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## THE CULTURE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME OF THE YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES – SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

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### Abstract

#### AIM OF ABSTRACT – RESEARCH QUESTION

The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) were officially inaugurated with the first summer edition in Singapore in 2010. Being an international sports event targeting young athletes aged 14 – 18; a major innovation of the YOG is its unique Culture and Education Programme (CEP). To date, very little scholarly research deals with the CEP and its perception by different stakeholders. The aim of this abstract is to give an insight into the athletes' perception of the CEP on occasion of the first Winter YOG in Innsbruck in 2012, Austria, and to analyse whether the CEP can be considered as a success or failure.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND – LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of the CEP is to give young athletes the chance to interact with each other and to learn about different cultures and other topics such as Olympism, health, career planning and social responsibility. Although a few studies highlighted the CEP since the introduction of the YOG (Krieger, 2012; Wong, 2013; Kristiansen, 2013), no extensive scientific research seems to specifically analyse the CEP and its impacts from an athlete's perspective.

#### METHODS

During the Innsbruck 2012 Winter YOG, a survey of 662 athletes (64.8% of all participating athletes) as well as six focus groups with 43 athletes from 17 countries were conducted by means of questionnaires (in English, French, German, and Russian language) and interviews. The quantitative data were evaluated using SPSS at a significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$ . The focus groups were transcribed verbatim by a content analysis according to Mayring (2003).

#### RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The outcomes of the focus groups corroborated the results of the survey: young athletes participating in the CEP activities perceived them mostly as excellent (37.1%) or good (47.8%); nevertheless, the tight training and competition schedule represented an issue for many athletes. While the overall compliance of the empirical study amounted to 64.8% and was therefore quite high, questions specifically related to CEP activities were answered poorly (39.1%). Out of the sample of 658 athletes, only 257 rated the CEP. 361 athletes who filled out the whole questionnaire stated 'I don't know' the CEP, or felt the questions relating to the CEP were 'not relevant'. This result clearly underlines that the importance the IOC ascribed to the CEP was not clear to many athletes and to their immediate social environment (e.g. coaches). Looking at the CEP ratings in detail, major differences were found with respect to the venues athletes were competing at. While athletes competing at the Sliding Center Igls perceived the CEP generally as excellent or good (94.2%), the perception became less successful among the competitors (Curling) at the Innsbruck Exhibition Center (76.7% excellent/good) or the competitors at the Freestyle Center Kühtai (72.6% excellent/good). When linking single CEP activities to the venues, further statistically significant differences arose. Besides the key learning the CEP assumed a minor role within the overall YOG programme the study revealed several critical issues relevant to the planning and staging of the CEP within the sporting context, leaving major organisational challenges to be addressed by the organisers (IOC and local organizing committee). With respect to the very positive ratings given by athletes participating the CEP the initiatives' great educational potential became evident and thus might be seen as a major step taken by the IOC in promoting Olympic Education.

The findings of the study may not be completely transferrable to the YOG summer edition (different size, cultural background, etc.). Moreover, the results do not reflect the CEP's long-term effect on the athletes. They represent just a 'snapshot' in a very dynamic process of single experiences. To conclude, the CEP at the Innsbruck 2012 YOG on the one hand can be considered as a success referring to the perception of those athletes that actually participated in the activities. On the other hand recognising the organisational constraints (e.g. tight training and competition schedule) due to which many athletes were not able to participate the CEP might as well be called a failure.

### References

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