

## OLYMPISM & VALUE LEGACIES IN OLYMPIC/ PARALYMPIC GAMES

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### Abstract

#### Aim

The aim of this paper is to explore the different meanings of the ideology of Olympism and how the Olympic and Paralympic values can be captured in practice in varying ways which extend beyond the somewhat narrow scope of sport, exercise and physical activity.

#### Theoretical Background

The term Olympism was first coined by the founder of the modern Olympic Games, the French aristocrat Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The fundamental principles of Olympism are stated in the Olympic Charter, of which the first version is estimated to have been published around 1898. Its definitions have been various and it has been referred to as a social philosophy which emphasises the role of sport in world development, peaceful co-existence, international understanding and social and moral education (Parry, 1994). In his *Memoires Olympiques* (1931) Coubertin interpreted Olympism as a school of nobility and of moral purity as well as of endurance and physical energy but only if &honesty and sportsman-like unselfishness are as highly developed as the strength of muscles (p. 208). Thus, Olympism aimed at the harmonious development of the intellectual, moral and physical aspects of a human being through athletic competition. Hence it was developed as a philosophy consciously intended as a set of rules or propositions not simply about sport and its governance but about how one's life should be led, and thus clearly can be implemented as a useful set of values which can be applied across a variety of contexts and people.

#### Discussion and implications / conclusions

In the same way that Olympism has been open to several interpretations throughout the history of the modern Olympic movement (Chatziefstathiou 2011a; 2011B; 2009), Olympic education or Olympic pedagogy has also been defined and delivered in different fashions. If one unpacks Olympism, will discover that the so-called Olympic ideals are also entailed in programmes of physical education,

sport education or youth education. It can be argued that the term Olympic education or Olympic pedagogy refers to a series of many different activities which although may be implemented by different organizations or institutions (eg Olympic Games Organizing Committees, Ministries of Education, Centres for Olympic Studies) or may adopt a different pedagogical approach and have different targets (physical education, lifelong learning or cultural activities), they nevertheless are based on the same fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter and are associated with the Olympic ideals and the multifaceted (and open to several interpretations) ideology of Olympism. One could also argue that, as it also happens with the so-called magic dust of the Olympics, in a similar vein there is a sense of a magic dust of Olympism in education. Values, norms and virtues that may already be taught - and not being named Olympic - in several contexts such as sport, physical activity, physical education, and youth education, through the power and the appeal of the Olympic Idea, they are transformed into what is termed Olympic education. Such arguments can be seen as critiques of Olympic pedagogy but can also describe the very essence of what this pedagogy really is; a rather flexible and useful tool for educators, coaches, athletes and other interesting parties who can draw a multitude of examples (positive and negative) from the mega event of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to promote principles and codes of practice. The Olympic and Paralympic Games can act as the Trojan horse (ἵππος Τροίας ἄλιθον) wherein several messages can be transferred to the youth of the world in many different ways inside or outside the school curriculum, through PE or any other knowledge subject, through cultural activities or lifelong learning, as well as through social media or international sport development programmes (eg Olympic Solidarity and the International Inspiration Project).

In the long debates about what Olympic education is and what an Olympic pedagogy can entail or how teachers and coaches can best serve and deliver Olympic value legacies, the answer should really be that Olympic education can involve sport, PE or other knowledge subjects, culture or different milieus in an individual's lifelong learning inside and outside the strict limits of school education. The Olympic Games, one of the biggest and most appealing mega events of modern times, and their underpinning philosophy of Olympism though not always systematic or coherent - have much to offer in the global educational space through values, practices and ideas that are flexible, multi-layered and adaptable to several contexts of broader education.

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