MORE THAN A FESTIVAL:
ANALYSING OPINION-FORMING SPORTS JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
OLYMPISM AND THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study analysed the perceptions of seven international opinion-forming sports journalists on Olympism and the Olympic Movement. Utilising in-depth semi-structured interviews, discussions were held on the themes of Olympism, the Olympic Movement, Olympism-associated initiatives, training for journalists and the participants' own media portrayals and perceptions of the broader media's depiction of the Olympic Movement. The interviews were transcribed verbatim using the GAT-2 minimal transcriptional style and analysed with the qualitative analysis style of content structuring of Mayring. Journalists' perceptions of this research topic have not yet been investigated. Five research questions were formulated based on the literature review. The key findings included: (1) evidence emerged portraying Olympism as significant within society today; (2) the philosophy appeared to be a base on which to evaluate the Olympic Movement; (3) the participants demonstrated a positive stance towards the Olympic Movement; (4) the main priority regarding their work was to cover sporting matters; (5) the participants perceived their own reporting to be similar to that of the broader media. Based on these findings, recommendations for the IOC were formulated concerning media interactions. Finally, it was argued that future research encompassing all aspects of media production and consumption would benefit the comprehension of Olympic-related media dynamics.

Keywords: Journalists; Perceptions; Olympism; Olympic Movement; Media
    interactions.

INTRODUCTION

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), as the organisational body of the Olympic Movement, underpins its actions (conducting the Olympic Games as the institutional framework of Olympism) on Pierre de Coubertin's philosophical conception of Olympism (Müller, 1998; Maguire *et al*., 2008; Wassong, 2014). However, while the Olympic Movement purports to promote this message of cosmopolitanism, environmentalism, internationalism, integrity and fair play, Maguire *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that the general public have a limited understanding of the organisation's philosophical grounding. They related this to contradictory messages regarding the Olympic Movement and commercialisation.

With the media's role being to transmit information to the public, numerous authors have noted the significance of the sport-media nexus to the promotion of the Olympic Festival (the Olympic Games), the Olympic Movement and Olympism (Maguire *et al*., 2008, 2015; Eagleman *et al.*, 2014; Moore *et al.*, 2015). Typically, this stance has been established around the processes by which information reaches the media's consumers, namely media production and consumption (Murdock & Golding, 2005; Hall, 2006). Acknowledging the importance of the media's role, it is interesting that very few studies have been conducted on Olympism's media presence (Maguire *et al*., 2008, 2015). Furthermore, the authors are unaware of any research conducted to-date attempting to determine how opinion-forming sports journalists perceive Olympism or the Olympic Movement.

Depicted as gatekeepers, journalists have the influential ability to not only determine what issues and topics their readers think about, but also how they think about them through the framing of their publications (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Thus, with this influence over which topics consumers regard as salient, a great deal of insight into the media interactions concerning the Olympic Movement could be extracted through analysing perceptions of opinion-forming sports journalists. Reaching such insights could be of great value to the transmission of Olympism and the associated Olympic messages.

Considering the above, the aim of this study is to bring light to this vital area of research through the analysis of perceptions of Olympism and the Olympic Movement of seven international opinion-forming sports journalists. The methodological approach to be applied in order to accomplish this goal is in-depth semi-structured telephone/Skype interviews. On account of the relative dearth of research on this topic, this qualitative approach alongside implementing the analysis style of content structuring (Mayring, 2015) would provide more meaningful results. It is also regarded that including the theoretical lens of both critical political economy and process sociology, as adapted from Maguire *et al*. (2008), will support the explanation and assessment of the results of this research.

Despite the evidence suggesting that the public are unaware of the Movement's philosophy of life, the IOC has long implemented/continues to implement numerous (Olympism-related) initiatives. While invariably these have attempted to impact specific societal issues and could be categorised accordingly, many are multidimensional and aim to achieve a wide array of objectives. These initiatives may be best categorised under aspects which pertain to the Fundamentals of Olympism, such as Olympic education, sports for all, the protection and support of athletes, and matters pertaining to combating doping and corruption (IOC, 2016; 2017).

Former initiatives have, however, never received so much attention as the recent adoption of the Olympic Agenda 2020. Unanimously accepted at the 127th IOC Session in Monaco in 2014, the Olympic Agenda can be viewed as the Olympic Movement's most significant attempt to reform itself since the establishment of the 2000 (Reform) Commission (Kidd & Dichter, 2012). Explicitly, the Agenda has been described as a strategic roadmap for the future of the Olympic Movement and its comprising fields (Horne & Whannel, 2016). Discussing the initiatives proposed within the Agenda, amongst others, this study intends to determine their

value and relevance, according to the participants. Particularly, given that the Olympic Agenda can be seen as a flexible document, which is adaptable to situational contexts, one outcome that could come from this is that of support for training journalists about the Olympic Movement. This, however, should be viewed against the more significant implication of how the IOC should both interact with the media and construct their own publications.

CONTEXTUALISATION

Olympism

According to the current Olympic Charter (August 2016), the IOC's codification of its fundamental principles, rules and by-laws, the definition and goal of Olympism are:

> 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, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

> The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity. (IOC, 2016:11)

This understanding of Olympism originated from and resembles the philosophical teachings of the founder of the Modern Olympic Games, Barron Pierre de Coubertin (Lenk, 2012). Attempting to answer what Olympism is exactly, Parry (1994) viewed its values as primarily the same as those of Humanism. This understanding of the connectedness between Olympism and Humanism was taken one step further by Boulogne (1999:37), who argued, "'Coubertinian' neo-Olympism asserted itself as humanism". Without doubt, this statement has not gone unnoticed and has received some level of support, such as that by Anthony (1994), who expressed that the two share/serve the same basic purposes. Interestingly, the leaders of the Olympic Movement and associated key stakeholders have always made the claim that "Olympism is humanism" (MacAloon, 1996:69). What distinguishes the two, however, was that Coubertin located these values in the context of sport and education (Chatziefstathiou, 2012).

One of the most prominent challenges to the meaning of Olympism is that of its need for redefinition throughout history, with many arguing that this disregards the philosophy altogether (Maguire *et al*., 2008; Patsantaras, 2008; Chatziefstathiou, 2012). It has been contested that there is no 'immutable code', with respect to Olympism, leading to its values changing over time and being interpreted and understood differently the world over (Tomlinson & Whannel, 1984:ix).

Despite the debates, controversies, and criticisms surrounding the meaning(s) of Olympism, authors have discoursed that the values which underline the philosophy are consistent (Boulogne, 1999; Lenk, 2012). Accordingly, the opposition to the Olympic and Paralympic Values (excellence, friendship, respect, and determination, equality, courage, inspiration) appears to be somewhat forgiving (Chatziefstathiou, 2012). Hence, it has been proposed that the Olympic Values still represent Coubertin's espoused values of citus-altius-fortius, as well

as their original meaning as an incentive for social progress and aim of attaining ecumenical universal values (Patsantaras, 2008).

Assessing the Olympic Values and their place in society today, much can be taken from the work of Lenk, such as that detailed within *S.O.S. Save Olympic Spirit* (Lenk, 2012). Hereby, Lenk (2012) referenced the prevalence and importance of over 30 Olympic aims and values, claiming that their combination forms the "[…] picture of the human being harmoniously balanced intellectually and physically […]" (Lenk, 2012:44). With this proclamation, he went on to state that the direction of Coubertin's Olympic Idea was aimed "[…] towards an educational programme in which physical culture is schooling for chivalry, intellectual-physical perfectionism and aestheticism" (Lenk, 2012:44). However, it was mentioned that because of the manifold meanings of the Olympic Idea there is no uniform definition of its basic concept. The overall finding of his previous assessment, in spite of the various controversies, was that with the exception of amateurism the Olympic Values have not changed and that this consistency has allowed the Movement to focus on the attainment of its aims.

Lastly, it is important to note Olympic education in the context of Olympism. Coubertin saw education as "the key to 'human happiness'" and the best response "to the accelerated pace of change in the world" (Müller, 2000:25). Highlighting the view of one of the most renowned researchers of Olympic education, Norbert Müller always maintained the stance that Coubertin's interpretation of Olympism was that of it being an educational subject (Müller, 2009). Furthermore, Kidd (1985) outlined ways in which the two share the same goals and ambitions. Consequently, the Modern Olympic Games can be viewed as a manifestation of Coubertin's firm faith in *la pedagogie sportive* – the lasting educational values that the founder perceived as inherent within competitive sport (Lenk, 2012).

Olympic Movement structure

For the assessment of the Olympic Movement, it is vital firstly to detail what it comprises. With this in mind, Ferrand *et al.* (2012) depicted the Movement as essentially constituting five categories, whereby the term Olympic Movement is used to encompass all of them. These consist of: (1) the IOC, as the Movement's central actor; (2) Organising Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOGs) and host communities; (3) the International Federations (IFs), which govern their respective sport and disciplines on a global level; (4) National Olympic Committees (NOCs), as territorial representatives of the IOC; and (5) Olympians and National Sports Federations (NFs), which oversee their respective sport within individual nations.

It should be acknowledged that today's Olympic family reaches out further than merely the classical system. As such, new actors have emerged expanding the overall Olympic Movement to include: (1) governments and inter-governmental organisations; (2) multinationals seen as commercial due to their involvement with sponsorship – particular reference should be given here to those belonging to the IOC's TOP (The Olympic Partners) marketing programme and the major Olympic Broadcasters, such as NBC; (3) national sponsors and media; (4) leagues and professional teams; (5) the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS); (6) the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA); and (7) the Ethics Commission (Ferrand *et al.*, 2012).

The *Total Olympic System* constitutes the above alongside the umbrella associations of the NOCs and IFs, organisers of major international or continental Games, Athletes' entourage and agents, Sports Equipment Companies, Non-Rights Holding Media, the Written Press, and the sporting population. Taking everything as one, the model of Ferrand *et al*. (2012) brings together 28 interrelating actors.

Media dynamics/studies

With over 200 different competing nationalities, 10.8 million ticketholders and 21,000 accredited media representatives, the Olympic Games are probably the most global international sporting event, embodying one of the world's largest sporting media events (IOC, 2012). The explicit dynamics that currently constitute the Olympic Movement-media interplay can be viewed as a series of interdependencies between transnational corporations (TNCs), television broadcasters and the IOC (Maguire *et al*., 2008). Additionally, Maguire *et al*. (2008) argued that it was these interdependencies that shape the production and consumption of both the Games and Olympism. They supported this through the presentation of financial logistics, whereby it was noted that more than half of the income attributed to the organisation comes directly from the sale of broadcast rights, with a further 34% coming from various sponsorship programmes.

Considering academic media studies, the two main approaches that have been adopted typically to observe media dynamics are that of framing and agenda setting (Sant *et al.*, 2013; Eagleman *et al.*, 2014). Both theoretical lenses indicate that the media frame their news/cultural information in a way that is beneficial to their own interests. In this regard, much can be taken from the study conducted by Moore *et al*. (2015). Implementing a theoretical perspective, which blended social construction of reality and framing, the study analysed both public perspectives and those of competing media outlets on NBC Universal's portrayal of the London 2012 female team gymnastics competition. NBC's coverage itself was edited, as is the accepted norm when portraying the Games. Although, it did so in a controversial manner by editing out the routine of the Russian gymnast, Ksenia Afanasyeva. This appeared to have been done with the aim of 'hyping-up' or dramatising a non-existent battle for gold between the U.S. and Russia. The (alternative) reality construed by NBC significantly differed from those realised either by live spectators or consumers of another outlet's portrayal, consequently leading to its rejection by those who had the ability to utilise differing mediums/information.

In the context of 'acceptable framing', one may perceive that it was natural for NBC to "give an audience what they want", whereby typically American athletes and popular sports are emphasised (Billings *et al*., 2008:15). However, due to the international socio-cultural nature of the Festival, "there is the worldly view perception that NBC is somehow conveying the universal Olympic(s) experience" (Billings *et al*., 2008:15). It is this inherent nature of the Games that means audiences desire a balanced account (Moore *et al*., 2015).

Very few studies to-date have attempted to determine the level of media representation Olympism receives (Maguire *et al*., 2008, 2015). Whilst not directly relatable to sports journalism, the study of Maguire *et al*. (2008) evaluating the utilisation of narrative pertaining to Olympism within advertisements of the British press during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, perhaps has the most congruence with this study. Their overall finding was that

"relatively few advertisers incorporated themes relating to Olympism" (Maguire *et al*., 2008:167). Invariably, many of the advertisements did, however, express something that could resemble excellence, but that arguably these were "more indicative of the achievement sports ethic and consumerism than of Olympic ideals" (Maguire *et al*., 2008:167). A key finding that was especially incisive in terms of media dynamics was that the Olympic-related advertisements were more prominent within the broadsheets and on specialist sports channels. The authors theorised that this favouring was the result of the advertisers deeming that their target audiences could be best reached through these providers.

Finally, with respect to globalisation, the media and the Olympic Movement, the IOC's stance is that globalisation aids in spreading Olympism. However, the extent to which "using the commercial and media networks of big business compromises the stated ideology of the Olympic Movement" has been questioned (Maguire *et al*., 2008:168). However, Ritchie (2002) acknowledged that in the attainment of internationalism, the IOC was dependent on the media to spread Olympic messages. Thus, he recognised that the sporting organisation was enmeshed in a wider political economy, relating to mass media dynamics that funds the Festival's growth. Maguire *et al*. (2008:168), nonetheless, argued that there was a contradiction present "between the ideals of internationalism and participation on the one hand, and individualism and nationalism on the other". In rebuttal, Olympic rhetoric is that of 'it's the taking part that counts' and that the competitions held within the Olympic Games are between individuals as opposed to nations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the works of Maguire *et al*. (2008, 2015) and Maguire (2011a; 2011b; 2011c), this study's implemented theoretical approach combines critical political economy and process sociology. With reference to critical political economy, what is vital is that while the theory proposes that the vast majority of cultural production will be limited in terms of diversity, it does not disregard the fact that journalists are individuals. Thus, the theory recognises that journalists have their own perspectives and goals, which may also contribute to cultural production (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Research regarding the objectivity of journalists in their work typically has been inconclusive (Applegate, 2009; Rasul, 2014). However, there have been studies concluding that total objectivity perhaps is impossible (Giddens, 1986; Sefiha, 2010). As for process sociology, Norbert Elias conceived several key concepts within his philosophical works. The two that have been deemed most relevant to the study at hand, are the civilisation process, which Norbert Elias coined 'sportisation', and the insider-outsider dynamic. This dynamic has been given particular attention in terms of the individual versus society, the nation versus state, and Westernisation/Americanisation in the context of globalisation (Dunning *et al.*, 2004). Hereby, the global media sport products and more importantly their discourses, according to Maguire (2011c), may be misunderstood, resisted, and/or recycled, hence subjected to hybridisation.

Bringing the two perspectives together, this study aims to both contextualise and analyse the perceptions of opinion-forming sports journalists. Critical political economy will be utilised for the most part to aid in the understanding of the processes by which cultural information is

produced and consumed. This study, however, will take this one step further and attempt to determine how free the journalists are to submerge individualism into their work. Hence, critical political economy will act as a platform on which to evaluate remarks concerning the participants' work and the broader media. Process sociology will be implemented to aid in the explanation and understanding of processes that have led to both the current status of the media's interaction with and journalists' perceptions of the Olympic Movement and Olympism. Explicitly, it is intended that process sociology will act as a lens through which to evaluate the participants' perceptions, based on their own (historical) justifications and external interlinking (socio-historical) processes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given that the aim of this study is to gain an insight into the inner workings of the media and the participants' individual perspectives concerning Olympism and the Olympic Movement, the following research questions, based on the current research available and theoretical framework, were formulated:

RQ 1   How do opinion-forming sports journalists perceive Olympism?

RQ 2   How do these journalists perceive the Olympic Movement?

RQ 3   How do these journalists' perceptions of Olympism differ from the IOC's definition of Olympism?

RQ 4   How do these journalists' perceptions of the Olympic Movement differ from their perceptions of their own media portrayals of the Olympic Movement?

RQ 5   How do these journalists' perceptions of the Olympic Movement differ from their perceptions of how the media portrays the Olympic Movement?

METHODOLOGY

Design

The implemented study design was a qualitative case study given that semi-structured one-time interviews were used to determine the participants' perceptions. A qualitative approach was selected on the basis that this would enable the collection of more in-depth, richer understandings of the participants' views to be expressed and analysed (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

Participants

Seven (7) renowned male opinion-forming sports journalists, with an age range of 29 to 81, participated in the study. It was essential to the study's purpose that the participants could be considered as opinion-forming in order to establish meaningful findings. With the aim of having an international perspective, the study included participants from Brazil (participants 1 & 5), Germany (participant 4), Great Britain (participants 6 & 7), and the United States of America (U.S.) (participants 2 & 3). These nationalities were selected because each country had been associated with the Olympic Games, either through hosting or bidding to host, within the last 10 years. Regarding the in-depth, semi-structured interviews via Skype/telephone, the

interview timeframe constituted a couple of months prior to the Rio 2016 Summer Olympic Games and the duration of the interviews ranged from 29–92 minutes (mean=53 minutes). This timeframe reduced the possibility of having a bias on account of one participant relating information that was not available to the others. It is important to indicate that as the interviews were confidential, no identifiable information has been detailed within this paper.

Whilst the sample of this study allowed for the contribution of very insightful international perspectives on the research focus, its composition did bring some limitations to the fore. Possibly, the greatest limitation was that of the interviews being conducted in English. Issues with meaning could have arisen with the three non-native English speakers. That said, given their profession, the non-Anglophile participants all had more than an adequate command of English. Another potential limitation was that of the backgrounds of the participants. While all have had experience within the production of textual media, many of the participants have undertaken numerous roles, whether as a columnist, within broadcast journalism, or as part of the traditional written press. This aspect could have had profound implications in terms of their understandings and opinions, resulting in a potentially unrepresentative sample. Finally, all of the participants were male. While this may be reasonably representative of the sports media industry, it would have provided a more comprehensive understanding if the views of female journalists had been included.

Methodology

The interview guideline included the themes of Olympism, the Olympic Movement, Olympism based IOC initiatives and media portrayals of the Olympic Movement. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the questions were open, allowing for the participants to voice their own opinions and conceptions alongside new relevant themes that had not been included within the pre-determined guideline. In addition, this meant that the order of the topics to be discussed could be altered from one interview to another, supporting the flow of conversation. The exception to this was that each participant was asked to state their personal opinion towards the Olympic Movement both at the beginning and the end of the interview in an attempt to determine any changes.

After completing the interviews, the recordings were saved onto the researcher's personal laptop, re-played and transcribed utilising the English adapted GAT-2 model verbatim. The minimal transcriptional approach was applied based on the argument of Selting *et al*. (2011) that this approach can be a useful tool for social science research. Finally, the transcripts were re-read and the content analysis commenced. The material that was utilised for analysis was the seven interview transcriptions. Only comments that were deemed to be within relevant themes were included within the analysis.

Content analysis

The qualitative analysis style of content structuring (Mayring, 2015) was employed to examine the collected data. Because the theoretical framework had been established already, an inductive approach with pre-determined categories could be applied. However, a deductive approach was also implemented due to the study's partially explorative nature. Each category and subcategory had its own rule to determine what could and could not be considered relevant.

From the inductive approach, the categories of Olympism, the Olympic Movement, Media Dynamics, Commercialisation, Politics, Global-National Aspects and Civilisation/De-Civilisation had been proposed based on the literature review (contextualisation) and theoretical framework. Where the deductive approach took over was in the establishment of subcategories.

The category of *Olympism* was divided into the following subcategories: (1) Understandings of Olympism, which was further divided into those in line with the IOC's definition and those against; (2) Olympic Education; (3) Perceived failings of the IOC in matters pertaining to Olympism; (4) Olympic Games and Olympism; (5) Opinions on Olympism; (6) Olympism and Sport; (7) Opinions on Olympism-based initiatives; (8) Doping, corruption, and good governance; (9) Sport for All; (10) Protection and Support for Athletes; and (11) the Olympic Values, which was subdivided into the categories of understandings of and opinions on the Olympic Values.

The category of the *Olympic Movement* was subdivided into: (1) Stance towards the Olympic Movement, which was split into the two categories of the beginning and the end of the interview; (2) Understandings of the Olympic Movement, which was split into the three categories of comments made implying that the Olympic Movement was the IOC, the Olympic Games and as an entity or umbrella organisation; (3) the IOC; (4) the Olympic Games, which was split into historical comments and opinion towards the Games; and (5) How to improve the image of the Olympic Movement.

The category of *media dynamics* was split into the subcategories of: (1) Sources on the Olympic Movement; (2) Newsworthiness; (3) IOC media dynamics; (4) Media and Olympism; (5) New media; (6) Training for Sports Journalists, which was split into the categories of supportive and unsupportive comments; (7) How the media portrays the Olympic Movement, which was divided into the four subcategories of positive and negative comments, portrayal of sports and the role of the media is to keep the Movement in check; and (8) How the participants portray the Olympic Movement, which was divided into the same categories as how the media portrays the Olympic Movement with the addition of two categories, namely biased and unbiased accounts.

The *politics* category was divided into (1) the political impact of the Olympic Movement and (2) political references; the *civilisation/de-civilisation processes* category was split into (1) civilisation and (2) de-civilisation processes; and the *global-national aspects* category was divided into (1) the Olympic Movement acting on a global level and (2) acting on a national level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Olympism

In order to analyse the opinions of the participants towards Olympism, it is crucial firstly to outline their understandings of the philosophy. Relating to RQ3, it must be acknowledged that all of the participants mentioned at least one aspect that could be considered as representing the IOC's definition of Olympism. Furthermore, there was a reasonable level of congruence

between the participants' responses and the IOC's definition (IOC, 2016). However, perhaps the most significant comments were those considered to be dissimilar to the IOC's definition. Two of the participants actually conceded that they did not (fully) understand what the term Olympism meant. While this appeared to be true for participant 4, participant 3 rather expressed his confusion over the 'true meaning' of Olympism. One could justify these responses within reason - alongside those of the other journalists due to the fact that all of them demonstrated some hesitance when defining Olympism – through the participants comprehending the contradictions within the need for Olympism's redefinition with societal changes (Chatziefstathiou, 2012). Further, this may find support in the current social environment and responses made by some of the journalists (participants 1, 2, 4, 6) indicating that Olympism, at its worst, is just a tool used by some for political and economic progression.

Answering the broader research question (RQ1), it was apparent that there were some rather large differences between the journalists' own individual interpretations of Olympism. The two most prominent themes presented were: (1) the concept of fair play and (2) how Olympism concerns itself with unity and utilising sport as a tool to promote peace. While both are undoubtedly representative of Olympism, it is interesting to note that in the context of its definition, far greater emphasis was devoted to the former. Placing this within the academic debate concerning the Olympic Games being perceived as of greater importance (Maguire *et al*., 2015), one could argue that when discussing fair play the journalists were rather more concerned about pertaining to sporting rules and regulations. Although, when making this claim, it should be noted that this is an inference from their remarks and that nearly all of the participants mentioned Olympism separating the Games from other world competitions.

With reference to the Olympic Values, the assumption that they defined/impacted upon the participants' understandings of Olympism could be made. Perhaps of greatest significance to the field of Olympic Studies was that the journalists' knowledgeable understandings of the philosophy were overshadowed by their interpretations of the Olympic Values. Although, it cannot be denied that only participant 2 explicitly named all three. The greater congruence, however, may give credence to the argument made by Chatziefstathiou (2012) that Olympism's underlining meaning and the values it represents are consistent. Furthermore, the majority of the participants felt that the Olympic Values constituted something of significance to society. Herewith, the participants appear to have recognised the important educational message of the values, as highlighted within Lenk (2012).

Overall, the majority of the journalists could be depicted as proponents of the Olympic philosophy. Without doubt, the aim of Olympism to utilise sport as a tool to foster progressive change resonated with the participants. However, when speaking of de Coubertin's philosophy, evidence surfaced indicating a level of disconnect between the Olympic Movement's actions and its philosophical footings. It is interesting to note that this sentiment of supporting the ideology but doubting its practical implementation was reflective of how the participants viewed the Movement's capabilities (see Olympic Movement). Situating the remarks within the academic discussions on the meaning and place of Olympism within society today (Ritchie, 2002; Maguire *et al*., 2008, 2015; Lenk, 2012), it could be argued that in spite of the numerous

contradictions, paradoxes and issues presented both within literature and the interviews, the underlying meaning and aim of Olympism still held value for the participants.

Olympic Movement

Relating the remarks of the participants to the existing literature – and in answer to RQ2 – the majority viewed the Olympic Movement as either an (umbrella) organisation or an entity and largely the same as portrayed by Ferrand *et al.* (2012). Moreover, this can be supported by the remarks made by most to the associated-organisations, such as Olympic broadcasters and sponsors, the IFs and NOCs. However, some of the participants demonstrated a level of uncertainty in terms of defining the Movement. Further, it was suggested that the Movement was either merely the Games or the IOC. The most definitive evidence for the latter being the exclamation of participant 4 that "[…] there is no movement (.) there's [only] a huge organisation […]" (T4-087). This confusion could provide support to the claim made by Maguire *et al.* (2015) that in today's society, the economic and sporting facets of the Festival are deemed more important than Olympism.

Having established how the participants envisaged the Olympic Movement, the analysis attempted to decipher their perceptions of it. Answering RQ2, there was variation in the stances of the participants. Overall, the remarks made about the sporting organisation were more positive than negative, although no definitive conclusions could be drawn. Like the remarks made towards Olympism, while the same reoccurring contradictions and paradoxes were identified, nearly all of the participants felt that the underlying aims of the Movement were worth striving for. Perhaps more significant, however, was that the participants appeared to use Olympism as the base point of reference for their evaluations. This can be deducted through the participants' praise and critiques, such as the recognition of participant 1, "[…] i think olympic education is also important (-) the concept […] can transmit […] the pillars of the olympic movement […] [making the Movement a] credible institution […]" (T1-040) or participant 2's criticism of "[…] the olympic scene [having] no check in balance […]" (T2-035). Without doubt, the topics raised here, Olympic education and governance, to evaluate the Movement are intertwined with Olympism, as portrayed within the Fundamentals of Olympism (refer to Fundamentals of Olympism-related concepts and associated initiatives, on the next page).

From the participants' remarks regarding the IOC, it appears that the head of the Olympic Movement's actions largely contributed to the negative side of the overall perceptions of the journalists. Specifically, in congruence with that of prior research (Maguire *et al.*, 2008; Horne & Whannel, 2016), it was the actions of the IOC's prioritisation of economic factors, issues with awarding the Games, interactions with politics, problems with corruption and governance, and their insufficient communications strategy with which the participates took issue.

Aspects raised pertaining to the Olympic Festival were perhaps more even in terms of positivity/negativity. What differed, however, was the significance of the participants' positive perception of the Games. This importance placed upon the Games even went so far as to lead participant 7 to argue that there was "[…] only one way [to define the Movement] […] and that is the err substance of the games […]" (T7-028-030). While it is unquestionable that the quadrennial sporting spectacle is of great significance throughout the world, the stances

presented in this context are a far cry from de Coubertin's original conception (Chatziefstathiou, 2012). For de Coubertin, the Olympic Games were merely an institutional framework for his educational philosophy of life (Müller, 1998). This loss of meaning does call into question what processes have created the greater importance placed upon the Games. Certainly, reading the works of Maguire *et al*. (2008, 2015) and Maguire (2011c), their firm belief was that commercialisation constitutes the cause of this rift. In relation to this study, one must acknowledge the profession of the participants, however. As sports journalists, it can be expected that they would devote significance to subjects they cover on a daily basis.

Further analysing what shaped the journalists' interpretations, evidence appeared supporting the works of Norbert Elias (Dunning *et al*., 2004) and process sociology. The participants demonstrated great knowledge of significant moments within the Modern Olympic Games' history, whereby they described the effects of the Salt Lake City scandal, Jessie Owens, Ben Johnson, the manipulation of the 1936 Olympic Games by Hitler, the Cold War era, and more recent historic moments. What stood out from these remarks was that the positive comments were made concerning sporting feats, while the negative ones were either in relation to the IOC's actions or (external) political factors. Placing this in the context of process sociology, there are two appraisals one could make: Firstly, it could be argued that activities, such as the Salt Lake City scandal, constitute a decivilisation process, leading to negative societal consequences impacting upon the journalists' perceptions. Alternatively, this may also be true vice-versa for the achievements of exceptional athletes, such as Jessie Owens forming a civilisation process. The second relationship, while perhaps harder to infer because of the lack of evidence, could be that of the insider-outsider dynamic having played a role in the formation of their perspectives. Here, perhaps the process of Westernisation may have occurred through the transference of morals during times of the Cold War era or the denouncement of the amateur code.

Finally, the result of analysing changes in the journalists' stances towards the Olympic Movement pre-post the discussions on IOC initiatives was that there were no noticeably significant differences. An explanation for this lack in change, feasibly, could be that the participants already had a wealth of experience in and knowledge of Olympic matters.

Fundamentals of Olympism-related concepts and associated initiatives

In view of forming a holistic understanding of the participants' conceptions, discussions were held with the participants on the aforementioned topics categorised as falling under the Fundamentals of Olympism (Olympic education, doping, corruption, good governance, sport for all, and the protection and support of athletes). Of the components, the issues of doping, corruption and transparency were discussed in the greatest detail. Like previous evaluations, this was likely because of the participants' professions, with the journalists reporting that these issues surface most frequently within the media. However, it could be contested that the reason as to why they gave such prominence was that they saw them as the greatest threat to the Olympic Movement.

Interestingly, despite the ongoing tumultuous environment with doping, the participants deemed that issues with transparency were most pressing. One explanation for this could be

that in spite of the participants recognising that it is the Olympic athletes who have the greatest ability to portray Olympism, it is the IOC/Olympic Movement who purport to live by its code. However, it could also be argued that doping was perceived as more acceptable. In no way does this mean that the journalists condoned doping, with participant 5 even going so far as to argue that " […] in some years people [will] (.) not follow […] [the Olympic Games as they fear] anyone […] [could] be a cheater […]" (T5-040). Rather, this explanation could be made due to confusion caused by the contradiction between the achievement sports ethic and the Olympic Value of excellence.

The discussed Olympism-associated activities appear to have had a greater impact on the participants' impressions than the above outlined concepts. Overall, the opinion of the journalists was that the initiatives were a step in the right direction and to be commended, but that more was required. This proclamation of the need for more was made especially in terms of further financial investment. However, it should be noted that participant 2 questioned who should be responsible for these initiatives and consequently meeting the goals of Olympism. This questioning should not take away from the fact that the outcomes were, however, considered to be required for greater societal benefit.

Finally, the theme of 'paramount' was raised by several of the participants. Explicitly, this was also where they criticised the Olympic Agenda 2020, arguing that most of its initiatives would amount to little, apart from the Olympic Channel. This contention may be the most insightful in terms of how the participants viewed the Olympic Movement. The rationale for this could be made on account of that if the IOC is only conducting such activities out of necessity, they do not (really) believe in the underlying messages and rather only care about protecting their economic interests. Without doubt, this was the perception of the German journalist (participant 4), who expressed that "[…] the desire of an organisation like the IOC […] [is] to strengthen its brand (.) its signs […] the Olympic rings […]" (T4-072).

In the light of RQ1 and RQ2, while the participants had more to say on the Olympism-related initiatives, it appears that they were arguing for the realisation of the aims of the IOC activities. Hence, they placed significance on the Fundamentals of Olympism concepts. As tools in the realisation of these goals, however, it must not be understated that the IOC's activities significantly impacted upon the perceptions of the journalists.

Media dynamics

For the purpose of assessing how the participants perceived Olympism and the Olympic Movement, the journalists' usual sources of information were discussed. Accordingly, the sources of the participants could be broken down into IOC sources, first-hand experience and broader reading. Evaluating the participants' remarks and contributing to the answers of RQ1 and RQ2, it was apparent that the participants utilised the same sources. Whilst most mentioned that they conducted broader reading on the subject, possibly the (over) utilisation of websites may lead/have led to a singular narrative within the media. This would provide support for the claims of Murdock and Golding (2005), who said that reporting in the media tends to regurgitate the same themes and topics.

Relating the data on the IOC's media activity to RQ1 and RQ2, the majority of the participants demonstrated their acknowledgement of Olympism's importance through statements that transmitting its messages was one of the Movement's/the IOC's greatest responsibilities. However, the strong belief that the IOC did not do enough in this regard may further play into the contradictions present throughout research. According to Maguire *et al*. (2008), the IOC justifies the huge commercial activity with the Games on account of this providing the resources required to transmit Olympism. The fact that the participants deemed their activity to be insufficient, to the point that they believed the general public were unaware of the Movement's philosophical footings, provides evidence to the proposition that the IOC concentrates more on economic factors.

When analysing the comments about the participants' work, one finding that may be especially pertinent to the discussion concerning the contradiction between the purported messages of Olympism and the representation of the achievement sports ethic (Maguire *et al*., 2008) was that of the participants claiming to cover sporting matters mostly. Furthermore, this in conjunction with the assessment of participant objectivity, provides a substantial argument for the theory of critical political economy. Relating to RQ4, evidence was present suggesting that the participants' views could be detected within their work. Those who generally perceived the Movement/Olympism positively claimed to depict it accordingly and vice-versa for those who depicted it negatively. Explaining this, however, may not be as straightforward as one might assume due to numerous extraneous variables. To mention just a few, as with the changing media landscape, what is considered journalists' work can vary depending on one's interpretation, the differing mediums within the industry could have impacted upon the conceptions of journalists and the fact that there are different types of journalists could have altered their perceptions.

Critical political economy does not dictate that the perspectives of journalists cannot come across within their work (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Rather, the theory signifies that it does so within limiting/facilitating societal structures. Applying this to the participants' remarks, support can be found for the lack of coverage of matters pertaining to Olympism, its associated initiatives and the Olympic Movement beyond the Games, due to the journalists not perceiving these topics as newsworthy. Such sentiment can be illustrated by the remark of participant 6, who contested that "[…] [Olympic solidarity is] not necessarily the most newsworthy thing […] I mean it's what we call soft news anyway […]" (T6-151). While this is a bold statement, it largely represented the remarks of the others.

Leading on from the participants' view of their own work, numerous comments were made about how the Media, typically, portrays the Olympic Movement and its associated initiatives. Reflecting on the comments, one could conclude that the participants viewed the broader media as portraying the Movement more negatively than positively, although this was not unanimous. However, this determination is largely dependent upon which facet of the Olympic Movement is being assessed. On the one hand, the Movement was perceived to have a relatively good portrayal, while on the other, the IOC was thought to be conceived negatively within the media. In addition, the British journalists (participants 6 and 7) articulated that the Movement's portrayal was considerably different depending on the type of journalist, observed country and

medium employed. Concerning the former, it was proposed that sports journalists had a tendency to present the Movement more positively than those within different sections of the industry. Regarding the observed country, it was noted that the media coverage of different nations often prioritises their own athletes and that one must look at a nation's (political) agenda to determine how valuable its coverage is. As for the final consideration, it was argued that different mediums portrayed the Movement in diverse ways. Remarkably, the notion of participant 6 that 'Broadsheets' had a greater tendency to cover matters other than the Games, directly reflects the findings of the study of Maguire *et al*. (2008). Although, when drawing conclusions from this, one must account for the fact that the study of Maguire *et al*. (2008) observed advertisements as opposed to articles or broadcasts.

The clear stance that the media does not devote much coverage to matters beyond sporting feats or negative news, like those comments made within the participants' own portrayals, again can be explained through the perceptions of the participants as to what could be deemed newsworthy. Perhaps the best example of this was the statement made by participant 2, whereby he commented "(---) in my experience the quote unquote media portrayal (--) the quotes end after (.) start[ing] before media and end after portrayal ((clears throat)) °hh of olympic day activities consist of photographs in the olympic magazine" (T2-063). This deficiency in coverage, however, appears to have a somewhat temporal effect, whereby the participants argued that more coverage was devoted during/around the Olympic Festival.

In answer to RQ5 and the question as to how representative the participants' media portrayals are of the broader media, the participants perceived their own coverage of the Movement to be similar to that of the broader media. Whilst this actually occurring is impossible, due to the fact that some perceived the Movement to be depicted as positive and some as negative, this finding is rather insightful as it may lead to supporting the claim of the media pertaining to a singular narrative (Murdock & Golding, 2005).

Finally, the possibility of further training journalists on the Olympic Movement was discussed with the participants. The purpose of identifying whether they were in support of or objected to further training was to determine if they felt this would lead to improved communication of Olympic messages. Most likely on account of the journalists viewing the supply of 'Olympic information' as the responsibility of the IOC, the majority of the participants did not overtly express support. It is not to say, however, that they dismissed the proposition altogether. Most of the participants were indifferent as to whether training journalists would be beneficial. Although, it should be acknowledged that with the exception of the Brazilian journalists, who were supportive, the main justification for this was fearing IOC propaganda-like persuasion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study's aim of attempting to determine the perceptions of opinion-forming sports journalists towards Olympism and the Olympic Movement found support within the findings. Utilising the theoretical lens of both critical political economy and process sociology enabled a greater understanding of the participants' professional environments to be captured. In addition, the combination of the two provided a platform to analyse the remarks of the participants.

The study demonstrated that the participants had a rather knowledgeable understanding of the Olympic philosophy. When comparing this against that of the IOC's definition, while none reiterated it exactly, there was a large level of congruence. This knowledge, however, was surpassed by their conceptions of the Olympic Values. Explaining the present misunderstandings, it was suggested that possible abuse of Olympic terminology and/or contradictions may have caused some confusion. Lastly, the majority of the participants understood the Olympic Movement as an umbrella organisation, comprising the Olympic family, and largely the same as the *Total Olympic System* (Ferrand *et al*., 2012).

Addressing the participants' stances towards Olympism and the Olympic Movement, one could argue that the overall opinion was more positive than negative. The two most prominent themes that emerged when speaking of Olympism, the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games were that of their ability to foster progressive change and universalism. Even accounting for the numerous contradictions relating to Olympism, most believed that the philosophy and the Olympic Movement were of great importance to society today. Accordingly, it was viewed that the IOC's initiatives relating to aspects encompassed within the Fundamentals of Olympism were of great value. However, it was also deemed that the current level of effort and funding put into IOC initiatives was insufficient. This, too, was the sentiment the participants portrayed regarding the Olympic Agenda 2020.

The journalists justified their understandings and positions by referring to numerous historical and recent historic accounts. Including process sociology within the theoretical framework aided in the evaluation of their perceptions. Links were suggested between both the mentioned and unmentioned accounts with their current views through the key concepts of civilisation processes and the insider-outsider dynamic. Providing support for the current debate concerning contradictions of Olympism (Maguire *et al*., 2008; Lenk, 2012), the topics of the prevalence of commercialisation, the prioritisation of the Games over the ideology, political matters, IOC activities and the role of Olympic athletes all surfaced. Interestingly, while these aspects shaped the views of the participants, most believed the positive aspects of the Movement to outweigh the negatives. Moreover, it was claimed that the ideology is what separates the Olympic Games from other world competitions. Thus, in answer to the study's presiding question, this provides support to the title's claim that the Movement does indeed constitute more than the Festival.

Turning to the media representations of Olympism and the Olympic Movement, the key theme raised by the participants was that of denoting greater significance to sporting matters. In terms of positivity/negativity, discounting those who could be considered extreme, the findings indicated that the participants viewed both the media's portrayal and their own to be essentially neutral. However, this neutrality is the balancing out of this equation, not that journalists depict the Movement as neutral. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that the participants who perceived the Olympic Movement negatively demonstrated stronger opinions.

When analysing the participants' media interactions with the Olympic Movement against the backdrop of critical political economy, it became apparent that there was a dissociation between how the participants perceived and portray Olympism and the Olympic Movement. By this it

is meant that due to the constraint of what is deemed newsworthy, the participants do not denote much coverage to the Olympic Movement outside of the Games, even though they view the Movement's aims and philosophy as significant. This finding was also true for how the participants perceived de Coubertin's philosophy and the Olympic Movement with how they viewed the broader media's portrayal of them. In addition, the participants described that they felt the media generally represented the aspects of interest (Olympism and the Olympic Movement) in the same manner as portrayed by themselves. Whilst one may assume that this could occur because of the professional objectivity of the journalists, it is argued that rather it is the political economy in which they work that inhibits their representations. Finally, the results indicated that it was not a lack of understanding that led the journalists to represent the Movement or Olympism in the manners with which they claimed. However, while no assumptions can be determined, it is interesting that participant 4, who claimed to not understand what Olympism meant, held the most negative stance towards the Olympic Movement.

The implications of this study, besides constituting new information in an understudied field, mostly revolve around media interactions with Olympism. Firstly, given that the Olympic Agenda 2020 can be viewed as a flexible document, which is adaptable to situational contexts, one outcome could be that of support for training journalists on the Olympic Movement. This proposition is the result of two factors, namely direct support and some gaps in the Olympic knowledge of the participants. Also, one could comprehend that those who have only been around the Movement for a short duration have more misunderstandings in relation to the Movement and its underlying philosophy. Whilst the participants made the claim that having an extensive understanding on 'these sorts of Olympic matters' was not a job requirement, ethically speaking, media producers should be knowledgeable of the greater environment.

The second implication is that of proposing recommendations for the IOC to better transmit Olympic messages. Evidently, this can find support in the results of this study due to the fact that the majority of the participants held the firm belief that the IOC pertains to this vital responsibility. Thus, the following recommendations can be made:

- The IOC should work in closer connection with the broader media. While the belief of the journalists was that the transmission of the Olympic Values was something rather institutional for the IOC, it was noted that they felt the IOC could do better in terms of opening up their press releases.

- More emphasis should be placed on Olympic Channel marketing. Whilst the interviews were conducted prior to the enrolment of the Olympic Channel, the model with which it follows encompasses the aspects deemed most significant by the participants.

- More emphasis should be devoted to the Olympic social media enterprises. Whilst the more recent Olympic social media initiatives are certainly a step in the right direction, the social media presence of the Olympic Movement still has a far smaller following than those of other sports.

- There should be better support for and media representation of the Olympic athletes. The athletes are those who are in the best position to spread the Olympic Values. Accordingly, the participants felt that the IOC does not do enough to promote them, arguing that the

Olympic athletes were better role models for youths than those of today's, mostly football, sporting idols.

- Lastly, Olympic terminology should be cemented and emphasised. It was argued that the Olympic vocabulary was perhaps too extensive and changes often, causing confusion.

Fulfilling the research aims and purpose, the study represents the great value of closing the gap in knowledge as to how Olympism is portrayed within the media. However, far more information is required in order to fully understand this vital topic. As such, it is proposed that future research implementing a mixed methods approach, determining how Olympism is actually presented within the media coupled with how the public receives this information, would significantly enhance our understandings.

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