



MALMÖ HÖGSKOLA

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A lot of books are published this spring, all addressing the same subject from a variety of perspectives, with different motives and ambitions; that's right, it's about the Summer Olympics in London. It is the thirtieth Summer Olympics, and it is the third time they're played out in London – London hosted the Games in 1908 and 1948 as well. No less than 204 nations have announced that they plan to walk the walk, with banner and athletes, at the opening ceremony, called "The Isles of Wonder" and directed by Oscar winner Danny Boyle, on 27 July. – Now, let's venture a bold estimate: 99 percent of the books about the 2012 Olympics are harmless tributes to sports, Olympism, Olympic history, de Coubertin, London, England, and so on. Not least for this reason it is important that idrottsforum.org highlights some of the books that seriously and critically examine Olympism, the Olympics, and the Olympic "movement", i.e. the International Olympic Committee, IOC. First up is John Sugden's and Alan Tomlinson's anthology *Watching the Olympics: Politics, Power and Representation* (Routledge), in which a number of renowned sports scholars, including Graham McFee, Barrie Houlihan, Ian McDonald, Jayne Caudwell and Holly Thorpe, in seventeen contributions perform an unusually critical examination of the processes of commercialization and institutionalization, as well as the individualism, that Olympic history has led to in our time. The Forum reviewer is Jon Helge Lesjø, and his reading reveals that it is a carefully joined collection of articles, which are unlikely to have been in a journal before it entered this book. The anthology begins with London's application and the decision-making process, and ends, happily, with a co-authored afterword by the editors. Excellent reading, our reviewer concludes, while waiting for the spectacle to kick off in a few months time.

The Olympics: London Calling

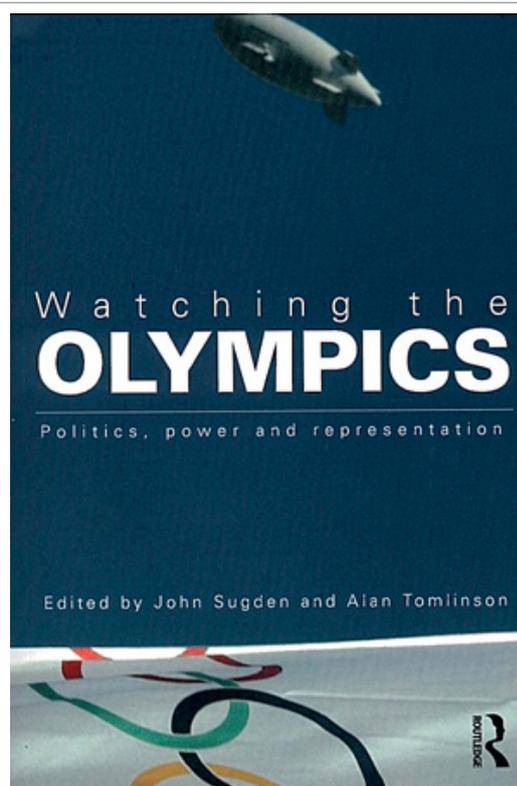
Jon Helge Lesjø

Lillehammer University College

John Sugden & Alan Tomlinson (red)
Watching the Olympics: Politics, Power and Representation
258 sidor, hft.
Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge 2012
ISBN 978-0-415-57833-2

Watching the Olympics is a book edited by two experienced sports sociologists, John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson. They are perhaps best known in the field for their collaborative books on FIFA (1998) and their editing of *Power Games. A critical sociology of sport* (2002). Both professors are today affiliated with the University of Brighton's Centre for Sport Research.

In July 2005 the IOC rather surprisingly decided that London would be the host for the 2012 Olympic Summer Games. Sugden and Tomlinson subsequently invited a group of colleagues to write about the Olympics in the running up to the London Games. The end result is a book, *Watching the Olympics*, with the significant subtitle *Politics, Power and Representation* and comprising 17 chapters.



Sugden and Tomlinson edited the book according to the principles of the Brighton group's sociological programme, formulated as: 'a healthy disrespect for disciplinary boundaries; an adventurous cross-cultural curiosity; and a commitment to critical social scientific scholarship not beholden to patrons, agencies or sponsors'. The word 'watching' in the title indicates a rather 'detached' look on the Olympic phenomenon, and suggests the influence of relevant theory and empirical data.

The authors analyse a great variety of Olympic issues throughout the book's 17 chapters. This brief review can only mention a few of them, selected by their informative newness to the Olympic studies. In 2012 London will be the first city ever to host the Games for a third time, following the Games in 1908 and 1948. How did this city in an environment of intense competition succeed in winning the bid for 2012? Tomlinson reminds us (ch. 1) that the bidding process is organized in ways that show the relevance of elite studies because the decision process requires the mobilization of huge resources for potential payments in status, power and prestige. London's three campaigns were led by the entrepreneurial ability of three lords, Desborough (1908), Burghley (1948) and Coe (2012). They were all former sportsmen who had ambitions to lead, but under radically different conditions. Though coming from distinct cultural worlds, they all had to be competent in networking diplomacy and backroom manoeuvring. Only Lord Coe needed the help of a prime minister in his bidding campaign, and this symbolizes that hosting the Games nowadays is quite another project, including the fact that social, economic and political issues are on an entirely different scale than in the first half-century of the modern Olympics.

Ethnic and cultural diversity was a very important 'selling point' in the city's bidding campaign leading up to the IOC decision in Singapore in 2005. The fact that London is home to hundreds of nationalities was used as bidding capital in the campaign and part of the rhetoric that convinced the IOC that this claim of diversity should be central to the modern Olympic discourse. Will these ideas also be seen in practice? And will London 2012 become 'the case of Olympic diversity or will it simply be an Olympic in a diverse city?' as Daniel Burdsey (ch.5) asks. He is not too

optimistic in his discussion, stating that: i) the city's sizable ethnic minorities 'are poorly represented' in the agencies organizing the Games; ii) most of the home nations medals in London 'most likely (will) come from white, middle-class athletes' and iii) and that the minority groups probably will be underrepresented in watching the Games live. But when they watch it (live or through the media) they will identify with and cheer not only for the British team, but equally for winners from countries like Jamaica, Nigeria and Pakistan.

” *But, as the authors emphasize, this market-driven strategy may have important unintended consequences, such as setting in motion a cultural shift from international Olympics to 'cosmopolitan Olympism'.*

One of the greatest challenges to the Olympic movement today is how the Games can remain relevant to the younger generation. Holly Thorpe and Belinda Wheaton discuss this issue (ch. 13) in relation to action sports and the 'search for generation Y'. ESPN's X Games has been the most important showcase for action sports and the life styles connected to them. It is not surprising, then, that their success and large television audiences represent strong competition for the IOC. Besides developing YOG (an Olympics for youth aged 14-18 years), the IOC's main strategy for becoming more attractive to young people has been to incorporate youth-oriented sports into the ordinary programme. President Rogge himself initiated an attempt to include skateboarding into the London Games, which led to some resistance from the skateboarding community. Thus, it seems that the efforts to renew the Olympic programme with youth sports as a means of reaching new audiences have been highly controversial, partly because the strategy of co-opting them into the structure and power networks of established sport organizations. But, as the authors emphasize, this market-driven strategy may have important unintended consequences, such as setting in motion a cultural shift from international Olympics to 'cosmopolitan Olympism'. This shift, however, depends on the expectation that the action athletes, more than the traditional competitors, will be dissociate from their national teams, a fundamental entity of the modern Olympics.

Coubertin's intention was to establish an institution of social reform; what actually developed during the following decades was the world's largest sporting spectacle. This spectacle and media event may also showcase other functions besides sport, like politics and terrorism as history has shown. 'The Games must go on', was Brundage's famous declaration in 1972, formulated as an answer to the Palestinian terrorist attack in Munich. In the post-9/11 era the potential threat from terrorism has increased security costs enormously. The UK strategy for 2012, in the aftermath of the London terror bombings in 2005, follows that of the 2004 Athens Olympic organizers, which turned the Games into a super panoptic form of surveillance, says John Sugden (ch 16). Michel Foucault is famous for turning Jeremy Bentham's innovative prison, the Panopticon, into a symbol of modern societies' regimes of control. This idea has now penetrated and manifested itself in the modern Olympics. In London 2012, as in other mega events, security will be a top priority, with the London Police saying that there will be a 'technological footprint' across London. The footprint will integrate the most modern security technology around the venues with the existing public and private infrastructure for surveillance. Every traffic move in the whole city will be monitored. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published a shortly before the 1948 Olympics; Big Brother will return to the Olympic city this summer. He will not appear intentionally as a totalitarian servant, but as a guardian against terrorism, for the safety of all the participants, visitors and inhabitants.

Watching the Olympics is a collection of articles that reflects both the present-day changes and the challenges to come for the Olympic movement. Most of the papers are influenced by the programmatic statements quoted from the preface, and they reflect the inspiration of the late John Hargreaves' work and ambition to promote a critical power analysis of sport as an important cultural field. To his memory this book is dedicated.

All in all, *Watching the Olympics* a worthwhile read as we wait for the Summer Games in London to commence.

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