

## Fair Play as an Olympic Ideal and a Personal Behaviour Pattern in Sports Activities: Vision and Reality assessed by young European Students

### Introduction

In a European study on physical fitness and active lifestyles 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls in six different countries have been involved. As a third part of the study (Olympic Ideals) their knowledge about the Olympic movement, attitudes to Olympic Ideals like fair play, assessment of personal fair play patterns, teaching experiences in Olympic Education, assessment of Olympic Champions and their personal aspirations to become an Olympic athlete were evaluated (cf. Telama et.al. 2002). In this paper results of young European students` assessments of fair play as an Olympic Ideal and their personal assessments of fair play patterns in sports activities are reported, including another Polish sample.

### Methods and Sample

An “Olympic Ideal Questionnaire” have been developed (cf. Telama et.al. 2002, appendix C) which includes quantitative and qualitative items of measurement, e.g. open questions for self-report, given multiple-choice items and items to fill in as personal comments and assessments to given items with a “Likert-scale”.

For the assessment of fair play a whole range of Olympic Ideals were given to the students identified by previous international literature reviews within the study. Item C 10 of the questionnaire for example includes “fair play” as one item (see Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Olympic Ideals (item C 10)

Typical for today		Totally agree	Quite agree	Quite disagree	Absolutely disagree
	Beauty	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Competition	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Freedom	_____	_____	_____	_____
	fair play	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Popularity	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Earn money	_____	_____	_____	_____
	Willpower	_____	_____	_____	_____
	cultural understanding	_____	_____	_____	_____
	mutual respect	_____	_____	_____	_____

The students should assess in how far they agree or disagree that “fair play” is associated with the Olympic Games. In addition they should tick the box at the left side whether an item like fair play is (still) typical of the Olympic Games of today. Percentages of agreement (totally and quite) were summarized likewise the identification as “typical for today” were measured in percentage. The percentages of agreement was counted as “desirability” of fair play as an Olympic Ideal and the

percentages of the vote “typical for today” was counted as “reality” of fair play as an Olympic Ideal both in the view of the students.

In addition, a set of 10 different personal fair play patterns were given to the students as items (C 5 of the questionnaire) to assess in the same way (agreement or disagreement) by the same Likert-scale. The ranges of items is given in figure two.

Fig. 2: Fair Play Behaviour Patterns (item C 5)

	<b>Totally agree</b>	<b>Quite agree</b>	<b>Quite disagree</b>	<b>Absolutely disagree</b>
1. In sports it is acceptable that one tries to bend the rules.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. You can't avoid injury to your opponent in some sports.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. It is impossible to do well in sports if you play fair.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Violence is an integral part of some types of sports.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. You can win playing fair.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. If your opponent plays unfairly it is acceptable to pay him back in the same kind.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Rules advancing violence should be totally prohibited in sports.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Fair play does belong to sport at any level.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. In sports it is okay to be a little selfish.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. I would take drugs to win an Olympic Medal.	_____	_____	_____	_____

The 10 items of personal fair play patterns in sports activities are very different: some (No.5) document a “pro-fair play-attitude”, some like No. 6 are ambivalent which means there is a situational ambiguity of interaction with an opponent and some others like No. 1 or 3 give real support to violence and clearly contradicts fair play behaviour.

After confirmatory factor-analysis of the items six items load on a “fair-play factor”, five items load on a “violence-factor”. Both factors will also compared later for each age and gender group of the study.

Finally, results of the “desirability/reality” assessments of fair play as an Olympic Ideal were compared with results of the personal reactions to fair play behaviour patterns measured by the “fair play factor” and “violence factor” respectively.

The sample of this European study included 3,440 boys and girls aged 12 and 15 years representing six European countries (Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary and Poland).

Tab. 1: Sample

	<b>CZE</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>GER</b>	<b>HUN</b>	<b>POL</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>12-year-old girls</b>	95	307	259	102	115	839
<b>15-year-old girls</b>	120	290	214	117	146	823
<b>12-year-old boys</b>	111	254	251	117	121	893
<b>15-year-old boys</b>	113	257	221	115	118	885
<b>Total</b>	439	1.108	945	438	500	3.440

## Fair Play assessed as an Olympic Ideal

Figure No. 3 und 4 document the results how 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls from the five European countries assessed Fair Play as an Olympic Ideal (desirability) and in how far Fair play is a typical today as a marker of Olympic Games (reality).

Fig. 3: Reality (r) and Desirability (d) of Fair Play by 12-year-old boys and girls

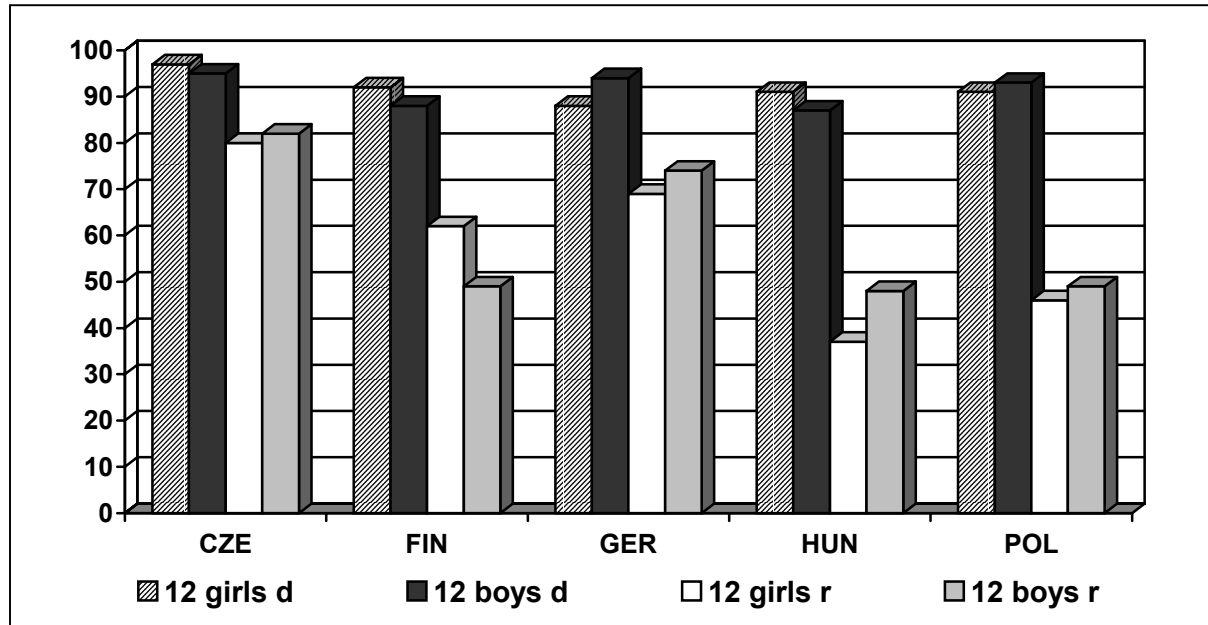
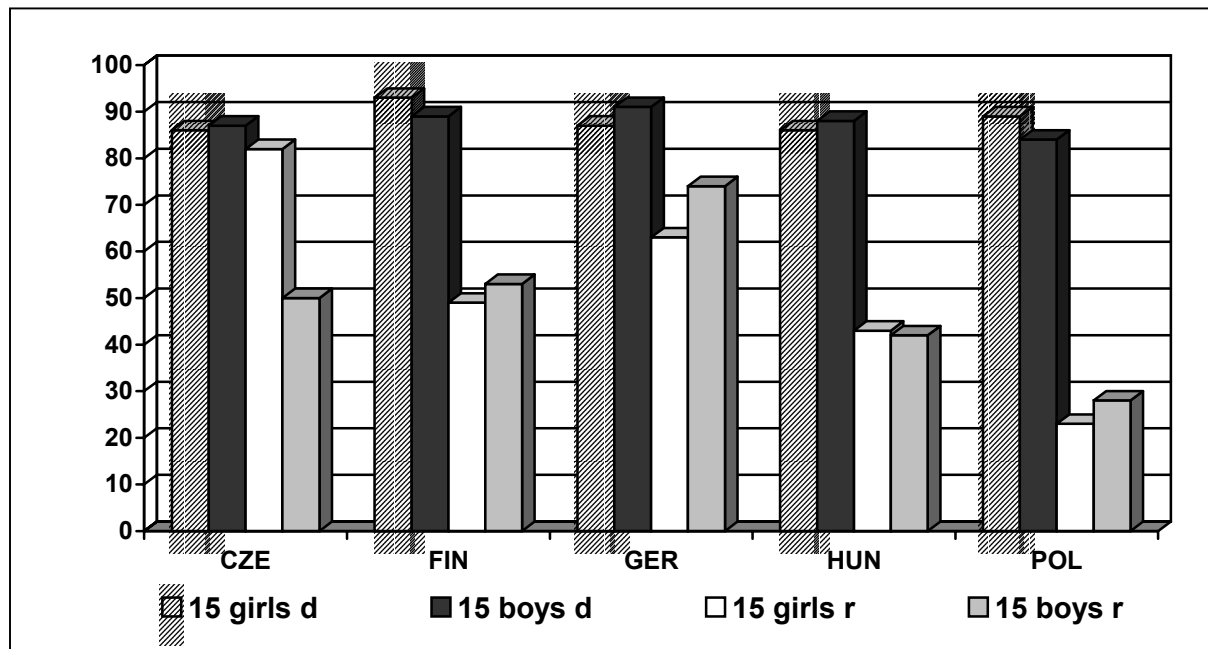


Fig. 4: Reality (r) and Desirability (d) of Fair Play by 15-year-old boys and girls



Up to 90% and more both boys and girls in their age of 12 agree on fair play as an Olympic Ideal in all countries of the study. However, significant differences occurred by the assessment how far fair play is typical in "reality". Young Girls tend to be a little more critical than boys are, but the majority of Hungarian and Polish boys and girls have serious doubts whether fair play is present in today's Olympics like many of their Finnish counterparts do. But up to 80% and 70% of Czech and German

young boys and girls do believe in fair play as a current element in the Olympic Games movement.

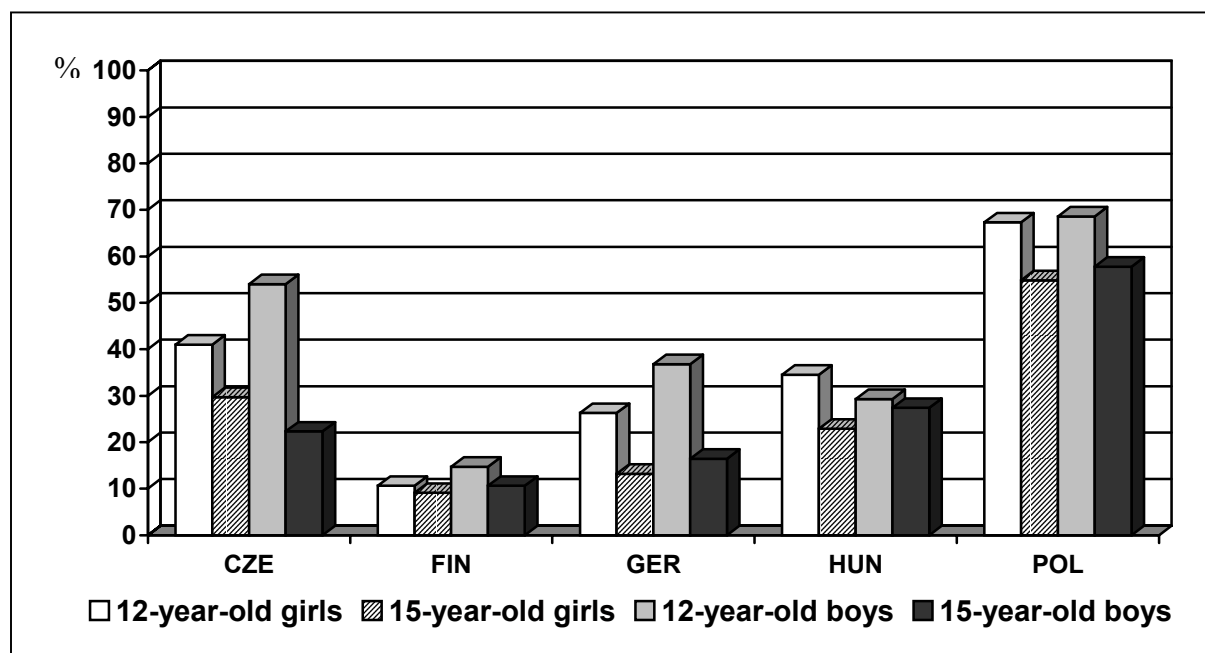
More reluctant to identify fair play as an Olympic Ideal and more critical about the real appearance of fair play in Olympic Games are the 15-year-old students. However, between 80 and 90% of all boys and girls in each country of this study are convinced that fair play is an Olympic Ideal. But most of the students except the Czech girls and in particular both German sample groups (girls agree up to 63 %, boys up to 74%) do not believe that fair play belongs to the “reality” of the Olympic Games. Most critical are the Polish and Hungarian boys and girls. Less than one out of three Polish students do associate fair play as a present feature of the Olympic Games.

In total: no important cultural, age or gender related differences were found for the acceptance of fair play as an Olympic Ideal, however, some significant cultural (e.g. Germany, Poland), gender (e.g. Czech boys and girls), and age (15-year-old more critical) related differences occurred by the assessment in how far Fair Play as an Olympic Ideal is typical for the Olympic Games today. A certain discrepancy is visible for almost each 12- and 15-year-old sample group.

### Fair Play assessed as a personal Behaviour Pattern in Sports Activities

Support for `bending` fair play principles

Fig. 5: Assessment of Bending Fair Play Rules by 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls

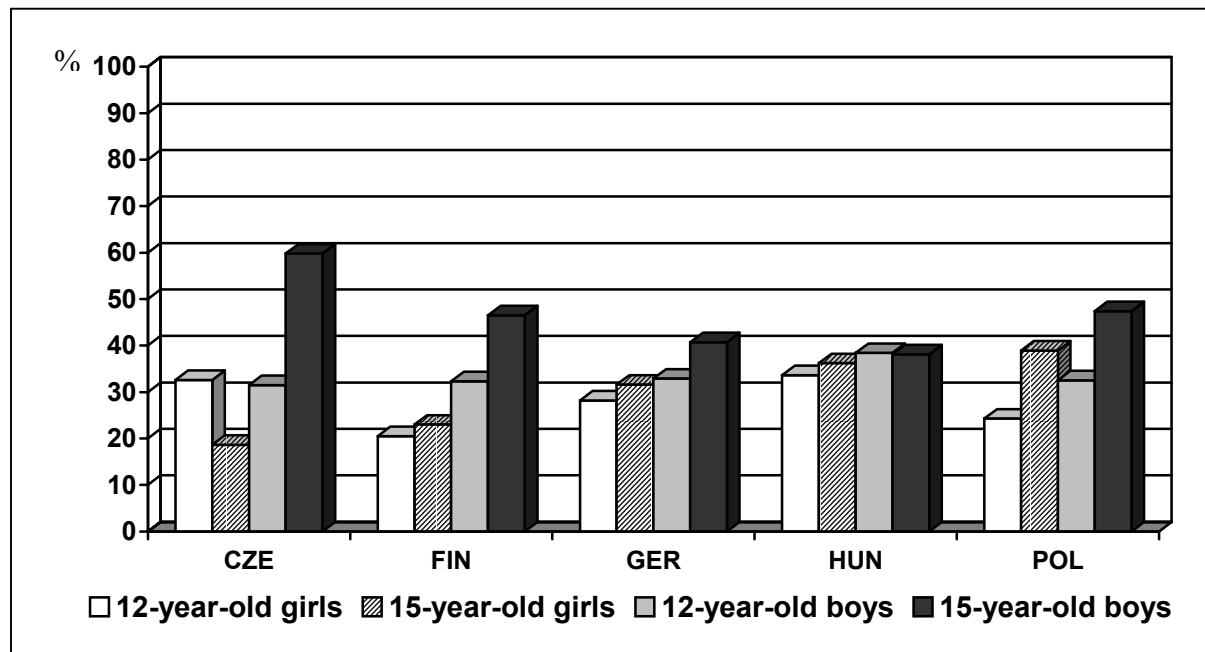


Up to 17% of the young German girls and up to 27% of German boys of both age groups are supportive of bending fair play rules (fig. 5). Notably, there seems to be no real age related differences for the various national boys` groups and that 15-year-old girls in all countries of this study are more reluctant to support bending fair play rules than their younger counterparts! Former age (the older the more) and gender related differences (boys significantly more than girls) measured in previous studies on fair play attitudes seems to become less important in regard of bending

fair play rules. Significant culture related differences also exist, particularly between Czech (lowest rates) and German participants (highest rates). But nevertheless and in total more than 80% of all students in this study are opposed to bending fair play rules.

#### Support of situational ambiguity of fair play

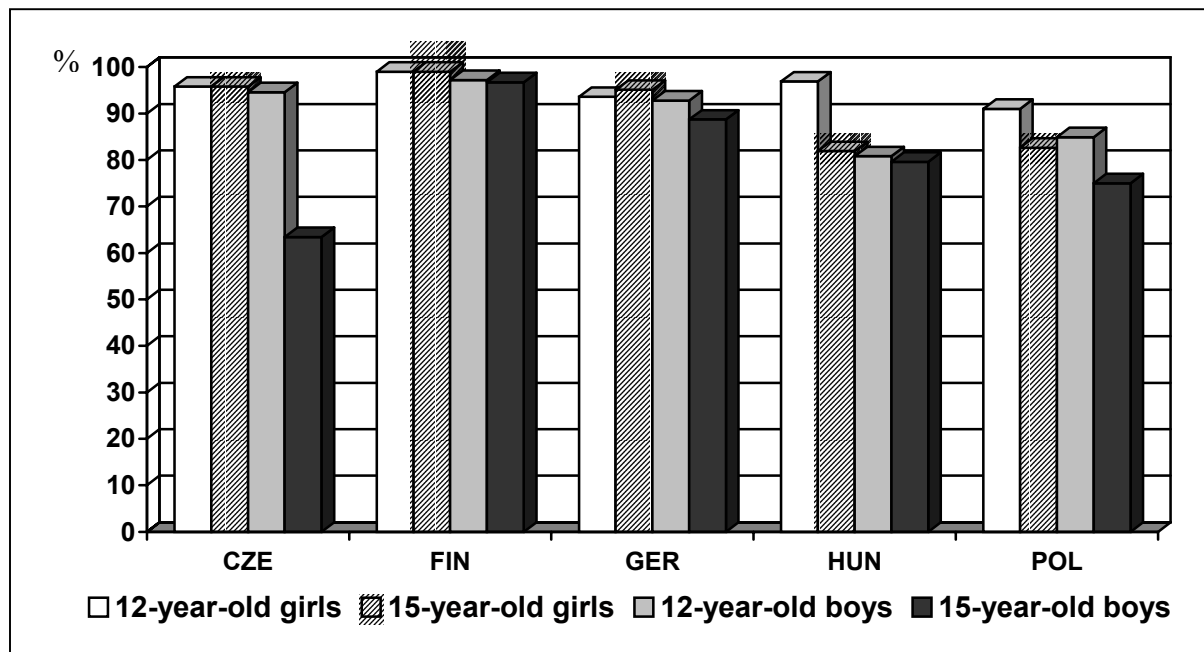
Fig. 6: Assessment of Situational Ambiguity of Fair Play by 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls



About 30 % and more of the young boys and 40% of all older boys` groups would pay reciprocate with unfairness to their opponent (fig. 6). Also 15 year old German (32%), Hungarian 36%) and Polish (39%) girls would pay back unfairness to their opponents. Less gender related differences occurred for the 12-year-old boys and girls, except for the Finnish sample. No real age related difference can be reported for girls, except for the Czech 12-year-old and Polish 15-year-old girls. However, traditional gender related differences for situational ambiguity in fair play actions clearly exist between 15-year-old boys and girls, except for the Hungarian group but significantly between the Czech and Finnish boys and girls. In both countries icehockey is a popular sport for boys inside and outside schools. Clearly gender and age related differences for situational ambiguity in fair play exist for the Polish sample. Finally, our data proofs that almost one out of three students would reciprocate unfairness to his or her opponent.

## Support of fair play

Fig. 7: Assessment of Promoted Fair Play Rules by 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls

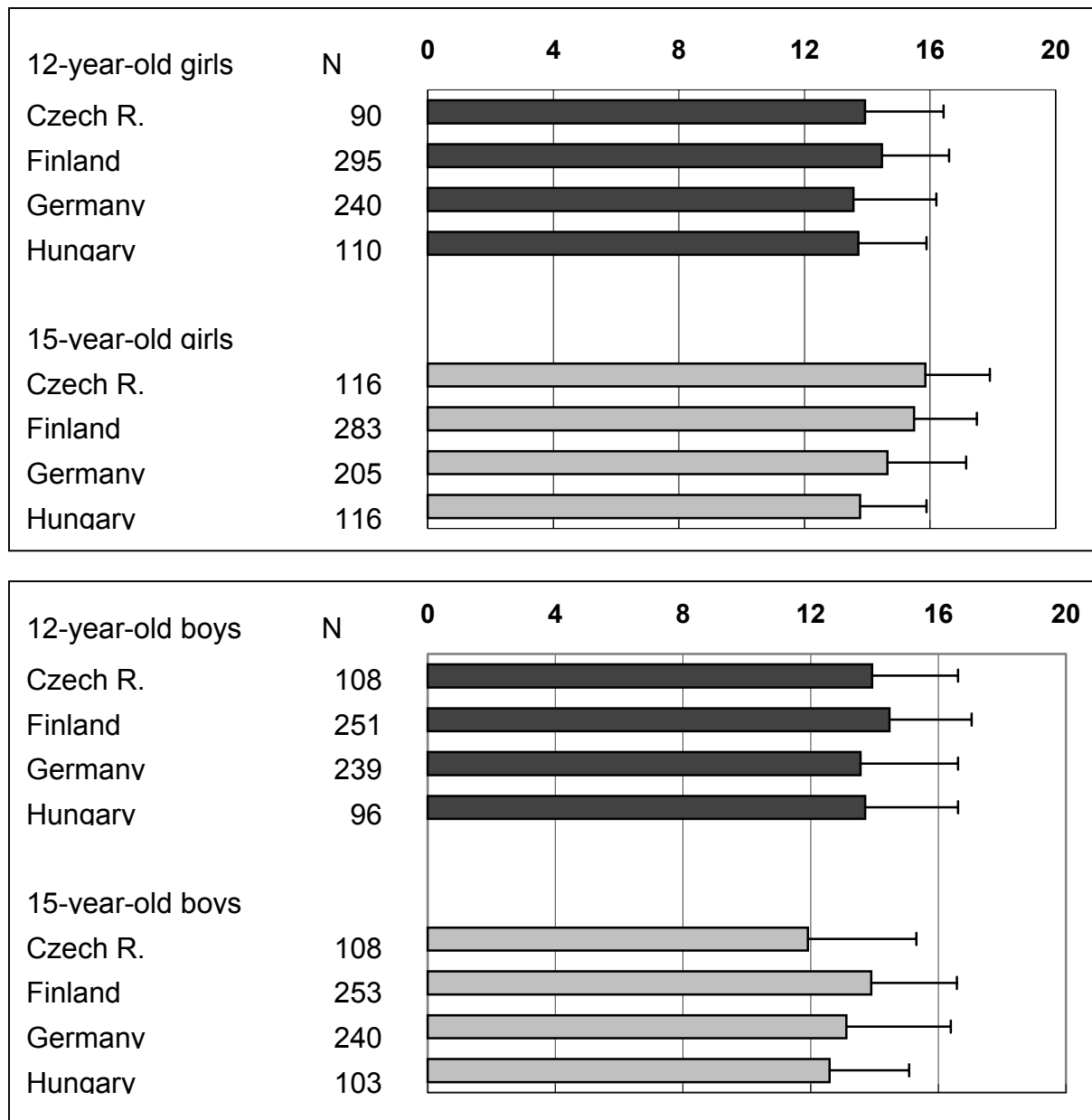


The majority of the student in our study (90% and more) are also strong supporters of fair play rules in practising their individual sports (fig. 7). Only the 15-year-old Czech boys (63%) and Polish boys (75%), and Hungarian and Polish 15-year-old students (about 80%) are less convinced. The results coincide with data about the students' desirability of fair play in Olympic sport activities. However, there also seems to be some correlation between critical assessment about the reality of fair play in Olympic Games sports activities and the students' personal assessment how to cope with fair play rules in practising sports if the rules are bended by their opponents.

### The two Faces of Fair Play Behaviour

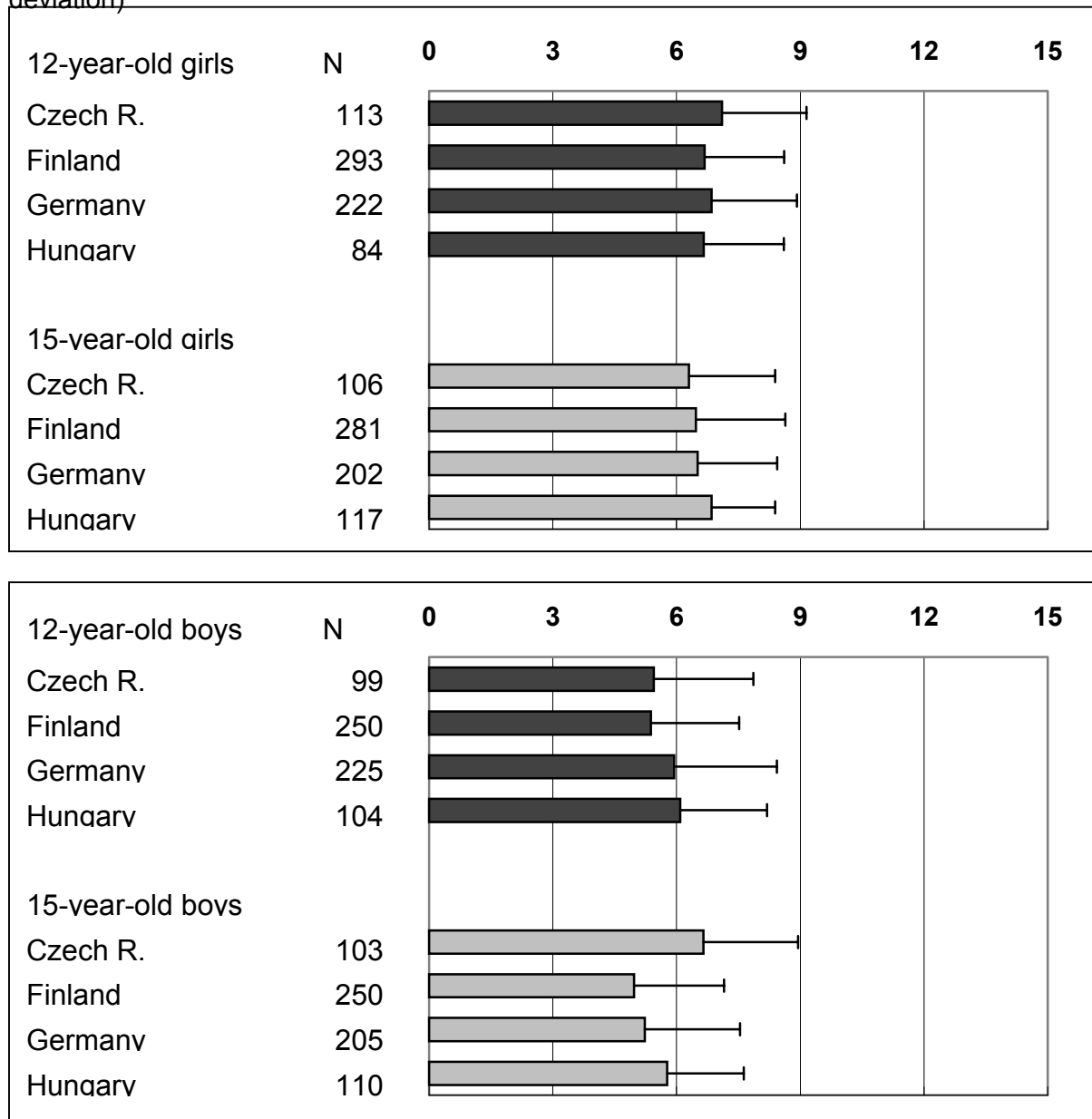
Evaluating our findings about the assessment of fair play by European students some ambivalences between desirability and reality within the context of Olympic Games sport activities as well as different personal reactions to the three types of personal fair play behaviour patterns are apparent. Factor analysis of the 10 fair play items may give some more insight about this ambivalence and how European students react to support fair play (fig. 8) and unfairness (fig.9). If a student supported all 6 items of the "Fair Play Factor" either with a statement, or in the reverse case with a statement of disagreement, the highest point score for fair play would be 24 and the lowest 6. If a participant supported 5 items of the "Violence Factor" by agreeing or disagreeing to the reverse statement, the strongest factor would be 5 and the weakest "Violence Factor" would be 20. For documentation and comparison, the values of the items in both factors were de-coded and polarised. The lowest possible score points (6 and 5) were set at zero. Therefore, scales range from 0 to 18 points (fair play) and 0 to 15 points (violence) respectively.

Fig. 8: The Fair Play Factor for the 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls (Mean and standard deviation)



All students' groups scored much higher than the mean of 9 which means fair play was supported by all of them (fig.8). The lowest mean value was for the 15-year-old Czech boys (11,91) and the highest for the 15-year-old Czech girls (15.85). Age and gender-related differences are visible: across the countries 15-year-old girls scored higher than 12-year-old girls (except the Hungarian girls) and 12-year-old boys scored higher than their 15-year-old counterparts. However, the two girls' groups scored higher in each country than the respective boys' groups. There are also some significant cultural- and gender-related differences for the Fair Play Factor: the 15-year-old girls from Czech Republic scored higher compared to the Hungarian 15-year-old girls and, in total, girls of that age scored higher than the 15-year-old boys.

Fig. 9: The Violence Factor for the 12- and 15-year-old boys and girls (Mean and standard deviation)



No group reached the mean of 7.5 (highest score: 7.10 by Czech 12-year-old girls), which clearly suggests that at least a certain sub-sample of boys and girls in this study and in each country had a tendency to support situational violence behaviour patterns and also disregard occasionally some fair play rules (fig. 9). The lowest mean, which implies the strongest support of unfair and violence patterns, was found for the 15-year-old boys from Finland (lowest score: 4.97). In all countries boys scored lower than girls and 15-year-old students both boys and girls (except the 12-year-old Czech boys and the 15-year-old Hungarian girls) scored lower than the 12-year-old students. There seems to be two important results: boys were more supportive of violence patterns than girls and the older the students were, both boys and girls, the more supportive they became. These results correlate inside with other findings on fair play and violence in children's and adolescents' sport activities (cf. Shields & Bredemeier 1995, pp. 178).



### Comparison of the Desirability/Reality of Fair Play as an Olympic Ideal with Results of the Fairplay and Violence Factor

Fig. 10 12-year-old boys

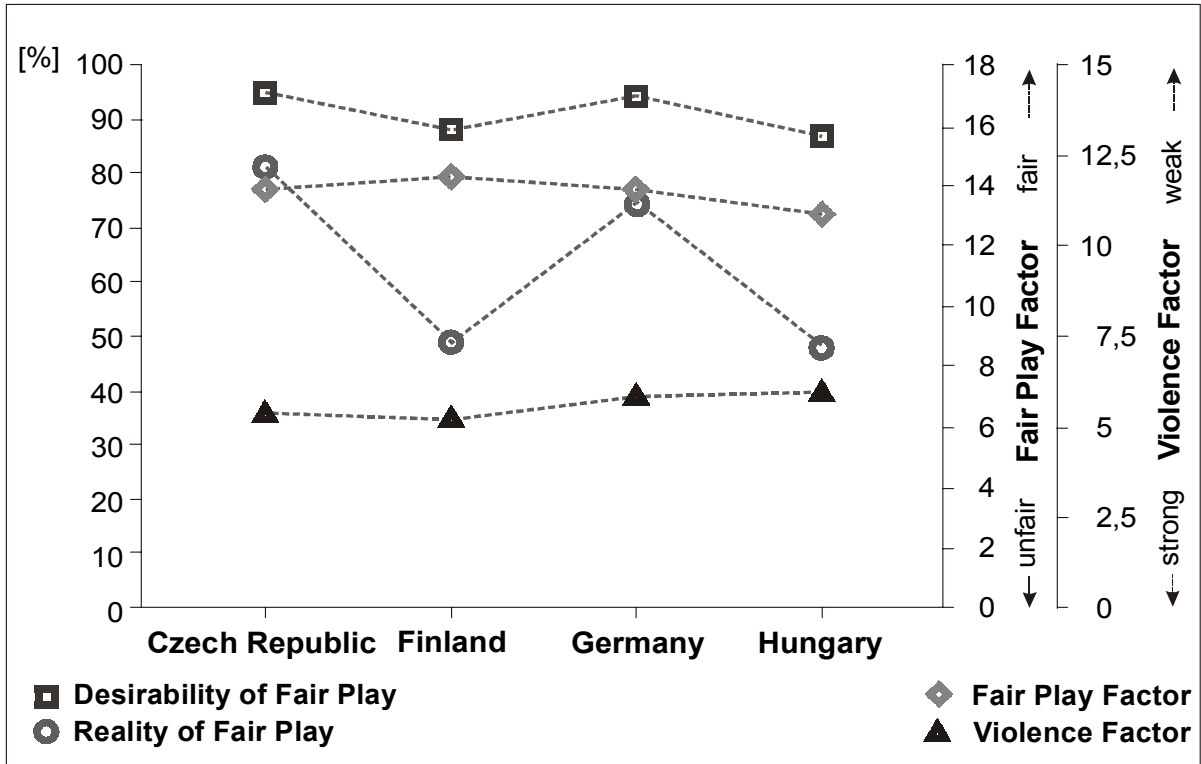
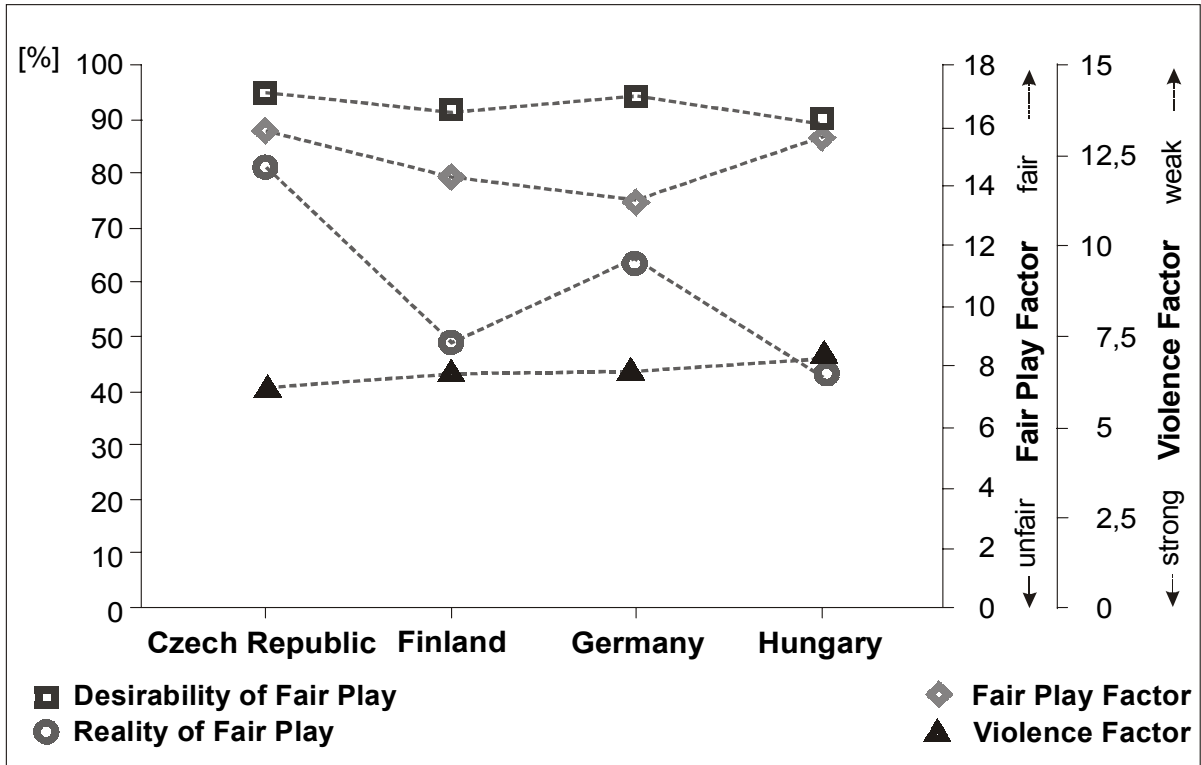


Fig. 11: 15-year-old girls



As already reported some divergencies exist between gender and national groups of the students. Twelve year old boys tend to be more critical about differences between “desirability” and “reality” of fair play as an Olympic Ideal than 15 year old girls do who think more positively and see a “closer gap”. On the contrast 12 year old boys in the Czech Republic and Germany assessed their support of personal fair play attitudes higher than their counterparts in Finland and Hungary did. A certain combination of a more critical assessment of fair play as an Olympic Ideal in “reality” correlates with a strong value of the violence factor for the Finnish and Hungarian young boys as well as for the 15 year old female groups of their country. However, across the countries and across the sample groups of the students we identified a high desirability of Fair play as an Olympic Ideal, regardless of any other personal assessments of fair play or unfairness in sports behaviour.

## **Discussion**

Both boys and girls aged 12 and 15 from five different European countries (CZE, FIN, GER, HUN, POL) strongly support the desirability of fair play in the Olympic Games. They all have a moral vision in expectancy of a very high level of fair play in Olympic sports activities; however, many of the participants in this study, including both boys and girls, have serious doubts as to whether fair play is practised.

This findings is divided between the two gender groups, with a more critical attitude about the reality of fair play in the sample group of girls. Some cultural-related differences exist, in particular for the assessment of how far fair play seems to be practised in Olympic sports activities. Students from Hungary and Poland seems to be more critical than others.

The ‘Fair Play Factor’ clearly shows dominant individual moral standards in practising sports for boys and girls; but again, girls supported fair play attitudes more strongly than boys did. The high desirability of fair play in Olympic sport activities seems to coincide with the individual agreement on fair-play behaviour patterns in both gender groups, again slightly stronger for the girls.

Although the results show slightly weaker values in the girls’ sample for the ‘Violence Factor’, it appears relatively strong for boys and girls. In both gender groups there seems to be a clear vision of high moral standard expecting fair play in Olympic sports and supporting fair play in personal behaviour in sport activities.

However, there seems to be two sub-groups in each country which are more and less convinced that fair play actually exists in Olympic sports activities. It is striking that there is a tendency of groups who are more critical about the reality of fair play in Olympic sports activities, to respond more positively to statements on personal behaviour patterns, which are unfair.

Obviously, there exist for young European students a vision of high moral demands on fair play in Olympic sports activities and yet the high moral expectancy seems to be dissonant when compared with the assessed reality of fair play in the Olympics, and the personal support given to the unfair behaviour patterns of the ‘Violence Factor’. The moral picture of fair play seems to have two faces for young people: high moral thinking, but real actions on a lower, pragmatic level.

## References

Shields, D. & Bredemeier, B. (1995): Character Development and Physical Activity. Champaign/Ill: Human Kinetics.

Telama, R, Naul, R., Nupponen, H., Rychtecky, A. & Vuolle, P. (2002): Physical Fitness, Sporting Lifestyles and Olympic Ideals: Cross-Cultural Studies on Youth Sport in Europe. Schorndorf: Hofmann.