

Olympic ideals from the viewpoint of German and Austrian sport students



1. Introduction

Coubertin „donated“ the Games to the Youth. Originally, he linked a pedagogical idea to the Games. Today, the modern Olympic Games are of high interest. But what do young people of today actually know about Olympism? This question was investigated carrying out a survey among sport students who, as PE teachers, will have a decisive multiplying role.

Coubertin gave the Games their characteristic profile through the Olympic ideals and his decisions regarding the procedure of the Games. The Coubertin researchers have been able to reconstruct the profile very well. However, a century leaves its specific marks on the profile of the Olympic Movement. In a time when values quickly change and especially after the Games of Atlanta, it is all the more important to determine the position of Olympic ideals.

2. Method

The data are based on a survey carried out among 628 sport students at three universities in Austria, seven in the old Federal German states (West) and five in the new German states (East) after the Games of Atlanta in 1996. A similar survey was carried out after the 1992 Games in Barcelona. In a direct comparison, possible changes in the sport students' knowledge of the Olympic ideals can be determined and shown in a profile.

From the methodological point of view, the distribution of the participants regarding university, sex and the level of knowledge acquired at university is sufficient. The selected universities give an overview of the German-speaking area. Since it was no random selection the results are only valid for the universities involved.

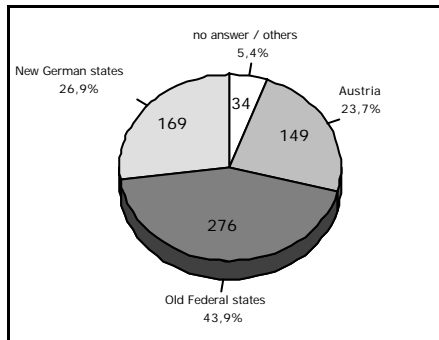


Fig.1: Number of students

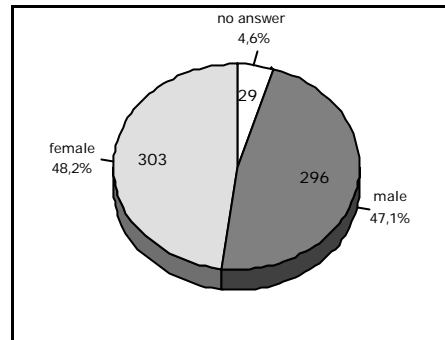


Fig.2: Sex of students

3. Discussion of Individual Results

3.1 Founder Pierre de Coubertin

One question was: „What do you associate with the name of Pierre de Coubertin?“ The frequency of answers in percentage is as follows:

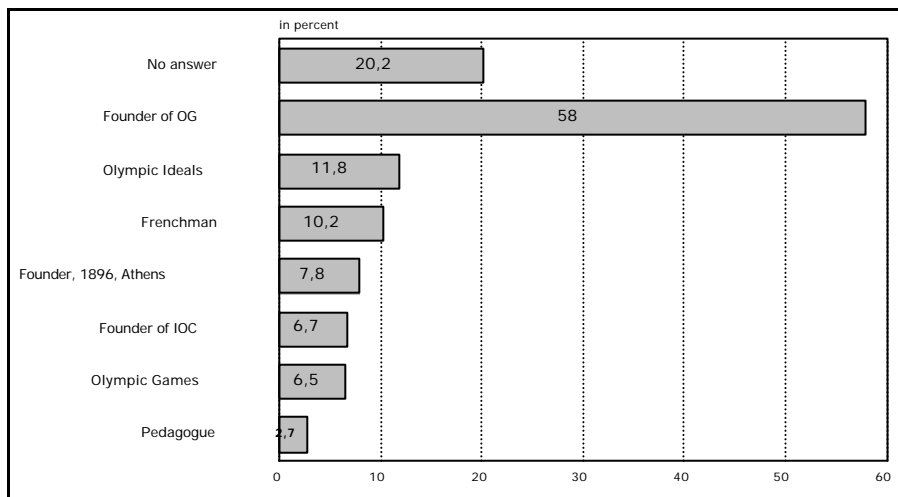


Fig.3: Associations with the name of Coubertin (total number N=628)

The assumption made in the 1992 investigation that the name of Coubertin is primarily linked to a keyword, namely that of the founder of the Olympic Games, was confirmed.¹ Hardly anyone mentioned his IOC presidency or his early commitment as General Secretary. One in ten mentioned the „Olympic Idea“ as such or the ideals linked to it. Many superficial or wrong answers lead to the assumption that more than the 20 % analysed here may not have any associations with the name of Coubertin.

¹ Preuß, H.: Olympische Realität im Bild von Sportstudierenden. In: Müller, N./ Messing, M.: Auf der Suche nach der Olympischen Idee. Facetten der Forschung von Athen bis Atlanta. Kassel 1996, p. 97.

In evaluating the answers by region, there is a similar order for all three regions, but there are differences in how often the individual items were mentioned. In Germany, the knowledge about Coubertin with 1.2 answers per student is greater than in Austria with 1 answer per student. Especially students in the West know Coubertin's country of origin, France (15 %).

Compared to the data gathered after the Games of Barcelona, sport students know 20 % less about Coubertin. In 1992, the average number of answers given by students from the East was 1.7.² Today, it is the same as in the West since the students' curricula in the East no longer highlight the history of the Games as it was for the GDR. Despite the centennial celebrations, Coubertin has not grown more popular.

It must be investigated whether universities as an educational establishment make a contribution to spread knowledge about Coubertin along with schools and the media. When the entire group is divided into a group who did not visit Olympic-related lectures and a group who visited one or more the latter revealed a considerably larger knowledge in all answer categories. Therefore, university lecturers, being multipliers, should be encouraged to discuss Olympic topics.

When the sport students heard the name of Coubertin, who was the second President of the IOC 80% knew something about him. 62% of the students mentioned Samaranch when asked about the name of the acting IOC President. In Germany, approximately 71% knew him, making him much more popular than in Austria with 41%. The value in East Germany aligned with that in the West where the value had been 72% in 1992.³ This result is not astonishing since Samaranch's popularity has mainly been promoted by the media which now is the same in both parts of Germany.

3.2 Profile of the Olympic Ideals

Divided by regions, the frequency in which Olympic ideals were mentioned by all sport students is as follows. Multiple answers were possible.

The greatest regional differences were for the topics of „Fair Play“, „Ideal of participation“, „International understanding/peace“ and „Amateurism“.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p. 102.

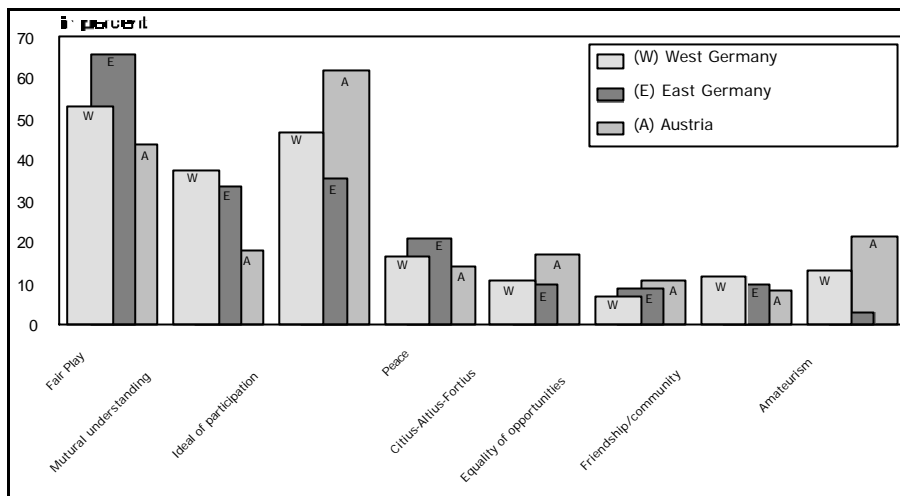


Fig.4: Profile of the Olympic ideals by regions (East Germany N=169, West Germany N=276, Austria N=149)

Fair Play: As a slogan of a long-lasting campaign in Germany, it is not amazing that German students mentioned it more frequently than students in Austria. Here, the success of the campaign is revealed in bare numbers.

Ideal of participation: Students of the East rarely mentioned this idea. A reason could be that the attitude of many citizens of this region is still influenced by a regime which tried to gain a high identification with the political system through success in the international high-performance sport.⁴ However, a change can be observed: After Barcelona, 20% mentioned this ideal, after Atlanta, the percentage increased to as much as 34%.

In contrast, Austria - with a strong sense to harmony - stressed this ideal, where 62% of the students mentioned participation. However the former GDR emphasised the competitive aspect and the winning. To simply participate did not represent a worthy achievement.

After the Games of Barcelona, as many as 54% of all students said „To win whatever the cost“ was the most important aspect for the Olympic athletes.⁵ After Atlanta, the percentage rose to almost 60%. As a reaction to this, „Participating is more important than winning“ may have gained more influence both in the West (+ 17%) and in the East (+ 15%).

Peace and international understanding: The ideal of peace has lost influence, a possible cause being the end of the East-West conflict. In the GDR, peace and international understanding were one of the basic elements of the socialist ideology. However, it meant a peaceful co-existence rather than the end of class struggle.⁶ After Atlanta, this main idea which was widely spread in the GDR was still alive which is reflected in the high percentages obtained. Compared to Barcelona, it declined considerably. The values approach those of the students in the West and in Austria.

4 Messing, M./Voigt, D.: Exkurs: Die Olympischen Spiele in Montreal und Moskau in der Berichterstattung der Medien. In: Holzweißig, G.: Diplomatie im Trainingsanzug. München, Wien 1981, p. 131.

5 Preuß, H.: Olympische Realität im Bild von Sportstudierenden. In: Müller, N./ Messing, M.: Auf der Suche nach der Olympischen Idee. Facetten der Forschung von Athen bis Atlanta. Kassel 1996, p. 111.

6 Messing, M./ Voigt, D.: Exkurs: Die Olympischen Spiele in Montreal und Moskau in der Berichterstattung der Medien. In: Holzweißig, G.: Diplomatie im Trainingsanzug. München, Wien 1981, p. 110.

The profile considering all students looks as follows:

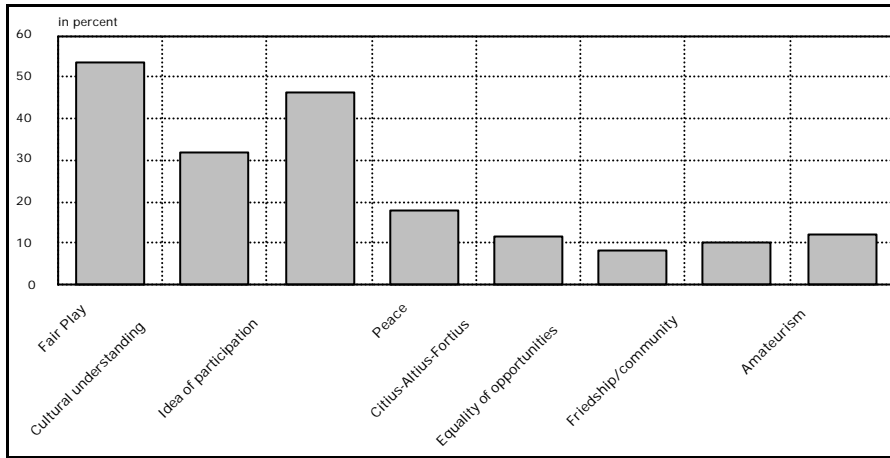
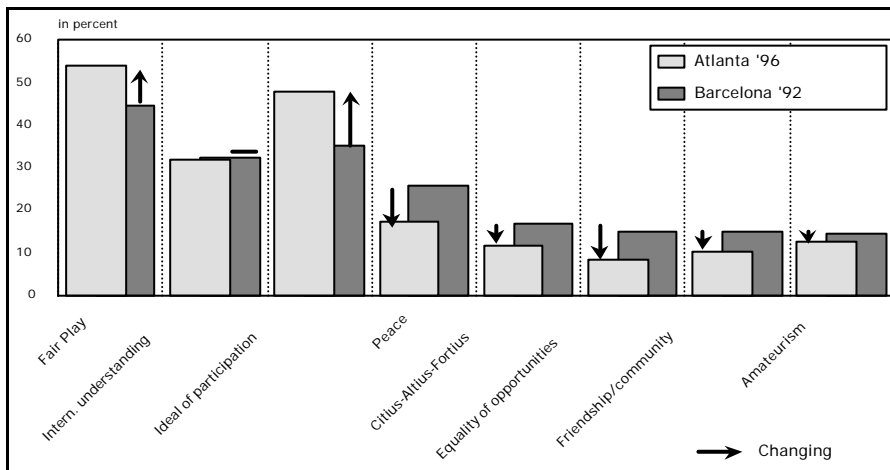


Fig.5: Profile of Olympic Ideals (N=628)

By weighting the data, the profiles of the Games of Barcelona and Atlanta can be compared to each other making the essential changes in the German-speaking area obvious.

Fig.6: Profile shift from Barcelona '92 (N=522) to Atlanta '96 (N=579)



There is a considerable shift in the ideal of participation the reason being - as already mentioned - the strong desire that this ideal may become reality.

When the students are divided into groups depending on the number of Olympic-related lectures visited there are following differences: Students who visited more than one lecture mentioned peace (+ 10%), Olympic motto (+ 7.5%) and amateurism (+ 8.8%) more frequently. The reason for the fact that these ideals were mentioned more frequently could be that „Pax Olympica“, the Olympic motto „Citius, altius, fortius“, and the long-discussed „amateur paragraph“ are more likely to be discussed in university forum than in the media. It has again revealed that Olympic-related lectures at universities enlarge the Olympic knowledge.

3.3 Future of the Olympic Games

Finally, the students' evaluation of the future of the Olympic Games will be analyzed. 69% of the entire group see the Olympic Games as an event with a promising future, 30% see an unsure future and only 1% see no future at all. Four years ago, the majority of the students asked, said the future of the Games was not sure.

Despite this positive evaluation, the students are also critical and see the greatest threats to the Games in doping (73%), in commercialization (72%) and in terrorism (57%). As many as 20% said doping was the key factor which determined the athletes' performance at the Games of Atlanta. 91% called for a fight against doping.

4. Conclusion

The survey revealed that German-speaking students know very little about Coubertin although many know his name. Olympic-related lectures at universities can help to foster the students' knowledge about Olympic topics and ideals, and make them more sensible for the dangers threatening the Games. The difference in the knowledge of Olympic ideals in East and West which even today exists became obvious. After Atlanta, the profile of the students in the East shifted towards the changes taking place in the entire German-speaking area in all aspects. It can be foreseen that they will be assimilated in the near future.

The analysis again revealed that the ideals people have do not depend on the individual person, but on the society they live in. In the GDR, the Olympic idea was interpreted within the Marxist context. Since Marxism is no longer the prevailing ideology new elements of the Olympic idea have been highlighted resulting in an Olympic interpretation similar to that of the West.