

**THE CONTENT AND FOUNDATIONS OF OLYMPIC STUDIES: SUBJECT
PROFILE ANALYSIS OF A DECADE OF *OLYMPIKA***

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Abstract

This study explores the nature of Olympic Studies by classifying the content of the peer review journal *Olympika* for the period 1997-2006. The results indicate a bias towards topics relating to the United States. Discussion of historical issues is more prominent than discussion of contemporary issues. A wide range of topics are explored in the corpus including: politics, governance and related issues; Olympic coverage in mass media; and tensions concerning Olympism. The roles and impact of individuals feature in many articles. Athletes and their sports are rarely featured. When they are, it is in the context of some wider issue. The editors include controversial topics as well as articles that address historical accuracy.

Introduction

This study explores one aspect of the nature of Olympic Studies by examining the content of research articles published in the peer reviewed journal *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*, published by the International Centre for Olympic Studies (ICOS) and classifying them by subject, using an accepted bibliographic technique. The analysis covers 48 articles in nine issues from 1997 (vol.

VI), to the most recently published 2006 issue (vol. XIV). It represents a decade of scholarship encompassing two Olympiads and 3 Winter Olympic Games. During this time the articles were on average written by 1.4 authors each, and averaged over 21 pages. Such studies of writings in a field are useful tools as journal articles establish the current state of the art in the field of study¹. As noted by Hyland:

These texts are the lifeblood of the academy as it is through the public discourses of their members that disciplines authenticate knowledge, establish their hierarchies and reward systems and maintain their cultural authority...[W]riting is not just another aspect of what goes on in the disciplines, it is seen as producing them².

While *Olympika* is a leading journal in the field of Olympic studies, it is recognized that there can be no definitively representative publication for any substantial field of study. Olympic Games scholarship appears in a range of other journals that embrace disciplines including: recreation, management, medicine, media studies, law, etc. The editorial policy of *Olympika* states that the editors: “invite scholarly papers, research notes, review articles, and other items relating to the historical, sociological, philosophical, and anthropological dimensions of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement”³. This indicates the intent of the journal to investigate broader subject coverage than other journals dedicated to Olympic Studies, such as the *Journal of Olympic History*.

In terms of scholarly independence, *Olympika* has no affiliation to the International Olympic Committee, unlike journals such as *Message Olympique* and *Olympic Review*. As a result, there are no obvious restrictions on the publication of articles that deal with controversial issues, including those that may depict the Olympic Games, International Olympic Committee (IOC), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and other individuals and organisations in a less than favourable light. Also, *Olympika* does have an international flavour. Despite the fact that most *Olympika* articles are published in English, this is not exclusively so. Between 1997 and 2006 one

article written in Spanish⁴ and one in French⁵ appeared. However, the fact that it is predominantly English does limit the nature of its total contribution to Olympic scholarship.

As a dedicated journal on the Olympic movement, with a high degree of academic freedom, *Olympika* provides a useful source from which to help identify the Olympic Studies field of study and to identify which disciplines form its base. Therefore, the following research questions guided this research.

Research questions

As represented by the content of the scholarly journal *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*:

What does the field of study of Olympic Studies comprise?

What are the foundation disciplines of Olympic Studies?

Method

In order to answer these questions, a number of bibliographic techniques can be employed to identify and classify the content of published academic work. Of these various methods, and in terms of *Olympika*, we used descriptor profile analysis, a form of subject profile analysis to analyse and represent the scholarly output of this journal. As noted by Marion and McCain: “Examination of classification terms, such as headings or descriptors, is an established method for structural analysis of a knowledge domain.”⁶

Descriptor profile analysis involves analysis of the indexing terms (often labelled “subject descriptors”) attached by indexers to the records of documents in

indexes and databases. In databases, descriptors are used by information seekers to retrieve documents relating to specific subjects. For this study, the subject headings attached by indexers in the *SportDiscus* database to *Olympika* articles were analysed and collated to identify the range of subject areas covered and their relative frequency. Using the subject headings assigned by professional indexers adds an objective element to the method⁷, especially when these headings are derived from a controlled vocabulary.

Subject profile analysis has been used previously as an accepted tool to map the range of fields of study. Earlier studies involving subject profile analysis include the fields of study of: geophysics⁸, technology⁹, bioelectronics¹⁰, and biotechnology¹¹.

For this study only research articles, essays and notes are analysed: book reviews are not included. Two exceptions to this are: the *Olympic Roundtable*¹²; and Barney's: review of *The Olympic Century: The Official History of the Modern Olympic Movement*¹³ as its lengthy description of the publication process qualifies it for inclusion. Following Latchem¹⁴ and Koble and Bunker¹⁵, who examined the *British Journal of Educational Technology* and *The American Journal of Distance Education* respectively, it is the subject rather than the scope of the article that is examined. Latchem categorized what he described as primary and secondary topics. This practice is also followed. So, for example, Little's article, "Preventing 'a wonderful breakthrough for Rhodesia': The British Government and the exclusion of Rhodesia from the 1968 Mexico Olympics"¹⁶, is categorized as involving the topics of "politics" and "history". Geographical, proper (e.g., de Coubertin, Pierre), and corporate name headings (e.g., International Olympic Committee) are additionally included to the topical subject headings. As many articles have the subject descriptors "Olympics" and "sports" attached to them, they become meaningless in terms of this analysis, and so

these labels are discarded. Similarly, some subject descriptors, although useful in other contexts, do not provide topical information, e.g., “longitudinal” and “cross-cultural studies”. These terms were also excluded in this analysis.

The subject headings were then grouped into categories that make sense in terms of the scholarly context of Olympic Studies. These groups are: specific Olympic Games (Summer and Winter); organisations; people; sports; Olympism; governance; politics; commercial aspects; mass media; arts and the Olympic Games; Olympic rituals; and legacy. Some of the analysed articles resonate with a number of these categories as the authors allow themselves the leeway of ensuring their articles include more than one group. This follows the practice of the *SportDiscus* indexers, who assign multiple subject descriptors to individual articles.

The category of “history” poses some problems for inclusion as, almost by definition, most research on human activity has a backward focus. For pragmatic reasons, the authors have assigned the “history” category to any article that deals predominantly with events that occurred more than ten years before the publication of the article. This takes into account: the time spent on developing the research model, collecting data, writing up for submission, and the review and publication process.

Limitations

Indexing, even when undertaken by experienced indexers who are knowledgeable in the field of study, is not foolproof. They are required to apply judgment. It is also difficult to represent the content and meaning of an article by some brief descriptive words and/or phrases. This means that subject descriptors rarely represent the full meaning of any document perfectly; instead they are a “best fit”. Professional judgment

is required to distil the most appropriate meanings and include the article in its appropriate category or categories. Finally, the 2005 *Olympika* articles (and by implication, their subject descriptors) could not be located on *Sportdiscus*. To overcome this, the subject descriptors applied were added by one of the authors, a trained indexer with knowledge of the field of study.

Literature review

Here are a assortment of explorations into the subject content of scholarly journal literature in a range of disciplines and fields of study. A number of examples relate to sports studies and cognate areas. For example Lumpkin and Williams¹⁷ examined 44 years (1954-1987) of *Sports Illustrated* feature articles. They focused on: the representation of different sports; gender and race; the roles of featured individuals and their descriptive characteristics; and length of articles among other things. Lever and Wheeler¹⁸ applied content analysis to 76 (1900-1975) years of the *Chicago Tribune* sports page, looking at evolving coverage of dominant sports, shifts from: amateur to professional sports, regional to national sports events, and individual to team sports. Urquhart and Crossman¹⁹ analysed coverage of Winter Olympics from 1924-1992 by the Canadian newspaper the *Globe and Mail*. Warning and Toohey²⁰ indexed and analysed the Olympics supplement in contemporaneous issues of *USA Today*, covering the Atlanta Olympics. Barnard, Butler, Golding, and Maguire²¹ (included in the current study) analysed British television and newspaper coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympics. Toohey and Warning analysed the subject coverage of a small sample of conference papers dealing with the Olympic Games²². Heinemann and Preuss²³ applied content analysis to the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* (IRSS) over a 25 year period (1966-1990). They provided the rationale for their investigation as follows:

Analysis of the contributions published in the IRSS provides systematic information on: the foci of research of sport sociology over the past 25 years, the assessment of the function and significance of the sociology of sport with regard to its successfully overcoming problems connected with the politics and practice of sports in various countries, the scientific claims of the sociology of sport, the extent to which it lives up to these claims and, above all, the degree to which the sociology of sport is anchored in sociological theory, and finally the extent to which the sociology of sport adequately reflects the relationships and developments ascertainable in the field of sport during the last 25 years.²⁴

They also investigated: types, status and kind of sports, persons or groups investigated; systems or organizations investigated; issues dealt with; scientific approach to the issues involved; and data used. They also noted the “length of a contribution, the number, sex, and nationality of the author(s).”²⁵

Similar investigations have been undertaken in other fields of study. Latchem²⁶ applied content analysis to the *British Journal of Educational Technology* for the period 2000-2005, following an earlier, less comprehensive, analysis by Hawkrigde²⁷, which covered a thirty-year span (1970-1999). Fox and Pearson²⁸ classified publications from Hong Kong relating to information technology in education. Koble and Bunker²⁹ explored the *American Journal of Distance Education* from 1987 to 1995.

Findings and discussion

The analysis of the articles in *Olympika* for 1997-2006 (the time period under consideration) evidenced that the subject headings and the related content for the articles included:

The roles of organisations and individuals in the Olympic Games

Issues of governance

Political impacts on the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement

Commercial impacts on the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement

Olympism

The origins and roles of symbolism and ritual in the Olympic Games

The relationship between the mass media and the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement

Arts and the Olympic Games and Olympic ideals

Physical education

These categories, and additional features such as geographical coverage and specific Olympiads, are discussed in more detail below.

The foundation materials (i.e. sources of information) for the articles involve a range of different formats including: unpublished historical documents (correspondence, meeting minutes etc), contemporary newspaper accounts, and prior scholarship. The foundation disciplines are dominated by history. However, other social sciences are still evident, including: politics, economics, philosophy, media studies and the arts.

Geographical coverage

The indexers assigned the following geographical headings to articles: Africa³⁰, Argentina (two articles)³¹, Australia (two articles)³², Belgium³³, Canada (two articles)³⁴, England³⁵, Rhodesia³⁶, Singapore³⁷, South Africa³⁸, and the United States of America (US)³⁹ (11 articles). It should be noted that geographical descriptors were not automatically added based on the location of an Olympiad. It indicates that a major

focus of the article is on a nation or a continent. The results indicate a clear bias towards material dealing with the United States.

Specific Games Featured in Articles

Over the period of *Olympika* publications under study, the following Olympic and Winter Olympic Games are featured. Specific Olympic Games are featured in 18 articles. These articles focused on 11 different celebrations of the Games. The most prominent are: the 2000 Sydney Olympics, which is the focus in four of the articles; the 1908 London Olympics, 1920 Antwerp Olympics, 1932 Berlin Olympics, and 1968 Mexico Olympics, which are foci of two articles each; the 1896 Athens Olympics, 1912 Stockholm Olympics, 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, 1956 Melbourne Olympics, 1992 Barcelona Olympics, and 2004 Athens Olympics, which are each featured in single published articles.

Specific Winter Olympic Games are the focus of seven articles. The 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics are featured in three articles; the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics are featured twice; and the 1949 St. Moritz and 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics are featured once.

The 1906 Intercalated Games in Athens⁴⁰, the 1919 Inter Allied Games⁴¹ in Paris, in which the IOC had a role, and the 1930 Empire Games in Hamilton, Ontario⁴² are also featured in articles during this time frame.

The relative frequency of foci on specific Olympic Games seems based on a combination of controversy and the specific time period when the Games were held. The Berlin⁴³ and Mexico Olympics⁴⁴, clearly distinguished by the overtly politicized elements that pervaded them and other Olympics (e.g. Munich, not referred to in this corpus), are still widely discussed within articles (noting that the articles dealing with

the Mexico Olympics do not address the “Black Power” issue). Sydney is represented in four articles probably due to its relatively recent occurrence; while, in contrast, the 2004 Athens Olympics (one article) may be too recent to figure prominently (due to time constraints related to the rigours of data collection, analysis, and the publication process up to the 2006 publication of *Olympika* included in this study). Increasing scrutiny of the commercialisation of sport, as well as the economic burdens and legacy of the Olympic Games has led to some retrospective historical studies, including those on the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics⁴⁵ and 1920 Antwerp Olympics⁴⁶. Recent analyses, looking at the implications of bidding for and hosting the Olympic Games⁴⁷, is a more widely featured aspect of specific Games.

Organisations

Thirteen articles have a focus on the International Olympic Committee. Other formal associations featured include: the British Olympic Association⁴⁸, Court of Arbitration for Sport⁴⁹, Olympic Movement, United States Olympic Committee⁵⁰, World Anti-Doping Agency⁵¹, and the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee⁵². The only IOC meeting featured is the 1914 Olympic Congress in Paris⁵³.

People

A range of august (and less than august) and diverse individuals feature in the articles, such as Adolf Hitler and General George F. Patton. Only two individuals feature in more than one article. They are, naturally enough, Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Olympic movement, and controversial IOC President Avery Brundage, each of whom appear twice. Of course, many other individuals are mentioned in many

articles, but the aforementioned represent those individuals whom the indexers consider are a major focus of the articles.

Seven articles devote enough space to individuals to be labelled as biographical by the indexers. These articles focus on: early British Olympic supporter Reverend Robert S. de Courcy Laffan⁵⁴; General Patton⁵⁵; Canadian IOC members Sir George Maclaren Brown and Willian Coleridge Patterson⁵⁶; the pioneering female Olympian trio from Singapore⁵⁷; IOC representative in the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, General Charles Hitchcock Sherrill⁵⁸; basketballer Bill Russell⁵⁹; and IOC representative from 1948-1968 John J. Garland⁶⁰. We would add Torres' account of the life of Argentinean pedagogue, government official, and early IOC member Jose Benjamin Zubiatur⁶¹.

Athletes figure sparsely in the articles. They include gold-medal winning Olympians such as runner Kathy Freeman and basketballer Bill Russell, to the lesser known Singaporean Olympian trio of Janet Jesudason, Mary Klass, and Tang Pui Wah. When included it is not always due to sporting prowess. For example, Freeman is referred to in two articles, one relating to Australian Aborigine protest at the Sydney Olympics⁶², the other based on her caricature in a newspaper cartoon depicting perceived nepotism of IOC vice-president Kevin Gosper⁶³.

Sports

Few sports are featured in articles. Where they do appear, they deal with: questions of historical accuracy concerning the first Marathon⁶⁴; equity issues relating to new judging system for figure skating⁶⁵; and issues relating to governance of amateur ice hockey in the United States⁶⁶. One article uses Canadian swimming as an example of the commodification of sports, especially relating to sports with funding pressures⁶⁷.

Finally, one article glorifies the sporting element, when Carson Cunningham extols the prowess of basketballer Bill Russell, demonstrating his wider influence on the game based on his performance at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics⁶⁸.

Olympism

Six articles address philosophical and ideological issues included in Olympism. These articles vary in their focus on this content and include: an historical excursus of Coubertin's views⁶⁹; three articles on the tensions between Olympism and emerging values⁷⁰; and, in a review essay, Barney addresses Olympism in *The Olympic Century: The Official History of the Modern Olympic Movement*⁷¹.

Governance

Historical and more contemporary treatments focussing on the role and performance of the IOC and other bodies are present in several articles. These articles focus on controversial issues that demanded governance responses. Of these: obstacles to leadership positions for women are explored⁷²; McLaren⁷³ discusses the introduction of the Court of Arbitration at the Olympic Games; and ongoing ethical issues relating to gifts to IOC officials⁷⁴ and how the media treatment of controversies reflected poorly on IOC and SOCOG⁷⁵ behaviours.

Other governance issues receiving an historical treatment include: controversial decisions made by the IOC just prior to World War I⁷⁶; control over amateur ice hockey in the United States and the 1948 Olympic Games⁷⁷; 16 articles dealing with IOC members and membership, including the biographies of Sherrill⁷⁸ and Garland⁷⁹; Canadian links to the IOC from 1928-1946⁸⁰; and the events leading to the "Expulsion

of South Africa from the International Olympic Movement” are used as a case study to describe IOC decision-making⁸¹.

Politics

Politics are inextricably linked to: the biographies of IOC members and Coubertin; articles dealing with the Berlin and Mexico Olympics; and articles dealing with governance referred to above. Other articles with a political emphasis include: Swanson’s account of the campaign to have the United States boycott the Berlin Olympics⁸² and Morgan’s discussion of Australian Aboriginal protest at the Sydney Olympics⁸³.

Mass media and the Olympic Games

The strong synergies between the Olympic Games and the mass media have long been recognised⁸⁴. These synergies can lead to tensions, especially when commercial interests may be seen to be at odds with values and ethics of the Olympic movement. Wenn discusses the proactive role the IOC took in negotiating directly with television networks prior to the Barcelona Olympics⁸⁵. Another article uses the portrayal of security issues surrounding the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics to provide a platform for discussion of how the Olympic Games can be used as a vehicle by media interests for reinforcing certain values⁸⁶. As indicated above, aspersions raised by the mass media on the IOC and SOCOG are explored prior to the Sydney Olympics.⁸⁷ Also indicated above was the study by Barnard, Butler, Golding, and Maguire⁸⁸ who carried out a content analysis on British television and newspaper coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympics. Finally, historical pieces include the role of newspapers in encouraging a

boycott by the United States of the Berlin Olympics⁸⁹ and the role of the American media in promoting the 1920 Antwerp Olympics⁹⁰.

The Arts and the Olympic Games

Three articles address the relationship between the Olympic Games and cultural or artistic activities. Segrave discusses the music, dance, and literature of the Ancient Olympic Games⁹¹, a tradition that has to a large extent disappeared in the modern Olympics. In his second article he narrates the background of poet Pietro Metastasio's opera *L'Olympiade* arguing that it maintained some level of consciousness of the Olympic idea in the period leading up to the modern Olympic Games⁹². The extensive artistic and cultural events, and their significance, leading up to and during the Mexico Olympics are also discussed by Wendl⁹³.

Commercial elements and Olympic host bids

There is discussion of both recent and temporally distant Olympic host bids, in terms of goals set and outcomes achieved. These include: the range of issues affecting the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics⁹⁴; Bondonio and Campaniello's⁹⁵ analysis of the effects of the 2006 Torino Winter Olympics, where they indicate a qualified achievement of many of the organisers' goals; White's⁹⁶ detailing of the commercial basis behind the hosting of the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles; Renson and den Hollander's⁹⁷ critical examination of the financial exploitation of the Antwerp Olympics by powerful local groups; and the vexed issue of revenue sharing between the IOC and USOC is explored by Barney, Wenn, and Martyn⁹⁸.

Olympic ritual and ceremony

The Olympic Games are redolent with rituals and ceremony⁹⁹, including: the torch relay (a topical issue in 2008); opening ceremony; and medals ceremony. Barney explores the origin and evolution of the medals ceremony in two articles¹⁰⁰, Lennartz discusses the gold chains worn by IOC members at the Berlin Olympics¹⁰¹, while Magdalinski analyses the origins and significance of Olympic mascots¹⁰².

Education

Education is discussed in three articles: all are historical excursions. One deals with Coubertin's educational initiatives¹⁰³. The other two explore aspects of the history of physical education in Argentina¹⁰⁴.

The historical emphasis

The vast majority (29) of *Olympika* articles have a major historical emphasis according to the criteria set out above. Some refer directly to questions of historical fact, such as: the identity of participants in a photograph of a marathon erroneously attributed to the 1896 Athens Olympics¹⁰⁵; and the history and existence of gold chains presented to IOC members at the Berlin Olympics¹⁰⁶.

Thirteen of the articles refer specifically to contemporary issues. Five have a significant mixture of historical and contemporary treatment¹⁰⁷.

Conclusion

The results of the analysis indicate that scholarly output from *Olympika* comprises a range of topics, including: history, philosophy, religion, the arts, politics,

business and management, education, event management, and media studies, amongst others. A major focus of articles in *Olympika* is historical analysis, supporting earlier findings on Olympic Studies by: Toohey and Warning¹⁰⁸, Warning, Toohey, and Ching¹⁰⁹, Warning and Toohey¹¹⁰, and Warning, Toohey, and Henri¹¹¹. There is an emphasis on controversial topics often placed in their historical context. There is also a strong publication bias towards articles dealing with the US. This may be due to the range and nature of the submissions rather than any policy to filter content.

In order of establishing what the field of study of Olympic Studies, as represented by the content of the scholarly journal *Olympika*, comprises (research question 1), we identify the following key areas: the roles of organisations and individuals; issues of governance; political impacts; commercial impacts; symbolism and ritual; and the mass media.

We posit that the major foundation disciplines of Olympic Studies, as represented by the content of the scholarly journal *Olympika* (research question 2) are: history, politics, management (governance), economics, philosophy, and media studies.

Further Study

It would be appropriate to extend the study to the complete corpus of *Olympika* (i.e. 1992 – present). This would provide a larger selection of articles and facilitate analysis of trends in the scholarly literature over this period. Characteristics of the authors could also be undertaken. This would involve identifying their gender and institutional affiliations and drawing conclusions from them about issues such as gender balance and invisible colleges. Internal citation analysis would indicate how often authors pursue sources outside *Olympika*, as opposed to those inside. Widening the scope of research to include other scholarly publications that deal with the Olympic

Games would provide a more comprehensive view of the range of scholarship within the field of study.

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¹⁴ C. Latchem, "Editorial: A Content Analysis of the British Journal of Educational Technology," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 37, no. 4 (2006).

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¹⁶ C. Little, "Preventing 'a Wonderful Break through for Rhodesia': The British Government and the Exclusion of Rhodesia from the 1968 Mexico Olympics," *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 14 (2005).

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¹⁹ J. Urquhart and J. Crossman, "The Globe and Mail Coverage of the Winter Olympic Games: A Cold Place for Women Athletes," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 23, no. 2 (1999).

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