

GYMNASTICS FOR ALL: DIFFERENT CULTURES, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Gymnastics for All (GfA) is a physical activity whose boundaries are not clearly defined from an institutional perspective. Thus, it is necessary to understand the conception adopted in GfA and its value for each social group. This study aims to discuss how different National Governing Bodies (NGB) of Gymnastics approach GfA. We asked 44 NGBs, represented by general administrative and/or GfA-specific members, about the definition of GfA adopted by the countries they represent. We used an online questionnaire hosted on Google Forms®, in four languages. The answers were analyzed through Content Analysis, whose categories were created based on a mixed model. Its strategy adopted an iterative construction of an explanation. Although similar principles of GfA can be found in different definitions, the results of the questionnaire showed that GfA means different things to each social group, so it is difficult to discuss one single understanding. Rather, it is more reasonable to think of GfA as a set of understandings. We understand that the value of GfA resides precisely in this wide variety of meanings and in the life-long practice of Gymnastics.

Keywords: *Gymnastics for All, approach, national governing bodies of Gymnastics.*

INTRODUCTION

Gymnastics for All (GfA) is a way to practice gymnastics that is shaped by the objectives, interests, and sociocultural aspects of each group or practitioner. Since it is not a discipline with predefined rules or mandatory requirements, GfA can be adapted to different purposes. According to the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG), it involves gymnastics in an educational and recreational context, fitness, and gymnastics performances, as represented by Figure 1. Hartmann (2010) quotes FIG by saying that, according to FIG, “General Gymnastics comprises all gymnastics activities that cannot be called a performance or high-performance sports in international competition.” (p. 25).

In addition to the assumption that it is a gymnastics discipline for people of all

genders, ages, skills, and cultures, it can involve gymnastics and dance activities, with or without apparatus (FIG, 2009). According to FIG (2010), GfA can also be defined by its 4F philosophy: having *fun* since participants who don't have fun will not continue this activity; fostering *fitness*

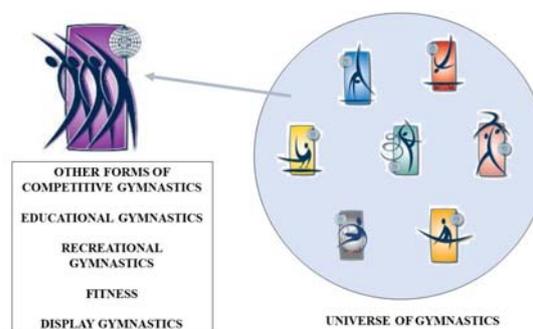


Figure 1. GfA according to FIG.

because participants who are not fit cannot improve their gymnastics skills; teaching good gymnastics *fundamentals* because they are the basis for all gymnastics disciplines; and fostering healthy *friendships* because these environments should encourage good relationships. FIG also highlights the pleasure of being part of and representing a group or association, which expands the reach of GfA in various fields, like clubs, schools, and associations. FIG believes that GfA is the basis of all types of Gymnastics (FIG, 2010).

The fact that it includes several activities like GfA reflects FIG's role in coordinating, organizing and publicizing large festivals that display several possibilities of these activities (Bortoleto, 2008; Russell, 2014). This choice also ensures a significant number of FIG affiliates since it allows the practice of gymnastics as a starting point (the early involvement in gymnastics by children and youth in mass sports), or after the end of an athlete's career (former athletes who want to maintain active involvement in gymnastics in a non-competitive environment, for leisure and health promotion purposes), or even to partake in gymnastics for leisure, keeping it an important influence on the sports life of the largest number of people possible.

Consequently, FIG (2010) indicates that each National Governing Body (NGB) can offer the types of gymnastics and events/programs it wishes to develop or believes to be beneficial to promote the practice of gymnastics in their region. Among the factors that can influence the choices made by NGBs to foster GfA, two are worth mentioning: aspects related to the management of sports organizations, using the same rationale of the importance of GfA to FIG, and the conceptions of Gymnastics, society, leisure, and health adopted by each country or social group.

Regarding administrative factors related to NGBs, it is reasonable to claim that the broader the definition of GfA, the greater the number of affiliates of that

NGB, which can significantly increase the budget of NGBs. They can also keep control of the activities they offer and of how gymnastics coaches, whether voluntary or professional, work and are trained. One example is from the German Gymnastics Federation (DTB), which, according to Hartmann (2010, p. 29), had 5 million members in 2010: 80% of them were enrolled in GfA activities, especially those related to fitness and health promotion.

Despite some institutions invest the budget collected with GfA again in this practice, it seems that, sometimes, the money from the participative Gymnastics ends to finance competitive Gymnastics. So, the maintenance of GfA in many institutions can not have as objective the development of actions that aim the access of people from different profiles to Gymnastics or the educative effort, but providing other forms of Gymnastics that attract more the media, sponsors and international organizations.

Research studies should also address the conceptions adopted by NGBs that determine their understanding of what Gymnastics is and how NGBs relate to society, leisure, and health. These conceptions show how social groups - and consequently national governing bodies - see their own activities and how they develop policies to promote gymnastics. This insight can help us understand GfA in several territories. It also fosters reflection, which is crucial for our local understanding of the importance of collectively discussing and building the guidelines to be adopted by each group or country. Globally, it can help us learn how to interpret GfA according to the culture it stems from.

This paper aims to discuss how different NGBs understand the role of GfA.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive, exploratory, qualitative research approach. In January 2016, 138 NGBs affiliated to FIG were invited to participate in the survey. Contact was made based on their contact emails available at the NGB Directory at the FIG website or from contacts previously known to the research team. Out of these, 44 NGBs agreed to answer an online questionnaire hosted on the Google Forms® platform. The questionnaire was provided in Portuguese, English, Spanish, and French. It had open-ended and closed questions about how federations were organized, their understanding of GfA and about information on teacher training programs that they offered. Specifically, this paper will discuss the question related to how the respondent's NGB understands the role of GfA. It was an open-ended question that read: "According to your federation, what is Gymnastics for All?" NGBs were represented by members who work in the administrative office and/or members who work specifically with GfA and with coach training. One answer was removed from the survey results because the respondent did not understand the question.

Answers went through a Content Analysis process, where categories are created from a mixed model. We adopted a

strategy that uses iterative construction for explanations (Laville & Dione, 1999). We analyzed answers using their units of analysis but we were also careful to look at answers as a whole, discussing their overall meanings.

Here are some limitations of the study: a) some of the NGBs invited to participate in the survey do not use the languages provided as their preferred language of communication, which may have influenced the answers we obtained; b) some countries do not allow the use of Google® platforms in their territories. In these cases, even after sending the questions using different communication systems, their governmental agencies did not allow them to answer the questions; and c) it is possible that the answers reflected the approach of a particular NGB, but it may not be the one actually adopted in that country, as it will be discussed in the Closing Remarks section of this paper.

RESULTS

Table 1 present the full transcripts of the survey answers. This chart provides the answers in English and the footnote brings each answer in the language they were originally answered, in the case of questions answered in Portuguese, Spanish, or French.

Table 1
Definitions of GfA according to NGBs – Part 1.

Country	Answers
Algeria	Gymnastics for all ages, focused on everyone.
Andorra	A sport that combines art, dance, elegance, strength, coordination, and flexibility.
Argentina	The members of my federation have no knowledge on Gymnastics for All. This is why my job, for now, is to spread the activity.
Australia	Gymnastics for All is a sport for everybody. You can develop amazing skills while getting strong and flexible in fun and challenging ways; it is a sport for life with something for all ages and all abilities.
Austria	The Basis of all gymnastics disciplines, very important for all Clubs, for all ages and many levels, competitive and non-competitive.
Azerbaijan	Gymnastics for All was established in Azerbaijan when the national team joined the World Gymnaestrada in Helsinki (Finland) in 2015 for the first time. It is the event where the representatives of all gymnastics disciplines can be united to make a great

	performance with a participation of people of different ages and without competition tension in a friendly atmosphere.
Bangladesh	Gymnastics for is gymnastics for everyone of all age people of the country.
Barbados	Gymnastic movement that is inclusive of all people, ages and abilities.
Benin	Gymnastics for All according to our Federation is the type of Gymnastics that everyone can practice without distinction of sex, age, race, or religious affiliation. This type of Gymnastics allows you to practice sports while having fun and improving your health.
Brazil	My NGB sees it as synonym of the World Gymnaestrada. I emphasize that I've been struggling to change that.
Canada	Gymnastics for All is gymnastics for all ages, all levels, and all abilities.
Cayman Islands	We do not have GfA program in Cayman.
Cape Verde	A discipline of gymnastics that includes all genders and age groups.
Denmark	Gymnastics for all is gymnastics without competition (VM, EM ect.).
Estonia	Moving together in fun atmosphere.
Finland	Gymnastics for All is a broad family of different kind of gymnastics styles. Focus in GfA is more on fitness, health, experiences and performing than competing. We do have some competitions under these styles, but that isn't the main focus, purpose or aim of the activity. GfA isn't age limited; we have activities for all age groups.
Great Britain	More opportunities for more people to take part in gymnastics.
Germany	Movement activities (in the field of dance, sports, recreational sports, lifestyle movement activities etc.) with no competition or competition on a low level that include various offers for all age groups and genders. Often the offers belong to health-orientated sports.
Hong Kong	Suit for everyone.
Ireland	Participation-based Gymnastics. Inclusive Gymnastics. Display Gymnastics.
Iceland	All gymnastics discipline that are under FIG and UEG are GFA. The basic gymnastics and performances.
Italy	The Gymnastics for All is a range of activities in which ALL (adults, children, over..., disabled, amateurs, athletes...) can find a type of work suited to them.
South Korea	Gym for all for general people's health.
Kosovo	A sport for everybody, regardless of age, gender. It is the perfect activity to prepare children for long-term participation in sport and develops vital life skills. Additionally, is one of the eight gymnastics sport disciplines officially recognized by The International Gymnastics Federation and gymnastics organizations worldwide.
Libya	It is the collective activities of any age by the sports movements, either alone or in the performance of mathematical tools, and done without code of points.
Luxemburg	We currently include General Gymnastics and recreational gymnastics in all its forms.
Monaco	Gymnastics practiced by a population of all ages.
Mozambique	Modality directed and accessible for all.
Mauritius	The foundation of any gymnastics/physical activity; the mother of all sports, practiced by people of all age groups.
Namibia	The opportunity for everybody to join gymnastics, irrelevant of talent.
Norway	All activities for children, youth, adults, elderly, without competition.
Paraguay	It is a gymnastic modality of non-competitive basis that fosters the health and participation of everyone who is attracted to physical activity and that is part of a group, who performs in creative and particular forms of expression.
Portugal	Gymnastics for All offers a wide variety of activities suitable for all genders, age groups, with different technical skills and cultural backgrounds. It is recognized that GfA activities contribute to personal health and physical, social, intellectual and psychological well-being. The great goals of GfA activities event are fun,

	friendship, physical fitness, and fundamentals of gymnastics. GfA performances can involve: Gymnastics with or without apparatus and Gymnastics and Dance. For the International Gymnastics Federation, Gymnastics for All is considered the basis of all gymnastics disciplines, physical activity and sports in general.
Qatar	The practice of GYMNASTICS by everyone, different ages and genders. Preparing a show with our gymnasts from different disciplines.
South Africa	Foundational gymnastics; mass participation; display gymnastics.
Singapore	Gymnastics for Everyone - a non-competitive FIG Discipline.
Slovakia	Basic part for development of our federation and gymnasts.
Sweden	All gymnastics without elements of competition based upon technical regulations (i.e. there might be elements of competition/challenges but it is not the main objective for training).
Trinidad and Tobago	Gymnastics for Gymnasts who do not train or wish to compete at the higher levels or who have competed and come back to gymnastics for pleasure. For all ages and physical abilities.
United States	We have non-competitive, competitive and special needs components.
Venezuela	Modality of gymnastics aimed at the participation of all age groups, whose main objective is to conduct healthy, recreational, creative, non-competitive physical activities.
Gran Canaria	Gymnastics practiced by anyone who does not want competition.
Aruba	Gymnastics for all ages and all levels.

Based on the Content Analysis of the answers obtained, the most recurring and the most significant aspects of definitions were identified (Tables 2).

Table 2
Content Analysis of GfA approaches.

Theme	Units of analysis (number of hits)	%
Possible types/groups of participants	Accessible to everyone (6); all genders and age groups, with various levels of technical skills and cultural backgrounds (1); all genders and age groups (4); all age groups (8); everyone who does not want to compete (1); everyone who feels attracted to physical activity (1); mass participation (1); sports for all (1); all ages and skills (6); possibilities for people with special needs (1); anyone, regardless of talent (1); for more people (1); for those who are not high-performance gymnasts or who do not want to participate in high-performance competitions or those who once competed and wish to partake in gymnastics again for pleasure (1).	72.7%
Relationship with competition and participation	Non-competitive aspect (6); promotion of some competitions, although this is not the main focus, purpose or goal of the activity (1); competitive and non-competitive (2); with no competition or with low-level competition (1); All-inclusive gymnastics (1); Recreational gymnastics (1); Performed without a scoring system (1).	34%
Activity type	Modality (3); discipline (1); gymnastics expression (3); sports (1); fundamental gymnastics; fundamentals of any gymnastics/physical activity (1); mother of all sports (1); sport for life (1), large family of various gymnastics styles (1); variety of activities (1); sports (1); movement activity (in the field of dance, sports, recreational sports (1); physical activities related to life styles, sports focused on health promotion (1); more opportunities to participate in gymnastics activities (1); every gymnastics without competitive elements based on technical rules (1); Inclusive gymnastics (1).	31.8%

Goals of GfA	Fun, friendship, fitness, fundamental gymnastics (1); performing healthy, recreational, and creative physical activities (1); fitness, health, experiences, and performances (1); overall health (1).	15.9%
How GfA is practiced	Gymnastics with or without apparatus and Gymnastics and Dance (1); performance gymnastics (4); show (1).	13.6%
Role of GfA in Gymnastics	Basis of all gymnastics disciplines, of physical activity and of sports activities in general (2); Fundamental gymnastics (1).	11.3%
Administrative issues	Important to all groups (1); basic aspect for the development of our NGB (1); FIG discipline (1); one of the eight disciplines recognized by FIG and other Gymnastics organizations all over the world (1); all disciplines that are controlled by FIG and UEG are GfA (1).	11.3%
Benefits of GfA	Personal health and physical, social, intellectual, and psychological well-being (1); health (1); development of amazing skills (1); strength and flexibility (1); preparing children for long-term sports practice (1); development of skills for life (1); fun and health (1).	6.8%
General characteristics	Combines art, performance, elegance, strength, coordination, and flexibility (1); joy and a challenging environment (1); fun atmosphere (2); Gymnastics of different disciplines.	6.8%
Association with events	World Gymnaestrada (2).	4.5%
Number of participants	Arranged in groups (2); collective activities (1); both individual and group activities (1); representatives of all gymnastics disciplines can be gathered (1).	4.5%
Teaching methods	Guided (1).	2.2%
Others	There is no knowledge on GfA at the NGB (1); GfA programs are not developed at the NGB (1); did not understand the question (1).	6.8%
Legend: %: Percentage of countries that mentioned the theme		

DISCUSSION

It is interesting to see that the key feature of GfA that was listed in the definitions (mentioned by 72.7% of participants) is the wide range of categories of participants. According to the answers, it is boundary-free and all-inclusive. It is worth mentioning that there was a high number of answers saying that GfA is an activity for all age groups (8), accessible to everyone (6) and for all age groups and skills (6).

This characteristic feature raised by the respondents places GfA in opposition to competitive Gymnastics disciplines, since GfA is seen as a discipline that stands apart from other gymnastics disciplines. We can say that NGBs see GfA as an activity for all types of people and that they believe that competitive disciplines are not for everyone but rather for participants with specific features -

skilled participants who seek to achieve technical perfection and beat their competitors. This is confirmed by one of the answers, which states that GfA is a practice “for gymnasts who do not train or wish to compete at the higher levels or who have competed and wish to go back to gymnastics for pleasure.” This argument shows that, historically, Gymnastics aims to improve fitness, as already noted by Langlade and Langlade (1970) and Soares (2012).

According to this perspective, GfA can be seen as part of all gymnastics disciplines: GfA is present in sports initiation activities in Artistic Gymnastics, in adaptive Rhythmic Gymnastics at the Special Olympics, in beginners’ groups in Aerobics, as well as in large group performances, fitness practitioners, among other types, as it is recognized by FIG. We notice that this approach is adopted by some NGBs (like Mauritius and South

Africa), which see GfA as a way to partake in Gymnastics, while other NGBs see GfA as an activity with an independent identity (for example, Singapore and Venezuela).

Nevertheless, we would like to highlight that some NGBs have put themselves at risk by determining that competitive gymnastics disciplines are only for high-performing athletes and for a specific audience. Thus, they have rejected the idea that, regardless of the discipline, sports can, among other roles, work as a facilitator in the pursuit for quality of life for all citizens (Paes & Balbino, 2009). Concurrently, ordinary people are not given the opportunity to participate in competitions, which can lead to experiences, feelings, discoveries, and repercussions in one's life that will stem from risk, adventure, challenge, and demands often found in a competitive environment (Bento, 1999). It is important that, at the same time, managers of gymnastics disciplines dedicate some time to reflect on competition models adopted and enhance them, so that these activities can be offered to everyone and not only to talented athletes. Coaches and managers should have a more educational focus on the organization of gymnast training programs, so that the 4Fs - stated by FIG (2009) as the focus of GfA - could be part of all gymnastics disciplines and not only of GfA.

Another observation to be made is related to the fact that despite being considered to all the genders, as other gymnastics disciplines, GfA is predominantly practiced by women (Silva & Barata, 2016; Silva, Santos-Rocha, Barata, & Saavedra, 2017; Soares, Bortoleto, Ayoub, Paoliello, & Carbinatto, 2015). This information, opposed to the conceptions of GfA of the big part of the NGBs, is important to inform the policies of promotion of this practice that should be encouraged by the national and international institutions to stimulate the increase the number of practitioners.

The second most common category (34%) was the "relationship with competition and participation". Countries stressed the non-competitive aspect of GfA (6), the fact that it can be competitive or non-competitive (2) and that it involves all-inclusive gymnastics (2). The wide range of answers regarding GfA and even the various ways to practice it, as indicated by FIG itself allow GfA to be considered *essentially intended for performance*, but not *exclusively so*.

Gym for Life Challenge is an event that can be described as "a type of worldwide championship for amateur Gymnastics clubs" and "another stage for GfA to showcase skills in a friendly environment" (FIG, 2017, p.1) and it has been promoted by FIG and rolled out by many NGBs. FIG considers this event "an international contest for Gymnastics groups" (2011, p. 6). The promotion of this event validates the answers that state that GfA is non-competitive as well as those that describe it as all-inclusive or hybrid, since its non-conventional format allows other similarities with an all-inclusive activity. Other studies about this event are being carried out and soon they will shed more light on this aspect.

Categories "type of activity" - a category that combined the units of analysis related to the nature of GfA - and "How GfA is practiced" - which represents the way GfA is expressed - were the third and fifth most cited categories, with 31.8% and 13.6% recurrence, respectively. The answers indicated different types of GfA activities focused on "performance", which surpassed any other definition of GfA.

This trend is also observed in the definition proposed by FIG. An example of this contrast is a comparison of the definitions of gymnastics disciplines provided by FIG. For FIG (FIG, 2015), Artistic Gymnastics (AG) is defined as "Competitive Gymnastics performed on different pieces of apparatus"; Rhythmic Gymnastics (RG) is "Competitive Gymnastics performed using different

hand apparatus”; but GfA is “Gymnastics without or with competitions (World Gymnaestrada without competition) of a recreational nature covering a wide range of gymnastic activities”. These definitions are similar to those found in the answers provided the NGBs that took the survey. NGBs see GfA as a way to practice gymnastics.

Again, it can be observed that, for some NGBs, GfA does not have its own identity. It is seen as an element of the development stages of other gymnastics disciplines. Another point that stands out is the fact that GfA is considered by NGBs and even by FIG as a discipline that “can be” and not as a discipline that “is”, confirming its adaptative character. About that, Hartmann (2010) says: “It is much easier to define what General Gymnastics does not mean than to describe what it actually is” (p. 25).

It can be observed that the conception adopted for GfA in each country becomes obvious in the definition of this activity and, therefore, of the policies that incentivize and promote GfA. As an example of this analysis, we would like to stress some definitions that were described in the answers: South Korea considers GfA as “Gym for all for general people’s health”; Great Britain, “more opportunities for more people to take part in gymnastics”; Ireland, “Participation-based Gymnastics. Inclusive gymnastics. Display gymnastics”; and the United States claim it is an activity with “non-competitive, competitive and special needs components”.

Therefore, it is possible to infer that, in some countries, policies that incentivize GfA may have an appeal with a stronger focus on health promotion, development of activities that can even be personal and with a purpose other than performing choreographies, like in events promoted by FIG. At the same time, these policies can aim to include as many people as possible and thus be shaped as competitions, contests, festivals, and even

other outcomes that are not related to group performances. The category of analysis “goals of GfA” ranked fourth in the number of hits and it was mentioned by 15.9% of NGBs. It is directly related to this discussion, similarly to the following answers: conducting healthy, recreational and creative physical activities (1), fitness, health, experiences and performances (1) and overall health (1).

Concurrently, other answers show that GfA is seen as one of FIG disciplines and, therefore, NGBs can develop GfA activities. Similarly, “benefits of GfA” (indicated by 6.8% of NGBs) are presented by NGBs in their definition of GfA. This is also a peculiar aspect: what other sport includes the possible benefits of GfA in their description? This reinforces the perception that GfA is an activity that, despite being boundary-free, has characteristics that make it a very specific activity. This is why NGBs indicate different categories to classify GfA, which range from “discipline” or “gymnastics expression” to even “fundamental gymnastics” or “large family of different Gymnastics styles”.

Finally, another relevant point indicated by the data collected is the number of answers that associate GfA with events (unit of analysis “association with events” accounted for 4.5% of the answers). These answers mentioned the World Gymnaestrada, an event promoted by FIG. They show that the policies of some NGBs are exclusively related to the management and organization of national delegations to attend the World Gymnaestrada, and are not necessarily concerned with the development of GfA in their country. Similarly, analysis categories “role of GfA in Gymnastics” and “administrative issues” (both mentioned by 11.3% of NGBs) include answers that describe GfA as the basis for the development of the NGB. If the GfA program is well run, this can represent a large number of affiliates, practitioners and, consequently, users of programs and

events promoted by that NGB. This chart shows weaknesses in NGB management in those cases. Since GfA is characterized as a versatile discipline, as indicated by NGBs themselves and by FIG, the development of GfA has a significant potential to make NGBs more influential.

Aligned with this analysis, Hartmann (2010) states that:

Today GG (General Gymnastics) has become recognized as one of FIG's varied disciplines. But it was a strong process and the position of GG/GfA (General Gymnastics/Gymnastics for All) inside FIG policy as well in most national gymnastic federations' policy is not as high as it should be for a prospective development of gymnastics at all. (Hartmann, 2010, p. 25).

That is, there is room for growth for GfA in different countries and worldwide, as long as GfA is discussed, understood and finally developed by managers, coaches, gymnasts and the society in general. Therefore, it is crucial to effectively understand GfA and how this activity can be adapted to needs of a group. This is only possible through the implementation of steps like raising the awareness about the importance of GfA for the development of gymnastics in the countries, adopting a conception, that is, a theoretical-practical perspective that drives the practice of gymnastics, providing technical and pedagogical training to the stakeholders, and promoting events that incentivize and feedback GfA.

In summary, we observed four groups of countries based on how they approach GfA. The first group has the largest number of respondents (n=26); they presented a general approach to GfA. These countries stressed the inclusive and boundary-free characteristics of GfA, in an approach that is similar to the one used by FIG, which shows the influence of this organization in the definition of this physical activity in several countries. Although they give room to diverse GfA outcomes, their definitions specifically mention the possible types of participants,

goals of this activity and its benefits. These are NGBs from various geographical locations and levels of gymnastics.

The second group, composed of Argentina, Azerbaijan, Brazil and the Cayman Islands, provided answers that indicate that GfA is not fully understood or discussed in unison in those countries today. Azerbaijan is a country that has achieved significant results in Rhythmic Gymnastics worldwide; Brazil has achieved good results in Rhythmic Gymnastics in the Americas and has talents with global reach in Artistic Gymnastics but it does not have the same tradition in Gymnastics as Argentina or the Cayman Islands. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the development of GfA does not match the development level of other gymnastics disciplines, and this is not restricted to one territory. Moreover, note that the respondents of these countries, especially Brazil and Argentina, are aware that GfA is not widely discussed and they are willing to further develop it, which is a positive aspect. The fact that only these countries briefly mentioned GfA does not indicate that it has not quite developed only in these countries - but it shows that these countries are aware of this gap.

South Korea is the only country of the third group since it has a very specific understanding of GfA, focused exclusively on health promotion. South Korea is widely known for its concern with the overall health and quality of life of its citizens. While the average life expectancy in South Korea is 80 for men and 86 for women, in the United States it is 76 for men and 81 for women; in Brazil, 71 and 79 for men and women, respectively, and in Germany, 79 for men and 83 for women, according to the World Health Organization (2018). Therefore, as mentioned before, it is possible to say that the GfA approach adopted by a country is related to the conception adopted by a

given social group and it is not detached from its social context.

The fourth and last group, composed of Austria, Denmark, Great Britain, Germany, Ireland, Iceland, Mauritius, South Africa, Slovakia, and the United States, shows a more utilitarian and administrative understanding of GfA. Overall, these countries see GfA as a physical activity that serves as a basis for other gymnastics. They see it as an organizational part of NGB and as an opportunity to have more people involved in Gymnastics activities. Therefore, although GfA is seen an activity with few unique features, it is instrumental for the development of NGBs. It is interesting to see that most countries in this group have traditionally involved in gymnastics and/or are developed countries with well-structured NGBs, where the sports practice is part of the country's routine. Consequently, it is possible to say that, in these countries, GfA does not necessarily have an identity, but it is characterized as the practice of Gymnastics in general.

Finally, it can be claimed that, regardless of the common political, socioeconomical, or event geographical context where GfA activities are developed, there is no common, shared definition of GfA.

In summary, the analysis of the results of this research study reinforces the hybrid, versatile, and adaptative character of GfA in various NGBs. This is a positive feature if we consider that different NGBs can match the interests of their potential participants to a given GfA format, thus allowing Gymnastics to continue to be developed according to the adopted conception. But the very same feature can have a downside. Given that different countries do not share a common understanding of GfA, establishing global discussions about GfA can be difficult since it can mean different things to different countries and, therefore, theoretical differences will be observed both between researchers and managers.

Globally, FIG puts itself in a neutral position in the way it promotes GfA. This is observed in the events promoted by FIG: they respect different approaches and even different definitions, as mentioned before. Regarding coach training by NGBs, however, FIG and NGBs do not share a common understanding or even among NGBs, which makes the proposal wide-ranging but sometimes superficial. This topic is currently being debated in academic circles and future studies may shed light on other aspects related to it.

CONCLUSION

The collected data show that GfA, despite having some principles that *may* be present in different definitions, has very specific meanings to each social group. It is difficult to talk about one *single* understanding; it is more reasonable to say there are *understandings of GfA*. In our view, the value of GfA lies precisely in this wide range of meanings, since GfA is the lifelong practice of gymnastics (Schiavon, Toledo, & Ayoub, 2017) which can be adapted to its practitioners and not the other way around. Therefore, "the pursuit of an understanding is nothing more than an attempt to better comprehend, define and express the symbolism of this activity" (Toledo & Schiavon, 2008, p. 221) and, thus, it is necessary to discuss the meaning of GfA for each social group. At the same time, we need to be constantly aware that "there is a historic and unique being behind each understanding and that these understandings were developed in different sociocultural contexts, which also contribute to their specific features" (Toledo & Schiavon, 2008, p. 224), that is, no approach is established by chance: they are part of a political project of a social group where practitioners and managers are not neutral.

Overall, as indicated by Fiorin-Fuglsang and Paoliello (2008), it can be claimed that GfA is currently “a rescue of the Gymnastics of the past, when people still did it for pleasure, for joy, without being concerned with setting records or with a perfect performance” (p. 100), although the desire to compete, even at a lower level or in other formats, is part of some GfA approaches. Consequently, GfA has become a set of exercises with various degrees of specificity of gymnastics disciplines, which get closer to the core of Gymnastics or the elements it is composed of; its major differential, however, is the combination of these elements with the specific features of groups in each territory and its goals or of the “product” it proposes to deliver, whether it is a choreography, a weekly activity or a sequence of exercises to improve the participants’ health.

We stress that, in the understanding of GfA adopted by the group that the researchers of this study are part of and by most Brazilian groups, GfA is not detached from a “process”, because it is inherent to it. Such “process” is educational and has the same level of importance as the “product” of GfA: during its pedagogical journey, the skills and cultural content of practitioners are appreciated and shared among the group members, in a proposal that aims at human development and training (Maturana & Rezepka, 1995) in Gymnastics for participants (Oliveira, Silva, & Silva, 2018; Paoliello, Toledo, Ayoub, Bortoleto, & Graner, 2014; Pérez Gallardo & Souza, 1995; Pérez Gallardo, 2008; Souza, 1997). This approach was developed and studied in Brazil by the Gymnastics Research Group of the School of Physical Education of the State University of Campinas (GPG-FEF-Unicamp), which has been studying this field since 1993 with a groundbreaking scientific production and the organization of academic events in this field. The Gymnastics Research Group is nationally and internationally recognized for its

excellence and it is very influential in the field. Its members have also been involved in teacher training activities across the country. The definition of GfA used by this group is:

An expression of body language that combines various interpretations of Gymnastics (Natural, Standardized, Artistic, Rhythmic, Aerobics, etc) and blends them with other forms of body expression (Dance, Folklore, Games, Theatre, Mimicry, etc.), in a free and creative way, according to the characteristics of each social group, promoting social interaction among its participants. (Pérez Gallardo & Souza, 1995, p. 33).

Although discussions on GfA in Brazil are advanced and despite our continuous effort to keep them, they have not yet reached the Brazilian Gymnastics Confederation. Consequently, they are not represented in the approach presented in the results of this survey. This mismatch between the approaches taken by the management organizations in Gymnastics and practitioners in general can be observed in other countries too. This is a limitation of this study, because the managers’ perspective or their understanding cannot faithfully portray the situation of GfA in the country, both because these managers represent an institution (and therefore do not express their personal opinions or what they perceive as a reality in the country) and because their statements are political positions that often times express what they would like to happen, but not what actually happens.

Finally, we would like to note that all GfA approaches described in the results of this survey show *potential* development of GfA: they involve perspectives of growth and development of GfA for the upcoming years, as indicated by the efforts of managers to promote GfA; proposals to promote the health of practitioners; and focus on continuously providing the opportunity to partake in GfA to leverage

the participation of everyone interested in it, according to their technical skills and cultural interests. The results also show that GfA cannot be treated as a standard global phenomenon. They indicate that we need to focus our attention on academic research and leverage the importance of national GfA events, which can be specifically targeted to meet the interests of each country.

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