

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Olympic Values Study

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Abstract

The Olympic Day Celebration (ODC) represents a unique and underexplored area of exciting research. This study examined how Olympic values are reflected in the ODC. A qualitative case study design was adopted as the main methodological approach. Results revealed four core values specific to the ODC, referred to as the P4s: preparation value, participation value, program value, practices value. The findings highlight that ODC plays a crucial role in promoting Olympic values through collective participation, inclusivity and effective organization. The absence of prior research on this topic underscores the originality and significance of the present study, which provides a meaningful foundation for future scholarly inquiry in this emerging field.

Keywords: *Olympic day celebration, Olympic values, National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka*

Introduction

The concept of values has long been examined from multiple philosophical, sociological, and cultural perspectives. Broadly, values refer to the significance or acceptance of principles, ideals, or standards that guide human behavior within nature or society. In recent years, values have received increasing global attention across diverse fields of research, including sport. Numerous scholars have explored the role of values within sport settings (Kelmendi et al., 2024; Georgiadis et al., 2024; Ghorbani et al., 2024). Notably, a substantial body of literature highlights how sport functions as a medium through which moral, social, and cultural values are cultivated and expressed (Simon, 2000; McFee, 2004; Sari et al., 2024; Morgan, 2024; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024; Alfurqan et al., 2024; Jahir et al., 2024; Risyanto et al., 2024). Thus, sport is increasingly recognized not merely as a pursuit of athletic victory but also as a mechanism that promotes social values (Zawadzki, 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2024; Lefort, 2024), economic values (Lefort, 2024), and individual development values (Jiang et al., 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2024; Kristiansen et al., 2024; Melchiorri et al., 2025).

The Olympic Charter (2015) articulates the core Olympic values of respect, friendship, and excellence (IOC, 2021). Friendship, often highlighted in sport, fosters social connection among participants of all ages and promotes cooperation, teamwork, and social cohesion (Parry, 2013; Ryall, 2016). Respect underscores learning to value oneself, opponents, rules, the environment, and society at large. Excellence emphasizes continual self-improvement, encouraging athletes and, by extension, all individuals to

pursue personal growth and strive to become better (IOC, 2023).

The Olympic Movement has initiated numerous programmes designed to promote these values. These initiatives emphasize respect for oneself and one's body, consideration for others, adherence to rules, appreciation of sport, and care for the environment (IOC, Fundamentals of Olympic Values Education, 2016). Consequently, Olympic-related activities such as educational programs, the International Olympic Academy, athletes' commissions, ceremonial events, and the Olympic Games themselves serve as powerful expressions of these core values. The foundation of Olympic educational programmes rests on principles of preparation, participation, teamwork, celebration, appreciation, education, and achievement, all of which reinforce the spirit and philosophy of Olympism (Park & Lim, 2022). For example, the opening ceremony symbolically communicates respect, belief, commitment, and the joy of effort, while motivating individuals to cultivate courage, self-discipline, pride, and mutual respect. As scholars note, "Olympism is expressed through actions which link sport to culture and education" (Garcia, 2022; Gargalianos et al., 2015).

Empirical and theoretical studies further demonstrate how Olympic values are promoted across global contexts. Blanco (2024) found that the Philippine Olympic movement emphasizes excellence, respect, and friendship, particularly in its commitment to athlete welfare and rights. McNamee et al. (2012) highlighted the youth Olympic Games as a response to declining youth engagement in sport, designed to re-motivate young people through Olympic values. Theodorakis et al. (2024) noted the movement's

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focus on excellence, friendship, respect, safety, sustainability, and gender equality, while Kamberidou (2011) identified the promotion of peace, respect for diversity, and non-violent conflict resolution as central outcomes of value-based Olympic education.

Olympic education programmes further align with five major Olympic educational values: joy of effort, fair play, practising respect, pursuit of excellence, and balance between body, will, and mind (IOC, 2021). Georgiadis (2010) emphasized that such programmes cultivate values through diverse educational and cultural opportunities surrounding the Games. Later, Georgiadis (2020) noted that these programmes inspire students while promoting cooperation, empowerment, critical thinking, and non-discriminatory responsibility.

Fundamental Principle 1 of the Olympic Charter describes Olympism as "a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind" (IOC, 2021). Olympism blends sport with culture and education, encouraging joy in effort, the educational value of good example, and respect for universal ethical principles. Host countries often integrate Olympic values into their Games. For instance, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics emphasized gender equality, achieving 48% female participation in the Olympics and 42% in the Paralympics for the first time. The Paris 2024 Olympic Games centred on societal cohesion, health promotion, social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and expanding sport participation. At Rio 2016, ten refugee athletes competed under the Olympic flag, symbolizing hope for displaced communities worldwide (IOC, 2016). Nissiotis (1985) argued that Olympic values represent universal human aspirations that unite individuals, races, and nations, while McNamee (2006) highlighted the role of sport in shaping ethical development among young people.

Existing scholarship has examined Olympism's potential to disseminate its philosophy globally. Most studies focus on Olympic values education programmes (Chatziefstathiou, 2005; Grasso et al., 2015; Molina & Gorrono, 2015; Hwang, 2018; Scarton et al., 2019; Ruiz-Rabadan & Moya-Mata, 2020; Geurin & Naraine, 2020; Park & Lim, 2022). Other strands of research explore Olympic Games hosting (Delaplace & Schut, 2019), economic impacts (Short, 2018; Chang et al., 2025), women's participation (Ruiz-Rabadan & Moya-Mata, 2020), athlete performance (Geurin & Naraine, 2020), and broader Olympic sport research (Millet et al., 2021).

However, the context of Olympic values within the Olympic Day Celebration (ODC) has received minimal scholarly attention. As of 2025, seventy-seven years have passed since the first ODC in 1948 (IOC, 2023, p.1). The ODC presents a unique yet underexplored opportunity to promote Olympic values through community-based activities and mass participation. A review of current literature reveals an absence of focused research on how Olympic values are expressed, reinforced, or interpreted within ODC events, indicating two notable gaps: (1). limited scholarly attention to ODC as a platform for Olympic value promotion; and (2). insufficient understanding of how Olympic values are reflected or not reflected in ODC activities.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines how Olympic values manifest within the ODC. The study seeks to advance understanding of Olympic-themed educational initiatives and contribute new insights into the ways Olympic values are expressed through Olympic programmes. Accordingly, the primary objective of this research is to explore how Olympic values are reflected in the Olympic Day Celebration, thereby enriching the broader literature on Olympic education and value-based sport promotion.

The Olympic Day Celebration (ODC)

In January 1948, at the 42nd IOC Session in St Moritz, the members adopted the project of a World Olympic Day. Presented at the previous Session in 1947 by IOC member Dr. Josef Gruss

from Czechoslovakia, the proposal was for National Olympic Committees (NOC) to organize this event between 17 and 24 June to commemorate the founding of the modern Olympic Movement and promote the Olympic ideals in their countries (IOC, 2023, p.1). Accordingly, the first ODC was celebrated on 23 June 1948, under the leadership of IOC President Sigfrid Edstrom. Historical records indicate that the National Olympic Committees of Portugal, Greece, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, Great Britain, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Belgium participated in this inaugural event. Later, the ODC was incorporated into the main Olympic recommendations. The 1978 edition of the Olympic Charter formally recommended that all National Olympic Committees organize an Olympic Day to promote the Olympic Movement, stating that "an Olympic Day be organized regularly (if possible, every year) for the purpose of promoting the Olympic Movement" (International Olympic Charter, 1978). The core activity associated with Olympic Day is the Olympic Day Run, a concept introduced in 1987 by the "Sport for All" Commission of the IOC. This initiative aimed to promote mass participation in sport and encourage physical activity for all. During its first year, 45 National Olympic Committees took part in the celebration, emphasizing inclusivity and the universal spirit of sport.

ODC are based on the three pillars: "Move, learn, discover. Move: This pillar encourages people to get active on Olympic Day. "Move" can refer to all sorts of physical activities for people of all ages and abilities from Olympic Day Runs to individual and team sports. Learn: Olympic Day is a great opportunity to learn about the Olympic Values, which are excellence, friendship and respect, and look at the contribution of sport to global social issues that can affect your community, such as education, health promotion, HIV prevention, women's and girls' empowerment, environmental protection, peace building and local community development. Being a responsible citizen is also part of the philosophy of Olympism Discover: This pillar is about people trying new sports and activities that they have never done before. This is done in a number of ways, for instance, by inviting Olympians to do a demonstration of their sport or a workshop in which participants can try the sport under an athlete's guidance (Factsheet, 2023)

The Case of Sri Lanka

The National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka (NOCSL) was established in 1937 and was recognized by the IOC in the same year. The NOCSL serves as the national governing body for Olympic sports in Sri Lanka, responsible for representing the country within the Olympic Movement. Over the decades, the NOCSL has introduced numerous Olympic programs and possesses a long and distinguished history of promoting Olympic ideals. Among its many initiatives, the annual ODC holds a central place in its calendar of activities.

In 2025, the NOCSL organized the ODC on 23 June in the city of Galle, located in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Galle is a well-known coastal city and a popular tourist destination recognized for its rich cultural heritage. The celebrations took place at the football field adjacent to the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Sri Lanka.

The 2025 ODC comprised several key components, including the opening ceremony, the Olympic Day Run, the Olympic poster competition, the Olympic video competition, the cultural showcase, the closing ceremony, and a final group photo session. The event attracted a diverse range of participants and stakeholders, including officials of the NOCSL, Olympian, sports administrators, representatives from the Ministry of Sports, police officers, media representatives, university students and faculty members, sponsors, and residents of Galle city.

In addition, students and fine Arts teachers from several schools, both girls' and boys' schools actively contributed to the

cultural showcase segment, which reflected the local cultural traditions and artistic talent of the region. The entire event was conducted from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., successfully combining sport, culture, and education in line with the spirit of Olympism.

Methods

This study was conducted to investigate how Olympic values are reflected in ODC in Sri Lanka. The selected case study is presented under the section The Case of Sri Lanka. A qualitative case study design was adopted to explore the meanings and practices embedded within the event. This approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of complex social, cultural, and organizational processes within real-life contexts (Hussein, 2023; Kwon, 2020; Osorio-García-de-Oteyza et al., 2020; Hervira, 2022). The qualitative case study method facilitates exploration not only of what occurs in the ODC but also of how and why it occurs, emphasizing participants' lived experiences, interactions, and perceptions rather than numerical measurement.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and secondary data sources. Using multiple methods allowed for triangulation, which enhances the reliability and validity of qualitative research findings (Shankaran et al., 2020; Ati Sulastri et al., 2020). Triangulation provided opportunities to cross-verify data gathered from different sources, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the ODC and the values it represents.

Field Observations

Field observations were conducted before and during the ODC to understand NOCSL's organizational culture and event execution. The researcher observed the preparation process, including planning meetings, staff coordination, and task allocation. Observations during the celebration focused on the functioning of teams, decision-making practices, communication flow, and leadership behaviors. These experiences provided direct insights into how the organization promoted Olympic values such as teamwork, respect, and excellence. Key incidents, statements, and behavioral patterns were recorded in detailed field notes, which later informed the thematic analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants: eight men and eight women representing staff members, sports officials, athletes, and other contributors to the event. Participants were selected using random sampling to reduce bias and ensure diverse perspectives. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and followed a flexible interview guide that allowed participants to express their experiences freely. Open-ended questions were used to encourage discussion on personal experiences, organizational practices, communication patterns, and leadership behaviors related to the ODC.

Interviews were conducted through multiple channels, including face-to-face sessions during event breaks and virtual platforms such as WhatsApp and teleconferencing, to accommodate participants' availability. Following Oplatka (2018), particular care was taken in planning and conducting interviews to maintain sensitivity when addressing participants' experiences and emotions. This research adhered to the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality (World Medical Association, 2013). Accordingly, participants' informed consent was obtained prior to each interview, and they were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary

nature of their participation.

Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data were collected from official and publicly available sources to complement primary data and enhance contextual understanding. These included the official NOCSL website, media publications (in Sinhala and English) related to ODC, event programs and agendas, YouTube recordings, and relevant research literature on Olympic values. Reviewing these materials provided historical and organizational insights into the development and objectives of the ODC. The use of secondary sources also allowed for cross-validation of information obtained through interviews and observations, thereby strengthening the credibility and consistency of the findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a widely applied method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Finlay, 2021). The process involved reading and analyzing the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to identify recurring ideas and patterns. Initial coding was used to mark significant segments of text relevant to the research question. The themes were refined and reviewed to ensure they accurately captured participants' experiences and perspectives. The final thematic structure was interpreted considering existing literature and research complied with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. (Table 1).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was upheld throughout all stages of the research process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality measures applied to their information. Informed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews and observations. All collected data including field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts were securely stored and used exclusively for research purposes. During data reporting, excerpts were carefully paraphrased or anonymized to protect participant identities and maintain organizational confidentiality. All secondary data were appropriately cited, and interpretations remained faithful to the original meanings of the consulted sources.

According to the World Medical Association (2013), this research adhered to the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Interviewees were clearly informed, both in writing and verbally, about the objectives of the study. They were explicitly reassured that their names would not be disclosed, that they were free to withdraw at any stage, and that their privacy, confidentiality, dignity, and respect would be safeguarded. Participants were also informed that their data would be utilized only with their explicit consent after they had read and understood the interview transcripts. These procedures ensured that no individual's privacy was compromised and that only those genuinely interested in the sport and the research participated willingly. Consequently, no participant expressed reluctance, and all data were obtained in an ethically sound manner. Furthermore, no deception, coercion, or exploitation occurred at any point during the study.

Results

A comprehensive account of the values identified through field observations and semi-structured interviews conducted during the ODC is presented in Table 1. The analysis identified

four overarching themes preparation value, participation value, programme value, and practices value under which 22 sub-themes were classified. Specifically, five sub-themes were identified under preparation value, four under participation value, six under programme value, and six under practices value. Collectively, these sub-themes revealed a total of 41 values associated with the ODC.

The findings indicate that the values reflected by participants are expressed across multiple dimensions, primarily through col-

lectivism, education, and participation, rather than through individualistic orientations. Notably, team spirit and fairness emerged as recurring values evident in nearly all aspects of the event. The ODC, characterized by minimal competition, functioned as a platform for community-based engagement, where collective values were more prominent than individual achievements. This observation suggests that the celebration embodies a cycle of shared values that foster unity and mutual respect among participants.

Table 1. Description of Values identified through Olympic Day Celebration

Phases	Descriptions	Value Characteristics
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Moving towards a value addition approach. – Focus on risk management. – Focus on upholding international standards. – Focus on organizing plans to achieve program objectives. – Acting in accordance with the knowledge and instructions of responsible officials. 	Passion Discipline Commitment Teamwork Responsibility Focus Respect Fairness Perseverance Creativity Enjoyment Integrity Perseverance Confidence
Reflected Value Preparation Value		
Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participation of culturally diverse youth. – Representation of both men and women. – Participation of university and school children and lectures and teachers. – Participation of Olympians, sports officials and coaches. 	Community Engagement Teamwork Respect Fairness Perseverance Creativity Social Bound Respect Rules
Reflected Value Participant Value		
Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adherence to the Olympic Day Celebration theme – Highlighting local and international identities Recognition of participants and competition winners – Competition design content designed to educate about the – Olympics and to create and encourage interest in it – Including team activities – Official Olympic flags, T-shirts, nameplates, designed with a common theme – Including the participation of government institutions 	Rituals Education Celebration Tradition Motivation Experiences Teamwork Respect, Fairness Perseverance Creativity Collective Commitment Achievement Unity Symbolic Elements Cultural Exchange
Reflected Value Program Value		
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The art of teamwork – Having a key officer in charge of the program – Working with attention to previous experiences – Organizers having an understanding of every task – Working in a friendly manner – Using formal communication methods 	Collective Commitment Due Respect Social Bound Inclusivity Managing Emotions Cooperation toward shared goals Localizing a global event Teamwork
Reflected Value Practices Value		

The results further demonstrate that specific activities within the program such as the Olympic day run, Olympic poster competition, Olympic video competition, cultural showcase, token of appreciation, and the opening and closing ceremonies served as primary avenues for the expression of Olympic values. During the preparation phase, values related to program management, collaboration, and organizational discipline were particularly evident. The participation phase highlighted values linked to inclusion, mutual support, and social connection, emphasizing the importance of shared experiences among diverse groups. Throughout the programme phase, cultural and symbolic values were prominently displayed, reflecting the integration of local identity with the universal ideals of Olympism. Learning and curiosity emerged as foundational elements in the creation and reinforcement of these values. In the practices phase, non-exclusion

and multi-stakeholder participation were central, illustrating how both individual and collective values coexisted and complemented one another. Table 1 presents a detailed description of the values identified through the ODC, organized according to the four main themes and corresponding sub-themes.

Moreover, these findings suggest that the ODC not only facilitates value transmission but also fosters an inclusive environment that reinforces social cohesion and intercultural understanding. Finally, Figure 1 provides a conceptual mapping of the values that emerged from the ODC, illustrating the interrelationships among them. Collectively, these findings reveal that the ODC embodies a multidimensional value framework conceptualized as P⁴ representing preparation value, participation value, programme value, and practices value which encapsulates the holistic reflection of Olympic values within the Sri Lankan context (Figure 1).

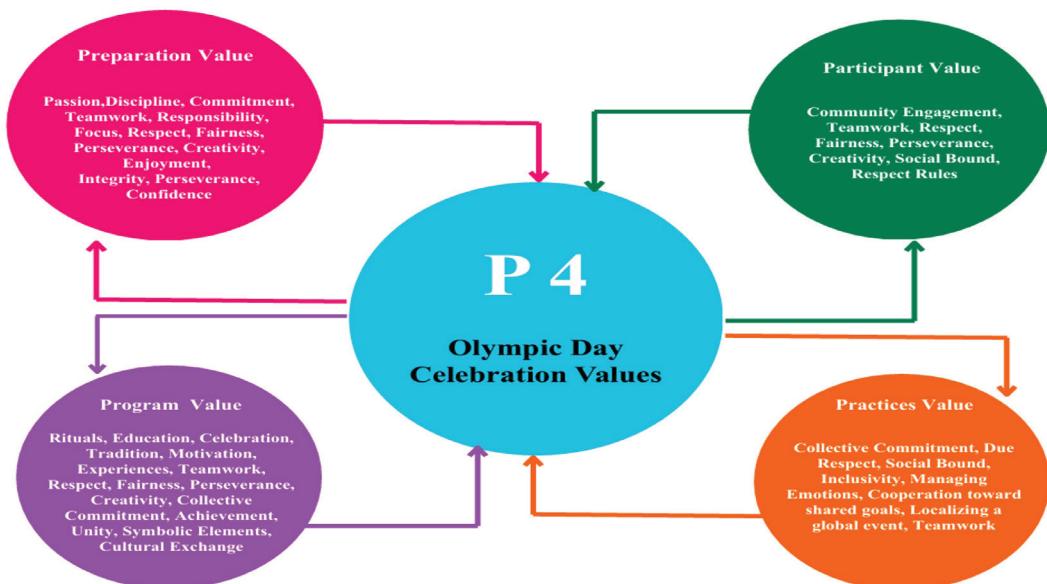


FIGURE 1. Conceptual mapping of the P4 values that emerged from the ODC in Sri Lankan context

Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine how Olympic values are reflected in the ODC. The findings highlight four key values embedded within the event: preparation value, participation value, programme value, and practices value. The study further reveals how Olympic values are fostered through programs grounded in Olympic educational themes. This aligns with Park and Lim (2022), who argue that Olympic educational programs are built upon the principles of preparation, participation, teamwork, celebration, appreciation, education, and achievement elements that collectively reinforce the spirit and philosophy of Olympism. Furthermore, recent studies (Jiang et al., 2024; Ribeiro et al., 2024; Kristiansen et al., 2024; Melchiorri et al., 2025) have demonstrated that individual values can be cultivated through Olympic-related activities, a finding that is corroborated by the current results.

The Olympic Charter (2015) articulates the core Olympic values of respect, friendship, and excellence (IOC, 2021), and this study shows that the ODC program has effectively embodied and promoted these values. The preparation value, participation value, and programme value identified in this research further reinforce the capacity of Olympic Day initiatives to deliver on these ideals. McNamee et al. (2012) have emphasized the role of the Youth Olympic Games in re-engaging young people with Olympic values, and similarly, this study finds that Olympic Day celebrations stimulate interest in the Olympic Movement among young participants, encouraging their involvement in Olympic activities.

These findings underscore the broader potential for promoting Olympic values through ODC as well as through other initiatives (Olympic Charter, 2015; IOC, Fundamentals of Olympic Values Education, 2016; Park & Lim, 2022; Blanco, 2024). Given the paucity of research in this area, the present study contributes a comprehensive analysis of values expressed through sport in general and those advanced through the Olympic Games and associated programs.

However, this study is not without limitations. It was conducted over a single year, which restricts the temporal depth of the findings. The qualitative case study design, combined with reliance on voluntary participation within a limited timeframe, further constrains the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the limited availability of prior research directly addressing Olympic Day posed challenges in situating and contextualizing the study within the broader literature.

Despite these constraints, the novelty and contribution of the study constitute its major strengths. To the best of current knowledge, this is the first scholarly work to examine Olympic values specifically through the lens of the ODC. The generation of new insights in an area unexplored for 77 years since the establishment of Olympic Day underscores the significance of this research. While substantial scholarship exists on Olympic values through educational programs (Chatziefstathiou, 2005; Grasso et al., 2015; Molina & Gorrono, 2015; Hwang, 2018; Scarton et al., 2019; Ruiz-Rabadan & Moya-Mata, 2020; Geurin & Naraine, 2020; Park & Lim, 2022), this study is the first to focus on how values are ex-

pressed through International Olympic Day celebrations an event observed globally in 206 countries. Conducting such pioneering work in Sri Lanka, a nation with only two Olympic medals, offers both symbolic and scholarly value to the global body of Olympic research.

Previous studies on Olympic values have predominantly focused on educational programs and youth initiatives that promote Olympic ideals (Kamberidou, 2011; IOC, 2021; Georgiadis, 2010). In contrast, this study emphasizes the importance of examining practical and contemporary applications of these values. Such an approach provides insights into how Olympic values are enacted in real-world contexts and adapted to modern societal needs. These findings may support policymakers in designing broader, more responsive programs aligned with contemporary social priorities. Moreover, emerging discussions and discoveries in this field can enhance the international visibility of the Olympic Movement and stimulate further scholarly engagement (Theodorakis et al., 2024).

Finally, several directions for future research emerge (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2020). Future scholars could conduct more extensive investigations into Olympic values using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Binder, 2021), employ longitudinal data collection over several years (Naul et al., 2017), and undertake cross-country comparative analyses (Teetzel & Mazzucco, 2020). Research may also explore participant percep-

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Kohe, G. Z., & Purdy, L. (2018). Sport, values, and the Olympic movement: tions (Brown & Gasser, 2021), compare ODC with other international sports days (Maguire, 2020), and engage in evidence-based investigations to deepen the scholarly understanding of Olympic values (Kohe & Purdy, 2018).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that ODC plays a crucial role in promoting Olympic values through collective participation, inclusivity and effective organization. Furthermore, the study identifies four P4 core values specific to ODC such as preparation value, participation value, programme value and practices value. These findings insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to design initiatives that strengthen the promotion of Olympic values through community-based and educational programmes. By recognizing and applying these values, the Olympic vision can be more effectively localized and sustained.

Ultimately, this research highlights that the realization of Olympic values extends beyond individual athlete excellence, encompassing collective participation and shared experiences. Olympic Day serves as an inclusive platform where both athletes and non-athletes can embody and practice the universal ideals of Olympism. The absence of prior research on this topic underscores the originality and importance of this study, which offers a meaningful foundation for future scholarly inquiry in this emerging field.

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