

Youth Perceptions of the Olympic Games:
Attitudes Towards Action Sports at the YOG and Olympic Games

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ABSTRACT

The IOC faces a significant challenge, that is, how to stay relevant to contemporary youth amid changing sport participation and consumption patterns and growing competition from mega-events such as the X Games. This project critically examined youth perceptions of the relevance and significance of the Olympic Games, and the Youth Olympic Games. It focused particularly on the attitudes of participants in newer, action sports (i.e., skateboarding, surfing, BMX, snowboarding, parkour, kite-surfing), as well as the cultural processes leading up to and following the short-listing of surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Online surveys, media analysis and interviews provide rich and nuanced insights into the experiences, attitudes, opinions, debates and politics that influence youths' current and future participation in, and consumption of, the Olympic Games. Ultimately, this project reveals generational differences in attitudes towards action sports inclusion in the Olympic Games, as well as changing perceptions among those working most closely with the IOC to prepare their sports for possible Olympic inclusion. Furthermore, this report highlights the power and potential of action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games, as well as some of the ongoing and new challenges for such significant changes to both the infrastructure of action sports cultures and industries, and to the transforming landscape of Olympic sport.

KEY WORDS

Olympic Games, Youth, Action Sports, Lifestyle Sports, Youth Olympic Games, Tokyo 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project critically examined youth perceptions of the relevance and significance of the Olympic Games, and the Youth Olympic Games [YOG]. It focused on the attitudes of participants in action sports (including skateboarding, surfing, BMX, snowboarding, parkour, kite-surfing), and explores how action sport cultures have responded to the short-listing of skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Three methods were adopted. 1). An online survey targeted the attitudes and opinions of recreational action sport participants and core/lifestyle participants. The survey was available in 9 languages (Arabic, English, Portuguese, French, German, Chinese (x2), Spanish and Japanese) and attracted responses across 51 different countries from all continents. 2). Media sources were collated covering the possible or past inclusion of action sports into the Olympics. The majority focused on shortlisting for Tokyo 2020 and were published in online action sport magazines, with extensive dialogue among readers in action sport related online forums. Cultural media, such as niche magazines and websites, are particularly influential in communicating attitudes and value systems within and across action sport cultures. This method therefore targeted the voices from the 'core' participants and the industry. A total of 655 articles were analysed thematically to identify core themes and debates within and across sports. These issues informed our interviews and overall thematic analysis. 3). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 key individuals in the action sports industries, focusing on the sports short-listed for Tokyo 2020 (surfing, skateboarding and sport-climbing) and kite-boarding for the YOG 2018. The interviews revealed the perspectives of those in action sporting industries, and those directly involved (or implicated) in the processes, including action sport journalists and photographers, federation members, past and present athletes, coaches, agents and event organizers. The interviews were conducted with the aim of understanding the cultural attitudes and debates within each sporting culture, and the processes involved in preparing these particular action sports for possible Olympic inclusion. The interviews provide rich insights into the experiences, attitudes, opinions, debates and politics that influence youths' current and future participation in, and consumption of, the Olympic Games. They were analysed thematically and trends across sports identified.

The project provided a wealth of data, some of which is summarised below.

Our survey revealed that;

- There is considerable interest in action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games: 60% of the survey participants thought that the inclusion of most action sports was a good idea, and would probably lead to them watching more of the Olympics. However, they also have concerns about how action sports are being represented. However while action sport participants are avid sport media consumer, they have not to date been inspired by the YOG.
- Skateboarding was clearly the most popular sport for Olympic inclusion, suggesting it's broader cultural significance and central role within the action sports community.
- Generational differences were evident: under 20s were most enthusiastic about action sports being included in the Olympics: 80 per cent of under 20s supported it. There were also gender differences and national difference that warrant further research.

Our interviews and media analysis highlights the power and potential of action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games and YOG, as well as some of the ongoing and new challenges for such significant changes to both the infrastructure of action sports cultures and industries, and to the transforming landscape of Olympic sport.

- There is huge potential in action sports to attract youth audiences and change global perceptions of the Olympics. But, including action sports can't be a simple process of inclusion within existing models. It must be done with respect and understanding for what makes these sports unique (i.e., cultural dynamics, values, style).
- Each sport has its own specific issues when working towards Olympic inclusion, including relationships between International and National Federations, the action sports industry, and the culture more broadly. Interviewees expressed uncertainty about funding following Olympic inclusion, and predicted politics for the flow of resources.
- This project reveals generational differences in attitudes towards action sports inclusion in the Olympic Games, as well as changing perceptions among those working most closely with the IOC to prepare their sports for possible Olympic inclusion.
- Opportunities for self-governance and trust in the international federations will be key for core participants 'buy in', and thus long-term sustainability

Our results signal important areas for further research, including national differences in perceptions of action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games; the perceptions of youth, and particularly children; mainstream audiences responses to action sports inclusion in Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games; the processes following the final announcement in Rio 2016 as to action sports inclusion into the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, including responses from the broader action sports cultures, changes within action sports infrastructure, and new challenges facing International Federations; and the effects of Olympic inclusion on gender diversity and global growth and development of action sports.

Key Recommendations

- As the IOC continues to consider new activities for inclusion (e.g., parkour, BMX freestyle) in the Olympic Games and YOG, it needs to recognize that the governance structures of these sports differ from most traditional sports, and those with the most insights and knowledge may not be housed within the expected sporting infrastructure.
- We encourage the IOC to continue to work with action-sport specific federations (in contrast to fitting within existing IFs that may not understand and respect the unique cultural value systems and be aware of the important issues within these sports). While this will involve considerable effort (and mentoring and support) to help them learn the rules and regulations required of Olympic sports, we feel this approach has the best chance of getting 'buy in' from the core of the cultures, and thus longer-term sustainability of these activities within the Olympic Games.
- We recommend that there will be important research following the announcement in Rio 2016 to Tokyo 2020. As signalled in this report, as this news is received the International Federations will take on new roles and responsibilities working with national federations, athletes and coaches. We anticipate that these processes will be complex and political, and much can be learned from this process for future action sport inclusion into and success at the Olympic Games.

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1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 The research subject and objectives

As recognized in the IOC's 2020 agenda, an important and mounting issue for the contemporary Olympic Movement is how to remain relevant to younger generations. Acknowledging the challenges of appealing to contemporary youth, many of whom are practicing and consuming sport differently to previous generations, the IOC has made various efforts to attract younger audiences. These strategies include, incorporating a range of youth-driven action sports into the Olympic program (i.e. windsurfing [1984], mountain biking [1996], snowboarding [1998], BMX [2000]), and launching the inaugural Youth Olympic Games [YOG] (Singapore 2010), which included action sports in the program (e.g. windsurfing) and Sports Lab (Ninjing 2014). However, the effectiveness of these innovations to attract younger viewers have yet to be given scholarly consideration.

Utilizing a multi-method approach, including an online survey, media analysis and interviews, this project explored the opinions and attitudes held by contemporary youth, about the Olympic Games and its portrayal of action sports (e.g. skateboarding, surfing, BMX, snowboarding, parkour, kite-surfing, sports climbing). Here 'youth' is broadly conceived as teenagers and young adults aged between 13 and 30 years old—the core action sports demographic. The project offers the first in-depth sociological investigation of how contemporary young men and women involved in action sports around the world—as participants and/or consumers—perceive the Olympic Games generally, and YOG specifically. To ensure youth participation from all continents, surveys were translated into Arabic, English, French, Spanish, German, Chinese (x2), Portuguese, and Japanese. The project also provides critical insights from key individuals within action sports cultures, medias and industries regarding the current attitudes, tensions, and politics within action sport cultures that are influencing current and future participation in, and consumption of, the Olympic Games.

Action sport participation and consumption is a growing, yet complex, part of the global sports market (Hajkowicz, et. al., 2013). Participation rates in action sports continue to grow in many western, and non-Western countries (e.g., China, Japan, South Korea), (see Booth and Thorpe, 2007; Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton, 2004a, 2004b, 2010). Research and media reports highlight, for example, that surfing is gaining popularity in previously marginal sites (e.g., Iran and Bangladesh Wheaton, forthcoming); Pakistani youth are taking up skateboarding in growing numbers; and parkour is rapidly gaining popularity across the Middle East (Thorpe and Ahmad, 2014; Wheaton, Forthcoming). Importantly, participation rates do not account for the broader cultural reach of these activities. According to Global Industry Analysts, Inc., the action sports industry, which includes media, events, clothing and equipment, continues to expand with predictions that the global board sports industry will reach US\$20.5 billion by 2017 (Global Boardsports, 2011). The rise of transnational action sport media and corporations (e.g., Burton, Quiksilver, Red Bull, ESPN X Games) continues to play a significant role in the spread of ideas, images, and styles across borders, and the organization of mega-sporting spectacles (Thorpe, 2014).

Over the past 20 years, the IOC has incorporated a range of youth-driven action sports into the Olympic program, but the marriage between 'alternative' action sports and the Olympics has not been straightforward (see Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a, 2011b). Reflecting action sports' counter-cultural heritage, many participants continue to view these activities as alternative lifestyles rather than as sports (Wheaton, 2004), and celebrate value systems that are often incompatible with the disciplinary, hierarchical, nationalistic Olympic regime (see Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a, 2011b). In 2011, we offered the first in-depth discussion of the cultural politics of action sports Olympic incorporation via case studies of windsurfing, snowboarding, and bicycle motocross (BMX) (see Thorpe & Wheaton 2011a, 2011b). In so doing, we illustrated some of the complex power struggles involved in attempts to modernize the Olympic Games via the incorporation of action sports. This project builds upon and extends this research

with the aim of providing a global analysis of youth attitudes and perceptions of the Olympic Games and YOG, and the potential of action sports for appealing to younger audiences.

1.2 The academic significance of the project

Over the past two decades, there has been an explosion of academic interest in what has been variously labelled alternative, extreme, lifestyle, whiz and action sports (see Midol, 1993; Midol & Broyer, 1995; Rinehart, 2000; Rinehart & Sydor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004b; Booth & Thorpe, 2007). While commentators have differed in their use of nomenclature, many are agreed in seeing such activities as having presented an alternative and potential challenge to traditional ways of ‘seeing’ ‘doing’ and understanding sport (c.f. Wheaton, 2004).

Since their emergence in the 1960s, action sports have experienced unprecedented growth both in participation and in their increased visibility. Evolving in a unique historical conjuncture of global communication, corporate sponsorship, entertainment industries, and a growing global young, affluent demographic, action sports have spread around the world far faster than most established sports (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a). A multi-million-dollar industry sells commodities and lifestyles to ‘hard-core’ aficionados and grazers alike. The media’s appetite for such sports is exemplified by the success of ESPN’s X-Games, which by 2003, less than 10 years after its inauguration (1995), had commanded a global audience of 50 million. Blurring the boundaries between music festival and sporting event (Rinehart, 2008), the X Games have been hugely successful in capturing the imagination of the lucrative youth market, with the medium age of the viewers being (in 2002) 20 years (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2001a; Thorpe & Wheaton, Forthcoming).

Research on institutionalization and professionalization processes, especially as expressed through attitudes to competition and regulation, has provided important insights into understanding how co-option has been contested (Beal & Weidman, 2003, Rinehart, 2000; Wheaton, 2010). A defining feature of action sport is their spontaneous nature, with participation predominantly taking place in informal settings, often with a lack of external regulation or institutionalization. Moreover, a central feature of many of these activities, particularly in their early stages of development, was a counter-cultural ethos that celebrated anti-authoritarian and do-it-yourself values (Beal 2005; Heino, 2000; Humphreys 2003). However, as these sports continue to grow and gain popularity, they face increasing external and internal pressures to professionalise, institutionalise and regulate. Some sports, such as snowboarding and surfing, have already gone through these processes, while others are just beginning to realise the complexities that come with such developments (i.e., parkour).

Cultural growth, fragmentation and diversity

With rapidly increasing visibility of action sports during the late 1990s and 2000s, it is unsurprising that action sports are also attracting an ever-increasing body of participants, from ever more diverse global geographical settings (Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Comer, 2010; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004). This expansion in participation includes not only the traditional consumer market of teenage boys, but increasingly older men, women and girls. To date, much of the research on different action sport cultures, including surfing, skateboarding, snowboarding, BMX and windsurfing, across different national and transnational spaces, has focused on understanding their cultures and identities, paying particular attention to the impact of gender, class and race on identity and inclusion (i.e., Atencio et al. 2009; Beal 1995; Chivers Yochim, 2010; Evers 2010; Kusz 2004; Thorpe 2010; Young & Dallaire 2008; Wheaton 2000). Accompanying this rapid expansion has been cultural fragmentation, with enthusiasts engaging in a wide variety of participation styles, which support new and profitable niche markets (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a). Fragmentation has also led to ideological differences among groups of participants, with various styles of participation, demonstrating philosophical, skill, and commitment differences. In skateboarding,

for example, styles of participation range from park-skating in relatively sanitised and controlled environments, to the more aggressive, unregulated, and male-dominated street skating, to long boarding on paved hills where the emphasis is on speed rather than the performance of highly technical manoeuvres (Atencio et al., 2009). Fragmentation continues to cause tensions and debate within these lifestyle sports cultures regarding processes of commercialisation and incorporation.

Women's participation

Many of the activities under the industry-defined umbrella of 'action sports' came into existence during the 1960s and 1970s at a critical juncture when increasing female participation challenged organised sports (as well as many other social institutions, such as education and the workforce) as an exclusive male bastion. Unlike in modern sports, women actively participated in the early forms of many action sports (i.e., snowboarding, climbing, skateboarding, surfing), and although fewer in number, women often participated alongside men, and thus action sports did not necessarily face the burden of years of historical and institutionalised sexism that plagues most other sports. Following this, it has been argued that action sports offered the potential for alternative gender relations because the activities developed in a different context to traditional sports and thus were not so entrenched in traditional gender rules and norms (Beal, 1996; Thorpe, 2007; Thorpe & Olive, Forthcoming; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998).

Despite the potential for more equitable spaces for women's participation, young white males have long constituted the dominant force at the core of most action sport cultures (Beal, 1996; Kusz, 2004; Wheaton, 2000), and there remains a widespread celebration of youthful, hedonistic fraternal masculinities, and the marginalizing of women and 'other' men in most action sports cultures (Kusz, 2004; Thorpe, 2013; Wheaton, 2000). Yet not all women accept their marginalization, with some adopting proactive roles in the action sports culture and industry, as instructors, athletes, journalists, photographers, CEOs and manufactures, and committed recreational participants (Thorpe 2005, 2007; Pomerantz *et al.*, 2004; Young & Dallaire 2008). While still fewer in number than men, women are successfully negotiating space in these male-dominated sporting cultures and industries via active participation and demonstrations of physical prowess and commitment (Beal, 1996; Thorpe, 2009; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). In so doing, some have developed an array of unique strategies to negotiate spaces for women within male-dominated sporting cultures and industries. Other women set about creating their own sporting spaces (i.e., roller derby) (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014).

The increasingly visible roles of committed women in local action sport communities *and* highly competent action sportswomen in broader society, have further contributed to the popularity of these sports among girls and women. The inclusion of women in globally televised events including the X-Games and Olympics (skiing, mountain-biking, kayaking, snowboarding, BMX, freestyle skiing), blockbuster movies focusing on female surfers and inline-skaters such as *Blue Crush* (2002) and *Brink* (1998), and the representation of female action sport athletes in the mass media (e.g., *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *Sports Illustrated for Women*), have all added to the visibility and legitimization of women in action sport. Yet, women's participation in some action sports is more visible in popular culture than others. For example, female snowboarders have been included in the X-Games since its inception in 1997, whereas female skateboarders and freestyle skiers were excluded until 2002 and 2005 respectively; women continue to be barred from all motorbike and snowmobile events. Thus, while the number of female participants has exploded in some action sports, others remain the exclusive domain of males.

As a result of the increasing visibility of (some) women in (some) action sports, expanding female niche markets, and opportunities for female-only lessons, camps and competitions, the female action sport demographic has grown over the past three decades. Snowboarding, kayaking and skateboarding, for example, were among the fastest growing sports for American women in the early 2000s (NGSA, 2005). In 2004 female skateboarders constituted approximately 25.3 per cent (or 2.6 million) of the 10.3 million skateboarders in the United States, up from just 7.5 per cent in 2001 (McLaughlin, 2004; Darrow, 2006),

and the number of American women who surf every day grew 280 per cent between 1999 and 2003 (Darrow, 2006; Women a Focus, 2003). While the reliability of such industry-produced statistics is questionable, the athleticism of committed female participants is now highly visible on the mountains, in the waves, rivers and lakes, and in particular forms of media. As a result of which, there is some evidence to suggest that boys and men are adjusting, and in some cases, radically altering, their perceptions of women's abilities and capabilities (Olive, et. al., 2012; Thorpe, 2007; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). In part due to these changes, action sports are increasingly attracting female participants from varying age groups, sexualities, abilities and levels of commitment, and from different cultures and ethnicities (Comer, 2010; Roy, 2013; Thorpe, 2014; Wheaton, 2013). Thus, it is important to note that, with such growth, girls and women in action sport cultures do not constitute a homogeneous category.

A variety of competing femininities exist within most action sport cultures, some of which actively challenge the maleness of these sporting cultures at local, national and international scales, while others passively accept, support, even reinforce, male hegemony. Girls and women experience action sports in diverse ways and this diversity nurtures various identities among women. For some women, participation is a gratifying experience and an important site for the creation and negotiation of cultural identity, in which they earn status as committed participants. Many 'core' participants continue to be assessed by male standards of sporting prowess and commitment, and those who accept such standards and demonstrate the appropriate skills can gain symbolic and cultural capital from their performances (Thorpe, 2009; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Although such women vary in ages, ethnicities and sexualities, it is the young, white, heterosexual, slim and able-bodied woman that continues to be the most visible in media representations of action sports.

For other women, their passivity in action sport cultural spaces conforms to more traditional gender roles.

Global growth

To date, action sports have been a predominantly western phenomenon. Despite increasing diversity, many action sports (e.g., BMX, surfing, skateboarding, snowboarding, windsurfing) have been dominated by young, white, heterosexual, privileged men in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as some Asian countries (particularly Japan) (Beal, 1995; Booth, 2011; Thorpe, 2011; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1999). Moreover, with many action sports having roots in North America, and most transnational action sport-related media and companies based in the United States, action sports have become closely interconnected with American popular culture, fashion and music, and particularly the 'cool' California youth culture aesthetic. For some—though certainly not all—this is part of the appeal. With the development of highly mediated action sport events such as the X Games, Gravity Games, and the inclusion of action sports into the Olympics, highly evocative images of (predominantly North American and European) action sport athletes riding waves, carving down snowy mountains, leaping across buildings, and grinding empty swimming pools, are reaching even the remotest of destinations. With the rapid expansion of the Internet and the global reach of transnational action sport companies, media and events, combined with the increasingly 'exotic' travel patterns of action sport athletes and enthusiasts, children and youth throughout the Eastern world are also exposed to action sports (Thorpe, 2014). While some reject them as 'crazy American sports', others adopt and re-appropriate these activities in relation to their local physical and social environments. In the Arab world, for example, surfing is gaining popularity in Iran and Bangladesh; Pakistani youth are taking up skateboarding in growing numbers; and sand boarding is a popular activity among privileged youth (and ex-pats) in Saudi Arabia.

The (re)appropriation of the predominantly western phenomenon of action sports by local groups in the Eastern world raises interesting questions about the complex and multi-faceted nature of global flows of sport and physical culture in the 21st Century. As various researchers and social commentators have suggested, global media cultures and patterns of consumption are changing contemporary youth cultural formations. According to youth cultural scholars, Nayak and Kehily (2008), everyday cultural flows and

mobilities of objects, images and information, are ‘transforming young people’s identities in complex ways as they come to interact with and reconfigure processes of globalization’ (p. 32). Attempting to understand and explain these changes, researchers are increasingly offering insightful theoretical and discursive analyses of the transnational flows of youth cultural discourses, products and images across and within local, national and virtual spaces (e.g., Nayak & Kehily, 2008). Building upon recent scholarship on the globalization of youth culture and sport (i.e., Giulianotti, 2004; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004; Henseler, 2012; Wheaton, 2005), Thorpe (2014) shed light on the development of action sports in the Middle East, and in so doing, revealed the agency of youth to negotiate space for themselves within complex networks of power in global, local and virtual geographies. Here she illustrated how youth in local contexts are adapting and redefining action sports to ‘suit their particular needs, beliefs and customs’ (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004, p. 546). More importantly, she revealed how youth in Gaza are using parkour as a physical form of self-expression and escapism, and an important coping mechanism in a world filled with risk and deprivation (also see Thorpe & Ahmad, 2014). Wheaton (2013) has also examined the growth of skateboarding in post-Apartheid South African, and more recently the rise of parkour among women in the Middle East (In Press). There is also a growing body of scholarship focused on Action Sports for Development and Peace (ASDP) initiatives that are proliferating across both the developed and developing world (see Thorpe, 2015).

The Rise (and Fall) of the X Games

Since their emergence in the 1960s, action sports have experienced unprecedented growth both in participation and in their increased visibility across mediated spaces (see, for example, Booth & Thorpe, 2007, Rinehart 2000, Thorpe 2011, Wheaton, 2004). Many of these activities were already gaining popularity when American-based cable television network ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, owned by ABC, itself a division of the Walt Disney Group) saw in them the potential to tap into the hard to reach young male consumer group. ESPN broadcast the first Summer X Games in mid-1995. Staged at Newport, Providence, and Middletown (Rhode Island), and Mount Snow (Vermont), the inaugural games featured twenty-seven events in nine categories: bungee jumping, eco-challenge, in-line skating, skateboarding, skysurfing, sport climbing, street luge, biking, and water sports (Booth & Thorpe, 2007). Twelve months later, X Games II attracted around 200,000 spectators, and early in 1997 ESPN staged the first Winter X Games at Snow Summit Mountain Resort (California) (Pickert, 2009). The X Games quickly garnered an international audience, and by 2002 the Summer X Games was broadcast on ABC, ESPN and ESPN to a record of 63 million viewers (Wong, 2013). Backed by a range of transnational corporate sponsors, the X Games—the self-defined ‘worldwide leader’ in action sports—have played a significant role in the global diffusion and expansion of the action sport industry and culture (Rinehart, 2000), and in redefining how sporting mega events appeal to younger viewers.

While the X Games have been a mainstay in the (particularly North American) action sports industry and culture for over two decades, it is important to recall that action sport participants were highly critical of the initial efforts by ESPN to capitalize on their self-generated and DIY activities and cultures (Beal & Wilson, 2004). The emergence of the first few X Games prompted vociferous debate among grass-roots practitioners who contested ESPN’s co-option of their lifestyle into television-tailored ‘sports’ (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Crawford, 2007, Rinehart, 2008). Inevitably, incorporation, institutionalisation and commodification continued regardless of action sport participants’ contrasting viewpoints. In so doing, action sport cultures increasingly became controlled and defined by transnational media corporations such as ESPN via the X Games, as well as others, including NBC via the Gravity Games that occurred from 1999-2006. According to professional US snowboarder Todd Richards (2003):

The X-Games marked the end of one era but simultaneously gave birth to a whole new world of possibilities. It was sort of sad to say good-bye to being a bunch of misunderstood outcasts. A lot of joy was derived from the punk-rock-spirit, and once the

masses join your ranks...its over. The image had already begun to change, but the X-Games put the icing on the mainstream cake. (p. 182)

Today, however, most action sport athletes recognize mass-mediated events such as the X Games as endemic to action sport in the 21st century, and are embracing the new opportunities for increased media exposure, sponsorship, and celebrity offered (Beal & Wilson, 2004). With the support of many action sport athletes and celebrities, the X Games have become an important forum for setting records and performing ever more technical and creative maneuvers for international audiences.

Blurring the boundaries between music festival and sporting event (Rinehart, 2008), the X Games have also been hugely successful in capturing the imagination of the lucrative youth market. In 1998, ESPN's different sport channels beamed the X-Games to 198 countries in 21 languages (Rinehart, 2000). In contrast to the aging Olympic viewership, the medium age of these viewers was 20 years (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a, p. 833). In the first decade and a half since the first X Games, the event experienced exponential growth in terms of participants and television and online audiences. The 2012 Winter X Games were the most-watched yet, with an estimated 35.4 million viewers in the United States tuning in to ESPN, and a digital media audience that was up 147 per cent from the previous year (Hargrove 2012). More recently, however, evidence suggests X Games viewer numbers in the US are declining (Paulsen, 2016). For example, domestic viewership of the 2016 US-based Winter X Games was down 11% from the previous year (Karp, 2016), which some are attributing to the decline of popularity of snowboarding—historically a mainstay of the Winter X Games (Higgins, 2016). Thus, in an increasingly competitive sport-media-culture context, the X Games continue to invest in ever-new strategies in their efforts to attract both action sport participants and mainstream viewers, and reach new audiences in the global market. In so doing, they are influencing the production and representation of other sporting mega events also seeking younger (male) audiences.

The X Games were instrumental in launching ESPN2 and helped spawn dozens of licensing deals including an IMAX movie, X Games skateparks, and X Games DVDs and toys. Today, the X Games continues to show innovation in mega event management and media representation in their ongoing efforts to remain relevant to (relatively) younger (male-targeted) audiences. For example, the annual Summer and Winter Games events in Austin (Texas) and Aspen (Colorado), respectively, continue to celebrate a music festival environment, with the former attracting over 160,000 spectators throughout the four-day event held in 2014 (Mickle, 2014). The 2015 Summer X Games in Austin received extensive coverage with content distributed across multiple television and digital platforms. In the USA, ESPN and ABC televised a combined 20 hours of live competition with an additional 6.5 hours of live action exclusively on ESPN3 and supported across ESPN digital platforms, including XGames.com, the X Games Austin app, and through official X Games social platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat. Additionally, X Games Austin was televised and syndicated in more than 215 countries and territories to more than 439 million homes worldwide (Baron, 2015).

Over the past five years, the X Games have been particularly proactive in their development and use of social media, and have introduced specifically designed Apps for iPhone, iPad, Android mobile and Android tablet that, for example, feature instant results, news, schedules, guest information (e.g., venues, parking), athlete bios, and live music from the events. The apps are highly interactive; for example one promoted the 'Hypemeter', a 'built-in game that lets you contribute to the overall excitement around X Games via tweets, Facebook posts or device interaction (shaking your phone or tapping your tablet)' (Foss, 2014). They also continue to develop emergent technologies for more spectacular media coverage. For example, in 2015 drones were used for the first time to cover the skiing and snowboarding events from above (Alvarez, 2015; see Thorpe, 2016). As a result of these ongoing developments in content, representation and an expanding array of media platforms, the average age of viewers of the Summer and Winter X Games—33- and 34-years-old respectively—remains younger than almost all other mega sporting events (Ourand & Karp, 2012), including the Olympic Games (Bauder, 2014).

We conclude this section with some thoughts on the ways in which the X Games are similar and different to other sporting mega events, with a focus on the role of sporting celebrities, corporations and the nation. According to Smart (2007), sport mega-events are ‘consumer cultural events’, in which sports stars are:

elevated to an iconic global celebrity status, represent[ing] local and/or national communities. The celebrities serve as role models, as objects of adulation and identification, but also increasingly as exemplars of consumer lifestyles to which spectators and television viewers alike are enticed to aspire. (p. 130)

Action sports stars competing at the X Games have certainly become internationally recognised celebrities’ overtly and covertly promoting consumer lifestyles. Like other sport celebrities, they are also predominantly able bodied, heterosexual young men, promoting and reaffirming the naturalness of the sporting realm as a masculine social space. Yet, as Kusz (2004) has persuasively argued, it is also a mediated space that, in North America in particular, became a key cultural site in the construction of whiteness. While action/extreme sport spaces like the X Games are often represented as a ‘cultural space that is overwhelmingly white’, it is ‘rarely ever imagined as a racially exclusive space’ (Kusz, 2004, p. 207). Despite the presence of female sporting celebrities and increasing ethnic and cultural diversity amongst competitors in many action sports, sport media still reproduce the gendered and racialised stereotypes, ‘associated with privileged forms of whiteness’ (Comer, 2010, p. 21). In so doing, the X Games continues to reinforce the hegemonic position of the heroic Western (young) white male action sporting identity.

In contrast to most traditional sport ‘mega events’, which reproduce ‘sport’s compulsive attachment to the production of national difference’ (Rowe, 2003, p. 292), action sport athletes competing at the X Games are not representing the nation. Indeed, there are very few signs of nationalism or national identity at X Games events. While the athlete’s nationality is sometimes declared during an event, spectators do not wave national flags, athletes do not wear national uniforms, and national anthems are not played as the athletes stand on the podiums. The X Games therefore seems better suited to the ‘carriage of the project of globalization’ than most sport mega events that are, as Rowe (2003) argues, so ‘deeply dependent on the production of difference that it repudiates the possibility of comprehensive globalization’ (p. 282). Rather, as the athletes receive their X Games medals they typically appear as ‘walking corporate billboards’ for transnational corporations ranging from energy drinks to credit card companies (Messner, 2002); their equipment is covered in the stickers of their sponsors, and their bodies are branded with multiple logos on hats, t-shirts, jackets and pants. Some will even be seen holding or drinking from the bottles of their soft- or energy drink sponsors as they receive their medals. In so doing, the athletes are representing national and global corporations rather than their nations. While many contemporary sports mega-events have increasingly become ‘ideal vehicles for corporate sponsors seeking to raise the global profile of their brands’ (Smart, 2007, p. 127), the X Games and action sport athletes relationships with commercial sponsors have always been integral to the production and consumption of these sporting spectacles (Thorpe, 2014).

Action Sports and the Olympic Games: In Search of Youth Relevance

The Olympics is the most watched sporting spectacle in the world, and is the pinnacle in the careers of many athletes from traditional sports. Over the past three decades, an enormous body of socio-cultural and historical literature has examined the power and politics of many facets of the Olympic Games, ranging from media coverage and women’s participation in the Games (Eastman & Billings, 1999; King, 2007; Markula, 2009) to environmental impacts of such mega-events (Lenskyj, 1998) to the legacies for host cities and their peoples (Bale & Christensen, 2004; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2011; Wagg & Lenskyj, 2012). A few scholars are exploring the aims and impacts of the Youth Olympic Games, particularly in host cities (Bodemar & Skille, 2014; Judge et. al., 2009; Krieger, 2013; Kristiansen, 2013; Leng et. al. 2014; Parry, 2012; Schnitzer et. al., 2014). However, Thorpe and Wheaton (2011a, 2012b) and Honea (2013) are the

only scholars to consider the efforts by the IOC to appeal to younger audiences via the inclusion of lifestyle/action sports into the Olympic program.

The aging demographics of viewers have been identified as a great concern to the International Olympic Committee (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a, 2011b). The diminishing numbers of young Olympic viewers contributed to the IOC's decision to pursue the incorporation of a range of youth-oriented action sports into both the Summer (e.g. windsurfing, mountain biking, bicycle motocross) and Winter (e.g. snowboarding, skier cross) programs (Bialik, 2002). To further appeal to younger viewers, the IOC and some affiliated media conglomerates also began to draw heavily on the representational styles developed by the X Games. Action sport events at the 2010 Winter Olympics included youth-focused features such as live graffiti art displays, break-dancers performing in the stands, and DJs and bands during breaks in competition (Thorpe, field-notes, February 2010). Commentators attributed the success of the Vancouver Olympics to the 'jazzed-up formats' of some events (e.g., half-pipe and snowboard- and ski-cross) which, drawing on the 'the razzmatazz and street credibility of the X Games', transforming the 'sometimes stuffy Olympic arena' into a 'party atmosphere' (Booth, 2010, paras 3 & 11). These innovations appear to have been successful, with audience figures for the 2010 Winter Olympics claiming a 48 per cent increase among 18- to 24-year-old viewers (Bauder, 2010). NBC coverage of the men's snowboard half-pipe final drew approximately 30 million viewers in the USA alone (Dillman, 2010). Recognizing the success of the strategies employed during the Vancouver Olympic Games, a spokeswoman for the London Olympic Games explained: 'the popularity of the ski and snow cross in Vancouver confirms that the way sports are staged can help capture the public imagination' (cited in Booth, 2010, para. 8). Continuing, she adds 'we are drawing up detailed marketing and sport presentation plans for 2012 for each sport to ensure that they engage and inspire ... [and] connect young people to sport' (cited in Booth, 2010, para. 8).

The IOC continues to draw inspiration from the X Games and, in September 2014, announced that three new action sports—surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing—have been among the five recommended from Japan to the IOC for possible inclusion into the Tokyo2020 Summer Olympics. While the sporting cultures and industries of skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing were abuzz with this news, each sport also has factions arguing for and against inclusion, and competing agendas based on unique logistical and political issues (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2015). While the cultural politics within each action sport continues, for the IOC the motivation to include these activities is primarily to attract younger viewers. Thus, the IOC has proceeded to invest considerable time and resources into working with key organizations, groups, athletes and leaders within each specific sport in an attempt to develop productive working relationships and to create space for them to share their cultural expertise.

The Cultural Politics of Olympic Inclusion: Lessons from the Past

As Thorpe and Wheaton (2011a, 2012b) have explained, the incorporation of action sports into previous Olympic Games has been a highly political and contested process within these sporting cultures. For many action sports athletes, events such as the X Games or athlete-organized competitions, continue to hold more 'cultural authenticity' (Wheaton 2005) and thus tend to be valued more highly within the lifestyle sports culture and industry (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011a, 2011b). Practitioners have been wary of their incorporation in these traditional forms of competition, seeing it as a form of 'selling out' their 'alternative' values and ideologies. For example, World Champion Terje Haakonsen's refusal to participate in the 1998 Olympics was a very visible form of protest against snowboarders being turned into 'uniform-wearing, flag-bearing, walking logo[s]' (Mellgren, 1998; para. 8). Indeed, snowboarding is now among the most popular sports at the Winter Olympics, and many contemporary snowboarders embrace the competition as an opportunity to perform on a truly global stage and to share their sport with the world. In so doing, the processes and politics of incorporation in snowboarding reflect trends observed in other contemporary 'post subcultural' youth and sport cultures (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Rinehart, 2008).

While the inclusion of snowboarding into the 1998 Winter Olympic Games caused much debate and has received considerable academic attention, similar cultural contestation over incorporation has occurred in other alternative sports, such as windsurfing (Los Angeles 1984) and BMX (2008) (Honea, 2013), and more recently kite-surfing and skateboarding (see Thorpe and Wheaton 2011a). This is graphically illustrated by the skateboarding communities' reactions to reports that 'Skateboarding could make its Olympic debut at the 2012 London Games' (Peck and agencies, 2008). Thousands of skateboarders from across the world responded by signing an online petition (The Petition. No Skateboarding in the Olympics! , 2010) titled "No skateboarding in the Olympics" addressed to the IOC president.

Despite the similarities in subcultural philosophies and ethos across many action sports, the particularities of each activity need exploration (Honea, 2013; Thorpe & Wheaton 2011a). The cultural politics between and within groups are unique, based on the distinctive history, ideologies, identities and development patterns of each lifestyle sport culture, and particularly the specific historical juncture within which the incorporation processes occurred or are occurring. In each case, the market-driven process of incorporation has led to complex, but contextually-specific power struggles between international and national sporting governing bodies, media conglomerates, and lifestyle sports cultures and their industries. Thus, in this project we build on this work exploring the changing relationship between actions sports, and the Olympic games, focusing particularly on younger action sport participants/consumers. This demographic are the least likely to be watching the Olympic Games and, according to previous research, the most likely to have different views about the role and value of competition.

Research Questions

1. What are action sport participants' perceptions of the relevance and significance of the Olympic Games?
2. What are action sport participants' perceptions of the relevance and significance of the Youth Olympic Games?
3. How have action sport cultures responded to the short-listing of skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games?
4. What are action sport cultural leaders perceptions of the process of short-listing and preparation of possible Olympic inclusion?

1.3 Impact on priority fields of research

Priority # 5 The Youth Olympic Games—impact, evolution, challenges and opportunities

This project has particular relevance to #5 The Youth Olympic Games—impact, evolution, challenges and opportunities. It drew upon online surveys, media analysis and interviews with youth participants from five continents. This data enabled us to explore the challenges and the opportunities arising from the inclusion of action sports. In so doing, we evaluated the impact they will have on young people, and make recommendations as to how the IOC can learn from this to evolve the YOG in future events.

Priority #15 The opportunities and challenges of establishing effective policies to empower girls and women in and through sport.

The participation of girls and women in action/lifestyle/emerging sports has been central to both Thorpe and Wheaton's research agendas for over a decade. This project also pays particular attention to the

perceptions of male and female action sport participants, and issues of gender equity in participation, representation, and consumption of action sports at the Olympics and YOG. In each of the three methods being employed, considerable effort was made to ensure the voices and opinions of girls and young women are captured and well represented in the data and analysis. In so doing, this project has relevance to priority #15: The opportunities and challenges of establishing effective policies to empower girls and women in and through sport.

Priority #17 Young people and their relationship with physical activity, sport and Olympism- Perception, interest, Participation and engagement.

This project contributes to #17, Young people and their relationship with physical activity, sport and Olympism-Perception, interest, Participation and engagement. This research contributes to an understanding of the ways in which young people from a range of backgrounds and national contexts can be engaged through participation in, and consumption of non-traditional action sports.

1.4 Methodology

This project examines youth perceptions of the relevance and significance of the Olympic Games and YOG, focusing particularly on the attitudes of action sport participants. To understand the attitudes and opinions of various groups involved in action sport cultures and industries, this study employed a multi-methodological approach, involving an online survey, media analysis, and interviews. Each of these methods targeted the voices and opinions of different groups within the action sports cultural complex (see Figure 1.0)

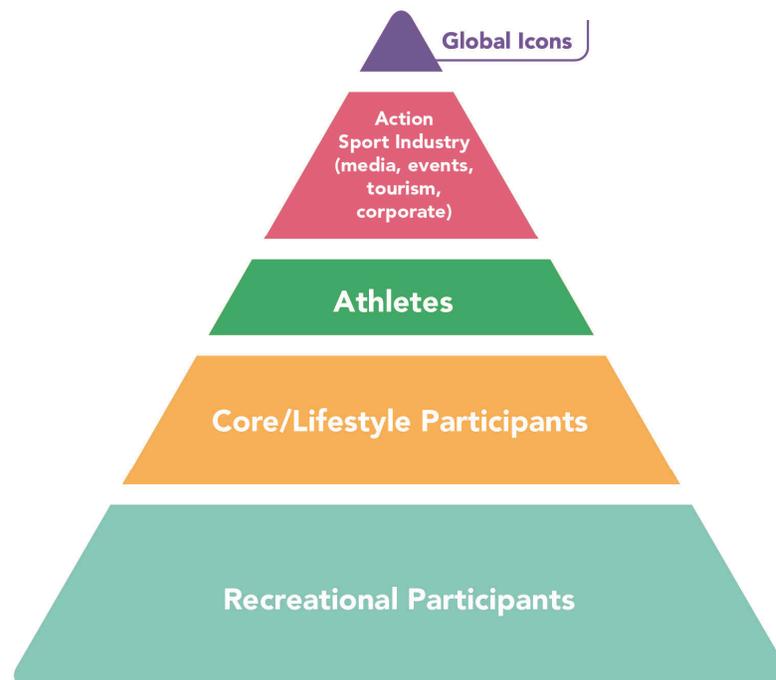


Figure 1. The action sport cultural complex

The news that skateboarding, surfing and sport-climbing were shortlisted for Tokyo 2020, was released shortly after the commencement of this project. As a consequence of this news, we implemented some minor changes to our project in order to fully comprehend how the news has been received, and is being responded to, within the relevant action sporting cultures and industries:

1. The amount of media coverage was much greater than anticipated. The research assistant time has therefore been focused on tracking this. We were fortunate in securing some match funding from the University of Waikato in the form of a summer scholarship for a graduate student to assist with this task. She worked 40-hours-per-week for 10-weeks accessing and archiving all media sources relating to the inclusion of surfing, skateboarding and sport-climbing into the Olympics, as well as online conversations about the inclusion of action sports into the Olympics and YOG more broadly.
2. We found that the initial interviews we conducted were longer and more in-depth than anticipated. This was in part because of the Tokyo2020 announcements, and subsequent debates within the action sport cultures and industries. We therefore decided that in order to stay within our budget and time constraints it was better to limit the number of sports we are looking at in the interviews, but gaining a more in-depth understanding of the politics and considerations currently taking place within various fractions, groups and organizations. Our interview case studies are: 1) skateboarding, 2) surfing, 3) sport-climbing, 4) kite-surfing, and 5) industry sources (e.g., action sport agents, international event organizers).

1. Online survey: The survey was targeted at the attitudes and opinions of the largest groups within the action sports cultural complex: The recreational participants and core/lifestyle participants. These are action sport participants who may or may not be involved or interested in the Olympic Games and YOG.

The survey was planned, piloted and then put on-line with support from the University's IT Department and a research assistant with on-line survey expertise. We also employed university students to do the translation. We decided to add Arabic and simplified Chinese in addition to the languages that we specified in our original project application. Such that the survey was available in 9 languages: Arabic, English, Portuguese, French, German, Chinese (x2), Spanish and Japanese. The survey consisted of 14 questions (see Appendices 4.0) to provide data on the attitudes and perceptions of action sport oriented youth towards the Olympic Games, the YOG and specifically the Sports Lab. The survey went live on August 21, 2015, and was closed in January 2016, thus it was 'live' for five months. We worked with various stakeholders to disseminate the survey as widely as possible, and made particular efforts to increase completions in areas where participation was initially low. While we initially found it hard to get access to some of the major action sport websites, our key informants (new and existing) have been very helpful. For example, the FISE (International Extreme Sports Festival) disseminated our survey with their 50,000 strong networks and announced the survey during their recent events in Chengdu (China), and we quickly saw a huge spike (200+) of completions in the two Chinese languages. Nonetheless, the editors/gatekeepers for action sport on-line media we targeted were not particularly helpful—most did not reply to our request to post the survey despite repeated emails.

2. Media analysis: The researchers worked with a graduate student to collate and organize over 650 media sources relating primarily to surfing, skateboarding, sport-climbing, parkour, BMX and kite-surfing's relationship with the Olympic Games, but also discussions relating to previously included action sports of snowboarding and windsurfing.

While newspapers and mainstream media sources covered the short-listing of surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing's shortlisting for Tokyo 2020, our analysis focused on articles discussing the Olympic Games and/or the YOG that were published in online action sport magazines, as well as the dialogue among readers in action sport related online forums. We have used this media analysis method effectively in the past, and have found some articles to be particularly revealing in terms of the attitudes held within

action sport cultures, and also to provide potential leads to follow up either via interview or further media analysis.

This method was important for two key reasons:

1. It enabled us to contextualize and understand themes emerging in the surveys and interviews.
2. Cultural media, such as niche magazines and websites, are particularly influential in communicating attitudes and value systems within and across action sport cultures. Social media and the comments sections in response in niche media articles gave us access to the attitudes of core participants.

Table 1. Media collated

Action sport	Number of media articles collated
Skateboarding	180
Surfing	130
Kite-surfing	95
Sport-climbing	91
Snowboarding	41
Parkour	40
Youth Olympic Games	37
BMX	19
Windsurfing	12
Other	10
Total	655

3. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 key individuals in the action sports industries. With the announcement of the short-listing of surfing, skateboarding and sport-climbing for Tokyo 2020, we used the interviews as an opportunity to understand the perspectives of those in the particular action sporting industries, and those directly involved (or implicated) in the processes, including action sport journalists and photographers, federation members, agents, past and present athletes, coaches and event organizers. The interviews were conducted with the aim of understanding the cultural attitudes and debates within each sporting culture, and the processes involved in preparing these particular action sports for possible Olympic inclusion.

Contact with potential participants was established via our existing networks within action sports cultures and industries, as well as via the technique of snowball sampling. Key individuals not known to us were contacted via email and/or phone, and invited to participate in this study. Interviews were conducted with influential persons in action sports that have been (or are being) considered for inclusion in future Games (i.e., skateboarding, kite-sport-climbing, surfing, kite-surfing).

Table 2. Interviews completed

Action sport	Number of interviews completed
Skateboarding	9
Surfing	6
Sport-climbing	5
Kite-surfing	4
Industry more broadly	1
Total	25

Due to geographical reasons, and to minimize costs, most interviews were conducted via Skype. All interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. This is a method that both researchers are familiar with, and interviews were highly effective in garnering the voices, opinions and experiences of leaders in action sport cultures and industries. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and three hours, and all provided rich materials. All interviews were undertaken to the latest technical, professional and ethical standards.

Both the researchers—Associate Professors Holly Thorpe and Belinda Wheaton—have excellent contacts within national and international action sport cultures and industries as a result of their research, and past and present participation in various action sports. Both researchers are familiar with action sport cultural etiquette and protocol, and have had much success in accessing participants for their projects to date. In this project, they both drew upon their existing cultural knowledge and contacts, as well as further research into who to contact (to ensure multiple perspectives were obtained), and the method of snowball sampling (where an interviewee is asked to suggest other relevant people to contact). We found those who were involved in action sports short-listing were eager to be interviewed and further express their support for inclusion, whereas those who were critical of the Olympic Games or action sports inclusion seemed less willing to be interviewed. While most of those contacted accepted our offers to be interviewed, there were a number who did not respond to our emails (this was particularly in the case of surfing). We expect this may be due to the highly political nature of the process during the time the project was completed.

Ethical approval for this project was approved by the University of Waikato, Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (see Appendices in Section 4.0). The interviews and surveys were all voluntary, and all participants were fully informed of purpose of this research and their rights (see Section 4.0).

2. RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Survey results

2.1.1 Understanding the sample

Eight hundred and twenty participants completed the survey. This was not a random sample but a self-selecting one. Nonetheless, as explained in the methods section, we worked hard to ensure that the survey was distributed across all continents (see Table 3 below).

We asked our survey participants about where they heard/read about this survey (Table 3). Word of mouth seems to have been the most effective way of disseminating the survey, with Facebook and friends accounting for over 70 per cent of responses. The dissemination via action sport website (e.g. the Inertia, Mporia) lead to minimal engagement (12 %) despite repeated chasing up with editors. Our emails were often ignored.

Table 3. How participants found out about the survey

Source	Per centage of respondents
Twitter	2.3%
Facebook	37.6%
Action Sport Magazine	2.9%
Action Sport Website	9.0%
Friend	26.3%
Other	10.61%

Before analysing the data it is therefore important to understand *who* our sample were; their demographics, and which segments of the action sport culture they represented.

2.1.2 Participation in action sports

Around half our sample were regular participants, and half occasional participants (Figure 2). It is interesting to note that) 187 people claimed not to participate in action sports suggesting that this survey topic was interesting to non-participants as well as participants. They were involved in a wide range of different action sports (Figure 3). The most popular sports for our survey were skateboarding (33 %), parkour/free running (25%) and mountain biking (23%) followed by surfing, snowboarding, BMX and skiing participants. However they also included; BMX, climbing, kite-surfing, moto-cross, mountain biking, parkour, roller blading/in-line skatingⁱ, skiing, skydiving/BASE jumping, snowboarding, surfing, wakeboarding. Of the surfers in our sample, 56% were *regular*, 59 % of the skaters were *regular* but only 29% of the climbers stated they were regular participants (Figure 3). Our sample therefore represented core and marginal participants across a wide range of sports.

ⁱ We did not include inline skating or roller blading in our survey but there were numerous comments saying it should have been included.



How often do you participate in action sports? (Samples: **609 survey participants completed this question**)

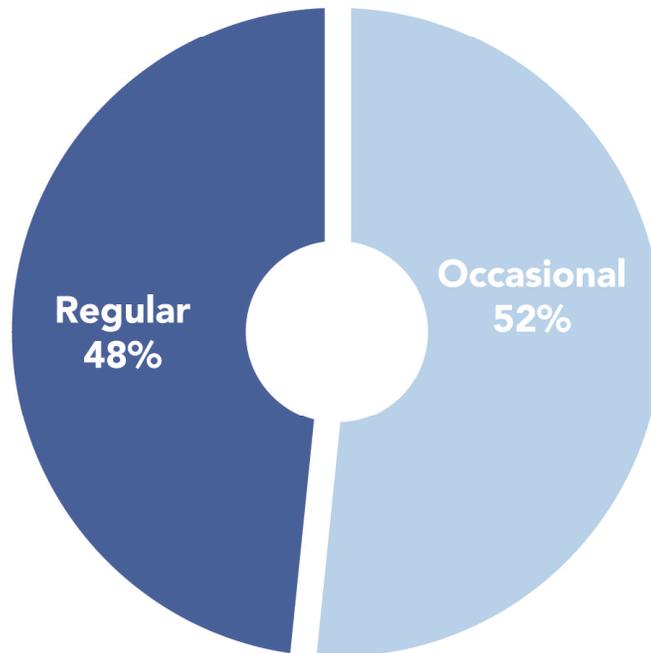


Figure 2. Survey Participants: Regular versus Occasional Participants



I regularly/occasionally participate in the following action sports.
(Samples: 820 survey participants)

Regular
Occasional

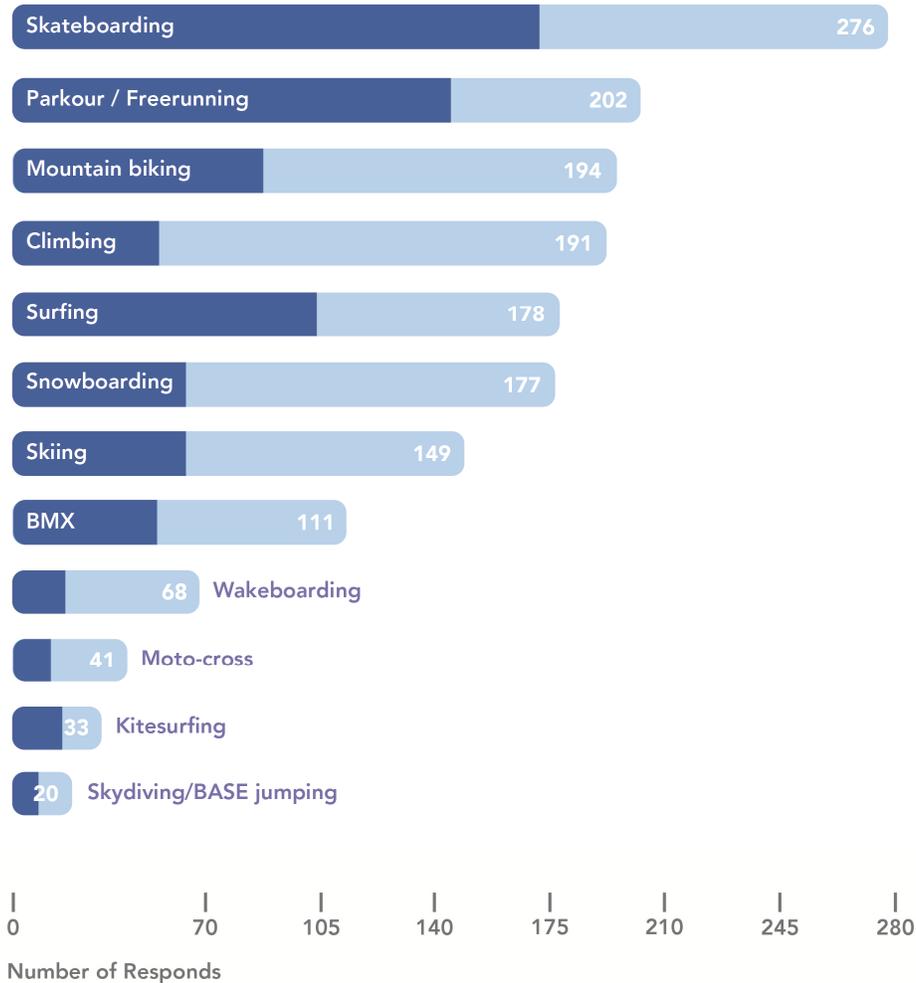


Figure 3. Survey Participants: Action Sports Participation (Recreational and Occasional)

2.1.3 Demographic data

Previous research has suggested that the demographic of the typical action sport participant is male, young and white (Kusz, 2010; Thorpe, 2014; Wheaton, 2013). Our survey participants were also young and male. Due to a data error, we were not able to retrieve data about ethnicity, however, their nationality was wide ranging (see below). The demographic data of the survey participants is as follows:

Male 72 %: Female 28% (29 % did not state their sex or chose not to answer) (Figure 4).

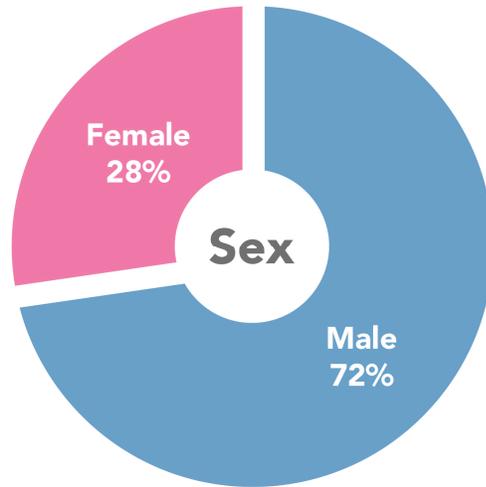


Figure 4. Gender of Survey Participants

Age is show in Figure 5. Young people dominated- under 20s constituted 19 %, those under 30 constituted 63 %, and over 30s were the minority (37 %).

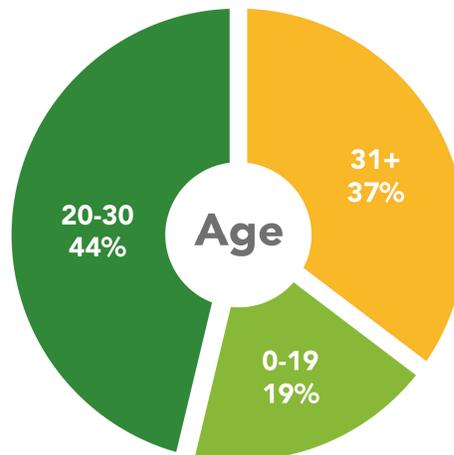


Figure 5. Figure 2.3: Age of Survey Participants

In terms of the language participants choose to use to fill in the survey English dominated (45%), with Chinese languages second (25 %). The remainder were, in descending order; German, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Arabic (1.2%). (see Figure 6).

Language

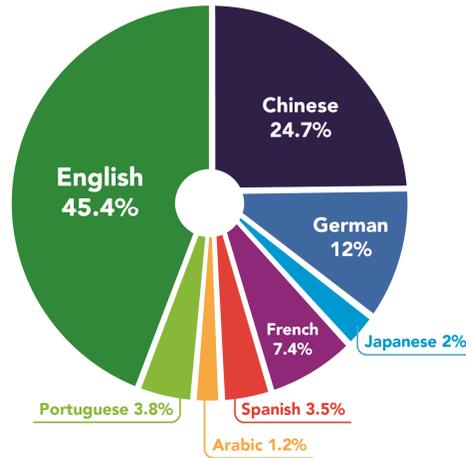


Figure 6. Languages in which participants chose to complete the survey

Table 4 shows the country where participants lived. Our survey appears to have had a wide reach with participants from all continents, and 51 different countries. China, however, was top of the table with 199 participants. This is not that surprising as we specifically targeted Chinese-speaking action sport enthusiasts (see methods). Second was Germany (81 participants), then USA (76 participants), France (45 participants) and New Zealand (42 participants).

Country Live	Number
Algeria	1
America/USA	76
Argentina	1
Australia	14
Austria	6
Belarus	1
Belgium	2
Brazil	30
Canada	7
Chile	7
China	199
Colombia	1
Costa Rica	4
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	3
England	12
Fiji	1
Finland	19
France	45
French Polynesia	1
Germany	81
Hong Kong	2
Hungary	1
Ireland	2
Italy	2
Japan	22
Lithuania	1
Morocco	2
Mexico	8
Netherlands	2
New Zealand	42
Norway	2

Palestine	1
Philippines	1
Poland	2
Puerto Rico	1
Qatar	1
Russia	1
Serbia	2
Singapore	1
South Africa	3
South Korea	2
Spain	10
Sweden	4
Switzerland	15
The Netherlands	4
Tunisia	1
UAE	1
UK	15
Ukraine	1
Wurundjeri Land	1

Table 4. Country where survey participants lived

2.1.4 Consumption of action sport

Figure 7 illustrates the different types of action sport events watched by the survey participants. A range of different action sport events were avidly consumed, including; the Summer and Winter X Games, international single sport competitions (e.g., World Surf League), National sporting events (e.g., Vans US Open), competition festivals (e.g. Tony Hawk and Friends Tour) and action sports competitions in the Olympics. The Summer and Winter X Games were both watched by around 75% of participants, of which 25% said they were *huge fans* or watched *when ever they could*. The Summer Olympics and Winter Olympic games were also very popular amongst these consumers, watched by 81% and 73% of respondents respectively (See also Figure 8). Our results suggest that action sport participants, both core and more marginal, avidly consume a range of different action sport media competitions and events, although international single sport competitions were the most popular (Figure 7).



Sport Consumption
(Total survey participants: 820)

█ Huge Fan + Whenever I can
█ Never
█ Occasionally

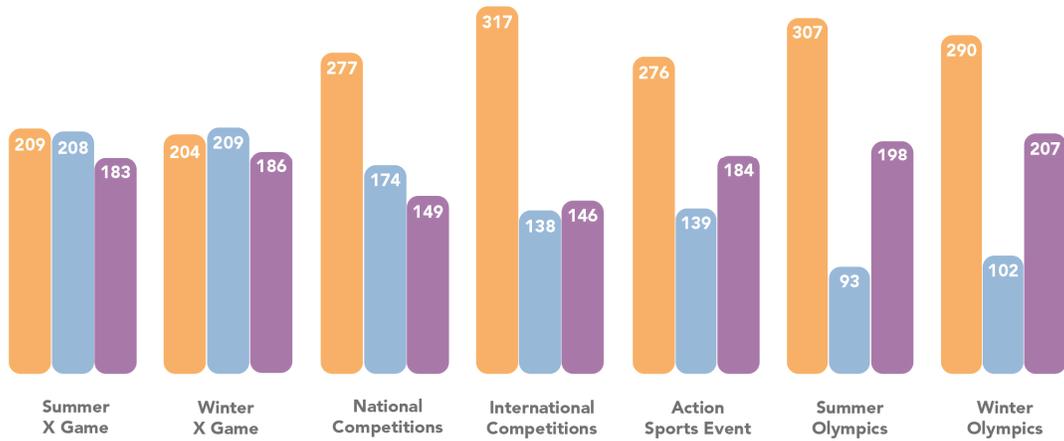


Figure 7. Survey participants sport consumption patterns



Do you watch Summer/Winter Olympics?
(Total survey participants answered the question, Summer Olympics: 533; Winter Olympics: 513)

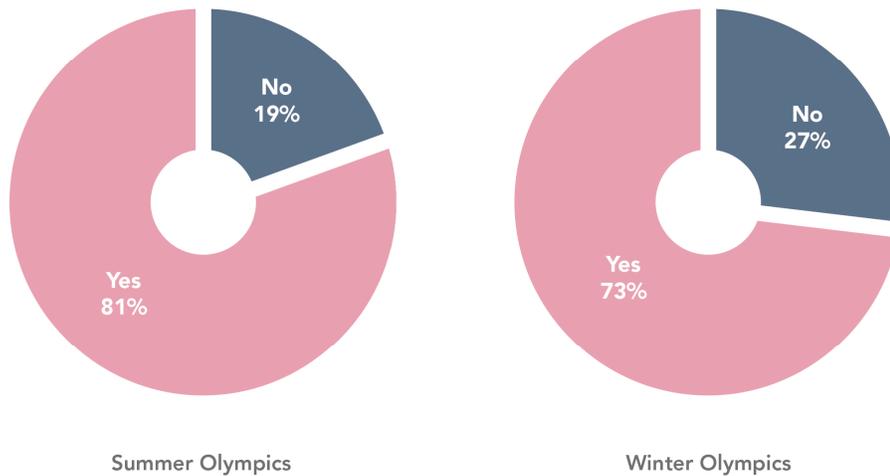


Figure 8. Survey participants Olympic Games consumption patterns

Within these trends, skateboarding was the most popular sport to watch on TV or the internet (36%) (Figure 9). This was followed by parkour/freerunning (31%), snowboarding (30%) and surfing (30%). Climbing was watched by 17% and kitesurfing 10%.

As noted above, the Summer Olympics and Winter Olympic games were very popular amongst these consumers, (Figure 8). Our survey explored viewing preferences when watching the Summer Olympic Games (Figure 10). The most popular sport to watch was track and field (watched by 27%) and aquatics (watched by 25%). Action sports were also highly placed with BMX 5th (watched by 19 %) and mountain biking (17%), which was higher than other forms of cycling or triathlon. The least popular to watch was golf (2%) and shooting events (4%). At the Winter Olympics (Figure 11) snowboarding was by far the most popular event to watch (37 %) followed by alpine skiing (28%), and then new skiing events such as slopestyle, halfpipe and skier X (24%).



I like watching the following action sports on television and/or internet.
(Samples: 820 survey participants)

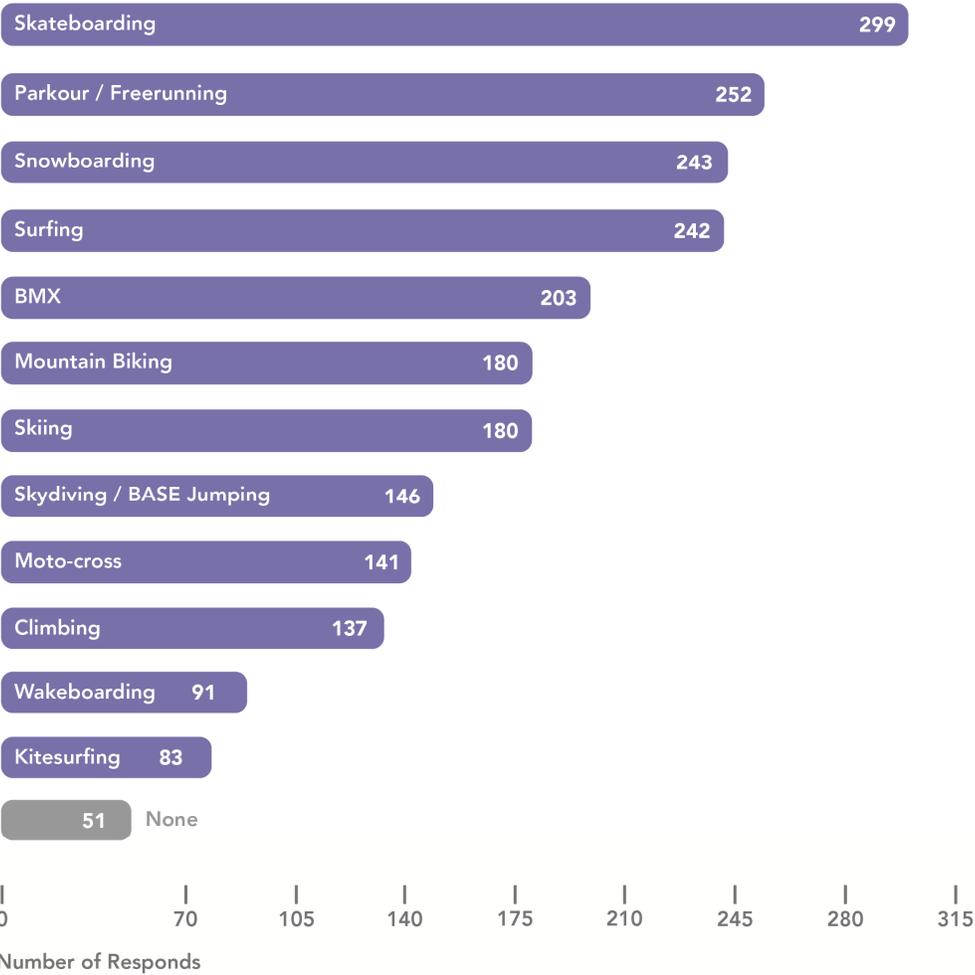


Figure 9. Survey participants preferred action sports to watch on television or internet



If you do watch the Summer Olympics, which sports/events do you most enjoy watching?
(Samples: 820 survey participants)

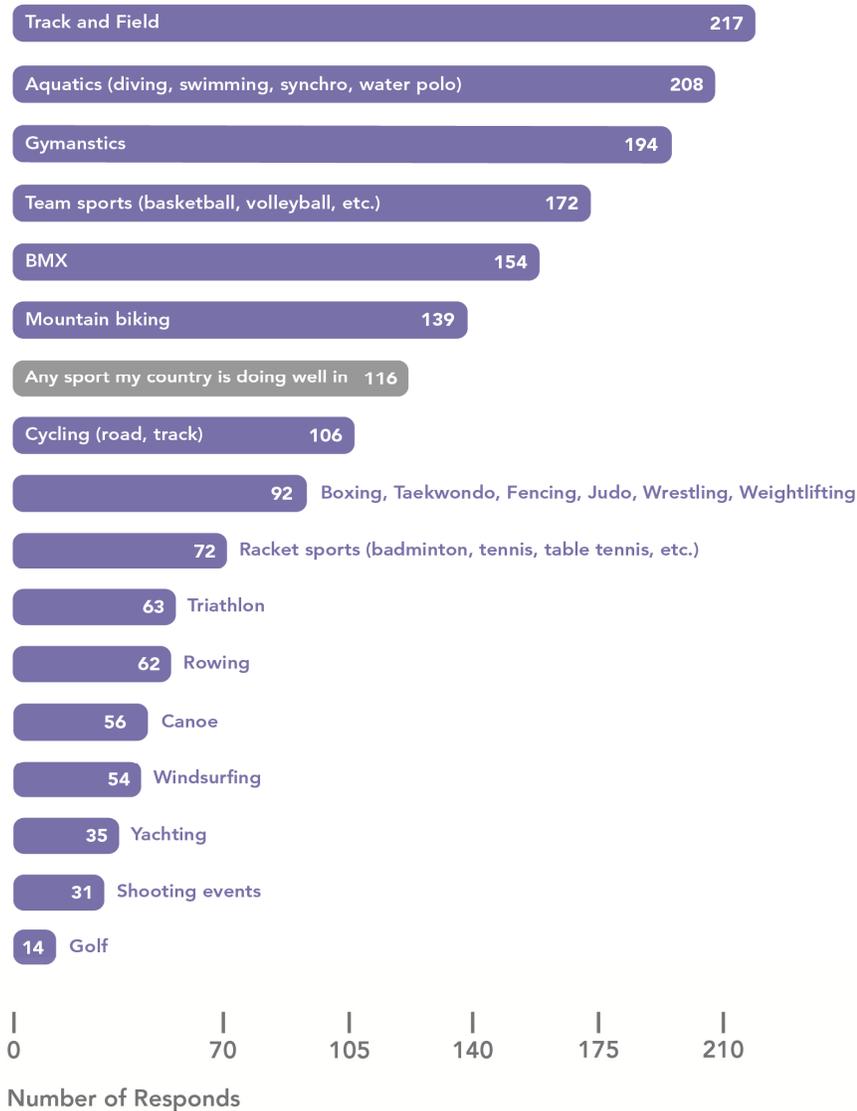


Figure 10. Sports survey participants enjoy watching in the Summer Olympic Games



If you do watch the Winter Olympics, which sports/events do you most enjoy watching?
(Samples: 820 survey participants)

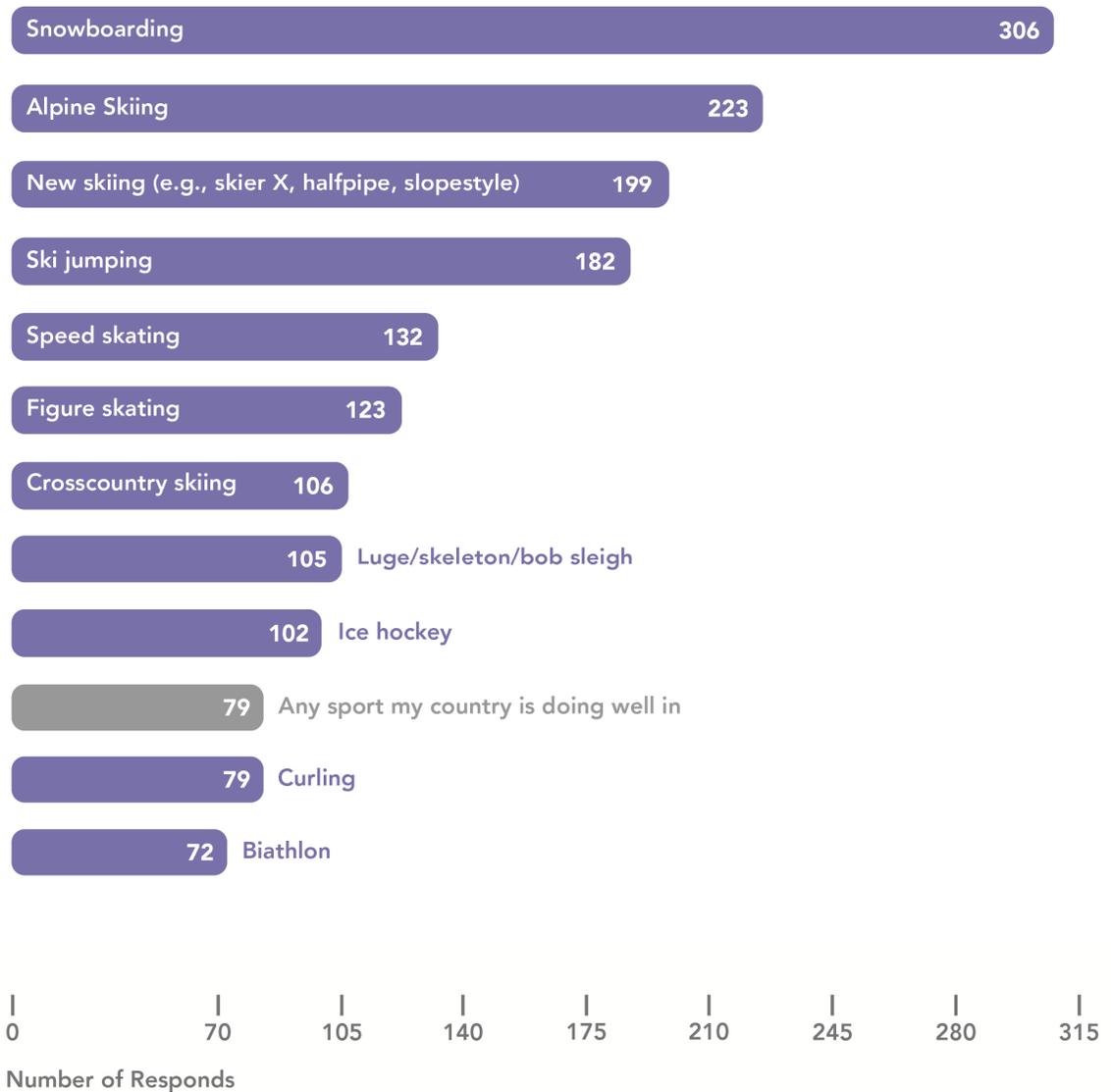


Figure 11. Sports survey participants enjoy watching in the Winter Olympic Games

We asked the survey participants who did not watch the Olympics about their reasons why (Table 5).

Table 5. If you do not watch the Olympics, why not?

If you do not watch the Olympics, why not?	Percentage who answered the question
I don't like the sports in the Olympics (SQ001).	8.2%
I don't like the style of filming and commentary in the Olympics (SQ002).	5.5%
I don't like what the Olympics represents/stands for (SQ003).	8.2%
I don't have the time (SQ004).	23.1%
I find it hard to find places to watch the Olympics (SQ005).	3.7%
I find the Olympics boring (SQ006).	9.7%
The sports I am most interested in aren't in the Olympics (SQ007).	19.8%
The athletes I am most interested in watching don't compete in the Olympics (SQ008).	5.11%
The styles of sport that I am most interested in watching aren't in the Olympics (SQ009).	16.7%
Other	3.7%

As the table illustrates, a range of different responses were given. However, the most widespread responses were; I don't have the time, the sports I am most interested in aren't in the Olympics, and The styles of sport that I am most interested in watching aren't in the Olympics.' We consider the issue of style of participation later in the report. However, it is worth noting here one of the Responses given:

Even though I watch snowboarding at the Olympics doesn't tell that I actually like it nor it is the right movement for snowboarding. Whole competitive snowboarding has been in short of stable situation where no progress has seen, thanks to the big players such as FIS and IOC. Last winter I found by accident a stream to watch The double pipe competition which offered a fresh view for snowboarding and pushed it more towards the creative direction

This quote highlights that while action sport participants avidly consume their sports including at the Olympic Games, that doesn't mean they don't have issues with how it is represented.

When asked about whether they preferred male or female event (see Table 6) it is interesting to note that despite the widespread belief that men's sport attracts greater audiences, participants in this survey showed little preference for men's events. The majority enjoyed men's and women's events. It is also interesting to note that in line with previous research on action sports, participants tend not to affiliate with athletes or events along nationalist lines. Only 4.5% stated that 'I have no preference when my country is doing well'.

Table 6. Olympic viewing preferences

Which of the following apply to your viewing preferences?	Percentage who answered the question
I prefer watching men’s events at the Olympics)	7.4%
I prefer watching women’s events at the Olympics	1.5%
I enjoy watching both	21.0%
I have no preference when it’s the sport I like	35.6%
I have no preference when my country is doing well	4.5%
Not completed	30.0%

2.1.5 The YOG

We wanted to ascertain if the YOG was an event that was familiar to our survey participants, and if so how popular. As previous research has suggested there is a low level of awareness about the YOG across many populations (Peterson. et al., 2015).

Sixty per cent of the survey participants who answered this question had heard of the YOG and 40 per cent hadn’t, however over 30 per cent of the survey participants did not answer the question (Figure 12). Nonetheless while they knew about the YOG, engagement with it was low. Only 16 per cent of survey participants had actually watched the YOG; predominantly on national/public television (47%), or YouTube and online platforms (26%). Six and a half per cent watched on the YOG website (see Figure 13). We asked if they had heard of the Sports Lab, only 4.8% responded *yes*. This data suggests that action sport participants were largely unaware of this event, and therefore that sports such as skateboarding and sport climbing had been part of the YOG (2014). We explored these finding further by looking at trends across the three sports of climbing, surfing and skateboarding (Figure 14). The percentage of sports participants who had heard of the YOG was similar across these three sports, however twice as many skateboarders had watched the YOG than climbers and surfers. They were also more cognisant about the sport lab.

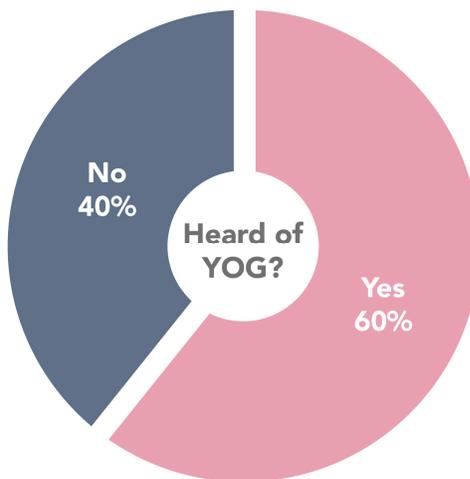


Figure 12. Survey participants who have heard of the Youth Olympic Games

Where did you watch YOG?
 (16.3% of all survey participants watched YOG)

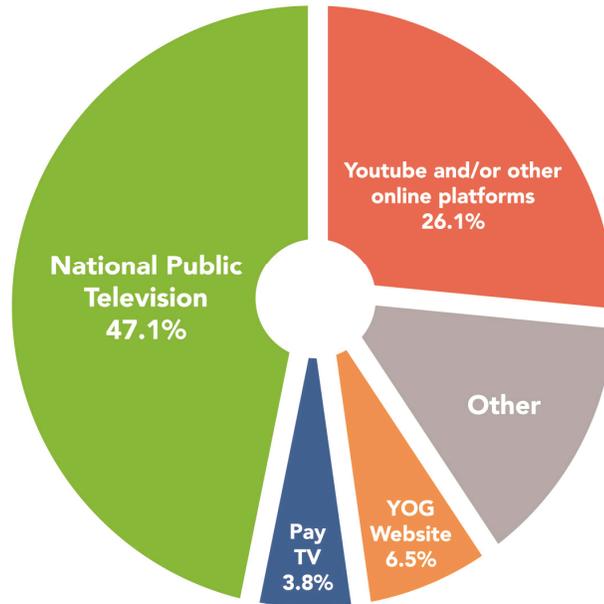


Figure 13. Where survey participants watched YOG

? Knowledge of YOG among the following three action sport participants
 (Surfer: 178; skateboarder: 276; climber: 191)

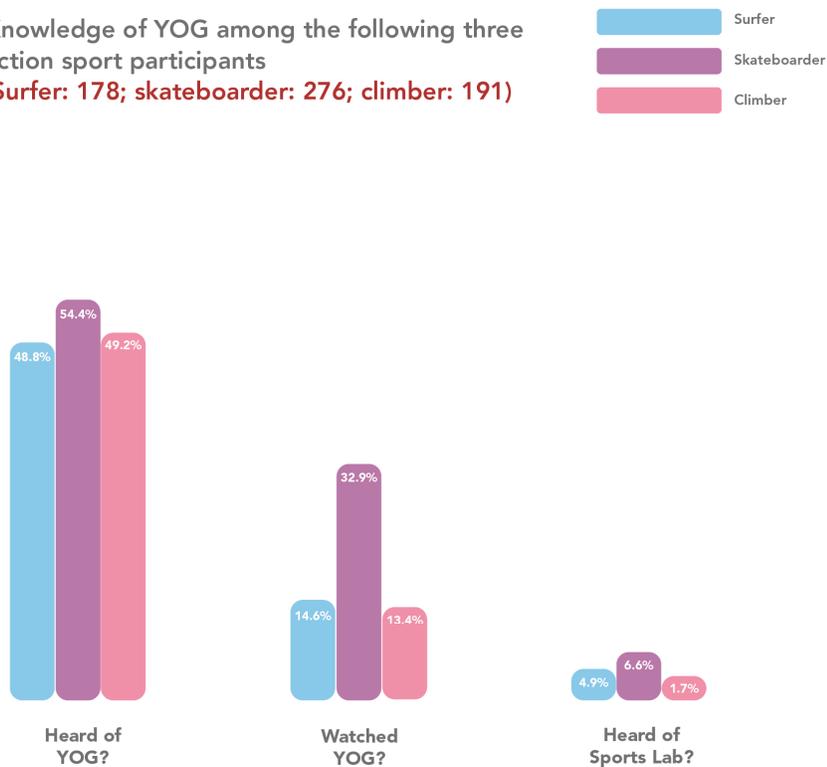


Figure 14. Surfers, skateboarders and climbers awareness and consumption of YOG

Figure 15 (below) shows the events that these participants most enjoyed watching at the YOG. It is important to note the small response to this question (*if you have watched the YOG what did you think?*), so results should be treated with caution. Team sports were most popular (57 responses) followed by BMX and snowboarding and alpine skiing (both 50 respondents). Twenty six respondents said ‘*any sport in which my country is doing well.*’



Events Survey Participants Watched at YOG.

(16.3% of all survey participants have answered this question, total number of responses given: 563)

Type of Sport	Number of Responses
Team sports (3X3 basketball, football, handball, hockey, rugby 7, volleyball etc)	57
BMX	45
Alpine skiing (e.g. slalom, downhill)	40
Snowboarding	40
Aquatics (diving, swimming)	35
Track and Field	35
Mountain biking	31
Gymnastics	30
Road cycling	28
Any sport/event my country is doing well in	26
Boxing/Fencing/Judo/Taekwondo/Wrestling/Weightlifting	21
Racket sports (badminton, tennis, table tennis etc)	21
Crosscountry skiing	20
New skiing (e.g., skier X, slopestyle, halfpipe)	18
Figure skating	17
Windsurfing	14
Demonstration sports events	14
Ice hockey	13
Yachting	11
Biathlon	10
Curling	10
Rowing	10
Triathlon	10
Luge/skeleton/bob sleigh	7

Figure 15. Events watched at YOG

For those who had watched the YOG, (230 people) we asked about their attitudes (Figure 16). Twenty nine per cent said ‘*they liked watching younger people compete*’; and 19 per cent said the liked the ‘*different events at the YOG*’. While 16 per cent said they preferred the main Olympics, over 17 per cent liked that the YOG doesn’t focus as much on national teams. As the literature on action sport events has illustrated, participants tend not to organize themselves along nationalist lines (Thorpe, 2014; Wheaton, 2004; in part this is because national teams have not been funded; in contrast athletes gain funding from corporate sponsors and affiliate with their ‘teams’, which are often a combination of national and international athletes sponsored by the same company.

If you have watched the YOG, what did you think?
(16.3% of all survey participants watched YOG)

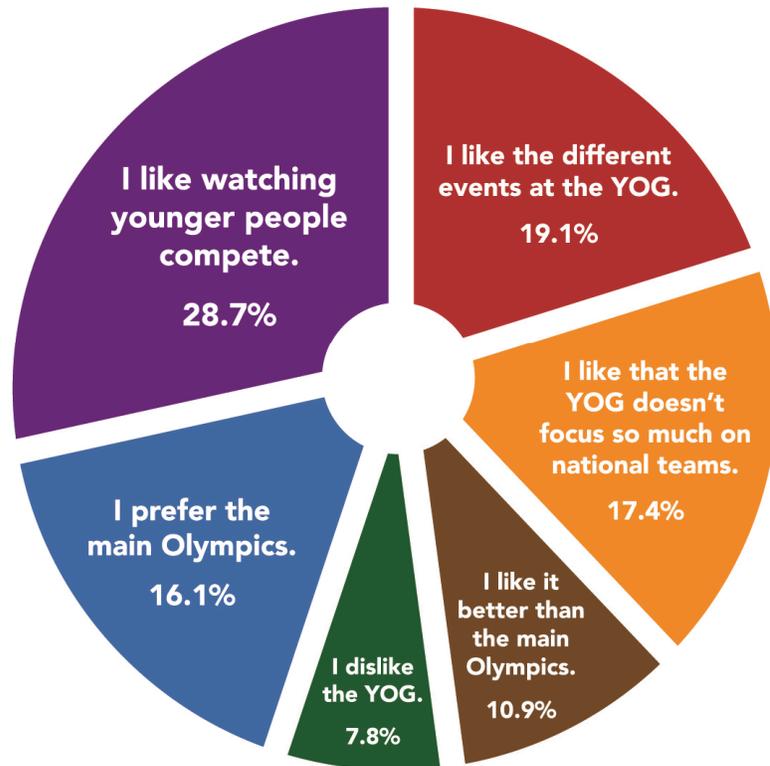


Figure 16. Perceptions of YOG

2.1.6 Action Sports in the Olympics

We asked about survey participants' attitudes to future inclusion of action sports in the Olympics. As Figure 17 illustrates, 60 per cent felt the inclusion of more action sports was a good idea and would encourage them to watch more of the Olympics. Reflecting some core participants concerns about actions sports commercialisation and institutionalisation, (see pp. 47–50) 27.5 per cent said they *disliked what happens to action sports when they become Olympic Sports*, and the remainder were ambivalent (13%).

How do you feel about the possibility of more action sports being included in the Olympic Games?

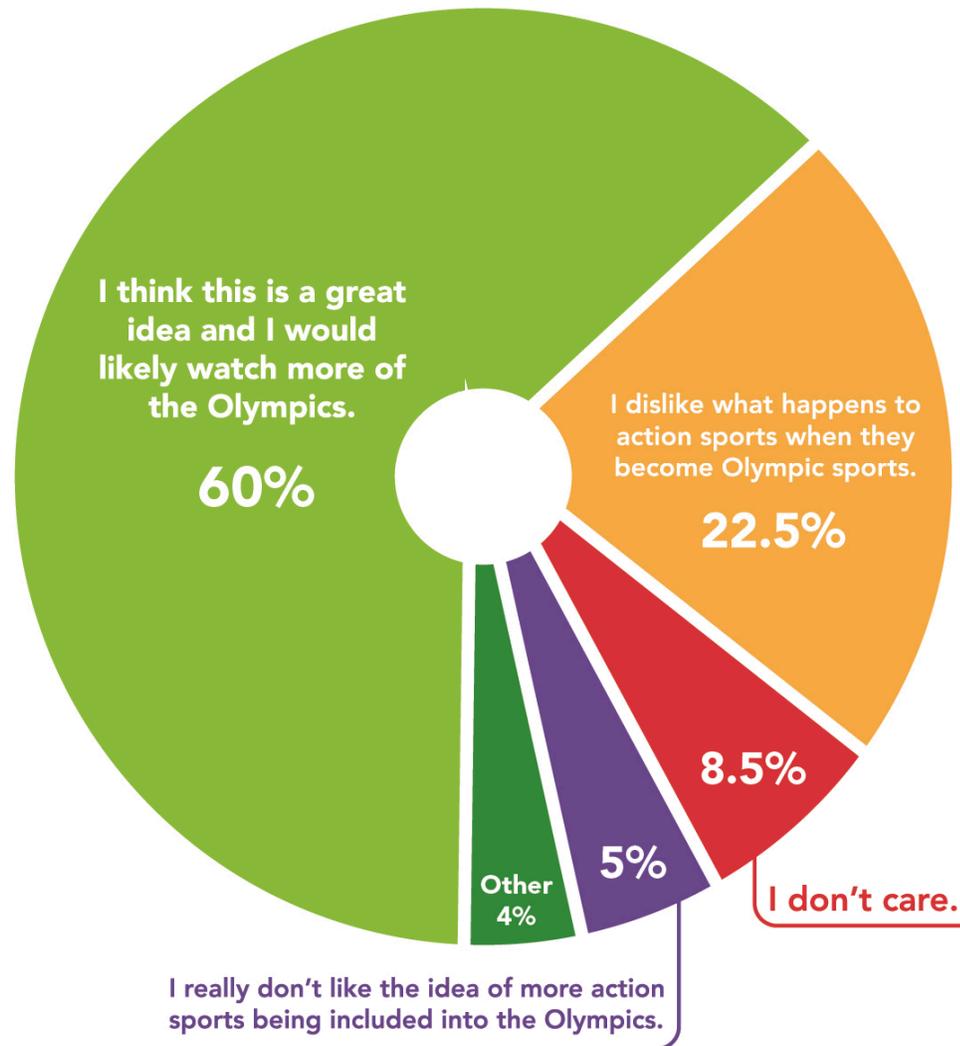


Figure 17. Attitudes towards inclusion of action sports into the Olympic Games

To further understand these trends we looked at the data according to gender and age of participant, to see if there was any generational difference in attitudes to the Olympics.

In term of gender (Table 7), the only real difference was shown under the first two questions: more men than women disliked what happens to action sports when they become Olympic sports, however more women said that they don't really care. Table 8 illustrates trends across age categories. The most interesting finding is that the youngest participants (under 19) were most enthusiastic about action sports

inclusion in the Olympics; 80 per cent said *I think this is a great idea and I would likely watch more of the Olympics*

Table 7. Attitudes towards Olympic inclusion: Gender differences

Opinion (percentage of respondents answering Q in each age category)	Male	Female
I dislike what happens to action sports when they become Olympic sports	25%	16%
I don't care	7%	13%
I really don't like the idea of more action sports being included into the Olympics	5%	5%
I think this is a great idea and I would likely watch more of the Olympics	60%	60%
Other	3%	6%

Table 8. Attitudes towards Olympic inclusion: Age differences

Opinion (percentage of respondents answering Q in each age category)	Age under 19	20-30	31-40	41-50	Over 50
I dislike what happens to action sports when they become Olympic sports	12.3%	27.2%	25.9%	18.9%	15.0%
I don't care	1.9%	10.3%	11.1%	7.5%	7.5%
I really don't like the idea of more action sports being included into the Olympics	2.8%	4.9%	7.4%	7.5%	5.0%
I think this is a great idea and I would likely watch more of the Olympics	80.2%	53.1%	54.6%	58.5%	65.0%
Other	2.8%	4.5%	0.9%	7.5%	7.5%

Table 9 (below) also illustrates some national differences in attitudes to Olympics Inclusion (based on based on the three most common languages amongst our survey participants.). The Chinese speakers were largely very supportive of Olympic inclusion (84%), with only a very small percentage expressing anti Olympics sentiments (2%). In contrast, only 17 per cent of the German speakers thought it was a 'great idea' and 59 per cent said they 'disliked what happened to action sport when they became Olympic Sports'. Given that many German-speaking participants are likely to be from Alpine countries (e.g., Germany, Austria, Switzerland), it is possible this attitude is a reflection of the inclusion of snowboarding. The English speakers had a less polarised view with 56 per cent saying *I think this is a great idea and I would likely watch more of the Olympics* and 26 per cent *I dislike what happens to action sports when they become Olympic sports*.

Table 9. Attitudes towards Olympic inclusion: Differences across languages

Opinion	Chinese	English	German
I dislike what happens to action sports when they become Olympic sports	1%	26%	59%
I don't care	13%	8%	4%
I really don't like the idea of more action sports being included into the Olympics	2%	6%	15%
I think this is a great idea and I would likely watch more of the Olympics	84%	56%	17%
Other	1%	4%	5%

Survey participants also had the opportunity to write additional comments; these were quite extensive. For example, 66 participants wrote comment in English ranging from a sentence to short paragraph.ⁱⁱ This engagement suggests that these are issues that are of interest and relevance to these survey participants.

The commentary endorsing the inclusion of action sports pointed to actions sport's as exciting to watch, and would enhance the Olympic programme, bringing it up to date. For example:

Surfing and other action sports are a great show! Fun to watch, exciting, it is time for a change in the Olympics.

Action sports often require a lot more training than other "normal" sports. And not only that. It also takes courage and bravery so i think that the Olympic spirit is more represented by this kind of sport. Action sport got that "plus" that always amaze people more than, just for example, the 1000 meters crawl of swimming.

For others, Olympic inclusion would give the sport more visibility, and credibility:

More action sports being included in the Olympics would allow hard working individuals to be able to make a living doing the sport they love.

Any sport being added to the Olympics increases it reputation and applicability to the general public and boost the funding and long term support for the sport.

Action Sports needs to get organized and follow the Olympic model... National Federations, developmental programs, drug testing..... they need to grow up and do it the right way

Others showed an awareness of the potential problems for the action sport cultures:

In some ways, adding the sport to the Olympics legitimizes the sport, giving it more respect in the community but I think that this also has negative effects on the culture of the sport.

I think it's a development for the sport to become part of die Olympic games. But of course its not cool when the "money-making-stuff" starts destroying the spiritual part/the idea of the sport. So it is allways important to keep the origins of the sport when it becomes more popular. [typos as written]

ⁱⁱ There were also a number of comments in Chinese but due to a data corruption we were unable to access.

Although only 28 per cent minority said they 'disliked what happens to action sports when they become Olympic Sports', a large proportion of the English commentary highlighted their concerns. For example;

Incorporating these sports into the Olympics undermines what some people want them to stand for, alternatives, non-nationalistic, art forms.

Many were concerned about selling-out action sport's alternative ethos and heritage. These debates have been discussed in the academic literature (e.g., Humphries; Rinehart, 1998; Thorpe, 2007; Wheaton, 2005) and are highlighted in the interviews.

skateboarding is not an Olympic sport. hell its not even a sport its a lifestyle that has been hijacked and exploited by big business.

Action Sports are individual activities that are fun and promote individual development and community building. Turning them into competitive spectacles that ultimately involve money and sponsorships is a perversion of the soul of the activity, and benefits the sponsoring entity, the commercial sponsor or the IOC, but not the spirit of the activity itself. The commercial exposure may create interest, and may be entertaining to general audiences, but in today's world, it has become cheap programing for TV audiences, stages for National Image Advancement, and opportunity for corruption and greed. It is sad to see the politics, maneuvering, greed and manipulation that goes on behind the scenes of what is promoted as an altruistic opportunity for great athletes to compete for the 'gold'. It is truly a sign of the times

The inclusion in such a mass media corporate sponsored event takes away the authenticity of the sports and their artistic nature even though it allows the elite level athletes in those sports to have professional careers.

I think that by formatting extreme sports into a rigid competition format with stringent drugs testing etc. there is high risk of taking away from the very culture and roots of these sports ... might cause loss of traditions and the emotion/reason people do these sports!

Others were concerned that the Olympic movement to date had not demonstrated the ability to preserve the sport's difference and creativity:

Every real world activity that has been introduced into the Olympic games seems to eventually loose sight of why the sport/activity activity was developed in the original sense. Taekwondo for example has become less of an actual 'martial' art and more about the flashy kicks that everyone wants to see. I don't see a good ending to some of these activities if entered in to the Olympics. (Answered I dislike what happens to action sports when they become Olympic sports.

Other were wholly critical of the Olympic Games and what it stood for:

Activities that most people call extreme or "action sports" don't belong in the out-dated Olympic games, the greed and pride of nations shown during the Olympics is a farce

The Olympics seem like a big waste of money, an excuse for corrupt people to line their pockets.

Olympics represent everything evil about sports. Sports shouldn't be part of politics, and that's what it's all about. If you just look at the places where Olympics been held in the past years (and will take place in the future), they are not the places should do so. Human rights, environmental issues and such are done so badly that there's no way you can say you support Olympic movement. Action sports have always been somehow "rebel" in a good way. They have always said "hell no" if someone wants them to be part of something they feel hard to represent. In the end, Olympics is the biggest NO to represent.

With that in mind, not only every action sport should get rid of Olympics but also the whole Olympic movement should vanish.

The age of Olympics status defining the most prestigious or elite level of sporting competition is nearly over. Especially for “action” sports. World Cup and Champs series and large one off events trump a once in four year, media driven, dubious sponsor fuelled jingoistic mess of an event!

Which sports?

The sport that survey participants most wanted to see in future Olympics was skateboarding (Figure 18), with street skating as the most popular (36 % of respondents). All other forms of skateboarding, except longboarding, were in the top five including; half pipe/vert (21 % of respondents), big air/mega ramp (19.3% of respondents), pool/bowl (19.2 % of respondents). This is a strong endorsement of skateboarding by action sport participants and consumers. As one wrote: “*skate street style is a new discipline NBC does on their Dew Tour—very exciting, all skaters love it ... X Games does not do it*”. Although skateboarders were the largest group on our survey, this may well be a reflection of the worldwide popularity of the sport (refs).



Figure 18. Action sports survey participants most want to see at the Olympic Games

BMX freestyle was also very popular for 23 per cent of respondents, and parkour/free running, 18 per cent. Climbing and short board surfing was less popular (15% of respondents). While roller blading was not one of the categories on the survey, we had a lot of comments suggesting that roller blading and aggressive in-line skating was considered popular amongst this group. For example;

Rollerblading is what you guys should bring in next it's on the up and u.

Include inline skating to the list, bigger jumps and longer grinds than most extreme sports are possible, thanks!

Rollerblading (street, big air, pool, vert) should be seen as a possible addition to the Olympic Games as well.

Rollerblading still exists as a relevant extreme sport and due to it's obscurity, could benefit from exposure on the Olympic platform in the same way that the Olympic platform could benefit from showcasing the raw athletic talent that extreme sport athletes embody

However, given that these results are likely to be influenced by the actions sports that a participant is familiar with, participates in or watches, we also looked at trends across three sports based on those who said they participated in the activities.

For the climbers in the sample (179 in total) climbing was the sport they would most like to see it in the games in the future (39%), followed by parkour/freerunning (29%). Street skateboarding was slightly more popular than surfing (18%). See Figure 19.

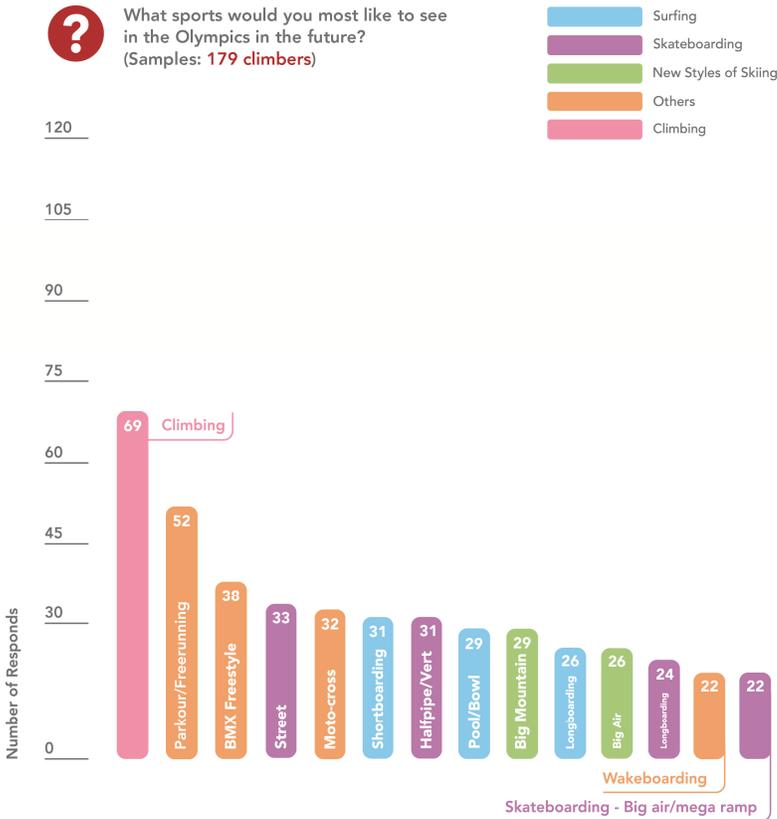


Figure 19. Sports that climbers most want to see in the Olympic Games

For the skateboarders in the sample (228 people) skateboarding was the sport that would most like to see in the Olympics (Figure 20), with 56 per cent preferring street, 47 per cent pool/bowl, 37 per cent half pipe/vert and 43 per cent big air/mega ramp.

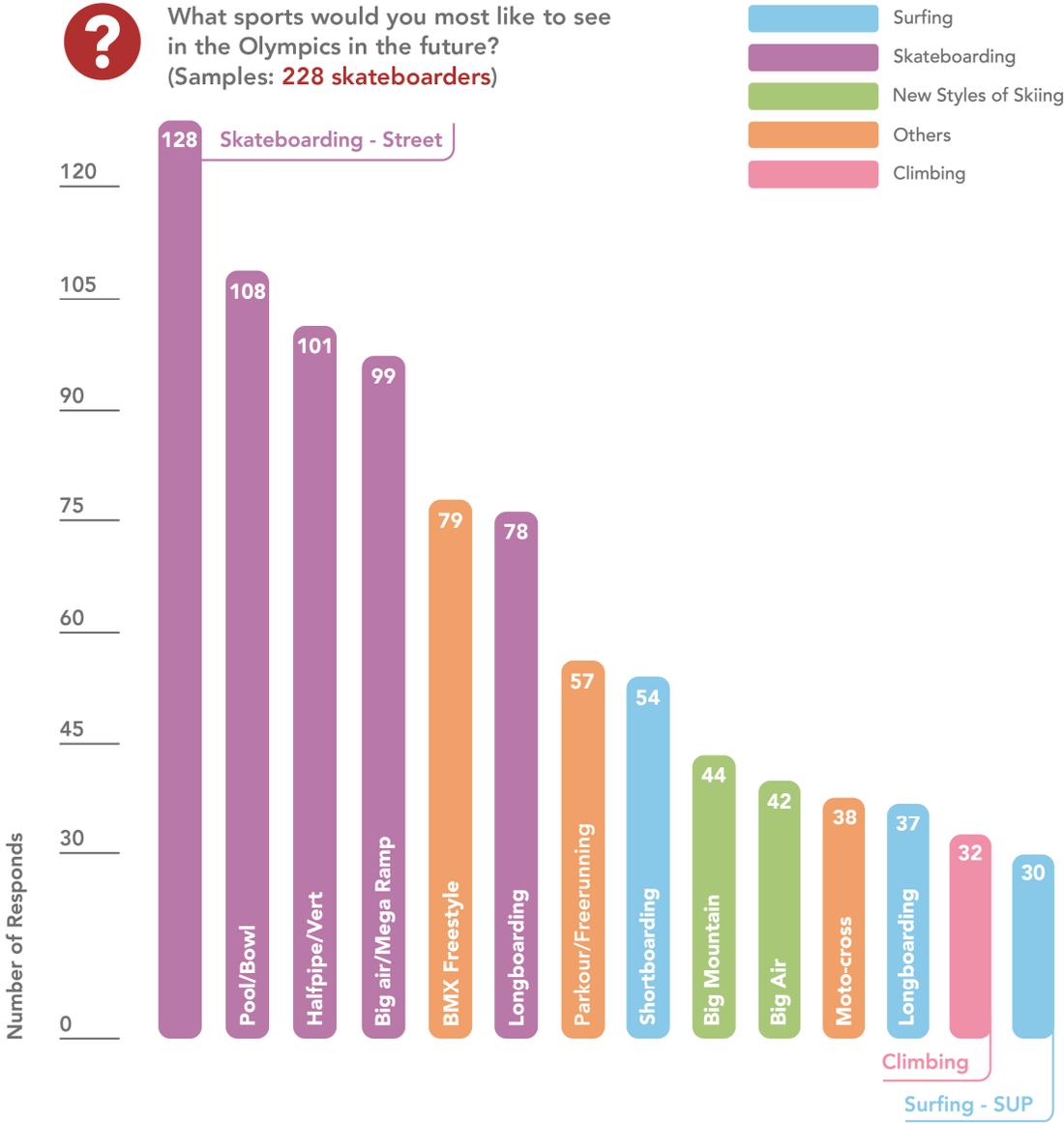


Figure 20. Sports that skateboarders most want to see in the Olympic Games

For the surfers in the sample (164 people) short board surfing was the number one preference. This was followed by skateboarding, with street marginally being the most popular style followed by halfpipe/bowl and big air/mega ramp. Long board surfing and SUP followed (Figure 21). However, surfing in a wave pool was pretty unpopular amongst surfers, coming second to last with only 34 people (20 %) supporting

its inclusion. As we discuss below, wave pools are controversial amongst the surfing community. As one survey participant wrote:

I'm a three-time National Surfing Champion and I'm not a fan of adding surfing to the Olympics especially in a wave pool. Wave pool surfing is entirely different than dealing with the elements in the ocean.

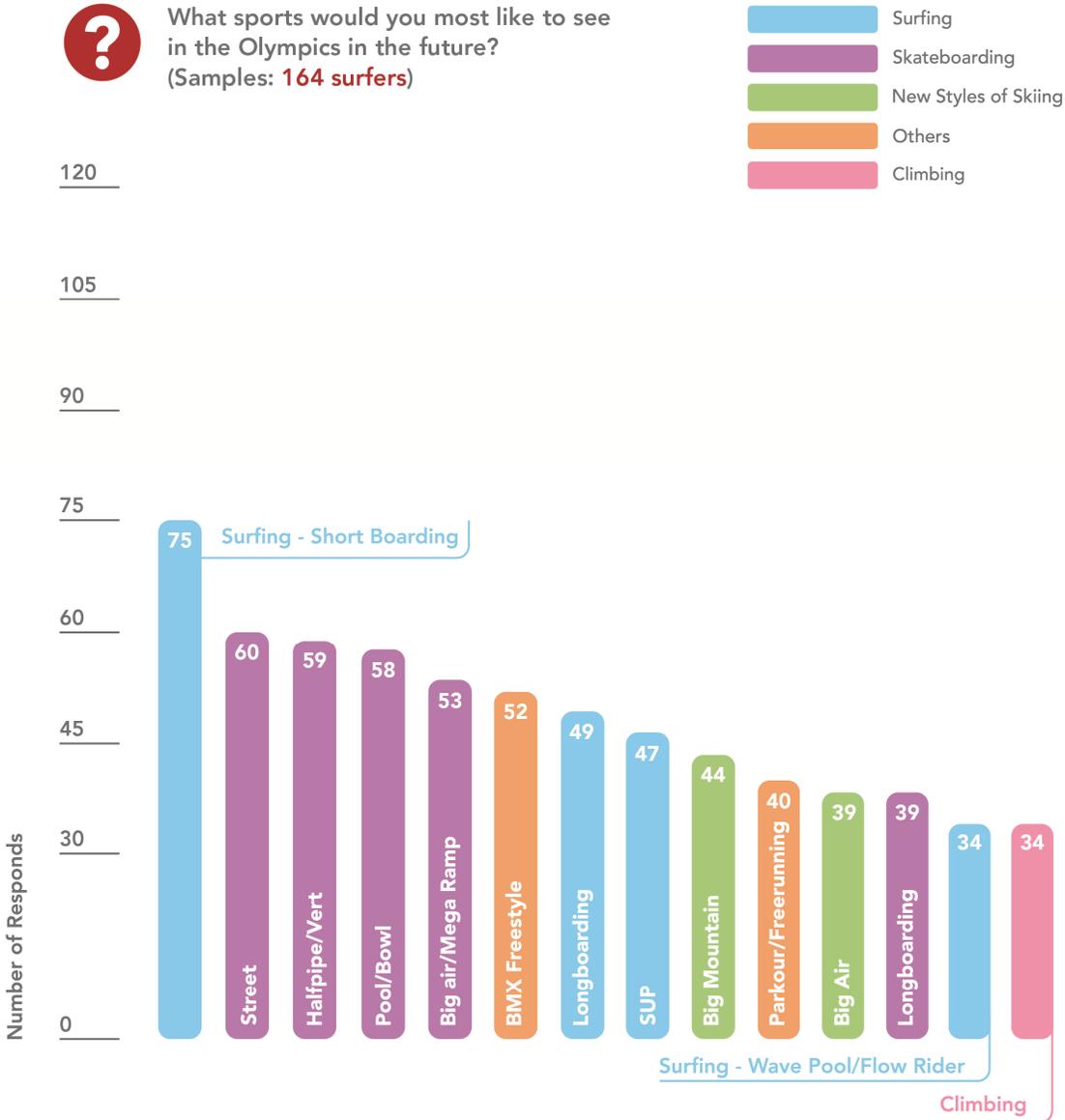


Figure 21. Sports that surfers most want to see in the Olympic Games

We also examined if there were any gender differences in the sports that these participants favoured for inclusion (Figure 22). Skateboarding, climbing and parkour showed similar levels of popularity amongst women and men. All styles of surfing however were more popular amongst women than men; for

example, long board surfing was popular for 27 per cent of women and only 11 per cent of men. Kitesurfing was also more popular amongst women (18%) than men (7%).



Figure 22. Action sports preferred to see at the Olympic Games: Differences between men and women

Table 10 explores age differences in the action sports participants would most like to see in the Olympics. Street skateboarding was most popular with under 20s; all top five ranked sports for the under 19s was a style of skateboarding. Some interesting patterns emerge across ages and sports such as BMX freestyle being most popular amongst ages 20–50, but not popular with under 20s. Surfing (short board) was popular with over 40s (ranked second) but not younger participants.

Table 11 explores what action sports participants would most like to see in the Olympics in the future based on the three most popular languages amongst our survey participants. As noted above, our survey suggests some national differences in attitudes to Olympics Inclusion. There are also some differences nationally and internationally in the sports that participants would like to see in the Olympics. For example, urban sports, particularly skateboarding styles, were the most popular sport for our Chinese speakers. The English speakers favoured a range of action sports with skateboarding and surfing ranked equal first. For the German speakers climbing was most popular. Short board surfing was ranked equal first amongst English speakers but not ranked by the Chinese or German speakers.

Table 10. Sport preferences based on age

Rank	Under 19	Rank	20-30	Rank	31-40	Rank	41-50	Rank	Over 50
1	Skateboarding - Street	1	BMX Freestyle	1	BMX Freestyle	1	BMX Freestyle	1	Skateboarding - Halfpipe/Vert
2	Skateboarding - Halfpipe/Vert	2	Skateboarding - Street	2	Skateboarding - Street	1	Surfing - Short boarding	1	Surfing - Short boarding
3	Skateboarding - Big air/mega	3	Climbing	3	Climbing	3	Skateboarding - Street	3	Parkour / Freerunning
4	Skateboarding - Pool/bowl	3	Parkour / Freerunning	3	Skateboarding - Halfpipe/Vert	3	Skateboarding - Pool/bowl	4	Skateboarding - Big air/mega
5	Skateboarding - Longboarding	5	Skateboarding - Halfpipe/Vert	5	Skateboarding - Pool/bowl	5	Skateboarding - Halfpipe/Vert	5	Skateboarding - Longboarding
		6	Skateboarding - Big air/mega	6	Surfing - Shortboarding			5	BMX Freestyle

Table 11. Perceptions of action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games based on language

Rank	Chinese	Rank	English	Rank	German
1	Skateboarding - Street	1	Skateboarding - Street	1	Climbing
2	Skateboarding - Big air/mega	1	Surfing- Shortboarding	2	BMX Freestyle
3	Skateboarding - Pool/bowl	3	BMX Freestyle	3	Parkour / Free running
4	BMX Freestyle	4	Parkour / Freerunning	3	Skateboarding - Street
5	Skateboarding - Halfpipe/Vert	5	Skateboarding - Pool/bowl	5	Moto-cross
		5	Skateboarding - Big air/mega		

Summary of key findings

- Action sport participation are avid consumers of sport media.
- They watch the Summer and Winter Olympics enjoying a range of events including traditional sports (e.g., track and field) and action sport e.g. BMX, snowboarding, new forms of skiing, mountain biking.
- Interest in and engagement with the YOG is low amongst these action sport consumers: only 16 per cent of participants had watched it. They were also largely unaware of the Sports Lab.
- Sixty per cent of the survey participants thought that the inclusion of most action sports was a good idea, and would probably lead to them watching more of the Olympics. However, they also have concerns about how action sports are being represented.

- Under 20s were most enthusiastic about action sports being included in the Olympics: 80 per cent of under 20s supported it. There were also differences nationally.
- Action sport participants tend not to affiliate with athletes or events across nationalist lines.
- Other popular media events include international/national action sport competition e.g., World Surf League and the Summer and Winter X Games.
- They watch sport on a range of platforms including TV, and online.
- Skateboarding was the most popular sport to watch on TV or the internet. Although skateboarders were over represented on our survey this may well be a reflection of the world wide popularity of the sport.
- The sports that survey participants most wanted to see in the Olympics was street skateboarding. All forms of skateboarding were popular, as was BMX freestyle. There were, however, some important differences and trends across ages and nationalities.
- These action sport enthusiasts did not prefer watching men's sport to women sport
- Under 20s were most enthusiastic about action sports being included in the Olympics: 80 per cent of under 20s supported it.
- Women were more enthusiastic than men about action sports being included in the Olympics, particularly for certain sports e.g., surfing, kitesurfing, and parkour.
- While the survey mostly provided quantitative data, many participants took the opportunity provided by the 'comments' sections to offer more colourful arguments for/against the inclusion of action sports into the Olympic Games.

2.2. Media: Critiques from the core

Our media analysis consisted of 655 media sources relating primarily to surfing, skateboarding, sport-climbing, parkour, BMX and kite-surfing's relationship with the Olympic Games. While newspapers and mainstream media sources covered the short-listing of surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing's shortlisting for Tokyo 2020, our analysis focused primarily on articles discussing the Olympic Games and/or the YOG that were published in online action sport magazines, as well as the dialogue among readers in action sport related online forums. We found these sources to be particularly revealing in terms of the attitudes held within action sport cultures. As we have explained in our previous work cultural media, such as niche magazines and websites, are particularly influential in communicating attitudes and value systems within and across action sport cultures (see Thorpe, 2011; Wheaton, 2010; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). Social media and the comments sections in response in niche media articles gave us access to the attitudes of core participants.

The articles were coded with the following themes:

- Attitudes towards the Olympics.
- Diversity.
- Facilities.
- Governance.
- Judging.
- Women's participation.
- Youth Olympic Games.
- Perception of the IOC.

- Youth inclusion.
- Tokyo 2020.
- Politics.
- Youth culture.
- Sponsorship.
- Equipment.
- Event format.
- Dangers/risks.
- Drugs.

The findings related to these themes informed the analysis of the overall report, and were important as it enabled us to contextualize and understand themes emerging in the surveys and interviews presented in other sections of this report. Here we share some of the comments from various niche cultural media sources to illustrate some of the ongoing concerns held by core action sport participants about possible action sport inclusion. These voices were not the priority of our interviews (which focused on key industry members, many of whom have been involved with Olympic short-listing and preparations for possible inclusion), thus we feel it is important to include such critiques as they continue to be an important force within action sport cultures (and also illustrated in comments written in the survey):

Surfing

Total referenced articles: 130

Mass media: 63

Niche Media: 43

Social media: 8

Websites: 8

Academic: 8

The Olympics: a strange and intoxicating mix of athletic excellence, corporate f~*kery, hysterical flag-waving, sterile conformism, furious competition, exhilarating sporting drama, tacit drug use, mental fortitude, sexual overtones, and heroic feats of adversarial endeavour in the ancient Greek tradition. Perhaps not all that far removed, then, from the present-day incarnation of competitive surfing, however incompatible the Olympic identity may be with the counter-cultural identity we still cling to". (Wilson, 2015, Surf Europe Magazine)

No, no and errr ... no. Olympic sports are all anchored around fairness and level playing fields, but the ocean doesn't offer that. The only way surfing would be considered an Olympic sport is if it was held in wave pools, and if it was held in wave pools then I wouldn't consider it surfing. (Sean Doherty, Surfer mag)

Someone please drown this whole f**king idea, surfing doesn't need this shit ... We don't need more surfers and more popularity.... The only ones who benefit from this shit are the big brands selling more crap gear from sweat shops in 3rd world countries. (Comment posted on Surf Line)

I think surfing in itself is more of an art form and an expression. The Olympic banner doesn't really suit the sport (Owen Wright, cited in Outside Magazine)

Skateboarding

Total referenced articles: 180

Mass media: 68

Niche Media: 48

Social media: 24

Websites: 35

Academic: 5

If it was in the Olympics, it wouldn't be skateboarding anymore. It'd be gymnastics on wood with wheels. It'd be overladen with rules and regs created by people who didn't know WTF they were talking about. (Comment posted on Vice magazine)

No way, keep it on the streets and keep it real! (Comment posted on Vice magazine)

The following comments were posted in response to an article titled *Tony Hawk Wants to Save Skateboarding*:

Rob Vargas:

x games is good enough. no need to go all crazy

Jim Booth :

No need to save skateboarding. It's fine! Hawk just wants to make more \$\$\$!

Michael Stover :

All X games are is skateboarding! It's enough.

LD Price:

Hell. To. The. No.

Marv Heuer:

mg hOW BORING

Sport Climbing

Total referenced articles: 91

Mass media: 35

Niche Media: 28

Social media: 12

Websites: 14

For the record, I think that climbing in the Olympics is a really crap idea because of the impact on me. □Olympics = more media attention = more people = more damage to the environment = more access problems = I can't go climbing in the places that I want to go. I know it is selfish, but the whole point of climbing is selfish (nobody else gets any benefit of me getting to the top of a rock). (Cited in <http://www.climbing.co.za/2013/06/rock-climbing-gets-cut-from-the-olympics/>)

Comments on Outsideonline.com in response to the announcement climbing is to be considered for inclusion in Tokyo 2020:

Rik Elderton from Facebook Jun 25, 2015

No!!!! No no no no. Please stop perpetuating the mainstream direction of these two lifestyles ... Dammit!!!!!!

James Crawford from Facebook Jun 25, 2015

*Olympics are a commercially driven activity, disguised as sporting event. F*** off!!*

Denis LAPIERRE from Facebook Jun 26, 2015

We don't need another Olympic sport that is decided by the subjectivity of judges.

Jon Powell from Facebook Jun 25, 2015

Great. Lets make climbing more popular. I mean the crags are not crowded enough as is.

Oh wait this is not rock climbing its plastic pulling

Kitesurfing/Kiteboarding

Total referenced articles: 95

Mass media: 16

Niche Media: 32

Social media: 18

Websites: 29

Just curious if I am the only kitesurfer who wishes kitesurfing would be removed from the Olympics? I liked our once relative anonymity. The whiny windsurfers can have their self-perceived lime light back in the corporatist Olympics. I don't care (cited in Kiteforum titled 'Remove kitesurfing from the Olympics')

Kitesurfing is evolving, and the very small per centage of kitesurfers who race, are clearly on the cutting edge. I welcome inclusion in the Olympics when the safety, equipment, logistics, and formats are ready. When instructional and competitive programs are developing young kitesurf racers, and safely channelling them toward their Olympic dreams, let's go. We are clearly not there yet for 2016 Olympic Games. (Kitesurfer Nevin Sayre, cited in <http://www.sail-world.com/Calling-out-to-U-S--Sailing-to-explain-their-Olympic-vote/97327>)

Parkour

Total referenced articles: 40

Mass media: 5

Niche media: 10

Social media: 7

Websites: 18

Parkour belongs in the city and not in the Olympics. If it were part of the Olympics, it would lose the urban aspect of the sport. Parkour would change. The sport is not about who finishes first, it is about overcoming physical and mental obstacles by pushing yourself to the limit. (Lorenzo Morandini, 2013)

I don't see Parkour ever fitting in to the Games. And this is why: The Olympics are steeped in tradition. ... Most Olympic sports are always conducted, year after year, in the same way and this is part of the tradition. [...] Because of this, I don't see Parkour fitting in to the Games unless the IOC accepted a standard course that they never expected to change. (Adam Dunlap, cited in parkour blog, 2012)

2.3. Interviews

In the following section, we offer qualitative insights from industry leaders in response to a selection of interview questions relating to the value of surfing, skateboarding, sport climbing and kiteboarding for the Olympics. These comments highlight the levels of support, passion and vision within these action sports

industries for Olympic inclusion, and also some of the anticipated advantages for particular groups, including women and youth in contexts of development. Key themes emerging across the interview included:

- A wide array of attitudes, some quite strong opinions (but some inconsistencies and contradictions);
- Generational differences in attitudes: ‘older guard’ holding more strongly to anti-establishment, counter-cultural philosophies;
- Younger athletes and audiences quite excited about possibility;
- Some differences across countries in feelings about increased nationalism the Olympics will evoke;
- Concerns about governance, fears of losing ‘control’ of their sport;
- Concerns about social and environmental ‘impact’ on sport (e.g., overcrowding);
- In contrast to our previous work, there seems to be a perceived shift in IOC (among those working most closely with IOC).

The remainder of this section consists of three main parts:

1. Sport-specific findings: Surfing, Skateboarding, Sport Climbing, and Kiteboarding.
2. Youth Olympic Games: Results from interviews across sports.
3. Trends across the sports, including women’s participation, issues of governance, changing perceptions of the IOC and the Olympic Games, and the process of short-listing and the lead-up to the announcement in Rio 2016.

In each of these sections, we prioritise the voices of participants and provide ample space for their voices, as we feel their insights reveal some of the diverse positions currently held within the various action sporting cultures, and some of the complexities based on individual’s different experiences in the action sports industry and roles in the positioning and preparation of their sports for possible inclusion in either the Olympic Games or Youth Olympic Games.

Sport Specific Findings

2.3.1 Surfing: Key themes from interviews

The following themes are based on six interviews with five men and one woman who hold key positions in the surf industry and media, and additionally 1 who holds positions across different action sports. Collectively their experiences included: The President of International Surfing Association [ISA], renown industry and media insiders/ commentators from Australia and the USA (e.g. Surf Magazine editors), two ex-world champions (USA and Australia), a wave pool developer, and Head of a National Surfing federation (in Europe).

What does the IOC gain from Olympic inclusion?

The ISA is convinced that surfing will have a positive, and long-lasting impact on the Olympic Games, specifically showing that the IOC is a) aware of, and responding, to the latest trends in sporting participation and consumption, and b) interested in youth sport, and that c) the Olympics will be infused with values of surfing:

So that would be a tremendous value adding, because it will show the world that the IOC is not stuck in time with a sport line up but it's actually looking around to see what comes up in the world, and supporting evolution and change in the world of sports.

I don't want surfing to through a metamorphosis become like the Olympics. I want the Olympics to become like surfing.

Other interviewees also saw the youth factor as beneficial for the Olympic Movement:

So I love the idea of being in the Olympics ... I guess the fact of life is the Olympics are ageing and surfing is a youth sport. It's got a worldwide footprint, which has largely occurred because of my generation spreading the word and travelling everywhere, professional surfing is spreading across the globe and creating incentive and opportunity for kids everywhere

Though not all where in support of such a move:

It's such a ploy to try to get the youth demographic back to watching. It's really kind of pathetic.

In contrast, the ISA offered a somewhat uncritical and evangelical vision of the power of sport generally, and of surfing specifically:

Surfing is going to cross pollinate the Olympic movement with some of our values and show them what young people of the world look after and look forward ... I think if the Olympics add some of the values that we have and the way we interact with the rest of the world, then that will enrich the Olympics. But at the same time, the Olympic competition will enrich our sport.

Impacts of Olympic inclusion on surfing as sport, culture & industry

As we illustrate through this section, the interviewees expressed a range of, often conflicting, viewpoints about Olympic inclusion ranging from positive endorsement to negative. Here we offer a summary of the range of these views, and the key debates that include:

- The Olympics as marketing device;
- Conflicted positions: cultural debates including overcrowding, 'selling out' debates, the anti-competition ethos and generational differences in attitudes.;
- The potential Olympics effect;
- Opportunities for women's participation;
- The politics surrounding governance;
- The impact of wave pools;
- Hopes for Tokyo 2020.

The Olympics as marketing device: Driving surfing sales

The Olympics were seen as a catalyst to spread the culture of surfing, and its values. The positive comments pointed to the *financial opportunities* for the industry generally, and for individual surfers particularly in securing endorsements beyond the industry. The Olympics was seen as a useful way for to increasing mainstream acceptance, so increasing the size of the surfing market:

So for me, this idea of surfing reaching out to new markets and going into the non-traditional surfing cultures, that's their opportunity to resell the same old story. And they're trying really hard, and the IOC can get them there.

There was also a broad recognition that surfing corporations have a very powerful role in driving the future direction of surf culture. However, the surfing consumer versus the aficionado was recognized as the target, with the aim to sell t-shirts not surfboards:

The truth is that the corporate brands have taken over our sports, taken it over. Nike is a perfect example with surfing. They took everyone, they put swooshes on everything, never once were they accepted into surfing. Eventually you go into all the stores and there's rows of Nike board shorts, no-one ever bought a pair of Nike board shorts. So what did they do? Took everybody and pushed them onto Hurley, because they bought Hurley, that was the only way to buy credibility. Fine, it works, but they are now considered the jock brand. You know, they only want you if you're going to be on the podium holding the cup. That's not what surfing is, that's not what skateboarding is. It just isn't. It's personalities and style and vibe.

The corporate side of surfing has stores in the bulk of nations (50 Quiksilver stores in Turkey for example.) Public identification with surfing in normally non-surfing nations will assist sales.

Some suggested that Olympic inclusion would give a boost to a declining industry:

Modern surfing is pretty well governed by the media who in turn is governed by corporations. Most generations now are right into the commercial arm of surfing ... that's what 40 years of pumping the next big thing ends up doing. Like I said, the numbers of purists are diminishing.

Some, however, questioned whether the Olympics was the right way to connect to their core audience:

Right now, all of the major brands are in retreat and they're trying to reach out and re-connect with their core audience, with their surf shops and all that, which is the exact opposite of going to the Olympics. And for exactly that same reason, going for the Olympic rings they may see as just too straight for their core audience. It's not Volcom with [their logo proclaiming] 'youth against establishment', this is the establishment.

Yet, as we discuss below, there was a recognition among many interviewees that not all of industry and community would embrace inclusion:

I don't think it's an absolute slam dunk that everyone in the surf industry is going to believe the Olympics is a good idea

Conflicted positions: cultural debates

Surfing is an activity that takes place in the ocean and requires access to a limited resource: waves. Thus, the most voiced concern was about overcrowding (in already crowded surf breaks) as a result of Olympic inclusion and thus growth in popularity of the activity:

A big factor is actually about the number of surfers in the water ... already surf spots are crowded ... if something becomes an Olympic sport ... millions and millions of people ... massive participation begins, the effect that that could have on surfing spots, I think that's probably one of the most consistent concerns that seem to be voiced, like great that's just what we need, even more surfers.

I was at a lecture last night where Kelly Slater was talking and that was one of his major gripes. ... and he said it himself, spots are getting really crowded now and the more

people that we market to and try to sell the lifestyle to, actually it's not great for him because his surfing spots are getting more and more jammed up. It seems to be a pretty consistent concern.

There were also concerns that the culture of surfing would change:

If you're an Olympic sport then all these federal Olympic bodies in various countries then sort of have to carve off billions of dollars and throw it at you and say employ coaches, employ this, deck officials out in their regalia, f~*king send them off on freebie trips around the world to talk to other officials, all that stuff. And I wonder if they're really just trying to create a kind of sporting bureaucracy in surfing, which I don't think surfing needs either.

Shifts in surfer attitudes to competitions?

Surfing, like most other lifestyle sports is experienced and understood in different ways ranging from a competitive sport, to an alternative lifestyle, to a an occasional recreational activity (Booth, 1995; Wheaton, 2013). It is not surprising therefore that a range of different views were expressed. While competition has played a significant part in defining surfing as a marketable and mediated consumer experience (particularly short board riding), an 'anti competition' ethos is still prevalent amongst surfers of all ages, nationalities and ranges of experience (Booth 1995).

- Surfing as lifestyle vs. sport.
- Anti-competition surfers, soul surfer.

Surfing as lifestyle vs. surfing as sport

The biggest constraint with surfing is the fact that it's been ... some people across the surf industry and surfers themselves, is that divide between is it actually a sport or is it a hobby, lifestyle, is it actually a cult, is it a religion, what is surfing? Because for so many people it is so many different things. So I think you're going to get your haters that are going to hate it, but you'll get some people particularly on the more competitive side of the sport saying well great, can I go and enter something, another competition and be able to be recognised for the hard work and dedication I've put to that sport over that time, because it genuinely is a sport to them.

There was also recognition that competitive surfing only appeals to a very small minority of surfers. Although the number of viewers of competitive surfing is growing only a small fraction of surfers will participate in competitions:

I think a more realistic estimate of the number of surfers that Surfing Australia represents would be a bit more like one or two per cent. The rest are interested in competitive surfing and all that, but a lot of them wouldn't even know Surfing Australia existed. Most surfers just go surfing for fun

Selling out debates

But I think at the moment, the big debate, and I'm sure you've seen it written up in many places, is just around the whole "soul surfer", selling your soul to potentially a corrupt ... I've read lots of people saying why would you want to get involved in the Olympics, the whole organisation of it, it just leads to basically selling the soul of the sport to something which perhaps isn't where the sport should be going.

surfing has escaped into a web of vested interests that leaves surfing purists (ever diminishing breed) less than happy.

And a lot of debate from core audience and brands ... because it is diametrically opposed to the original spirit of surfing.

The anti-competition ethos remains strong amongst many surfers:

You'll find a lot of people who surf, or want to surf, they have what they think are moral objections to the competition in surfing

So in the surfing world, there are people that don't care about competitions, don't care about the ISA, don't care about the pro league, don't care at all. Those people will not hear about the Olympics, because they just don't care about competitive sports.

I think that one thing that we're seeing with snowboarding is that push-back. And I think that will translate to surfing as well. But the fact that the surfing identity is so tied to a relationship to nature, in a constantly shifting, unpredictable environment, that's the core of where it can challenge competition, because competition demands structure, it demands repetition, and it demands stability. And that's not surfing.

There are people whose surfing values are really anti competition and they're just not going to like it because it's competition. They think there's all sorts of weird shit tied up with surfing competition. Usually they haven't had any experience of it so they don't really know but for them their values in surfing don't include competitions so they're not going to like the Olympics.

The people that only get to surf, who are the majority who like living in the city and get down the coast like once every month, or whatever. Those are the people who couldn't give a rat's ass about competing. They might watch it here and there on their computer screens, but the reason that they surf has never had anything to do with competition. Even if they are recreational competitions because they want to show up with their group. Competition in surfing, it's always been sort of a tenuous place. It had its heyday in the 80s and 90s and I think there is so much going on in the world today that people really understand this, especially surfers, having to 'compete' in the water for waves as it becomes more and more crowded. [Former surfing world champion]

There are certainly pockets of surf culture that more actively embrace competition in all forms; and some potentially significant differences nationally, and in terms of ages of participants. However, most of our interviews were with 'core' industry participants who did not oppose the Olympics, or as one interviewee stated '*I don't really have any issues with it.*'

In surfing the idea of getting in a uniform and being part of a team is really counter to the bohemian nature of the sport. However, for me I've always been that odd man out in surfing the idea of representing your country and going away as a team was pretty astounding for me as a kid. (Former surfing world champion).

There was an understanding that those most likely to embrace Olympics are elite professional surfers:

Yeah, and it would be the first—they [professionals] would definitely sign up and do it.

So I think there lies the biggest opportunity for people who are already professional surfers or people who are at the top of the elite side of the performance side of the sport. But it gives them another place, another platform at which they could showcase their talent. Because we know with the Olympics, if you succeed in the Olympics you're bathed in glory and that can be a real crowning moment for a lot of them. So I think that's the big plus for that side of it.

Some professional surfers have endorsed Olympic inclusion in surf media (e.g. Kelly Slater). However, even then they won't necessarily see the Olympics as the pinnacle of surfing competition:

I think secretly maybe the elite pro crew, they say oh it'd be nice to win an Olympic medal but they don't really give a f~*k. If they all got on board with it and started pushing it, Kelly and co all the way down, if they all just went yeah we should have the Olympics, then I think it would just be fait accompli, the whole rest of the surf culture would get on board with it ... it's like once every four years, they're not really into that and it'd only be a gimmick thing for them to do.

There's a couple, like Kelly Slater's sort of been quite pro hasn't he, in various media. I don't know if that really is what he thinks. But it seems like most of the pros have stayed away from the debate at this point.

However, Olympic as side show to professional surfing:

I don't think it would cause any ructions. For that crew it would just be a sideshow every four years. They wouldn't value an Olympic gold medal the same way that they would value the world professional surfing championship.

The top pros might show up if the waves are really good and they were having it in a place that was really, I don't know, what they would consider to be in their league. They'd have a very similar attitude to it as the top basketball players in America have, they'd go in it if it was all suited to them but if it wasn't they wouldn't bother.

Generational differences in attitudes: youth vs. old guard

In particular, a sense of **intergenerational differences** was prevalent across the interviews. The younger surfers were most likely to embrace surfing as a range of experiences including as a competitive sport. Older surfers were often nostalgic about surfing in the past when it was less commercialised, and less crowded.

In the world of surfing, like in every sport, there is kind of I will call it the old guard. [...] With an emphasis on the old. And some of the people, some of the old guard will look at the Olympics or any surfing competition or any promotion of the sport, even visiting surfing websites, as a way to put more people in the water. And in that case, they say oh wow, I don't want that. [...] they know that surfing is so great for millions of people today but they don't want to share it with anyone else. So that's kind of their attitude, if you go online to any forum the attitude that you will see is that one. [...] But if you're talking about the youth, for the most part all the youth look forward to the surfing competitions to look at the top athletes, and they look at the competitions, the surfing competitions.

There's the grumpy surfer. There's plenty of grumpy surfers in the world. They're mostly older, they're grumpy because they feel the experience of surfing that was their youthful experience has somehow been lost to them. It's been tarnished by what's happening in the world today of surfing, and so they're really mourning their youth but its just getting channelled off into resentment of all this other stuff. One of the classic resentments is any kind of organised competitive surfing, they just dislike the Olympic idea is the same way they dislike profession surfing and everything else of that nature that they feel is coming over the top of their own experience.

how I would feel about it if I was a 16-year old kid who was loving my surfing and saw surfing as a competitive sport, and particularly potentially an Olympic sport, I would think that it's a great thing because there is always that slight chance that you might be able to have a shot at that. I would imagine that people, once they get past a certain so called ripe for competition sort of age, say 35, are going no this is a lifestyle sport because probably that door to them being a decent competitive surfer is closed.

boys between the ages of 18 and 27 they just don't like any kind of organisation at that age. And certainly don't like that happy clappy flag waving Olympia shit you know. Unless they're like a star athlete they won't want a bar of it, and they'll just bag it all day long in a very sarcastic manner on social media of all kinds.

National differences

The interviewees also observed some national differences toward Olympic inclusion. In particular, some mentioned that in Australia surfing is more like organised traditional sport than in other countries and parts of the world, including California:

I don't see any real issues with competition in surfing at all. Seems to me like competition has been part of surfing ever since the Hawaiian people turned it into a bigger thing and sort of developed the surf culture. For [...] It transferred from there into Australia through where I grew up as a surfer in a really competitive Olympic context [...] That sort of element of competition is fun and an important part of your learning process as a surfer and has been around in Australia surf culture from the very beginning. It's by no means the be all and end all of surfing at all, but it's a part of it. So, I don't see that as being any kind of issue. [Australian perspective]

Well, I personally love the idea. I'm a pretty conservative guy. In Australia the Olympics is such a huge thing because Australia does very, very well in the Olympics compared to its size. The teams going to the games, Olympics and Commonwealth, these sorts of sporting things are like the Australian culture. We're indoctrinated with that as kids and all the way through, so for that reason I've always loved, valued, the idea of surfing being in the Olympics. [Australian perspective]

And California is the dominant surf culture in America, and Californians essentially don't like competitive surfing—the surf culture there has a much more romantic version of surfing ... hey like the idea that surfers are really sort of rebels and cool and all that stuff, which is kind of amusing to me because I go and watch how people surf in California, I've lived there for many years and I go surfing there now and I look around at what they're doing there with their surfing trying to be cool and all that, and they don't ride nearly as many waves as people here in Australia for instance. They're sort of so tangled in the look and feel of surfing and they spend a surprisingly little amount of time in the water. It's more like talking about surfing and thinking about it, remembering the history stuff. Whereas in Hawaii, in Australia, in Brazil even, it's more about just being in water as much as you can.

Cultural clashes and cultural change

For some interviewees, change in surfing is somewhat inevitable:

Yeah well, there's elements of surfing that don't change, there's elements that do. If surfing is in the Olympics that'll change surfing a bit in some ways but surfing would be changing anyway. But the ways that they do change, the demographics that are involved and the countries where people surf, it's pretty crazy really ..Yeah, I don't think the Olympics is going to challenge that part of surfing in the slightest

However, for others there was a strong feeling that surfing doesn't need the Olympics. Even for some of those who were for competition in general, saw little value in Olympic inclusion other than as a marketing device or way to get new money sources:

when I see the people from the ISA and so forth desperately talking up the Olympics and the need for surfing to be in the Olympics, it causes me a little of why—why are you so super keen to see this happen, is it surfing just doing fantastic by itself? One of the great things about surfing is it's been able to create a place in the world on its own merits, and largely through the efforts of people deeply enmeshed in the culture of surfing, and believers, people that actually made surfing what it is. [...] And I don't really reckon surfing needs the Olympics, surfing doesn't need the Olympics to make it better. [...] Like its mandated, right; if you're an Olympic sport then all these federal Olympic bodies in various countries then sort of have to carve off billions of dollars and throw it at you and say employ coaches, employ this, deck officials out in their regalia, f~*king send them off on freebie trips around the world to talk to other officials, all that stuff. And I wonder if they're really just trying to create a kind of sporting bureaucracy in surfing, which I don't think surfing needs either.

Drugs

Another potential cultural clash between surfing culture and the Olympics that was identified was cultural attitudes to drug taking and testing. While performance enhancing drugs taking doesn't seem relevant to surfing at this point, recreational drugs has been seen as endemic to the sport. A key moment in the recent history was seen to be the death of professional surfer Andy Irons (see Thorpe, 2015). His sponsor Billabong declared his death was dengue fever, but insider claims this was a 'lie' a (poor) smokescreen for his drug habit.

It started with Andy Irons in Billabong lying about the fact that he' had dengue fever. It really threw a lot of people for a loop and everybody was just like you know what, this is, pardon my French, but this is f~*ked.

Since Andy Irons died, this conversation about drug testing has been massive. So, the WSL will vet their athletes prior to sending them in, or prior to allowing them to go.

Other cultural commentators have suggested that Irons was not the only one with a drug problem within the WSL, and similar issues continue despite the increasing professionalization of the competitive tour.

The potential Olympic effect

Some suggested that the changes proposed would lead to the development of more and different formal competitive structures, coaching pathways, a growth in competitive surfing (e.g., talent-identification, coaching and training facilities).

Whereas some countries like Australia, already had a high-performance surfing pathway for aspiring elite level competitors, most were unfunded. It was perceived that if surfing becomes an Olympic sport this would change:

I mean they [Surfing Australia] just take the template from all these other sports as well. [...] so surfing has plugged right into that, they get plenty of money off the government. Yeah, Americas not quite as set up. France is extremely set up. A shitload of money in surfing in France. Like they're good at bureaucracy, so they've formed a surfing bureaucracy over there and it's pretty big compared with the number of people that surf there. And so France is proceeding down that road. Brazil would love to have that kind of structure, the nation is not quite there with that stuff yet, they're better with the pro stuff I think. There's a lot of range. Australia's got templates for this stuff that got back a hundred years and so when it came to forming the structures around surfing competitions

and surfing organisations, Australians have been much more thorough, I guess, with that stuff.

There's Surfing America, that's not quite as well set up because American's aren't very good at creating federal bureaucracies, they don't like them, they really don't.

It was also recognised that current professional surfing is dominated by a handful of mostly developed nations, but Olympic inclusion might open this out.

That's [World Surf League] an elite high end pro competitive sport and unless you've got so much in the bank as far as skill development and all that stuff, you can't make it into that arena. Whereas the Olympic arena is a lot more open.

Some hoped that the Olympics would enable amateur and more diverse surfing to be showcased:

Surfing in the Olympics necessarily must be an inlet for young Amateur surfing, a classic step up to further careers or indeed long amateur careers. ... If surfing's inclusion has a 10-year lead-time it would give all nations chance to develop credible athletes -but not if pros were to be included. That would be the key positive, completely amateur, even though the benefit going to Australia, the U.S., and probably Brazil via coaching and advisors would be quite massive.

Those key nations with the surfing coaching expertise were seen to be potential beneficiaries:

Surfing Australia or the U.S. equivalent could, with reason, expect to ship many a decent expert off to any one of 50 nations thus the return would be huge.

The ways in which qualification was set up was seen as important in striving for diversity:

The IOC doesn't allow more than three athletes from any country in the same discipline, and I would probably shrink that back to two. Because it's a small group. And I would like to see Aussies and Americans and Brazilians, which have the leading professional surfers, but I would like to see Africa, Latin America, South Pacific, and other peoples represented. For me, if the only thing we do is put just the best athletes in the world but without geographical distribution, then we failed. It's not really Olympic principles.

Women's participation: opportunities and challenges

The interviewees had mixed views about whether the Olympics would provide greater opportunities for women as athletes, coaches or industry leaders. It was widely recognised that surfing is male dominated (see Booth, 2001; Comer, 2010; Henderson, 2008; Olive, McCuaig, & Phillips, 2012), but that women's participation has significantly increased over the past 20 years:

Not the 50/50 that I would like to see, but a growing percentage every year.

All of the men who we interviewed claimed to be wholly supportive of women's role in surfing culture and competitions. It was suggested that women had been really held back by the surfing culture, media, industry and professional surfing organisations (ASP/WSL specifically):

I think that the evolution and status of women in surfing has been seriously positively impacted by the skillset of the current top eight women surfers. The facts of life are that they're really good surfers. Great surfers. You could see circumstances where Carissa Moore could win half the heats on the world tour, she's that good a surfer.

These male interviewees recognised that male surfers tend to dominate surfing spaces, '*The boys dominate the space because people protect*', and contribute to marginalising women, although the situations is complex and locally variable.

It's endemic within surfing that there's, is it misogyny? You know, chicks are relegated to the crap waves on the inside. That is a fact of life in every surf break around the world. It takes an extraordinary woman to actually go out the back and catch set waves in competition with the established people in the line-up that's established men.

They also recognised the negative role played by the surfing industry, particularly in the sexualisation of female surfers.

So then you look at the industry and the juniors, the woman's line is a by-product of men, and you look at the way they're marketed. For God's sake, Ripcurl is a wetsuit company and they hire some chick with a g-string to be their female model.

Some were optimistic that the Olympics could be a showcase and catalyst for change, and that the ISA bid had spots for equal numbers of male and female surfers:

Look at the value that gets placed on a woman's success in that circumstance. Just picture that. Suddenly everyone has to support the girls. I think it would be a very, very healthy thing.

But others (and particularly the women we interviewed) were more sceptical arguing that equality was a lot more complex than equal numbers of women and women participating, and would require a major cultural shift in attitudes towards women at varying levels:

Well that's the dream, that's the illusion that they would find a way out. But you can look at other Olympic sports and you can see how that doesn't ever work. [...] Yes, it's going to increase the visibility of female surfers, I absolutely believe that. And it's going to increase the opportunity for women surfers of a certain type to get to the Olympics. So, you can say yes in that regard. But I think that we're beyond a point now in women's surfing where it's simply about enlarging the pool of women surfers. I think that targeting certain groups becomes the more important point than increasing the access. ... that's equal, but does it do anything in order to increase the capability of girls to get into the sport aspect of it that would eventually lead to the IOC level?

The Governing body [ISA] showed awareness of the importance of gender equity in leadership, and commitment to women in leadership positions in its own organisation. However, some argued that ISA had not been proactive enough, and that their international competitions to date did not promote women and girls. As one national coach explained;

In fact, with every one of these teams we go to we're only allowed to have half as many women as men So right there, the women are valued at half the score for a winning team. You look at the breakdown at the Olympics, it's 50/50. So I think it's [equity] a fallacy.

However, there was a belief by some (not all) that the professional surfing WSL driven by Natalie Ziff was making inroads to promote elite women's surfing:

The women's prize money has increased dramatically. The number of events has increased, and she is such a huge advocate for women's surfing. They now run the women's in some of the best waves. Life has never been better for a woman surfer under this current ownership structure. I don't believe that ISA has the same focus and valuation on women's competition.

The politics surrounding governance

The ISA is the designated international body, but currently doesn't have the status of the professional bodies like WSL (World Surf League, formerly ASP). It is also important to note that there has been a long history of ISA trying to get surfing into the Olympics, dating back to the late 1970s.

And we know that the IOC has given the ISA the approval, but in our little teacup in the world of surfing the big dog is the WSL—the world champion, the pro tour, everything like that, the big money—and the ugly stepchild is the ISA and the national teams.

Well, it's [ISA] got a really big membership if you include all the member countries. So there is a lot of people tied into its goals and dreams

Broadly people were supportive of ISA and its ability to retain autonomy for surfing: that it has '*managed to give legitimacy to his body, rather than it being subsumed under somebody else*' (like snowboarding).

I'm critical in many ways of how Fernando runs his events but I'm super congratulatory in terms of how he's been able to navigate this path through to where we're at right now. That to me is just extraordinary.[...] Well see, that right there is just a testament to Fernando's perseverance and his ability to actually navigate the waters; it's exceptional and I was a total unbeliever. So, I'm super stoked. In a sense, I don't believe there's anyone else in the whole surfing world that would have had the perseverance to continue this path for that length of time.

There was a widespread belief that ISA president was motivated by the legacy it would create, not money or personal power:

It's his legacy. I really believe that. It's not about money, he's got plenty. [...]. So, for him, it's his legacy. He sees it as the continuation of Duke Kahanamoku's work and he wants to be on that ticket. It's just a legacy thing for him.

However a number of issues were raised about the ISA's governance of surfing in the Olympics.

1. Judging politics and competence (discussed in more depth below)
2. The style of leadership provided:

It's a really stifling atmosphere at the ISA level.... So you're dealing with a management style that doesn't provide much autonomy for the people organising it. [...] I think he's a massive control freak and he doesn't know what he's doing in that element. [...]. So there's a completely different management style[...] So Fernando should concentrate on what he does well, which is charm the Olympic committee.

I think Fernando is just passionate, and for him it's like a driving force that goes beyond anything bureaucratic or whatever—he doesn't need that, he'd just love to see surfing be an Olympic sport, he's South American, he's passionate. For quite a long time South American countries were a little bit shut out of the elite pro thing, and so I think at the time Fernando felt like he could put his flag on this Olympic thing as being a really great thing to do for surfing, and he's just unqualifiable passionate about it. But underneath that, you've got these layers of different nations with different set ups that are all linked into the ISA

3. The negotiation between the WSL who control professional surfing and ISA

Some predicted a struggle between WSL and ISA due to potential conflict in styles, personalities and judging systems. Some saw this as a serious potential issue; the majority however thought that despite differences in styles, all parties would accommodate Olympic inclusion as they all stood to benefit. According to ISA, a compromise has been agreed:

We have the full support of the WSL, surfings pro league, a private business. When I made the presentation to Tokyo it went on the record in video with the CEO saying "we will bring the best athletes to Tokyo". So, we presented a unified front

Not all the interviewees agree with this:

I believe that they [WSL] will threaten to boycott. It may be a ploy to get leverage.. [...] That's a shot right cross the bows of the ISA because there's contracts that the WSL have with their surfers forbidding them from surfing other events unless those events are sanctioned by the WSL ... That's why I think that a principal driver in terms of the final solution will be it will come from the surfers. [...] But the political ramifications of the conflict between WSL and ISA, who's going to field the team and all of those things, I think it's fascinating. .. Because if you get Paul Speaker and Fernando Aguerre in one room, this will not get worked out.

Judging and scoring systems

There was recognition by ISA that while subjective judging is prevalent in action sports, the IOC have traditionally been cautious of anything that isn't first past the post (although gymnastics and boxing are good exceptions). However, with a range of more subjectively judged sports introduced into recent Olympic Games (i.e., snowboarding and skiing halfpipe, slopestyle, big air) there is an understanding that the IOC is increasingly open to sports with subjective judging and that isn't necessarily a limitation for surfing:

I'm very confident that our benchmark for judging would be up to par to any of the other subjective judged sports. And I know I have to, because if we don't do that it would be a shame. It would not be possible. And I will not stand for it.

There were, however, a range of views about current judging systems, with some expressing concerns about subjectivity and bias within WSL:

The thing with surfing that I hate is if you look at the scoring, the judges talking 'oh what did you give this?', changing their scores. I've seen it ... I've stood there with judges sitting there, behind judges and they're on their Instagram and then all of a sudden the heat is over, 'what did you give him, oh an eight'. So there's no real standardisation. I know it's getting better and I know IAS with Fernando, he's trying, he's been for years, he's been a proponent of it, he sees the vision, he's trying to standardise it. But I've had clients misjudged and then when they went and complained, it affected them down the road and they were underscored, I've seen it.

Broadly, the ISA was seen as less competent (and less experienced) than WSL professional judges. There were also comments made that a dialogue between competitors and judges would be critical to success of system:

Say Morocco qualifies and gets in there, you don't want to have two Moroccan judges on your judging panel, unless they've been taught. Who is going to do that training? [...] Even though there's a lot of criticism of the judging in the WSL it is way better and way more organised and way more understood by everyone than anything that happens at the ISA . [...] Bottom line is that has to change. [...] It'll be ISP or WSL judges, or no go, period. Because the athletes will not subject themselves to the bullshit of ISA judges.

Further, it was acknowledged that conversations with the surfers that would be competing would be very important:

Judging in elite pro arenas ... is kind of a dialogue between the surfers and the judging panel that evolves over time. The dialogue is a sort of interrogation between the judging panel who wants to see the surfers perform at a certain level and produce a certain range of stuff on a wave, and the surfers who want the judging panels to be directed by them and their activities. So, it's an interesting dynamic and, I think a pretty damn successful dynamic given that it is almost totally subjective. They get the winners right far more often than they get it wrong. But how you'd develop that into an Olympic context I just

don't know, I don't know how you'd do that. I find it difficult to imagine them developing that kind of interrogative relationship once every four years.

I don't think any ISA judging panel would have the same kind of critical relationship with the surfers as the World Surf League panel does. The elite pros would be a little dubious of a judging panel that wasn't of that sort of ilk. It might be enough to stop them from going to the Olympics, if they don't have a good enough judging panel and a good enough I guess understanding of what the critical elements of great surfing are.

But not all interviewees agreed:

Yeah, I don't think that [judging] would be a problem.

Across many interviewees, however, there was a recognition that judging was hard for public to understand and would require careful education of mainstream audiences to help them understand what they are looking for in terms of a good performance. There have already been developments in this area, particularly in WSL:

The original intention of the scoring system was to be able to communicate to the public and to the surfers what the immediate status of a heat was. Not to wait 10 minutes for the judges to watch freaking replays.

Judging as political and biased? Some argued that surfing had in the past been plagued with a nationalistic element to judging. This was not a unanimously held view.

Yeah it's a feeling but it's not the truth.

Chronically biased judging. [...] There was one situation in Peru where they replayed these waves and the head judge in fact admitted to having underscored, so he overcompensated on another wave later in the heat, which is absolutely illegal. Fernando, for once, at that meeting was at a loss for words because the video was clear that our guy out-surfed the other guy but got a lesser score ... because as an athlete you know when you've been ripped off. [...] I think there is some element of bias. I think there's quite a lot of inexperience. I think that there's certainly tons of enthusiasm that swings them in one direction. So, you're not really getting a fair decision.

Interviewees, however, offered some interesting suggestions as to how competition structure and the current judging could be improved. For example;

Artistic interpretation would return—for all.

I think it's going to be exactly like ice-skating. They'll have the style element and the technical element.

Others suggested that Olympic inclusion might be an opportunity to more radically revisit existing judging systems:

F~*k these ISA and WSL judges. A new order has to be created. Too many years have passed since artistic interpretation was last used. Beautiful surfers need to judge the artistic angle. Radical surfers need to judge technical aspects. Normal judges have been failures or close to it since the inception of pro surfing in '76. Again, it's a chance to revolutionize the sport from the ground up.

Wave Pools: is it really surfing?

The Tokyo Games are likely to be held in the ocean, not in a wave pool, a decision which according to the ISA, is supported by the IOC:

That's what the IOC wanted to do. I think it's the reality. Although wave pools have improved a lot and they're very promising, we don't have a couple of years under our belt to show how they operate and how they work in competitions. We're all happy with doing it on the ocean. We're very excited because we know that surfing in the ocean will be great, and at the end of the day it's the way surfing is, in the sense that when the fans are on the beach.

Nonetheless, the potential inclusion of wave pools was widely debated. It was recognised they provide a potential solution to the problem of fair judging, and of ensuring that competitions could be held regardless of weather /location.

I think that's [judging issues] probably why they're so hopeful about wave pools in the Olympic context, because they think that will kind of normalise the situation, so everyone will be riding the same wave all the time.

However, most were critical of the ability of pools to provide quality waves. It is important to note that these comments were made before the release of Kelly Slaters surf pool, which has been described as a 'game changer in technology' (Struck, 2015). This is a rapidly changing situation; at the time of writing, it has been reported that the WSL had just 'bought' partial right to the technology for the Slater Pools (Struck, 2016).

That's where the Olympic idea of surfing really loses me. I don't know, I think wave pools are kind of embarrassing things for surfing, certainly in their current state. I don't think you can possibly imagine that wave pool surfing is ... I don't know, it's so far from the summit of surfing. And so if you stick the Olympics in a wave pool, I think it'd just lend more fodder for those who want to mock the Olympics in a surfing context.

So then the question is in this next period of time, can wave pool technology improve so that it's far better than Snowdonia? Snowdonia is not acceptable.

Others predicted that pools would kill the surfing creativity; Surfing as an inherently unpredictable activity in an ever changing environment

Moving surfing from the natural element to this element is complete, final elimination of our identity as surfers as connected to something natural, and the complete disconnect from the ocean. [...] Surfing isn't the thing that you do on the waves, it's the relationship that you have to the ocean, and a lot of surfers understand that. ... we don't ride waves on the ocean, or waves in a natural element like rivers. You stop being a surfer, because the surfer identity cannot be disconnected from the natural element. It becomes wave riding.

I think it's the kiss of death of surfing and SUPs ultimate future in this program to have it 100 per cent exclusively in wave pools. Simply because the most esoteric nature and one of the most beautiful things about surfing is the fact that it's in the ocean. It is the ever variable waves, it is the magical sense of being in the surf and the spiritual nature of all of that, which is absolutely gone if you're in a wave pool.

Questions were raised about the costs, particularly environmental costs (and footprint) to build, and maintain, and fix such highly technical facilities:

*That's cool but the cost is insane. Swimming pools are almost not cost effective as it is, without any machinery to make waves. [...]. Whack waves on the top of that and it's like *&%\$.*

Interviewees also expressed concern about the politics underpinning wave pool development, and who stood to benefit financially:

The people who are pushing it think it's a great thing. First of all, it's going to be people like ISA, that's their purpose or they've made it their purpose to try and drive that.

The actual surf pool manufacturer, or some surf pool manufacturers, are driving it hard because it's just purely to solidify their market position and be synonymous with this particular type of wave pool is the wave pool to be doing it. I think that should be taken out of the argument.

Another perspective was about the potential for wave pools after the games, and especially their potential to introduce surfing to communities who have not been able to access the sport:

I would argue that you need a wave pool that can do that for the Olympics but then you can very easily adapt and make it into a beginners and intermediates pool so it's then a resource that can be used from then on. ... It's about accessibility.

Perceptions of and relationship with the IOC

The Olympics had been perceived as behind the times; but interviewees who had dealings with the IOC talked about a new era emerging with the entrance of President Bach, and the importance of agenda 2020 for opening new opportunities for surfing and the Olympic Games more broadly:

This is what the Olympic movement needs if we want to have an impact in 2020, a positive impact on the games that is perceivable, that is strong.

I think in the program composition the IOC was behind the times, behind history. The arrival of president Bach in 2013, like the election of the new Pope, was the arrival of another great leader for the world.

Working with the IOC was described by the ISA as productive, and the ISA seemed convinced (at the time of interview) that surfing would be included in Tokyo 2020.

We haven't even been accepted for Tokyo, and these leaders of 2024 are already talking about surfing. So, obviously there is an important momentum in their minds. And I think in maybe a year or two years wave pools will be so developed and there will be world championships held in them, there will be running.

I don't know if they see me as somebody they can trust, a partner that they can work with and they have provided me, they are already talking to me about how we're going to work for the games after Tokyo. So I think surfing will be included.

Hopes for what surfing will look like in Tokyo 2020, and Beyond

While some of the important detail for the Tokyo 2020 surfing events such as qualification, and judging is still to be decided, ISA have a picture about how they see surfing in the games. A festival style event is being imagined:

We're very excited because we know that surfing in the ocean will be great, and at the end of the day it's the way surfing is, in the sense that when the fans are on the beach and there's 3000 people wearing shorts and bikinis it's like a surfing competition. [...] if I had my way I would love to see not just a surf competition but a surf destination during the whole duration of the Olympics. So you are going to come to the Olympics and you're going to come to the surf contest area, and when there is no competition we're going to have a board for you to try—stand up, short board, long board, body board, body surf, fins, everything. We don't want to just run a competition. [...] it's a festival. And

probably will include music. It could include art, food. Different things that really represent the diversity of surfing.

Critical concerns for Tokyo 2020 and beyond

- Potential environmental issues in Japan: Japan's beaches do not have a good reputation for clean safe water (ref Brazil legacy too) following the Fukushima disaster which some claim has '*been leaking radioactive waste into the oceans*'. Some suggested that the Olympics was a smoke screen: '*So, it's a big PR campaign.. a full blown marketing campaign to try to distract away from Fukushima.*'
- Complexities of nationalist: Some suggested that there could be a boycott if Hawaii is not treated separately to USA. There is likely to be an issue around the issue of Hawaiian nationalism, and potential protests and boycotts. Historically, Hawaii has competed separately to the USA in international surfing events and surfing remains an important part of establishing a Hawaiian identity (Walker, 2011).
- Other countries may have similar issues of how national teams might be configured, but much less political (e.g., Wales vs. UK; Basque nationalist vs. Spain).
- Event format: there have also been conversations about the dominance of short board surfing, and how it impacts on surfing's diversity. For some SUP is better suited to the Olympic movement:

I think that whole stand up things got a better shot at the Olympics than surfing, to be honest. It just feels like a more natural fit. There's a lot more of a racing element in stand up paddle boarding, the first across the line sort of thing, which the Olympics really likes and seems to work really well there. And it's a relatively new pastime, which has spread really quickly through nations where there's not necessarily surf.

I think the natural choice after surfing, short boarding which is the one they will bring is, should be stand up racing.

2.3.2 Skateboarding: Key themes from interviews

In this section, we present key themes that emerged from interviews with nine individuals (7 men and 2 women) who hold key positions in the international skateboarding culture and industry, including two Presidents of international skateboarding federations, one Chairman of an international skateboarding-related organization, one skateboarding agent, one industry organization key member, one event organizer and skateboarding commentator, one skateboarding photographer and journalist, one ex-professional skateboarder and skateboarding company owner, and one current professional skateboarder with a key role in the Women's Skateboarding Alliance.

Perceptions of Olympic Impact on Skateboarding: Global growth, diversity and new opportunities

Many of the interviewees acknowledged the potential of Olympic inclusion for creating new opportunities for youth to skateboard in both the developed and developing world. Part of this will be the challenges to traditional stereotypes of skateboarders as trouble-makers (Beal, 1995; Howell, 2005) by offering new representations that show skateboarders as serious athletes and thus making a valuable and unique contribution to the contemporary sporting landscape, and increased governmental investment in skateboarding facilities and skateboarders.

It'll open up skateboarding to more people around the world.... I don't know necessarily that everyone else is thinking about that, but it will give some agency to the other countries, and I think about the potential for skateboarding and diplomacy, that that's the benefit.

Bringing these new events into the Olympics will give the opportunity to new countries to be involved from the beginning in these new events. I really believe that the Chinese athletes have the skill and the potential to win medals in the future, and I think it's fair. It's fair to give the chance to every country in the world, to showcase their talents in the biggest sport event ever.

Skateboarding is relatively inexpensive compared to other sports, and once you build a skate park, there's somewhere for kids to skate. And I look at it like, 'wow, if more countries could do this and give kids hope....' I think that skateboarding in the Olympics will legitimise it in that way, where other municipalities and governments in general will look at it and go, 'yes, we can build this [skate] plaza'. It seems so clear to me, how you can help kids and give them something to do, just via skateboarding.

In Afghanistan the sport with the most female athletes is skateboarding, it's amazing! It's kind of these little pockets where skateboarding is flourishing. The South American and Latino American countries are also booming. We think there could be more Brazilian skateboarders than American skateboarders. Brazil and Mexico, even Peru and Colombia, they have these huge burgeoning skate communities that go right along with this whole Olympics thing, it's the international organisation of skateboarding that is growing very quickly.

Other interviewees pointed out the benefits that Olympic inclusion might offer in terms of challenging long-held stereotypes of skateboarders, which have plagued further investment in skate parks in communities around the world, and influenced how skateboarders are treated by parents, the public, and authorities (Howell, 2005; Wood, 2016):

There are people out there that have had nothing but bad experiences or bad tastes in their mouths with skateboarders their whole lives. They either broke the ledges out in front of the place, or graffiti-ed something. Did something not cool, who knows, whatever, trespassed, whatever. But now it's going to be like, 'wait those guys are on an Olympic stage! This is like legitimate now'. It's legitimate and it's like if the world is recognising it, if the Olympics are recognising it, and that's like the ultimate judgement. I think it's really good for skateboarding as a whole then that people in the past had maybe had a derogatory feeling towards skateboarding in general, that might shift. And I view that as something really positive. The punks can still be in the alley and build the stuff under the bridges and do whatever, there's room for every type of skateboarder is how I look at it. If you want to rebel against the system, by all means do it, I'm totally open to that; skaters with this philosophy don't have to go to the Olympics.

Governance of Skateboarding

From the announcement that skateboarding had been short-listed for possible inclusion in Tokyo 2020, there were three organizations vying to be the Federation selected by the IOC to develop, manage and lead the inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympic Games:

- World Skateboarding Federation Tim McFerran (President).
- International Skateboarding Federation (President, Gary Reams),
- Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports (President, Sabatino Aracu).

Each Federation has different historical and geographical contexts of development, and with different connections to skateboarding as a sport, culture and industry. From the interviews, we found that each of the three Federations have strengths to offer in terms of managing skateboarding as an Olympic sport.

While mainstream audiences will surely find the presentation of skateboarding at the Olympics fascinating regardless of the selected Federation, for the skateboarding community to support the inclusion they need to feel confident that their sport is being managed and represented by those who understand and respect their culture and what makes their sport unique. In other words, for the international skateboarding community to support the inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympics, the perceived ‘authenticity’ of the federation and its leaders is of utmost importance.

Below we offer some *comments from interviews* to illustrate different opinions as to the strengths and limitations of the different Federations. It is important to reiterate, however, that the comments below are the opinions of key members within the skateboarding industry and not the researchers themselves.

International Skateboarding Federation (ISF)

The President of the International Skateboarding Federation is Gary Reams, a non-skateboarder but long-time owner of Camp Woodward, originally providing gymnastics and cheering camps to children and youth in Pennsylvania, but over the past few decades has grown to become an international leader in action sports camps, including BMX and skateboarding.

The International Skateboarding Federation was created approximately twelve years ago, but until recently remained a largely US-based and mostly dormant organization. Over the past few years, however, Reams has rallied with skateboarding icons (including Tony Hawk, Vice President of ISF), skateboarding athletes, media producers (i.e., NBC) and the skateboarding industry (i.e., Nike, DC, Vans) to become a very strong contender for the leadership position of skateboarding into the Olympics. According to one interviewee, ISF was not initially driving the proposal towards Olympic inclusion, but quickly came on-board when they realized that it could happen without them: “*So I think WSF and FIRS kind of forced skateboarding’s hand to come together and now there’s all this action going on within skateboarding to make sure the ISF is the strongest contender*”. A number of other interviewees noted that it was the fear of being managed by non-skateboarders that inspired the ISF to rally together to try to become the federation acknowledged by the IOC.

Arguments for: cultural knowledge and power.

I don’t know him personally, but I have heard talk within the [US] skateboard industry and the big companies that Gary Reams knows what he’s doing and this is his thing. He seems to be the one they’re leaning towards or talking about.

We watched as snowboarding went in under the Skiing Federation, so we’re definitely interested in skateboarding being able to be in control of our own sport and our image. That’s kind of the biggest point for us, that if it’s going to happen then this grouping [ISF] is the one to lead it. You don’t get as strong support for anything in skateboarding as this group of people. It’s Tony Hawk, it’s Chris Cole, it’s everyone that’s kind of on board with ISF and trying to make sure they can be able to be the ones who are the Federation.

I just think that when you look across the table and it’s NBC, ESPN, FOX, Tony Hawk, all these giant guys, Rob Dyrdek who started Street League and he’s one of the biggest pop culture stars in the US now too, when you have all those people, how do you go against them? I haven’t heard the actual what would happen if that ... you know, the break the glass plan or anything. My gut feeling is if it all falls apart [and the IOC goes with FIRS or WSF], you would probably have all the top guys pulling out and almost I think that would create enough of a backlash where those big guys who ride for companies that

are counting on them to do it, to maybe second guess that. I don't know yet, I would imagine that it wouldn't be pretty....

Arguments against: assumption of economic motives of powerful skateboarding businesses

My biggest fear is that people who have their own agendas may get control. Some big companies are part of ISF. I think that if you're one of the two or three companies that are pushing to get skateboarding into the Olympics and you've got business people trying to run it, and they only care about sales of their products, then you have the potential for corruption. Because there are going to be people that want to sway the decisions, and there's going to be money. I think it took years for FIFA to get the way they are. But I think if you start out the wrong way, before even the first 2020 Olympics there could be some really bad stuff happening in skateboarding, and I'm very leery about that.

World Skateboarding Federation (WSF)

American Tim McFerran founded the World Skateboarding Federation in 2014. McFerran is not a skateboarder, but recognizing the business opportunity in the sport of skateboarding, he set up the World Skateboarding Grand Prix in 2013, a skateboarding event management company based in Sacramento, California but with events around the world, and particularly in developing regions (i.e., South Africa). According to the WSF website:

World Skateboarding Federation is the leader in providing skateboarders around the world with funds to help pay for travel expenses to attend international contests. WSF actively donates skateboards to youth in poverty stricken areas and supports worthwhile skateboarding organizations like Skateistan in South Africa. WSF is currently working with a number of countries, providing leadership and expertise, to help them form national federations. World Skateboarding federation is a USA incorporated nonprofit 501-c-3 organization. (Retrieved from <http://worldskateboardingfederation.org/about/>).

Arguments for: A focus on youth development:

I didn't do it for the Olympics. I did it with an eye for expansion, because my passion, although I love contests and I'm super-competitive, my passion is helping underprivileged kids. ... So, from my standpoint, it was all about the social development side. ... It shouldn't be a matter of who you know, it's a matter of what you've done for skateboarding.

Arguments against: Lack of cultural credibility and questionable past practices:

I don't think Tim stands a chance; he's burned every bridge in skateboarding and he doesn't have a good bedside manner.

The WSF ... it's one guy who does a contest in South Africa and ... he has done a lot of unethical things as far as press releases and stuff like that. He puts out a lot of press releases that makes it seem like he's doing something, but behind the curtains there's not that much substance there. He doesn't really come from skateboarding ... he's more of an event planner. It could be a monetary thing.

Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports (FIRS)

Established in 1924, *Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports* is the IOC recognized world governing body for roller sports, including rink hockey, inline hockey, inline speed skating and artistic roller-skating. Although FIRS has not had a history of organizing skateboarding events, skateboarding is under their umbrella of roller sports. It was FIRS that initially proposed the inclusion of street and park skateboarding

events in Tokyo 2020. Among many committed skateboarders, however, FIRS lacks any credibility or authenticity as an organization that understands the unique culture of skateboarding.

Arguments for: A long-standing federation that knows the rules and regulations of running Olympic events:

I think that FIRS will put the proper skateboarding people around them. The contest will have some subtle changes if somebody else is running it, and it could have a big impact at the event, but I think you're going to get the skateboarders coming. They might not like the format, but they're still going to compete.

I believe that it's not a matter of having a federation that caters only to the skateboarders. I don't think that the skateboarders themselves have the skills to control the sports and to politically develop the sport. This is two different skills so let the federation that's already in place since they were kids lead the process and they rely on the right people. This is what I believe, so no need to create new federation because the skateboard is already roller sports, we do have a federation for that who has the necessary experience.

FIRS have the experience of the international federation, because an international federation as a body will manage 80, 90, 100 countries around the world, and FIRS knows how to do that, and to work concretely with the skateboarders. They know how to work with the key players like FISE, all the other organisers, ISF and WSF, so I believe this is the best way to develop ... to make clear for everyone who is leading, and to go to Tokyo and to have a successful event. We all have the same goal—to have a successful event in Tokyo and to showcase the skateboard.

Arguments against: Lack of understanding of skateboarding culture:

I think that FIRS should just bow out. Yeah, they've had skateboarding as part of their federation since 1985 or something, I don't know exactly, but it's a long time. It seems weird to me, and I have no relationships at FIRS so it's easy for me to talk about and just say, 'why are you trying to control something that doesn't seem like you have a direct tie to?' It's seems that other people can do it better than you, but you're still trying to control it. It seems that they're a distant third.

[FIRS] has been around for 90 years. They've never done anything in skateboarding, never held an event, never had a meeting, never had anything. And suddenly they're interested when they hear it comes in the Olympics, and so that interest bubble is always questionable to me when that happens.

Calls for Collaborations

Many within the skateboarding industry suspected that ISF may be the strongest candidate to become the official Olympic federation, with some expressing caution against WSF and FIRS because they seemed to hold less credibility and authenticity within the skateboarding culture. Some predicted boycotts if the position goes to any other group than ISF:

Until we understand that it's going to be managed by skateboarding, we are not celebrating. Because if it so happens that it's managed by somebody else there will be major league pushback. It will be scary.

However, there were also some expressions of interest in a more collaborative approach that draws upon the strengths of the various organizations and works to unite the international skateboarding industry and culture:

The best scenario will be to have identified players around the table, what we already did a few months ago in Lausanne with FIRS, with Gary Ream from ISF, with Tim McFerran from the WSF. Tony Hawk was there as well. So the best scenario for me is to agree all of us, and to say okay FIRS, we do have this knowledge and this is what we can bring to the project. American event organiser, this is what we know and what we can do, same with the European event organisers, and all together we work hand in hand. So, this is the best scenario. The other scenario will be that the IOC—they own the games by the way, so they are the decision maker—they could say okay, you will take care of the skateboard because we believe that you are the key player and we don't care of the politics. Maybe. But if they do that, it's not fair because there are some rules with the IOC and the international federation, and if they take out the skateboard from one international federation they could do that with other federations, so I guess the international federations will be all together to say hey, this is not fair.

In skateboarding, we're really all fragmented. We never really work together as an industry. People have a lot of opinions, but I hope [the Olympics] brings it together and we're all working toward this greater good within the industry, which I think will be pretty awesome, if that in fact does happen. I think a lot of good can be done with this power and this organisation in skateboarding. Get us all on the same page. We've all just been like mice trying to get our crumb for years, and now maybe we can organise a little bit. I think it will be awesome.

I know there's talk about combining all three of us, and I've had a couple of proposals, and I'd be surprised if we weren't involved, because we're the only ones doing what we do. But if we're not, I don't think it changes, because it's not the reason why we started. I think it would change ISF dramatically if they didn't get in it, because that's the whole purpose why they're in there, for the Olympics.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Federation that is ultimately selected by the IOC will certainly have much work ahead of them, particularly in terms of preparing national federations and the athletes, and developing the most appropriate formats for competition and systems of judging that will be respected by the athletes and cultural participants, and easily understood by mainstream audiences. A number of interviewees recognized the challenges ahead for governance, with some admitting confusion as to how funding will be organized and administered and how athletes will qualify to compete:

[Women's skateboarding] is definitely going to be something that needs a lot of work. There's also going to need to be a lot of work in some other countries as well, even on the men's side. There's only a few places in the world where [competitive skateboarding] is really dialled in. There's going to be a lot of work to do in a short period of time.

It would be great if some money trickled down from the federation ... but it's going to be interesting how they allocate that, and who's going to be in charge of giving the money out. From my understanding, there will be a ranking system or something that's going to have to be created for how skaters go to the Olympics, but I don't really know. I keep hearing different things, so I don't know how it's going to work. You're going to have to win certain competitions, I'm assuming, just like other sports.

With the support of the big skateboarding companies and influential skateboarders, the chosen Federation will also be in a good position to contribute to educating the international skateboarding community as to the benefits of Olympic inclusion and to reassure skateboarders that the Federation will be working closely with the IOC and Host City organizing committee to represent skateboarding in ways that are

authentic to skateboarding culture. Since the announcement in September 2015 that skateboarding was short-listed for Tokyo 2020, it has largely been fears of the unknown and loss of control that have caused some anxieties among recreational skateboarders:

There's definitely a right and wrong way to do things. Hopefully, we can have some sort of representation with whoever does end up representing our sport and hopefully make sure the right people are in there, the right format and things like that on the contest side because that's important. I don't know how all that's going to end up playing out in the long run but hopefully we will have someone in charge that is privy to those things.

While FIRS is the Federation historically recognized by the IOC, the skateboarding culture (and ISF and WSF) have articulated the problems of being run by an organization without understanding of the unique culture of skateboarding, and thus expressed concerns of repeating the cultural controversies that ensued when snowboarding was managed by ISF (International Skiing Federation) rather than the International Snowboarding Federation that had been organizing the dominant international competition circuit for many years. Yet, some sources note that if the IOC selected ISF or WSF, it could set a bad precedent by effectively bypassing the IOC's recognition process. On March 15, 2016, a group meeting was held in Lausanne with each of the Federations with the intent to encourage a more cooperative approach, with some sources suggesting that an ultimatum was given that if they did not work together, skateboarding's proposal could be rejected. At the time of report submission, however, the researchers are unaware of the final result of this meeting.

A key theme throughout the interviews, however, was that whatever the final decision regarding the Federation structure, it will be of utmost importance to skateboarders that the IOC works with those who have a deep understanding and respect for the culture:

Skateboarding, it's such a passionate sport! There's a lot of emotion behind the love these guys have, and I just think it gets heated really quickly. They're not used to being told what to do, it causes friction in general. And they're very eccentric. But I think in terms of the best show and the best possible product for NBC and the Olympics, it would be smart to have the experts tell them how to do it so they can have that end result.

Responses to critiques and concerns from the core

While our media analysis suggests that many core, recreational skateboarders are critical of Olympic inclusion (see pp. 48–49), some of our interviewees revealed their personal tensions with this possibility. This was particularly the case for those who have spent their childhoods and young adult lives committed to 'core' skateboarding values, but who have transitioned into roles where their livelihood is dependent on the health (and continual growth) of the skateboarding industry. Interestingly, some also noted that the processes of commercialization and institutionalization have been underway for many years, and thus the inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympics should not suggest that 'skateboarding is selling out', because for many, such processes are already well underway. Some interviewees also commented on the self-focused opinions of recreational or core skateboarders who wanted to 'keep skateboarding for yourself and how you want it to be'. For those who now have careers in the skateboarding industry, many could see the positive possibilities for growth and diversification offered through Olympic inclusion. In so doing, however, most acknowledged that for core 'skateboarders globally ... it's not cool to be part of the establishment', and thus this makes the relationship with the IOC and possible Olympic inclusion that much more difficult for those working with skateboarders (i.e., the Federation, NOC and the IOC):

That's how I view the Olympic thing. You don't want it to be there. You don't want it to be on this world stage because you want to keep it for yourself? That's already way gone with Nike, Monster, Red Bull, and every other corporation involved in skating. That's not even an argument anymore. You can still keep skateboarding for yourself and how you

want it to be. You can live skateboarding exactly how you want it to be, but to hold it back from other people, or potentially hold it back from other people, that seems selfish to me.

The truth is this industry is run by suits, and its run by guys that answer to shareholders. And my job is to ensure that my clients aren't taken advantage of. And it's something that I feel like though you can't stop progress, it's also my job to sort of protect the culture. I don't view surfing and skateboarding from my personal perspective as a sport, I view it as a cultural phenomenon. ... But the Olympics are doing the same thing that ESPN and Mountain Dew and NBC are doing which is exploiting our culture. And is that bad? Yes and no.

I think the way I look at it [Olympic inclusion] is if it's good, if it gets more kids on skateboards, and we can get more kids to experience skateboarding, and it can bring great things to their lives like it has for me and all the people I associate with in skateboarding, then I can view it as a good thing. Of course, nothing's going to be perfect, there's going to be flaws, and we kind of look at it here as you're going to have competition skateboarding that becomes very, very organised and very specific, and has all these rules and regulations and policies and things you have to adhere to be in that business, or be recognised in that business. But then you're going to also have the whole other do-it-yourself aspect or ethos of skateboarding that has always existed. Guys that are building ramps in their back yard, building spots under bridges, filming skating and just living like skaters and doing what they want to do. I think there's going to be room for both, and for me, yeah, I'm in the middle: I'm a grown up that has to have an income because I have a family, and I'm also a skateboarder.

In social media, you can read the comments—f**k that, that's whack, we're going to have to wear uniforms, drug test. Then don't do it, you don't have to do it! No-one's making you do it! No-one's going to change skateboarding, and that was exactly to your point—snowboarding didn't change as far as the people that are filming in the back country and jumping down stairs, and building snow structures in the cities and all that. They didn't change anything. Those guys are still snowboarders.

Sometimes you get very narrow-minded attitudes in skateboarding... They don't want to change things. I've seen the petition for 5,000 but I think that they started it because they don't understand. I think sometimes they want to be able to skate by their own rules, and there's the fear factor of maybe being proliferated by some other organisations that skateboarding's going to take away their freedom, and there's going to be a referee on the local skatepark going 'hey, you can't skate that way'. It really only affects 80 skateboarders in 2020, and it only affects those skateboarders who want to be affected, right!

It's interesting to me because a lot of the core skaters are worried they're going to lose something. They're worried that these jock-like people come into our people just to win the Olympics or to be an Olympic athlete that we're going to lose some of the identity of our sport. But actually, I disagree. I think it's going to have a polarising effect, and almost make the core pure side stronger, because that will always be there. You know, the backyard skaters or street skaters who skate in the middle of the night at illegal spots; that's always going to be a part of skateboarding whether the Olympics come in or not. I don't know, I don't really understand the worry over that.

I personally think no one can take that love that you have for skateboarding away, unless you let them. I feel pretty calm about it. I actually think it'll be a good thing and usher in new opportunities for a lot of people. And a lot of people around the world too.

Difficulties for Athletes within such a strong cultural backlash

An interesting theme that emerged from a small number of interviews was the difficulties for professional skateboarders to publicly support Olympic inclusion in fear of a cultural backlash that will compromise their 'authenticity' within the skateboarding culture:

There is not a skateboarder alive, or very few, that will do an interview and say if they are sponsored, if they earn their living through the skate community, they are not going to say oh I can't wait til the Olympic games. There are some that are old enough and feel comfortable in their skin and financially tied that are able to do it ... but the rest have to watch themselves. But I believe that we will rally skateboarders around this (GR)

The Olympics doesn't look core to the hardcore skaters. ... image is just so important to these guys ... I've had clients turn down such big money because their friends will make fun of them if they do it. I've had clients go off energy drink sponsors because their friends made fun of them. And you know what, I always tell them if your friends got offered that sponsorship, in a second they'd take it. They're making fun of you because they're jealous and they can't make a living. So 100 per cent it's cool to say it's not cool to do the Olympics. We'll see what happens when people get asked.

Other interviewees, however, mentioned the important role that cultural education will take following the announcement in Rio 2016. One participant noting that, if skateboarding is included in Tokyo 2020, the skateboarding industry will need to work with key media producers (e.g., Transnational Skateboarding, Transnational Business) to highlight the strengths of Olympic inclusion and thus try to sway the general attitude of 'anti-Olympics' that continues to pervade many pockets of the core skateboarding community.

The Olympic Effect: Predicted Changes to the Structure of Skateboarding

Many of the interviewees identified possible changes that will (or need to) happen following Olympic inclusion, including instructional programmes for learners to develop skills more safely, and training facilities and coaching for elite skateboarders, few of whom have worked with coaches in their careers to date:

Skateboarding never had programmes to teach people how to skateboard. The US product safety commission found that one third of all skateboarding injuries happen in the first week someone skateboarding. Coaching and instruction programmes never happened but now they're sprouting up. And I think that's another thing the Olympics brings, is those programmes, those gateways into skateboarding.

Most skateboarding is done in an atmosphere with relatively no coaching, no organisation, meaning it's just where the kids mentor one another. One age group to the next age group, pretty amazing. So it's just totally, totally different.

I think it's already changing. And though some governments are looking at it, you still have companies like Nike, like the training facility in Australia for surfing and skateboarding. It's just like any basketball or football or whatever training facility, its proper. You go there, you get better. Red Bull has it. I think it's going to be different, I think it's going to have to be a combination of government and private brands, companies. And that's going to be the toughest part. Because these sports are not okay, we're all Nike/Team USA, not working that way.

I think too, about training and being an athlete, who's in charge of coaching? Some skateboarders don't have coaching, some do; now it's becoming very popular to have a coach. I hear it more and more. So yeah, who's in charge of all this stuff and how does that work. I don't know. I'm not sure...

Anti-competition attitudes and the increase in competition based careers: Forecasted change in investment in skateboarding career choices

While competition skateboarding is growing in popularity, the skateboarding media (i.e., magazines, social media) continues to focus on non-competitive skateboarding (i.e., do-it-yourself spots) and the industry has long focused its investments (i.e., sponsorship dollars) on non-competitive skaters because they best exemplify the 'core' attitudes of the culture.

I think the brands are going to put more money into the farm leagues of skateboarding, if you will ... [But competition skaters haven't had a lot of support]. In skateboarding, you can be a contest skater and have a career, [but few have 'legitimate sponsors']. Then you have other guys that don't skate contests at all. At all! And they're held in such high regard and so highly respected in skateboarding. You have these guys that are iconic skaters that don't give a shit about contests. I think that's going to continue, because that's what traditionally has sold skateboards. Champions have not traditionally sold skateboards or skateboarding products.

However, according to other interviewees, this is changing with more skateboarders participating in competitions and some companies putting more support behind competitive skaters. This is a shift that some interviewees see as a direct response to possible Olympic inclusion:

The top skaters have started doing contests because now they've become important. And the why they become important is because corporate America has invested in them. The dream companies, the shoe companies, the phone companies, the whatever. So all of a sudden to get good sponsorship you've got to be doing televised contests. So, that's why they do them. If they didn't have to do contests, I guarantee most of them, most skaters, wouldn't bother. They'd rather go out on the streets and film and put out that part and skate with their friends or whatever. Because there are a lot of guys doing that for a living right now and doing really well. And they don't have to deal with contests. But the ones that have aspirations of longevity and don't ever want to have to work a real job in their lives, they have to get into the contests and they ride the line.

Another topic that came up in a number of interviews was the topic of drugs and drug testing. As the following interviewee notes, there will be a serious need for proper education for those seeking to go to the Olympics, and also for a 'shake up' within the broader skateboarding industry and events regarding attitudes to drug testing for competitive skateboarders:

I think skateboarding's got some real problems that have to be fixed. Number one is the drug education part of it, and I think that's a huge problem. I just sent an email to WADA and sent an email to Thomas Bach, because I think what Street League did at the Chicago Finals, I don't know if you heard about that? They announced that they were going to do a drug test for the final eight guys, and they did it like a week or two before the event, then they realised that if they were going to go by WADA rules that if anybody tested positive, they would have to suspend them. So then, they cancelled the contest and I think that put a shadow over all of skateboarding that these guys are a bunch of drug users, and I don't think that's fair. So my standpoint is, number one you've got to do the education. These guys are not used to drug testing. This is new to skateboarding, and they're going to want to know when's the last time I can smoke pot before the contest? They're going to want to know things like that. And that's what the education process has to be. I guarantee if you put the proper education processes in, no one will test positive....

The Changing Roles of Corporations

There was a general acknowledgement that most skateboarding brands were in full support of Olympic inclusion because of the economic growth it would offer. However, some noted that it could cause problems for the smaller, more authentic skateboarding companies who may be pushed out of the market when big corporations offer large sponsorship deals that can't be matched by the smaller companies:

Absolutely, the big super powerful companies 100% back it [Olympic inclusion] And this is off the record, but all they are is culture appropriators. The second it stops making them money, guess what, bye. ... they only want you if you're going to be on the podium holding the cup. That's not what surfing is, that's not what skateboarding is. It just isn't. It's personalities and style and vibe, and yeah the competitive guys are that and that's what the Olympics is looking at. But take into consideration the culture and how these brands are coming in and sort of selling culture and why they're doing it.

Now there's this outside force pushing. ... And also to give you context, all the endemic brands now have to worry about all these non-endemic brands pushing at them, stealing their riders, doing all of this. The core skateboarding companies are not necessarily going to win in this Olympic bid. Sure, it could be amazing for Sole Tech or Globe, but it won't be, because these non-endemic guys will come in and buy up everyone, and make the entire podium all Nike guys, that is going to send in the minds of all the kids that oh, they're going to grow up with it is okay that Nike is this, because Nike makes running shoes, and now they make skate shoes, and now they make these things, when it's just a product category.

Fairness, judging/scoring systems

The skateboarding industry is currently exploring an array of different competition formats and judging systems that will be better suited for the Olympic Games. Some interviewees suggested that more rigorous judging and competition criteria are long overdue with much personal (and corporate) bias within competition skateboarding, with others commenting on the need for attention to qualification systems.

Judging: Subjectivity and Personal/Corporate Biases

I've been working on this scoring system that now gives points for every trick. It's something that is going to be a little hard for skateboarding (culture), because skateboarding is used to judging. If you know anything about it right now, it is four or five guys sitting down in a chair and just giving an overall impression. Can you imagine if that was in the Olympics, how people would think that was fair?

There is no proper qualification and there are no rules, there's no standardised scoring. And that's what Rob Dyrdek is trying to do with Street League. I was there for day one with that and I've got to be honest with you, I've seen the evolution of it and if anyone is qualified at this point, Brian Atlas, he's really done a good job of taking it and at least giving it a format, he's giving it proper immediate scoring.

The problem with judging today is half of the skaters don't like certain judges and don't think that they give them a fair shot, because it's subjective, right? And you've got a judge that works for Nike SB and he's got Nike SB skateboarders in the contest and it's subjective. There's a lot of pressure to judge people correctly.

It's going to be really interesting, because the scoring of skateboarding, the judging of skateboarding, is so subjective. It's like 'oh I didn't like it, I wasn't feeling it'. That could

be a comment from a judge. In Street League it tends to get a little more fine-tuned and more specific on how they're judging tricks. But every judging system still has flaws. We're currently working on a scoring system that judges tricks. It's pretty interesting, we're not ready to unveil it yet, but we will soon. It's like a program and it judges the tricks.

Qualification systems: Addressing Biases

As corporate money goes away, and Dew Tour disappears and X Games is the only game in the show, and the only people that get invited for the most part are whoever's sponsoring it. So, when it was a Red Bull event, you got all the Red Bull athletes. Now it's a Monster event, certain athletes, like rock star athletes like my clients are getting left out because they're not on Monster. And kids that shouldn't be in certain disciplines, because they're on Monster, are getting invited. To me that's total bullshit. (MM)

The three big contests outside of the world championships are X Games, Street League and Dew Tour. All three of them are hurting a little bit financially right now. They're not making any money and they're laying off people, but part of the problem is that they all only invite specific skaters. And they invite them based on everything except for how they're doing on the contest, how they compete. ... It's like picking Michael Phelps to swim in the Olympics because he has more Facebook likes than anybody else. And it smacks in the face of traditional sports.

Women's Participation

All the interviewees strongly believed that Olympic inclusion would greatly support the role of women in skateboarding as athletes and in management roles. As previously noted, skateboarding has long been a male-dominated activity (Beal, 1996), but since the announcement that skateboarding was shortlisted for Tokyo 2020 there have already been significant signs of change within the industry to create more opportunities for women in both competitions and in leadership roles in the Federations:

I've seen changes already. For instance, Street League, my perspective is that Street League probably wouldn't have thought to include women at this stage of the game, which is a very late stage of the game. I don't think they would have been pushed to do that had they not realised okay, well, we have to make sure it's an even playing field as far as men and women because you can't introduce that sport into the Olympics unless you have both.

Maybe the numbers [of female skateboarders] are a little low now—the talent's good, but the numbers are down. But the numbers are going to multiply incredibly and the talent is going way up. And it will be done by Tokyo, no question. And any girl who wins a medal at Tokyo, wow, she will be a household name, because the whole industry is wrapped with consumer products and fashion.

You could see that Street League just started including girls, and we can all see what that was. And that's cool. Everyone has to check the boxes off to be recognised by them—by IOC and ISF, so everyone's like doing what they need to do. Kimberley Diamond Cup there's the same thing. They have a girls' division there. So, everyone's trying to make sure that 'hey, we're checking the boxes'. I think it's something as skateboarders, it's such a male-dominated thing, so it's like, 'oh sh*t, that's right, women are there too, duh! It's 50-50, you know?' The possibility of Olympic inclusion puts it on the agenda.

It's still very challenging to create a career in skateboarding for women. Right now there's really only two women in the world that are paid to skate fulltime. Everyone else has nine to five jobs or they're in school or they're kids still with their parents paying for them. There's still a lot more work to be done, but I do think that being in the Olympics will help women the most out of any of the demographics. I think it will be very positive for women.

In contrast to many core male skateboarders who have concerns about the loss of control and authenticity that could happen as a result of Olympic inclusion, the female skateboarders interviewed explained that competitive and/or professional female skateboarders wholeheartedly support skateboarding in the Olympics. This is primarily because it holds the possibility for new opportunities that female skateboarders have never had access to:

We're already used to not having anything so, aside from our own love of skating and the community we've built, there's really nothing to lose at this point for anyone. Even the most hard-core street skater on the girl's side is ready for the Olympics. They could care less, they're like bring it on, let's do this! It's seen through such a different lens for us. We don't have the luxury of some of the men who can just film and do what they want and be more of an artist with their skating. It's definitely seen in a different way by female skaters.

However, some comments suggested that there would be challenges for women when they continue to be judged against male-defined standards and skateboarding remains "an industry based on very core masculine boys club kind of mentality":

Maybe the women can be marketable, I don't know; but so far, women have never sold skateboarding product. And that's just a fact. I remember a girl that I know in skateboarding getting super mad at me when I said that to her before. I was like this isn't my opinion, this is a fact. Women have never sold skateboarding product.

The Street League with the women's event two weeks ago ... just didn't flow. It was very fragmented for me when I watched it. The women competed in the same venue as the men for Street League, and the girls were saying 'oh my god, that drop was so high', and 'that rail was really high'. They're used to having different size street competitions than the men, because they're not held side by side. They were saying certain things were 'really huge', and 'they don't understand we're girls' ... But I don't hear that with bowl. I'm curious what's going on with Street League where the girls feel the obstacles are so much bigger and higher than what they are used to (CW).

Women's Skateboarding Alliance

Founded in 2005 by two professional female skateboarders—Cara-Beth Burnside and Mimi Knoop—the Alliance was an organization aimed at empowering women in the action sports industry. A sub-group of the Alliance is the Women's Skateboarding Alliance—a 'global management and consulting agency dedicated to authentically representing the industry voice of women's skateboarding'—that formed in 2015 under the leadership of long-time professional skateboarder, Mimi Knoop, and four other women involved in the skateboarding industry primarily in marketing and media roles. The WSA has been an important initiative to ensure women are involved in how female skateboarders are represented (MacKay & Dallaire, 2013), and some members of WSA have been part of group meetings and decision making leading skateboarding towards (and beyond) Tokyo 2020. With gender equity within the skateboarding industry and at skateboarding events an ongoing issue, each of the skateboarding federations have been making significant efforts to improve their gender balance in management roles as well as opportunities for athlete. According to a key member of the WSA, the group have not yet 'aligned with anyone. We're

kind of just in the wings watching and waiting. We just want the best for the women, so how that plays out we'll see'. Their hope is that the alliance will be 'involved in some capacity in terms of representation' of women skateboarders at the Olympics:

We've been the voice for the professionals for a long time. Sometimes we can make great things happen, other times we can just listen and try to pass along the message to the people we work with. We've done a really good job of being there, being a tightly knit group with the athletes, so I would hope that that would continue on to the Olympic stage.

A lot of times at events where the guys are running the events and a lot of them really don't know who the girls are or what their needs are. A lot of times it just gets swept under the rug and the girls end up getting stuck with whatever they get. It's almost like the women's side is an afterthought. That's one of the reasons we did form [the Women's Skate Alliance] over a decade ago, to make sure we were represented. So whoever the responsibility lands with in terms of representing skateboarding, I would hope that they would work with our group because it really is not about one person, whether it's myself or a guy from another company. It's not about one person just giving their opinion, it should be a collective voice from the athletes and that's kind of what we represent. So yeah, I hope that we can continue to do that on the Olympic level.

Need for cultural understanding and some negotiations

Despite their varying positions on the possible inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympic Games and perspectives on leadership options, each of the interviewees in this project emphasised the importance of 'doing it right'. In other words, this means representing skateboarding in a way that remains true to some of the core values of the sporting culture. For this to happen, they argued that the IOC will need to work with skateboarders with one noting that this will need to an 'ongoing conversation' as both the IOC and skateboarding culture have their own unique 'languages' (rules/regulations/norms/terminology) and for a productive relationship both sides will need to be willing to listen to and respect the other. Many of the interviewees suggested that negotiation would need to be made by both skateboarders and the IOC:

If the international federation and the IOC keep the authenticity and they respect the rules, not the rules because these sports don't really have rules but we have a spirit, some values, that we need to keep in order to still be followed by the fans (OP)

We are part of the process and we want to bring the action sports to the Olympics. If the IOC or the federation oblige the skateboarders or the riders, for example to wear a uniform, this is a fault, and no way, I prefer not see skateboarding at the Olympics than oblige the rider to wear some uniform. We need to keep the authenticity; again some compromise with the dollar. But it's mandatory to keep the values and authenticity (OC).

What does the IOC gain from the inclusion of skateboarding?

As the quotes below illustrate, interviewees see the potential of the inclusion of action sports in the Olympics for attracting younger viewers, signalling a shift in the Olympics towards more contemporary sporting trends and a clear youth-focus, and bringing a unique combination of sport/music/popular culture/fashion and art to the Olympics that (if done well) will offer a distinctive experience for attendees as well as international audiences. There was also mention of the potential for the facilities built for skateboarding and climbing at the Olympics to offer a unique legacy for the host city with a skatepark/climbing wall that can be used by local residents, as well as attracting national and international action sport tourists for many years to come. Some interviewees also noted the value of action sports for showing spectacular performances but in the true spirit of Olympism, with athletes valuing personal achievement and peer-encouragement over winning and nationalism.

Youth relevance. There's not a sport on the globe that has more youth relevance than skateboarding. It's very youth relevant, it's very accessible, it's global, and also there's a huge percentage of the sport/activity that does not compete, so there is the complementary side to the competition of skateboarding, that it's an art form. And it's also driven by what youth are doing with technology and ... music.... This little thing that we have in our hands is a tool for lifestyle sports. So there's a perfect storm.

If we are presented on the global stage in Tokyo, it should be a celebration with world-class music, social media and art, and the world's best skateboarders. And we will deliver the youth to your doorstep. And in the process, we will change the thought process of youth globally. ... if the IOC allows skateboarding to present itself in the right way, after the games the IOC will be the hero [emphasis added].

A real, real, global vibe! That's what's going to happen. This is world changing for youth. This is a powerful influential passionate group of kids globally. They live what they do. A huge proportion of skateboarding has nothing to do with competition: you live it it's all about the style, the fashion, it's an art form.

Skateboarding is going to make the Olympics so much cooler and hipper.

I get why the Olympics are starting to consider these fringe or action sports is ratings. Their seamless success, the cultural phenomenon is real and you can't deny that they're athletes, even in skateboarding they're athletes, they're kids that train and go out and they skate three, four, five, six hours a day and they are true athletes.

The skatepark built for the Olympics is the opportunity for the IOC to really start a sustainability legacy programme. I think for Tokyo it's important—people want to understand when the Olympics comes, what benefits them after the Olympics goes? And skateboarding is the perfect mechanism to help with that. I think it's going to be hopefully they're talking about building a temporary skatepark and leaving a permanent one later, and that's good for me. That's important—a skatepark left for the community.

I want to see skateboarding portrayed as the freedom that it has, for these guys to show the natural beauty of skateboarding. But I also want it to be helpful to the Olympics, because I think it will. If it's done right, I think it's going to be very helpful to the Olympics. I want to see it portrayed on TV as a positive sport for young people, because skateboarding is turning from this backstreet, grungy, sort of thing to more of just a cool way of living. Plus, the thing about skateboarding is, when you get on the skatepark everybody's equal. Everybody is the same. And I think there's a lot of social cohesion the rest of the world can learn from skateboarding, and hopefully that message comes through in the TV broadcast.

Visions for Tokyo 2020

Some of the interviewees, particularly those who have been intimately involved in the process of shortlisting have some strong visions of what skateboarding should look like in Tokyo. Some of the key points here included 1) a skatepark as a legacy for Tokyo youth and tourists, and 2) an event that sits at the intersection of art, music and youth culture. A number of interviewees also noted the need for careful consideration as to the representation of skateboarding to mainstream audiences, and the importance of making the judging system clear and easy for non-skateboarding audiences to understand:

The skatepark built for the Olympics is the opportunity for the IOC to really start a sustainability legacy programme by leaving a skatepark for the community.

It should be a celebration with world-class music, social media and art, and the world's best skateboarders. And we will deliver the youth to your doorstep. And in the process, we will change the thought process of youth globally. ... If the IOC allows skateboarding to present itself in the right way, after the games the IOC will be the hero.

I wouldn't make it very complicated. I would make it very easy to understand for the layperson, for the person watching. I would do the typical Olympic style of tons of back-story, tons of history. I would make sure the announcers are explaining what's going on, and talking about it. And I would probably throw some wild cards in there beyond the ranking system. I would also probably try to show the artistic side of skateboarding, and the non-competitive side of skateboarding, and maybe that's done with the back stories, or whatever, but show where it came from, where it's going to. But I wouldn't make it too complicated for TV though. There's a few things that work in skateboarding, and a few formats that really work well on TV, I think and I would stick to that. I can tell you one thing—a traditional best trick contest where there's a hundred kids flying at an obstacle, that would suck for TV.

I want to see skateboarding portrayed as the freedom that it has, for these guys to show the natural beauty of skateboarding. ... I want to see it portrayed on TV as a positive, because skateboarding is turning from this backstreet, grungy, sort of thing to this more of just a cool way. Plus, the thing about skateboarding is, when you get on the skatepark everybody's equal. Everybody is the same. And I think there's a lot of social cohesion the rest of the world can learn from skateboarding, and hopefully that message comes through in the TV broadcast.

During the interviews, some also offered their reflections on the decisions as to which skateboarding events are best suited for the Olympic Games, and why street and park were the two events chosen from many options (i.e., big air, vert/halfpipe, mega ramp). While there were some differing opinions on what events should be part of the Olympic format, most recognised street skating as the most culturally relevant and park as an opportunity to reveal the energy of a pool event, with a number of interviewees mentioning the Van Doren Invitational at Huntington Beach that runs alongside the US Surfing Open as an exemplar for the 'vibe' they would love to see at the Olympics:

I definitely think if big air ever made it into it ... the kind of the mega ramp stuff. If that was on a world stage that would be just as exciting as the ski jumping where they flip; I have no idea what they're doing but I enjoy that. I think if street was in there, the people are going to see that some of the biggest influencers in the world are skateboarders. So that'll be cool, people will see that Nyjah or Paul Rodriguez have just as much influence, I don't want to say street cred but street recognisability as a Kobe Bryant or something, in these places that skateboarding is huge.

I have nothing against vert but the reality is that vert riders are still the same since ages. Why? It's just because it's too expensive for municipalities to install vert so there is not a lot of vert, especially in Europe, maybe more in USA but I doubt it. So, it's expensive. For the ramp it's also dangerous, because when you fall on the vert you fall out and you hurt; when you fall directly on the flat it's a big crash and it's the same for BMX and for roller. So, that's why for me vert is not the future of the sport.

Street League is still pretty new. I like watching Street League but I know some people think it's not as exciting to watch because it's one at a time, very structured, but I think they've tweaked it every year and it's getting closer to what it might be in 2020.

I think that the street aspect of it is because in those big urban centres you have hundreds of thousands of those kids who skate that way. And that's why you have such a diverse pool of people and people are interested in, and those guys are also the more stylish guys

who have broader influence in who are in rap videos or hang out with rock stars or anything like that kind of comes out of that group.

2.3.3 Sport Climbing: Key themes from interviews

In this section, we present themes from interviews with five key members of the international sport-climbing community, including current and past competitive climbers, a CEO of a national climbing federation, the President and a key member of the international federation (IFSC), and a director of a leading climbing company. Interviews ranged from 1–2.5 hours in duration with each participant offering valuable insights from their unique perspectives within the sport-climbing culture and industry, and with varying levels of involvement in the short-listing and preparation of the sport for Tokyo 2020.

Perceptions of the impact of the Olympic Games on sport-climbing: global growth, diversity and development

In the contemporary climbing industry, it tends to be outdoor climbers who hold the most cultural status, and thus receive the most media coverage and largest sponsorship deals. Competition or sport climbers are a small (but rapidly growing) segment of the climbing culture, and as they typically train indoors and compete in highly formalised events, there has been a tendency for them to be marginalized in the broader climbing culture which continues to hold true to the lifestyle sport philosophies of self-expression, freedom and anti-establishment (Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Robinson 2008). Thus, for most sport climbers the possibility of inclusion into the Olympic Games is warmly welcomed as it is likely to increase the mainstream visibility of their sport and offer new opportunities for increased sponsorship deals. As the following quotes illustrate, there is overwhelming support from the sport climbing community for inclusion in Tokyo 2020:

Benefits for athletes

- Greater visibility and mainstream exposure.
- Greater financial support for competitive climbers.
- A shift for some companies in sponsoring competitive climbers instead of solely focusing on outdoor climbers.

The athletes, by being in the Olympics, might have much higher profiles and be able to command more money for advertisement or for endorsements or programmes. That could change dramatically.

Across the world, there is really low funding for competition climbers. ... The industry, like the climbing companies, they don't sell product by using competitors in their campaigns. Outdoor climbing provides a much more glamorous picture of travel, good spots... beautiful people in beautiful places ... and this is what sells product [edited for clarity].

We don't get paid to train, we don't get paid to go climbing, we don't get paid to compete, we don't get paid for travelling ... There's no support for climbers at any level. Who is going to go to the Olympics and who is going to pay for this? ... if climbing gets into the Olympics, much more money is going to flow into climbing.

If you're an athlete, like a competitor, you spend your everyday life training for maybe eight competitions a year, making €1,000 a month. So going to the Olympics

is something they expect, something they want ... because going to the Olympics means getting more funding to be able to make a life.

I also think that what's going to happen is it's likely that a company will take a look at competition specific specialists as well, where before that might not have been the case because the imagery that you get out of an athlete in the mountains climbing on some beautiful cliff is much more compelling than an indoor gym.

from a professional point of view, what those guys need is to make money. There is no conflict issue with being a professional and making money and the commercialisation of the sport—this is totally fine. Part of the job is to make the sport more popular and they know that the Olympics is a means to do this. ... We're far from surfing, skateboarding and all these different sports in terms of money, in terms of visibility, in terms of sponsors. ... I remember the first sponsorship contract from Adidas in Europe, it was two or three years ago and it was for €3,000 per year. Just to give you an idea of how much money we're talking about when we talk about professional climbers. It's just nothing!

Global diversity

- Due to the accessibility of the sport, the Olympics will further encourage international growth of climbing in less developed countries and regions.
- Some noted that changes in the format for speed climbing by IFSC has already facilitated this process of internationalization of the sport.

I think [Olympic inclusion] would also open up a lot more teams into areas that don't have much representation, because you don't need to have the environment, you can build this in any country and any temperature range for any economic level. I think we'd see huge interest coming out of China for sport climbers, no one knows they are even there, really, outside of China. But there's a lot of really great ones. It's probably like that all over. I think it would open up a lot more people to the sport.

The more climbing gyms are built around the world, the more climbers we have. One of the biggest issues we face today, especially in countries in Africa but also in Asia, is that since we are not an Olympic sport any kind of project is almost blocked when we go to the national Olympic committee. It's 'oh it's not an Olympic sport, we have requests from other sports, blah blah blah'. Although many authorities, including ministries of sports, recognise the value of the sport, they don't invest in it. So this will change. It's not only the media exposure, it's also the grass roots, the fusion of the sport.

I will say that IFSC did change the format of speed maybe five or six years ago to homologate it, whereby it's a specific route on a specific wall and it's inspected with a micrometer to make sure it's built and set up within tolerance. At the time, that was a big move. But now having seen it play out, it was a great move, because what happened was it for years traditionally smaller countries had no chance of competing at the international level in bouldering or lead. But with homologation of that route and making it accessible worldwide, they immediately made it a medal that a more non-traditional country could win. Like we're seeing development of really good speed climbers out of Iran. And the US, and South America, and countries that have traditionally never really had great teams with the other

disciplines but speed was what they needed. Having seen it play out the way it did, I believe 100% that it was the right thing to do.

Opportunities for Women: as athletes and leaders

Similar to skateboarding, most interviewees recognized the inclusion of sport climbing into the Olympic Games as having many benefits for competitive female climbers, and the next generation of young women entering the sport. In contrast to skateboarding, however, many of the interviewees noted that climbing has not been as traditionally male dominated as other action sports (i.e., surfing, skateboarding) and the requirements of the activity do not privilege the male or female body, or any particular body type. There are a number of world famous female climbers who have been successful in their own right, with some out-performing their male peers (Robinson, 2016). Thus, gender relations in climbing have been different to many other action sports (Dilley & Scraton, 2010) and this was illustrated in the interviews:

From the very beginning, it appears in terms of participation we have almost the same figures. ... depending on the event, for example the youth championships last year I think it was 40 (girls) : 45 (boys), to 60 (boys) : 55 (girls), depending on the age category. ... Climbing is very attractive for women and it can be proposed as an equal gender sport. Why, because there is no direct comparison between the men and the women. In other words, we create routes for men and routes for women where actually we give to both genders the best possibility to express the skills of their body, because they are not the same. ... In sport climbing both genders can reach the top in different ways. So they can really express the particularity of their body skills.

There's not really a super type that you have to be in order to be great. There are tall climbers and short climbers and thin climbers and heavy climbers—they come in all shapes. There's not a lot of short basketball players. It's open to a lot more people, because a lot of it also requires balance and that it allows the women athletes to really maybe even outperform the men athletes. So you don't get a one-sided sport. You have one that both sides have really interesting top athletes and abilities.

However, some interviewees noted that there was less gender balance in organizational management and leadership within climbing:

In the IFSC the secretary-general is from the US, a lady from the US, and then we have another lady who is the president of the Pan American council. So we have 20 per cent of membership of the executive board is female. It's not easy. I still see that in the sport world, okay it's difficult to enter this world because yes, it is male dominated, but also listen to my people. They say you don't find so many women motivated to get in, and honestly I don't know why this is. ... I think that in the future we need to motivate more women to be active on the political level,

Industry growth and participation rates

- Overwhelming support for potential economic growth the Olympics could offer for the climbing industry.
- Growth at national federation levels.
- Olympic inclusion could lead to great support and opportunities for competitive climbers within University structures (e.g., scholarships).

From my perspective, it's 100 per cent positive. I can see some people saying 'oh, it's now being commercialised, it's the commercialisation of my individualistic

outdoor environmental sport'. But, I think that's inevitable anyway, and this would give it more of a sanctioned body. It would give the ability to promote better, and then use that interest to protect them. But, I think it's super positive. ... I think it would be not only beneficial for businesses but also the colleges we work with and the schools, and then the hundreds of thousands of sport climbers who could then participate or at least enjoy them.

It's a stage like no other, in terms of the popularity of the sport. Putting climbing on the Olympic stage is going to reach viewers that we've never been able to reach. My sincere belief is that as soon as climbing is represented on that stage we're going to see a spike in the growth of our membership.

Governance

In contrast to skateboarding, sport climbing has one international federation, the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) that is leading the development of the sport and the proposal for Olympic inclusion. The IFSC was founded in 2007 when a group of passionate sport climbers decided to leave the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) due to ongoing frictions. According to one interviewee, the initial motivation to start the *IFSC* was to “not leave the sport in the hands of the bureaucrats, let's manage the sport ourselves”. The IFSC has worked closely with the IOC since their foundation, such that one participant described it as “deep cooperation”, and another also described a productive working relationship:

From the very beginning, we tried to work with the IOC. The reason is very simple. We are almost new to this world and we are not politicians. So even when we created the IFSC in 2007 we tried to get advice from them how to make the statutes, how to make the structure, because what we have seen over the years was other federations who had been existing for maybe 100 years, then when they had to change or make some decision it maybe took one year or two years and this is not okay. We didn't want to be the same as those. Not because they are bad but simply because they are caught, they are really bound by their structure. So, the collaboration with the IOC started from the very beginning. And now... we have seen something change in the IOC and we work very well together. ... This is probably something new, because in the past I think that there was some distance between the international federations and the IOC. This time it looks like we are really working together, so something has changed.

Despite a positive working relationship and ‘deep cooperation’ between the IOC and IFSC, there was some confusion as to the process following Tokyo 2020, which was making a more long-term approach to planning difficult for the IFSC:

It will be interesting to understand what is the procedure for the next Olympic Games, because if we are chosen for 2020, we are chosen for 2020 only. Then, at the moment there is no clear path for the procedure to accept a new event—now we are talking about events, we are not talking about new sports so new events in 2024. So what we know is after Rio there will be an evaluation of the 310 events in Rio and then the IOC will decide which events to keep, and which events should disappear or are suspended from the Olympic games. When this is done then we will know how many new events can be included for the future. So there are still a lot of things to be defined inside the IOC to understand what will be the future of the IFSC and the other eventually chosen federations inside the Olympic family in the Olympic program. ... there is still a lot of uncertainty about the future of our position or the five sports that can be chosen for 2020. Of course, we have a plan that takes into account the positive choice, if this happens but it is difficult to think well beyond.

From our side, we cannot say in terms of money what this will bring because still we don't know exactly which will be our position inside the Olympic family in terms of money. Because we have been told immediately that we will not touch the television rights for Tokyo or anything, but there we will negotiate with the IOC something else, including the fact that if we are chosen then we have to manage the sport. Tokyo is not exactly around the corner so we need to have people going there, working with the national federation.

In theory that's Tokyo and then either they put in place some new process to integrate eventually these sports into what they call the core sports, there's 28 so far, or they don't do that process and then we have to start again with 2024. I know the intention is to eventually integrate some of these action sports, but they need to create a process ... There's a couple of problems because if they want to evaluate us, to put us in the core program, technically they can do it in 2020 but let's say the answer is even 2021, that's three years before the 2024 games. So, it's too late. Basically, I guess they're pretty aware of this; they need to find a different way. But that's one question we have for them since the announcement came—what's your plan after Tokyo? And I guess the plan is some sort of evaluation in the mean time. But if you evaluate us, then that means that somehow we should be aware of what you want. If we can agree on what is the wish situation in three years, four years, then we can dedicate our time to making sure we meet these criteria.

A few interviewees from within the international climbing community expressed some concerns over the leadership of the IFSC, though this was a small minority and the general opinion was one of optimism and hope for what Olympic inclusion would mean for sport climbers (as athletes) and the industry more broadly:

The way that I see it right now is that there are many, many national federations that are run more effectively than our international federation. Strategically, financially, fiduciarily. I can tell you right now Austria, France, Germany, each of their independent federations is run much better than our international federation. These folks [from the well-run national federations], they're not throwing up red flags or stop signs, they're just asking questions like what do you think this will mean to the future bouldering world cup circuit? We ask that question and there's no answer. We typically get that kind of response from our international federation, and I get it part of it is because they just don't have time to accurately dive into these issues and really think about them. But, if they need to take the time to strategically plan out how these things are supposed to go, then take the time to do that, don't offer some shiny bauble when the long-term goal still has little clarity in terms of where we're going or how we're going to get there. ... I'm not convinced that climbing's international federation has it's shit together.

I think that our international federation suffers from a lack of financial support with sponsorship. ... The international federation has been driving towards this path of discussion on inclusion in the Olympics, like this is where we're going, and in the meantime they've been very hopeful that that would help generate sponsorship leads at least, in the meantime by being on that track and it has generated zero. I'm not sure that their marketing or sales people can effectively speak on behalf of the sport to sell it to a non-endemic sponsor because they themselves are not climbers, they're not competition climbers.

I don't have a whole lot of faith that the people that are leading the charge internationally to develop this have a clear strategy or direction in where they want to go.

Interestingly, some within the IFSC openly admitted some of the challenges they have faced in terms of the dual roles of continuing to support the international growth and development of their sport, and

preparation for possible Olympic inclusion, but with little support in this process. One interviewee suggested the need for a more hands-on approach from the IOC to help them through this ‘teething process’ of preparing for the Olympic Games, and another also called for more support from the IOC as they work through new processes and learn new roles and responsibilities as an international federation preparing a new sport for the Olympic Games:

In the last two years, I basically switched my priorities from management, managing events, to membership and Olympic bid management. Which means that the events are somehow left alone [under resources]. This can last for one, two years more, but at some point, we need to put some extra effort into the events to make sure that they still improve. But I’m obliged to work on the membership and also the Olympic bid because this is where the fire is burning. At some point, we need some resources to do the job. Or maybe that’s the job of the IOC to tell us— okay, forget about this, that’s fine, now focus on this. But so far we cannot do this because we have to answer to all the stakeholders. ... This relationship between the IOC and the IFs should be addressed. And Christian and Pierre know this, but I think they are somehow blocked with some higher political consideration and some situation with the IOC, so it’s not their fault. It’s a choice from the executive of the IOC but I believe that that’s something we need to address anyway. Again, it’s not asking for more money, because money is one thing but it’s mostly resources and advice [that we need].

I would really love to have a relationship with them [the IOC] and say ‘Okay, yes, we have some problems, these are this one, this one, this one. Now we work on these issues, but you need to help us’. We put a timeframe and some resources and all these things, and that would be much better for us, the IFSC. Then if at the end of this period we did not tick all the boxes then that’s okay, too bad, we wait for the next time. And we keep on working on those things.

Another challenge that the IFSC has faced has been the communication with the broader climbing community, particularly during times of heightened sensitivity in relation to the process of working with the IOC:

This job of explaining to the community is not an easy one and if you don’t have the opportunity to do it then you might miss the support of the community. But some guys would say ‘okay, I’m sorry, I have some more important things than just the question of the guy at the local club in France’, but that’s really important especially in the world today with social networking, if we don’t have these conversations and have an open line of communication, there is the chance the a social media post could really put fire on something. So that’s the problem, it’s not an easy job.

The IFSC is also facing many difficult decisions as to how to grow the sport and harness the increased attention into support without losing touch with the core of the climbing community. The following quote illustrates this concern in relation to sponsorship, and the need to maintain close connections with the culture:

If we get some big sponsor on board, we need also to leave a space for the smaller sponsor, the one coming from the community. That could be in a different form because they could be an official technical sponsor but we have to leave a space for the real people coming from the community. If we accept support from big corporations, like Coca Cola and all these things, those are nothing to do with climbing, then the IFSC will only manage marketing product and not the heart of the sport. That’s why it’s important to not forget where we come from.

National federations

Many national organizing bodies are in the process of preparing for possible infrastructural changes and hoping for additional resourcing if climbing is included in the Olympic Games. However, interviewees noted that while many are very hopeful, they are adopting a ‘business as usual’ model until a decision is confirmed. It is possible that the previous near short-listing of sport climbing could have influenced this constrained enthusiasm for the latest short-listing. The potential of increased funding to support their athletes and set up Olympic-appropriate infrastructure is much anticipated by some federations, particularly those that have been struggling financially over recent years:

And since it [Olympic inclusion] is a dream for most of them, they are thinking, ‘okay let’s wait before we move and once this will be done [officially announced] now we will begin organizing’, but yes, it’s already moving. Already there’s some signs that people are getting started, mostly in the federation and in all the formalised groups, like the NOCs, the federation, the political bodies, they are starting to get some direction in order to get on board and get their organisations aligned with the objective of the Olympic games. So, there are some movements that are started. But still it’s not full speed. They’re still looking at the competition of tomorrow. But that’s good for us [IFSC] because it gives us more time to understand what the changes are going to be otherwise we would be like ‘okay we do business as usual’, and then get a phone call ‘okay, now you’re in the Olympic games’—it would be a huge mess because then everybody would be calling and saying ‘oh what can we do, what is the event, what is the discipline, oh you did that, no, it’s not possible’

The other piece that would definitely be beneficial is its revenue [as a result of Olympic inclusion]. We’re talking about increased amounts of revenue coming to us through any of these different streams. I think the main recipient of any of those additional funds that comes from that needs to come down to climbing’s athletes [within the National Federations] to support them in their participation in international competition.

The biggest impact will be on the national federations. Why? Because the day sport climbing is an Olympic sport, then the national federations will automatically be recognised by the national Olympic committee as an Olympic organisation and they will have access to the Olympic preparation funds. So, it is not peanuts. This will be really the big change for our national federation. I think in most countries, if not all, the national Olympic committee helps the national federation of each sport to prepare their athletes for the Olympics.

We’re only now in the process of applying for recognition from our national Olympic committee. The reason I’m finally doing it is because of the proposal for inclusion in 2020. For many, many years it’s been irrelevant to me in terms of whether or not the sport of climbing was part of the Olympic family, because we got plenty of things to do here [in country] with our competitions that we’re going to do regardless of whether or not we’re going to the Olympics or not. We’ve always had any number of projects that we just got to get done, so to me that’s always been on the backburner. But even beyond that, the way that I’ve tried to position the sport here in the [name of country] is I would much rather continue to dive into what we do, do it better and better and better, and sit back and wait for the [National] Olympic committee to come to us and say we really want, we need to get you to apply to this because climbing is coming into the Olympics, very likely, you’re the market leader in the US, we don’t know what we’re doing with the sport of competition climbing so let’s do this.

My fear with the [National] Olympic committee is that they’ll suddenly try to seize control from our national federation. I don’t know if that’s just speculation or me being

some kind of conspiracy theorist but it is a fear. And I don't feel confident that there are many other people that will try and protect the heart and soul of what we do, and keep that link to action sport alive. My fear is with Olympic inclusion or recognition or support that suddenly it's turning into a homogenous, easily recreated sport that moves further and further away from the sport that we actually practice in our free time outside of competition.

While generally in full support of Olympic inclusion, some within national federations were concerned that IFSC hadn't fully considered the 'trickle down' effects of the combined approach for the ways their activities and events are funded, supported and organized:

I don't think the international federation is thinking about what those trickle-down effects (of the combined approach) will be at national level because let's be honest, those five rings, every one of my members is going to want us to target that, because that's their child that has the chance to go to the Olympics. It's going to be a battle for us to continue to invest the amounts that we do in those other successful disciplines. ... it's a trickle-down effect and we really won't have much communication to offer until I see final voting from the IOC that climbing is in fact going to be represented in 2020. My defence at that point is going to be, and I don't know how forward I'm being, that other than adding an Olympics trial I don't have any assurances that climbing will be in the Olympics in 2024, so why would I try and change what has traditionally been successful for us, as informed by what's right now something that may not happen. I know I'm being pessimistic. And number two, if it does happen in 2020, we have no guarantees that it will be in 2024 or even look the same as it did in 2020.

As noted by the IFSC, the lack of long-term certainty of Olympic inclusion is causing some difficulties for national federations in terms of their willingness to change major sporting infrastructure for one event. If and when a more longer-term vision for sport climbing's inclusion into the Olympics is announced, there will likely be a more enthusiastic embrace of the major changes that will be required for Olympic inclusion.

Critiques and concerns from the core

As previously noted, all of the interviewees were in full support of Olympic inclusion, though mention was made to some tensions and concerns within the broader climbing community. Here we present four themes of tension:

1. Outdoor climbers versus indoor climbers.
2. Generational differences in attitudes to Olympic inclusion.
3. Environmental impact and overcrowding.
4. A combined approach: For and against.

The latter point (#4) was of the most contention among interviewees who expressed many concerns from the sport climbing culture and industry as to what the ripple-effects of this decision will be for how sport climbing organizations are structured, events run, and resources allocated.

1. Climbing culture: Outdoor versus indoor

- Philosophical differences between outdoor and indoor climbers means that outdoor climbers are typically less enthusiastic about Olympic inclusion, whereas indoor climbers are almost in full support
- Non core, recreational indoor climbers will likely find climbing in the Olympics 'very entertaining'

I kind of feel if the people who are doing expedition climbing, that are climbing in the Himalayas and stuff, they're less likely to be excited about the Olympics because they're more focussed on the individual sport of adventure. Sport climbers are such a small per centage of the actual population, but I think probably a big per centage of those probably would love to see climbing as an Olympic sport. ... Whereas the large number of people just doing indoor climbing as a health benefit, as a way of working out, I think that group, which is much larger, would be very interested in seeing it in the Olympics, because it's entertaining for them.

I would say just different opinions within outdoor climbing. Because climbers, at least the people I've been working with and the people I'm climbing with, they don't pay a lot of attention to competition climbing. You know, like the old school thing with the lifestyle sport is not competitive blah, blah, blah. I wouldn't say there is no competition, but there is no interest for competition climbing.

If we just go back to the divide between competition and outdoor climbers, because the ones who will go to the competition are the competitive climbers. But, the aesthetic or the artistic side of the activity and all the lifestyles and these dimensions are much more associated with outdoor climbing styles than with competition climbing. Competition climbing is much more an athletic view of competition ... it's just like you go in isolation, you go out and you have five minutes to climb, that's it: You don't talk to anyone, you don't see anyone. You go from one room to another. Just look at the clothing for example. They have special gym clothing and all this stuff. It's not core climbing culture that is on display with competition climbing (edited for clarity).

2 *Generational differences in attitudes to Olympic inclusion*

- Many of the interviewees noted differences between older climbers who tend to hang on to anti-establishment philosophies, and younger climbers who are less critical of Olympic inclusion

There are some competitors that are really excited about this because the Olympics are the premier stage for international sporting events period. Those that are most excited are probably 11- or 12-years-old at this point. For these young athletes the sky's the limit—they just want to know what needs to happen so that they can prepare accordingly. ... The older athlete ... it's much more likely that that person is upset about the format that's being proposed because up until now we've never really highlighted this "all-round climber", we've highlighted the specialist. And created world cup series that are specialised. For those people, it's too late already. They really don't have a chance at getting to the Olympics because they're past their prime. If they're a world champion right now, it's statistically unlikely that they'll still be at that level in five years.

There's always going to be traditionalists that think competition climbing is the dumbest, most contrived thing that is not linked to the sport of climbing that they could ever imagine. It's not only not even climbing it's some bastardised step-child of a sport they love, because it's not held outside, it doesn't deal with the natural environment, it's a manmade environment, and those people want to complain about things anyway, no matter what they're saying.

Some coming from the old guard like me maybe would have some reluctance in accepting the fact that sport climbing has become such a sport. ... But today there are less and less frictions so there are less and less concerns about the future of the

sport, because new generations have come, and the new generations are not part of this culture or process; the new generation just lives for today and for tomorrow. They don't have the history of climbing on their cell phones so actually it's very difficult for them to know. Yes, some people are complaining but they are a real minority. For me, the problem is not minority or majority. It's the fact that I think that deep in their heart, everybody is happy if we go to the Olympics. Because whatever your practice – sport climbing, outdoor, traditional climbing—it's always climbing. So being in the Olympics should make everybody happy. Then you know, some people, especially from the old guard, they don't feel considered anymore so they have to say something and I understand that.

I think the younger climbers all want it. So, say under 25, probably a big percentage would like it. Older climbers feel that maybe it will bring too many people to the sport, and therefore the climbing areas could become more overcrowded. But my opinion is that by having more people you have more resources to protect those areas. With less people involved and less people who care about something, the less people are willing to vote to maintain it, or to take care of it. I think in general, the feeling in the climbing community is it would be a great thing, and the only fear would be that it brings more people to climbing. That's always the case.

I'll say it now. I'll call it now that I'm going to see a young athlete tell an older athlete 'yeah, climbing in the Olympics, that makes sense to me. I was on NBC Sports last week, Olympics makes sense, it's a great opportunity for me to promote my brand'. And I will know we have come full circle because those older athletes, they're not even thinking in those terms anymore. But for the younger athletes, if they're smart enough they'll see that that's the direction that they need to take to have some level of personal success within climbing.

3. Environmental impact and overcrowding

As noted in the quotes above, there is some concern that the inclusion of climbing in the Olympics will increase the number of participants and thus lead to overcrowding in outdoor climbing spaces and thus heighten the environmental degradation that is already occurring. Some, however, noted that climbers tend to be environmentally conscious so the inclusion of climbing into the Olympic Games could lead to great environmental awareness:

I'm not sure what is going to happen to the sport in terms of outdoor access, sustainability and all this stuff. The issue is just that the sport growing, and it will grow even more with the Olympics, but outdoor spaces are limited. But again, when you look at indoor climbers today—or gym climbers as we call them—they don't go outdoors too much to that won't even be an issue.

I think actually, even the ones who are afraid that [Olympic inclusion] will bring too many people, don't really quite understand that the growth in sport climbing is really a growth in environmental beliefs, because it's the general attitude of the people who do it. And I think what they would see with a rise in participants is more power, there would be more protection and more opening of outdoor spaces. There's always a strong environmental slant to climbing, and everybody involved is also pretty much involved in environmental programmes.

4. Debate over the combined approach: Speed, Lead and Bouldering

There was a lot of confusion and frustration among sport climbing industry personal as to why the IFSC opted for a combined approach (speed, lead and bouldering scores combined). But, as noted below, the IFSC was hamstrung in what they could communicate to their broader community and this has led to tensions and fears about the unknown:

There is a big debate around the combined. Basically, it's because we have one medal. Some people keep thinking that we chose combined instead of asking for three medals. But it's not the case, the case was actually that the quota for us to be in the games was one medal; so either there was one discipline or the combined. People really don't know this so we need to explain this to the athletes—'look, there was no choice to put all three disciplines in otherwise we had to do away some disciplines'. This explanation of what happened in the past months, the rationale of the decision the IFSC made to put climbing in the Olympic games needs to be explained to the people in order to have their support of this. That was not possible in the past months because we [IFSC] were supposed to keep all of the bidding information secret. It's still the case normally, but we need to explain at some point....

As I understand it, what was originally proposed was speed. Which is the most contrived of all of these disciplines, because there's only a very small link between speed climbing and what people practice if they go climbing outside. So with bouldering, yes people go bouldering outside, and in general the format of a competition mirrors something that people do for fun as their action sport. Lead climbing same thing. There's a large practising group of folks internationally that go lead climbing regularly. Speed climbing though ... I think that once the international federation saw that there is specific interest at the Olympic level in speed, I think they took a step back and said 'well what does that mean about the sport overall, because we really need to get these other disciplines represented so that the world doesn't think that competition climbing is only speed climbing'. I think that the reason they partially did that is because there's a lack of a user group practising speed climbing in their daily lives, and there's just far fewer participants in competition speed climbing and spectating. And I believe that's partially because people just aren't speed climbing for fun.

Interviewees offered a number of arguments against the combined approach, including the concern that those competing at the Olympics would not be the world's best athletes in particular climbing disciplines, but rather those that are good across the three disciplines. Many such concerns, however, came from those who will be directly involved in needing to restructure their organizations, competition events and schedules, in response to this change. Others, particularly those who understood why the combined approach was adopted, could see a more long term view and that while the transition might be difficult, sports do change and evolve over time in response to changing circumstances, and this isn't necessarily a bad thing:

That decision is very weird, because speed climbing is like something you only have in competition climbing and no one is watching. The people, the climbers competing in lead or in bouldering, they don't even compete in speed. People competing in speed are just a few, really just a few climbers training especially for this and doing it and there is no recognition. Within climbing or outside of climbing, it's like the dark side of competition climbing will be speed climbing. No one cares about speed climbing, absolutely no one. ... Yes, speed climbing is seen as the simplest form of climbing and the most understandable way to explain climbing to a massive audience. But within the climbing community, there is absolutely no interest for speed climbing. Nothing. This is why it is funny to see speed climbing at the Olympics.

There is a section of the folks [within national federations] that have been involved in competition climbing that have some reservations about what is specifically being proposed for Olympics inclusion. Because that format of a combined format doesn't really function ... 99 per cent of the events that national federations are hosting are all specific to the discipline, meaning bouldering or lead or speed. So, it's one of those three. They'll structure their calendar nationally around having a specialist national championship for bouldering, or a specific national championship for speed, same thing for lead. Maybe they'll have some different construct as a way to determine a combined winner that's competed in all three, but that combined format as an event in and of itself does not yet exist.

The concern amongst the federations that we shared is that this combined format will mean the end of specialised national championship, specialised world cup series, that so far up until this point has been pretty successful and the best offering that the international federation can offer.

Domestically in the US—bouldering competitions, that's where eyes are. People are interested in watching, people are interested in participating. It is by and far the most successful discipline that we run; from participation, viewership, any metric that you want to use, this is where we're seeing success. Lead not so much and speed not so much. ... I'm terrified of the fact that this decision for Olympic inclusion will potentially inform what we do domestically as a process for athlete selection at the Olympics. ... I would hate for that lumping of everything together to be at the expense of traditionally successful disciplines, both domestically and internationally.

The type of athlete that will be selected ... they're not going to be world class level at bouldering, they're not going to be world class level at speed, they're not going to be world class level at lead. They're going to be second-tier competitors in each of those disciplines that are just better than mediocre at all three.

Arguments for combined: A necessary compromise:

The fact is that being in the Olympics, especially the first time imposes some constraints. There are some limitations—the number of athletes, especially the number of athletes, and the number of medals. This was the same for other sports in the beginning, at their first appearance. ... We have this limitation in terms of medals, so we had to find a way make everybody happy—so the IOC who wanted some disciplines, Tokyo who wanted some other disciplines, and of course the values of our sport.

At the moment, I must tell you that we have not defined the format 100 per cent. There is still four-years to go. The decision will be in August and we will test some formats in the next six months to one year, and probably we will have a final format by June of 2017. Then the athletes will have time to train for that format. So yes, it's true that we have some difficulties at the moment.... So, now it's time to prove that also we are ready to be modern and to modernise a sport that is young but maybe needs some other advice and input to have the best show and the best values to the athletes in the Olympics.

The Process: Olympic Bids, Short-listing and the importance of YOG

In 2012, sport-climbing was one of eight sports being considered for possible inclusion in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, but in May 2013 it was announced that baseball/softball, squash and wrestling were the three sports recommended for possible inclusion. In September 2013, it was announced that wrestling would be included in the Summer Olympic Games of 2020 and 2024. For some involved in climbing, this experience of being considered and then rejected has meant some caution towards the more recent short-

listing. Others, however, feel that this has been an important period of growth and learning that lead to a much stronger application in 2015:

Actually, we were surprisingly included in the short list in 2012, for Tokyo. It was quite a surprise because I must tell you we have grown up very quickly but the structure still had some problems ... So anyway, we had to play the game. We played the game together with the other seven sports. Unfortunately, you know how it went ... we were disappointed more because of the way it went, but we were ready to start to fight for the next addition to the games.

And then we started playing for this new opportunity that was the additional sports for Tokyo 2020. It was really exciting because the way the Tokyo organising committee helped us, welcomed us, was amazing. They really showed in typical Japanese style a lot of respect and we had very long interviews and presentation of the sport in August last year. When we were chosen together with four other sports, we were particularly happy of this choice because we think that if all the five sports are kept it will really be a sign that the IOC is changing, is improving, is growing and so on.

I used to say that we woke up from the Olympic dream when we were excluded from the short list for Tokyo but then we found ourselves in Nanjing. From being excluded in the Olympics, we were involved in an Olympic scenario in Nanjing. People could come and watch the three disciplines and immediately everybody who was there started asking questions, so we could not only showcase the sport but also explain what is behind it.

For those involved in the process, the inclusion of sport climbing in the Sports Lab at the Nanjing 2014 YOG was an important step towards shortlisting for Tokyo 2020, mostly because it provided an opportunity to showcase sport-climbing to IOC members (see YOG section 2.35 below). Some noted that this represented a clear sign of change within the IOC with the arrival of President Bach:

Suddenly, something new happened because there were the elections in the IOC and the new president wanted to make some changes to improve the organisation, to improve also the image of the IOC, and he and the IOC invited us to Nanjing to showcase the sport. This was really the turning point, because in Nanjing together with three other sports we could showcase and present the sport to the IOC family.

Those that were involved in the process of short-listing in Japan, noted that this part of the process was relatively 'smooth' because they had previous experience with delivering a report and presentation, but also because they felt there was support from key members within the IOC and that the Japanese Organizing Committee understand the significance of climbing in their own country. There was also comment of the kind hospitality from the Japanese Organizing Committee that made the process particularly enjoyable:

Sport climbing amongst all the climbing gyms around Japan is quite strong, so we are not in a country where we have to explain everything to the panel that we had in front of us. So, we were kind of lucky in this, even though we know that the action sports in this shortlist after Tokyo are mostly the IOC choice. So, we were pretty happy to not only count on the support of the IOC because it looks like they were happy with us after Nanjing but also Tokyo, because they saw that climbing is something that can bring something to the sport community, to the youth, in Japan. But there was a lot of work that lead to this proposal, but that's just the basic international federation job of networking, getting in line with the IOC regulation, the WADA regulation and all these things, and then finally do a presentation in front of a panel that is full of experts, politics and all these things.

The Olympic Effect: Predicted Changes to the Structure of Sport Climbing

Interviewees discuss a range of structural changes that are already underway, as well as predictions for further changes that will occur if sport climbing is announced as being included in the Tokyo Summer Olympic Games. Here we present some of the key predicted changes, including 1) event format, 2) coaching structures, 3) young athletes, and 4) corporate sponsorship and support strategies.

1. Event formats

- Challenges of judging systems for the combined approach that are easier for mainstream audiences to understand, and for the winner at the end of the three day event to be clear:

We want to arrive at a format where on the third day ... the winner of what is happening on the third day is the winner of the gold medal. So, we don't want to have a situation where actually we make a strange point combination and the fifth on the last day is the winner of the gold medal. ... We would like to have a situation where the best one in the last event is the one who wins the gold medal. ... It's a little bit difficult to understand, in fact, we don't know how to do it yet but we are working on it.

I do have concerns with whether they do the triple in the bouldering, speed, and lead. If it's boring, I think it might really hurt the future of our sport. I think sometimes what we've seen when it's a one against one speed climb, the audience is more interested and participates more. Especially an audience that's not aware of the sport, that doesn't know how hard moves are, doesn't understand the different rating systems. If the scoring is really complicated, there's all these strange scoring programmes in climbing sometimes where the person who got the highest on the last move, and different things, so the winner could be somebody who didn't look they made it to the top. It can be confusing, so I think if the Olympics does it, they need to keep it really simple, it would give people time to learn more about the sport.

2. Coaching

- A need for more developed coaching training programmes:

An important first step will be towards more developed education opportunities for our coaches, because as a sport in the US, and I will say internationally as well, the knowledge level of our elite coaches pales in comparison with any other sport that I would consider. I really think that one of the first steps for us is education for our coaches and then the next step is starting with better financial support of our athletes.

3. Young athletes (and parents)

- Young climbers are already training in preparation for the Olympics.
- Parents are also anticipating Olympic inclusion and putting more pressure on their children:

I have heard quite a lot saying they hope it gets started sooner than later, so they can compete. I know Sasha, who just turned 23, feels that she could still compete four-years from now. But after that, she knows she wouldn't be able to. And there's a lot of younger 16-year-olds, 15-year-olds who are coming up really strong, who are

hoping that that happens because they would be in their prime at that point. I know there is certainly training and focus based on the potential chance that they could be in the Olympics.

We already see it in some areas of the US, like Texas, where a lot of parents that grew up in a high pressure, high performance football culture, are really trying to apply that type of belief on behalf of their children with climbing. It's an interesting thing in and of itself in terms of where climbing sits with the parent/athlete relationship.

4. The role of climbing corporations/impact on companies/investment in athletes

- Corporations in full support of Olympic inclusion for growth in participation that it will likely bring.
- Several interviews noted the unique approach that Adidas has taken in supporting the growth and infrastructure of competitive climbing, with many suggesting that this is in anticipation of Olympic inclusion.
- Olympic inclusion will be followed by more financial support of younger, up-and-coming competition climbers who have to date haven't received much funding in an industry that still focuses on outdoor climbers:

We [Adidas] like it. When we see a sport go to the Olympics, it tends to also bring in a lot more younger people, which is what the outdoor world needs, is the next generation to want to be a little bit more outdoorsy. First, fit and healthy, and then second, with a feeling for nature and the environment and the outdoors. I think overall, it's what our outdoor industry really needs.

You look at Adidas for example and the push they made into climbing that started in 2012 ... They have a bunch of athletes. They're not paying a lot of money but if you look at the sponsor policy of Adidas, they're putting much more money into infrastructure, competition, and federation, instead of athletes. Every single competition in the US is sponsored by Adidas. They sponsor the French national team. They sponsor the Spanish national team. They sponsor the Polish national team. So, what that business has been trying to do is put all the money they have in competition climbing, which is weird because competition climbing is not popular. So, you're seeing not a fusion but a merging between industry and federation, and Adidas is a good example of this.

We [Adidas] are very focussed on it [Olympic inclusion] and paying attention to the younger athletes. It would make a big difference if it was actually in the Olympics, because then we could put more energy into the 13- and 14-year-olds who are coming up.

Perceptions of the IOC

Across the interviews, there was a strong perception that the IOC was making a concerted effort to respond to new trends in sporting participation, and that this is a recent shift. A few noted that they felt the IOC was 'making things up as they go along', which has caused some confusion for those who are trying to work with the process. However, others noted that a younger guard within the IOC was working hard to 'do it right', by working closely with key people and organizations within sport climbing. Ultimately, there was an understanding that the IOC is heading in a positive direction by considering the inclusion of newer sports, such as climbing.

- Difficulties for the IOC of responding more quickly to sporting trends:

If I have to tell the truth, I see that the IOC is trying to run very fast and of course they have the same problems as any big structure. Sometimes someone is able to follow and someone is not. So the President is an athlete and he wants to go fast, but the structure has to follow and it may be sometimes they have a different schedule, or they need more time. But you know, when the machine is on the road and you start driving it, that is a good sign. There is a big change inside the IOC in terms of attitude, at least towards us, and not only sport climbing but also the five federations that are involved in this journey.

I view the Olympics as a big oil freighter inexorably moving in the direction around the world. Given enough time it's going to go around the world, it's always going to continue on its track and there's going to be very few malfunctions mechanically with the machine, it's just slow. Climbing competitions, my feeling is that it's a jet ski. You're not going to have enough gas to get around the world but you're going to zip, we're going to run circles around big freighter that's moving at 10 knots or whatever. I think of climbing as a jet ski and the Olympics as a freighter.

- A new generation in the IOC is making good progress:

I think that they [the IOC] have to change otherwise they're going to run out of people to watch. And they're going to run out of companies that want to market them and finance it and put on the games, and to promote them. Part of the Olympics is sponsorship, and so in order to get sponsorship you have to have markets, and the growing markets are the young markets because the other ones are going to slow down. There's no question. I think [including action sports] is absolutely essential. I think the Olympics would look completely different if it didn't have snowboarding and stuff like that. I think that brings in a much younger group. I don't think it's losing any interest from track and field, or any interest from weightlifting or other areas, but it is bringing in a lot of additional viewers who would love to see something younger and fun, and something that they can actually participate in.

[I expect this is being] driven by "the new generation" of people that are representing the IOC now. I'm guessing that's why ... they're stepping back and saying 'well, we want to do this right; we don't want to just do it, we want to do it right and in order to do that we really, really want you to inform that process'.

What does the IOC gain from the inclusion of sport climbing?

According to interviewees, sport climbing would be a huge asset for the Olympic Games, attracting new audiences (climbers) and also being of interest to mainstream viewers. Some also noted that the addition of climbing would open up more options for sponsorship from the outdoor sports industry, which was otherwise not represented at the Olympic Games:

This is the gateway to a whole new generation of outdoor participants and people that may or may not normally even watch sports or be that involved in the Olympic sports, but are gravitating to climbing gyms and a healthier, active lifestyle. It would bring a lot of additional, new supporters of the Olympics in the form of viewers as well as companies and brands that are in the outdoor market. Around the world, outdoor look and fashion and attitude is one of the fastest growing categories everywhere, in clothing and in footwear and lifestyle and imagery. Even all the movies. ... And yet there's no sport, there's no

organised Olympic sport that supports all of that. I think it really could help; and it would help the Olympics; and it would help the sport.

It brings a whole new generation of younger people who would watch the Olympics. In the US it's estimated that there's about 7 million sport climbers, so it's a growing area of interest.

The atmosphere in sport climbing is very special. For example, before climbing the route and lead but also before climbing the boulder problems, the climbers stand together and observe the routes and the problems. They give information or give suggestions and advice to each other, no matter which country they come from, because it's a sort of community. The challenge will be to go on with this even when we are Olympics. And then there's the image. The image is fresh. The image really brings something new, and last but not least this would be the only sport going up and not horizontal or in the air.

What do you hope climbing will look like in Tokyo 2020?

Not dissimilar from skateboarding, there was a lot of enthusiasm for a sport climbing event that embraced the best elements of climbing competitions with music and a youthful energy (i.e., music). However, most importantly was the need for an event format that will be clearly understood by both the athletes and audiences, and will enable spectacular performances. Some also hoped to see crossover between skateboarding and sport climbing within the same venue, with comments about audiences having opportunities to participate, and also a climbing wall that could be a legacy for Tokyo following the Olympic Games. However, some noted that it would be important in the introductions to athletes that outdoor climbing was also represented so that mainstream audiences could see that the natural environment is also a very important part of this sport. Others noted the importance of better integration of social media into the event, and that notes could be taken from how climbers are proactively using social media to connect with their global community of fans and followers.

1. An event at the intersection of music, sport and youth culture:

I would rather that the event itself look like a rock concert than a sporting event. With lighting, sound, big screen. But ... if we don't have athletes that are exciting to watch or a format that's exciting to watch, no matter how many lights or DJs we throw at the problem, the problem is still inherent in format.

I think to attract a bigger audience, and to influence a larger number of new participants in sport, to keep it with music and fun and young and fresh is better.

2. Importance of event format for accessible and spectacular performances:

I do have high hopes that the nature of the climbing competition will be spectacular. When well executed, climbing competitions allow viewers to watch an athlete put it all on the line in the moment when it counts most and also their ability to execute flawlessly when the pressure's on—I'm hopeful that that all of those things come through in whatever is represented at climbing competition at the Olympic games.

3. Audience interaction and participation, cross over with skateboarding, and legacy:

One of the projects is to have a combination, the same location for skateboarding as for sport climbing. ... the idea is also to have this event maybe in an open space, in a square, in order to involve the local population. The concept would be close to the concept of the Sports Lab in Nanjing. In other words, it would be nice to have the medal event but also initiations for the people. The concept of Thomas Bach is to bring people closer to the games. Not only as spectators but also as active actors.

It would be fantastic to have—imagine sport climbing and skateboarding in the same place, and you have the medal event for sport climbing then you have initiation [for audience members to try the activity], then at the end of you have the skateboarding medal event and in the meantime you have also initiation for them. It would really be a celebration of the sport with the local people involved.

We like to engage a bit more of the audience into our sport, and I really would like to keep the wall in place after the event ... opening the wall to the public and saying ‘okay, now please try’. We would set some new routes, some easier ones, and we would also like to have competition to be open to the public. Because otherwise again it creates a gap and then it’s only a show. It’s not a sport, it’s a show, and that’s a bit limiting. That doesn’t serve really the development of the sport ... We can even have some small parties at the walls, any kind of thing that we are doing in the community then that would be fantastic.

4. Importance of showing (through coverage) climbing in the outdoors:

The stories could be fabulous. In the Olympics, they normally do a little back-story on the athlete, so for the climbers it would be great to be able to show the athletes [that] in their recreational time they go climbing in the outdoors. I think the visuals [of outdoor climbing] are so great, that it would really attract a lot of interest, because people just love to see these big climbs. You know, they’re very interesting and exciting.

5. Importance of Social Media:

I think they [the IOC] could learn a lot from climbers in terms of how they are using social media. Because for the young athletes, social media is part of their DNA, they just know—they are posting more, they’re communicating more, they’re paying attention to it more, and they are creating whole markets with their million followers. It’s their number one form of promotion or communication. And they’re very communicative; it’s become a really big network of storytelling and support. The kids who are climbing in gyms from very young ages, are part of the new cohort that are promoting Snapchat and Instagram; they’ve moved even beyond Facebook. They’re posting millions of photographs every day. And I know companies like Adidas and certainly all the outdoor companies, every one of their websites have some sort of a social media connection. I think it would be good for the Olympics worldwide in communicating their story [if they pay attention to how climbers—both athletes and the youth—are using social media]. Because social media is one way to really get to the next generation!

2.3.4 Kitesurfing/Kite boarding in the Olympics and YOG

Interviews were conducted with three men and one woman who hold key positions in the kitesurfing industry. Collectively their experiences included: The President of International Kitesurfing association (IKA), International kite competitors, three national champions, involvement with coaching at national and national level. The industry insiders have run national and international federations. Many of these individuals came from a windsurfing background and have experience in other action sports governance, coaching and media including windsurfing, sailing and surfing.

Overview of themes in analysis

1. Kiteboarding and attitudes to Olympic Inclusion:
 - a. Why kitesurfing? Opportunities.

- b. Disadvantages.
- 2. Governance of kitesurfing: politics and difficulties.
- 3. Overview of kiteboarding in the 2018 The YOG (for details see YOG section).
- 4. Kite boarders at the Olympics: potential issues and conflicts.

Background

- Kite boarding has been selected for inclusion in the 2018 YOG (see YOG section 2.3.5).
- While it is not shortlisted for inclusion in the Rio Olympics, it was selected by the ISAF to be included as one of the 10 yachting event in the Rio 2016 Games. This decision was then overturned but has left kitesurfing in a slightly strange position. (Some of the implications and impacts on the sport are highlighted below).
- Kite boarding international governing body is the IKO. [International Kitesurf Association] .
- Competitive kite boarding is governed internationally by the International Sailing Federation (ISAF), recently renamed World Sailing (the world governing body for the sport of sailing).
- N.B. kitesurf is the more usual name for the sport but Olympic kite sport has been termed kiteboarding. The terms are used interchangeably in this document as they were by interviewees.

Kiteboarding and Olympic inclusion: pros and cons

Why kiteboarding?

- Kiteboarding is the fastest form of sailing and has the potential to be spectacular for spectators and television.
- Faster in light winds.
- Popular with youth.
- Range of potential formats.
- Most accessible forms of yachting class (along with windsurfing)- potential to democratise yachting.

The kitesurf governing body IKA is driving Olympic inclusion:

So IOC put eyes on the new sport and from all the list of the new sport become more known around the world, kite boarding was one of them. We really jumped into it and start to keep IOC informed as much as possible, to try to claim a place in the Olympics.

Broadly though, the kite surf community are ambivalent about kiteboarding being in the Olympics:

There's quite a big disconnect of communication and no interest between what's going on in the Olympic world and Joe public just go down to the beach and going out and mowing the lawn or doing a few jumps and that really across the board in kite boarding is, even if it's freestyle competition or wave competition or racing or Olympic, all of these recreationists, and there's a massive bunch of them, they haven't got a clue and then they have no interest.

Different participation styles

There are various styles of participation within contemporary kitesurfing, with styles and technologies evolving rapidly. Broadly, the two disciplines are racing (with a focus on speed) and freestyle (with a focus on performing tricks). Freestyle is the most popular style, but not seen to be practical for IOC style competitions or sailing venues.

We know it's not the majority of the kite boarders around the world that are doing racing. But we know that most of the kite boarders around the world, say 80 per cent are free riders. That means everything but it means nothing.

- The choice of racing vs. freestyle is driven by the IOC:

They [Olympic people] said to us 'no, they're not interested in freestyle', mainly because there is a judging system, they try to avoid judging disciplines, and also because if you have less than 15 knots the discipline of freestyle is a joke, it doesn't make any sense.

We presented them all disciplines that we had, from freestyle, wave riding, kicker/slider, slalom, speed racing and they said we want to have something racing where we can say first one over the line wins. Okay, and it was [IOC person] that we had the meeting with, [he said] we don't want to see speed racing because that's boring.

The IOC has encouraged kiteboarding to consider challenge existing racing formats as they are 'boring', and recommended new approaches to 'showcase the sport', though this is within the racing genre.

They [IOC] don't want another sailing discipline. They don't want a discipline whereby the person that goes into the medal race finished 8th but yet wins gold. They want the person that goes into the medal race and win the medal race to wind the games

IKA recognise that the politics of judging is a potential issue, with a lack of standards or training and possibly some bias [this was evident in discussing the professional kite events, and the commercial interests that underpinned them].

It's not easy to form proper judges, because we still have people coming into this role ... let's say coming from another sport background. I think we can have a really good judge if you can take people from ice-skating or something like that, that they are used to doing this kind of sport, judging the sport, and then trying to explain our rules—I think it would be easier for them. But it's going to be our next step, to form a big team of judges with high skill.

It has been suggested, that by proposing speed kitesurfing, rather than freestyle, for Olympic Inclusion means Olympic kiteboarding will be out-of-date and not youth focused. As illustrated by one participant, if based on industry sales, it is clear that freestyle kitesurfing is the most popular among recreational and committed kitesurfers:

Interest of the industry basically is to sell equipment, and that's mainly freestyle equipment.

Despite some concerns about the decision to focus on speed kiteboarding, some existing competitors, and part of the industry, see the benefit of kite board being in the Olympics to expose the sport, inject money and help it develop:

Oh, they are, of course, also the people that say we shouldn't be governed by anyone; we should just do our thing. But I think those people exist anywhere. But I think kite boarding as a community in general and also the industry behind it, which is very strongly involved

with competitors and sponsorship and competitions, definitely sees that becoming an Olympic sport with whichever discipline, if it's racing or freestyle or whatever, would give the whole sport such a boost that it just has to happen. So, that is pretty clear as a general outcome of the community, that it's very obvious that everyone wants it for the benefit of the sport.

If you are Olympic there is nothing wrong, it can only be better for all the community, because it's getting more popular.

Opportunities: Money following Olympic pathways?

Opportunities for elite kite surfers are currently very limited: Prize money and sponsorship comes predominantly from the kite industry or corporate sponsors, not national federations or government. As a consequence, many athletes do as many different types of events as possible:

So, they've either got to win prize money and/or have a good sponsor which can, as you know, come from your brands or outside sponsorship and that will all become easier if it was Olympic for many people. So, at the moment the athletes are really keeping both doors open, they're doing the formula class and they're also doing this kind of development class which is the foil.

Training tends to be self-organised and self-funded (or via commercial sponsorships) even at very elite levels:

Many of them for race training, they're doing it themselves or they're doing it in twos or threes in their area. [...] we are practicing hard on both disciplines, so foil and formula. [World champion]

But there is the perception that Olympic inclusion will change this situation:

A lot of people already around the world, they are just waiting for the possibility to become Olympics, because they know that they will benefit pretty quick to develop kite boarding inside of their sailing program.

Most of the sailing federations are only interested in the Olympic pathway, for the sole reason that that's where they get their money from. And they're not interested in spending any money on something that doesn't bring them money.

I think as soon as a sport becomes Olympic actually, the money flows. [...] They want to improve, they want to train and they want to get medals.

But there was also recognition that there is some conflict/complexity for flow of money, and who has access (e.g. national funding though federations vs. Olympic money):

I heard from the Polish association that because of the prospect of potential Olympic inclusion and the youth Olympics that are coming up, the Polish yachting association gets more money from the government but they're not passing it on to the kite association. They employed one or two coaches that are going with the riders but I think part of the money they just put in their own pockets and use it for Olympic classes. Which is not fair, is not the right thing to do.

Some recognised that this is/was an issue for all new sports coming into the Olympic under existing federation (e.g. BMX, snowboarding) (see section 2.4.2 below):

The problem is when the sport tries to become Olympic it's pretty much cut off from national funding. [...] But in the end, the funding will go to the sailing federation. And there is only little control, I think, on how the sailing federation then spends the money

that they get in addition for potential new Olympic sport, and what they actually do with it.

So, there is a big problem but I think that's a problem in the national association. It's not a problem of the sport, it's just a natural thing, and I hear it from everywhere. As you say, it's the same thing in BMX and snowboarding and other young sports that come into established federations, that the distribution of the money, and the flow just doesn't work. I don't know if the IOC should control that better or if it should have policies about it. That's just something that one has to deal with.

Following the announcement of the kitesurfing's inclusion in Rio (and YOG – see 2.3.5), there was observable shift in attitudes and interest in some countries. In particular, there was an observed increase in the numbers of competitors at events, including among women:

We had our world championships that happened in the September it became Olympic and we had 212 entries from 48 countries. And only in a couple of months. [normally] 100, 120. So, it was almost double. A lot of windsurfers started kite boarding and started training in kite boarding. They were all excited, super quick, fast and jibing.

When it did become Olympic in 2012 and, we were going to the Olympics then and it was even it was 50/50 maybe 40 per cent. There was a lot of girls.

Yet, recognition of central role of the kiteboard industry (rather than governments or Federations) for funding athletes, but that the industry won't invest in building kiteboard racing technologies until a decision has been made for Olympic inclusion:

I think there's certain members of the industry that are passionate and moving forward and there's other members of the industry that are sitting on a fence and they're saying they're in transition while they wait for decisions and when the decision comes they'll then invest. But many members of the industry are continuing to support their athletes because when that decision came in that November it was huge impact [...] So this is all done off individuals' backs, so they've either got to win prize money and/or have a good sponsor which can, as you know, come from your brands or outside sponsorship.

But as I found in the 80's with windsurfing industry sponsorship, they [the industry] only like to fund sailors from countries where sales are high.

Disadvantages for kitesurf of Olympics inclusion

Those who saw Olympic inclusion as problematic had several key concerns:

1. Not sufficient number of people do kite racing to justify it as an Olympic sport:

When we look at classes or sports that become Olympic or get nominated to become Olympic, [such as windsurfing in the late 70s early 80s] the sport is generally very mature, so its formats are all completely sorted out, the equipment is sorted out, they've got large masses, [world championship fleets in the 100's & internationally in the 1000's] they've got a development programme happening from juniors all the way to seniors. It's very well established, so it's very easy just to slot it in. Whereas suddenly kite surfing gets presented with an international fleet sizes [being generous] around 300 with a handful of juniors internationally & less than 50 women.

Kite surf racing had no national class associations, equipment readily available in retail shops or even in any reasonable production numbers. [...] Kite racing did not have a junior or youth kite racing fleet larger than 40 globally.

2. It will lead to an ‘equipment arms race’ (see below). This will ultimately reduce the appeal and diversity of kiteboarding participation:

Kite racing should stay an open development class so that it can continue to evolve funded by individuals & the industry—not driven by disproportionately well-funded nations competing against developing nations. [...]. Unfortunately, some of the things like the fins for the kite boards, there was quite a waiting list for having good fins, because The top sailors always had the best fins, and the best board and people couldn’t compete. That was already killing the sport of kite racing, because people could not afford to compete against the development as it was happening so fast. Evolution driven from well developed nations would keep their equipment advantages protected by not allowing sailors from other developing nations being able to obtain the best equipment—similar to what happened in the Tornado Class.

I like kite surfing, and I like kite surf racing. I think it’s an awesome, dynamic sport and what they’re achieving is just getting better and better and better. The problem is the moment that it becomes Olympic, to aid developing nations, and to stop a financial arms race between the countries, and to keep things sensible, you have to have restrictions on equipment. And as soon as you have restrictions on equipment, it stops the development of the sport. [...] but really one of the things that I know about the Olympic games is it’s actually quite restrictive on sports development.

3. It will kill/change the culture:

There was a belief that Olympic inclusion will stifle development of the lifestyle sport—as happened in windsurfing racing (See Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). An example given was how the Mistral One Design class was ‘killed’ as a recreational class when it became an Olympic sport. Some also noted that they lost the ‘recreational’ and ‘weekend warriors’ who wanted to party as well as race. Olympic inclusion brought in standards that made it difficult for more recreational participants to continue to enjoy competition:

It was a fun, social, party class ... [Olympic inclusion] killed all the weekend warriors, because they weren’t finishing inside the time limit anymore. [They] only finished half the races because these other guys are so damn good that I didn’t even finish it within this time limit, so I didn’t get a score [...] And that’s what happened, so they [the more recreational competitors] moved to another sport.

This has implications for longevity of the sport, which is driven/sustained by the recreational participants, and the industry. Similarly, there has been a history of previous sailing classes disappearing as a result of the increased costs of technologies as disciplines become Olympic sports:

Yes, if we look at say the Europe dinghy class, and the Finn dinghy class, and the Tornado, and the Flying Dutchman. These are/were development classes where fleet sizes died in the end due to cost.

4. Spatial conflict and safety: Aspects of kitesurfing just don’t fit into the way yachting regattas are run that could have safety implication for the riders. These points are also relevant to the YOG:

Safety is a complex and important issue: Kiteboarding has revolved around safety issues with new technologies evolving and events organized with a focus on safety. However, the practical/logistical/ political implications of kiteboarding being located and housed in existing sailing venues and structures, may mean kiteboarders are put in dangerous situations by those who do not understand the complexities of kiteboarding safety requirements:

Kite surf racing is more vulnerable to weather condition changes than other sailing classes & conditions can quickly become dangerous for the sailors.

And sometimes race committees and organising committees often can be too ego driven to listen to the sailors & coaches. They are often volunteers [after ISAF world cup 2016].

Launching a kite needs a lot more space than other craft; Differences for the safe set up and performances of kiteboarders are still not well understood by sailing fraternity:

I was kite surfing there [Weymouth, site of London 2012, sailing], and there were people learning there, crashing kites everywhere. And they took up a lot of space, and yet you wouldn't have been able to windsurf there because of the kites crashing.

When launching kites, you need space. And if they don't have adequate space, and in some locations they just don't have that many safe spaces to launch a lot of people from in a short period of time. Many sailing venues for current events are not suitable for Kite racing & they would need to be accommodated in a different location to the rest of the yachting event, which causes other logistical issues for organisers, competitors & nations supporting the sailors.

Some noted that this often a lack of space for launching in many sailing parks: possible solutions were boat launching and finding different venues to launch close by. However, some felt boat launching was hard:

But what is the more common thing is that you just go to the beach next door. Obviously it means it doesn't work for every club in the world, but that's just the nature of things.

At the top level, it's probably not going to be a problem [boat launching]. You sort your systems out and it's probably not so bad.

Politics surrounding governance

Competitive Kite boarding is governed internationally by the International Sailing Federation (ISAF), now called World Sailing (the world governing body for the sport of sailing.), But it is important keep in mind that kiteboarding is a very young sport, only developing 16-years ago (1999) and only starting to gain momentum approximately 12-years ago. Thus, the formation of IKA is also relatively new. IKA was founded by a group of its first members, with early issues focused on safety—as a factor for seeking governance:

Between 2002 and 2006, all the factory improved a lot and spent a lot of money, invest a lot of money in safety. [...] because a lot of injury, some people die, it was not safe at all. This is why it became really important to have a body, an association that governs and can talk with everyone, not only organising events but they want to start making rules for safety reasons. Otherwise, we were really close to having a lot of countries that will stop kite boarding, forbid kite boarding, and we really tried to avoid that. We achieved that all around the world.

So, everyone was doing their stuff and at the time, there were two commercial tours claiming world championships ... and no one knew who was really the world champion and there were no proper rules. It was a complete mess.

The IKA looked to PWA (windsurf) for guidance:

So the riders actually approached us from the windsurfing organisation and said it's all organised, what you're doing, and everyone seems to know what's going on and what he's doing so can you help us organising the sport. Then we started with a group of riders to talk about how we can actually do that and if we should set up our own international federation or if we should join an existing federation. We had a look around at the different IOC recognised international federations and found that it's on the water, it's powered by wind, it's pretty close to sailing, even if we're jumping and doing other stuff than sailboats. But in principle, similar to windsurfing, which also has freestyle competitions and wave competitions and all of that, which is also organised in the International Sailing Federation, we thought well that's the closest to kite boarding that we find, and setting up our own international federation with ethics commission, athletes commission and anti-doping, and all of the stuff around it, is just such a huge project for such a small sport.

While it is beyond the scope of the discussion here, it is worth noting that there have been some competing governance struggles within the professional competition organisations, and two rival organisations over past few decades, particularly for freestyle and wave styles of competition.

Most of the personnel involved with the IKO today have extensive experience with/from other activities particularly windsurfing including professional tour and Olympic campaigns.

IKO became an ISAF sailing class (2008).

IKO followed the windsurfing model (i.e. affiliated to/under yachting world governance) by becoming affiliated with the ISAF:

So, that was 2006 or something. It took us two years to adjust the structures, because equipment rules for sailing, so what defines a board and so on was all not fitting to kite boards because there's no mast, there's no boom. But we were facing the same problems as windsurfing seven years ago when windsurfing came into the ISF. So, windsurfing is in ISF since around 30-years

Reflecting other sailing classes, members are in national kite associations. Early in 2016, 63 of the 67 national kite associations (e.g. German Kite Association, the BKSA in the UK, and Kiteboarding Australia) were members of ISAF (interview). The strength of the relationship between the national kite federations and national sailing federation varies between nations and in France, kite sports sits under the power gliding association, which has caused some difficulties. IKO have negotiated this position in discussion with the two existing professional kite tours, who oversee their 'world tour' or championship competitions. It was agreed that the ISF would take responsibility for the whole range of the discipline styles, from course formula to freestyle to speed to wave. But there continues to be discrepancies between the focus on freestyle kiteboarding within national federations, and a focus on racing when discussions of the Olympics emerge:

I think as far as the national federations are concerned freestyle is still the main thing.

And racing ... came later than freestyle, which is why I think freestyle is still more popular.

Proper racing only exists since 2009 basically. It exists longer, but not with proper rules and proper race management, and all of that.

We know it's not the majority of the kite boarders around the world that are doing racing.

The racing path developed through two different pathways: 1) informally at freestyle competitions (*'let's get on the water and race around, on the same equipment as they do freestyle'*), and 2) Those coming from sailing origins (*'The other pathway that started at the San Francisco Yacht Club where members of the club actually came from sailing and*

starting to kite board and thought well, we could do the same thing that we do on our sailboats with kites’).

So there are two main streams of racing development with completely different backgrounds and completely different attitudes and they had to grow together. However, a situation that while bringing benefits caused a number of difficulties & clashes in cultures (see on). It is important to keep in mind, however, the majority of kite surfers, like windsurfers (and most other action sport participants) do not join clubs or organisations, unless required for access (see Wheaton, 2013):

Because kite boarding, most of their country are not already related to their sailing federation or the sailing association, and it’s not easy to get involved and to keep control of kiteboarding. That’s the main problem that we have, to link all of the kiteboarding community in each country to their sailing federation.

Kiteboarding negotiating a place in ISAF

Kiteboarders have struggled (and continue to struggle) to negotiate space in ISAF, a very traditional and long standing sport federation. Kite boarders constantly have to lobby and negotiate their position. There is the perception among some interviewees that ISAF was blocking their progress, and ability to work with IOC more effectively. Concerns were raised that the ISF is ‘old fashioned’, ‘self-interested’, and ‘not able to make decisions quickly’:

Kiteboarding is low on their agenda. If it becomes part of the Olympics, of course, they will embrace it but they’re not particularly keen on it. That’s my impression.

About lobbying, it’s not easy. It’s not easy at all because you need to understand who is in front of you and in which way you have to try to explain or to get them informed.

It’s an odd game; we really need to have credibility when we talk. So if your background is coming from sailing, they cannot tell you ah, you are not a sailor. They cannot say that. I’m also a sailor, I’m a windsurfer, I’m a kiter, I’m a surfer, so what more do you want?

We had a meeting 2013 and been trying to set up another meeting basically for the whole year. It mainly doesn’t happen because we have to go there with ISAF because we are a class of ISF. Understand the IOC doesn’t want every of the 120 classes in ISF brought to the IOC directly and talk to them because they won’t have time to do their work anymore.

Concerns were also raised that the ISAF is slow to change, undemocratic, and unwilling to compromise:

Everyone’s very traditional and it’s all structured, and the people that are sitting in council and the federations they’re 70-years-old now and they had their sailing career in the laser in 1950. [...] if there’s no pressure from the IOC to modernise things, then ISF will continue to sail in a 70-year-old boat in the Olympics. That’s like on wooden skis and they’re still having the laser, since 1956! They can’t keep up with the challenges of sport becoming more professional and needing faster reactions. I don’t know if it’s organisation or if it’s the people.

The problem is the whole ISAF system is flawed. I think the best thing that could happen is for ISAF to collapse completely and start again with a new constitution. [...]. Because the problem with the democracy is people always vote in their own short term self-interest not the long term interests of the sport. So, the nations vote for the classes that are most likely to win them a medal. So, a country that has invested decades & is getting good results doesn’t want to loose that advantage. So, they vote for how cost effective it is for them to win a medal, not for what’s best for sailing to remain Olympic. Which was also partly why the USA who were very strong in kite racing & weak in windsurfing, bought pressure on other nations to vote for Kite racing.

Some argued ISF was not competent to run kite boarding effectively:

So, here we've got ISAF/the race committee, organising committee being completely inflexible and not really understanding what they should be doing to help publicise the event to first time & willing spectators, and we've got this very dynamic specialised sport that needs expert people managing it and running it [re experience at YOG].

Kitesurfing and windsurfing: Lessons from Olympic inclusion

Kite surfers talked about problems with windsurfing in the Olympics, how it had developed and the need to learn from the mistakes of windsurfing (See Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011). There was a broad recognition of issues and problems, and that kitesurfing should not repeat these mistakes (e.g. equipment choices):

Because in windsurfing the kind of equipment they are using in the Olympics almost nobody is using because it's not fun, they cannot have fun with this kind of board.

This is why I don't believe it's going to be the same with windsurfing. [...] already from the first Olympic they make the wrong choice. So, that's a part of history. They did always the wrong choice of the discipline to be in the Olympics, that was not representative of the community of windsurfing around the world. This is something that we really need to be careful of for kite boarding. [...] so kite boarding will be the quickest and the fastest sailing class

It's similar to windsurfing and there are millions of windsurfers, and how many are actually doing competition? And no windsurfer in the world who is just windsurfing for fun is a member of a sailing club. So, it's only for the ones that are competing.

That was always my biggest problem with Olympic windsurfing and if you talk to every windsurfer on the beach, they say it's not representing my sport.

ISAF windsurf vs kitesurf decision 2012

The event of kitesurfing being selected by the ISAF as one of the 10 events for Rio, and then the decision being revoked, was still widely discussed. The debate has been widespread in kitesurfing-related social media sites. This discussion has had a lasting impact on kite surf governance and development. The point at which kitesurf was nominated for 2012 Olympic inclusion (and windsurfing was dropped), saw some rapid shifts in interest in kiteboarding racing competitions. Even though the decision was ultimately revoked some months later, it signalled that the ISAF and IOC were seriously considering kiteboarding for Olympic inclusion, and this was further reinforced by selection for the 2018 YOG:

A lot of windsurfers started kite boarding and started training in kite boarding. [...] we figured out the potential.

Kiteboarding was obviously selected in May and everyone got really excited as your probably aware including the likes of [athlete] and [athlete], they were quite excited they thought this is a new challenge and they picked it up quite well, I think both of them would have gone on and will still probably continue to be kite boarding athletes probably one day because it's a crossover sport.

My main point is kite surfing was very under developed compared to windsurfing & so should not have replaced windsurfing or any other sailing class, until it was fully developed & without question, better than a particular sailing class it would replace. Windsurfing is certainly a better in many ways as a current Olympic sport than many of the other sailing classes.

However, there was a lot of misunderstanding about the process; the public believed that a choice had to be made between windsurfing and kitesurfing, and that it was the IOC who decided which classes are included. This misperception appears to have been fuelled by social media, which often pitted windsurfers against kite surfers:

I think they put it as a board sport didn't they. I think they were saying one board sport, is that right? [Elite kite competitor]

It seemed to me it was a real waste of energy, they should have been lobbying together against the ISAF, to say we are two modern sports that can represent the modern face of sailing ... they were not willing to make any compromises and to work together. It was very disappointing, and there has been quite a strong polarity of kite surfers against windsurfers and vice versa for some time. It's not right.

Concerns: Sailing as elitist

Kite surfers expressed concerns that a) sailing in general was elitist, and that the ISAF was playing lip service to improving access (see on). This would have repercussion for the role of kiteboarding as one of its classes; b) Concern that the development of kiteboarding being promoted would lead to a focus on affluent nations and less on encouraging new nations. It was also considered that sailing events were too expensive for developing nations:

The part of the problem with the whole system is there are too many events, and sailors can't physically & often financially unable, do them all. And part of the world ranking based of the world cup, which is expensive, because you've got to fly around the world with all the equipment. So the best sailor might come from a very under-funded nation and shows up and can win the world championships every year, but will never do any good in a World Cup. So frequently, people that are at the top of the ranking of the World Cup are in fifth, sixth, or seventh at the world championships, because they come from a really well funded country.

they didn't seem to have much appreciation for what could happen with kite surf racing when some of the wealthy nations got involved and did their own development programme, and excluded other countries from being able to do that. So suddenly, it would become a class, in my opinion, where the developing nations wouldn't have a chance.

ISAF are paying lip service to doing that. They have a developing nation program that sends some coaches every now & then to those regions—but those nations need much more than that. The proof is that we have never seen developing nations get strong enough to get into any medal races. For many of those nations, they will not or cannot fund their sailors to ever get good enough. One needs to be able to compete against the best often to learn how to get good enough. They need to have competitive equipment & knowledge over an 8-year period to have any chance. The IOC offers more \$ than ISAF. For instance, I've been working with India, one of the biggest population countries on the planet. And you know what? They're not going to be able to qualify for the Olympic games in the inexpensive classes, as it is too tough to compete against any of the other nations. They cannot afford the development program or even enough good equipment or coaching.

The amount of knowledge involved and all the rest of it, and the equipment's very technical. If the equipment wasn't so technical and expensive, it would be easier for these developing nations to engage with

Governance Conflicts and Challenges

It is beyond the scope of this report to detail the histories of various conflicts *within* kite surfing. While kiteboarding sits under ISAF, kiteboarders feel they are having little impact on ISAF decisions. However, it is important to recognise existence of these internal battles and why. Indeed, some of the underpinning issues are important for future kiteboarding direction and development:

1. Move to self-governance: Setting up alternative or rival federations?

There has been some debate about setting up rival organisations, but there is recognition of difficulties in doing so:

I think one of the key problems of all these young, fun, extreme sports is that they are not really interested in organisation and the whole politics and lobbying and so on. They just want to do their thing and want to have fun and express themselves. That's why the level of organisation in such sports—skateboarding, BMX, whatever—is fairly low, and that's why they'd rather join big brother.

We are currently thinking about setting up snow kiting as a separate federation because ISF is not dealing with that and we have been thinking about going to FIS and talking to them, which is still an option but we are aware of the whole snowboarding and FIS thing. So, we are thinking about that. And there is more than just organisers for snow kiting world cup and it could actually be the first sport that's in the summer Olympics and the winter Olympics. We are definitely thinking about it, especially after the recent experiences that we had with ISF. You get that I'm a little bit unhappy with ISF at the moment. I can tell you that I'm by far not the only one.

There is a lot of unhappiness from a lot of classes. I can tell you there are windsurfing classes except RSX because it's Olympic, that we have very close contact with the windsurfing classes, so formula and fun boat and stuff like that, and they all say why are we actually in ISF, why don't we so a water sports federation or something like that. The main frustration comes from that nothing moves in ISF. It's so political. I don't know; if we set up our own federation then we probably become the same and don't want to change, because we know what we have and we get paid for it and we make money with it, why change? Probably it's human nature. ... We are not really keen to set up our own federation because it's so much hassle. But it would be an option.

2. Challenge: Equipment is changing rapidly

The speed of change within kitesurfing technologies and styles has implications for future planning:

Now, ISF has decided two-years-ago that they will have exactly the same equipment in 2020 that they have in 2016, which I thought at the time is a stupid idea because everything changes so fast nowadays. They're talking some seven-years ahead of time, it's risky.

There is lots of debate about developing new and different formats, including 'short track' format being proposed, the box rule for equipment, and evolution of foiling (see below):

The kite community at the moment ... the people that have come from sailing obviously don't really like that new format [...] but it does test all of your points of sail, even though you start on a reach and actually, it does test the sailor quite a lot. It tests a lot of skills, there's quite a few manoeuvres within the course and tactically is very similar. So, there's that element which actually is quite positive.

The other element that's really positive is that we're all pretty much on the same equipment, so it really is the best person that starts well, the best person that does the right angles down wind and up wind and makes the best transitions wins. Obviously some luck as well.

short track is like boarder cross, like a knockout. [...] Its great because it tests all the points of sail, [...] So short track is really positive for skill set, and it could also still involve the jumping which we've done on a couple of events but haven't put into a world sailing club event yet. Jumping can be done again in light winds.

Some consider it of utmost importance that access and costs are kept low to ensure all competitors have access:

We suggest to have more than one manufacturer. For price reasons.

Now we are playing with box rule and it took us a lot of thought when we become Olympic three-years-ago just for the six-months to let them understand the equipment is really different from all the other boards and we can deliver the same equipment and the same fins and the same kite if it is box rule and not only one manufacturer.

All equipment can be changed pretty quick and all the manufacturers can change and deliver to the kite community new board and new kite quick as. We have Olympics every four-years so if the year before we can make a decision to have a couple of equipment, board and kite, to be used for the Olympics they're going to be just like that. [...] So you keep the development going ahead, we are not talking about equipment like a boat or a dinghy that costs €10,000 or €8,000. Kiteboarding, compared to the other, is not expensive. I think we can manage to have updated equipment every four-years without staying on the rule, as you said IOC or ISAF will need six- or seven-years to change and then you have to keep old stuff for too long and then it's getting bored or not updated, it's not fun anymore. I think we can manage that.

New developments around foiling: There's been quite a big development in the kite industry in the last two years with kite hydro foiling. While this is an exciting development within the sport, it is still very expensive:

Foiling is becoming more and more popular and a lot of people that have been normal racing are going foiling in the sailing world now everyone wants to go foiling ... everyone, basically will be in foiling boats next year and the match racing will be in foiling boats, and everyone is foiling. If we get something new in the Olympics and we really want to showcase something, I think we should probably foil in 2020. We can do the same course and the same racing although probably not jump it, as it's too dangerous.

there's big movement in sailing towards hydro-foiling with the Olympics and with many other developing classes with catamarans that have gone foiling. [...] it's a really growing sport but it's also a development sport so it's very money driven and equipment driven because obviously the equipment is changing rapidly and it's quite expensive, it's very specialised.

3. For some it is early days for kite board racing, and the sport is not sufficiently developed for Olympic inclusion

Kitesurf racing had no national class associations, equipment readily available in retail shops or even in any reasonable production numbers. Cobra did not have any

boards in production at the time ISAF voted kiter surfing in and they had been the largest manufacturer of kite racing boards in the world. But stopped, as the brand owners could not sell them. Kite racing did not have a junior or youth kite racing fleet larger than 40 globally.

Increasing opportunities for women?

Women constitute as much as *'40 per cent participants'* of recreational kite surfers, particularly *'in warm water locations the warm places the Brazils, the Caribbean and the Sri Lankas.'* However, this is considerably less in Australia and the UK. In competition, there are fewer women involved: *'In the competition for racing or foiling racing compared to the men, maybe maximum 20 per cent more like 15'*. There was also a sense among interviewees that women/girls are not that well supported in current competition classes. But, there was a belief that if became Olympic girls/women would have greater motivation and opportunity:

I think probably from a girl's point of view, I'm a bit concerned about that maybe. Because, until it becomes an Olympic sport, girls are sort of on the fence. When it gets that status and if it's likely that the girls are going to get a medal then obviously many more girls will not only take it up but they will also train and try and put everything they've got into it. In our last world championships, we had really good turnout of girls and good racing. Foil class has got the same. I think it's stabilised; when we get any formal decision I think things will move on.

When it did become Olympic in 2012 and, we were going to the Olympics then and it was even it was 50/50 maybe 40 per cent. There were a lot of girls.

Kiteboarding in the 2018 YOG

We discuss kiteboarding in the YOG in section 2.3.5 below outlining the difficulties and opportunities. Many of the issues for the kite community are similar to Olympics inclusion:

- Young people focus on twin tip and freestyle not race boards.
- Concerns and debates about the The format and rules; IKA have proposed a short track format for YOG.
- Recognition kiteboarding involves expense and commitment. Lack of formal and funded training or coaching pathways in most countries.
- Windsurfing and sailing at YOG Nanjing was seen as a big success (and much more popular than Olympic windsurfing- different craft).
- Decision to replace bite boat with kite boarding perplexed some commentators.
- Fear kite surfing will not make an impact at YOG (due to poor decision about style of event) which will have implications for the future of kite surfing in Olympics.

Kitesurfers at the Olympics: Potential issues and conflicts

What does the IOC gain from Olympic inclusion?

Some of the key benefits that emerged from the interview (see also section 1- why *kitesurfing*?)

In summary

1. Kitesurfing the fastest form of sailing; potential to be more spectacular than most yachting events; faster in light winds; popular with youth; offer a range of styles and formats; spectator friendly:

The women's world champion was 17 when she won world championships and the European champion is just 18 now, so there is a lot of youth top competitors. Number four or five in the world is, I think, 15 now. It's a very young sport; the top athletes are actually very young!

2. Kitesurfing like windsurfing is a more accessible form of yachting: it has the potential to democratise yachting:

And I think sailing is in trouble anyway, because developing nations struggle to be competitive, unlike say athletics or some of these other sports that are not so equipment-oriented. [...] One of my biggest concerns for sailing is if we don't get the developing nations in, sailing will drop out of the Olympic games. Developing nations need affordable classes to compete in ... I think you might see them looking at kite surfing going well, you know, that's pretty cool, you can do all this stuff, in the waves, free style etc. and it's so transportable & relatively affordable

Olympic inclusion will stifle development of the sport- as happened in windsurfing racing.

... the possibility for them [IOC and ISF] to embrace kite boarding program and kite boarding training with the sailing federation easily because compared to all the other classes the cost is really low, so they can make a lot of activity with a low budget. Like windsurfing, with techno. Why techno is so popular all around the world, the youth with the surfing class, because the cost is low, super easy, a lot of kids and they can do a lot of activity with just a couple of thousand euro. It's easy to travel, transportation and everything. Kite boarding can have the same good things.

3. Easier to transport: Because transportation is no problem, you don't have a boat to carry around. You just jump in the car or it's on the roof and that's it'.
4. It can be conducted outside of formal club base participations- appeals to different groups and a younger demographic than many yachting classes.
5. Provides route for developing nations to get into yachting disciplines;

It's just too hard for most developing nations to get into Olympic Sailing ... I think that's one of the really wonderful things of kite surfing is that it's so transportable ... and currently low cost compared to other sailing classes. It's easy to fly around the world with it. That's huge. And I think that we might have seen some countries come into the Olympic games for that factor. [...] Kitesurfing in this case is more affordable than most classes & much easier to obtain.

You can travel all around the world with 15 kgs [of] equipment, you can do it almost everywhere when you have some wind and some water. It can be done by a lot of people. It's really great to see from the beach, really great to see in the middle of the sea, TV it's great, sponsors are happy [...] So there is not only one reason, altogether they make good reasons to be there.

6. Kite organisations actively addressing ways in which inclusion can be improved: e.g. quotas, qualifying events locations:

So I think for the qualification process it's important that we have a fair continent representation. Of course we also want to have the top athletes in the age group

there, that's why we are thinking that we take the best competitor from each continent so that means every continent is represented with at least one competitor. [...] That means that the top African, let's say, even if the federations can't afford to send them to any qualifying events, they can still have one competitor.

7. But recognition of the complexities of quota systems:

That's why we think that we shouldn't do qualifying events but just offer events around the world that people can go to and collect points. Then we look at who is the highest ranked African in the world ranking, who's the highest ranked Asian in the world ranking, and so on. Then we take the next five from the top of the world ranking, which might be all Europeans [...] Somehow, every continent needs to be represented but on the other hand I think for the Olympics you should have limited entry. There is a qualification system before it ... or you get sailors at the Olympics that they can hardly get around the course. Or remember the winter Olympics, Eddie the Eagle?

However, as discussed in Section 2, a range of different concerns were voiced-

If we get something new in the Olympics and we really want to showcase something, I think we should probably foil in 2020. We can do the same course and the same racing although probably not jump it, as it's too dangerous. But why not foil?

8. YOG inclusion has not guaranteed funding in many countries. E.g. A successful national coach:

For the last Youth Olympic games, Yachting [a country] were mildly interested in it, and I really say mildly. Because it's not an Olympic class. The only funding that's happening really in yachting in [country], serious funding, is happening in the Olympic classes. And yes, they do have a youth development officer, but the money coming from Sport [country] only targets success and they are not paying for development, so they don't pay for the youth, the focus on Olympic class sailors in the top ten in the world.

They [national sailing federation] are so set on Rio at the moment, the blinkers are off to anything else.

9. Situation unlikely to change significantly if kite boarding is in OG: industry funding will be key source except for world top 10 competitors:

Interviewer: But if it did become an Olympic sport, then there would be a channelling of money into it?

Interviewee: No, not really. They don't fund youth. A lot of countries look at [us], go hey look, here's a country that's punching well above its weight in all kinds of sports. How are they doing it? Oh, they're only spending money on the top sailors.

10. Recognition that diversity and inclusion are key and ongoing issues for the future of sailing disciplines

It's basically [popular in] Europe and North America, and Australia, New Zealand. That's the strong areas—Oceania, Europe and North America, the Americas.

Difficulties in developing a relationship with the IOC

Most of the interviewees felt that the IOC now understood some of the issues and problems they were facing, and there was a perception that Agenda 2020 was a good initiative with positive implications for kiteboarding:

I think the IOC genuinely wants to learn about what are indications and where is the youth going independently.

It's not that the IOC doesn't want it, the problem is that the IOC sometimes should give a little bit clearer indication to the federations on what they want.

There was a recognition that yachting itself is under threat- as a largely expensive, elitist and undemocratic sport:

The national Olympic committees. And of course, they are going to be voting in their own self-interests and if they are not involved in the sport [kiteboarding] it will be gone. We're looking at youth Olympic kitesurfing, and we've got a situation we've got no athletes doing it. I haven't seen any. So in that case it would be gone next time around & possibly not replaced with a sailing sport —but skate boarding instead.

Despite observed positive changes at the IOC, ultimately they felt they weren't able to communicate effectively with the IOC. They felt the sailing federations blocked their voice either through ignorance, incompetence or self-interest. As a consequence, the right decisions were not being made and communication wasn't good enough:

I think IOC should be much more proactive in telling the federations, because in the end the Olympics are a product of the IOC and if you want to do product development and brand building and all of that, then you have to know what you want your product to look like. One of the big moves at the moment, as far as I understand, is to make it more youth appealing and more modern, more X Games style. But that will not work if the IOC is leaving. The federations are the most conservative things in the world, and if they are not pushed they will not change. So I think the IOC should, well they don't need to dictate what to do but they should go and see and say, we would really like to see that, or you should think about this. Or you have to do something, figure it out but you have to do something. There's no pressure from the IOC. At least in ISF I can tell that for sure, if there's no pressure from the IOC to modernise things, then ISF will continue to sail in a 70-year-old boat in the Olympics. That's like on wooden skis.

Some noted that this wasn't just an issue for kiteboarding, as some other yachting classes wanted to modernise but were being held back by ISAF:

So now after agenda 2020 came out with every individual event ISAF finally noticed, oh we have to make our events different. Only took them 30-years; but finally. So, the 49ers for example have a fantastic thing called stadium racing with boundaries left and right, and semi-finals, finals stuff, and they were completely turned down by ISAF council because you have to make everything the same. [...] It's unbelievable. They have been fighting for that for four years and were turned down in the end

I think it just needs a push from the IOC to the international federations and the longer the federation exists and the more traditional it is, the bigger the push has to be otherwise nothing happens.

2.3.5 Youth Olympic Games: Key Themes from Interviews

In this section, we present findings from interviews conducted across the sports of skateboarding, climbing, kiteboarding and BMX freestyle, with a focus on perceptions of the Youth Olympic Games, and particularly the experiences of those who have been involved in past (Nanjing, 2014: skateboarding and sport climbing) and future (Buenos Aires, 2018; kiteboarding, BMX freestyle) Youth Olympic Games (YOG):

Reflections on past YOG: Nanjing (2014)

Skateboarding and sport climbing were featured as part of the Sports Lab innovation at the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games. Interviews with individuals involved in the presentation of skateboarding and sport climbing at this event believed it was pivotal in facilitating their consideration for Tokyo 2020, and overall considered it to be a very positive experience for their athletes and the progression of their sport more generally. However, most interviews noted that few within their broader sporting cultures were aware of this occurrence, mostly due to a lack of coverage or accessibility to the event via social media platforms common among action sports participants (this was also clearly evidenced in the survey).

Need for better media exposure

I think the Youth Olympic Games they need to have a better media exposure, to be broadcast on the web in order to reach the young generation.

Not only in terms of sports but also the way we present it. So for example, the Youth Olympic Games. I don't know if they are doing something but we said to the IOC several times webcast the Youth Olympic Games and you will see. Maybe you will not have huge audiences, but the young generation are so used to use their cell phones something will be seen. With the means they have they can make a huge promotion everywhere. And then the youngsters know that there are the Youth Olympic Games

Skateboarders' experiences:

I followed the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games because of the street and vert exhibition, which were in the sports lab. And I think it was a mistake, politically speaking from the IOC, because they gave that to a private event organiser. But I also believe it was a good decision to showcase skateboarding at the sports lab, so at the end of the day this is just positive. It was not done in the right way but it was done, so this is good. To be honest, before we started to be in this small world of Olympics and internationalisation, I wasn't aware of the Youth Olympic Games.

Dealing with an organisation that's hundreds of years-old with rulebooks bigger than you could ever read, to me it's a learning experience. And it is a really, really big deal that they're willing to make changes. I think that's super cool; if it gives great skateboarders opportunities to do new things on a skateboard and be on this global stage.

Climbers' experiences:

... we were involved in an Olympic scenario in Nanjing. People could come and watch the three disciplines and immediately everybody who was there started asking questions, so we could not only showcase the sport but also explain what is behind it. So showing this and explaining this to the IOC and the media was important because then people can make a link and maybe realise that this is one of the only basic motor skills that is not already represented by a sport at the Olympics.

Actually, I think this [inclusion in Nanjing YOG] was the key step ... because all the IOC members were coming to the sports lab and watching all those sports. This was not just

like a brochure or checking on the web. This was seeing and discussing with the athletes and that's eventually when they—that's all the IOC member, the staff, the board and the president—realised that maybe there is an interest with sport climbing.

Then came the Youth Olympic Games, our inclusion into the sports lab. Actually, I think this was the key step ... because all the IOC members were coming to the sports lab and watching all those sports. This was not just like a brochure or checking on the web. This was seeing and discussing with the athletes and that's eventually when they—that's all the IOC member, the staff, the board and the president—realised that maybe there is an interest with sport climbing, maybe because they might have the answer and I think that they are interested in our sport.

Experiences from Nanjing: windsurfing, kiteboarding and sailing

In Nanjing at the last Youth Olympics, there was no wind the whole time. If there had have been kitesurfing at that event, I think they would have got maybe two races the whole event. This would have been a disaster for yachting compared to the other Olympic sports.

- Windsurfing and sailing at YOG Nanjing was seen as a big success (and much more popular than Olympic windsurfing—different craft, popular with youth).

The windsurfing is a whole lot more technical to do, but it was still great—we saw some people coming from countries that we've never heard of before, like the boy from [X] going really well in some races. That was awesome, but you're not going to see that in the senior Olympic classes in its current format, because people have to provide too much of their own equipment, it's very expensive to move it around the world etc. etc.

- The subsequent decision to replace Bite boat (as used in Nanjing) with kite boarding for 2018 perplexed some commentators.

It [Bite] has been favoured by ISAF for quite a few years & has reasonably large fleets of a high level at the world Championships. Now a class that doesn't really exist in any numbers at any world championships ever has replaced it! First thing is I didn't think it should replace windsurfing. Windsurfing ticked a lot of the boxes that I thought represented an Olympic sport better than most of the other sailing classes. It's affordable, it's transportable, it's colourful, young people are doing it. The techno class, there's a good base there. The Bic Techno World Championships is probably one of the biggest one design sailing classes in the world. [...] there was a nice pathway for it. To suddenly have it dropped for kite surf racing, which was not that well developed, I found shocking. [...] So, the kite replacing Bite [biggest class of the Youth Olympic games because of the large number of nations have youths in this sport] is another ISAF big disaster. The Youth Olympics was the first time I'd actually been to an international yachting event where I've thought, hey, this is really cool. It's the first time I've seen smaller & developing nations being quite competitive. Because the classes were affordable & accessible for the kids to get into the sport and there were large numbers globally doing the sport at a high level and everything was provided for the event. Around 10 coaches from the various nations where all the coach boats together, so the coaches weren't making the difference, and it was just the kids.

Looking forward: Buenos Aires (2018)

Proposed new sports: BMX Freestyle and Kiteboarding:

I think that the BMX freestyle in the next Youth Olympic Games is just a perfect move and we are so glad. ... they selected this discipline because the UCI recognised it through FISE, through Hurricane, so it's a satisfaction for us, and this is the step before the Olympics I guess (action industry/events)

This is an important development in our Olympic journey and we are excited that young kiteboarders will be given the first opportunity to showcase their talent at the 2018 Youth Olympics. Young athletes now have a serious goal to strive for, and as many of our top sailors will be in the right age range for the Youth Olympics, we are sure that the highest performance will be guaranteed. This is going to be a terrific event for both competitors and spectators alike (Mirco Babini, President of the International Kiteboarding Association, IKA).

Interviewees expressed some uncertainty about how/what new sports are added, and the processes involved in such decision-making. For example, a member of the skateboarding industry (and action sports events) noted that 'vert' skateboarding isn't accessible enough or youth-focused, and thus should not have been included in Nanjing:

No vert. For me, the vert is not existing anymore. I'm a skateboarder since I was six-years-old, it was my first action sport. I love vert, I do love vert riders. But the reality is that vert riders are a lot older, the infrastructure is too expensive, and it's high risk. So, that's why for me vert is not the future of the sport. I think Olympics need to showcase sports which are more developed and the sport, the discipline where the youth can identify themselves and it's definitely not the vert, this is the park on the street, which is the same by the way.

Qualification systems for kitesurfing were unclear (early 2016), but under discussion at national/international level:

we will try to make the qualification events as late as possible. One of the options would be we take the world ranking end of 2017 and take the best competitor from each continent, then the next top five from the world ranking, or something like that.

Kiteboarding in Buenos Aires 2018

Key issues

- a. The format.
- b. Concerns about rules.
- c. Difficulties and opportunities.

While the IKO was clearly pleased about this, there was also some concerns expressed by the kite community, and potential competitors. Competitors/parents/coaches talked about the patchy information about the YOG.

Again, they don't have much knowledge at the moment, because we don't know the format and we don't know the discipline.

Kiteboarders expressed concern about the decision to use the Formula Kite rather than styles more popular among youth (i.e., twin tip), and this was a point of considerable discussion within the kiteboarding community.

Formula Kite provides a stable equipment platform across the world. Even in the lightest wind conditions, we can showcase high performance sailing and display the sport at its best. Twin Tip Racing remains our grassroots racing equipment, and we continue to race hydrofoils experimentally without equipment limitations. For the Youth Olympic Games however, it's important to use equipment that is readily available so that National Federations (MNAs) can kick off their athlete programs quickly and with certainty. This is why ISAF has selected Formula Kite (Markus Schwendtner, CEO of IKA).

While recognising that freestyle (the most popular amongst youth) is not practical for IOC style competitions or sailing venues (see kitesurf interviews), there is still concerns that young people focus on twin tip and freestyle not race boards.

We're looking at youth Olympic kite surfing, and we've got a situation we've got no athletes doing it. I haven't seen any ... most of them are on twintip boards, the normal, not race boards and with an age of 15 to 18.

That shocked me actually. [...] Personally, I've never ever seen anybody kite surfing, racing, in their early teens. Never.... ISAF created a Youth Olympic sport, without athletes in most countries around the world & most countries will not bother to send someone.

- This choice of racing vs freestyle was driving by IOC

They [Olympic people] said to us no, they're not interested in freestyle, mainly because there is a judging system, they try to avoid judging disciplines, and also because if you have less than 15 knots the discipline of freestyle is a joke, it doesn't make any sense.

We presented them all disciplines that we had, from freestyle, wave riding, kicker/slider, slalom, speed racing and they said we want to have something racing where we can say first one over the line wins.

There are guidelines from the IOC on how to do it and the last time I spoke with [person], who is the competitions manager at ISF, he hadn't received the guidelines from IOC yet. [...] It's the international federation that is deciding the details of the qualification. They are sending that idea to the IOC to check if IOC is happy with it. It's the same process I guess as works for normal Olympics.

Extensive debates about new formats, choice of equipment and the ramifications:

We have talked a long time about what equipment we should use and should do, because especially for young people [...] The advantage is that the guys that are going to youth Olympics are basically already the top competitors in the open class as well, or in open age group, by that time. The problem is that three years in the future to the youth Olympics, that means they 12 to 15 now to be at the right age then, and no one being 12 to 15 is usually racing. For they will start racing when they are 14, 15, and then they are 18 by the time of the youth Olympics. That is one of the challenges with the whole youth thing. People develop very fast into the sport and become very good very quick, and then are ready to compete.

What we have proposed at the moment is formula kite class, we call it a box rule, and there are limitations on size. There's a maximum length, a maximum width, but basically everyone can build whatever he wants as long as he is producing it in a serious production system, so everyone can go in a shop and buy it, the same board and kite as the world champion.

- IKA have proposed a short track format for YOG:

So the short track format is run in heats like slalom windsurfing, so reaching start [...] We basically set up an up and down in slalom. You slalom eight, basically, around the windward and leeward mark, which means you have two manoeuvres on each tack and you have to use tactics on where you want to tack, to go further out or to go directly round it. [...] You get a lot of action because you have a reaching start where they go 30 knots full speed and then go downwind. In the next evolution step, we want to put a jump to the finish line.

Recognition kiteboarding involves expense and commitment. Lack of formal and funded training or coaching pathways in most countries. Hope that being in the YOG would help

It's [YOG] going to help general participation and obviously particularly youngsters, we hope, and parents that see that they want to get their kids into it and go well actually there is a pathway for this child, which there hasn't been.

- However, recognition that YOG unlikely to lead to much funding from national federations:

it's just expensive for a lot of parents and it involves parents putting the input in—you know, driving to the beach, providing them with equipment and making it safe. [...] kiteboarding involves expense and commitment.

it's ensuring that they then have got an opportunity to continue with their kite boarding and that normally comes from either a club or parents. The [yachting NGB] level one or level two, whatever that was for windsurfing isn't that place, which again I'm really surprised that the [yachting NGB] haven't got onto this because I presume that they will want to take a couple of youth riders to the Olympic Games for the youth, it's only two years' time.

Funnily enough, it's more so in the developing countries or countries like Slovakia and all those kind of Eastern bloc, you see so many young kids being pushed by their parents in all these different disciplines and you say well how old are they, oh they're born in 2001 well they're going to be in the Youth Olympics.

I heard from the Polish association that because of the prospect of potential Olympic inclusion and the youth Olympics that are coming up, the Polish yachting association gets more money from the government, but they're not passing it on to the kite association. They employed one or two coaches that are going with the riders but I think part of the money they just put in their own pockets and use it for Olympic classes. Which is not fair, is not the right thing to do

There are some fears that kite surfing will not make an impact at YOG which will have implications for the future of kite boarding in Olympics:

What will the IOC think of Sailing as an Olympic Youth sport if only a handful of competitors show up? The sailing classes at the last youth Olympic classes were oversubscribed & many sailors/nations were turned away. I find this whole situation really shocking. I'm absolutely flabbergasted.

Summary of YOG findings:

- Huge potential in action sports to attract youth audiences and change global perceptions of the Olympics via YOG.
- Action sport enthusiast/ participants largely not that interested in the YOG (survey findings).
- Many youth are not watching YOG.

- Much can be learned from use of social media and connectedness in action sport cultures/events.
- Some excitement about inclusion of action sports, but this can't be a simple process of inclusion within existing models. It must be done with respect and understanding for what makes these sports unique (i.e., cultural dynamics, values, style).
- Particular struggles over who decides which events/equipment/facilities are showcased at YOG, especially when the sports are subsumed under federations not run by those with understanding of action sports themselves (i.e., kiteboarding).

2.4. Trends Across Sports

In this section, we present eight themes that emerged across the four sports that were the focus of the interviews (surfing, skateboarding, sport climbing, and kiteboarding), and also in relation to our two other methods of media analysis and the survey. The eight key themes are:

- 2.4.1: Women's participation: Opportunities and challenges;
- 2.4.2: Governance: The challenges of/for new and existing federations;
- 2.4.3: Relationships with the IOC and reflections on the process towards Tokyo 2020;
- 2.4.4: The challenge (and importance) of action sport community engagement;
- 2.4.5: Drugs: Are the athletes ready?
- 2.4.6: The changing relationships between athletes, corporations and the nation;
- 2.4.7: Changing global perceptions of the IOC and Olympic Games;
- 2.4.8: Comparisons across sports.

As may have become apparent in the previous section, action sport participants identify strongly with their sporting cultures and thus are very passionate, and in some cases, highly protective, of 'their' sports being misappropriated by outside organizations that do not understand or respect their unique cultural value systems. For those who have dedicated their lives to these sports (and particularly the older participants still involved), they have seen this many times before and have developed their own particular ways of responding to, rejecting, organizations that they do not consider 'culturally authentic' (Beal & Wilson, 2004; Wheaton & Beal, 2003). As the following quote illustrates, even the seemingly banal issues (e.g., clothing) are considered very important to the cultural core and periphery, as such issues represent matters of autonomy over their sports, and also are connected to key cultural values of self-expression through bodily displays:

We are part of the process and we want to bring the action sports to the Olympics. But if the IOC or the federation oblige the skateboarders or the riders, for example to wear a uniform, this is a big fault. No way, I prefer not to see skateboarding at the Olympics than oblige the rider to wear some uniform. We need to keep the authenticity; again, some compromise with the dollar. But it's mandatory to keep the values and authenticity of skateboarding culture.

Although such an attitude may be considered extreme to those involved in more traditional sporting cultures where uniforms are 'part and parcel' of the sporting experience, for many action sport participants such issues are highly controversial (see Thorpe & Wheaton, 2012). In this section we highlight some of the key issues that have emerged across sports with the aim that they will be helpful to those working with action sport athletes and federations, and to facilitate deeper cultural understanding that can be used towards developing more productive and constructive ways through such issues, and thus a more successful (in the eyes of both the IOC, mainstream audiences and action sport enthusiasts) representation of action sports on the Olympic stage.

2.4.1 Women's participation: Opportunities and challenges

Across our interviews and surveys, there was a general perception that Olympic inclusion would be a positive development for women in sport climbing (see p. 84), surfing (see pp. 59-60), skateboarding (see 77-79) and kitesurfing (see pp. 112). It is important to note that there are differences across these sports due to different gender relations within these sporting cultures, and the opportunities currently available for women as athletes, managers and leaders. For example, women have much greater visibility and financial support in surfing than in skateboarding. However, there was a common theme that because women hold secondary positions within these sporting cultures, inclusion in the Olympic Games has the potential to offer opportunities for greater visibility and support that is otherwise largely unavailable. The following quote from a female skateboarder is particularly insightful here:

We're already used to not having anything so, aside from our own love of skating and the community we've built, there's really nothing to lose at this point for anyone. Even the most hard-core street skater on the girl's side is ready for the Olympics. They could care less, they're like bring it on, let's do this! It's seen through such a different lens for us. We don't have the luxury of some of the men who can just film and do what they want and be more of an artist with their skating. It's definitely seen in a different way by female skaters.

The surveys also showed that women were more interested in the inclusion of surfing and kitesurfing into the Olympics than their male peers, which further support our suggestion above. That is, that the historical male-dominance of action sports means male participants are more wary about the 'loss' of their dominance and control of these activities, whereas women tend to view the Olympics as less a threat to 'lose' something, but rather as an opportunity to gain positioning in action sports cultures and industries.

In terms of women in leadership and coaching positions, it was noted that most Federations remain male dominated. Some are making attempts to include women in positions of power, but more can be done in this respect.

2.4.2 Governance: The Challenges of/for New and Existing Federations

As more action sports are considered for Olympic inclusion, International Federations are taking on new roles and responsibilities, some of which will prove challenging as the Federations negotiate new positions within the global action sport culture and industry. To date, existing International Federations have played a secondary role to action sport corporations and events that tend to dictate how the sport and athletes are funded. The Figure below illustrates the position of International Federations with pressures and expectations from various aspects of the culture (i.e., media, events, global icons, corporations), and how the International Federations negotiate these roles and relationships will be important for the overall success of these sports at the Olympic Games. As we explain in the remainder of this section, however, the existing positions of the Federations within the global action sports industry will be very different for those sports who are being subsumed under existing Federations (i.e., kitesurfing and BMX freestyle) in comparison to action sport specific Federations that have either been in existence for some time and functioning as an international governing body (i.e., International Surfing Federation), or federations that are quickly growing in response to possible Olympic inclusion (i.e., International Skateboarding Federation, World Skateboarding Federation).

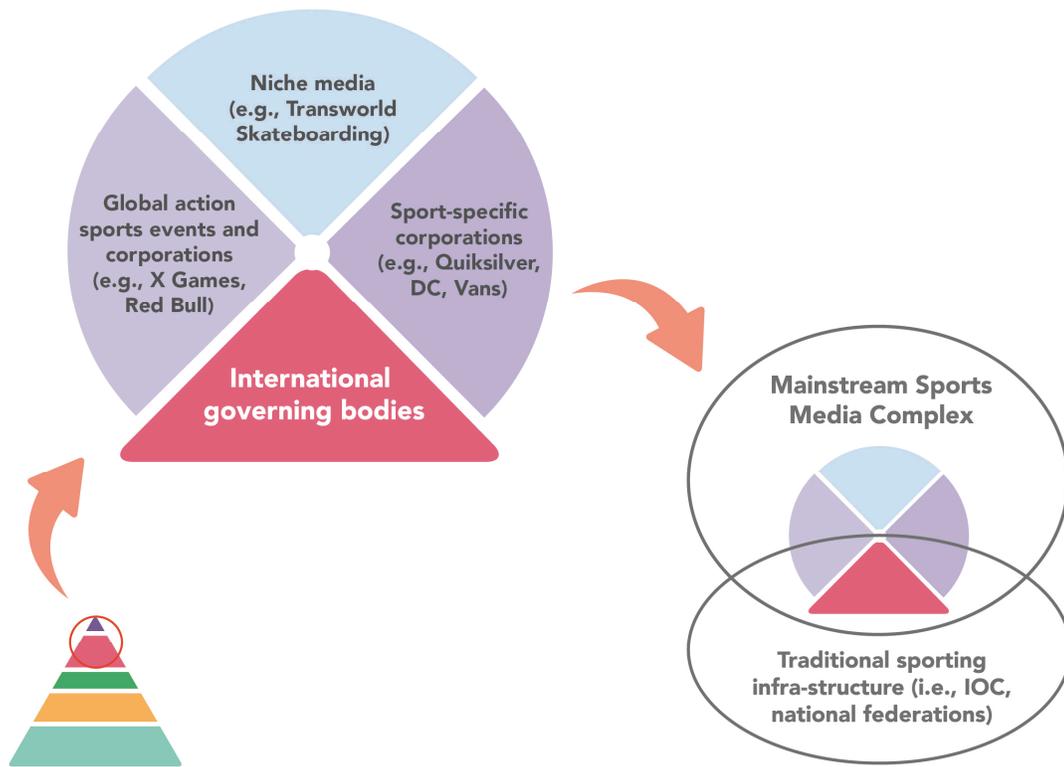


Figure 23. International Federations position within and between the global action sports cultural complex and traditional sporting infrastructure

There is an important distinction to be made between two different models of governance being utilized for action sports inclusion into the YOG and Olympic Games:

1. Action sport managed by an existing federation:

This is the approach used for the incorporation of windsurfing (ISAF), snowboarding (FIS), and BMX racing (ICF), and is the case for kiteboarding (ISAF) and BMX freestyle (ICF) inclusion into the 2018 YOG. There are strengths and limitations of this approach. The main strength being that the existing federations have experience with the roles, rules and regulations required for a sport competition to be hosted at the Olympic Games. A limitation can be that the parent federation doesn't have the cultural understanding (or respect) for what makes the action sport unique (and thus a point of difference and value for the Olympic Games). However, through our interviews, we recognize that there are different ways that existing federations are approaching (or avoiding) the inclusion of action sports. For example, some kiteboarders do not feel that the ISF is responsive enough to new trends:

Everyone [in the ISAF] is very traditional and it's all structured, and the people that are sitting in council and the federations, they're 70-years-old now and they had their sailing career in the laser in 1950s.

The federations are very slow and there are other people in the federation that first have their say on it, or try to move things in the direction they think it should go. I think IOC should be much more proactive in telling the federations. One of the big moves at the moment, as far as I understand, is to make it more youth appealing and

more modern, more X Games style. But that will not work if the IOC is leaving it up to the international federations to renew, because the federations will not. The federations are the most conservative things in the world, and if they are not pushed, they will not change. At least in ISF I can tell that for sure, if there's no pressure from the IOC to modernize things, then ISF will continue to sail in a 70-year old boat in the Olympics. That's like on wooden skis.

There are also concerns about whether money will flow to kitesurfing, or will be redistributed to other yachting classes. In contrast, some freestyle BMX'ers felt they had a productive relationship with the UCI who are working with consultants to ensure they have appropriate cultural understanding and insight:

So we have three years to prepare that with the UCI and will not appear as an organiser or whatever, the UCI will be in charge of that. They will make their own decision but we'll (FISE) be behind them to help them to make the right choices and to showcase the best of the BMX freestyle men and women competition.

It's exciting because we are now talking to the leaders and they really listen to us and they start to understand. I believe that because now the federation, especially the UCI recognise the BMX freestyle, we are more listened to by the decision makers in the sport industry who are still traditional.

2. Action sports managed by a new federation:

In contrast, those sports that are being (or are proposing to be) managed by a federation specific to their sport, including surfing (see pp. 60-62), skateboarding (see pp. 67-72), and sport-climbing (see pp. 85-89), have a different set of issues they are working through. In particular, they are learning the new roles and responsibilities involved in leading and managing an Olympic sport, and there is currently considerable confusion as to what this process involves. Some federations asked for more support from the IOC in terms of focusing their limited resources and making decisions to best prepare their sport for Olympic inclusion, as illustrated in the following quote:

I would really love to have a relationship with them [the IOC] and say 'Okay, yes, we have some problems, these are this one, this one, this one. Now we work on these issues, but you need to help us'.

Following the announcement of the decision at the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics, we anticipate the International Federations will have a lot of work ahead of them in working with existing (and new) national federations, and communicating clearly with athletes and nations interested to know more about qualification criteria, drug testing, event formats and judging, age limits, to name just a few of the relevant topics. While the International Federations are preparing for their new roles and responsibilities, they will largely be in uncharted territory and will be requiring new resourcing structures and knowledge exchanges with the IOC.

2.4.3 Relationships with the IOC and reflections on the process towards Tokyo 2020

While some committed action sport participants may be critical of Olympic inclusion, as suggested in the survey results and in niche media analysis, young action sport participants are most excited by the possibility of seeing action sports on the Olympic stage. It is also worth noting that many of the interviewees felt high levels of confidence in the IOC based on their interactions at various stages over the past few years. It is important to note here, however, that these are a very small, select few who have worked closely with the IOC. It was apparent that in a lot of interviews, especially those with heads of International federations, their responses had a clear agenda that was to use the interview as another

opportunity to strengthen their case to the IOC. Moreover, at the time of this project, no announcement had been made and thus some were taking a lot of care to portray their sport and federation in the best possible light. In our interviews with Presidents of International Federations (or potential IF), we also found some of their responses to be somewhat romantic visions for their sports inclusion into the Olympic Games, and there was some glossing over the complexities of what Olympic inclusion may mean for their sporting cultures and industries more broadly. For example, while many were aware of the need to promote diversity in their sports, reaching out to non-core and developing nations, the difficulties and complexities of achieving these objectives were often ignored, or glossed over. We understood such romanticizing to be an important part of their role as Presidents, to captivate the imagination of both the IOC and various key industry and sporting members to help move along their cause.

Working with the IOC: Significance of Agenda 2020

A number of our interviewees observed a significant shift in their interactions and working relationship with the IOC since the arrival of President Thomas Bach and Agenda 2020:

I do believe the process today is totally different to the process of 2004—but I also think the world has changed and their thought process has changed and they are definitely becoming more, how would you say, more relevant to the thought process of youth. But I do believe they get it. We have a new generation of young people at the IOC, and sometimes it's all about timing. (Skateboarding)

There is a big change inside the IOC in terms of attitude, at least towards us, and not only sport climbing but also the five federations that are involved in this journey. (Climbing)

I believe that the leaders of the IOC, the head of the IF, they get older so new people are coming, it's not necessarily 'young' people running the show, but it's younger people so they realise a new trend and they know that they need this kind of sport to be younger. (Skateboarding)

New IOC Approaches to Working with Action Sports

Comments were made about the new strategies being employed by the IOC to better understand the particular action sport cultures and industries. In particular, mention was made of sending younger IOC staff to action sports events where they spoke with athletes, event organizers, sponsors, and media, to develop more in-depth and nuanced understandings of these sports:

The sentiment that I do hear across the industry is that the IOC is taking a lot of time to really choose who is ultimately going to govern skateboarding. And I think that's awesome. ... They actually had an IOC representative in South Africa that I hung out with quite a bit. It was really cool. I did normal things with them, went to lunch, and did some tourist stuff, and he was just asking a hundred questions. I thought that was great, he was really trying to understand it. ... he was really young and he was a former Olympian. He was a swimmer, and he was 27 or 28, and I was like hmm. So they're trying to put these people in there, and here I am 15 years older than him, which I thought was funny. I was like, Dude, you're like a kid, and you're the age of guys skating in this contest, and you're here evaluating. I thought that was pretty cool, like they didn't send some old guy. I thought that was pretty impressive that they even knew they send someone that can understand and appreciate this. So yeah, I think there is a shift. What I've always heard, and I never paid any attention to it because I didn't care about it, but when snowboarding was brought into the Olympics as a sport, that I always heard it was done wrong. It was done wrong. I don't know what that means, because I didn't study it, but I've always heard that. Maybe they're trying to not do that again, is what I suspect. (Skateboarding)

Some interviewees also recognized changes in the IOC in terms of their willingness to make (some) compromises for the inclusion of action sports, and this was appreciated:

... [a top action sport athlete] he told me as an athlete my dream is to participate to the Olympics, to represent my country. So again, it's just a matter of compromise. We are ready to do some compromise, and I think that the IOC and the federation, they are already doing some compromise. They did it with the snowboard so I don't have any fears regarding that. (Action sports industry)

... it is a really, really big deal that they're willing to make changes. I think that's super cool. To me it makes it even more enticing and appealing and gives good vibes and good feelings towards it, is what I think. Like, hey we're not trying to change you, and of course they're trying to use skateboarding for ratings and to get the youth involved, and so what? So be it, if it gives great skateboarders opportunities to do new things on a skateboard and be on this global stage. (Skateboarding)

Ongoing Challenges

Despite many interviewees commenting positively on the efforts of the IOC to develop more productive and respectful relationships with their action sporting cultures, some noted that there was still some work to be done. In particular, some federation members expressed that they have not always been able to access clear answers that would help them in their longer-term planning and investment in resourcing, and that they have felt at the mercy of the IOC who continues to 'pull the strings':

I don't know ... the rules are unclear and to be honest this is not really fair but this is the situation so we need to accept. (Climbing)

Money and Power

For some interviewees within the International and National Federations, there were concerns about the uncertainty of funding structures within the Olympic Games, including:

- Television rights from the Olympic Games;
- Funding via Olympic pathways.

For those within sports that are managed by an existing federation (i.e., kitesurfing), there were serious concerns that funding coming into the federation would not reach the athletes due to politics within the federation and a lack of respect and value for the action sport.

The Olympic Games: Not the Pinnacle of Competition for Action Sports

Some of our interviewee's reiterated that the Olympic Games will not be the pinnacle of achievement in action sports, but rather an 'additional' event that only a select few will choose (or have the opportunity) to participate in:

It's like once every four years, they're [professional surfers] not really into that and it'd only be a gimmick thing for them to do.

For [the professional surfers] it would just be a sideshow every four years. They wouldn't value an Olympic gold medal the same way that they would value the world professional surfing championship.

The Olympic Games will be part of the athletes' competition schedules, which will include events with different rules and regulations. This was particularly apparent at the 2016 Winter X Games in Oslo where

the event organizers refused to impose drug testing on their athletes, despite the public concerns of IOC President Bach and the President of WADA. This will be an ongoing consideration for the IOC as action sport athletes will only temporarily enter the Olympic framework, while the majority of their year will be dedicated to competitions and performances within their sporting cultures that will not necessarily have the same rule structures.

2.4.4 The challenge (and importance) of action sport community engagement

While the inclusion of action sports into the Olympic Games is likely to be of interest to mainstream audiences who are less familiar with these sports and will consider them an exciting novelty at the Olympic Games, it will also be important that the 'core' of these cultures 'buys in' to Olympic inclusion. The analysis of a wide range of action sport media illustrated that the anti-Olympic sentiment is still strong amongst some parts of the 'core'. It was also evident in our survey that core action sport participants have concerns about the IOC and what Olympic inclusion may mean for their sporting cultures:

Action sports often require a lot more training than other "normal" sports. And not only that, it also takes courage and bravery. So, I think that the Olympic spirit is more represented by this kind of sport. Action sport got that "plus" that always amaze people more than, just for example, the 1000 meters crawl of swimming.

Olympics represent everything evil about sports. Sports shouldn't be part of politics, and that's what it's all about. If you just look at the places where Olympics been held in the past years (and will take place in the future), they are not the places should do so. Human rights, environmental issues and such are done so badly that there's no way you can say you support Olympic movement. Action sports have always been somehow "rebel" in a good way. They have always said "hell no" if someone wants them to be part of something they feel hard to represent. In the end, Olympics is the biggest NO to represent. With that in mind, not only every action sport should get rid of Olympics but also the whole Olympic movement should vanish.

The age of Olympics status defining the most prestigious or elite level of sporting competition is nearly over. Especially for "action" sports. World Cup and Champs series and large one off events trump a once in 4-year, media driven, dubious sponsor fuelled jingoistic mess of an event!

If the core action sports communities and industry are unsupportive of their activities being in the Olympics, it will likely make it very difficult for athletes to follow an Olympic career path, thus compromising the sustainability of these sports in the Olympics.

They can easily make some crazy event, something fantastic. But for me the important thing, if they really want to have the support from the community of these sports, is to engage all the community in advance. They [the IOC] will use the value of the sports for some sponsors, marketing, but [if they don't respect the culture] they will miss all the community engagement and that's too bad, because then we are not on a sustainable basis.

This was particularly evident in the debates about surfing in wave pools, which to date, was largely unsupported by action sport participants. However, as the survey illustrated, younger participants (under 20-years) were the most likely to embrace such changes in their sports cultures. Some also suggested that the IOC should pay attention to strategies of successful action sport companies regarding 'authenticity' within action sport cultures, as some have done a good job of negotiating the line between cultural credibility and economically successful ventures:

Basically they [the IOC] should use them [big action sport sponsors] as an example. Because some have done a very good job of managing the balance, between trying to make money, as a principal, but at the same time they get the legitimacy of the community. Which is very important!

2.4.5 Drugs: Are the athletes ready?

A question that has garnered much consideration both within the action sporting cultures and within the IOC is ‘are the athletes ready?’ According to our interviewees, there was a belief that the select few athletes who choose to follow an Olympic career path and who gain qualification will ensure they understand and follow the rules and regulations of the IOC. It will ultimately be the role of the International Federations, however, who ensure that the athletes are well informed of the processes and expectations involved in Olympic qualification and competition:

I think if it’s a situation where you are going to the Olympics and you have worked hard to get there, and somebody is saying to you ‘if you violate this rule, you’ll be thrown out, you work for Team USA and you will be disqualified’, I think they would think long and hard about it. (Skateboarding)

There’s a lot of rumbling about the drug tests, but I think they guys that want to go, won’t care, especially the younger skaters. Because everyone is just going to know—if you want to go down this path, you don’t do drugs. And that’s the end of it. So, yeah there are definitely rumblings, but I think it’s almost going to be non-issue in the long run. Someone who has an opportunity to be an Olympian and wants to be, are they really going to be like no, I’m not going to be an Olympian because I’m going to smoke weed instead? It just sounds stupid. (Skateboarding)

2.4.6 The changing relationships between athletes, corporations and the nation

The Olympics marks a new phase in an ongoing professionalization of action sports, which will not only accentuate the increasingly complex relationships between athletes and corporations, but also has the potential to change how athletes’ careers are funded (and dictated) with a potential swing from corporations to the nation. These issues came to the fore during conversations about potential uniforms, branding and cultural attitudes towards uniforms. For some sports (i.e., skateboarding) more than others (i.e., surfing, climbing), the idea of wearing a uniform was highly controversial among those interviewed:

For those athletes at international competition, all that USA Climbing contractually agrees to is with our sponsor The North Face is whereby all the athletes have to wear the official US team jersey and jacket, but if they want to wear their personal sponsors lower body wear that’s absolutely okay and they just have to make sure that the branding is not to exceed the specific size. So, I think because we structured that way the athletes themselves can still continue to try and generate revenue for their personal sponsorship through that opportunity, but USA Climbing still has the ability to generate sponsorship revenue specific to the upper body wear, if that makes sense. (Climbing)

I had a great conversation with one of my colleagues, who said what are you talking about? You can’t argue with the IOC about stuff. They make the uniform, that doesn’t even make any sense, they are the Olympics. If they want you, there’s just a thing and you just do it. And we’re like no, that’s not how it’s going. And that’s the fight that we’re trying to have in the first place, is to have some agency. And that’s the big thing. (Skateboarding)

Skateboarders are not uniform people ... I just think we've done it with ice skating where individual form of expression in clothing has been completely acceptable. And so could we not go there with skateboarding? That would be my hope in a way, but then again there's a lot of money at stake for that branding, so I don't think that opportunity is going to pass by lightly. (Skateboarding)

2.4.7 Belief in changing perceptions of the IOC and Olympic Games

As noted in previous sections on individual sports, there is was a perception among many of our interviewees that the inclusion of action sports into the Olympic Games signals to an international audience that the IOC is flexible and responding to changing trends in youth sport participation and consumptions:

What a tremendous value adding, because it will show the world that the IOC is not stuck in time with a sport line-up, but it's actually looking around to see what comes up in the world, and supporting evolution and change in the world of sports. (Surfing)

The IOC is often compared to FIFA with money and scandals. This is an opportunity to show the world there is a big change in the IOC, and they are listening to youth [edited for clarity]. (Climbing)

In the program composition, the IOC was behind the times, behind history. The arrival of President Bach in 2013 was like the election of the new Pope ... the arrival of another great leader.... They both needed to figure out how to adapt [to a changing society], how to evolve, how to embrace [change]. (Surfing)

Again, it is important to note that many of our interviewees were individuals who have been involved in working with the IOC towards short-listing and inclusion, and thus have a much more positive interpretation of the IOC that those who have not been involved in the process, or those in action sport cultures more broadly, many of whom remain highly sceptical of the IOC's motivations for the inclusion of 'their' sports into the Olympic Games, and even fearful of the consequences for their sporting cultures.

2.4.8 Comparisons across sports and lessons from the past

Some of our interviewees noted that the IOC seems to have learned a number of important lessons through the process of including snowboarding in the 1998 Winter Olympic Games (under the International Federation of Skiing that proved very controversial at the time), and windsurfing under the control of yachting (1984). While the IOC may have learned many lessons from this process, and are going a long way to ensure a more productive (and less political) way forward with other action sports, it is important to note that many within action sport cultures also seem to have learned important lessons by looking back at the inclusion of other action sports into the Olympic Games. Indeed, the example of 'what happened to snowboarding' in the process leading up to and following the inclusion into the Olympic Games was raised throughout interviews, as well as in the survey comments sections and in our media analysis. For the kiteboarders, most wanted to learn from, and avoid the mistakes made in the inclusion of windsurfing, particularly the wrong choice of equipment and format.

Interestingly, many of our interviewees are involved in multiple action sports (as least as recreational participants or viewers), and intimately aware of the connections across the board-sports industry (particularly for surfing, skateboarding and snowboarding). Thus, some offered comments across sports that included comparisons on the suitability of different action sports for Olympic inclusion:

I fight for the sport I represent officially, which is skateboarding and I also believe that there is some technical issues with the surf, including the weather conditions, and the cost

of the infrastructure. Also, I believe that the sport that will go to the Olympics needs to be a worldwide practice. Yes, surfing is a worldwide practice but less so than skateboard. Except if you live on the shore with waves, you need a lot of money to be a surfer. So unfortunately, not a lot of young people have the chance to ride on a surfboard. I believe there are some breaks (problems) with the surf that the skateboard doesn't have at all.

In skateboarding today, I am really into watching all the contests, I kind of get into them and stuff, but surfers have actually really started taking the world surf tour seriously and staying up all night to watch it and stuff. Skateboarding, you may not be even getting a guys best material in a skate contest where you can just watch the video footage that he puts out and it's better than sitting there all day trying to watch the skate contest. So that's kind of the interesting thing about the skateboarding, you have the videos and stuff as well that most skaters prefer to watch.

This final quote highlights important differences in media consumption across action sports that might prove important when the IOC works with the International Federations to make decisions about how to represent the sports at the Olympic Games. Based on such comments and our research across an array of action sport cultures, we recommend that the IOC encourages the International Federations to look beyond their individual action sport to take note of trends in other action sports to see the strengths and weaknesses in their own (and other) action sports event organization and management, and media production and consumption strategies.

2.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey revealed that there is considerable interest in action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games: 60% of the survey participants thought that the inclusion of most action sports was a good idea, and would probably lead to them watching more of the Olympics. However, they also have concerns about how action sports are being represented. Skateboarding was clearly the most popular sport for Olympic inclusion, suggesting it's broader cultural significance and central role within the action sports community. It also confirmed the existence of generational shifts in attitudes (also discussed in the interviews). Under 20s were most enthusiastic about action sports being included in the Olympics: 80% of under 20s supported it. There were also differences nationally, and in some sports between men and women, that require further research.

The research illustrates that there is huge potential in action sports to attract youth audiences and change global perceptions of the Olympics. But, including action sports can't be a simple process of inclusion within existing models. It must be done with respect and understanding for what makes these sports unique (i.e., cultural dynamics, values, style) and different to more traditional sports. Each action sport has its own specific issues when working towards Olympic inclusion, including relationships between International and National Federations, the action sports industry, and the culture more broadly. Opportunities for self-governance and trust in the international federations will be key for core participants 'buy in', and thus long-term sustainability. Interviewees expressed uncertainty about funding following Olympic inclusion, and predicted politics for the flow of resources.

Our results signal important areas for further research, including national differences in perceptions of action sports inclusion into the Olympic Games; the perceptions of youth, and particularly children; mainstream audiences responses to action sports inclusion in Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games; and the effects of Olympic inclusion on gender diversity and global growth and development of action sports.

We encourage the IOC to continue to work with action-sport specific federations (in contrast to fitting within existing IFs that may not understand and respect the unique cultural value systems and be aware of the important issues within these sports). While this will involve considerable effort (and mentoring and support) to help them learn the rules and regulations required of Olympic sports, we feel this approach has

the best chance of getting ‘buy in’ from the core of the cultures, and thus longer-term sustainability of these activities within the Olympic Games. As the IOC continues to consider new activities for inclusion (e.g., parkour, BMX freestyle) in the Olympic Games and YOG, it needs to recognize that the governance structures of these sports differ from most traditional sports, and those with the most insights and knowledge may not be housed within the expected sporting infrastructure.

We recommend that there will be important research following the announcement in Rio 2016 to Tokyo 2020. As signalled in this report, as this news is received the International Federations will take on new roles and responsibilities working with national federations, athletes and coaches, both niche cultural and mainstream media, and the action sports industries and corporate sponsors. We anticipate that these processes will be complex and political, and much can be learned from this process for future action sport inclusion into and success at the Olympic Games.

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