



ARE THE OLYMPICS UP-TO-DATE? MEASURES TAKEN BY THE IOC TO ENHANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE GAMES

Abstract - Olympism emerges as an instrument of integration that, through the Olympic values, overcomes ethnic, religious, and cultural differences in favor of a world free of discrimination, ensuring the practice of sports as a right for all. Having equality as one of its principles is foreseen in the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Agenda 2020+5, just as it is consistent with the global movement for gender equality, as proposed in Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations' Agenda 2030. This study aims to identify the actions taken by the IOC for gender equality related to all women, athletes or non-athletes, who are part of the Olympic Games scenario. This study is documentary research, using the official documents published on the IOC website related to gender equality as a primary source of data. Through Thematic Analysis as a method of data analysis, we achieved a qualitative understanding of the documents to measure the main actions adopted by the body in favor of gender equality in the Olympic Games. As a result of this study, we seek a greater understanding of this relevant theme in the discussion of gender equality in the sports context, with a specific look at one of the main events in the area, which involves a range of sports and has tremendous impact, reaching international visibility.

Keywords: Gender equity; Female participation; Women in Sport; Sport for Social Change; 2030 Agenda.

AS OLIMPIADAS ESTÃO ATUALIZADAS? MEDIDAS TOMADAS PELO COI PARA AUMENTAR A IGUALDADE DE GÊNERO NOS JOGOS

Resumo - O Olimpismo surge como um instrumento de integração que, através dos valores olímpicos, supera as diferenças étnicas, religiosas e culturais em favor de um mundo livre de discriminação, assegurando a prática do desporto como um direito para todos. Ter a igualdade como um dos seus princípios está previsto na Agenda 2020+5 do Comitê Olímpico Internacional (COI) tal como é coerente com o movimento global pela igualdade de gênero, conforme proposto no Objetivo 5 de Desenvolvimento Sustentável da Agenda 2030 da Organização das Nações Unidas. Este estudo visa identificar as ações tomadas pelo COI em prol da igualdade de gênero relacionadas com todas as mulheres, atletas ou não-atletas, que integram o cenário dos Jogos Olímpicos. Este estudo é uma pesquisa documental, utilizando os documentos oficiais publicados no website do COI relacionados com a igualdade de gênero como fonte primária de dados. Através da Análise Temática como método de análise de dados, conseguimos uma compreensão qualitativa dos documentos de forma a mensurar quais foram as principais ações adotadas pelo órgão em prol da igualdade de gênero nos Jogos Olímpicos. Como consequência deste estudo, procuramos uma maior compreensão deste relevante tema da discussão de igualdade de gênero no contexto desportivo, com um olhar específico sobre um dos principais eventos da área, que envolve uma gama de modalidades e possui grande impacto atingindo visibilidade internacional.

Palavras-chave: Igualdade de gênero; Participação feminina; Mulheres no Esporte; Esporte para Mudança Social; Agenda 2030.

¿ESTÁN ACTUALIZADOS LOS JUEGOS OLÍMPICOS? MEDIDAS TOMADAS POR EL COI PARA MEJORAR LA IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO EN LOS JUEGOS

Resumen - El olimpismo surge como un instrumento de integración que, a través de los valores olímpicos, supera las diferencias étnicas, religiosas y culturales en favor de un mundo libre de discriminación, asegurando la práctica del deporte como un derecho para todos. Tener la igualdad como uno de sus principios está previsto en la Agenda 2020+5 del Comité Olímpico Internacional (COI), ya que es coherente con el movimiento global por la igualdad de género, tal y como se propone en el Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 5 de la Agenda 2030 de Naciones Unidas. Este estudio pretende identificar las acciones emprendidas por el COI en favor de la igualdad de género en relación con todas las mujeres, atletas o no atletas, que forman parte del escenario de los Juegos Olímpicos. Este estudio es una investigación documental, que utiliza como fuente primaria de datos los documentos oficiales publicados en la página web del COI relacionados con la igualdad de género. A través del Análisis Temático como método de análisis de datos, logramos una comprensión cualitativa de los documentos para medir cuáles fueron las principales acciones adoptadas por el organismo a favor de la igualdad de género en los Juegos Olímpicos. Como resultado de este estudio, buscamos una mayor comprensión de este relevante tema de la discusión sobre la igualdad de género en el contexto deportivo, con una mirada específica a uno de los principales eventos del área, que involucra una serie de modalidades y tiene un gran impacto que alcanza visibilidad internacional.

Palabras-clave: Igualdad de género; Participación femenina; Mujeres en el deporte; Deporte para el Cambio Social; Agenda 2030.

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Introduction

In 1896, Baron de Coubertin created the modern-era Olympic Games to rescue the values of sport from Ancient Greece in the contemporary world. In recreating it, Baron de Coubertin proposed to follow the ideals of Olympism, with the principles of friendship, equality, mutual understanding, solidarity, and fair play, with the primary objective of creating and maintaining a better world¹⁻⁵.

However, female athletes could not observe this ideal at the Olympic Games for a long time. Mainly because the definition of equality at that time differed from today. Since it was focused strictly on the thoughts of white European men, never considering the feminine perspective. Coubertin himself was against female participation due to his belief that such participation would be 'indecent'^{1,5}. He defined the Games as "the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its settings, and a female applause as a reward" ⁶. Despite his position, the 20th century saw a gradual increase in the participation of women as athletes in the Summer and Winter Olympic Games and meager participation in administrative and managerial positions in the Olympic Committees^{3,5-7}.

At the Tokyo 2020 edition of the Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee achieved the highest participation of female athletes in Olympic history, corresponding to 48%^{8,9}. Notwithstanding, it has taken more than a century for women to be almost equally present in one of the world's major sporting events. Therefore, it is vital to raise reflections on how the values of Olympism have been used in the IOC's previous actions to ensure an increase in female participation among athletes and non-athletes nowadays and in the future of the Olympic Movement.

Literature Review

Olympism emerged after Pierre de Frédy, the Baron de Coubertin, decided at the end of the 19th century to revive the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece, creating a competition model that, based on its humanist bias valued the pedagogical aspects of the sport, promoted through sport principles such as friendship, equality, solidarity, and fair play, overcoming ethnic, religious and cultural differences for the sake of a world free of discrimination, ensuring sport as a universal right^{2,4,10,11}.

This philosophy, inherited from Hellenistic times, understands sport as a primary instrument for promoting peace, unity, and respect for rules and opponents^{2,12,13}. Education, cultural integration, and the pursuit of excellence through sport are ideals to be achieved, with the goal that these values transcend the boundaries of competition scenarios and can influence the lives of all, contributing to a better world.

The Olympic Charter, drafted by Coubertin himself and updated for the last time in 2019, is the document that, in addition to regulating everything that happens at the Olympic Games, deals with all that Olympism entails¹². It defines the Olympics as a philosophy of life, that exalts and combines in a harmonious whole the qualities of body, will, and spirit.¹ By associating sport with culture and education, Olympism aims to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good examples, and respect for universal ethical principles¹⁰.

The first article of this letter contains the Olympic Movement principles. Since its function is keeping alive the ideals of Baron de Coubertin, it contemplates in a list that has grown in recent years with the increase in the scope of the Olympics, the IOC, the international sports federations, the national Olympic committees, the organizing committee of each edition, and the subsequences^{12,13}.

Through a modernized version of *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, the International Olympic Committee disseminates and operates the Olympic Movement in its eight areas of action: the choice of the host city, the organization of the Olympic Games, the promotion of women in sport, the protection of athletes, development through sport, the promotion of sustainable development, respect for the Olympic Truce, and the promotion of culture and education^{2,10,13}.

The Olympic Movement aligns with the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda principles through the development agenda. A document created in 2015 at the UN headquarters in New York has 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to eradicate poverty, promote prosperity, the environment, and the well-being of all by 2030, with the support of 193 countries worldwide¹⁴. The IOC referred to the 2030 Agenda by creating its own, the Olympic Agenda 2020+5, which aims to strengthen the Olympic Games and further develop an Olympic Program that remains balanced and relevant to young people, ensuring gender equality, innovation, universality, and participation of the best athletes¹⁵.

One of the principles set out in the 2020+5 Agenda is to obtain 50% of female athletes for each Olympic edition and "to encourage the inclusion of mixed-gender team events."(p.2)¹⁶. This goal is directly related to SDG 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda, which refers to gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women^{14,17,18}.

Coubertin has consistently opposed the participation of women in the Olympic Games. Although the first female participation in the Olympic Games of the Modern Era took place in its second edition, in 1900 in Paris, it only corresponded to 2.2% of the total number of athletes⁵⁻⁷. The Baron described as indecent the presence of women cheering in the physical exercise of sport, since for him women's role it was limited to procreation¹. Despite the opposition to the insertion of women in the games, the participation of women in Olympic competitions has been consistently increasing until the present day^{1,3,19}.

However, it took many years for the effective participation of female athletes. More than a century after the first participation of women in the games, only in London 2012 did female athletes compete in all sports²⁰. In addition, 2012 was a landmark in terms of increasing participation in leadership positions, which is not the main issue to be solved, although efficient in solving some of the persistent problems of gender inequality²¹.

In the Tokyo 2020 edition, held in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the goal, later achieved was to reach the mark of the most significant female delegation in the history of the Olympic Games, with 48% of the total number of athletes^{8,9}. In Beijing 2022, there was a full gender balance in 10 out of 15 disciplines and the most expressive female participation in a winter edition so far, 45% (IOC, 2022). The next record to break is in Paris 2024: this time, the goal is that 50% of the delegation is composed of women²².

The modern Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup are the two most relevant sporting megaevents of our time. In turn, the existence of a megaevent requires a large audience, merchandising negotiated between these events and the communication sectors, and, finally, a social and economic legacy to be left by the host cities^{23,24}.

Due to the high visibility of mega sporting events, promoting gender equality through an increased presence of women at the Olympic Games can directly contribute to improving gender equality in the sports segment¹⁶. It can primarily combat that

women are still marginalized and underrepresented in sports leadership positions besides female athletes' representation, including coaching and administration^{25,26}. Moreover, it can also contribute to society since the media and social networks now function as mass influencers of opinion²⁷.

Therefore, with the importance of debating the topic of gender equality in the different positions within a sporting event, the initial hypothesis of the research problem is based on the fact that, over the years, there has been increasing participation of women in all Olympic Games performance formats²⁸, corroborating with the idea of Olympism preached by the regulatory sports organs, in an attempt to reduce the disparity between genders. Nonetheless, the disparity still exists in the field of international sport - such as the difference in salaries between athletes of the same modality or the difference in prizes between athletes who reach the same positions within the same championship or modality, for example^{29,30}.

Thus, there still is a significant gap between the Olympism principles and their applications and their acknowledgment by society. The IOC will value gender equality in a more balanced manner from the subsequent editions of the Games and incentivize their performance, fulfilling its role as the highest institution regulating Olympic sport in the world³¹.

Objectives

Considering the SDG 5 of the UN Agenda 2030 in favor of gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women, this work seeks to analyze, what were the advances in Olympic sports governance around gender equality and raise some recommendations on the subject so that not only the IOC but also other sports institutions can organize themselves and engage in solving the issues related to gender equality in the different areas of sport.

Methods

This work is qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive research since it can better understand the research problem, describing the characteristics of particular populations or phenomena³².

This is documentary research³² with a systematic procedure of reviewing and evaluating documents requires that data be examined and interpreted to elicit meanings, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge^{33,34}. For this study, we approached as sources journalistic and informative reports, in addition to documents/reports in the public domain available on the official IOC website, having as the main criterion to be in the field of discussion of gender equality in the Olympic Games, whether summer or winter, adult or youth. For the data collection, we used the term ‘Gender Equality’ in the search engine of the IOC institutional website. We found 408 results of different nature, such as specific pages on the subject, news, reports, and technical documents, in the last 17 years, between the years 2004 and 2022.

We adopted Thematic Analysis³⁵ to organize and reduce the information obtained to analyze the data. Of the entire records, only 43 correspond to complete reports or informative data available on the web platform in open access, thereby, the research data for this study. Thus, we organized this data according to the main themes of each of the analyzed documents to group their similarities that reflect the actions taken by the IOC to promote and develop gender equality issues in recent years.

Results

From the 43 official documents, we generate a total of 7 themes - each one with its sub-themes - which corresponded to actions related to supporting gender equality, ordered in Table 1.

Table 1 - Themes and sub-themes of actions related to gender equality available on the IOC website.

Main theme	Related sub-themes
Inclusion of women in administrative and organizational positions at the IOC and the Olympic Games	Require all nations to have at least one man and one woman on their national Olympic committees (1); Inclusion of women in administrative management positions is essential for implementing actions and competitions (23, 29, 33, 34, 40, 43).
Promote gender parity	Creation of new categories for men and women in

among athletes participating in the Games	sports (3, 5, 14); Reduction of gender-specific participants in specific sports (14); Creation of sports for mixed-gender competition (3, 5, 40, 41)
Creation of a program to promote women's participation in sports	Creation of initiatives to stimulate female participation in sport by Olympic stakeholders (39, 40); Use of successful female athletes as incentives for young athletes (11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 27, 30, 34, 35, 36); Award and recognition of women fighting for gender equality rights in sport (8, 9, 34); Inclusion of gender equality debate in Agenda 2030 (2, 6, 18, 21, 40)
Elaboration of communication material for the dissemination of actions	Audiovisual productions and informative publicity materials with social development themes through sports (4, 25, 38, 40, 41)
Joint action with international authorities, international federations, and national Olympic committees to achieve social goals	(10, 13, 19, 20, 26, 28, 30, 31, 33)
Production of scientific content on the theme	Specific content on gender equality and women's leadership in sports (24, 25, 27, 37, 43)
Specific events for the development of actions related to gender equality and women's leadership development	(31, 32, 33, 34, 43)

Discussion

When analyzing the themes generated from the data collection, one can see that the IOC has been carrying out actions to improve the gender equality scenario in sport. However, such actions were done on a small scale and within a long time.

During the data search stage - which covered 17 years - many punctual actions were identified, with the intention of incentive so that other institutions could carry out

similar actions. Unfortunately, few of these actions were intended to foster discussion and possible resolutions to solve gender inequality in the whole Olympic environment. Solely after 2012, the actions aimed at increasing women in administrative positions, differently from the actions aimed at women athletes, which have been registered since 2004, the beginning of the research data collected.

We noticed extensive use of the image of successful female athletes in their sports careers. That was a publicity strategy to encourage more athletes to practice their sports. Although it is crucial to acknowledge more significant results from athletes, we also observe a lack of incentive for female participation in other positions and functions, such as coaches or administrative roles within institutions, which is essential to reduce disparities between women and men.

The production of communicative and scientific materials deserves special attention, considering that few institutions worldwide, whether within sports or not, are engaged in producing publications on the subject. In this case, it is a high-quality material produced by people involved in the IOC and sports. That was in free access on the site itself, facilitating its divulgation and guiding people to work with the updated scientific guidelines.

We discern among the institution's actions the notorious importance of the issue of gender equality in the Olympic Games. Be highlighted by the temporality of the publications, which, although available on the IOC institutional website since 2004, are primarily recent actions such as the IOC Gender Equality Review Project (document 37 in the research data), implemented only in 2018.

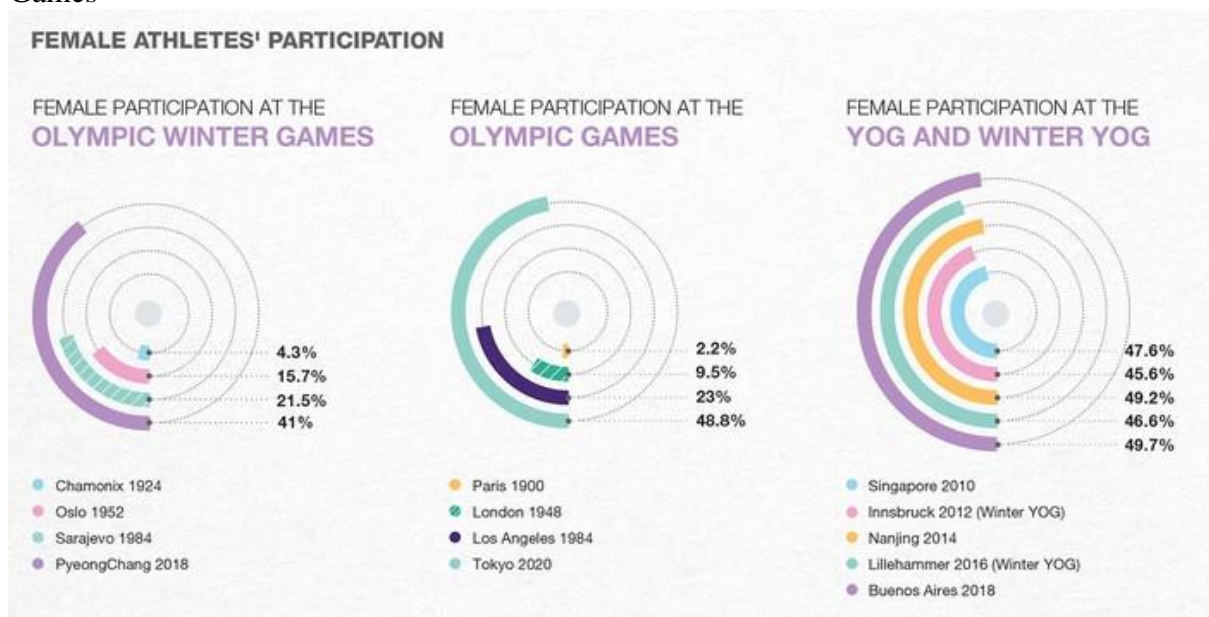
Such actions are related to the competitions that aim to meet the objective of equal participation of athletes of both genders, corroborating the dynamics of contemporary Olympic sport described by Wheaton and Thorpe¹⁶ and with the UN 2030 Agenda, as observed in the speech of Lydia Nsekera, the Chair of Women in Sport Commission¹⁸.

With the 2030 deadline for the UN Sustainable Development Goals looming, we must also continue to support the development of girls' and women's participation in sports at the grassroots level. Sport provides a space for inspiring female role models and can propel gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in society. With its requirement that everyone follow the same rules and play on the same field, sport

transcends the boundaries of gender, race, language, sexual orientation, religion, politics, or nationality.

One reinforces this hypothesis when we observe Figure 1, which shows the growth of female participation in the Summer, Winter, and Youth Olympic Games, in which the YOG (which are more recent competitions, existing since 2010) already has more egalitarian and different characteristics, and which bring more turned ideas for educational sport and values concerning the Olympic movement and sport^{36,37}.

Figure 1 - Participation of female athletes in Summer, Winter, and Youth Olympic Games



Source: Athena Sports³⁸.

In order to increase female participation in the Games, it is vital to carry out some actions, such as those highlighted in the themes "Reduce gender disparity" and "Create programs to stimulate women's participation". Thus, with the inclusion of women athletes and more modalities, it was also possible for a more significant promotion of athletes who could use their sports careers as tools for dissemination and encouragement, so that other women athletes could also participate in competitions, use the media to publicize the representation and participation of women in Olympic sport²⁰.

The growth of women's participation in all sports has occurred gradually through time and struggles for equal rights worldwide through feminism, as shown in Figure 2.

Although women are allowed to participate in all the sports present in the Summer Olympic program, in London 2012 for example, only 35.8% of the events on the Olympic program were equal for both genders in terms of the maximum number of competitors permitted and the rules of the competition²¹.

Additionally, as pointed out as recommendations by Donnelly and Donnelly's research, it is fundamental to equalize the number of events/medals available to men and women, as has been done by inserting new modalities such as surf and skateboarding and the inclusion of mixed-gender events and to add equivalence opportunities for medals for both genders, due to the fact that, at present, for example, men are not allowed to participate in sports such as artistic swimming and rhythmic gymnastics³⁹.

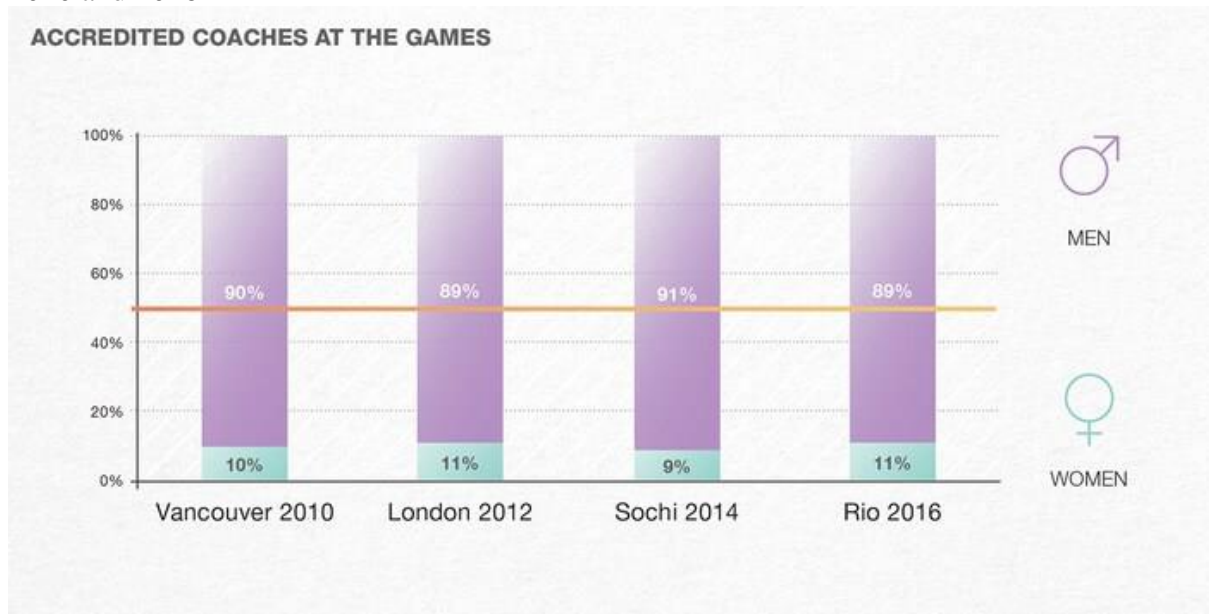
Figure 2 - Introduction of women's participation in Olympic sports



Source: Athena Sports³⁸.

Those actions are still developing when it comes to women's participation in other branches of Olympic sport. As coaches, for example, no direct action on female participation was verified, which reveals a weakness in this type of field of study and action of women, as represented at the national and continental level^{40,41}. Figure 3 shows the percentage of women who acted as coaches in Olympic competitions between 2010 and 2016, highlighting the low participation of female coaches compared to men.

Figure 3 - Participation of women as coaches in Olympic competitions held between 2010 and 2016



Source: Athena Sports³⁸.

In stark contrast, Figure 4 shows the growth of female participation in IOC management positions, reinforcing those actions to encourage the involvement and valuation of women in administrative positions had some direct impact.

Figure 4 - Women's participation in IOC administrative positions



Source: Athena Sports³⁸.

When analyzing the number of accredited women coaches at the Olympic Games until 2016 in figure 3, we observe an insufficient number of only 11% in London and Rio Olympic editions. The winter editions were even lower, with 10% and 9%, respectively, for Vancouver and Sochi. This fact represents a deeper problem: women are less likely to be considered for leadership positions, as these positions are perceived to require stereotypical masculine attributes and behaviors⁴².

Knoppers and Anthonissen⁴³ also demonstrated how dominant discursive practices have marginalized women in sports leadership positions. Male managers described the importance of a more masculine character while in a leadership position. Aichers and Sagas⁴⁴ pointed out in the context of intercollegiate sport that male stereotypes such as classic dominant and aggressive personalities were more consistent with head coaches' views than sympathetic and tender personas, considered feminine stereotypes.

According to Figure 4, the IOC has taken several actions to enhance the presence of women, including an increase of 124% in female participation in the administration sector over the recent past years. Despite this fact, women account for only 34.3% of the IOC members and 30.8% when looking at the IOC Executive Member Board Members. Plus, we did not observe any goal of promoting total balance

for administration positions for female leaders, as observed in the 50% of female athletes' goal for Paris 2024. When will we have such a goal for leadership positions?

Hovden⁴⁵ examined that discourses regarding the selection of leaders in sports organizations are strictly linked to gendered images of heroic leaders. In addition, Shaw and Hoeber⁴⁶ reported that managers admitted to giving more challenging interviews to women as they assumed they would be less suited for managerial positions. The evidence of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in sports organizations and the noted absence of research on women's aspirations for leadership positions within sports organizations must leverage further research in the field⁴².

Further, through accountability as part of the problem, we can obtain social change; therefore, renowned institutions, such as the IOC, must leverage their role to invest in solutions to build a more sustainable society with egalitarian opportunities for all women.

Conclusion

It is possible to conclude from this study that the International Olympic Committee has carried out specific actions in recent years to increase female participation in the Olympic Games. The results of these policies, though, cannot be easily identified since the growing presence of women in sports is fundamentally an organic movement. As vital measurements, allowing an equal number of female and male athletes in newly added sports and creating new gender-balanced events such as the YOG are some of the actions to fulfill the social and sporting prerogatives inherent to the history of Olympic values.

Moreover, the establishment of the goal of increasing female participation in each Olympic edition stands out, with the most significant novelty planned for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, the first competition in which women will represent 50% of the total number of athletes. With athletics, boxing, and cycling reaching full gender equality for the first time, 28 out of 32 sports in the Paris 2024 program will be fully gender-balanced, all actions strictly aligned with the IOC Agenda 2020+5 and with SDG 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the IOC and other significant sports institutions must be up-to-date and take plenty of actions to correct the history of

underrepresented female participation in every sports sphere. It is urgent to increase the number of women in leadership and management positions inside the IOC and publish participation data for females and males by NOC or gender. Thus, the Gender Equality action plan must be a goal to pursue even after the 2030 Agenda, becoming a human rights social goal.

Seiko Hashimoto's promotion to the Head of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games after Yoshiro Mori resigned due to sexist comments is an example of decisive action. However, she could have been the first choice from the beginning. Fundamentally, men must be willing to take responsibility and contribute to a future with social change, including equality of opportunities in the sports megaevents organization for all. Further, scholars must also continue to recognize gender as an organizing principle in sports needs to be considered along with other forms of identity, including race, sexual orientation, class, and ability.

Recommendations

We hope that this preliminary study can serve as an example and incentive for future research both on the issue of gender equality in Olympic sports and on the role of the IOC as one of the most important sports institutions worldwide. Since through Olympism the sport can be used as a valuable tool in the fight against social inequalities on the planet, every sports institution must promote the development of the sport with gender equality, as precisely envisaged in the 2020+5 Agenda proposed by the IOC, in line with the UN 2030 Agenda.

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