2 Olympics and the media

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The Olympic and Paralympic Games are the greatest media spectacle of modernity, providing a powerful platform for the host nation to communicate ideas about itself and future visions with domestic and global audiences. In terms of media reach, no other global event rivals the Games: Only the Summer Olympics have the institutional framework to bring representatives from all nation-states of the world together for the celebration of excellence, fairness, and respect under commonly agreed rules and regulations. The worldwide interest in athletics, paired with the allure of medal counts and rankings for petty nationalist ambitions, guarantee an unrivalled scope of media coverage. The IOC Marketing Report claims a global audience of 2.6 billion, or half of the worldwide TV universe, that was watching parts of the Rio 2016 Games. With over seven billion video views of official content on social media platforms, including Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, digital media coverage exceeded conventional TV rates for the first time in history. Sales of broadcasting rights provide the IOC with multi-billion-dollar revenue streams: 74% of the IOC income of \$5.6 billion for the 31st Olympiad 2013–2016 stemmed from broadcasting rights arrangements.

Television has been the most significant factor in the commercial growth of the Olympics. Satellite technology was first used for the Tokyo 1964 Olympics. The liberalization of national media systems in the 1980s lay the foundation for the Olympics business model, catering to the needs of corporations for marketing opportunities. In 2001 the IOC established OBS (Olympic Broadcasting Services) to take greater control of televising the Games. OBS produces and transmits the world feed of live coverage of every sport from every venue. Media partners can select images and events of greatest interest to their audiences. In response to the rise of internet platforms and social media services threatening to capture audiences' interest without the revenues, the IOC started the Olympic Channel in 2016 to keep up year-round interest in the Olympics.

Media in a catch-22

The mediatization of Olympic sports has increased the number of events on the program and invited private broadcasters, seeking exclusive rights to particular events, to raise prices. The IOC insists that a certain amount of TV coverage be universally accessible but leaves enough leeway for content to be locked behind paywalls and subscriptions. Since private broadcasters face enormous problems in recouping the rising expenses in advertising revenues, the IOC is willing to adjust timing and scheduling of events to the need of its media customers. The selection of climbing, surfing, and skateboarding as additional sports at Tokyo 2020 aims at younger audiences from the Global North that are disinterested in conventional sports. Placing the Games into Tokyo's midsummer heat is a bow to the global sport event circuit, as America's Big Four sport leagues and European football are not yet in full-swing. Time slot allocations also follow the money. American broadcaster NBC has been paying to the IOC more than four times per event than the Japan Consortium. The coalition of NHK and private broadcasters paid a record \$660 million for exclusive rights for the 2016–2020 Olympiad (with NHK covering about 70%).

Japan's private broadcasters are all part of media networks that were founded by the major newspaper houses, and the four largest broadcasters as well as major regional newspapers have come on-board for Olympic sponsorship. Hence when it comes to troubling issues such as athletes' health in Tokyo's summer heat, corruption scandals, and the economic burden of hosting, the media face a conflict of interest. Should they pay more attention to their corporate sponsors or to the politics of the Games?

On a global scale, critical media reporting has contributed to the demise of the "urban growth myth," which promises purely positive results from hosting mega-events. In recent times, politicians are increasingly confronted with the reluctance of their local electorate to support their ambitions. Citizens in Vienna (2013), Munich (2013), and Hamburg (2015) voted against their governments and forced them to give up on the "Olympic dream," and other cities have also backed out in recent years. The failure of the bid for Tokyo 2016 was largely explained by the IOC's concern about the lackluster enthusiasm among residents. One bid later, the IOC opinion poll displayed a significant increase of support from 55.5% in Tokyo and 53.5% in all Japan to 70% and 67% respectively. A close reading of the media reporting on the two bids reveals their crucial role in manufacturing national consent and framing the central narrative of hosting the Games, with critical reporting drastically declining over the consecutive periods.

Manufacturing national consent

The 2016 bid was spearheaded by Tokyo's controversial Governor Ishihara Shintaro, who ultimately seemed to be the single driving force behind the bid as well as responsible for the critical reactions to his power play from those outside Tokyo. Ishihara also initiated the second bid with its motto, "Discover Tomorrow," but pulled out of local politics before the IOC's decision in 2013. For how the Japanese newspapers reported on winning the bid on September 13, see Figure 2.1. In marked contrast to the earlier bid, the second campaign was re-fashioned as teamwork involving a wide variety of collaborators in the service of national interest, led by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his strong nationalist agenda. "All Japan" is a key term that emerged during the second bid campaign. All Japan became a metaphor for the whole nation plus a nickname for the cross-sectional, nation-wide alliance of key persons. Most notable was the successful incorporation of governors from prefectures in Tokyo's neighborhood and the disaster-struck region, as well as the alliance between competing companies as joint sponsors. As a member of the wide-ranging and bipartisan Advisory Board to the Organising Committee, Abe demonstrated his strong involvement at the all-important IOC session with the infamous statement that Tokyo is safe from radiation and his

Figure 2.1 Winning the bid: newspaper headlines September 8, 2013.

Source: © Antje Bieberstein.

flashy appearance at the Rio 2016 Games closing ceremony dressed up as Super Mario.

The shocking experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear disaster was of particular significance in forging a national alliance and streamlining public opinion in the bidding phase. The 2020 bidding campaign built on the emotional appeal of showcasing to the world Japan's recovery after the devastating disasters and cast Tokyo 2020 as the "Recovery Olympics" (*fukkō gorin*). The bid cemented public awareness of the "power of the dream" (of hosting) as being what Japan most needed right now. This promotional slogan effectively minimized the discursive space for public critique or opposition. It maximized support and camouflaged the disproportionately high significance that hosting the Games has for the Greater Tokyo Area, as opposed to the country as a whole. The "power of the dream" resonates with the "power of sports," and was music to the ears of the IOC.

Freedom of speech concerns

Even in the liberal newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, not known as a supporter of either Ishihara or Abe, critical reporting has been scaled down. The invisibility of opponents, the silencing of critical issues, the paucity of self-reflection are characteristic of media narratives serving the needs of political elites. That we are now in the midst of an "Asian Age," in which Korea, Russia, China, and Middle Eastern nations are in the course of hosting sports mega-events is indicative of a shift away from democratic societies where ruling elites need to seek their voters' compliance. While the control of media reporting in Japan is a far cry from the outright censorship of authoritarian regimes in China or North Korea, the grip by the Japanese state on the media has increased in recent years. Wherever the media are willing to sacrifice neutrality and critical reporting for the privilege of staying in contact with political elites, they are likely to contribute to a sanitized display of seemingly common interests pooled behind the unanimous support for hosting the sports mega-event.