancy stage, it is possible a more positive genuine image of the Olympic Games can be conveyed via a separate platform for the Olympic Movement featuring young athletes in three age categories from 15-18 years representing the youth of the world. Notably, this concept links back to Pierre de Coubertin’s original vision for the modern Olympics.

In contrast to the Olympic Games, no record of results is kept, a means by which the IOC intends to reduce the importance placed on the participants’ competition results. Yet, as Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard (2007) suggest, “it would be naïve and unrealistic to assert that winning is not an important part of youth sport. Winning is an inherent part of competition and therefore an important goal” (p. 322). Similarly, Tomlinson (2002) argues, “there is a discrepancy between what might go on before our very eyes at the spectacle, but what may well be going on behind the gloss of the spectacular event” (cited in Krieger, 2012 p. 42).

Krieger and Kristiansen (2016) note that the concept of elite sport cannot be

overlooked, particularly when publications related to the Olympic Games refer to the YOG as preparation for the Game. Successful athletes who have “graduated” from the YOG are certainly tracked and celebrated by their respective countries. However, the authors questioned why there is not the same follow up on the educational aims and how the young athletes function as sport ambassadors in their community as the IOC envisions.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores the theoretical framework, research design and methodology used to conduct this research. As this research sits within the framework of social science, a brief overview of the qualitative paradigms relating to the area of research will be discussed.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Defining qualitative data analysis is problematic due to its variable nature. It has evolved across several scholarly disciplines over several decades. The purpose of qualitative research can be for many reasons; to drive consumption of a product, to offer competing points of view, to convince policymakers, to expose instances of injustice, to alter public opinion, or to advance understanding. Importantly there is no one purpose more valued than another, but for the researcher, there needs to be a clear purpose (Markula & Silk, 2011).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that qualitative research is a set of interpretive activities, using such methods as textual analysis or narrative, interviews, case study or ethnography, that crosscuts fields, disciplines and subject matters. They provide a generic definition of qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3).

Central to qualitative inquiries is the process of asking questions that focus on the how and why of human interactions (Agee, 2009). Hence ascertaining the perspectives and intentions of those involved in social interactions. Central to this research is to obtain information from Australian participants of the 2018 YOG and to draw conclusions that may be useful in the future development of youth sport participation. The interaction of our elite youth athletes with their peers from around the world, in cultural and educational programmes at the YOG, is a key aspect of the IOCs vision to inspire young people and address the global decline in levels of participation.

Thomas Kuhn brought the concept of the paradigm into research design. Kuhn (1970) suggests that a paradigm is an overarching set of beliefs, techniques and values that are shared by a scholastic community (Markula & Silk, 2011). It is these paradigms that provide the researcher’s boundaries for ethics and values, actions, control of the study and the

fundamental understanding of the world. Markula and Silk (2011) note that the researcher needs “to be clear about what they believe is the real world where physical culture exists (ontology), how they can know or understand this world (epistemology) and how they can obtain knowledge about it (methodological practices)” (p. 25).

Social science research is comprised of several paradigmatic approaches and choosing which approach to use for this research is based on deciding which paradigmatic logic best fits the purpose of the research (Markula & Silk, 2011).

Of the three paradigms of qualitative research: post-positivism, humanism and postmodernism/poststructuralism, this research fits within the humanist paradigm, whereby knowledge production is a subjective process. Humanism can be further divided into interpretive and critical paradigms. From the interpretive aspect, the researcher is interested in “how multiple individual experiences can collectively reveal the reality”. From the critical aspect, the researcher assumes that the ideological constructions of individual experiences, “work universally to benefit certain groups and marginalize others” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 53).

Lyle (2002) describes humanism as an ideology or a belief system in which people can adopt practices that reflect the concept, without being aware of the ideology or its values (as cited in Cassidy, 2010). This range of interpretations bears a similarity to the ideology of Olympism.

The recognition of the power of sport, to uphold moral values and seek social change has been the Olympic Movement’s vision, from the earliest onset. Coubertin’s ideology of Olympism, aimed to prepare elite young men for the challenges of the twentieth century (Schantz, 2015) while prioritising the role of education in athletic development (Miah & Garcia, 2012).

This humanistic approach to social development aligns with the IOC’s principles of fair play, peaceful co-existence, non-discrimination, equity and international understanding. It is Coubertin’s philosophy, which identified a range of values that brings scholars such as Parry (2003) to agree that Olympism and humanism share the same purposes (Chatziefstathiou, 2012). With the common alignment of values, despite the sometimes-

differing interpretation, key stakeholders from within the Olympic Movement have claimed, “Olympism is Humanism” (MacAloon, 1996).

As such, this research fits within the humanism paradigm due to the close association of the concepts of Olympism and humanism, and the alignment to the vision of the Olympic movement.

Subject matter for qualitative research includes *physical culture*, defined by Markula and Silk (2011) as “multiple forms of being physically (in)active” (p. 6). This includes such practices as fitness, health, elite sport, recreational sport and exercise.

### ***Research Design***

Within this research, questions were designed to ascertain the perspectives of individuals from within the sporting group, the 2018 Australian Youth Olympic team. At first, exploratory questions about the participant’s competitive sporting history. Subsequent questions then became more focused on the particular situation and particular person.

With qualitative studies, Agee (2009) notes that the questions “seek to uncover the perspectives of an individual, a group, or different groups” (p 434). Moving the researcher toward understanding how people experience an event, a series of events, and/or a condition, they will learn “what is happening in a particular situation with a particular person or group” (p. 434).

The development of research questions stems from an intellectual curiosity or passion for a particular topic. The challenge in qualitative research is to frame a qualitative question that inquires about phenomena, perceptions or understanding and at the same time demonstrates the relevance of the study to a discipline or field (Agee, 2009).

The guiding interview questions enabled the researcher to ask each participant, in the course of two rounds of interviews, “the same basic questions, in the same basic order” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 353).

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), the degree of structure in the interviews reflected the purpose of the interviews: to generate the feelings of the participants about the YOG. By

framing questions in a particular way, one became aware of what knowledge was required, based on what they did not already know (as cited in Cohen et al., 2007). Similarly, by allowing the questioning to move between structured and semi-structured the researcher could rely on the participants to provide further information, which the questioner was not aware of beforehand. As a result, some questions emerged during the natural course of conversation and were not pre-determined. This allowed a degree of flexibility as the conversation evolved.

Interviews conducted before the athletes' departure to the YOG were designed to gain an insight into their expectations as members of the Australian team, their prior knowledge of the YOG as an international competition, and their understandings of Olympism.

All interviews commenced with a personal introduction followed by confirmation that permission to take part in the study had been granted by parents/guardians, together with a statement of assurance of confidentiality. Initial questions enquiring about the participants' background in their chosen sport were aimed at establishing a rapport. Follow up questions and prompts were used to attain further responses that emerged into themes and sub-themes.

Whilst it has been reported in the qualitative research literature that telephone interviews are often considered less attractive than face-to-face interviewing due to the absence of visual cues, there is little evidence to suggest that there is a loss of data or the quality of findings are compromised (Novick, 2008).

## ***Methodology***

### *Participants*

The AOC announced a team of 88 athletes to represent Australia at the Buenos Aires 2018 YOG on August 30, 2018. The author selected a group of 16 athletes (8 male and 8 female) varying in ages from 15–17, from a range of different sports to take part in the study. Despite restrictions of availability and parental consent, it was intended to create a broad sample of differing ages, gender and sports. Consideration was given to the athletes being participants in a team, individual, new (sport climbing) or proposed new event (roller sports) to the Olympic programme.

Access to the athletes would be made available at Champ Camp, the Australian Youth Olympic Team's official assembly before departure to Buenos Aires. The camp, held across

two-days, included several workshops aimed at preparing the team members and giving them time to get to know each other before travelling overseas. Due to time constraints, 8 athletes were available for interviews between organized activities on each of the two-day camp.

Ultimately, five athletes from the sample group were available to conduct a second interview on return from the YOG.

Participant 1: female, 18 years, boxing

Participant 2: male, 17 years, field hockey fives

Participant 3: female, 17 years, roller speed skating

Participant 4: female, 17 years, basketball 3 on 3

Participant 5: male, 17 years, sport climbing

### *Data Collections*

A dedicated room for interviews was made available at the Australian teams' camp, which was a set in the grounds of St Ignatius College, Riverview, Sydney. Face to face interviews were recorded and ranged in length from 12–18 minutes. Second interviews, which were conducted on return from the Games, were conducted by using Skype and similarly recorded. The interviews ranged in length from 16-32 minutes. One participant was available for a recorded face-to-face interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with general questions about

- a) The athlete's previous major competition experiences
- b) Preparation and training schedule
- c) Personal and sporting goals for the YOG

These were followed with more focused questions on the athletes':

- a) Prior knowledge of the YOG
- b) Expected learnings from the YOG
- c) Understanding of Olympism and values

During the second round of interviews athletes were asked questions that focused on:

- a) The overall experience at the YOG
- b) Achievement of personal goals
- c) Participation in events/activities other than their sport competition
- d) Understanding of Olympism
- e) Future intentions/goals

The second round of interviews was conducted in the period five to eight weeks after the conclusion of the YOG and the athletes had returned to Australia. Second-round interviews were conducted with five participants of the original sample group.

When collecting data Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) maintain that to achieve data saturation there are three considerations: content, interview structure and participant homogeneity. To acquire content, a fewer number of participants are required when the domain of knowledge or particular experience is widely distributed. With regard to interviews, a similar set of questions should be asked with all participants to avoid new responses each time new questions are introduced. While to ensure homogeneity, choosing participants according to a common criteria, it would be expected to render similar experiences thereby reaching saturation sooner.

Fusch and Ness (2015) acknowledge that because study designs are not universal “There is no *one-size-fits-all* method to reach data saturation” (p. 1409). Similarly, Bernard (2012) suggests that is difficult to quantify the number of interviews that are required to reach data saturation, “but the researcher takes what he can get” (cited in Fusch & Ness 2015, p. 1409). In addition, a researcher with specialized information on a topic may inadvertently or intentionally overshadow data, known as the *sharman effect*. This factor was noted by the researcher due to their personal experience as an Australian representative at an Olympic Games.

In summary, according to Fusch and Ness (2015) “Data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012), when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained (Guest et al., 2006), and when further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006)” (p. 1413).

### *Data Analysis*

Harding and Whitehead (2013) acknowledge “the goal of data analysis is to illuminate the experiences of those who lived them by sharing the richness of lived experiences and cultures” (p. 143). Thus, systematically transforming large amounts of text into a concise summary of key results is the objective of content analysis. The initial stage of processing raw data from verbatim-transcribed interviews is then followed by abstracting data into meaning units, and then further condensing these units using codes and then grouping these codes into



categories or themes (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

As such, all interviews conducted in this research were first transcribed verbatim using the services of Rev.com resulting in 74 pages of single-spaced raw text and then reviewed by the author for accuracy. To get a clear understanding of the participant's interviews, these transcripts were read multiple times to identify the main points and ideas that were being expressed.

A thematic analysis of data was used requiring a regrouping of information. Themes and responses to questions were collated according to what Grbich (2010) refers to as a *block-and-file approach*, whereby data is selected due to its relevance to a particular aspect or response to a particular question. Data from the interview responses that were identified as relevant to a theme were selected and transferred intact to separate columns on a spreadsheet. Consolidation and the development of new columns emerged as the process unfolded.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Attaining a group of participants for interviews was performed following the Nuremberg code (Markula & Silk, 2011). Procedures to ensure participants had received sufficient information, that participants could make an informed choice and voluntarily decide to take part in the research were adhered by the researcher.

Approval was granted by the AOC to conduct interviews during a two-day pre-departure "Champ Camp", to be held in Sydney from September 29–30, 2018, before the teams' departure to Buenos Aires. The games were conducted from the 6 – 18 October.

Both a thesis information document and parent consent form, outlining the thesis topic and the procedure of audio-recorded interviews, were emailed to 16 team members by the AOC. (Refer Appendices I and II) On return of a signed Declaration of Consent of Participation, by the athlete's parents, a schedule for interviews was arranged during afternoon breaks between team meetings and information sessions conducted by the AOC.

A Working With Children Check (WWC) was provided by the researcher/interviewer to the AOC, to ensure the organization's responsibilities in creating and maintaining a child-safe environment. The WWC Check is a compulsory screening strategy that aims to protect

children, by preventing people from working or volunteering that has a criminal record that indicates they may harm a child. Pre-employment screening of adults is mandatory in all Australian states and territories (Child Family Community Australia, 2020).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the results gathered from five members of the 2018 Australian YOG team, over the course of two interview sessions, conducted between September and December 2018. The findings have been selected through thematic analysis as documented in the previous chapter.

#### Research Question

Using the overarching research question as a guideline, interview questions were categorized under a guiding framework allowing the researcher to stay on topic when conducting the interviews. Themes and subthemes were generated as the semi-structured interviews unfolded and data was collated accordingly. The findings on the outlined themes are illustrated by quotes from the interviews. Five major themes are used to present the data: awareness of YOG, Olympism, YOG experience, the knowledge gained from the YOG, and future goals.

**Table 3.** Research question and related themes

<i>Do the Youth Olympic Games inspire young athletes to learn through sport? If so, how?</i>		
<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Key themes</b>	<b>Support for themes and subthemes</b>
1. How did you find out about the YOG? 2. Describe your understanding of the YOG.	<b>1. Awareness of YOG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations of the YOG</li> <li>• Purpose of the event</li> <li>• Personal goals</li> </ul>
3. What is your understanding of Olympism.	<b>2. Olympism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Olympic Values</li> </ul>
4. Describe your overall experience of the YOG?	<b>3. YOG experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International competition</li> <li>• Highlights and disappointments</li> </ul>
5. Did the YOG meet your expectations? Explain. 6. Was there anything you learnt from the YOG experience?	<b>4. The knowledge gained from the YOG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal</li> <li>• Educational</li> <li>• Cultural</li> </ul>
7. Using your YOG experience, what are your recommendations?	<b>5. Future Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations</li> </ul>

All participants had taken part in sport during their early childhood development, primarily because of family members' participation. Two participants had switched from one sport, in which they had been involved for an extended time, to their current sport. These are a relevant selection of their words that are not always grammatically correct. Participant 5 switched events (to sport climbing) after exposure to this new Olympic competition at a school camp.

My parents got me swimming from an early age, and then went into competitions as a natural progression . . . I did a school camp in year seven at Mount Arapiles, so outdoors. . . . Then for my birthday, my parents got me a gift voucher for indoor rock climbing, and then I picked it up from there and I slowly stopped doing swimming and started doing more climbing.

I actually did dancing for seven years and then decided to give it a go . . . I started fighting when I was 13 years old. (Participant 1)

The other participants had taken part in their chosen sport from the ages of 4-8 and progressed via the various levels of competition to the YOG. Participant 3 had the earliest introduction to their sport:

[I] first went skating when I was four years old, and I started doing speed lessons when I was five . . . I think I was 12, no sorry, 11, I had my first national championships and I've been every year since then.

In order to examine each theme, relevant quotations from the participants have been grouped accordingly, to present both similarities and differences in opinions.

### **Theme 1: Awareness of YOG**

The level of awareness of the YOG ranged from athletes knowing of the event as early as when the Nanjing 2014 YOG were conducted, to within three months of the 2018 games:

When I was in grade 6, I went on a trip to Nanjing for a school trip. That was when I first learnt that Nanjing was holding the 2014 games. (Participant 3)

Probably two or three years ago. . . . that [YOG] was my goal. (Participant 1)

I didn't even know it was a thing until I was selected. I found out maybe two to three months ago. (Participant 4)

For Participant 5, awareness of the YOG occurred when sport climbing was recognised as an Olympic sport:

Now that it'll be in the Olympics, and now it will probably be in the Youth Olympics and through that we figured out that the qualifying event was in Noumea . . . probably a year and a bit ago.

Similarly, Participant 2 had learnt of the YOG in the year before the games:

The first time I heard about it was last year. When we started talking about the nationals and people were talking about selecting the Youth Olympics from next year's nationals. That's the first time I thought about it, but I didn't think much of it after that.

When the participants discussed their level of awareness and knowledge of the YOG, they also provided clear and definite descriptions of their expectations of the event and what they hoped to achieve. Whilst their knowledge of the YOG, as a competitive event, had been attained at various times within one Olympiad, their personal performance goals were set with high expectations:

Podium is my main goal. Obviously gold, everyone's gold. Just the experience in itself and actually being here (as a member of the Australian team) (Participant 1)

Ideally, the gold medal. (Participant 2)

To get into the top ten, in one race is my goal. (Participant 3)

Come home with gold . . . I want to play my role, I want to try and get that gold medal. . . . but I want to be able to do the cultural things and meet the other people. (Participant 4)

I want to get top ten in my category for climbing. (Participant 5)

When the participants were further asked as to the role or purpose of the YOG, within their answers they identified three of the Olympic values that embody the YOG: friendship, excellence and respect:

I think getting young athletes together and being a team environment, and meeting new people as well that share the same sort of lifestyle as you. (Participant 1)

Just to be able to play good hockey with great people and meet everyone from around the world and make friends. (Participant 2)

Learning about people from all around the world, their cultures, their way of life. (Participant 4)

I think it has different motivations for different people. So for some it might be preparing them for the adult Olympics, and for others it might be a progression into adult life. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 identified one of the primary aims of the IOC, in staging the multisport event:

To engage a younger audience that isn't quite at the fully elite state . . . I feel like the Olympic people are trying to sort of engage the new generation and to sort of give them the opportunity to have the Olympic Games.

For the participants of new sports to the Olympic programme, speed skating and climbing, the YOG also represented further possibilities and expectations:

Because it's not a very big sport in Australia, so I think it's great to get exposure for the sport (speed skating), to promote in Australia. So I think it's important that we're competing to sort of, to show that Australia does do this sport and that we have people that have been to the Olympics. (Participant 3)

Being around 20 of the top best climbers in the world for my category, because Australia is quite, relatively new in terms of sport climbing. . . . But once it [climbing] became an Olympic sport, it was kind of like, oh right, I could actually see this becoming something that I can turn my life into, and seeing that transform me and the sport as well. (Participant 5)

## **Theme 2: Olympism**

During the first round of interviews, participants had difficulty in describing their understanding of the term Olympism:

I think respect, with teams and working together, just a family really. . . . You get really close with people, and you're only with each other for three weeks, that might form a friendship later on and meet up at another Olympics. (Participant 1)

Representing your country in the best way possible in competing in your sport. (Participant 2)

It's been like an elite, elite sort of thing. It's honourable. (Participant 4)

I think it's portraying the Olympic values. But I'm not sure. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 was able to articulate the concept of Olympism more comprehensively:

There's those three values, the Olympic values: friendship, respect and . . . maybe teamwork. Olympism probably means like a universal thing that brings people together because sport is obviously a medium that is shared among every country. There's not many things that every country has in common, apart from sport. It's trying to encapsulate a common trend and a common string. Connecting everyone and that everyone can relate to and sort of doing that in a fair, just equal sense that gives everyone equal opportunity to come together and celebrate things, such as sport, without the conflict of politics or international relations and things like that. (Participant 3)

To attain further understanding of the participants' knowledge of Olympism, further questions were directed about what values were important to them, as they were more likely to be familiar with this term.

Friendship . . . making connections with people. (Participant 1)

Being fair, being a good sport and trying your best. (Participant 2)

Honesty, reliability . . . that also comes into the fair play, you just don't want to be cheating. (Participant 4)

Definitely sportsmanship . . . being sort of a humble winner and a good loser. (Participant 3)

I think respect is a big one . . . just having respect for other competitors no matter their background. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 also questioned whether other team members would have an understanding of the Olympic values:

I doubt, if we surveyed the team, they wouldn't know the Olympic values . . . I only know them because I was writing an application at school to be part of the school committee in year 12 . . . I didn't know them before. [People] probably don't even know that Olympic values exist.

Linking the values of sport to personal life, Participant 2 acknowledged the similarity of values:

The same values are pretty similar. You want to have the same attitude towards everything you do and give it your best go.

Participant 5 suggested that the task of continuing to support the Olympic values outside of the Olympic arena could be difficult:



I think a lot of people can learn from the Olympic values, but it's kind of hard to implement them without some sort of personal experience, or without going there and really being in the atmosphere of everyone supporting each other.

The value of friendship and the importance of building team spirit were highlighted during the pre-departure interviews:

The whole experience is just going to make it a memorable trip . . . making connections with people as well, like just other teammates as well as your coach. (Participant 1)

I've tried to branch out and make as many friends as I can whilst I am here, But I'd love to be able to say that I know the names of and have spoken to every person on the Australian team. . . . I think doing this Champ Camp is really beneficial because we can start to build connections within the team before we arrive. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 also acknowledged the value of cultural experiences:

I want to be able to do the cultural things and meet the other people. I think That in this situation that's also one of the most important things. . . . Just learning about people from all around the world, their cultures, their way of life.

During the second round of interviews, after the YOG, the participants were asked again as to their understanding of Olympism. Participant 3 acknowledged the blending of sport, culture and education:

I think its sort of like an overarching banner/umbrella to just a sport. As much as everyone that was there was really elite, but it felt like there was a real focus on grassroots development and participation and inclusivity towards everyone. . . . There was a real focus on broadening and taking your knowledge and taking your skills back home and sharing it with other people to try and increase participation in sport.

While Participants 4 and 5 recognised an awareness of values portrayed during the Games:

No matter what level you play. . . . Be honest, be a good sportsman . . . play fair  
And really do your best. (Participant 4)

I definitely saw it [values] through like the top athletes. . . . like respect and obviously like the officials and competitors. . . . Definitely saw a lot of values, especially friendship . . . It's a very nurturing experience. (Participant 5)

### **Theme 3: YOG Experience**

Four of the five participants had previously competed in international events, ranging from representation in an Australian School Sports team to competing at World Youth and World Championship events for their respective sports.

The most noticeable discourse to emerge was that the participants' YOG experiences were notably unique, as they had not previously taken part in a multi-sport event with large-scale global participation. Their responses were reflected in these examples:

The experience was awesome, a big eye-opener. Everything with the whole team being multi-sport, a team of 88 athletes . . . living alongside them for three weeks in the Olympic Village with 4000 athletes from different countries. . . . So you are learning stuff while you're there and talking to different athletes . . . By the end we had friends from every country. . . . probably my best experience going overseas for international competition. (Participant 1)

It was pretty amazing. It was probably the best experience that I could ask for, especially being so young. . . . The village I will always remember because I have never been in an environment . . . to see all different countries from around the world. . . . And it was just one of the best three weeks of my life. (Participant 2)

Overall I found it a great experience. . . . it was just amazing to be a part of the village with 4000 other athletes that have all been training really, really hard

for so long. . . . it's the first time we had been in a multi-sport competition. . . . being able to watch other events and see all the other sports. . . . It made it feel much larger scale and much broader in that sense. I did find it really enjoyable to watch other sports. . . . I think we got to see every sport. . . . we'd maybe go to two or three, or even four different sports in a day. (Participant 3)

Walking into the village was like breath-taking. . . . this event was so big and that I was so lucky to be a part of it. . . . To come away with a bronze (medal) as well, the experience just kept getting better and better. . . . I was exposed to a new environment and I got to meet so many people who play different sports. . . . I think that was a really, really crucial part of my experience, was that it wasn't just basketball. (Participant 4)

It's unlike any competition I've ever done before. . . . It's definitely so much more than I ever thought it would be. . . . it's such an intense two and a half weeks. I never thought it was so big. . . . It's nothing like I have ever done before and I don't know if I'll ever get to do it again. (Participant 5)

The athletes also drew comparisons to the Olympic Games:

I think after going there [Buenos Aires] and knowing how awesome it is . . . getting treated like it is an Olympics . . . like the real Olympics . . . it just makes you want to train harder. (Participant 1)

It did feel like you are sort of part of a club . . . you've made it into the Olympic club. . . . Representing the country is not really a new concept except for the fact that it's an Olympic Games . . . everyone knows what an Olympic Games is, not everyone will know what an inline speed skating World Championship is. (Participant 3)

To think that I have been to an Olympic event at the age of 17 . . . I want to make it a focus for me that one day I'll be at the actual Olympics. (Participant 4)

## *Highlights*

The highlight for the athletes was notably the whole experience. They were unable to single out specific moments that resonated more than others. The blending together of a team from different disciplines was a new experience for the athletes and they enjoyed the camaraderie that evolved from being together for almost three weeks:

The village and just the experience of actually walking out to the rings at an Olympics, is something else. (Participant 1)

We did everything as one big Australian group. . . . we were always staying together and all supporting each other . . . meeting everyone else, their different sports from all over Australia . . . Other than playing sport, that was I think one of my favourite parts. . . . to become friends with everyone from around Australia . . . we got to interact with all the other different countries. (Participant 2)

I was actually lucky enough to be picked . . . out of all of the Australian team to write the athletes' pledge for the closing ceremony. . . . which was talking about sportsmanship and how the universal language of sport has brought us together. . . . I was the Oceania representative. (Participant 3)

To come away with third is just absolutely incredible. . . . to even step on that podium, representing our country, being able to hold our country's flag, it was just absolutely incredible . . . we got a medal and that's why we went there. We achieved what we wanted to. . . . it was just amazing to have that sea of green and gold [Australian supporters] there supporting us. (Participant 4)

I was really happy with my preparation, leading into the comp. So, training and what I did before [the competition] on the day. . . . My performance wasn't that good, but definitely the experience was worthwhile and mostly had a great time. (Participant 5)

The YOG was the athletes' first experience at a multi-sport event, which provide a unique experience for them:

I've never done a multidisciplinary event . . . so many options to choose from . . . I checked out beach volleyball . . . track and field events, did swimming, badminton, Tennis, did skating . . . fencing . . . I watched a lot of events. (Participant 5)

A really crucial part of my experiences was that it wasn't just basketball. I had the opportunity to go watch sports and go support athletes in whatever their sport was, whether it was a team event or an individual event and I think that was really important. . . . It definitely made me realize that there are so many sports that you don't actually realize that play a big role on the international stage. (Participant 4)

Because it was multisport, something different than what you'd experienced before, being outside of just your particular sporting area, that made it (Participant 1)

It was the first time that we had been in a multi-sport competition. . . . It was much more broadly focused. . . . to watch other events and see all the other sports. It made it feel much larger scale. . . . often we'd go out and watch events . . . like hockey games. (Participant 3)

### *Disappointments*

There were few disappointing aspects for the athletes during their YOG experience and these primarily related to scheduling or logistical issues. Not having enough time to visit other sporting venues to watch team members compete together with programming events at the same time, made it difficult for athletes to sometimes engage in sports outside of their own:

I was over there for about two and a half weeks . . . I was just training . . . So it was a bit of a struggle at first, seeing everyone else compete and finishing before I even start. . . . I was hoping for a medal but I fell just short of that. I got fourth overall so just missed out on the bronze. (Participant 1)

We kind of had the impression that we'd be doing a bit of sightseeing and we would go to relax a bit. A group went to an animal shelter, and they said that we'd go to an orphanage and things like that, so sort of volunteering activities and we didn't get to do any of that which was a bit disappointing. (Participant 4)

Some [events] were a very long bus ride away. . . . It would have been nicer if they [golf and sailing] were all closer together. (Participant 5)

To ensure the safety of the team members there was a rigorous protocol for leaving the village to meet family or visit points of interest within the city. Participant 5 highlighted this:

If you wanted to go with your coach, it had to be pre-planned. You have to check with multiple different officials and it was just a lot of work.

Whilst the participants understood the necessity for this procedure, it was often time-consuming and therefore easier to stay within the village or attend a sporting event using the designated transport for participants. The provision of regular entertainment and educational activities within the village ensured there was always a range of programmes to take part in outside the completion schedule. Participant 4 noted that some of the organised events for athletes would have also been valuable for spectators:

It's disappointing that it was only the athletes and the officials that got to experience that. [information sessions]

#### **Theme 4: The knowledge gained from the YOG**

On return from the YOG, participants were asked a series of questions to ascertain what knowledge was gained from their participation at the event. The responses were sub-grouped into personal, educational, and cultural.

##### *Personal*

I think that fending for yourself a bit, at a young age, and getting those opportunities will definitely help for the future. (Participant 1)

Nothing's easy. You got to really put in the hard work. (Participant 2)

It made me realise that I am good enough to race against the best in the world. Because being in Australia you feel quite isolated from the rest of the world and the rest of the competition, because there's no one here to race. . . . Maybe it has made me grow . . . I learnt how important a team is . . . representing the country . . .

I did learn how important that is and how lucky I am. (Participant 3)

I feel like I did grow up a, because this is an international event. . . . it's such a big personal achievement, but to also know you have made your country proud. (Participant 4)

It's probably the biggest step I've taken in the lead up to, hopefully, the adult Olympics. . . . Probably carry on the momentum into other international events. Hopefully, maybe get some sponsors or some grants. . . . probably more confidence .. take a little bit of a risk or do something you wouldn't normally do. (Participant 5)

### *Educational*

During the Games there were opportunities for the participants to engage in activities within the village, take part in field trips and attend information sessions conducted by IOC designated Athlete Role Models:

They had activities and that in the village . . . it was optional . . . I didn't do much of that . . . it was mainly for people that had finished competing . . . [my event] wasn't until the last four days of the whole competition . . . I just wanted to make sure I stayed focused on my own sport. (Participant 1)

Did a little bit of like culture and kind of educational things. But apart from that, it was mainly watching sports. I think if it wasn't so time consuming and so much of a hassle then I probably would have gone out to the city more. (Participant 5)

There was lots of information sessions . . . like the anti-doping . . . we had sessions with some previous Olympians from all different sorts of sports. . . . I think the village was where the main action actually happened. . . . you definitely experienced mostly in the village. . . . It was just so unique and to be the only ones to experience that was incredible. (Participant 4)

In the village, they had a functional movement screening ... It was like a movement analysis ... and they'd analyse where your strengths and weaknesses were.

(Participant 3)

### *Cultural*

A large amount of the cultural experience was encountered within the village. With daily activities, entertainment and designated areas for the athletes to relax, meeting people was very much a part of the total experience. With the use of a social media tool, the YOGGER, which had been introduced at Nanjing 2014 YOG, athletes not only had access to digital documents and videos but could easily develop friendships by a simple exchange of personal information (IOC News, 14<sup>th</sup> Aug 2014).

We had these little things called Yoggers . . . it's like a little USB stick . . . I could log onto my account and see all the people I tapped Yoggers with. . . . Whenever I did the YOGGER I . . . started conversations that way. . . . Every night, the village square was just packed with athletes until about midnight. There was just people there talking. (Participant 3)

We got to talk to all the volunteers from around the sporting events. . . . On a few of the days that we had off, we went and saw other sports, and went around the city and saw some stuff. We really did learn a lot. . . . [In the village] we could all interact with other countries and play games ... that's how we first initially met people from around the world. (Participant 2)

It [The village] just brought the athletes together. No matter what country, you'd talk to them and you'd meet new friends. (Participant 4)

We went on some field trips into like the heart of the city and went to like some historic places. We went to the oldest town square and just looked around and went to some markets. So did a little bit of culture and kind of educational things, but apart from that, it was mainly just watching sports. (Participant 5)

There was little down-time, we were constantly doing things. . . . there was also a tour of La Boca, which is like a tourist site in Buenos Aires . . . we did that, and



that was really traditional. . . . Other than that, we didn't get to see much of the city. . . . But I suppose we could have. We didn't have to go and watch events. We could have just gone out and gone sightseeing. But we wanted to see the events.  
(Participant 3)

### **Theme 5: Future Goals**

During both interviews, participants were asked about their future goals with all responding that they aimed to gain Olympic representation at either the 2020 or 2024 games. Participant 1 was very clear in outlining their goal was participation at an Olympic Games and this was restated again in the second interview:

My aim is 2020. If I do get there I'll be very young but sort of see how I go here, and then work everything else out after that.

It makes you want to train harder and get to there again and have that experience again, because it was so good. . . . the 2020 Tokyo, that's my ultimate goal. . . . If I don't make that one [2020] probably try for 2024. . . . because you've got those stepping stones, if the first one doesn't work out. (Interview 2)

Post-games interviews highlighted that Olympic representation ranked high in the participants' future goals and when discussing this point, the researcher noted that there was a level of excitement and emotion from what they had experienced.

My goals at the moment are to prepare for Tokyo 2020, as best I can. (Participant 5)

It's made me more determined to reach my end goals. . . . I want to make it a focus for me, that one day I'll be at the actual Olympics . . . Hopefully one day I will be wearing the Opals uniform [of Australia]. (Participant 4)

After year 12, I really don't know, maybe I'll get back into it then. But it'll be my first senior year then. Potentially, skating isn't in the 2020 Olympic Games . . . but I think it'll be in the 2024 Paris Games. I don't know if I'll be aiming for that. (Participant 3)

I think the YOG just gave me a little bit of a taste of what the real Olympic Games

could be . . . there would be no reason if we go to the full Olympics now . . . It makes me want to go [to the Olympic Games] a lot more now that I've got a little bit more experience. . . . keep progressing . . . make the Open Victorian team and then hopefully one day make it into the Kookaburra [Australian team] squad. . . . I think for everyone it's like a dream to go to the Olympics, but to be at the Youth Olympics and experience all that sort of thing, it makes you realize how more realistic it can be. (Participant 2)

### *Recommendations*

Train as hard as you can, as I want everyone to experience what I've experienced at the Youth Olympics . . . if you're good enough to, definitely try and strive for that and experience it and I think that will make everyone coming into elite athletics just a lot stronger. (Participant 1)

Just give it all you got, because there's no reason that you shouldn't be aiming high. (Participant 2)

To just participate in everything and don't be shy and just get to know everyone. Because it makes it that much better when you can make friends with people and enjoy the experience with them (Participant 3)

Take in every bit of the experience. . . . you also need to take your time to take in the cultural things. Taste all the different foods, meet all the different people, participate in as many activities, all the activities that you can because it honestly is a once in a lifetime opportunity. (Participant 4)

### **Summary**

There were varying levels of understanding about the YOG. These directly correlated to when participants had become aware of the global event. For one participant it was only two to three months before the games. It was apparent that whilst the participants may not know of the IOC's vision of the YOG, embodied in their responses were the values of friendship, excellence and respect.

Personal goals for the games were directly associated with competition, excellence and performance. For participants within new sports to the Olympic programme, this provided exciting and promising opportunities to promote their sport. All participants had high expectations for their performance, to either finish in the top ten, or win a gold medal.

Whilst the participants may not have been able to explain exactly the term Olympism, they were able to relate to the values of friendship, excellence and respect. These were reflected frequently during the participants' discourse.

The experience was exceptional, to a level that none of the participants could have predicted. The sporting experience was a priority as indicated by the high achieving goals set prior to arrival at the YOG. Personal development was seen as an area of growth and learning that was an outcome of the games. Cultural engagement through socializing within the village and interacting with peers through sport was viewed as an integral part of the overall experience.

The participants viewed the invaluable experience as possibly the forerunner to further elite competition with aspirations to achieve what they deemed the pinnacle in sport, to compete at an Olympic Games. The participants recommended that athletes should aspire for such events, as there were not beyond the reach of young committed sportspeople.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the YOG inspire young athletes to learn through sport? If so, how? Based on the perceptions and experiences of the young Australian athletes in this study, the YOG provided the platform for athletes to be inspired and to learn through sport. However, the learning experiences were not restricted to the activities provided within the CEP (Learn and Share programme).

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The inclusion of the YOG into the Olympic programme aimed to introduce youth to Olympism and Olympic values, with the premise to combat the global issue of obesity and inactivity in the young. This is an ambitious initiative, disseminated via a relatively small population of elite youth athletes, totalling 15,160 participants in six editions of the Games since 2010. For the participants in this research, it was found that there is an awareness of Olympic values, an understanding of internationalism through cultural initiatives predominantly through informal activities while demonstrating excellence via the competitive programme is of high importance.

#### *Awareness of YOG*

The low level of awareness of the YOG, a view shared by scholars as early as 2009, still has relevance in 2018. Similar to findings of Judge et al. (2009) who labelled the YOG as “The Best Kept Secret” and Krieger (2012), participants in this research demonstrated minimal awareness of the cultural mission of the Games, with the competitive programme being their main focus.

During interviews conducted prior to the departure of the team to Buenos Aires, two participants indicated they did not know of the YOG until almost a year before when they became involved in the team selection process, with one participant not knowing “it was a thing until I was selected. I found out maybe two to three months ago.” Only one participant acknowledged the cultural mission of the Games together with the importance of the competitive programme, “I want to try and get that gold medal. . . . but I want to be able to do the cultural things and meet the other people.” For the other participants, their knowledge of the YOG focused on their respective sports and competition.

A review of how the dissemination of information can be structured in the future, via defined sport performance pathways from grassroots level organizations and sports federations, in conjunction with NOC's, would combat part of this problem.

### *Olympism*

As Parry (2006) suggests, the principles of Olympism may change and be interpreted differently according to time and place, the participants in this study also had differing interpretations and could not clearly define the term. Their understanding and awareness of Olympism centred round their knowledge of values, specifically as they were portrayed through the competitive environment. The participants identified, friendship, fair play, honesty, reliability, sportsmanship, teamwork and respect as elements of Olympism.

Similar to findings by MacIntosh et al. (2019), we can draw from this knowledge, that it may not be as important for the athletes to be able to communicate this ideology, but more so to enact on the values, via their behaviours and actions. The competitive programme provided the learning environment for the athletes to recognize values and interpret them via their learning processes and judgments. One participant highlighted this when they acknowledged that during the Games “There was a real focus on broadening and taking your knowledge and taking your skills back home and sharing it with other people to try and increase participation in sport.”

Loland (2104) reported one of the main intentions of Pierre de Coubertin's revival of the Olympic Games, was for internationalism and the peaceful exchange of cultures. Participants in this study acknowledged that the YOG village, which housed 4000 international participants, together with the use of the social media tool the YOGGER, provided the setting for informal learning and interaction between cultures. “We got to interact with all different countries” and “every night the village square was just packed with athletes until about midnight . . . there was just people there talking” signalled that internationalism, an element of de Coubertin's philosophy of Olympism, is not only recognized in the competition format of mixed NOC teams but is also generated within the informal social encounters of the participants.

The use of the YOGGER was an icebreaker for the athletes to make introductions and share experiences with participants from other countries, particularly within the informal

setting of the athletes' village. These findings also support the research of Parent et al. (2014) and Kristiansen (2015), who found that for the Canadian and Norwegian team members at the Innsbruck 2012 winter Games, it was the international atmosphere, together with the competitive programme that had the biggest impact on the athletes. One participant's description of the village highlighted that it "brought the athletes together, no matter what country, you'd talk to them and you'd meet new friends." Internationalism and the peaceful exchange of cultures, as identified by Loland (2014), were paramount to Pierre de Coubertin's revival of the Olympic Games and are resonating within the structure of the YOG today.

### *Olympic Values*

Of the three core Olympic values, friendship was frequently referred to during the two rounds of interviews. The participants acknowledged the benefit of a pre-departure camp, which provided the environment to develop new friendships and build team spirit at the beginning of their YOG experience. Participant 3 summed up the importance when stating, "I think doing this Champ Camp is really beneficial because we can start to build connections within the team before we arrive." This appreciation and mutual respect for other sports disciplines were further enhanced, within the very social environment of the village. These findings were in accordance with MacIntosh et al. (2019) who found that developing friendships during the games period was an important factor in the athletes' social learning experiences and this engagement was not limited to within a team or sports discipline.

In contrast to Loland (1995) who suggests that values such as friendship and mutual respect may be unimportant to athletes when they are focused on victory and commercial benefit, these findings concluded that friendship was of high importance. The athletes' sort to establish friendships both within their team and with athletes from other countries. Participant 2 summarized this value when stating, "We were always staying together and all supporting each other . . . to become friends with everyone from Australia . . . Other than playing sport, that was I think one of my favourite parts" This was supported by Participant 1's statement, "By the end, we had friends from every country."

Forming friendships at a national and international level were identified within this research as an integral part of the athletes' overall Games experience and reinforces the IOC's intention of providing a positive, fun sporting experience.

### *The competition programme*

During the early development of the YOG, former IOC president Jacques Rogge claimed, that this addition to the Olympic Movement should not be perceived as a mini-Olympic Games. Yet, 10 years on, the participants continue to highly value the level of competition, perceiving it as a stepping-stone to future international events and ultimately participation at the Olympic Games.

During the post Games interviews when asked to describe their future goals, all participants indicated they had aspirations to compete at an Olympic Games. For Participant 3, the acknowledgement of having “made it to the Olympic club” inferred that this international event, by the very nature of being under the umbrella of the Olympic Movement, was perceived as a mini-Olympics. The athletes’ expectations of personal achievement were very focused around the competitive programme and their perceived sports projection was for further representation within elite competition. All participants viewed the YOG as a step along a perceived pathway, with their future goal being to compete at either the 2020 or 2024 Olympic Games.

The athletes’ in this research support the notion identified by Krieger and Kristiansen (2016), that IOC publications refer to the YOG as preparation for the Olympic Games, with comments:

If I don’t make that one [2020] probably try for 2024. . . . because you’ve got those stepping stones if the first one doesn’t work out. (Participant 1)

I think the YOG just gave me a little bit of a taste of what the real Olympic Games could be . . . there would be no reason if we go to the full Olympics now. (Participant 2)

Kristiansen et al. (2017) noted that part of the legacy of being a participant at the YOG is the pursuit of further elite competitions, primarily the Olympic Games, as a result of increased motivation, self-confidence and belief in capabilities. Findings in this research were similar as the researcher noted at the time, during post YOG interviews, there was a heightened level of excitement and emotion when the athletes expressed their personal goals to strive towards taking part in either the 2020 or 2024 Olympic Games. Their aspirations were reported accordingly: “It’s made me more determined to reach my end goals”, “I want to

make it a focus for me, that one day I'll be at the actual Olympics.” “ It makes you want to train harder” and having “more confidence” to “take a little bit of a risk.”

In contrast to results from Krieger (2012) and Séguin et al. (2014) research, where participants at the first summer and winter editions of the YOG did not consider the festival as the most important competition of the year, participants in this research held the opposite view. The opportunity to participate in a large scale, multi-sport event presented experiences and opportunities not encountered before. “I was exposed to a new environment,” “it’s unlike any competition I’ve ever done before,” “probably my best experience going overseas for international competition,” “probably can carry on the momentum into other international events” were some of the impressions of the YOG environment.

While the participants in this research had clear goals and ambitions to take the next step towards Olympic representation, research conducted by Gould and Carson (2004) suggests that youth sports do not necessarily develop Olympic champions. This also correlates with the statistical evidence provided by the AOC, that only 10% of Australian YOG representatives have become Olympians.

It was also noted that before the teams’ departure to Buenos Aires, the importance of the competitive component of the Games was central to the athletes’ experiences and personal goals. Three participants expressed their goal was to win a gold medal, while the other participants’ goal was to finish in the top ten of their sport. These findings were similar to results of athletes from 24 NOC’s in the 2016 winter edition of the YOG conducted by MacIntosh et al. (2019), who concluded that “Striving for a personal best and a good finish” were central to the athletes’ experience (p. 13). The results of this research also support findings by Cumming et al. (2007) who acknowledged that winning is an important part of youth sport.

Despite the IOC’s narrative that the purpose of the YOG is to create a blended sport and equally important educational programme, the athletes viewed competition as their key objective. This was exemplified by Participant 1 when describing how the scheduling of their event was in the last four days of the Games, gave fewer opportunities to take part in some of the educational events, as they “wanted to stay focused on their own sport.” Participant 5 also supported this view, when they acknowledged that taking part in some of the cultural and



educational activities was time-consuming due to the rigorous protocol that needed to be followed.

The experience of being able to attend other sports events was mentioned in discourse by all the participants in this research, highlighting how they valued the opportunity to not only take part in the competition but also watch competitive sport, “I think we got to see every sport,” “we’d maybe go to two or three, or even four different sports in a day.”

The findings in this study indicate the participants’ highly valued excellence and performance. Their personal goals of achieving a gold medal or to be ranked in the top ten reflected the importance of the competition programme as compared to the CEP. Notably, when reflecting on their success, participant 4 who achieved a bronze medal, highlighted the priority of the competition when stating, “We got a medal and that’s why we went there. We achieved what we wanted to.” These results were similar to the focus group findings of Schnitzer et al. (2014) that revealed one of the main reasons for athletes attending the 2012 YOG in Innsbruck, was for the competition.

#### *The cultural and education programme*

Central to the development of the YOG was the combining of sport, education and cultural activities that would offer a unique experience for the young athletes. The CEP, now known as the Compete Learn and Share experience, has been the IOC’s avenue for providing educational activities around Olympism and the Olympic values. By learning about different cultures via interaction with other participants, the IOC envisioned the educational programme would invoke a sense of social responsibility, promoting the role of the youth as future ambassadors for their communities.

While the IOC claims that the cultural exchange is achieved mainly through the CEP, findings in this research support the findings of Krieger (2012) and MacIntosh et al. (2019) who identified the unplanned, informal experiences, intrinsic to the concept of an international multi-sport event, provided opportunities to develop friendships and learn about other cultures through the presence of being together in the athletes’ village. The international setting within the village, fostered cultural exchanges, often during incidental, unplanned occasions as reported by Participant 1, “You were learning stuff while you’re there and talking to different athletes . . . By the end, we had friends from every country.” Supporting

this statement was Participant 2's comment: [In the village] "we could all interact with other countries and play games ... that's how we first initially met people from around the world."

For the participants in this research, it was the first time they had been to a multi-sport event and it was this unique experience that offered new, informal learning experiences aside from the organized CEP. The participants were also spectators at other competitive events, which provided learning opportunities and strengthened friendships within the Australian team. Participant 2 and 3 summarized their experiences of living in the village and establishing friendships:

The village I will always remember because I have never been in an environment . . . to see all different countries from around the world. . . it's the first time we had been in a multi-sport competition. . . Other than playing sport, that [meeting people] was I think one of my favourite parts. (Participant 2)

We wanted to see other events, [rather than take field trips outside the village or take part in the organized CEP]. (Participant 3)

While the education programme is an integral part of the IOC's mission to educate the youth to become sports ambassadors of the future, it is debatable whether this has been fully achieved through the function of the dedicated education programme within the YOG format. The results from these findings indicated that while there were a variety of cultural and educational activities for the athletes to take part in, which were positively received, performance and competition were the primary focus and if there were time constraints or tight scheduling of events, the sports programme took priority. These results were similar to the findings of Schnitzer et al. (2014), who also found, that while the educational activities were well received at the Innsbruck 2012 YOG, the athletes were often too busy with their competition commitments or preferred to attend other sports events, resulting in a low level of CEP involvement.

During second round interviews, one participant in this research did indicate an understanding of the IOC's vision of educating youth to become future ambassadors, when they acknowledged that "There was a real focus on broadening and taking your knowledge and taking your skills back home and sharing with other people to try and increase

participation in sport.” For the other participants that were interviewed, this message was not indicated. As such, there continues to be a tenuous balance between the competition and education programmes, which will need to be addressed by the IOC in future editions of the YOG.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Overall, research in the field of the YOG is still new with only six editions, three summer and three winter, having been conducted to this point since their inception in 2010, although they have already been held in three populous continents, Asia, Europe, and South America and will include Africa in 2022. This contrasts with the 28 summer and 22 winter editions of the modern Olympic Games across five continents since 1896.

#### *Recommendation 1*

This research was limited to Australian participants, whereas the scope of this study could be replicated with participants from other NOCs, beyond those that have already been included in the literature, adding greater breadth and understanding of the perceptions of elite performance youth athletes.

Previous research, from the point of view of youth athletes, has been conducted only within teams from Norway, Germany and Canada. There has been minimal global cross-sectional quantitative research of participants. It would be most illuminating to compare the attitude of participants from other countries, particularly from nations with different cultural traditions. A comparison between athletes from different global regions may also prove useful in the future, should the IOC aim to tailor the YOG specifically to the needs of youth athletes.

Furthermore, as mentioned in a previous chapter, extending the study group to include a cross-section of participants from all age groups, evaluating possible age or gender differences, would also strengthen research in this area.

#### *Recommendation 2*

To understand the development of athletes within their sport beyond the YOG, longitudinal studies would offer further insight and information as to the long-term benefits of this global event. At present, this information is inconclusive from research within the field of the YOG. During the post YOG interviews, the athletes in this study had aspirations to be

representatives at an Olympic Games. To gain a greater understanding of the athletes' reactions to the YOG in years to come, and how they have incorporated Olympism and the Olympic values into their lives would provide data specifically related to one of the IOC's objectives of the YOG.

### *Recommendation 3*

Since Australia's first YOG representatives participated in Singapore 10 years ago, there have been a total of 340 athletes who have taken part. Further studies to ascertain how these competitors benefitted from their involvement in the Olympic Movement and if they have remained in sport within community, national or international levels would be of interest.

Whilst the IOC believes that the YOG has the potential to impact these levels, little research has been conducted on the trickle-down effects and benefits of the YOG, a topic for future studies. As far as I know, apart from research conducted by Kristiansen et al. (2017) who used a retrospective survey of Norwegian YOG participants from 2010, 2012, and 2014, there is minimal documentation of how participation at the YOG may, or may not, facilitate the athletes' sports development pathway.

Broadening the research to include multiple countries, to ascertain whether or not the YOG facilitate a long-term engagement in sport for the young participants, fulfilling their role as future sports ambassadors could assist national sports federations and Olympic committees, in supporting the IOC's vision to target the youth and create a healthier global society.

### **Closing Remarks**

As an Olympian, I have for a long time been interested in how the YOG fit into the concept of the Olympic Movement. The tenth anniversary of the Games seemed an especially appropriate time to study this question. Research in general of the attitude of the athletes themselves has been rather limited. Nothing has hitherto been published about young Australian athletes who have significantly competed in all the Youth Olympics.

By examining the participants' perceptions, understanding and experiences from the Buenos Aires 2018 games it was evident that the YOG provides a platform that unquestionably inspires participants to engage in sport at the highest level of competition,

using this experience as a stepping-stone for continued participation at elite competitions. The participants' perceived trajectory in sport after competing at the YOG was for continued national representation and ultimately selection in a future Olympic Games team.

This may be a laudable aim, but using the resources provided by the AOC, we can conclude that from the four possible editions of the YOG - the Tokyo and Beijing Olympics not yet having taken place - there have been 22 former YOG athletes who have competed for Australia at subsequent Olympic Games, representing a mere 10% of the total participants. That means that nine out of ten YOG participants before 2018 failed to participate in future Olympics. It would be interesting to see if this is true of other nations.

As to the participants' development as ambassadors of the Olympic values of respect, friendship and excellence, they were able to identify with these values through their own experiences thereby exhibiting the very attributes of Olympism, but without a definitive understanding of the term, as it is presented within the Olympic Movement.

The multi-sport competition provided learning experiences and an appreciation for other competitors, within an environment they had not previously encountered in their sport discipline. Despite some participants having competed at an elite level, such as a world championship, the nature of a different sports environment was stimulating and educational in both informal and formal contexts. Meeting athletes from other disciplines, other countries and also from within their team provided informal learning opportunities. Significantly, building friendships and respect for competitors in other sports was identified and established early, through the attendance at Champ Camp held in Sydney, before the team departure.

Whilst the IOC promotes the YOG as a place for learning, based around the Olympic values, the competition factor and desire for excellence was the primary goal for the participants. Before the Games, the aspirations of the athletes were either to finish in the top ten or win a gold medal. This has been noted regularly in YOG discourse. When given the opportunity, the athletes chose to attend other sports venues reflecting how they valued winning, excellence and performance. Hence, de-emphasizing the competitive aspect in to include more formal educational activities would not serve to enhance learning through specific programmes based on the Olympic values and Olympism, nor encourage the athletes to participate more fully in the CEP. The athletes desire to perform at the highest level was a

key motivator for them, as they value competition. For the participants, the whole experience of the YOG was predominantly positive.

It was also noted, that in an age where dissemination of information is reportedly quicker and easier via the availability of different sources of media, the participants' awareness of the YOG was relatively minimal, before engaging in a selection process within their sports organization. This is an area that could be addressed through the relevant sports federations in conjunction with the AOC, to support the Olympic Movement as it targets the youth age group globally.

The achievement of the educational aims of the YOG will continue to present differing opinions amongst scholars, athletes and those within the Olympic Movement, notably the IOC. It remains to be seen whether the YOG, a different kind of festival from the Olympic Games, will be successful over the long term from the perspective of both participants and organizers. The sporting ambitions of the youth may not align with the structured educational programme conducted within the multi-sport event. For the participants, it is primarily a sporting competition. Whether the somewhat tarnished image of the Olympic Games, in the minds of some critics, can be ameliorated by this youthful, innovative festival and become a platform for driving Olympism within the IOC's mission to overhaul the global problem of obesity, will continue to be an area of further research.

To conclude, this research further progresses evidence that the YOG does inspire young athletes to learn through sport. The athletes' experiences were enhanced as an outcome of the intrinsic concept of the multi-sport festival that has been developed within the Olympic Movement. With consideration of the limitations within this study, being a small sample focused on one country, further investigation and analysis of athletes from other nations, to provide a broader perspective of the development of the youth Olympians in the future, would add to our understanding of the long-term impact of the YOG.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX I**  
Master's Thesis Information Document





**HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE  
FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE SCIENCES  
MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME  
"OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC  
EVENTS"**

## **Information Sheet**

19/09/18

Dear

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "**Athletes' Perspectives of the Youth Olympic Games.**" which is a requirement for my master degree thesis, under the supervision of Prof. Culpan, at the University of Peloponnese, Greece.

This information sheet is to provide you with all the necessary details so that you can make an informed decision on whether you are willing to participate in this study.

The aim of this research project is to examine participant's views and knowledge of an elite sporting event, the Youth Olympic Games. Your involvement in this research would include a 30 – 40 minutes audio-recorded individual interview before and after participation at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games. You will be asked questions about your understanding of

- The cultural and competition programme of the Youth Olympic Games
- The Olympic Values
- Future competitive aspirations.

These interviews will be completed at a convenient time during the 2018 Champ Camp and at a pre arranged time within one month of the completion of the Youth Olympic

Games in Buenos Aires. I will maintain the confidentiality of any information gathered and your identity will be kept anonymous, as names will not be used in the thesis. Instead, code names will be used to identify the participants. You will be able to view the interview transcripts. The data will be kept on my personal password-protected hard disk and will be stored for a period of no more than 2 years before being destroyed.

This interview offers no risk to you and your participation in this research is voluntary. Therefore, you are able to withdraw from the project, including any material you have provided, at any time without consequence. At all times this research will adhere to the ethical standards and requirements of the University of Peloponnese's research protocols.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request and if you do agree to be a participant in this study, please complete and sign the consent form provided with this information sheet.

Should you have any questions or concerns about your participation, you can contact me on the details provided below. If you wish to contact my thesis supervisor at any time, please contact .....

Yours sincerely,

**APPENDIX II**  
**Master's Parent Consent Form**



HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
UNIVERSITY OF PELOPONNESE  
FACULTY OF HUMAN MOVEMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE SCIENCES  
MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME  
"OLYMPIC STUDIES, OLYMPIC EDUCATION, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF OLYMPIC  
EVENTS"

**Consent Form**

FULL NAME

TEL/EMAIL

**Athletes' Perceptions of the Youth Olympic Games**

**Declaration of consent of participation**

I have read and understood the purpose and requirements of the study and on this basis, I agree to participate as a subject for this research. I understand that any data gathered will remain anonymous and confidential. I understand that I may withdraw at any time, without consequence – including the withdrawal of any information I have provided. I understand the information on this form is for contacting purposes only and will not be disclosed to other parties or used in the study.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your contribution to this study.*

**APPENDIX III**  
Guide to Interview Questions

### **Round 1 Guiding interview questions and prompts**

1. How did you find out about the YOG?
2. Describe your understanding of the YOG.
3. What is your understanding of Olympism?
4. What are your expectations and goals for the YOG?

### **Round 2 Guiding interview questions and prompts**

1. Describe your overall experience of the YOG?
2. Did the YOG meet your expectations? Explain.
3. Was there anything you learnt from the YOG experience?
4. Using your YOG experience, what are your recommendations?