

The Youth Olympic Games, Their Programs, and Olympism*

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Abstract: The Youth Olympic Games were inaugurated by the International Olympic Committee in Singapore in 2010. Their scale was nothing short of impressive. Focused around a vision to inspire young people to participate in sport and learn about the values of Olympism, the YOG implemented an extensive Cultural and Educational Program and an innovative Competitive Program. This paper evaluates both these programs and the extent to which they embody and advance Olympism. It identifies strengths as well as potential areas of improvements. This paper argues that the YOG demonstrate that alternate Olympic scenarios, ones that are more sensible to Olympism, are not only desirable but also possible.

Key words: Youth Olympic Games, Cultural and Education Program, Competitive Program, Olympism

The recently inaugurated Youth Olympic Games (YOG) constitute the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) latest enterprise. It could be argued that the YOG are the most significant Olympic undertaking in more than eight decades, since the inauguration of the Winter Olympic Games in 1924. The scale of the first YOG, held in Singapore from 14 to 26 August, 2010, was remarkable. Indeed, the event gathered more than 3,500 athletes from all but one of the 205 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) that existed at the time of the Opening Ceremonies.¹ In addition, the Singapore 2010 Youth Olympic Games, as the event was officially known, was attended by 1,800 accredited officials, covered by about 1,900 accredited media personnel, and organized with the assistance of 20,000 volunteers.² Another measure of the relevance the IOC gave to the inaugural YOG was the flame relay. In spite of the IOC's decision after the 2008 Olympic Games that future flame relays be held within the host city's country, an exception was made for the YOG. Thus, after the lighting ceremony in Ancient Olympia, the flame travelled to one city in each of the five continents,

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where community welcoming festivities were celebrated, before arriving in Singapore for the domestic leg of the relay.³

Given their scale as well as the consideration and importance given to their organization, the YOG are the largest multisport international event for young athletes. Although almost all International Sport Federations organize junior championships for different age brackets at the world, continental, or regional level, the YOG are much wider in scope and participation. However, the motivation for the YOG was as much the athletic competition as the values that have inspired and framed the Olympic Games since their inception in the late nineteenth century, a vision known as “Olympism.” Thus, as IOC President Jacques Rogge articulated, “These Youth Olympic Games should not be seen as mini-Olympic Games.”⁴ Rather, Rogge explained, “There will be competition, of course, but the main goal . . . is not competition as such. The main goal is to give the youngsters an education based on Olympic values.”⁵ In other words, the YOG were envisioned as a sizeable and unique Olympic pedagogical effort. As the IOC put it, “the YOG would be true to the vision of educating young people through the values sport teaches.”⁶ This is at the center of the goal the Olympic Movement has professed for itself throughout its history.⁷ To accomplish their vision, the Cultural and Educational Program (CEP) and the Competitive Program (CP) of the YOG were given equal worth. In doing so, the IOC thought it was “both breaking new ground and returning to its roots.”⁸

In addition to putting them on equal footing, which constitutes a novelty in itself, both the CEP and the CP of the YOG included a series of innovations. For instance, while the former included more than 50 activities meant for athletes “to share the Olympic values,” the latter, albeit with fewer disciplines and events, featured some, such as the basketball three-on-three tournament, that are not contested at the Olympic Games. Another innovation of the CP was the inclusion of contests for mixed-gender and mixed-NOCs teams. Yet, for all the

innovations, there was much continuity between the YOG's and the Olympic Games' CP as it comprised the 26 sports that will be contested at the 2012 Olympic Games to be held in London. In light of these changes, this paper evaluates the CEP and the CP of the YOG, and analyzes whether they embody and advance the values of Olympism. This also allows for a comparison between these programs at the YOG and the Olympic Games as well as the identification of potential areas of improvement. I will begin by briefly characterizing Olympism. Then, I will provide a historical overview of the YOG and a description of their CEP and CP. This is necessary to examine said programs in the sense indicated above.

Olympism

Since the creation of the IOC in the late nineteenth century, Olympic officials have insisted that the Olympic Games are like no other sporting event in the world. In 1908, discussing the difference between world championships and the Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the IOC, stressed that the uniqueness of the latter was that although including international competitions they “are ‘something else’ as well, and it is just this, ‘something else’ that matters, as it is not to be found in any other variety of athletic competition.”⁹ This “something else” is captured by his notion of Olympism. Arguably, this philosophical vision constitutes the driving force behind the universal charm of the Olympic Games, what sets them apart from any other sporting event.

Though Coubertin wrote several articles discussing Olympism and mentioned it in many more, he never articulated a concise and clear definition. Historically, the complexity of the concept might reflect the fact that Coubertin was influenced by, and nurtured himself from, different worldviews raging from classic Hellenism to English muscular Christianity to French social reformism to classic nineteenth century liberalism.¹⁰ Coubertin thought that Olympism was a “philosophy of life” and “a state of mind” that could be approached as “the

religion of energy, the cult of intensive willpower developed through the practice of virile sports supported by hygiene and civism and surrounded with arts and thought.”¹¹ He then said that the “religious sentiment [was] transformed and expanded by the internationalism and democracy that are distinguishing features of our day.”¹² Notice the diversity of very complex elements mentioned in these quotes. While Coubertin continued adding attributes to, and even reformulating, the concept of Olympism until later in his life, he consistently argued that it “refuses to make physical education a purely physiological thing.”¹³

Despite the challenges posed by Coubertin’s radical eclecticism, his writing along with the normative exegesis of Olympism proposed by Olympic authorities allows for the identification of a set of central values. For instance, *The Olympic Charter* advances that

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.¹⁴

It also pronounces that

The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.¹⁵

Finally, it proposes that

The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.¹⁶

It is clear that Olympism makes the explicit pursuit of moral values through sport its distinguishing feature. This is apparently the same conclusion reached by several scholars.¹⁷

For instance, sport philosopher Jim Parry argues that Olympism “emphasizes the role of sport in global culture, international understanding, peaceful coexistence, and social and moral education.”¹⁸ Similarly, Nikolaos Nissiotis, a former president of the International Olympic Academy, advances that “The Olympic Ideal is what qualifies sport exercise in general as a means for educating the whole of man as a conscious citizen of the world.”¹⁹ Even sport

philosopher Lamartine P. DaCosta, who believes that Olympism is better understood as a protophilosophy marred with epistemological vagueness and contradictions, does not deny that it pretends to express and transmit moral values.²⁰

Although its specific content and relevance are debatable and debated, that Olympism is a morally value laden concept is not disputed. Even more, as sport philosopher Mike McNamee's has recently defended, "Olympism is a contested concept [but] it is not an essentially contested one. There does appear to be a fairly clear core of persisting and persistently shared features."²¹ This is not the place to analyze competing views of the moral content of Olympism. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that in spite of the debate over its specificity, Olympism is understood as a secular, humanistic, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan vision emphasizing "values such as holistic human development, excellence, peace, fairness, equality, mutual respect, justice, and non-discrimination."²² Under the precepts of Olympism, sport, and consequently the Olympic Games, there lies an educational rationality, a means to advance and materialize a set of moral values through sport. Without these values, the Olympic Games would just be, to use Coubertin's phraseology, world championships, or "simply games."²³ That is, devoid of Olympism, the Olympic Games, and sport, would be less than what they could be because they would lack a higher purpose.

Historical Overview of the YOG

The idea to establish a global multisport international event for young athletes seems to have gradually developed among Olympic officials in the last two decades. Rogge was the driving force behind the initiative. In this regard, he declared that "The Youth Olympic Games is a project I've had at the back of my mind since being elected IOC President in 2001."²⁴ Rogge traced back his interest in the creation of this kind of international sport opportunity for youth back to the early 1990s. Under his leadership, the European Olympic

Committees launched in 1991 the European Youth Olympic Festival, a biennial event for young athletes from European NOCs.²⁵ Rogge eventually formalized his project to create the YOG, the IOC studied its feasibility, and on April 25, 2007, its Executive Board unanimously approved it during a meeting in Beijing. Two months later, on July 5, the IOC approved the creation of the YOG during its 119th Session held in Guatemala City and decided that the first edition would take place in 2010. In October, nine cities submitted their bids to host the inaugural YOG. Early in 2008, Singapore was elected the host over Moscow by 53 to 44 votes.²⁶

Apparently, it took some time to conceptualize and garner support for the YOG. Gilbert Felli, IOC Executive Director of Olympic Games, provides insight into this process. Although “The IOC had been thinking about it for many years,” Felli said, “when we talked about a purely sporting event the response was pretty negative.”²⁷ It was only “when we talked about a different kind of event in which sport, culture and education were equal, an event based on Olympic values, people said, ‘Ah, maybe this is something we should explore.’”²⁸ While partially modeled after the Olympic Games, in the course of exploring possibilities for the YOG it was decided to depart from this model in relevant ways. Though the event’s competitive element was retained, the YOG was infused with “culture and education at its core.”²⁹ As such, the YOG were envisioned to materialize the values of Olympism. Thus, the structure of the event created by the IOC for athletes between the ages of 14 and 18 seeks to maintain a balance among “sport, education and culture” as well as to “work as a catalyst in these fields throughout the Olympic Movement and to encourage young people to play an active role in their communities.”³⁰ In accordance with this structure, the following goals were articulated for the YOG:

1. to bring together the world’s best young athletes and to celebrate them
2. to offer a unique and powerful introduction to Olympism
3. to innovate in educating and debating the Olympic values and challenges of society

4. to share and celebrate the cultures of the world in a festive atmosphere
5. to reach youth communities throughout the world to promote Olympic values
6. to raise sports awareness and participation among young people
7. to act as a platform for initiatives within the Olympic Movement
8. to be an event of the highest international sporting standard for young people³¹

In order to accomplish these goals, the IOC developed two ambitious and complementary programs to be implemented during the YOG. One of the programs was the CEP, the other was the CP.

The YOG's CEP and CP

At the very core of the YOG's CEP was the attempt to familiarize athletes with Olympism and its values "in a fun and festive spirit and to raise awareness of important issues such as the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, the fight against doping, global challenges and their role as sports ambassadors in their communities."³² The CEP was developed by the IOC with the assistance of international groups, such as the World Organization of the Scout Movement, known for their involvement and work with the youth. In the end, the structure of the CEP was based on five themes:

1. Olympism. This theme focused on the origin, philosophy, structure, and evolution of the modern Olympic Games.
2. Skills Development. This theme reflected on various facets of a professional athlete's career (including personal development and managing transitional phases in life).
3. Well-Being and Healthy Lifestyle. This theme related to concerns such as healthy eating habits and the prevention of doping in sport.
4. Social Responsibility. This theme revolved around the young Olympians' responsibilities as members of their own communities as well as global citizens.
5. Expression. The last theme included learning, interacting, and celebrating through the medium of digital media.³³

To accomplish its goal, and inspired by these five themes, the CEP offered activities in seven different formats:

1. Chat with Champions: The young Olympians had the opportunity to get up close with role models, and hear them share personal and inspirational stories about the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect. Role models shared their personal experiences through dialogue sessions, conducted in an entertaining talk-show format.
2. Discovery Activity: Through interactive exhibitions and workshops, the young Olympians explored topics relevant to their journey towards becoming champions in life.
3. World Culture Village: The World Culture Village, located in the Village Square, was a focal point for international visitors to interact with one another. There were cultural booths, hosted by young Singaporeans, featuring each of the 205 participating NOCs. Hosts at each booth invited visitors to explore different cultures and take part in fun activities and traditional games. [...]
4. Community Project: The young Olympians and local community organisations came together to participate in fun activities like drumming and circus arts. Through these activities, the young Olympians got to make friends with the beneficiaries, learnt about social responsibility and were encouraged to give back to their own communities.
5. Arts and Culture: The young Olympians were treated to an exciting mix of musical performances, dance acts and inspirational Olympic-themed artwork during the evening festivals. These activities aimed to bring out the celebration of youth, cultures and friendships forged at the Games.
6. Island Adventure: . . . [the young Olympians] worked together in teams to go through confidence-building courses, water activities and physical challenges, which brought out the values of teamwork, mutual respect and friendship. These activities were held at one of Singapore's offshore islands – *Pulau Ubin*.
7. Exploration Journey: The young Olympians embarked on a green experience in the half-day Exploration Journeys to HortPark and Marina Barrage, two of Singapore's newest environment-themed attractions. At HortPark, the young Olympians participated in a terrarium workshop and garden tour. The terrarium workshop taught the importance of our ecosystem by providing the young Olympians with materials to create a mini-garden in a glass bottle that mimics our ecosystem. The young Olympians also learnt about environmental issues at two themed gardens, where they had the opportunity to reflect and discuss environmental issues and green initiatives in their home countries. At Marina Barrage, the young Olympians learnt about sustainable water management through three different activities.³⁴

In total, the CEP offered the young Olympians more than 50 different activities meant to provide an exciting learning environment. These activities included workshops, exhibitions, forums, artistic performances, community projects, and educational field trips through which they were stimulated to learn, embody, and share Olympism with fellow Olympians from all over the world. In addition, according to Olympic officials, through the CEP's activities the young Olympians were encouraged "to discuss important themes linked to the practice of sport as well as to global and societal challenges."³⁵ As the IOC put it, through the CEP young Olympians had the opportunity to:

- **learn** about important global and sports topics;
- **contribute** to the environment and society;
- **interact** and build friendships with other young people from around the world; and
- **celebrate** the Olympic Movement and the diverse cultures of the world.³⁶

Most of the activities of the CEP were held within the Youth Olympic Village to facilitate athletes' participation. Similarly, such participation was also facilitated by coordinating the CEP with the CP. Clearly, this coordinating effort was meant to materialize the IOC's message that "The [Cultural and Education] programme is critical to the success of the Youth Olympic Games."³⁷ Moreover, the IOC tried to create a unique educational experience. As Patrick Stalder, a member of the IOC's YOG department, explained, "We tried to develop events and experiences that did not feel like a school or college environment" and commented that "We didn't want this to be traditional education because we knew we had to engage athletes in a different way – learning by doing and sharing."³⁸ For the IOC, the CEP "turned out to be a huge success."³⁹ According to its own estimation, most of the more than 3,500 athletes participating in the YOG took part in one way or another in the CEP. Indeed, the majority seemed to have visited the World Anti-Doping Agency and the UNAIDS (Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS) exhibits in the Youth Olympic Village. For journalist Michael Stoneman, "It was the manner in which all 50 CEP activities were

embraced by the athletes, however, that ensured that the programme was deemed a resounding success.”⁴⁰ Even if an overstatement, there is no doubt that the organizers engage in a credible effort to highlight education at the YOG as well as to combine their CEP and CP to advance the idea that, as Rogge said, “The Youth Olympic Games are about much more than sport.”⁴¹

In the attempt to equip the YOG with “their own unique identity,” the IOC decided that the event’s CP would consist of the same 26 sports that will be included in the London 2012 Olympics with fewer disciplines and events but with some innovative and significant modifications. As Rogge admitted, “the creative approach to the sports competition at the YOG help to give the event its own identity.”⁴² Behind the innovative look at the YOG’s CP was both “the integration of youth-relevant sports and disciplines into the Olympic programme” and “making urban culture part of the cultural programmes of the OG.”⁴³ The strategy seemed to have been to make the CP more amenable to young athletes and therefore “to keep the Olympic Games relevant for the younger generations.”⁴⁴ Regardless of the motivations to provide the YOG’s CP with a character of their own within the confines, stability, and recognition of the CP of the Olympic Games, the IOC implemented bold changes to the layout of Olympic competition. So, although the sports contested at the YOG were the same as those featured at the Olympic Games, the former initiated several new disciplines and competitive formats.

There were three prominent innovations introduced by the IOC to the YOG’s CP. Before the festival was held, Olympic officials deemed them “The most important particularity of the YOG.”⁴⁵ The first innovation was mixed-gender events. A number of sports included this kinds of events in their competitive format. For instance, in swimming, the 4 x 100 meters medley relay and the 4 x 100 meters freestyle relay were events in which women and men came together to form a single team. Similarly, in cycling, 32 national

teams consisting of three men and one woman participated in the sport's only event. A second innovation was the inclusion of events for mixed-NOCs teams. The equestrian team event exemplifies this innovation. Riders from different NOCs of the same continent formed a team and competed as such. The final innovation featured events with both mixed-gender and mixed-NOCs teams. In judo, the mixed team events encompassed both men and women from different NOCs competing on the same team. Another example is that of the mixed team event in fencing in which nine continental teams consisting of three men and three women were formed for the competition. Much in the same vein, in triathlon, the mixed relay included teams made up of two men and two women from different NOCs.⁴⁶

While many of the events in the YOG's CP were adapted to the young athletes' developmental possibilities, others were modified to make them more appealing to them and supposedly satisfy their athletic interests. Thus, for example, in athletics the men's javelin weight was reduced from 800 to 700 grams. Likewise, the longest race in athletics was the 10,000 meters walk. In some sports, new events were introduced. Such was the case with basketball, cycling, and fencing. Basketball used a 3 on 3 format which was contested on one half-court with one basket. Games consisted of two periods of five minutes each. The team leading after regulation time or the first team to reach 33 points was the winner. If the score was tied, the game continued for as many extra periods (two minutes each) as needed to break the tie. In cycling, the woman in each team had to compete in BMX, cross country, and time trial while the men in each team were required to compete in one of these disciplines. In addition, all riders in a team had to compete in the road race. The medals were awarded to those teams whose members accrued the most overall points. Finally, in fencing, the mixed team event was also new and required the use of all weapons (épée, foil, and sabre).

It is worth mentioning a novelty introduced to the YOGs CP related to the equipment used in some events. Both in canoe/kayak and equestrian the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee provided the horses and the boats to all athletes, respectively. In the case of canoe/kayak, the same boats were distributed to all athletes for both categories of competition. As for equestrian, the horses were carefully prepared in Australia and brought to Singapore for the YOG. After being inspected, the horses were allocated to the rides by a draw. Riders kept the allocated horse for both the individual and mixed-NOCs event.

Much like the YOG's CEP, the CP was considered quite successful. Stoneman wrote that the mixed-gender and mixed-NOCs events "added a completely new element to the sporting competition and proved particularly popular with the athletes."⁴⁷ The new events, he added, captured the imagination of athletes and spectators alike. Speaking of the novel basketball competitive design, Rogge claimed that "It is a very exciting event" and explained, "I like the format very much, you know it's an extrapolation of how basketball was played in the inner cities and backyards. The rules are clear, there is suspense and obviously the players love it."⁴⁸ In the IOC president's view, taken as whole, the CP and the CEP contributed to the full realization of the YOG.

The YOG's CEP and CP, and Their Relation to Olympism

Replicating the relevance that Olympism places on the "blending [of] sport with culture and education" to accomplish its goals, the *Olympic Charter* stipulates that those in charge of organizing the Olympic Games must implement "a programme of cultural events" that lasts at least the period during which the Olympic Village is open.⁴⁹ That is, the Olympic Games' Cultural Program must be combined with the sporting competition. This aspiration can be traced back to Coubertin's emphasis on the connection between sport and art.

However, in spite of Olympic regulations, lofty rhetoric, and admirable efforts, for the most part, the Cultural Program of the Olympic Games has been secondary to the event's CP. As Beatriz García, a researcher in cultural policy, explains, one of the problems is that while the *Olympic Charter* requires the staging of a Cultural Program during the Olympic Games, it is broadly defined and no performance indicators are detailed.⁵⁰ This leads to extreme laxity in the interpretation of the significance and role of the Cultural Program as well as its conceptualization and implementation. These ambiguities, in turn, have led to misunderstandings, lack of funding, and managerial troubles, which have rendered the Olympic Games' Cultural Program relatively invisible. This invisibility is obviously at odds with the tenets of Olympism. In this regard, García contends that "despite the constant re-invention and adaptation of the Cultural Olympiads . . . structure and themes to the demands of the environment, they have remained in the shadow as a marginal aspect of the Games."⁵¹

The YOG's CEP marks a radical departure from the long history of invisibility of the Olympic Games' Cultural Program. Unlike the latter, the former was conceptualized by the IOC not only as an important element of the YOG but as having as much worth as the event's CP. From their formulation to implantation, the YOG were presented as "much more than sport."⁵² The "more" referred to the function that culture and education were meant to play in the YOG. Before, during, and after the event, Olympic authorities underscored time and again that the YOG are a festival in which sport, culture, and education come together to form a meaningful unity. Thus, it is no coincidence that the IOC thought that by giving equal worth to the YOG's CEP and CP it was "returning to its roots."⁵³ This admission of returning is doubly telling. On the one hand, it indicates that the Olympic Games have departed from its roots, at least in regards to its educational purpose. Admittedly, by overly concentrating on its much vaunted CP, the festival has diminished the significance of its Cultural Program. On the other hand, it reminds the Olympic Movement that a better realization of Olympism is

possible. Indeed, the intended balance between the YOG's CEP and CP shows that these programs are not mutually exclusive and points to a direction to better realize Olympism at the Olympic Games.

There is no doubt that the IOC attempted to distinguish the YOG from the Olympic Games. In doing so, it enhanced the value of the event's educational potential and consequence by developing a well-defined, structured, and visible CEP. As the IOC put it in 2007, "The YOG would create a true community for young people to participate in sport, to learn, and to share experiences with their peers" and added that,

By creating a special occasion which places as much, if not more, emphasis on the *manner* in which things are achieved, rather than the sporting achievement itself, the YOG would be true to the vision of educating young people through the values sport teaches.⁵⁴

The YOG's integration of cultural, educational, and sporting activities are better aligned with Olympism than the Olympic Games. If this is desirable and possible for the YOG, it is most probably desirable and possible for the Olympic Games. Granted, the stakeholders and their interests differ in the two events but their goals, albeit with some admitted variance, are fundamentally the same. The cultural and educational mission of the Olympic Games could be bolstered, and a new and more appropriate balance between their CP and Cultural Program could be found. The YOG offer a path to follow. Likewise, the YOG's CEP should be reviewed to assess its goals, content, configuration, impact, and reach. However, the CEP's role in the YOG should be preserved and Olympic authorities should insist both rhetorically and in practice that it is an integral and highly valued part of the event. In addition, it would be important for the IOC to develop well-defined policies to ensure the continuity of the YOG's CEP as well as a wide and deep multicultural educational experience for the young Olympians.

However, even though the YOG are more in consonance with Olympism than the Olympic Games, their CEP and CP appear to run on separate, albeit parallel and seemingly

valued, courses. Apparently, sport did not have a prominent place in the CEP while culture and education did not have a prominent role in the CP. The paradox is not only that sport is a cultural artifact or product but also that the values so intimately connected with it are central to its practice and to Olympism. The distancing between the two programs seems to be unwarranted. It could be argued that the YOG's CEP and CP were organized under an implicit policy that considers them equal in value but separates them. As argued above, there is much to be praised about the efforts to make the two programs analogous in importance and therefore aligning the YOG with the goals of Olympism. Yet, this policy carries some risks. García identifies some of these risks when studying the Olympic Games' Cultural Program. She argues that

Although the Olympic Movement is supposed to be a humanistic project encompassing "sport, culture and education," the reality of the existing Olympic Games' staging process shows a total predominance of sporting issues over the rest. This fact is also reflected in the operational structure of the OCOG [Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games]. As a result, the team in charge of the cultural program tends to be structured almost independently with respect to the rest of the organization. This does not only provoke an understandable separation from the departments in charge of sporting competitions but also from the departments in charge of Olympic ceremonies, marketing, communications, media and institutional relations. This dissociation of programs and activities has led to an unnecessary duplicity of resources.⁵⁵

One of the challenges for future YOG is to create a dynamic synergy among the different actors involved in the planning and organization of the event in order to fully integrate the CEP and the CP. Moreover, the idea is to associate and make sustainable this integration into all activities related to the YOG. In this way, Olympism's blending of sport, culture, and education could be more fully realized in all aspects of the YOG, from their preparations to their staging. Seen in this way, culture and education are neither additional nor complementary to sport but the three come to form a whole in Olympic programming.

The YOG were equipped with a distinctive character because of the significance given to their program of cultural and educational activities as much as for their innovations

in the competitive realm. Several of the innovations to the CP highlight values that are in accordance with Olympism and are worth exploring at the Olympic Games. One of such innovations was the introduction of mixed-gender events. Traditionally, the Olympic Games have been organized along the lines of what is known as “sex pluralism.” This ideal of gender equality in sport acknowledges “sex differences in an attempt to insure that members of each sex receive equivalent benefits.”⁵⁶ Sex pluralism implies that “separate but equal” is an acceptable notion when it comes to sex equality. Thus, it moves away from simple nondiscrimination and allows the institution of separate categories of competition for men and women. This is what happens at the Olympic Games: regardless of whether the differences between the sexes are durable and/or relevant to the demands of the sports in the CP, Olympic competition strictly separates men from women. The objective behind the implementation of sex pluralism at the Olympic Games might well have been to increase and insure women participation in the event while respecting sex differences.⁵⁷

The introduction of mixed-gender events to the YOG is an innovation that shows an alternative competitive format to the “separate but equal” idea permitted by sex pluralism. Mixed-gender events still recognize durable and/or relevant sex differences but instead of simply creating one category of competition for each sex, it requires men and women to come together in their differences. The point is that mixed-gender events show that “separate but equals” is not the only way to organize competition under sex pluralism. Perhaps the most salient feature of these kinds of events is that both men and women compete in unison, not just against each other, to create interesting, exciting, and unique kinds of athletic drama. Whereas most mixed-gender events at the YOG favored “male” abilities and qualities, events favoring “female” assets could be implemented. It is important to notice that by integrating men and women in competition, mixed-gender events promote a different way to implement sex pluralism in sport while avoiding the dangers of the ideal of “sex blindness” in sport.

This ideal requires ignoring durable and/or relevant differences between the sexes. One such problem is that under a model of sport that assimilates competition and is sex-blind, women will probably be absent from elite competition in most sports. Mixed-gender events seem to be a fair alternative that respect sex differences and present a great educational opportunity to understand these differences better.

A second innovation to the YOG's CP was the introduction of mixed-NOCs events. This represents another departure from traditional practice at the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games have favored a form of internationalism that pits competitors against each other. This is suggested in the *Olympic Charter*, which states that the Olympic Movement "reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world's athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games. Its symbol is five interlaced rings."⁵⁸ This view is reinforced in the following claim: "The Olympic Games are competitions between athletes in individual or team events and not between countries."⁵⁹ As the many displays of and problems with nationalism throughout Olympic history exemplify, it is disputable whether this is realized in practice or not. What appears indisputable is that at the Olympic Games athletes or teams from individual NOCs compete against each other. Of course, cooperation is central to competitive sport itself. There is a sense in which contestants cooperate to make competition possible. However, the cooperation fostered by the YOG's mixed-NOCs events goes beyond this necessity. These events favor a form of internationalism based on actual cooperation among athletes from different NOCs. Young Olympians from different NOCs come together to form teams, which opens up rich dialogical and competitive opportunities. The "bringing together of the world's athletes" the *Olympic Charter* talks about takes on a whole new dimension as young athletes form transnational teams to compete together. In the process, nationalism is, at least momentarily, refocused and young athletes are required to engage in meaningful conversation with other. Once again, the educational potential of this kind of

event seem to embody not only the values of Olympism but also to help meet the goals of the YOG.

The final innovation introduced to the YOG's CP deals with equipment. It is well known that access to resources related to athletic performance can greatly increase the chances of an athlete to succeed in competition. However, when it comes to access to these resources, such as equipment, medical care, training facilities, or coaching education, there are great inequalities among the athletes of the world. Sport philosopher Sigmund Loland argues that in order to have equal competition, inequalities that are not relevant to athletic performance should be eliminated or compensated. As a rule of thumb, these are inequalities for which individual athletes cannot be reasonably held responsible. One such inequality is access to resources, including equipment. When it comes to equipment, especially that which significantly influences the outcome of athletic competition, Loland believes that it should be standardized and that all athletes ought to receive the same equipment "based on a pure procedural justice via random lots."⁶⁰ The latter is precisely what the IOC did at the YOG's canoe/kayak and equestrians events. Unmistakably, when competitors use the same equipment, one source of inequality presumably irrelevant to competition is eliminated. This not only levels the playing field among individual competitors but also between richer and poorer NOCs. In other words, using the same equipment alleviates inequalities in access to resources, and fairness is fostered because the relative abilities of the contestants are measured and compared, not the resources to acquire better equipment. This innovation represents a step forward in promoting fair play, another Olympic value.

As much as there is a great deal to approve in the innovations introduced into the YOG's CP, there are also areas of concern. Two seem to stand out. The first relates to the overall structure of the YOG's CP. Although Coubertin noted that since the beginning of the IOC, "it was understood that the modern Games would include all forms of exercise practiced

throughout the world today, to the greatest extent possible,”⁶¹ his inclusiveness and internationalism were restricted to “the best representatives of civilised nations.”⁶² Given the limitations of Coubertin’s, as well as future IOC presidents’, notions of inclusiveness and internationalism, the Olympic Games’ CP retained, even to this day, a distinctive Western connotation. As Parry puts it, the IOC “tend[s] to produce a list of sports that have already attained world popularity, which means, in effect, those that reflect the earlier cultural hegemony of the West.”⁶³ In its current form, the CP is overwhelmingly dominated by sports developed in the West and the very few that did not were adjusted to mimic typical Western ways of organizing and participating in sport. Parry notes that the traditional policy regarding the CP has the undesirable effect of causing the underdevelopment of traditional and regional sport.⁶⁴ In doing so, it undermines the purpose driving the Olympic Games and their foundational values. By organizing their CP following the sports that will be contested at the 2012 Olympic Games to be held in London, the YOG reproduced this situation and ignored, to a large extent, the diversity of sports in the world.

The continuity between the YOG’s and the Olympic Games’ CP takes away the possibility to more completely educate young Olympians on the value of cultural diversity, extended multicultural dialogue, and comprehensive inclusiveness. However, as the YOG’s CP already departed in significant ways with that of the Olympic Games, it could also be adjusted to offer the young Olympians such an education. The IOC’s goal that “The YOG would create a true community for young people to participate in sport, to learn, and to share experiences with their peers”⁶⁵ could be better accomplished through a CP that incorporates and values non-Western sports. It goes without saying that this would be a challenging innovation but given the bold changes introduced to the YOG, this seems to be within their aims and scope. By all means, it is a splendid opportunity to integrate the CP and the CEP in the sense indicated above, not to mention that the incorporation of non-Western sports into

both programs would align the event even more with Olympism. The CEP should not be seen as the main or only avenue to give “all participants the chance to interact with each other and learn more about different cultures.”⁶⁶ Clearly, a more multicultural YOG’ CP “could also advance the more than a century old idea that the Olympic Games were created to recognize each other in our differences, which in no small part are expressed in and through the multiple sports practiced around the world.”⁶⁷ A CP more sensitive to the variety of sports practiced by people all over the world would promote greater cultural equity, better serve the educational needs of young Olympians, and more fully embody the tenets of Olympism.⁶⁸

A second area of concern in the YOG’ CP has to do with the event’s declared purpose to inspire young people to live healthy lifestyles. This has been a constant in the IOC discourses regarding the YOG.⁶⁹ For instance, Rogge exclaimed before the YOG, “Let us continue to work hard to ensure the Games –and the youth of the world– have a bright and healthy future ahead of them.”⁷⁰ After the YOG, it was said that the CEP gave the young Olympians the opportunity to learn about topics such as health.⁷¹ In this regard, the IOC announced in a press release following its Executive Board approval of the YOG that “Sports events would be carefully chosen to protect the health of the young athletes.”⁷² Yet, the YOG included sports with a questionable impact on the health of young athletes. The most notorious case is boxing. With the well-documented risk of sustained brain injury as well as other ailments, boxing does not appear to be a sport that protects or furthers the health of young athletes. Featuring boxing as one of the sports in the YOG’s CP flatly contradicts one of the event’s self-professed goals.⁷³ Under the light of this contradiction and the fact that boxing was the only sport in the YOG’s CP that did not include female events, it is not difficult to make a case that the sport should be removed from the YOG.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have evaluated the CEP and the CP of the YOG and analyzed them under the tenets of Olympism. I have identified areas of strength and weakness in both programs, and argued that overall, the YOG partially embody and advance the values of Olympism. One remarkable strength is the attempt to put the CEP and the CP on equal footing. On the other hand, the innovations introduced should be deepened and the areas that show ambiguities or contradictions vis-à-vis the goals of the YOG should be reconsidered so the event fulfills those goals more fully. The ideas presented here to address the ambiguities and contradictions are complementary to the strengths of the CEP and the CP. For example, mixed-gender events could easily coexist with gender-specific events. The same goes for mixed-NOCs events, they could be held alongside events organized under the traditional format in which individual or teams from particular NOCs compete against each other. The point is to make the YOG converge as much as possible with the unique character Olympic authorities profess for the event. As discussed, the “more” that they wish for refers to the full implementation of the educational rationality that lies in Olympism.⁷⁴

The comparison between the YOG and the Olympic Games seems inevitably. Before the opening of the YOG, Rogge declared that “There is a lot we carry over from the Olympic Games to the YOG, Olympic symbols such as the podium, the flame, and the values, but the YOG have their own unique identity.”⁷⁵ Perhaps, it is important to ask whether there is something to carry over from the YOG to the Olympic Games. After all, both events are founded upon the same ideals. If culture and education can be fruitfully integrated with sport at the YOG to materialize an educational experience that touches young Olympians beyond their competitive feats, the same can be attempted more forcefully at the Olympic Games. This, of course, does not mean that the two festivals should look alike. It might be even appropriate that they retain distinctive, albeit corresponding, characters. In the end, what the

YOG demonstrates is that alternate Olympic scenarios, ones that are more sensible to Olympism, are not only desirable but also possible.

¹ The Kuwait Olympic Committee, suspended from alleged government interference, was not represented. Nevertheless, two Kuwaiti athletes took part in the YOG as independent participants under the Olympic flag.

² Hereafter, for simplicity's sake, I will refer to the event as the YOG. The data about the YOG come from International Olympic Committee, *Youth and Olympism. Olympic Studies Centre Content Package* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2010).

³ The cities were Berlin, Germany; Dakar, Senegal; Mexico City, Mexico; Auckland, New Zealand; and Seoul, South Korea. The number of continents in the world is a contentious issue. The most popular distinctions recognize between five and seven continents. The IOC has traditionally recognized the five-continent model. For instance, the *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2010), makes several references to five continents. Similarly, there are five continental associations of NOCs recognized by the Association of National Olympic Committees. For the IOC's decision regarding the international leg of the flame relay, see, for example, Lynn Zinser, "I.O.C. Bars International Torch Relays," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/28/sports/othersports/28torch.html> (accessed November 1, 2010). Here, I follow John MacAloon's assertion that what is relayed is the flame and not the torch. See, for example, his article "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 241-280.

⁴ Stephen Wade, "No kidding: Teens to get Youth Olympic Games," *USA Today*, April 25, 2010, http://www.usatoday.com/sports/olympics/2007-04-25-2774646336_x.htm (accessed November 1, 2010).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See International Olympic Committee, "IOC Executive Board Welcomes Idea of Youth Olympic Games," April 26, 2007.

⁷ See International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 13.

⁸ Matt Slater, "Youthful Outlook," *Olympic Review*, no. 71 (2009), 26.

⁹ Pierre de Coubertin, "Why I Revived the Olympic Games," in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 542-543.

¹⁰ For an account of how these ideas influenced Coubertin see Sigmund Loland, "Coubertin's Ideology of Olympism from the Perspective of the History of Ideas," *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 4 (1995):49-77 and John J. MacAloon, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

¹¹ Quoted in Lamartine Pereira DaCosta, "A Never-Ending Story: The Philosophical Controversy Over Olympism," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33, no. 2 (2006): 157. See also Pierre de Coubertin, "The Philosophic Foundation of Modern Olympism," 580; idem, "Olympic Letter IV: Olympism As A State of Mind," 548; idem, "The Origins and Limits of Athletic Progress," 202; and idem "The Sports Psychology Congress (Lausanne 1913)," 456, all in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000) for elaborations of Olympism as a religion, as a state of mind, and as a philosophy of life.

¹² Coubertin, "The Philosophic Foundation of Modern Olympism," 580.

¹³ Idem, "Olympic Letter III: Olympism and Education," in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 547. For an analysis of Coubertin's eclecticism, see Lamartine Pereira DaCosta, "Olympism and the Equilibrium of Man," in *Coubertin et l'Olympisme: questions pour l'avenir. Le Havre 1897-1997. Coubertin and Olympism. Questions for the Future*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Pierre de Coubertin Committee, 1998), 188-199.

¹⁴ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See, for example, Warren P. Fraleigh, "Competition Olympique et Valeurs Dominantes," in *Valeurs de L'Olympisme*, ed. Bertrand Durling (Paris: INSEP, 1989), 107-121; Vassil Girginov and Jim Parry, *The Olympic Games Explained. A Student Guide To the Evolution of the Modern Games* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 1-15; Hans Lenk, "The Essence of Olympic Man," *International Journal of Physical Education* 21 (1984): 9-14; idem, *Social Philosophy of Athletics* (Champaign, Illinois: Stipes, 1979), 119-199; Loland, "Coubertin's Ideology of Olympism from the Perspective of the History of Ideas;" Mike McNamee, "Olympism, Eurocentricity, and Transcultural Values," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33, no. 2 (2006): 174-187; Jeffrey O. Segrave, "Towards a Definition of Olympism," in *The Olympic Games in Transition*, eds.

Jeffrey O. Segrave and Donald Chu (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1988), 149-161; and Jim Parry, "Sport and Olympism: Universals and Multiculturalism," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33, no. 2 (2006): 188-204.

¹⁸ Parry, "Sport and Olympism: Universals and Multiculturalism," 190.

¹⁹ Nikos Nissiotis "Olympism and Today's Reality" in *International Olympic Academy Proceedings* (Athens: International Olympic Academy, 1984), 64.

²⁰ See DaCosta, "A Never-Ending Story: The Philosophical Controversy Over Olympism," 157-73.

²¹ McNamee, "Olympism, Eurocentricity, and Transcultural Values," 176.

²² Cesar R. Torres, "Results or Participation?: Reconsidering Olympism's Approach to Competition," *Quest* 58, no. 2 (2006): 242.

²³ The paradox is that those who believe that the Olympic Games are simply games necessarily base their interpretation on value standpoints, albeit they might not be fully aware that competitive sports are value laden activities. For instance, some values seem to be so intimately connected with competitive sports that they are central to their practice. For an analysis of the "inner morality" of competitive sports see Nicholas Dixon "Canadian Figure Skaters, French Judges, and Realism in Sport," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 30, no. 2 (2003): 103-116; Robert L. Simon *Fair Play. The Ethics of Sport*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 45-52, 199-204; and idem "Internalism and Internal Values in Sport," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 27 (2000): 1-16.

²⁴ Slater, "Youthful Outlook," 33.

²⁵ The event was originally called European Youth Olympic Days. See the European Olympic Committees's website at the <http://www.eurolympic.org/> Another predecessor of the YOG were the World Youth Games organized in 1998 in Moscow with the patronage of the IOC.

²⁶ The cities were Athens ,Greece; Bangkok , Thailand; Debrecen, Hungary; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Moscow, Russian Federation; Poznan, Poland; Singapore, Singapore; and Turin, Italy. See International Olympic Committee, *Youth and Olympism. Olympic Studies Centre Content Package*, 6.

²⁷ Slater, "Youthful Outlook," 35.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ International Olympic Committee, *Youth and Olympism. Olympic Studies Centre Content Package*, 4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Ibid, 10. Some of the language was borrowed verbatim from this document.

³⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

³⁵ Ibid., 10.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jacques Rogge, "Foreword by Jacques Rogge," *Olympic Review*, no. 75, 7.

³⁸ Michael Stoneman, "Welcome to the Olympic Family," *Olympic Review*, no. 76, 33.

³⁹ International Olympic Committee, *Youth and Olympism. Olympic Studies Centre Content Package* , 10.

⁴⁰ Stoneman, "Welcome to the Olympic Family," 33.

⁴¹ Kimiya Shokoohi, "Games They Can Call Their Own," *Olympic Review*, no. 75, 29.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ International Olympic Committee, *1st Summer Youth Olympic Games in 2010* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2010), 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ International Olympic Committee, *Factsheet Youth Olympic Games. Update – July 2009* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2009), 3.

⁴⁶ The information in this paragraph and the next comes from International Olympic Committee, *Youth and Olympism. Olympic Studies Centre Content Package*; International Olympic Committee, *Factsheet Youth Olympic Games. Update – July 2009*; and the IOC's web pages detailing the YOG's CP. To start exploring these pages, visit: <http://www.olympic.org/yog#/side07> (accessed, November 1, 2010). See also the *Olympic Review*, nos. 75 and 76. The experience, perception, and reaction of athletes, coaches, spectators, and officials to the innovative events described in this paragraph remain to be studied. However, as it will be seen below, these innovations promote Olympism and are beneficial to the Olympic Movement.

⁴⁷ Stoneman, "Welcome to the Olympic Family," 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 11 and 80.

⁵⁰ Beatriz García, "Comparative Analysis of the Olympic Cultural Programs and Management of Barcelona 1992 and Sydney 2000," in *Bridging Three Centuries: Intellectuals Crossroads and the Modern Olympic*

Movement, ed. Kevin B. Wamsley, Scott G. Martyn, Gordon H. MacDonald, and Robert K. Barney (London, Ontario: The University of Western Ontario, 2000), 156.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵² Shokoohi, "Games They Can Call Their Own," 29.

⁵³ Slater, "Youthful Outlook," 26.

⁵⁴ International Olympic Committee, "IOC Executive Board Welcomes Idea of Youth Olympic Games."

⁵⁵ Garcia, "Comparative Analysis of the Olympic Cultural Programs and Management of Barcelona 1992 and Sydney 2000," 157.

⁵⁶ Simon *Fair Play. The Ethics of Sport*, 113.

⁵⁷ See chapter 5 in *ibid.* for a thorough discussion of gender equality in sport.

⁵⁸ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Charter*, 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁰ Sigmund Loland, *Fair Play in Sport. A Moral Norm System* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 64.

See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of fairness in sport.

⁶¹ Pierre de Coubertin, "All Sports," in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne:

International Olympic Committee, 2000), 706.

⁶² Idem, "Why I Revived the Olympic Games," in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 544.

⁶³ Parry, "Sport and Olympism: Universals and Multiculturalism," 201.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ International Olympic Committee, "IOC Executive Board Welcomes Idea of Youth Olympic Games."

⁶⁶ Stoneman, "Welcome to the Olympic Family," 33.

⁶⁷ Douglas W. McLaughlin and Cesar R. Torres, "Olympism and the Olympic Program: An Intersubjective Moral Approach to Sport," in *Rethinking Matters Olympic: Investigations into the Socio-Cultural Study of the Modern Olympic Movement*, ed. Robert K. Barney, Janice Forsyth, and Michael K. Heine (London, Ontario: The University of Western Ontario, 2010), 495.

⁶⁸ Space limitations do not allow to elaborate a way to modify the YOG' CP. See McLaughlin and Torres, "Olympism and the Olympic Program: An Intersubjective Moral Approach to Sport," for an alternative to the Olympic Games' CP that could be used as a blueprint for the YOG.

⁶⁹ See, for example, the *Olympic Review*, no. 75 (2010), for numerous examples of this.

⁷⁰ Rogge, "Foreword by Jacques Rogge," 7.

⁷¹ Stoneman, "Welcome to the Olympic Family," 33.

⁷² International Olympic Committee, "IOC Executive Board Welcomes Idea of Youth Olympic Games."

⁷³ It is worth noting that because of the risks associated with its practice, the British Medical Association favors a ban on children below the age of consent from boxing. See http://www.bma.org.uk/health_promotion_ethics/sports_exercise/boxing.jsp

⁷⁴ Shokoohi, "Games They Can Call Their Own," 29.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*