

Olympic Cosmopolitanism: The Case of the Athletes' Parade in Buenos Aires 2018

Rafael Mendoza González

r.mendozagonz@gmail.com

Abstract

In 2018, the Buenos Aires Youth Olympic Games Opening Ceremony presented a special characteristic in the athletes' parade: all participants marched together instead of doing it by separate countries as usual. The intent of this paper is to analyze this particular feature. The article will defend that Olympism is experienced through constant interaction with people from different countries and cultures - not just in competition but throughout the whole festival - and will conclude that this feature reveals an Olympic Cosmopolitanism. First, the paper presents an overview of the modern Olympic Games, Youth Olympic Games, and the ideas inherent in the Olympic ceremonies. Second, Pierre de Coubertin's ideals will be presented along with the reality of the festival; in this section concepts such as multiculturalism and interculturalism will be discussed. Lastly, in section three, the interpretation of the athletes' parade will be presented by connecting it with Reid's interpretation of Olympic peace and Carrington's call for a Cosmopolitan Olympism. The article won't state that the Buenos Aires 2018 Organizing Committee are actually promoting Olympism nor that this should be considered a legacy, but it will conclude that the athletes' parade is in fact aligned with the ideals of Olympism.

Keywords

Olympism, Cosmopolitanism, Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, Intersubjectivity.

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Introduction

Since its conception, the history of the modern Olympic Games has often been characterized and described as the constant struggle of Baron Pierre de Coubertin's - the main architect of the modern Olympic movement - ideals, against the pessimistic reality the world is constantly facing. Coubertin's influences run from ancient Greek idealism to the moral philosophies of the Enlightenment. Indeed, since the Olympic movement was conceived in the 19th century, it was strongly influenced by positivistic views and the French cultural Republicanism, which were concerned with moral education, social unity and that ideals of humanity could reign. These humanistic ideals are clearly seen in the first three fundamental principles of Olympism in the Olympic Charter, which emphasize in universal fundamental ethical principles, harmonious development of humankind, promotion of peaceful society, and highlight that Olympism reaches its peak by bringing together the world's athletes to the festival. On the other hand, the 20th century -in which Olympism actually evolved- carried a pessimistic uncertainty due to the political and economic forces that contributed to an increase of urbanization, industrialization, nationalism and militarism, and eventually led to two World Wars (Osterhauadt, 1980). The modern Olympic movement situates itself in between the 19th century positivistic views and the 20th century pessimism and are constantly fighting against each other.

Even though Olympism and the Olympic Games manifest a humanistic view of sport and are against any negative conception of it, the ideals behind the Olympic Games have been dominated by the its negative

instrumentalization. S. Brown (2012) has noted that it will be difficult for Olympism to achieve its goals since the festival only represents the politics of nationalism and militarism. He goes on to provide a list of incidents in the modern Olympic Games that have contributed to negative conceptions of the Olympic movement: The examples given by Brown go from Hitler's political propaganda in 1936, political terrorism in the Olympic village in 1972, and the Olympic boycotts in 1980 and 1984 during the Cold War. In short, since the early history of the modern Olympic Games until now, the festival has been utilized for political propaganda and economic purposes. These actions have come to diminish Coubertin's ideals from the Games.

The Youth Olympic Games and the Ceremonies

However, in April 2007 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) -in an effort to return Coubertin's ideals to the foreground- decided to organize the Youth Olympic Games (YOG). By bringing 15 to 18-year-old athletes to the YOG, the IOC stated that the festival is both breaking new ground and returning to its roots (Slater, 2009). Jacques Rogge, -president of the IOC at that time- emphasized that these should not be considered mini-games, but rather that the main goals of the YOG are based on true pedagogical efforts since the idea is to "give the youngsters an education based on Olympic values" and to encourage young people to "adopt and live by the Olympic values" (IOC, 2007). Krieger (2012) states that the YOG represent a change from a 'winning by all means' philosophy to an education-based festival, and Torres (2010) acknowledges that the YOG were designed to materialize the values of Olympism.

In fact, since its first edition in Singapore 2010, the YOG have presented several innovations in comparison with the summer and winter Olympic Games. MacIntosh et al. (2019) noted that with the new additions presented at the YOG, athletes can gain two types of knowledge (explicit and tacit). The explicit knowledge is understood as the 'know-what', where individuals are consciously learning defined information and it is usually delivered in a formal environment. This type of knowledge can be seen off the field of play at the "Learn & Share" program (formerly known as the Culture and Education program) where athletes, - through dialogue sessions, activities, projects, exhibitions, forums and workshops – learn about the ideals of the Olympic movement, athlete's career, social responsibility, well-being, healthy lifestyle and expression (Torres, 2010). On the other hand, the tacit is based on personal experiences, memories and convictions, is usually delivered in an informal environment and individuals are unaware of the knowledge gained. The tacit type of knowledge can be seen on the field of play, where in some sports, mixed-teams' competitions (gender and nation) have been introduced. The idea of adding these kinds of competitions is to transform the traditional sporting divisions, as well as for athletes to interact with various participants and to emphasize that genders and different countries can compete together (Torres, 2010; Parry, 2012).

The IOC, the different organizing committees of the Olympic Games (OGOG) and the academic community have paid close attention to the pedagogical innovations of the YOG, and others have analyzed the potential ethical issues that might arise in the festival (exploitation of young athletes,

doping, overtraining and age falsification). But no attention has been given to the opening or closing ceremonies of the YOG, even when Coubertin himself emphasized that these are one of the most important aspects of the Games that distinguish them from mere world championships (Coubertin, 2000a). The Baron (Coubertin, 2000b) emphasized that through the ceremonies "each generation celebrates its coming of age, its joie de vivre, its faith in the future, its ambitions and its desire to excel" (p. 600) and that in the modern Olympic Games we must try to recover "a sense of collective evolution" (Coubertin, 2000a, p. 597). Diem (1964) noted, that Coubertin wanted to insert moral and civic dimensions in the festival, and by adding historical, pedagogical, artistic and religious symbols into the ceremonies, individuals from all over the world would acknowledge their humanity, work towards the common good and a deeper inner realization would be achieved. For her, the ceremonies provide the festival with a real sense of Coubertin's work.

Garcia (2011) stands that the Olympic ceremonies represent a chance for the Olympic movement to manifest its underlying historical, universal and peaceful aspirations and Torres (2013), notes that the effects of rituals such as the ceremonies have positive social transformations, the most important is that participants share a common humanity. Moreover, D. Brown (1996) sees that the aesthetic imperative of Olympism -Eurythmy- is revealed during the ceremonies, since for him, eurythmy consist mainly of the union of opposites: art and sport, body and intellect, athletes and spectators, as well as the unity of future rivals. However, two features of Coubertin's ceremonies have been condemned by the academic community. For him, in the

parade, athletes should “enter the stadium by country, marching behind their respective national flags” and a fragment of the Olympic Oath -which from 1920 until 1961- could be read “for the glory of sport and the honor of our country” (Coubertin, 2000b, p. 600). Scholars have argued that the traditional division between countries and the emphasis on national pride could create tensions among athletes and political rivalries might arise or grow bigger (Toohey & Warning, 1981).

The first four editions of the YOG didn't present any major innovations in the opening ceremonies, but in 2018 the Buenos Aires YOG presented a special characteristic in the athletes' parade. The OCOG decided to bring into the stage all athletes of all National Olympic Committees (NOC) marching together instead of doing separately as different countries as usual. The athletes kept their nations' uniforms but each participating nation's name and flag were separated from them. The rationale of bringing athletes together into the stage is unknown, but even if this decision was taken regarding logistical concerns, – since it took place in the streets of the Argentinian capital - it does require analysis since it can be considered as a kind of tacit knowledge.

The Olympic Ideal and the Reality of the Modern Games

Before moving on to the analysis of the athletes' parade, it is important to know the current situation of the modern Olympic Games. As noted earlier, Olympism posits itself between the 19th century positivistic views and the 20th century pessimism. Coubertin's (2000b) idealistic aim was to unite “at the same time all forms of physical activity and all the nations of the world” (p. 600), in

short, international unity. Martinkova (2012) stands that internationalism for Coubertin meant respect for different cultures and various forms of living and not destruction of them. His aim was for individuals to recognize social and cultural differences, try to understand people's beliefs and acknowledge different forms of life, all while sharing their humanity and keeping their national and cultural affiliations. In 1894, Coubertin (Coubertin, 2000c, p. 299) explained that the best form of internationalism is by bringing the athletes of all nations in peaceful courteous confrontations every four years in a common ground. Also, in 1935 the Baron (Coubertin, 2000d) noted that participants will only respect each other once they meet in the Olympic Games and said that “to ask people to love one another is merely a form of childishness. To ask them to respect each other is not utopian, but in order to respect each other they must first know each other” (p.583).

Certainly, Coubertin saw in sport a school for moral education but above all, he envisioned a multicultural festival where international understanding and peace could be fostered. Through the games, internationalism goes beyond boundaries and national interests (Chatziefstathiou, 2011). Morgan (1995) depicts Coubertin's internationalism as a sort of an ethical demand that while knowing others (their convictions and customs) is essential to treating them with respect.

However, in a multicultural environment, having people from different countries and cultures at the same time and place, does not necessarily mean they are united, know and understand each other's differences, or are overcoming prejudices. In fact, Orwell (1945) stated that international sports competitions

are contests that lead to hatred and could be described as ‘war minus the shooting’ and Murray (1992) says that the Olympics have become a ‘battle among races’ where nations try to crush one another. For Koulouri (2009), at the Olympic Games, the victory of one team country over another is seen as a victory of political supremacy.

As said before, since the revival of the modern Olympic Games, there can be found several examples opposing the idea of international unity in and off the field of play. The bloody confrontation in 1956 between Hungary and the USSR in the water polo final known as the ‘Blood in the Water Match’, as well as the numerous Olympic boycotts trying to bring to the public sphere their opposition to political actions taken by the host country, the IOC or other nation-states teams taking part in the Games. More recently, in Rio 2016 the Egyptian judoka refused to handshake the Israeli who defeated him, or the Lebanese team that refused to share the same bus with the Israeli team on the way to the opening ceremony. Also, these kinds of actions have been transferred to the YOG, when Iranian taekwondo athlete Mohammad Soleimani withdrew from the competition against an Israeli athlete alleging an injury and later unable to attend the medal ceremony. Israeli officials stated that the withdrawal was politically motivated since Iran does not recognize Israel politically as a state (Parry, 2012). These examples suggest that the reality of the festival seems to be contrary to Coubertin’s ideals.

In fact, multiculturalism has been largely related as the outcome of globalization processes. Globalization can be understood from many different standpoints, however,

is usually related to the exchange of goods and the interdependence of the economies, free market trade, development of communications, and the transport of goods and people (Olivé, 2010). However, as many have pointed out, globalization has led to the increase of inequalities, the accumulation of huge fortunes in a thin layer of the population and the exile of millions of human beings from the benefits of wealth. The fact that diverse groups of people are located in the same time and place is also a consequence of global economic policies that force people to move from their country of origin to another in the search for better life conditions (Olivé, 2010). Multiculturalism is the phenomenon that can be found in almost all countries and refers to the existence of diverse groups of cultures within the same society which share the same geographical area, but not correlated or interacting with each other.

In Cacchiarelli’s (2017a) criticism of multiculturalism within the Olympic Games, he suggests that the festival must move from multicultural to intercultural encounters, because under multiculturalism, participants do not necessarily know, interact and most importantly, understand each other. While presenting Panikkar’s typologies of cultural encounters, Cacchiarelli (2017a) concludes that multiculturalism aims just as coexistence and communication, while interculturalism aims at agreements and dialogue. That is, while multiculturalism falls short in coexistence and tolerating differences, interculturalism aims at mutual understanding and for individuals to be open to the differences of other cultures. Interculturalism does not deny multiculturalism, but stands that a multicultural society in order to understand their differences must create intercultural

experiences that strive to go from mere coexistence to real and enriching interactions (Cacchiarelli, 2017a). Multiculturalism is a phenomenon that happens because of global economic policies, but interculturalism strives for connections with other cultures. For Betancourt (2010), real interactions will not just give space for a true diversity of cultures, but will create intercultural relationships that will allow individuals to understand different realities; moreover, through these interactions it is precisely that memories and human traditions meet each other, exchange histories and eventually can be substituted for a history of the cultures together and not separated. Nonetheless, is not difficult to note that the reality of the Games is multicultural and not intercultural.

The Athletes' Parade as Olympic Cosmopolitanism

Now, before defending the YOG Buenos Aires 2018 opening ceremony as a manifestation of cosmopolitanism, first, I must say that Coubertin himself spoke against this concept, since his way of understanding it was against his educational project. For him, Enlightened Cosmopolitanism represented those people trying to get rid of any national attachments (or peculiarities) in order to achieve a neutral position; and Nomadic Cosmopolitanism was connected to those people traveling around the world but not engaging with the visiting country's culture, people, customs and ways of living (Coubertin, 1898).

In fact, my interpretation is rooted from the work of two Olympic scholars: First, Reid (2004) included cosmopolitanism or the idea of world community in her criteria for peace or Olympic peace. She acknowledges that

Coubertin's internationalism indeed has a strong connection with Stoic cosmopolitanism, which sought to engage different cultures in a commonplace without losing its peculiarities and challenged individuals to get along despite their differences. Reid (2004) noted that cosmopolitan ambitions are clearly seen in the fundamental principles of Olympism because it proposes an ethical attitude of individuals towards diverse groups of people. For instance, the first principle states that Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on -among others- social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles; the second one is concerned with the world community because its goal 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"; and the fourth highlights that those participating in the Olympic movement must represent the Olympic spirit which "requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play" (IOC, 2019, p.11). Second, Carrington (2004) has noted that the current situation of the Olympic Games does not stimulate positive transformations among participants. He has called the Olympic community for a 'Cosmopolitan Olympism' where wider temporary solidarities could be produced and 'new senses of the self' to be formed within the movement. Carrington suggests that cosmopolitan actions contribute to new ways of thinking and feeling, and that we must imagine alternative ways of including and not excluding the otherness of the other.

Cosmopolitanism, Intersubjectivity and the Other

Cosmopolitanism comes from the Greek *kosmo polités* which literally means citizen

of the world, first used by Diogenes (412-323 BC) the Cynic philosopher when he called himself a cosmopolitan person (Nussbaum, 1997). The current discourse among scholars about cosmopolitanism can be seen from two different angles: those who are specially interested in trying to define and defend national and international policies that can guarantee global justice and protection for humanity in terms of the moral, political and economic obligations; while others call for a cosmopolitan ethos, a form of conscious moral ethos due to the continuous social transformations derived from globalization in the last two centuries, (Strand, 2014; Millán Acevedo, 2013; Cid, 2011). The former perspective does not aspire for all human beings to have universal citizenship, nor to find a universal essence called human nature and not a universal way of organizing the world, but to look for an ethical disposition to see the world (Carrington, 2004).

Indeed, Immanuel Kant, by bringing his cosmopolitan idea from ancient Greek philosophy, stands that the one who is Cosmopolitan strives toward an ordered and harmonious universe (Conley, 2002 as cited in Patsantaras, 2015, p. 218). Also, Patsantaras (2015) notes that Appiah's and Hannerz interpretation of a cosmopolitan person is one who feels pleasure from the presence of others and is willing to engage with those others always striving for cultural diversity. In fact, Nussbaum (1997) states that cosmopolitanism is an 'invitation to exile' and that we should not see foreigners, immigrants, refugees or visitors as strangers, rather to see everyone as part of our sphere of concerns and obligations. Moreover, Hansen (2010) emphasizes that cosmopolitanism tries to widen the gap between the "known and the

strange, the particular and the universal, the near and the far, that is constantly opened up by contacts of life" (p. 159). Strand (2014) points out that cosmopolitanism recognizes humanity before sociality, which is opened up by the mutual encounter we have with other cultures. Carrington (2004) recognizes that cosmopolitanism in its Neo-Kantian form ought to contribute to new ways of feeling and thinking. For him, cosmopolitan actions can dissolve the absolute binaries of self/other, friend/stranger, insider/outsider.

In fact, cosmopolitanism does not ought individuals to be affiliated to a certain state or world nation, it does evoke an ethical view of the world and to see all human beings be part of the same community. Also, the disposition to interact with others, always keeping our cultural or national peculiarities, while at the same time perceiving, understanding and connecting these peculiarities with the ones of others (Patsantaras, 2015). Inherent in the cosmopolitan ethos envisioned by these authors, there is the idea of interculturalism and not multiculturalism. The cosmopolitan ethos demands an intercultural approach, in other words, it demands integration and not just toleration, also that individuals must be open to engage with other cultures and finally notice that there's no one single way to see the world.

Moreover, sport philosophers McLaughlin and Torres (2011; 2012), guided by the ideas of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, see that an intersubjective moral approach is inherent in Coubertin's idea. Intersubjectivity is a phenomenological concept that tries to explain the relationship between the self and the others; sees no subjectivity nor objectivity, since our existence in this world is determined and influenced by the constant interaction

with many 'others', and at the same time those 'others' are influenced through interactions with the 'self' and many others. In other words, the self is formed with the constant relations with others. The world is based upon an intersubjective ground which means that people are embedded within the self and that humans are selves for the others. Intersubjectivity obliges us to think of the other, and that there is a reciprocal understanding as well as a responsibility. For them, the 'self' and 'others' share a common responsibility from one another, indeed, the "presence of others precede one's own sense of self" (McLaughlin & Torres, 2011, p.274).

Intersubjectivity is always an intracorporal experience since it is through our bodies that we perceive and engage with other people and the world, and because values and meanings are developed through embodied experiences (McLaughlin & Torres, 2011; 2012). The basis for an ethical life is forged by having interpersonal face-to-face encounters and through our constant dealings with others in movement activities because through these we can get to discover and construct ourselves (McLaughlin & Torres, 2011). Levinas claims that once we encounter with the face of the other we arrive at a decentralization of the self, which is to leave ourselves to place our attention on the stranger which produces an awakening in the being and morality arises (Cacchiarelli, 2017b). The individual who engages in knowing the unknown faces, is overcoming misunderstandings, ignorance towards others and it will be much harder to harm them or to think badly about them. Similarly, Martinkova (2012), declares that meeting others enables individuals to learn deeply and understand each other. The face of 'the other' is something more than his/

her face physiologically speaking, but it has an ethical significance so that good consists in unconditional generosity and symmetric relationship with her/him. Yet, it is worth to note that an intersubjective experience does not necessarily mean that individuals will be joyful or happy, but will acknowledge that they inhabit the interhuman sphere of communication and contact (McLaughlin & Torres, 2012).

Even though McLaughlin and Torres (2012) invite us to read the Olympic Games with an intersubjective lens and to see competition as the 'mutual quest for excellence through challenge' - since competition forces you to think of the other, and the Olympic Games bring athletes from the five continents together - the examples given in this article suggest that the reality of the Games seem far distant to the ideal. Actually, it has been said that the festival produces multicultural and not intercultural experiences, since it keeps the athletes apart and not necessarily interacting with each other. However, the protocol presented in the athletes' parade in the YOG Buenos Aires 2018 brought all participants of the Games to a face-to-face intracorporal encounter.

During the parade, the participants kept their national uniforms and costumes, in other words, they kept their national and cultural peculiarities, but by marching with people from different countries, cultures, religions, and ethnicities, the participants by facing and getting in contact with the the faces of 'the others' and in this case their future opponents, they experienced cosmopolitanism. In fact, when athletes were asked about social interactions during the YOG they said that there was a sense of community-building. MacIntosh et al. (2019) recorded the

experience of an athlete from France who said that meeting people from different places was actually friendlier than the actual competitions, and also from a British athlete who stated that during the YOG “everybody’s interacting with each other, and you’ll find that you’re not just hanging around with your nation anymore. You’re all one big community here, which is really nice” (p.12). Moreover, during the live streaming of the ceremony, the narrator in the Olympic Channel said that the parade was an invaluable educational experience since they were exposed to many social and cultural differences (Olympic Channel, 2018). In another TV channel in Latin-America, the commentator indicated that one of the most important parts for an athlete in an Olympic journey is “to experience different cultures, different countries and to coexist with different people” (Claro Sports, 2018).

Integration is fundamental in Coubertin’s idea of Olympism, and is visible with this action, since they are all marching as one and not separated as usual. The cosmopolitan ethos explained above is embedded in the YOG Buenos Aires 2018 Opening Ceremony athletes’ parade since it projected an intercultural experience and not a multicultural one. It did not just aim at coexistence and tolerating differences, but at facilitating communication, be able to start a dialogue off the field of play and invited participants to be open to differences and to learn from them. Also, by having a face-to-face encounter is a recognition of ‘other’s’ humanity which has ethical significance. For Cacchiarelli (2017b), in the Olympic Games, the ‘other’ competitor must always be seen as someone “who goes with me with whom I share part of the journey” (p.157), even before the competition itself.

Indeed, an argument could be made here, because since Melbourne 1956 until now, athletes have marched together only in the closing ceremonies. For MacAloon (as cited in Torres, 2013, p. 6) the parade in the opening ceremony represents a rite of separation from ordinary life to the New Olympia, and the parade in the closing ceremony represents the friendship and mutual respect that participants achieved during the seventeen days of the festival. The idea of having athletes marching together in 1956 was a reaction to the political conflicts around the world that were transferred to the Games. However, by having athletes marching together in the opening ceremony, opens up a completely new paradigm because Olympism should not be reactive or proactive, but always constant. Participants must be exposed to Olympism the very first minute they step on Olympic ground.

It is the IOC, NOCs and OCOCs duty to push for intercultural encounters among participants of the Olympic Games and YOG not just in competition but throughout the whole festival. The athletes’ parade in the opening ceremony of Buenos Aires 2018 must be seen as a clear representation of Olympism, and Olympic institutions must try to find new ways to reinvent activities in order to be aligned with the ideals of the movement. As said by Reid (2004) cosmopolitanism is a fundamental criterion for Olympism, indeed, all actions taken towards cosmopolitanism should not be seen as additions to the current practices, but as transformative (just as the Olympic movement is) and must take place at the Olympic Games and YOG. What about mixing athletes from the same sport at the athletes’ parade during the opening and closing ceremonies? or maybe giving them the same

table in the dining room? What about placing their dormitories close to each other or even placing them as roommates? The 'common' practices within the Olympic movement must be rethought and rebuilt, since the real sense of Olympism will only be seen when practices allow maximum integration among participants from various cultures.

Conclusion

Nissiotis (as cited in Reid, 2006, p. 212) describes the Olympic Games as "a world community beyond any kind of discrimination and hatred." There are numerous examples in the modern Olympic Games that contradict this statement. Indeed, it has been noted that having people from different countries and cultures at the same time and place, does not mean they are united, know and understand each other's differences, nor that they are overcoming sentiments of hatred against others.

The academic community has paid close attention to the explicit and tacit knowledges the YOG have presented, but no attention has been given to the Olympic ceremonies. There is indeed a need to analyze those actions that on the first sight seems like they do not require exploration, because inherent in them a kind of knowledge aligned with the ideas of Olympism can be found. The athletes' parade at the Buenos Aires 2018 YOG opening ceremony revealed a cosmopolitan ethos, or better, an Olympic Cosmopolitanism because participants marched together without separation or country borderlines. They kept their uniforms and national identities, but they were able to be in contact with the unfamiliar, the others, and in this case, their future opponents. In other words, the

Olympic cosmopolitan parade invited them to have an intercultural experience not a multicultural one, not just to tolerate and coexist, but to face the face of the others, to be open to other cultures, other ways of being, to experience new senses of the self which can lead to self-transformation. An intersubjective moral approach was inherent in this innovation because by having intercultural and intracorporal encounters by facing the face of the others had an ethical significance that strives toward symmetric relationships.

All in all, the most powerful strength of Olympism is best learned experimentally through actually being together and not separated. A real sense of the otherness of the other is an essential component of the whole Olympic experience. Is it worth having the Olympic Games if a real sense of others does not go beyond competition? The real meaning of Olympism will only be perceived once participants interact with each other in and off the field of play. The IOC, NOCs and the OCOGs should focus more and make efforts for the participants to have actual encounters through the whole festival with people from different countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. This kind of encounter would allow participants to gradually get rid of prejudices societies have imposed over them, and "the ignorance of each other in which people live will disappear" (Coubertin, 2000e, p. 537).

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Author

Rafael Mendoza holds a Masters' degree in Olympic Studies and a Bachelors degree of Public Policy and Administration. He finished a traineeship in the Olympic Studies Centre at the German Sports University of Cologne and has worked in different sports organizations. His academic interests include, among others, the history and development of the Olympic movement, and the philosophy of sport.