

THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES – AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MINUTES OF IOC SESSIONS (1894 – 1981)

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Resumo: O objetivo principal desta pesquisa foi examinar em detalhes o processo de inclusão das mulheres como atletas nos Jogos Olímpicos (JO) desde 1900. Muitos documentos, particularmente fontes primárias como as Minutas das Sessões Anuais do Comitê Olímpico Internacional (COI) e as Minutas das Sessões da Comissão Executiva, foram rigorosamente examinadas de forma que pormenores pudessem vir a elucidar as razões pelas quais sempre houve um número reduzido de mulheres atletas nos JO. Essa autora teve acesso a essas fontes primárias através de uma bolsa de pós-graduação concedida pelo Centro de Estudos Olímpicos do COI. Os resultados desta pesquisa mostraram que embora não houvesse documentos proibindo as mulheres de participar nos Jogos Olímpicos, elas lutaram contra preconceito e discriminação para poder participar dos JO. Também foi possível observar que o COI desenvolveu estratégias ao longo dos anos para evitar que mais mulheres participassem nos Jogos Olímpicos.

Abstract: Although women have been taking part in the Olympic Games as athletes since 1900, their participation has not been thoroughly studied. Many documents, particularly primary sources such as the Minutes of the Annual Sessions of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Minutes of the Executive Board Sessions, were scrutinized so that details that may reveal the reasons of this phenomenon should be unearthed. This author had access to these primary sources through a post-graduate scholarship conceded by the Olympic Studies Center of the IOC. Questions related to the participation of women athletes in the early Games were especially tackled in addition to other points such as women athletes' participation in the Ancient Olympic Games, a supposed prohibition to take part in the Games and the many barriers women had to overcome in order to be part of the Games, including prejudice and discrimination. The historical method of research was used to gather and analyze materials related to the subject under investigation. The results of this research showed that there were no documents prohibiting women from participating in the Olympic Games either in the Greek antiquity or in the modern era. Even so, women had to overcome prejudice and discrimination to take part in the Games. It was also possible to observe how the IOC developed strategies to prevent women from participating in the Olympic Games.

Key Words: women athletes; IOC documents; Olympic Games

Women's participation in sports is a recent social phenomenon. Acceptance of women's participation in sports by societies worldwide is an even more recent phenomenon. Although the register of women's participation in the Modern Olympic Games points to their debut in 1900, 'unofficially', it took women 104 years to be 40.7% of the total number of athletes participating in Olympic Games (International Olympic Committee - Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens, 2004: 10,864 athletes: 4,306 women and 6,452 men) (IOC, 2005).

With the evolution of humankind in a more inclusive direction, it becomes important to investigate and describe the role played by women athletes in the process of admission to the Olympic Games. For this reason this author submitted a research project to the Postgraduate Researchers Scholarship Program of the IOC Olympic Studies Center (OSC), located in Lausanne, Switzerland. The proposal was selected by the grant program Selection Committee and this researcher received a grant that covered for almost two months of investigation at the OSC in 2004.

The Olympic Studies Center is one of the largest centers of written, visual and audio information on the Olympic Movement and on the Olympic Games. It houses the collective memory of past Games and the Olympic Movement. This author concentrated efforts on the written documents which are kept by the following services: (i) Historical Archives, (ii) Library, and (iii) Documentation Service.

The International Olympic Committee's Historical Archives display documents that attest the evolution of the Olympic Movement since 1894 including not only the collections of Pierre de Coubertin, reviver of the Games, whose documents go back to 1886, including his correspondence, but also the Minutes of IOC Sessions and of the Executive Board Meetings, which were vital documents for this research as primary sources for the period 1894-1982.

The Library aims to offer the most complete possible collection of books, reports, annals of conferences and symposiums on the Olympic Movement, the Olympic Games and the Olympic sports, including theses and dissertations in several languages including English, French, Italian and Spanish languages, consulted by this author. The works also cover scientific, medical, economic, legal and other aspects of sport in general. In addition, the library also offers consultation to the following important collections of documents used by this author: the Olympic Review; the Olympic Charters, and the Official Reports of the Olympic Games. The library also houses not only a wealth of newspapers and magazines such as *La Vie au Grand Air*, *Le Sport Universel Illustré*, *L'Éducation Physique*, *Révue Sportive Illustré*, but also the Reports from the International Olympic Academy Sessions all consulted by this author.

The Documentation Service makes available to researchers their collections of official documents, press clippings and other relevant information sources gathered by the documentalists. These files cover varied subjects related to the history of the Olympic Movement, the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Games, covering sporting, political, social, economic, scientific or artistic topics.

After two months of intense investigation, covering all of these available sources, it was possible to observe that the little research that existed concerning the participation of women athletes in the Olympic Games included few and incomplete studies. Besides, no studies had been done on the participation of women in the Olympic Games using primary sources such as the Minutes of the IOC Sessions and on the Minutes of the Executive Board Meetings, written primarily in French. These documents are essential as they represent the heart of the Olympic Games once they are exactly what was discussed and decided by the IOC members in relation to the participation of women in the Olympic Games. Most of the decisions involved the International Federations (IFs) and the National Olympic Committees (NOCs). The period covered in this research extended from 1894, when the IOC was founded by Pierre de Coubertin, until 1981, when the very first two women were co-opted as IOC members.

Since history brings along echoes of the past, investigation of the ancient historical sources became a must as the Olympic Games of Antiquity had deeply influenced Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the renovator of the Olympic Games.

Research questions

Some of the research questions initially proposed were the following:

- Were women initially excluded, prohibited from participating or not included in the Ancient Olympic Games? What about in the Modern Games?
- Which barriers did women have to overcome?
- How did then women take part in the Games? Were they admitted, allowed, given permission, helped or did they struggle to be included?
- How do the Minutes of the IOC Sessions, other official documents and the specialized literature reflect the historically developed process of women's participation and inclusion in the Olympic Games as athletes?

Relevance

For the past decades, male Olympic athletes have provided other young athletes and future athletes an image worthy of emulation. Women and girls should also be given the chance to identify with female Olympic athletes with the admiration, recognition, and approval which is usually given to high achievement in sports. Maybe by putting together the facts which relate to women's struggle for inclusion in a full Olympic program and

treating it as a portion of the whole effort for women's emancipation, this project could contribute to the pride of women and girls in their achievements in sports and provide a way through which they can identify and recognize the contributions, struggles and efforts of the highly skilled women athletes of the past. The analysis of history is an important tool for people to appreciate and understand the events, forces and processes that have shaped their lives and self-image. It is therefore extremely desirable if the analytical process related to the progressive participation of women in the Olympic Games is done intensively.

This careful overview and analysis of the past could be a tool not only to avoid the mistakes made in the past but also to help understand the forces, movements and tendencies which were present in that context. The result of this study or of any other re-examination of the history of women in sport can bring about not only a sense of pride in the struggles, efforts and accomplishments of previous generations of women but also a clearer comprehension of the conditions which have limited those accomplishments so that a greater sense of will, determination and aspiration will be stimulated in girls and women to shape their own future.

Methods

The historical method of research was used to gather, and analyze materials related to the subject under investigation. Initially much of the material utilized in this study could only be found in international journals, available through the World Wide Web (internet) and the books identified by this author. Moreover, the essential materials were available only at their source: the Olympic Studies Center located at the Olympic Museum, founded in 1993, in Lausanne, Switzerland. The examination and analysis of primary sources required contextualization according to data found in secondary sources. The Minutes of the Annual Sessions of the IOC, the Minutes of the Executive Board Meetings and the Olympic Charters, primary sources by excellence, were analyzed from the perspective of their own time contextualized through information related to the following: (i) the participation of women in the Ancient Olympic Games as they deeply influenced Pierre de Coubertin; (ii) the position of women in society in the 19th and early 20th centuries; (iii) Coubertin's life and influences; and (iv) the foundation of the IOC, its control over women's admission process and the early female Olympians.

Results

The process of inclusion of women in the Olympic Games is long, extremely complex, strewn with obstacles and has not been completed yet either for women as athletes or for women as sports administrators. It also involves the process of inclusion of women in the societies to which they belong. Although, according to the specialized

literature, there are no documents that prohibited women from participating in the Ancient Olympic Games, there were no official documents excluding women's participation from the modern Olympic Games.

The results of this research showed that there were no documents prohibiting women from participating in the Olympic Games either in the Greek antiquity or in the modern era. Even so, women had to overcome prejudice and discrimination. It was also possible to observe how the International Olympic Committee developed strategies to prevent women from participating in the Olympic Games.

Next Stages

As 'women in sport' is a relatively recent area of study, there is still a lot to investigate and discover, particularly through the use of primary sources such as newspapers, letters, minutes of clubs and sports associations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, written in various languages. Consequently, more research is necessary to examine the roles women have played not only as athletes but also as administrators in national and international sports federations, and other sports governing bodies, related not only to the Olympic Movement but also to the culturally-rich national associations of sports worldwide.

The next steps for this research will be investigations in relation to the participation of women in the administrative areas of the various sports organizations, including the International Olympic Committee and the International Federations. More details related to the participation of women athletes in the 1904 Saint Louis and in the 1906 Athens Olympic Games are still to be investigated as the documents found in the OSC did not provide enough evidence. Other sources need to be found and scrutinized, both in Saint Louis and in Athens.

Reference:

MIRAGAYA, Ana (2006). The Process of Inclusion of Women in the Olympic Games. Doctoral dissertation (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação Física) – Universidade Gama Filho, Rio de Janeiro, 2006.