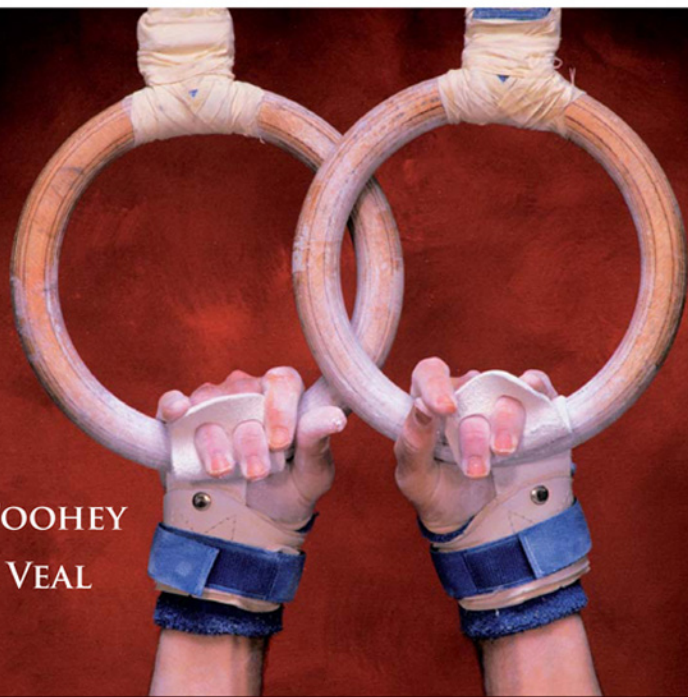


# THE OLYMPIC GAMES

2ND EDITION

A SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE



K. TOOHEY

A. J. VEAL

The Olympic Games:  
A Social Science Perspective

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# **The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective**

**Second Edition**

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# List of abbreviations

AAFLA	Amateur Athletics Federation of Los Angeles (now LA84 Foundation)
ACOG	Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games
AOC	Australian Olympic Committee
ATHOC	Athens Olympic Committee
BOCOG	Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic Games
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
COOB'92	Barcelona Olympic Organising Committee
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sport (UK)
EPO	erythropoietin (a human growth hormone)
FIS	Fédération Internationale de Ski
IAAF	International Amateur Athletics Federation
IF	International (Sport) Federation
IOA	International Olympic Academy
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IPC	International Paralympic Committee
LOCOG	London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games
NOC	National Olympic Committee
NPC	National Paralympic Committee
OCA	Olympic Coordination Authority (Sydney)
OCOG	Organising Committee for the Olympic Games
ODA	Olympic Development Authority (London)
OGGI	Olympic Games Global Impact
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy (USA)
SLOC	Salt Lake Organising Committee
SOBO	Sydney Olympic Broadcasting Organization
SOCOG	Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games
THG	tetrahydrogestrinone (a synthetic steroid)
TOP	The Olympic Programme/Partners
USADA	US Anti-Doping Agency
USOC	United States Olympic Committee
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency

# Preface

The first edition of this book arose as a result of the decision of the International Olympic Committee, in September 1993, to award the Games of the XXVII Olympiad to Sydney, Australia. The announcement prompted us to develop undergraduate and postgraduate courses on the Olympic Games in the School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). A considerable amount of research and teaching activity was subsequently developed at UTS, on the Olympic Games generally and on Sydney 2000 specifically. A book seemed a natural progression and it was published in early 2000.

Despite the controversies which enveloped the International Olympic Committee in 1998/99, there is no sign of the Olympic Games fading in terms of their sporting, cultural and economic significance. From their origins in ancient Greece, during their revival at the end of the nineteenth century and through most of their twentieth and twenty-first century existence, the Olympic Games have been more than just another sporting event. There is, consequently, an enormous and varied literature available on the Olympic Games. In the mid-1990s we noted that there was, however, no up-to-date publication which sought to provide a broad, independent, multi-disciplinary account and analysis of the Olympic phenomenon. This book was designed to fill that gap in the literature. It was not possible to provide the definitive analysis of a phenomenon as complex as the Olympic Games in a single, short, book: what we aimed to do was to provide an introduction to the various ways in which the Games have been analysed and to raise issues and provide pointers to further study. The ‘social science approach’ was not intended to involve a heavily theoretical perspective, but rather to reflect the range of interests which observers with a social scientific outlook had, and continued to have, in the Games.

The second edition of the book updates the first edition in relation to the burgeoning research literature and in relation to Olympic Games and other international sporting events of the last 5–6 years. While the first edition was published in a relatively expensive hardback format, the new edition is being made available as a paperback, to make it affordable for students studying in the growing number of university courses on the Olympic Games. To this end, study questions have been added at the end of most chapters and a supporting website is available at: [www.business.uts.edu.au/lst/books](http://www.business.uts.edu.au/lst/books).

As part of the process of developing this book we assembled a substantial bibliography on the Olympic Games, much of which is included in the references section of the book. The full bibliography is, however, considerably more extensive and is being continually updated. It is available online at: [www.business.uts.edu.au/lst/research/bibliographies.html](http://www.business.uts.edu.au/lst/research/bibliographies.html).

K.T.  
A.J.V

Sydney  
September 2007

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Studying the Olympic Games

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

– *The Olympic Charter* (IOC, 2004: 9)

The primary aim of the organisers of sports or Olympic competitions is not sport for its own sake but sport for capitalist profit; or rather, their aim is capitalist profit through sport. – Jean-Marie Brohm (1978: 137)

### The phenomenon of the Olympic Games

Every four years, in recent decades, some 10,000 athletes from 200 countries, with a similar number of coaches and officials, as many as 15,000 accredited media representatives and hundreds of thousands of spectators have gathered for more than two weeks to participate in, report on and watch a sporting event which is in turn viewed on television, listened to on radio, read about in the print media and followed on the Internet by billions of people around the world. Each Games has cost enormous sums of money to stage, funded from taxpayers, sponsors and television companies and their advertisers. Sporting records have invariably been broken and national and international heroes created. It is the world's biggest peace-time event: the Summer Olympic Games. These games are followed a couple of weeks later, in the same city, by the Paralympic Games, involving almost 4000 athletes with a variety of disabilities from 136 countries. Two years after each summer Olympic Games the Winter Olympics are held, involving over 2000 athletes from 70 countries and the corresponding Winter Paralympic Games attract almost 500 athletes from 40 countries.

The history of the Olympic Games begins at least 3000 years ago in Ancient Greece. In their ancient form, while they celebrated physical excellence, the Games served a primarily religious purpose. In their modern form, while still ostensibly about physical excellence, they also play a cultural and economic, and often political, role.



The history and global significance of the Games, in sporting, cultural, economic and political terms, therefore justifies their serious consideration as an object of academic enquiry.

### **The Olympic Games as an object of academic enquiry**

The academic literature on both the ancient and the modern Games is massive and growing – an online, English-language, bibliography of mainly academic research on the Games currently runs to some 1800 items (see Veal and Toohey, 2007). A number of research centres has been established around the world, mostly in universities, specifically to foster research on the Olympic phenomenon, including:<sup>1</sup>

- the Olympic Studies Centre at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland;
- the International Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada;
- the Centre d'Estudis Olímpics at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain;
- the Australian Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia; and
- the Centre for Olympic Studies and Research at Loughborough University, UK.

Across the world, there is now a body of 'Olympic scholars', much of whose work is listed in the bibliography of this book and in the aforementioned online bibliography. Many are listed in the register maintained on the website of the Barcelona centre mentioned above. An academic journal, *Olympika*, is published by the University of Western Ontario centre mentioned above, and many universities offer units of study on the Olympic Games as part of sport management, event management or human movement degrees.

Before embarking on our own review and analysis of the Olympic Games, we examine, in broad terms, the nature and scope of Olympic research and serious commentary to date. This examination is presented under two headings: disciplinary perspectives and paradigms.

### **Disciplinary perspectives**

Most social science disciplines and sub-disciplines have something to offer in the study of the Olympic Games, including history, economics, politics and sociology.

Historians are, not surprisingly, the largest single group of contributors to the research literature on the Olympics. History is, admittedly, generally seen as part of the humanities rather than the social sciences, with which this book is primarily concerned, but historical work on the modern Games is frequently concerned with social issues, such as the changing status of women, issues of race and community politics, and the costs and benefits of the Games, so that sociological and economic dimensions of historical events are often to the fore.

Economic analysis of the Games has become increasingly common with their growing scale and costs. It focuses on such issues as the sources of funding of individual Games and their economic impact on the host city or nation, the funding of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the remuneration of athletes.

Politics, political analysis and political debate are never far away from any consideration of the Olympic Games since, while in principle, according to the

rhetoric of the International Olympic Committee, athletes who participate in the Games represent just themselves and the ‘youth of the world’, in practice they represent individual nation states.

As a field of economic enquiry, *political economy* preceded the separate disciplines of economics and political science. As the name implies, political economy covers aspects of both economics and politics and, to some extent, sociology. The works of some of the great social thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century can best be described as political economy. The most notable of these, as far as Olympic Games research is concerned, is Karl Marx. Marx himself died in 1883, so did not write on the modern Olympic Games, but a number of contemporary Marxists or neo-Marxists have done so. These are referred to particularly in Chapter 6.

Sociological perspectives arise from such considerations as the question of gender and racial equity in involvement with the Games, assessing the cultural significance of the Games and the role of the media in shaping and portraying their cultural dimensions. Some of the research and commentary in this area falls into the specialist fields of cultural studies and media studies.

Disciplines provide one way of categorising research on the Olympic Games and they have largely determined the range of topics selected for study, the theoretical frameworks brought to bear on a topic and the research methods used. While much of the research on the Olympic Games has a single disciplinary perspective, particular topics can be seen as multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary in nature. For example, examining the issue of drug abuse in the Olympic Games, and in sport generally, involves a range of perspectives, including medical sciences, psychology, sociology, economics and politics. Examining the legacy of the Games in a single host city involves historical, economic, sociological and political analysis (see, for example, Cashman, 2006).

In contrast to most of the existing scholarly publications on the Olympic Games, which have been primarily historical or concerned with a single perspective, such as politics or the media, the aim of this book is to encompass all of these dimensions, at least at an introductory level. We seek to provide an overview of the basic socio-cultural dimensions of the Games from both contemporary and historical perspectives. Because of the breadth of coverage attempted, the book does not deal with any one issue in great depth: it seeks to pose questions, examine issues and provide the reader with information and sources for further reading and study.

## Paradigms

Cutting across disciplinary categorisations are *paradigms* or ways of conceptualising and analysing phenomena. We have selected three paradigms which, we believe, between them encompass the bulk of Olympic Games research. They are: a descriptive/pragmatic paradigm; a critical paradigm; and a managerialist paradigm. Each of these is briefly described below.

### Descriptive/pragmatic paradigm

Much historical research has been conducted within what we have termed the *descriptive/pragmatic* paradigm. Olympic historians in particular have documented

and analysed the ancient and modern Olympic phenomena, with a number of alternative goals and outcomes:

- to fill in gaps in the record, in a purely descriptive way;
- to debunk myths about the Games – in the interest of truth;
- to draw out thematic issues.

### Critical paradigm

In research adopting the critical paradigm, analysis of the Games is set within a broader agenda or ‘project’ which is critical of society from one or more perspectives. The Games and their organisers are then seen as complicit in, hi-jacked by, or the victims of, particular social, economic or political interests or forces. Four types of critical paradigm can be identified as follows.

- *Neo-marxist* – this sees the world, including modern sport and high profile events such as the Olympic Games, as being under the hegemonic control of international capital and business in the interest of the pursuit of profit, to the disadvantage of the mass of people and arguably counter to declared Olympic ideals.
- *Feminist* – sees society, including sport and the Olympic Games, as being dominated and controlled by men in the interests of men and to the disadvantage of women.
- *Environmental* – this paradigm is critical of the materialism of contemporary society and its wasteful and environmentally unsustainable practices; development of infrastructure for the Olympic Games in some host cities has been criticised for not adhering to the ‘green’ principles declared by the International Olympic Committee.
- *Communitarian* – this sector of Olympic research is concerned with such issues as: the effect of the Games on disadvantaged groups in host cities; the failure of organisers to gain community support when making bids for and planning infrastructure for the Games; the cost to the public purse in hosting the Games; and the elitism which is seen to pervade the Games in general.
- *Ethnic/cultural* – this perspective is critical of the Olympic Movement on grounds of its Eurocentric outlook and European-dominated governance.

### Managerialist paradigm

In recent years much research has been commissioned by governments and Olympic Games organising committees to investigate the projected and actual economic impact of the Games and academic researchers in areas such as economics, management and marketing have investigated the Games. Two groups within this paradigm can be identified: evaluative and reformist.

1. *Evaluative* research is generally technical in nature and is dominated by economic impact studies. A common aim is to produce estimates of likely impacts in advance of the Games – sometimes as part of the process of deciding whether to bid to host the Games. Other research in this genre is conducted after

the Games, to establish the extent to which they have met their economic, social, environmental or sporting goals.

2. *Reformist* research is more wide-ranging and is concerned with the governance of the games and such things as the effectiveness and legitimacy of the International Olympic Committee and the scale and organisation of individual Games events.

Of course not all research and commentary can be neatly pigeon-holed under just one paradigm: many have features of two or more. At various points in the book reference is made to these paradigms. Most chapters include references to one or more of the three major paradigms. It is hoped that this will provide a measure of coherence for the reader and assist in making sense of the many diverse contributions to Olympic studies.

## Structure of the book

*Chapter 2* provides an historical introduction to the original Olympic Games, of Ancient Greece. The Games of the classical era were the source of inspiration for the modern revival of the Games in the late nineteenth century, but the precise nature of those ancient celebrations, which lasted for over a thousand years, is the subject of on-going research, including continuing excavations at the ancient site of Olympia.

*Chapter 3* examines the events leading to the modern revival of the Games in Athens in 1896, while noting that this was by no means the first attempt to revive the Olympics. The revival of the Games at this time was not an isolated event, but was associated with enormous changes which had been taking place in sport and indeed in the wider economy and culture during the second half of the nineteenth century.

*Chapter 4* presents an overview of the modern Olympics. It focuses particularly on the philosophy and *modus operandi* of the International Olympic Committee, noting the criticisms which this unique body has attracted over the years, many of which were seen to have been vindicated by the scandals which erupted in 1998–1999. The complex worldwide ‘Olympic Movement’ is examined in this chapter, including: the phenomenon of ‘Olympism’; the structure and functioning of the International Olympic Committee; and the roles of National Olympic Committees and International Sport Federations. In addition the Winter Olympics, the Cultural Olympiad, the Paralympic Games and similar international sporting events are examined briefly.

*Chapter 5* analyses the issues of politics and nationalism, which permeate the Olympic phenomenon. While sport is widely promoted as being ‘beyond politics’, the chapter examines six different forms of political intervention in the Games, from international terrorism to local pork-barrelling, illustrating the fact that, far from being ‘above politics’, sport, and the Olympic Games in particular, are quint-essentially political. They have been used to promote political philosophies and to support sectarian and national political goals. They have themselves been subject to political intrigue, and they have been caught up in many of the major international political events of the last 100 years. The chapter examines the bribery scandals which surrounded the International Olympic Committee in 1989/90, and their aftermath.

*Chapter 6* considers the economic and financial dimensions of the Olympics. First the question of ‘political economy’ is addressed – in particular the questions which increased funding, commercialisation, sponsorship and professionalisation raise about the role of the Games in the wider economic and political world order. As the