



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OLYMPIC YOUTH CAMP PROGRAM: THE CASE OF THE SYDNEY OLYMPIC GAMES 2000

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the Sydney Olympics Youth Camp program (OYC) on 331 children (160 males and 171 females) aged 16-18 years, from 187 participating National Olympic Committees (NOC). The participants, through a variety of activities, had the opportunity to be involved in the Olympic Games, developing an understanding for different cultures and learning about the history and culture of the host city. Questionnaires were administered to the Sydney OYC participants, before and after the implementation of the program. The results indicated that the program was perceived as very important, and the children were highly satisfied from the activities they were involved in during their 22 days visit in Australia. It was concluded that the program contributed to the promotion of the Olympic ideals, promoted cultural exchange, fostered international cooperation, and developed respect of all countries and human dignity.

Key Words: Olympic Youth Camp, cultural Olympiad

INTRODUCTION

Sport and youth are identical concepts (Nagano Post Games Report, 1998). Each new generation in the Olympic Movement relies on the cultivation of the Olympic Ideal among young people. The founder of the Olympic Movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, had a vision of a global movement that would transcend barriers of race, political systems and beliefs; a movement uniting the youth of the world in friendship, solidarity and peace (Montreal, Post Games Report, 1976).

The Olympic Youth Camp (OYC) is considered to contribute significantly in the education of the individuals who participate. In order to promote and play a future role in the Olympic Movement, it is imperative that youth who would be the leaders of the future, would take part in the Olympic Games. Their participation should be different from athletes and they should pass on their experience in the excellence of

sport impressions of the Games and message for peace to the next century. The youth Camp provides a meaningful forum for the realization of these goals.

The OYC provides a unique opportunity for youth around the world to experience cultural exchange. The aims and goals of the OYC are for young people, representing almost every nation in the world, to come together every four years in conjunction with the Olympic Games to promote international goodwill and better understand the traditional culture of the host country, thereby contributing to the creation of a peaceful world. The OYC allows participants to sustain a network of friends throughout the world and to practice the ideals of peace and unity on return to their home country. The OYC is a mutual, although unofficial, corollary to the Olympic Games. In concept, it closely parallels the thinking of de Coubertin: youth attracts youth, achievement stimulates emulation and participation promotes friendship (Montreal, Post Games Report, 1976). The ultimate goal of the OYC then is that through sport and Pierre de Coubertin's ideals of the modern Olympic Games, the ambassadors of the Camp can spread the world of Olympism, peace and unity throughout their own country and the world through sports.

The program is based on Article 58 of the Olympic Charter (1999, p.75) which stipulates that "an Olympic organiser may organise an International Youth Camp during an Olympic period under its responsibility". Each city is expected to provide the theme, contents and "personal seal" of its OYC according to its own cultural personality and way of organising youth activities. Although the Olympic Charter recommends that the OYC should be held and the OYC has a long history within the Olympic Movement, it is not compulsory. Since the first time it was held at the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912, when King Gustav V invited 1,500 scouts to put up their tents beside the Olympic Stadium providing organisational aid, it has become a strong tradition since then and there have been OYCs at ten (10) of the Olympic Games. (Post Games Report, Barcelona, 1992).

After the interruption of the World War I the OYC was introduced again in 1936 in Berlin where, along with the boy-scouts, young sportsmen studying at physical education colleges from twenty-three countries attended. The total number participating amounted to 700. The contact was further enhanced by visits to the Games premises, cultural festivities, excursions to the area surrounding Berlin, as well as by sport (Lotz, IOA, 1987). The World War II caused yet another break in the celebration of the Olympic Games and the OYC was not to be held again until the Helsinki Games in 1952. Approximately 5,000 young people aged between 16 and 22 years old from seventeen countries took part. Girls participated for the first time.

Since 1960 in Rome, an OYC has been held at every Games, except in Los Angeles in 1984, where it was substituted by a sports promotion program in the schools. During the 1984 Olympics, the organisers decided not to stage a camp and organised sports programs for youths instead, in a policy to foster a pre-Games boom among young citizens. However, an unofficial camp was held at strong urging from major youth organisations of West Germany and some other European countries (Post Games Report, Seoul, 1988).

Post Games Reports show that all the candidate cities for the 2004 Olympic Games had included the program in their bid. The number of participants and the estimation of the cost for each one was different, however the fact that it was included in the candidate city's component reinforces the importance of the program (Report of the IOC Evaluation Commission for the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in 2004, (1997).

For hundreds of teenagers from around the world the Cultural Olympiad is just as important as the main event. It provides the once-in-a-lifetime chance to travel, experience the Olympic Games first hand, learn about new cultures and make international friends.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the program on issues related to the principles of the Olympic Movement. More specifically, this study aimed to examine the following aspects: how effective the program was, to what extent the program accomplished its goals, to which extent the participation in the program affected participant's behaviour, set of values, and awareness, what was the level of participants' satisfaction, and what was the impact of the program on them, in order to suggest its value for the future OYCs.

The significance of the current study is that it examines the impact of the Olympic Youth Camp on the education of the individuals who participate, the youth who will be the leaders of the future in organizing high caliber sport events. The skills and knowledge that relate to the organization of Olympic Games would be extremely useful for the sport managers of any level.

METHODS

Subjects

The sample consisted of 331 children (160 boys and 171 girls) aged 16-18 years, from 187 participating National Olympic Committees (NOC). A number of socio-demographic data were collected through the use a questionnaire which was distributed in the "Hub" (the meeting point for all participants) the afternoon of the OYC Opening Ceremony.

Program

Participants embarked on a comprehensive 22 days schedule of events (Sept. 12 to October 4, 2000) designed to display the best Australia has to offer. Participants were involved in Olympic activities like the Torch Relay, attended the Opening Ceremony and a number of sporting and cultural activities, including their own mini-Olympic Games. Moreover, participants attended various events, visiting the Athletes' Village and meeting some Olympic Family dignitaries. The program had workshops on the environment, cultural diversity and stereotypes, and Olympism. There were outdoor adventure, bush walking, arts and crafts. Furthermore, participants learnt and took world famous Great Barrier Reef. Moreover, Campers had the opportunity to explore Sydney, learn about Australia, and stay with Australian Families.

Questionnaire

For the questionnaire construction, a pilot study was used. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, which were anonymous and comprised multiple choice format questions. A limited number of open questions were also included. The use of the closed questions facilitated the statistical analysis of data. Questionnaires were sent to two different groups in order to extract information for the OYC: the first group was 20 Australian participants in the Atlanta OYC (some of them had offered volunteer work, as leaders, for the Sydney OYC) and the second was the Sydney

OYC participants, during the operational days. Both groups responded to the initial instrument and provided comments and feedback on the clarity of the statements. The quality of the questions and the problems which were emerged were examined in order for the final questionnaire to be finalised. As a result, some questions were excluded or reworded, while space was provided at the end of the questionnaire for leaders to make additional points they considered important. Those participants that were not OYC staff, they received the questionnaire by mail. Another envelop with a prepaid stamp, was included to the envelop and Atlanta's participants had been asked to make comments and give feedback. Not many changes were made after feedback, including the split of the questionnaire up to three sections. Since the first draft of the questionnaire was tested on the group of the Sydney OYC participants during the operational days, no attempt was made to check for its reliability using the test and retest method due to the lack of time.

The final questionnaire was consisted of 35 questions (some of which included as many as eight statements) and included three sections: in the first section participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements concerning the participants' awareness on the Olympic Games and the OYC. Analytically, participants were quested on issues related to the Olympic Games, as a model for the young people, as a source of national pride, as a symbol of international cooperation, principles which are derived from the Olympic Charter (Olympic Charter, 1999). The questions refered to the OYC, were taken from the Program's Mission Statement and examined the participant's conception about the OYC. The second section was refered to the Environment, and examined the level of participants' environmental awareness, IOC's involvement in the environmental protection and how participants nominated the environmental problems, among big challenges for the world in the next years. Finally, another section was consisted of questions regarding the evaluation of the program and the recommendations to the future OYCs. These questions were based on the aims of the OYC in order to check if the aims and objectives of the program had been met. The questionnaire was administered the night of the OYC Closing Ceremony (Oct 3rd) to 280 participants remained until the end of the 22 days program. The number of complete responses was 79.2% (222 children). A Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used to measure the participants attitudes on questionnaire items.

RESULTS

The ethnic group analysis revealed that the higher persentage was "Black, African" (26.7%), followed by "European" 23.7%, "White" 17.0%, "Asian, Pacific Islanders" 13.7%, and "Hispanic, Latino" 12.7%. The vast majority of them (91.2%), participated in sporting activities, and only 8.8% had not any involvement in sports. The level of participation in relation to gender was also examined. The cross-tabs analysis did not reveal significant differences between genders ($\chi^2=4.98$ $p=.546$), as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation level to sports according to gender

	Club Level	Regional	National	International	Total
Boys	29	20	31	67	147
Girls	36	29	29	61	155
Total	65	49	60	128	302

The open-ended question about the reasons for attending the Camp returned a variety of answers as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons for participating in the Youth Olympic Camp

Reasons for participating	Frequency	%
Meet people and discover other cultures	103	31.1
Meet people from all around the world & attend the OG	71	21.5
Meet people and have the experience	64	19.3
Meet people, go to Olympics, and have fun	38	11.5
To discover other cultures and the OG	30	9.9
NOC' s decision	19	5.7
Meet people in my age, know Australia, I like travelling	13	3.9
To learn about Sports and to be a future Olympian	12	3.6
To become a professional athlete	11	3.3

The level of education of the participants' parents was also examined. The analysis revealed that 66.9% of the children had at least one parent with a university degree, 17.6% of them had at least one parent with a secondary education, 11.9% had at least one parent with a professional degree and only 3.6% of the children had both parents with a primary education. The selection criteria set by the different NOCs to participate in the YOC covered a wide range and are presented in Table 3.

The level of awareness about the Olympic Games and the OYC was examined in the first section of the questionnaire. The independent samples t-test did not reveal any significant differences between boys and girls, apart from the negatively stated item 5 (mean score 1.84 for boys and 1.56 for girls) and item 7 (mean score 4.03 for boys and 3.75 for girls). The mean scores of the participants' attitudes as a whole, as well as according to gender, are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Selection criteria for participation in the Youth Olympic Camp

Selection criteria	Frequency	%
Strong background in sports	77	24.6
School essay contest on the Olympic Games	44	14.1
Sport achiever	41	13.1
The NOC suggested me as a candidate participant	32	10.2
Interview for selection	30	9.6
Test in the English language	22	7.0
Youth leadership performance	21	6.7
Academic achievers	18	5.8
Quiz on the history of the Olympic Movement	14	4.5
Randomly	8	2.6
Ballot after short listing	6	1.9

Table 4. Level of awareness about the Olympic Games and the OYC

	Total	Boys	Girls	p
OG provide a good model for young people	4.59	4.57	4.61	.825
OG are the world's top sporting event	4.67	4.69	4.66	.903
OG are a source of national pride	4.53	4.54	4.52	.935
OG are a symbol of international cooperation	4.54	4.46	4.60	.177
OG do not bring the world together	1.68	1.84	1.56	.018*
OG is a good advertisement for the city	4.34	4.41	4.29	.178
The city hosting the OG has financial profit	3.87	4.03	3.75	.016*

The opinions of the children about the importance and the goals of the OYC was examined in the next part of the questionnaire. The children's opinion on statements related to the importance OYC Program were highly positive, but no significant difference was observed between boys and girls in any of the eight questions. The mean scores of the participants' opinions as a whole, as well as according to gender, are presented in Table 5.

In the next part of the questionnaire participants were asked to indicate their level of environmental awareness. "Well informed" on issues related to the environment answered 25.4%, "aware" 49.2%, "some knowledge" 23.6%, and "not aware" 1.8%. As the environment is one of the IOC's most important issues, as well as the OYC's, the opinions of the participants on four questions related to the environmental protection were examined. The independent samples t-test did not reveal any significant differences between genders as presented in Table 6.

Table 5. Children’s opinions on the importance and the goals of the OYC

	Total	Boys	Girls	p
OYC contributes to education about the Olympic Games	4.32	4.32	4.33	.981
OYC contributes to building a better world through young people	4.55	4.60	4.50	.305
OYC does not aspire to promoting friendship	1.54	1.58	1.51	.551
OYC creates an international understanding by overcoming differences in participants’ religious-racial-political beliefs	4.51	4.49	4.53	.752
The OYC program contributes to equality/ fairness among participants	4.29	4.28	4.30	.939
OYC helps to develop lasting cross-cultural relationships	4.38	4.43	4.34	.322
OYC plays important role in promoting peace	4.23	4.26	4.20	.570
The OYC teach you to appreciate the way of life of other participating countries	4.39	4.36	4.41	.760

Table 6. Opinions about the environmental protection

	Total	Boys	Girls	p
The Olympic Movement can play an active role in the protection & safeguarding of the environment	4.37	4.44	4.32	.181
Emphasis should be placed on awareness-raising education & training in environmental protection	4.28	4.34	4.23	.210
Athletes, should be encouraged to contribute to the promotion of environmental education and practice	4.41	4.42	4.40	.932
Everyone should feel more responsible for the environmental protection	4.51	4.48	4.54	.540

As far as the scope of the activities of the OYC is concerned, participants believed that for the “Environmental day” the purpose was environmental (61.8%), the “Outdoor challenge day” had a competitive purpose (41.9%), the “Attendance in sports events” had a more recreational purpose (40.8%), as well as the “Treasure of Sydney” activity (39.1%), and the “Travel to Cairns” option (38.0%), the “mini Olympics” activity was more competitive (51.4%) and the “Torch Relay” more educational (41.4%). The last two, “Aussie Family Visit” and “Outdoor Adventure” activities had a cultural (49.8%) and a recreational scope (35.5%), correspondingly. The most important activities of the OYC according to the participants, were “Travel to Cairns” (53.2%), “Attendance in sports” (50.9%) and “Torch Relay” (50.7%), while 83.8% stated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” (41.% and 42.8% respectively) with the statement “The Aussies Family Visit program gave you an opportunity to feel as a member of an Australian family”.

The level of participants' satisfaction was high as the program was "much better than they had expected" (63.5%), while they expressed very positive feelings about the Sydney OYC with the most predominant answers being "I just loved everything about the program" (55.2%), and "It was a good program" (41.2%). The Program was highly recommended by participants from all around the world. There was a substantial difference between participants who answered "Strongly recommend" the program (67.0%) and those who answered "Somewhat recommend" (21.7%), while the number of participants who did not recommend the program was tiny (1.4%). Finally, the question about what participants liked most during their participation in the program returned a wide range of activities which are presented in table .

Table 7. What participants liked most about the OYC

What the participants liked most	Frequency	%
Meeting new people and experience different things	50	23.7
Everything	38	18.0
Make new friends	29	13.7
Aussie Family Visit	27	12.8
Opening Ceremony, Sport Events	23	10.9
Environmental awareness	13	6.2
Electives/Staff behaviour/Cairns	11	5.3
The atmosphere	10	4.7
I've learnt a lot of things for my future success	10	4.7

DISCUSSION

No known study concerning this topic has been published. This means that the significance of this study is enhanced, since is the first attempt to analyse the perception about the importance of the OYC Program, but on the other hand means that there is no point of reference for comparison reasons, and the references from similar studies are actually non-existent.

Each Organising Committee has to follow some guidelines from the IOC, in order the whole organisation to be under control. In the case of the OYC, the Olympic Charter provides some guidelines, one of them the age group of participating should be between 16 and 18 years old. This age group has not been selected randomly. It is the period of adolescence, where the group relationships become of major importance. It is a time when an individual gains experience and knowledge in many areas and interprets his environment in the light of that experience (Horrocks, 1976). Moreover, Rice (1975), argues that adolescence is defined as a period of growth between childhood and adulthood. The transition from one stage to the other is gradual and uncertain, while the beginning and the end are some what blurred and are not the same time span for every person.

The findings that most of the participants were actively involved in sports and that no differences were observed between genders were not unexpected, since two of the most important selection criteria for participation in the Youth Olympic Camp set by the NOCs were the children's "strong background in sports" and their "sport achievements". However, although the vast majority of the participants (91.2%) were

involved in sports and most of them (62.4%) were competing at a national (20%) or international level (42.4%), the most preferred reason for participation in the OYC was to meet people and discover other cultures and not to attend the Olympic Games. The third most preferred reason was also to 'meet people and have the experience'. This finding is probably connected with the high education level of the participants' parents. According to Rice (1975), the educational level of parents has a positive relationship with the socioeconomic status of the family. Families with high income differ on the basis of experiences and opportunities for social interactions. It could be argued that most of the participants had already a good level of social interactions.

The finding that the level of awareness about the Olympic Games and the OYC, as well as about the importance and the goals of the OYC, was high (average score 4.40 and 4.39 respectively in the 5-point scale), can easily be explained because of their strong background in sports. Apart from that, among the selection criteria set by the various NOCs, "school essay contest on the Olympic Games" and "quiz on the history of the Olympic Movement" were included, indicating that the participants had already an experience with issues related to the Olympic Games. Since research has presented evidence that at this age group girls usually are at a more mature level than boys (Singer, Milledge, & Tennant, 1993), a significant difference between the two genders in their extend of agreement with the various statements would be expected. The results however showed that this difference was negligible. The fact that the means between the two genders were almost the same, can probably be explained by the fact that participants had the same interests since the majority of them were athletes, and most of them participated for the same reason (meet people and discover cultures, learn about the Olympic Games).

The finding that the participants had very positive opinions about the environmental protection (average score 4.40 in the 5-point scale) was also not unexpected, since the vast majority of them had a high level of awareness about the environmental protection even before they arrive to Sydney to participate in the OYC. A percentage of 25.4% answered that they were "well informed" and a percentage of 49.2% declared that they were "aware" on issues related to the environment. During the 22 days of their participation in the OYC they had the opportunity to become more educated about the protection of the environment, and to develop their awareness level even higher, because this was one of the most important issues of the OYC program.

Not surprising was the finding that the level of participants' satisfaction from the program was very high, the stronger evidence being that it was highly recommended by participants from all around the world. It is not a coincidence that the most predominant answer was "I just loved everything about the program", while many participants declared that participating in the OYC program was a unique and one in a lifetime experience. In general, the OYC was an effective educational, recreational, and cultural program. The importance of the camp had been rated by the majority of participants as extremely important. The cross-cultural interactions were positive as participants answered that what they liked most about the program was the opportunity to meet people, to make friends and to learn a lot of things about their future.

CONCLUSION

The Olympic Youth Camp is a program of the Olympic Games designed to educate youth through sport, promote cultural exchange and foster international co-operation,

under the Olympic banner. The Sydney 2000 OYC, the most diverse ever with 187 countries sending representatives, seems that fulfilled its expectations.

After the 22 days experience, the OYC participants returned to their home countries fully educated about the Olympic Movement, the Environmental protection and how young people can contribute to the peace around the world and to an international understanding by overcoming the differences in religious, racial and political beliefs among participants. The OYC program affected participants mentally, physically, and spiritually; developing respect of all countries and human dignit.

It is a pity, and difficult to explain why, the successful operation of OYC since 1912 was interrupted in the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Considering the optimistic messages given by the boys and girls of the OYC in the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the authors would propose to the organizing committee of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games to give a high priority to the operation of the OYC.

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Η ΣΗΜΑΣΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΟΛΥΜΠΙΑΚΟΥ ΚΑΜΠ ΝΕΟΤΗΤΑΣ: Η ΠΕΡΙΠΤΩΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΟΛΥΜΠΙΑΚΩΝ ΑΓΩΝΩΝ ΣΤΟ ΣΙΔΝΕΪ

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Περίληψη

Ο σκοπός της παρούσης μελέτης ήταν η διερεύνηση της επίδρασης που είχε η παραμονή στο Ολυμπιακό Κάμπ του Σίδνι, στα 331 παιδιά (160 αγόρια και 171 κορίτσια), ηλικίας 16-18 ετών, από τις 187 Εθνικές Ολυμπιακές Επιτροπές. Οι συμμετέχοντες, μέσα από μια ποικιλία δραστηριοτήτων, είχαν την ευκαιρία να εμπλακούν στους Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνες, να κατανοήσουν διαφορετικές κουλτούρες, και να μάθουν την ιστορία και της κουλτούρα της πόλης που φιλοξενούσε τους Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνες. Διενεμήθηκαν ερωτηματολόγια στους συμμετέχοντες στο Ολυμπιακό Κάμπ πριν και μετά την εφαρμογή του προσχεδιασμένου προγράμματος. Τα αποτελέσματα έδειξαν ότι το πρόγραμμα εκτιμήθηκε ως πολύ σημαντικό, και ότι τα παιδιά ήταν πολύ ικανοποιημένα από τις δραστηριότητες στις οποίες αναμείχθηκαν κατά τη διάρκεια της παραμονής τους για 22 ημέρες στην Αυστραλία. Συμπεραίνεται ότι το πρόγραμμα που ακολουθήθηκε συνέβαλε στην προαγωγή των Ολυμπιακών ιδανικών και στην ανταλλαγή της κουλτούρας, καλλιέργησε τη διεθνή συνεργασία και ανέπτυξε τον σεβασμό για όλα τις χώρες και για την ανθρώπινη αξιοπρέπεια.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Ολυμπιακό κάμπ νεότητας, πολιτιστική Ολυμπιάδα

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