

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE: IMAGES OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Pierre-Olaf SCHUT , Marion PHILIPPE 

Université Gustave Eiffel (Francia)

[Original text in French published in this issue]

The Olympic Games are an exceptional global event; held every 4 years and receive exponential media coverage. The two weeks of competition are unforgettable, generating countless images of sporting achievements, host cities and sporting events. They create stories –some marvellous, others dramatic– around the athletes, but also events within the event. They create images and construct representations. The Olympic institution and the various stakeholders (sports organisations, sponsors, broadcasters, host territories, etc.) commit themselves to take over the production process of these representations and control them in order to ensure that their strategies/policies are implemented.

Image is primarily controlled by the International Olympic Committee. The international sports institution exists through its image; it must control and sustain it (Giesen & Hallmann 2018) to keep support from the public and therefore from the media as well as companies. Indeed, the Partners programme implemented in the 1980s and supported by Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the IOC from 1980 to 2001, is based on the benefits that companies hope to gain from this partnership, which is primarily a matter of image (Stipp 1998). As Marc Lits (1997) explains, it is because of the way an event is portrayed by the media that it actually becomes an event. This makes it a godsend both for corporations, which can use it as a means of making money, and for athletes, as part of the commodification of sport and the Olympic Games that began in the 1980s. The question of image as iconography, but also as representation, is therefore central to the long-term future of an event like the Olympic Games.

Of course, private and commercial issues are linked to public ones. The commitment of host cities and their country is largely driven by the desire to (re)build an appealing image. The attractiveness of the area for tourism or commercial activities is fundamental (Kenyon & Bodet 2012; Hahm, Taci & Terry 2018).

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial reuse, distribution and reproduction in any form, except for the modification and creation of derivative works, on the condition that the original work is properly cited.

The image issues raised by public actors are also symbolic and cultural. Opening ceremonies are the best examples to express the host country's history, culture and values (Hogan 2003; Kramavera & Grix 2023). Minorities who make demands, whether peacefully or violently, also disrupt the Games to take advantage of the spotlight they represent. But national identity remains at the heart of the Games, as flags are raised, and anthems sung at the end of each event. These symbols are in many ways an extension of an international competition between countries defending their athletic performance in a globalised society. In this respect, the medals won by champions help to forge sporting identities and, by extension, national identities.

Through the various articles in this issue, we intend to contribute to this vast and complex theme. We do not claim to exhaust the subject, but rather to shed light on some of its aspects. Through their diversity, the authors offer complementary perspectives on various Olympics, sports, and countries.

Hugo Gerville-Réache delves into history to understand how the Olympic Games have been portrayed in films. Indeed, the event is a source of inspiration to produce fictions that draw on a reality that touches the public in order to develop a sporting adventure that stages performances and carries a moral discourse – which may be critical of Olympism or, on the contrary, support the viewpoint of the sporting institution.

As for Guilherme Carvalho Vieira, Ester Liberato Pereira and Janice Zarpellon Mazo, they focus on the production of still images: photographs published in reports on the Olympic Games and in the media. They broach the theme of how representations of an activity are built, using the example of horseback jumping in the culture of a country: Brazil.

Sport is also at the heart of Cyril Thomas's contribution which dwells on the Kenyan athletes who dominated the middle distance at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Beyond the sporting results, the author reconstructs the French media discourse that tended to devalue these performances by attributing them to a particular geographical environment, in a post-colonial context of repositioning France in relation to African countries.

Valérie Cruzin focuses on the image of Cathy Freeman, who was supposed to symbolise the reconciliation between the Australian nation and the aboriginal people at the Sydney Games in 2000. The athlete of aboriginal descent who carried the Australian flag at the opening ceremony, won the 400 metres and then waved the Australian and Aboriginal flags simultaneously. Valérie Cruzin deciphers the image of this victory and the way it was reported in the press.

Marion Philippe reflects on the role of French radio and television in building sports expectations in the public. She dwells on the swimmer Christine Caron at her first Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964. The swimmer was visible in the media because of her sporting achievements, but also because she conformed to gender norms, making her a real icon of the 1960s.

Referencias

- Giesen, N., & Hallmann, K. (2018). The impact of the perceived image and trust in the International Olympic Committee on perceptions of the Olympic Games in Germany. *International journal of sport policy and politics*, 10(3), 509-523.
- Hahm, J., Tasci, A. D., & Terry, D. B. (2018). Investigating the interplay among the Olympic Games image, destination image, and country image for four previous hosts. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35(6), 755-771.
- Hogan, J. (2003). Staging the nation: Gendered and ethnicized discourses of national identity in Olympic opening ceremonies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 27(2), 100-123.

- Kenyon, J. A., & Bodet, G. (2018). Exploring the domestic relationship between mega-events and destination image: The image impact of hosting the 2012 Olympic Games for the city of London. *Sport Management Review*, 21(3), 232-249.
- Kramareva, N., & Grix, J. (2023). Understanding Russia's identity through Olympic ceremonies. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 20(1), 79-100.
- Lits, M. (1997). Le récit médiatique : Un oxymore programmatique ? *Recherches en communication*, (7), 37-59.
- Stipp, H. (1998). The impact of Olympic sponsorship on corporate image. *International Journal of advertising*, 17(1), 75-87.

ORCID

Pierre-Olaf SCHUT  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0062-0261>

Marion PHILIPPE  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2368-4658>