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Original

El Impacto a Largo Plazo del Programa de Cultura y Educación de los Juegos Olímpicos de la Juventud en los Atletas Turcos

The Long-Term Impact of the Youth Olympic Games Culture and Education Program on Turkish Athletes

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EL IMPACTO A LARGO PLAZO DEL PROGRAMA DE CULTURA Y EDUCACIÓN DE LOS JUEGOS OLÍMPICOS DE LA JUVENTUD EN LOS ATLETAS TURCOS

THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THE YOUTH OLYMPIC GAMES CULTURE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM ON TURKISH ATHLETES

RESUMEN

Desde 2010, el Comité Olímpico Internacional (COI) ha estado organizando los Juegos Olímpicos de la Juventud (JOJ), una reciente incorporación a la familia olímpica, diseñada para atletas talentosos de entre 15 y 18 años. Estos juegos no solo abarcan eventos competitivos, sino también programas culturales y educativos. El objetivo principal de este estudio es explorar los impactos educativos, sociales y culturales a largo plazo de los JOJ en los atletas turcos. Un total de 11 atletas turcos (compuestos por 4 atletas olímpicos, 4 atletas de élite y 3 atletas retirados) fueron seleccionados mediante muestreo intencionado y de bola de nieve de un grupo de 184 atletas turcos que habían participado en varios eventos de los JOJ. La recopilación de datos involucró entrevistas semiestructuradas y métodos retrospectivos, mientras que se utilizó un análisis temático para el análisis de datos. Se emplearon la verificación de memoria, amigos críticos y el compromiso prolongado para garantizar la confiabilidad. Los hallazgos del estudio indican que los JOJ tuvieron una influencia duradera en los atletas turcos, inspirando a muchos a convertirse tanto en olímpicos como en embajadores de los valores olímpicos. La formación de amistades e interacciones sociales y culturales significativas durante los JOJ los motivó a buscar la excelencia en sus carreras deportivas. Cabe destacar que, incluso los atletas retirados continuaron participando en actividades que promueven los valores olímpicos y el deporte después de su experiencia en los JOJ.

Palabras clave: Juegos Olímpicos de la Juventud (JOJ); Desarrollo de Atletas; Programa de Cultura y Educación (PCE); Motivación; Comunidades de Práctica (CoP); Legado Deportivo; Valores Olímpicos; COI

ABSTRACT

Since 2010, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been organizing the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), a recent addition to the Olympic family, designed for talented athletes aged 15 to 18. These games encompass not only competitive events but also cultural and educational programs. The primary objective of this study is to explore the long-term educational, social, and cultural impacts of the YOG on Turkish athletes. A total of 11 Turkish athletes (comprising 4 Olympic athletes, 4 elite-level athletes, and 3 retired athletes) were selected through purposive and snowball sampling from a pool of 184 Turkish athletes who had participated in various YOG events. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and retrospective methods, while thematic analysis was utilized for data analysis. Memory checking, critical friends, and prolonged engagement were employed to ensure trustworthiness. The study's findings indicate that the YOG had a lasting influence on Turkish athletes, inspiring many to become both Olympians and ambassadors for Olympic values. The formation of friendships and meaningful social and cultural interactions during the YOG motivated them to pursue excellence in their athletic careers. Notably, even retired athletes continued to engage in activities promoting Olympic values and sports after their YOG experience.

Keywords: Youth Olympic Games (YOG); Athlete Development; Culture and Education Programme (CEP); Motivation; Communities of Practice (CoP); Sports Legacy; Olympic Values; IOC



INTRODUCTION

The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was proposed by Jacques Rogge, the former president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), as a new event aimed at addressing rising obesity rates, lack of physical activity, excessive screen time associated with video games, and the declining popularity of the Olympic Games (OG) among children (Judge et al., 2009; Nordhagen & Lesjø, 2018; Wong, 2012). During the 119th IOC session in Guatemala in 2007, the YOG was unanimously accepted by the IOC Executive Board and approved as the International Olympic Committee's newest project. The first Summer YOG was hosted in Singapore from 14 to 26 August 2010, while the inaugural winter edition took place in Innsbruck, Austria, from 13 to 22 January 2012 (International Olympic Committee, 2021).

The YOG brings together talented athletes aged 15 to 18 from around the world, offering them a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience encompassing culture, education, and sports. This initiative signifies a return to the roots of the Olympic Movement (Nordhagen & Lesjø, 2018; Wong, 2011). The IOC has a two-fold purpose concerning the YOG: to establish it as the premier sports competition for this age group and to impart Olympism—a philosophy of life in which sports are utilized as a means to serve humanity and promote a peaceful and better world—along with valuable skills that enable athletes to excel both on and off the field through the "Compete, Learn, and Share" approach (International Olympic Committee, 2023). Moreover, these athletes are expected to serve as role models and ambassadors of the Olympic Movement in their communities. The adopted vision for the YOG aims "to inspire young people around the world to participate in sport and encourage them to adopt and live by the Olympic values and become ambassadors of Olympism" (International Olympic Committee, 2019a). The participation criteria for this event, which brings together elite athletes aged 15-18 from around the world, are established in collaboration with the IOC and international federations. As a result, the participation criteria for the YOG can vary for each sports discipline. However, "universality" is considered the most crucial aspect of the event's success. Therefore, the maximum number of athletes that a National Olympic Committee can bring has been determined,

ensuring a place for each National Olympic Committee in this event. As a fundamental principle, each country is required to have "at least 1 female and 1 male athlete" participating in the event (UOK, 2019b; Wong, 2011).

While the IOC aims to educate young athletes within the highly competitive environment of the YOG, scholars and athletes have criticized certain aspects of the YOG since its inception under Jacques Rogge's proposal (Grayson, 2021; Hanstad et al., 2013; Judge et al., 2009; Kristiansen, 2015; Krieger, 2013; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Parent et al., 2014; Parry, 2014; Schnitzer et al., 2014; Torres, 2010; Wong, 2011; Wong, 2012). Several studies suggest that athletes had low awareness of the cultural and educational activities, focusing mostly on winning medals and the competitive aspects of the YOG (Derwent & Yoruç Çotuk, 2013; Grayson, 2021; Hanstad et al., 2013; Krieger, 2013; Kristiansen, 2015; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; MacIntosh et al., 2022; Schnitzer et al., 2014). They also perceived the YOG as a "mini-Olympics" (Krieger, 2013; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016). Moreover, some organizational challenges prevented athletes from participating in the cultural and educational aspects of the YOG (Krieger, 2013; Kristiansen, 2015; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Parent et al., 2013; Parent et al., 2014; Peters & Schnitzer, 2015; Schnitzer et al., 2014). Kristiansen (2015) examined the YOG experience of 28 Norwegian athletes from different sports disciplines during the Innsbruck 2012 Winter Games. She found that due to their tight competitive schedules, media appearances, and homework, some athletes, particularly the curlers, were unable to attend the Cultural and Educational Program (CEP). When they did have spare time, they preferred to rest instead of participating in the CEP activities. The results indicated that those who had the opportunity to attend perceived the CEP as "entertainment." Additionally, the educational value of the CEP was questioned (Krieger, 2013), and it was not well organized to meet the diverse needs of participating athletes, including education, language, religion, and culture (Doll-Tepper, 2014).

On the other hand, Parent et al. (2019) found that the satisfaction level of athletes during the 2018 Buenos Aires Summer YOG increased compared to earlier



editions, indicating a reduction in criticized components. The researchers argued that the athletes' learning and interactions with Athlete Role Models (Olympic Champions) and their peers played a significant role in shaping their identities as elite athletes and ambassadors of the Olympic Movement upon returning to their home countries. A survey-based study conducted by Dervent and Yoruç Çotuk (2013) examined Turkish athletes' learning about the Olympic values from the YOG. The study found that one-third of the Turkish athletes considered the CEP valuable in establishing future goals for their sports careers. Moreover, several studies (Peters & Schnitzer, 2015; Stålstrøm et al., 2023; Schnitzer et al., 2014) identified valuable communication skills and the ability to present themselves effectively in front of the media as significant learning outcomes resulting from athletes' participation in the YOG.

The IOC aims to integrate young athletes who have limited knowledge concerning both the Olympic Movement and a high-level sports environment, transforming them into senior ambassadors while still young and fostering community participation (International Olympic Committee, 2019c). This aligns with Wenger's Communities of Practice (CoP) framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2023), representing a collective body of social knowledge developed through dynamic learning processes. Communities of Practice (CoP) involve individuals collaborating to advance their knowledge and competence in a specific field, sharing common interests and concerns (Wenger, 1998). Learning within Communities of Practice (CoP) is viewed as a social process where practitioners' identities are shaped through engagement and collaboration (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023). Multiple studies (Parent et al., 2019; MacIntosh et al., 2022) exploring YOG experiences using Wenger's Communities of Practice (CoP) framework suggest the potential for further research. Therefore, this study adopts Wenger's Communities of Practice (CoP) framework to examine the YOG experiences of Turkish athletes.

Empirical findings in the literature offer diverse perspectives on the expectations, perceptions, and legacies of athletes participating in various YOG editions (Kristiansen, 2015; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Parent et al., 2014; Schnitzer et al., 2014).

However, these studies typically take a short-term approach, conducted either immediately or several months after the YOG (Dervent & Yoruç Çotuk, 2013; Grayson, 2021). Consequently, there is a scarcity of data on the long-term impact of the YOG on athletes, especially concerning education, social dynamics, and cultural dimensions, including Turkish athletes (Dervent & Yoruç Çotuk, 2013; Grayson, 2021; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Peters & Schnitzer, 2015; Schnitzer et al., 2014; Stålstrøm et al., 2023).

Moreover, many studies have focused exclusively on athletes from a single country, particularly in countries such as Norway, Canada, and Australia (Souza & Tavares, 2021; Grayson, 2021). Given the IOC's objective to spread Olympic values worldwide through YOG athletes, this gap underscores the need for further research by investigating the impact of the YOG on athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds (Camara, 2021; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Kristiansen et al., 2018; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Schnitzer et al., 2014; Souza & Tavares, 2021).

Consequently, this study aims to explore the long-term educational, social, and cultural impacts of the YOG on Turkish athletes.

Literature Review

The YOG and Olympism

Baron de Coubertin, who dedicated his life to history, education, and sociology, reinitiated the Olympic Games (OG) in 1896 and introduced the concept of Olympism. Olympism is a philosophy of life in which sports are utilized as a means to serve humanity and promote a peaceful and better world. The mutual interaction of the attributes of the body, will, and mind forms the basis of this philosophy. This ideology, which serves as the foundation of the Olympic Movement, is expressed through actions that integrate sports with culture and education. Baron de Coubertin had an ambition to educate youth through sports, viewing the OG not only as a sporting competition but also as a means of promoting the values of Olympism—excellence, friendship, and respect—while educating youth through sports (Nordhagen & Lesjø, 2018; Wassong, 2006).



Despite this idyllic foundation for the modern OG, Wassong (2006) and Hanstad et al. (2013) argued that Baron de Coubertin's philosophy and the OG have become incompatible over the years due to commercialism and the loss of amateurism. Furthermore, Nordhagen and Lesjø (2018) highlighted that the interest of young people in the OG has declined over the years, with a shift towards other exciting games such as the X Games. Therefore, after being elected as the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2001, Jacques Rogge made a promise to "bring the IOC closer to society through innovation" (Rogge, 2010, pp. 33-35). As a significant step towards fulfilling this promise, he proposed a new international multi-sport event that would integrate Olympic education and sports. He drew inspiration from his original idea, the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF), as well as the Australian Youth Olympic Festival (AYOF) (Wong, 2011). During the preparations for the 2010 YOG in Singapore, IOC President Jacques Rogge emphasized that while competition would be a part of the event, it was not the primary focus. According to Rogge, the main objective was to provide young participants with an education centred around the values of the Olympic Movement (Judge et al., 2009; Nordhagen & Lesjø, 2018; Torres, 2010). In other words, Rogge's objective was to capture the attention of young people, meet the contemporary demands of society, and return to the original ideas of Baron de Coubertin for the OG through the YOG (Vanmeerbeek & Zintz, 2018). The essential aims of the YOG are as follows (International Olympic Committee, 2019a):

- Bring together the best young athletes for high-level global multi-sport competition at a purpose-driven sports festival that includes cultural and educational activities.
- Promote cultural exchange and the Olympic values, including non-discrimination, fair play, and the pursuit of excellence.
- Engage with young people on their terms through the Olympic Movement's digital platforms, including the Olympic Channel and IOC website.
- Be a catalyst for innovation and an incubator for new concepts such as testing and validating new sports and competition formats, youth education initiatives, or

technologies focused on more sustainable event delivery models, and the creation of programs that can be shared digitally.

The IOC offers a comprehensive Cultural and Educational Program (CEP), renamed "Compete, Learn and Share" after the 2012 Innsbruck Winter YOG (International Olympic Committee, 2015), before and during the YOG for young athletes, their entourage (coaches and parents), and other participants, including local people. This program is considered as important as the competitions and contributes to the uniqueness of the YOG among Olympic events. "Compete, Learn and Share" encompasses three main themes: "Athlete Performance," "Protect the Clean Athlete," and "Athlete Beyond Sport" (International Olympic Committee, 2019a). Under these themes, athletes acquire skills necessary for long-term athletic progression, explore career options both within and outside of the sports environment, and learn about Olympic values. Additionally, various activities are organized to maximize the learning outcomes for young athletes. These activities include "Chat with Champions," "Athlete 365" activities, "International Federations (IFs) Focus Day," and the "Game-Changer Studio." The IOC has also introduced several innovative and supportive programs to enhance athletes' experiences during the YOG. These programs include the "Young Change-Makers (YCM)," "Athlete Role Models (ARM)," "Young Reporters," and "YOG Ambassadors" (International Olympic Committee, 2019c). During the YOG, athletes are especially in contact with YCMs. Under the program previously known as "Young Ambassadors," YCMs are nominated by the NOCs and selected by the IOC to help young athletes from their nations maximize their YOG experience. These representatives encourage and assist young athletes from their own countries to participate in events within "Compete, Learn, and Share" and to interact with athletes from other countries (International Olympic Committee, 2019c). During the mandatory stay at the YOG, athletes are encouraged to attend these activities (Hanstad et al., 2013; Krieger, 2013).

Innovations are incorporated into competitive programs alongside cultural and educational activities at the YOG. Moreover, the IOC emphasized that the YOG has a unique identity and spirit that transcends



being merely the OG for young individuals (Parent et al., 2014). The inaugural YOG, held in 2010 in Singapore, featured 26 sports disciplines. These disciplines were also part of the 2012 London Summer OG, although with fewer disciplines and some variations in competition formats. For instance, the YOG introduced the 3x3 basketball format instead of the traditional basketball competition. New event formats, such as mixed-gender and mixed-NOC (National Olympic Committee) events, have since been introduced in the YOG. These formats promote inclusivity and collaboration among athletes from different countries. Examples of these new event formats include archery mixed-NOC, Nordic mixed-team, and mixed-team swimming events (International Olympic Committee, 2019b).

The IOC also introduced a special device called YOGGER, designed to facilitate athletes' interaction during the YOG. The YOGGER aims to enhance communication and engagement among athletes, providing them with a platform to connect and interact with each other throughout the event (International Olympic Committee, 2019c). This initiative by the IOC aims to foster a sense of community and collaboration among the participants of the YOG (Peters & Schnitzer, 2015).

These innovations align with the original idea of Baron de Coubertin to organize games based on the participation of athletes rather than nations (Olympic Charter, 2021).

Communities of Practice

Wenger's initial concept of Communities of Practice (CoP) emerged from his collaboration with Jean Lave in their 1991 publication, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They argued that learning is not a passive acquisition of information but an active process of increasing participation in a CoP. In his influential 1998 book, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Wenger expanded on this idea, focusing on workplace learning and how social resources shape individuals' learning journeys and professional identities. Since then, Wenger has further developed the concept, applying it to various domains such as business, education, government, and civic life. Etienne Wenger further expanded the

concept by introducing Landscapes of Practice (LoP) (Wenger et al., 2014).

Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) emphasizes the developmental journey of learners within a social learning environment, as they move from the periphery to the core of practice. CoPs have hierarchies and boundaries that make full participation challenging for outsiders. Newcomers start at the periphery and gradually acquire knowledge to become competent senior members of the community. CoPs are dynamic and cumulative, evolving through ongoing interactions and collaborations among individuals who share a common concern or passion (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

CoPs are a body of social knowledge maintained by a group of people, representing a common social structure that emerges and evolves through a cumulative and dynamic learning process. They refer to a group of individuals who share a common concern, set of problems, or passion and who collaborate to develop their knowledge and expertise in a particular domain through ongoing interactions (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023). Learning is seen as a social process where newcomers and experienced practitioners interact, negotiate meanings, and collaborate within established frameworks of competence to achieve their goals. The learning process gradually shapes the identities of practitioners as they engage in the practices of the community (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

The concept of Landscapes of Practice (LoP) expands beyond a single CoP and includes multiple communities and their interconnections (Wenger et al., 2014). It recognizes the interconnectedness and interactions among various entities such as peers, coaches, sports clubs, fellow athletes, national sports organizations, NOCs, and the IOC. These interactions shape the learning and development of young athletes within the Olympic Movement (MacIntosh et al., 2022).

Moreover, Wenger differentiates between "competence" and "knowledgeability" in relation to CoP and LoP. Competence refers to knowledge within a specific CoP, while knowledgeability



represents engagement and relationships with multiple practices across a broader field, or “landscape.” Engaging in diverse CoPs expands general knowledge and develops competence within specific local communities (Wenger et al., 2014; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

At the beginning of their careers, most young athletes have limited knowledge and experience regarding the requirements of becoming elite athletes. The Olympic Movement is also new to them. The YOG provides a suitable learning environment and resources for these young athletes to progress toward becoming elite athletes and ambassadors of the Olympic Movement. The YOG aims to transform their identities by allowing them to stay in a multicultural and interactive environment.

The overarching research question for this study is: What are the long-term educational, social, and cultural impacts of the YOG on Turkish athletes?

MATERIAL and METHODS

We utilized a qualitative approach with a retrospective design to gain deeper insight into the expectations, experiences, and lasting cultural, educational, and social impacts of the YOG among Turkish athletes who participated in the YOG from 2010 to 2020. The subsequent sections provide detailed information on the samples, data collection methods, and analysis techniques employed.

Participants

After obtaining approval from Istanbul Gedik University’s ethics committee, the study participants consisted of 11 Turkish athletes selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods (Gill, 2020) from a pool of 184 Turkish athletes who had participated in various YOG events held between 2010 and 2020.

The rationale behind purposive selection is to choose information-rich cases that provide opportunities for in-depth study. Information-rich cases refer to contexts where significant insights can be gained regarding the research's focal topics (Gill, 2020). To better understand the impact of the YOG on Turkish athletes who have pursued various career paths after

the YOG—including becoming Olympic athletes, actively pursuing the Olympic dream, or discontinuing their athletic careers—these scenarios comprised the research sample. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to complement the formation of the research group. Snowball sampling allows for the identification of new participants through initial contacts within the research domain (Staller, 2021). This approach was particularly useful for reaching athletes who had discontinued their athletic careers, as many of them are no longer associated with sports and may be living in various countries.

During the sample group selection process, participants were chosen based on three criteria to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the enduring impact of the CEP on Turkish athletes at various stages of their careers. Athletes who were under 18 years old and those unwilling to share their experiences regarding the YOG were excluded. The criteria for participant selection were as follows (see Table 1):

-----Table 1-----

The Demographics of Turkish YOG Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	YOG Participation	Olympic Participation	Current Level
Cemre	Female	19	2018 Buenos Aires	2020 Tokyo Olympics	High-performance
Damla	Female	26	2014 Nanjing	2016 Rio Olympics	High-performance
Berk	Male	29	2010 Singapore	2020 Tokyo Olympics	High-performance
Nisa	Female	23	2014 Nanjing	2016 Rio Olympics	Retired
Meltem	Female	20	2018 Buenos Aires	N/A	Professional
Burak	Male	21	2018 Buenos Aires	N/A	Professional
Mehmet	Male	21	2018 Buenos Aires	N/A	Professional
Birrol	Male	21	2018 Buenos Aires	N/A	Professional
Utku	Male	25	2014 Nanjing	N/A	Retired
Ozan	Male	23	2014 Buenos Aires	N/A	Retired
Kaan	Male	26	2014 Nanjing	N/A	Retired

High-Performance: athletes who had participated in the YOG and subsequently went on to participate in the OG while continuing their sports careers; **Professional:** athletes who had participated in the YOG but had not yet participated in the OG, yet continued to actively pursue their sports careers at a high level; **Retired:** athletes, one of whom attended the OG, who had participated in the YOG and had either participated or not participated in the OG but had already discontinued their involvement in the sport.



To ensure the confidentiality of the participating athletes, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and only minimal descriptive demographic information was provided. The age range of the participants was between 19 and 29 years (Mean = 23, SD = 3.1 years).

Interviews

The data collection method for this study involved conducting semi-structured interviews, guided by the Communities of Practice (CoP) theory and relevant literature on the YOG. The research instrument comprised 20 questions, addressing several key aspects:

- a) **General Information:** Gathering general demographic details, such as age, education level, foreign language proficiency, and the athletes' prior experiences in major competitions.
- b) **Expectations and Knowledge:** Exploring the athletes' expectations and knowledge leading up to the YOG (initial knowledge regarding the Community of Practice).
- c) **YOG Experiences:** Examining the athletes' experiences with the "Compete, Learn and Share" program and the innovative competition formats during the YOG (gaining knowledge concerning the CoP and the interaction between novices and seniors).
- d) **Perceptions and Long-Term Impact:** Assessing the athletes' perceptions of Olympic values and the objectives outlined by the IOC for the YOG, as well as exploring the long-term impacts on the athletes and any activities they have undertaken to promote the dissemination of Olympic values following the YOG (becoming senior in the Community of Practice).

Pilot Study

After the interview form was created, the opinions of three expert academicians working in this field were sought regarding the appropriateness and clarity of the questions. Based on these opinions, it was observed that no changes were needed. Subsequently, a pilot application was conducted with two athletes

participating in the YOG to identify, eliminate, and make necessary adjustments for recurring questions and issues in the question flow. As a result, data collection began in the main application, with only some sentences made more understandable, without any changes to the questions.

Data Collection

In order to elicit more in-depth responses and explore the topic further, this study employed probes and follow-up questions during the semi-structured interviews. In this study, the interviews took place between July and October 2022, scheduled at a mutually convenient day and time for the participants. The main interview questions were shared with the participants before the agreed interview date to facilitate the interview process. Also, this approach can help them to take enough time to recall their experiences. This approach was adopted based on the understanding that when participants have more time to reflect on their answers, their responses tend to be more comprehensive and in-depth (Burke & Miller, 2001). Each interview was conducted in Turkish and had a duration of 30 to 40 minutes. The interviews were facilitated using Zoom video calling technology. The chosen interview method proved advantageous, especially when participants are geographically scattered, hard to reach, or when the researcher's physical presence is restricted (Smith & Parkes, 2016). The athletes interviewed in this research were in diverse areas, including international settings. Prior to the commencement of each interview, the participants provided their consent orally, and this consent was recorded.

In qualitative research, there is no fixed quota for the number of participants to be interviewed. Instead, it is advised to conduct interviews until "data saturation" is achieved, meaning that no new information or insights emerge from subsequent interviews (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). In this study, it was observed that data saturation was reached after the 10th and 11th interviews, as no new information was obtained. Consequently, the data collection process was concluded after the 11th interview.



Data Analysis

The acquired data was transcribed using the voice transcribing feature of the Microsoft Office Word Program. This process resulted in obtaining 52 pages of raw data with single-line spacing.

A deductive thematic analysis approach was utilized during the data analysis phase, as Terry et al. (2017) recommended. The initial stage involved the creation of descriptors or codes to identify specific segments in the transcripts that were pertinent to the study's research questions and objectives. This coding process was carried out manually by the first researcher using various coloured highlighters, with accompanying notes directly written on the transcripts. In the subsequent coding cycle, the researcher summarized and grouped the codes from the first cycle into more specific themes based on Communities of Practice (CoP). A Microsoft Word document was utilized to organize and assign the codes to these themes.

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the study's findings, several processes were implemented to ensure trustworthiness such as memory checking, critical friends, and prolonged engagement (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). These included memory checking, involving cross-referencing collected data with participants to ensure accuracy and consistency. External reviewers, also known as critical friends, were involved in reviewing and providing feedback on the research process, coding and findings to minimize bias (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Additionally, prolonged engagement was employed, with the researcher maintaining continuous involvement in the research setting and establishing rapport with the participants over an extended period. This prolonged engagement allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and the establishment of rapport, particularly since the first researcher served as the Young Change-Maker of the Republic of Türkiye at the 2018 Buenos Aires Summer YOG. By employing these processes, the study aimed to strengthen the trustworthiness and validity of its findings (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

RESULTS

The objective of this study was to examine the lasting cultural, educational, and social impacts of the YOG on Turkish athletes, utilizing the Communities of Practice (CoP) as the underlying framework. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of how the YOG experience influenced the athletes' long-term development and its broader implications for their lives and interactions within society, as guided by the principles of CoP. The data is organized around three main themes: YOG awareness, YOG experience, and legacies.

YOG Awareness

Before participating in the YOG, athletes sought information from various sources to gain insights into what they could expect from the event. They gathered information from multiple avenues, including athletes with prior YOG experience, activities organized by the Turkish National Olympic Committee, information sessions conducted by Young Change Makers, guidance from their coaches, and their own personal efforts. These sources provided essential knowledge and guidance, helping the athletes prepare for the YOG and understand the unique aspects and requirements of the event. By accessing information from these diverse sources, athletes were better equipped for their YOG experience:

"I had limited knowledge about the YOG initially, but fortunately, athletes from my own sport who had previously participated in the YOG shared their experiences with me. They provided insights into the overall atmosphere and environment of the event, which I wasn't aware of before. Prior to their input, my focus was solely on the competitive aspect of the games" (Nisa).

It was evident that many athletes had limited or no knowledge of the Olympic values and the Olympic Movement prior to their participation in the YOG. Berk expressed this sentiment, stating, "Frankly, my understanding and knowledge of the Olympic values significantly increased after attending the YOG. Prior to my participation, I had limited knowledge about these values."



YOG Experience

Many athletes who participated in the YOG and engaged in the CEP expressed that their experiences were positive, highlighting the significant benefits they gained in terms of skill development and acquiring valuable insights for their future endeavours. Nisa shared her experience: "Of course, I learned a great deal. The most significant aspect was gaining an understanding of the Olympic Village. Additionally, there were discussions with Olympic athletes where I gained valuable insights on subjects like group dynamics, suitable attire, and proper behaviour."

Chatting with Olympic athletes, regarded as one of the most significant aspects of the cultural and educational events, has been a source of motivation for many athletes to continue their athletic pursuits:

"I believe that social events played a significant role because having the opportunity to meet renowned athletes is a remarkable experience. During the YOG I attended, I had the privilege of meeting swimmer Chad Le Clos. Interacting with them in the same environment and learning from their experiences was invaluable. These events hold greater importance than the competition itself because all the athletes participating in the YOG were still young and at the early stages of their careers. Beyond performance, it is truly meaningful as it motivates young athletes, making the YOG a truly special event in that regard" (Nisa).

Turkish athletes greatly benefited from the international and intercultural atmosphere of the YOG, as well as the structured learning environment provided by the "Compete, Learn, and Share" program. These interactions were facilitated through the use of the YOGGER. The YCMs played a significant role in motivating athletes to participate in social activities and various events. They offered encouragement, guidance, and support throughout the athletes' YOG experience.

Ozan mentioned that the presence of their YCM was crucial in motivating athletes to actively engage in social events, which enabled them to participate in various activities, including a talk with their favorite swimmer, Chad Le Clos. Despite initial hesitation, the support and encouragement of the YCM helped

them step out of their comfort zones and take part in numerous events.

Interactions within the YOG environment have not only facilitated connections among athletes but have also provided valuable opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning. Athletes have been able to benefit from each other's experiences and expertise, as well as from the diverse learning opportunities available to increase knowledgeability within the YOG. This collaborative atmosphere has fostered a culture of knowledge exchange, enabling athletes to expand their understanding and enhance their skills beyond their own sports.

Burak shared his experience: "At the YOG, my roommate, who was a tennis player, personally taught me the ins and outs of the sport, providing valuable insights into the player's lifestyle, match processes, and scoring systems."

The YOG experience significantly fosters athletes' sense of belonging, making them view themselves as integral members of the Olympic Movement. Kaan shared that after receiving his medal, he watched various athletics competitions with friends, experiencing a strong connection with the athletes and sharing their emotions. This experience reinforced his belief in the importance of sharing such feelings and feeling connected during competitions.

On the other hand, some athletes faced obstacles that hindered their full participation in cultural and educational activities at the YOG. These challenges included concerns about their performance being affected by dedicating time to other activities, coaches prioritizing winning medals, and language proficiency issues:

"For instance, if I had a less productive training session after participating in social activities, my coach would directly attribute it to my involvement in those activities, saying, 'See, your performance decreased because you went and had fun'" (Nisa).

Legacies

Participation in the YOG has a lasting impact on Turkish athletes, influencing both their athletic careers and personal growth. The most significant



finding is that many athletes reported increased self-confidence in their abilities and potential in sports as a result of their YOG experience. Engaging in "Compete, Learn and Share" activities and interacting within the YOG Village allowed them to connect with top-level peers from around the world, boosting their self-esteem and confidence. This experience also instilled in them the belief that they have the potential to compete in future Olympic Games.

Berk shared his perspective, noting that being in the finals had a profound impact on his life, influencing him to set his sights on the Olympics after the YOG. The atmosphere of athletes from various nations coming together for a common purpose was truly unique. Connecting with others who had similar stories inspired him to continue in sports and pursue greater achievements. Although he initially planned to quit sports after the YOG, his firsthand experience motivated him to stay involved until the age of 30, which ultimately allowed him to participate in the Olympics.

Nisa emphasized the importance of social events, saying: "I believe social events were crucial because encountering great athletes, even once, is a remarkable experience. Swimmer Chad Le Clos attended the YOG I participated in. Being in the same environment provided an opportunity to communicate with them and benefit from their experiences. Regardless of the different sports we engage in, we ultimately undergo similar processes. I find it highly valuable that they shared their experiences with us, particularly face-to-face. In my opinion, these events are even more important than the competition itself because all the athletes participating in the YOG were very young and at the beginning of their careers. Consequently, these young athletes have much to learn, and I consider the transfer of experience as one of life's most effective learning methods. Beyond performance, this is genuinely meaningful as it serves as a motivator for young athletes, making the YOG exceptionally special in this regard."

Damla also reflected on her experience: "From Athlete Role Models, I learned that their career journeys were similar to ours, and I realized that I am on the right track."

The interactive environment at the YOG facilitated connections and knowledge sharing among athletes from diverse nations, leaving lasting impacts. Athletes maintained contact and continued to engage beyond the event, with these friendships and ongoing communication serving as strong motivators in their sports careers.

Mehmet shared his perspective: "The YOG provided me with an unforgettable experience, exposing me to the diverse talents of both Turkish and international athletes across various sports. Whenever we reunite at subsequent competitions, we eagerly engage in conversations and warmly greet each other. These encounters serve as a powerful motivator, reigniting our shared memories of competing together in events. These individuals hold a special place in my heart as true friends, and our continued connection epitomizes the core values of the Olympics. Nurturing these friendships from the YOG has also positively enriched my social well-being."

Many athletes have expressed that the events, social interactions, and learning environment at the YOG had a more significant and lasting impact than the actual competitions. Birol shared his perspective:

"I believe the social events were more important than the competitions because while we only competed for one day, we spent about 15 days at the YOG. During those 14 days, we participated in various social events. I remember those social events more vividly than the competitions. They held greater importance than the competitions, training, or anything else. If I had to compare, I recall very little about the training and competitions, but I remember almost everything about the social events."

After participating in the YOG, many athletes began to see themselves as integral parts of the Olympic Movement. Motivated by their experience, they actively sought to promote and embody the Olympic values and spirit through various activities:

"Despite retiring from sports, my experience in the YOG environment inspired me to dedicate myself to teaching my sports discipline to children. My primary objective is to introduce them to the world of sports and instill a love for it by sharing my own experiences as an ambassador. These meaningful interactions and positive impacts on others are



incredibly fulfilling and serve as a profound source of motivation for me" (Nisa).

"I received an invitation to appear on a TV program. Additionally, I visited a secondary school in Gaziantep upon the invitation of the Turkish Olympic Committee and met with the children there. Moreover, during training sessions, I offered advice to young athletes to help with their development and encouraged them to participate in the YOG" (Ozan).

On the other hand, it has been observed that not all athletes were able to fully grasp the Olympic values and, as a result, did not actively engage in disseminating these values and the Olympic spirit. Nevertheless, the Olympic values have been implicitly experienced by all athletes throughout the various aspects of the organization led by the IOC:

The YOG provided a profound personal experience of the Olympic Values, where socialization and friendship played a central role throughout the event, going beyond mere competition. However, I may not be able to explicitly articulate each Olympic Value (Birol).

The YOG is viewed favourably by athletes who have experienced both the YOG and the OG. Many express that the YOG offers a more enjoyable, instructive, and fun-filled event:

"The YOG holds a special place in my heart because of the atmosphere, which encourages young athletes to strive for excellence, develop a love for sports, and truly enjoy the experience. The focus at the YOG is not solely on competition but on the holistic development of athletes. This distinct approach sets the YOG apart from the Olympic Games, making it my personal favourite" (Berk).

DISCUSSION

The findings presented above reveal key insights into the long-term educational, social, and cultural impacts of the YOG on Turkish athletes. In this section, these results are discussed in relation to existing literature, emphasizing their broader implications and contributions to the understanding of the YOG experience.

YOG Awareness

Athletes' awareness of the YOG varied prior to participation, with many relying on insights from peers, coaches, YCMs, and the Turkish National Olympic Committee. While these sources provided some foundational knowledge, there were gaps in the official information, which often lacked depth and engagement. Dervent and Yoruç Çotuk (2013) noted that athletes were uninformed about certain key activities, such as the CEP, during the 2010 YOG. This trend persisted in later editions, with some athletes from various nations viewing educational sessions as unengaging distractions (Naraine, 2021; Kristiansen, 2015). To enhance athletes' preparedness and understanding of the event, more dynamic and interactive pre-YOG sessions should be introduced to better communicate the cultural and educational components, allowing athletes to embrace the Olympic values more fully.

Athletes often entered the YOG with limited knowledge of the Olympic values and the Olympic Movement. The finding is supported by other studies (Camara, 2021; Grayson, 2021). As newcomers to the Olympic Movement, athletes were initially at the periphery and began their journey toward the center of practice to develop their competence (Lave & Wenger, 1991), yet the lack of a robust initiation process may hinder the pace of this transition. Introducing the Olympic values to athletes before the YOG, facilitated by NOCs, could provide athletes with a better understanding, and create a stronger sense of purpose, making it easier for them to engage with the Olympic Movement during the YOG. This proactive approach can enhance athletes' connection to the Olympic values and contribute to a more meaningful YOG experience.

YOG Experience

Athletes who participated in the YOG and engaged in the CEP reported positive experiences, noting benefits in skill development and gaining insights relevant to their future careers. This positive perception is well-supported by prior research (Grayson, 2021; Krieger, 2015; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Kinoshita et al., 2023; MacIntosh et al., 2022; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Parent et al., 2019; Peters & Schnitzer, 2015; Schnitzer et al.,



2014). These findings underscore the value of the CEP in enhancing athletes' broader Olympic experience and preparing them for future challenges.

Engaging with Olympic athletes during the YOG, a key component of the cultural and educational events, has been a significant source of motivation for young athletes to continue their athletic careers. Stålstrøm et al. (2023) found that Olympians provided valuable guidance on balancing education with sports, excelling as elite athletes, and prioritizing long-term goals. These interactions align with the Communities of Practice (CoP) theory, where novices learn from experienced members, gradually transitioning into more central roles. For YOG participants, interacting with Olympic champions allowed them to gain insights into their path to success and their potential as future role models, embodying the principles of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

Turkish athletes benefited greatly from the international and intercultural atmosphere of the YOG, particularly through the structured "Compete, Learn, and Share" program and the YOGGER platform. The YCMs played a pivotal role in motivating athletes to engage in social activities and events, fostering a supportive environment. Multiple studies consistently highlight the athletes' significant enjoyment of the spontaneous and global aspects of the YOG (Grayson, 2021; Krieger, 2013; Schnitzer et al., 2014; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Kristiansen, 2015; MacIntosh et al., 2022; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Parent et al., 2014). This highlights the significance of unplanned interactions and cross-cultural experiences within the event. The diverse and international nature of the YOG provided athletes with unique opportunities to connect with peers from other countries, fostering a sense of unity and camaraderie. These unplanned interactions often resulted in lasting friendships and valuable cultural exchanges, contributing to the athletes' overall positive perceptions of the YOG (Grayson, 2021; Krieger, 2013; Schnitzer et al., 2014; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Kristiansen, 2015; MacIntosh et al., 2022; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Parent et al., 2014). Interactions with international peers during the YOG played a significant role in shaping the identities of young athletes, fostering a sense of

belonging to the Olympic Movement (Grayson, 2021; Krieger, 2013; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016; Kristiansen, 2015; MacIntosh et al., 2022; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019; Parent et al., 2014; Schnitzer et al., 2014). This aligns with the concepts presented by Wenger (1998) regarding the impact of social interactions on individual identity formation within Communities of Practice (CoP). Moreover, Australian (Grayson, 2021), Canadian and Norwegian (Parent et al., 2014) athletes regarded the YOGGER platform as an effective "icebreaker," facilitating initial connections and communication among themselves. It proved particularly valuable for some athletes such as Gambian, enabling them to overcome barriers and engage with their peers (Camara, 2021). The YCMs, on the other hand, provided guidance and support to athletes, encouraging their active participation in social activities, and helping to create a positive and inclusive atmosphere throughout the YOG (Peters & Schnitzer, 2015; Schnitzer et al., 2014).

The YOG environment has facilitated valuable knowledge sharing among athletes, enabling them to learn from each other's experiences and expertise across different sports. This collaborative atmosphere fosters a culture of knowledge exchange, allowing athletes to expand their understanding and develop skills beyond their own disciplines. Grayson (2021) observed that Australian athletes broadened their sports knowledge by attending events as spectators, while MacIntosh et al. (2022) emphasized that these diverse learning opportunities can support athletes in future roles within the Olympic Movement, such as coaching, officiating, and education.

The YOG experience plays a pivotal role in fostering athletes' sense of belonging, making them feel like integral members of the Olympic Movement. This is consistent with Peters and Schnitzer's (2015) findings from the 2012 Innsbruck Winter YOG, where athletes felt empowered as future ambassadors in their sports. MacIntosh et al. (2022) further supported this, emphasizing the YOG's role in reinforcing athletes' connection to the Olympic values and the broader sports community.

Despite the benefits of the YOG, some athletes faced obstacles that hindered their full engagement in cultural and educational activities. Concerns about



performance impacts, pressure from coaches to prioritize medals, and language barriers were key factors. For instance, athletes from Eastern countries, such as Taiwan and Korea, faced challenges as their coaches prioritized training over participation in the "Compete, Learn, and Share" initiative. In contrast, Western coaches encouraged involvement in these activities (Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019). This difference in coaching approaches often stems from the potential future benefits of winning a medal, such as monetary support and scholarships, making it crucial to educate stakeholders about the broader goals of the YOG.

Furthermore, despite language services provided by the IOC, communication challenges persisted, emphasizing the need for enhanced language support to promote inclusivity (Kristiansen, 2015; Nordhagen & Krieger, 2019). The "Compete, Learn, and Share" program plays a critical role in athletes' identity transformation, helping them transition from novices to ambassadors of Olympism. Without participation in these activities, their development within the Olympic Movement may be incomplete (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

Legacies

Participation in the YOG has left a lasting imprint on Turkish athletes, significantly shaping their athletic careers and personal growth. Many athletes reported a substantial boost in self-confidence and belief in their potential due to their involvement in the YOG. The "Compete, Learn and Share" activities, alongside the international and intercultural environment of the YOG Village, provided opportunities to interact with top-level peers from around the world. These experiences fostered a sense of belonging and increased self-esteem, reinforcing their confidence in pursuing future Olympic ambitions.

One athlete, who initially planned to retire after the YOG, experienced a profound shift in mindset. After reaching the finals, the unique atmosphere of camaraderie and shared experiences with athletes from different nations inspired him to continue his athletic career, eventually leading him to the Olympics. This case highlights the YOG's potential

to transform athletes' perspectives, extending their careers far beyond what they initially anticipated.

Furthermore, these interactions with Athlete Role Models, such as Olympic swimmer Chad Le Clos, provided invaluable insights and motivation for young athletes. These experiences were seen as equally, if not more, important than the competition itself, especially for athletes at the beginning of their careers. The chance to learn from seasoned athletes face-to-face, regardless of their sport, helped participants realize they were on the right track in their athletic journeys, strengthening their resolve to pursue further achievements.

This transformative impact is supported by Kristiansen et al. (2018), who found that the YOG had varying influences on Norwegian athletes—some were inspired to aim for greater success, while others felt they had reached their peak and shifted away from competitive sports. The example of the Turkish athlete who became an Olympian ten years after his YOG participation emphasizes the long-term influence of the YOG. It underscores the program's ability to reignite passion, build determination, and contribute to the athletes' identities as they transition from novices to seniors within the Olympic Movement (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023).

The YOG's interactive environment fostered deep connections and opportunities for knowledge sharing among athletes from diverse nations, leaving a lasting impact on their personal and athletic lives. These friendships and ongoing communication extended beyond the event, serving as powerful motivators throughout their sports careers. Athletes frequently reunited at future competitions, where shared memories of the YOG helped reinforce their sense of belonging to the Olympic Movement. These enduring relationships fostered a strong sense of camaraderie, contributing positively to the athletes' social well-being and supporting the core values of the Olympic Movement.

Research by MacIntosh et al. (2022) supports this view, showing that athletes who established cross-cultural friendships during the 2016 Lillehammer Winter YOG were positively influenced by their future sports-related aspirations. The YOG



experience often inspired athletes to continue pursuing their athletic careers or explore roles such as coaching, officiating, and sports administration. However, they indicated that this impact could be tentative and requires further research.

Our study also demonstrates that the impact of the YOG persists long after the event itself. The concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) and Communities of Practice (CoP) theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023) aligns with this finding, as athletes transition from the periphery to the core of their sports through their YOG experiences. These interactions play a pivotal role in their long-term athletic development and deeper engagement with the Olympic Movement. The YOG serves as a catalyst for this progression, with the friendships and knowledge gained continuing to influence athletes' identities and career trajectories well into the future.

Many athletes indicated that the social interactions and learning environment at the YOG had a more significant and lasting impact than the actual competitions. Although previous studies (Camara, 2021; Dervent & Yoruç Çotuk, 2013; Grayson, 2021; Handstad et al., 2013; Kristiansen, 2015; Krieger, 2013; Krieger & Kristiansen, 2016) suggest that athletes predominantly focus on competition, our study reveals that those who actively engage in "Compete, Learn and Share" activities may benefit more in the long run. Embracing the full YOG experience—beyond competition—allows athletes to develop essential skills, expand their networks, and acquire knowledge that contributes to their long-term success in sports. This underscores the importance of a balanced approach that values both competitive performance and personal development within the YOG context.

After participating in the YOG, many athletes began to see themselves as active participants in the Olympic Movement, motivated to embody and promote its values. Inspired by their experiences, several athletes took personal and professional initiatives to introduce sports to younger generations, share their knowledge, and encourage others to engage in the Olympic spirit. Contrary to findings by Krieger and Kristiansen (2016), which suggested limited post-YOG engagement by athletes, our study

found that some athletes actively shared their YOG experiences through various platforms, including media appearances, school visits, and mentorship. These efforts underscore the lasting impact of the YOG, as athletes continue to serve as ambassadors of Olympism and contribute to the broader dissemination of Olympic values.

Not all athletes were able to fully grasp or explicitly articulate the Olympic values after participating in the YOG. However, the Olympic values were implicitly experienced throughout the event, as socialization, friendship, and shared experiences played a central role. Even though athletes may struggle to define Olympism, their behaviours and interactions during the YOG reflected the core values of Respect, Excellence, and Friendship. Similar findings were observed in Australian athletes at the 2018 Buenos Aires Summer YOG (Grayson, 2021) and in studies by MacIntosh et al. (2022) and Parent et al. (2019), where athletes demonstrated these values through their actions rather than words. This suggests that while athletes may not retain a precise verbal understanding of the Olympic values, the lived experience of these principles left a more lasting and meaningful impression on their attitudes and behaviours.

Athletes who have participated in both the YOG and the OG express a preference for the YOG, praising it as a more enjoyable, instructive, and holistic experience. Unlike the OG, where the focus is primarily on competition, the YOG places greater emphasis on the personal development of young athletes, fostering a love for sports and encouraging a broader engagement with Olympic values. This approach aligns with the IOC's commitment to revitalizing the educational aspects of the Games, echoing Baron de Coubertin's original vision. The YOG's less competitive atmosphere, as highlighted by Handstad et al. (2013) and MacIntosh et al. (2022), reinforces its role in fulfilling the educational and developmental ideals of the Olympic Movement.



CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights that while young athletes had some knowledge of the "Compete, Learn and Share" program, their understanding of the fundamental objectives of the YOG was limited. Effectively conveying the primary goals of the YOG to all participants—including athletes, coaches, and team members—is essential for creating a meaningful experience and engaging them in disseminating Olympic values, ultimately making them sports ambassadors.

Our findings support the IOC's assertion that young individuals involved in the Olympic experience can become future Olympians and sports ambassadors, gaining an understanding of their relevance and significance (International Olympic Committee, 2012). The transformative impact of the YOG has empowered Turkish athletes to pursue their Olympic dreams and advocate for sports and Olympic values. Some athletes who initially planned to quit sports were positively influenced by the YOG and decided to continue their athletic careers. Through their participation in the YOG, they transitioned into elite athletes and ambassadors of the Olympic Movement.

The study also underscores the profound impact of international and national friendships established during the YOG on athletes' motivation to continue their athletic journeys.

Furthermore, athletes who participated in both the YOG and the OG expressed a stronger preference for the YOG. They reported higher enjoyment, educational value, and overall fun, citing the unique atmosphere of the YOG and its focus on the personal development of young athletes.

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