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Connecting the past with the future

*Wolfram Manzenreiter in roundtable discussion
with Munehiko Harada and John Horne*

The following discussion between three Japan sport scholars is based on a DIJ Roundtable event, held October 20, 2018 at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo.

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WM: The Olympics have come a long way. It was French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin in the 19th century who designed their organizational form and underlying principles of Olympism to cherish sportsmanship, mutual respect and peaceful unity of mankind at a time when Europe was suffering from the terror of war between modern nation-states.

JH: In the beginning, the International Olympic Committee was a compound fashioned out of various ideas about the pursuit of physical culture. Pierre de Coubertin was in particular taken with an English gentlemen's club in England that organized the Henley rowing regatta in Oxfordshire. In many ways the IOC remained essentially an elite club with many aristocrats among its members. But during the last decades, the Olympics have become a very well recognized global brand, turning it into a transnational enterprise.

WM: Early in the 20th century, the Olympics also were a composite of sport contests, art competitions, and exhibitions featuring tribal sports or national showcases.

JH: The early Olympic Games were held in conjunction with World Fairs. Since the transnational spread of color television, the Olympics have grown out of being nested within the international expositions. Currently these non-sport mega-events attract more visitors than the

Olympics – but hardly any media attention. The attraction of watching live sports makes the difference.

- MH: From a marketing point of view, sport is a very special product, easy to buy, and easy to sell. It doesn't need much education or experience to understand what's going on in the competition. Everybody is a customer, no matter what race or class. When the Olympic Games started in 1896, they were like ketchup served on the side of the hamburger. But they grew and grew, with ups and downs like an elevator, and ultimately succeeded in the competition against other sport events trying to invade their property. This is kind of a survival of the fittest. Today the Olympic Rings are immediately recognized by 94% of all people. It's more than just a sports brand, representing friendship, excellence, and respect. Universal brand recognition like this is unique.
- WM: Yet the Winter Olympics, which are riding on the same train using the same brand ticket, do not attract the same kind of global attention. They target a separate market of different customers.
- JH: Winter Olympics, like the Paralympic Games, are smaller in terms of number of events, duration, participants, and broadcasts. Television reach and media coverage are growing, but only in some parts of the world. Basically, they are Games of the Global North. The recently established Youth Olympics equip the IOC with a third element to keep the brand alive. For similar reasons of maintaining brand awareness, the IOC decided on the alternating format of Summer and Winter Games. In the years in-between the IOC handpicks its favorite hosts from candidate cities.

Launching a bid

- MH: Being a host city candidate is one thing, getting the bid another one. A successful candidate city must have everything first class. First class airport, first class hotels, first class transportation systems, first class economic situation. For the 2016 Games, a joint bid by Hiroshima and Nagasaki stepped into the ring with Tokyo. But the Japan Olympic Committee decided only Tokyo can do it.
- JH: Britain similarly had bids coming forward from Birmingham and Manchester that ended in defeat. A newspaper article afterwards stated the only way Britain was going to get the Olympic Games was if London put itself forward. Only London has the world-class facilities the IOC is attracted to. Not many cities fit to their standards. If we were having this discussion in 2028, half of all Olympiads would still only have been officially assigned to six cities: London, Tokyo,

Los Angeles and Paris got the bid three times, Berlin and Athens twice. Launching a bid is not a cheap thing to do. Estimates I have seen for Tokyo run into multi-million dollars. We're talking here about campaigning managed by spin-doctors and companies with a proven track record in winning bids.

- MH: Previously I helped Osaka bid for 2008. Before entering the bidding phase, we were very cautious about any contenders. So we asked China: "Are you coming for 2008?" They said: "No, we're not gonna do it.", "Are you sure?", "Yes we are sure." So we went for it. But right after that, China came and Beijing got the 2008 Games. Knowledge, experience, and relations are key. The JOC bid for 2016 failed but the insights gained during the process, and the human network we established, especially with IOC members, naturally secured the 2020 Games for Tokyo.
- JH: Certainly persistence is needed. Pyeongchang kept going and made three consecutive bids before landing the 2018 Winter Olympics. Japan with the Osaka bid for 2008 has a history of persistence as well.
- MH: People just told us don't quit, you have to keep bidding, you know, many times.

Narratives and message control

- WM: It's the scarcity value of having the Olympic Rings that sustains bidding activities. Host cities aim for the unique situation to transmit powerful messages to the world.
- JH: In 1964 Japan had its coming-out-party, showcasing modernity and technological development.
- MH: In 1964 the message was very clear: recovery from World War II. The message from 2020 is different: how to maintain our infrastructure, particularly at times of rapid aging and population decline. Sydney 2000 became the Green Olympics, London 2012 were called the most connected, and Tokyo will be about artificial intelligence. We envision Tokyo 2020 as a showcase of how technologies deal with these problems.

What stays behind

- WM: Inevitably it will take time to recoup expenses, if ever. Public finances in the red belong to the most frequent aftereffects of Olympic hosting. This is not the kind of legacies that the IOC has in

mind when it encourages candidate cities to think ahead about what stays behind when submitting their bids.

- JH: The IOC summarized 40 changes and recommendations in its “Agenda 20/20.” It’s got nothing to do with Tokyo 2020 specifically but deals with cost reduction, environmental protection, sustainability, and legacy building. Legacy has been around as a keyword in its association with mega-events for 20 years only. It is extremely popular as it holds at bay the concerns about gigantism, wastefulness, and the sustainability of something that critics would say is not sustainable. Legacy can cover what appears to be a kind of almost instantaneous change. But it can also mean something very long-term, which people are not going to see possibly in their lifetimes.
- MH: We learned a lot from the London Games. They left a very good legacy, with the redevelopment of East London and the successful operating of many commercial areas. But the biggest legacy is tourism development. London did a wonderful campaign attracting millions of visitors to the UK. It hosted the Commonwealth Games in 2014, the Rugby World Cup in 2015 and other large athletic events, raising the number of annual visitors from 31 million in 2012 to 41 million most recently.
- JH: Many cultural institutions in London however, such as the British Museum, reported their visitor numbers to be down by 25% to 30% during London 2012. I came across reports of the same displacement effects of regular tourists by sports tourists in 2000 in Sydney, disappointing many restaurants and business owners outside of the honeypot areas.
- MH: Sports tourists spend about twice as much than average travelers. During the 2015 Rugby World Cup, their expenditure was even four times higher. If Japan manages to attract many sports tourists who spend more and stay longer, this would be a wonderful legacy for a shrinking society. With every Japanese we lose, consumption goes down by \$12,000. Japan aims at welcoming 60 million inbound tourists per year.

For more information, photos, and the Podcast: www.dijtokyo.org/event/tokyo-2020-and-beyond-legacies-from-hosting-the-olympic-and-paralympic-summer-games/.