

# Networking in Olympic Studies: current situation and proposals for development and cooperation

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## Summary

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## 1 | Introduction

In April 2004 the Department of Information Management of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) commissioned the Centre d'Estudis Olímpics of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (CEO-UAB) to develop a study on the current situation of Olympic Studies on a global scale in order to analyse the opportunity for the IOC to promote an international network in Olympic Studies.

The final purpose of this network is to enhance knowledge about the evolution of the Olympic Movement and to increase the dissemination of the Olympic values through improved communication and collaboration between organizations and individuals involved in Olympic studies.

The main goals of the UAB's study were to identify actors and opportunities for the development of Olympic Studies within the network and to make recommendations as to the strategic and practical management of this network in order to maximize its effectiveness in promoting cooperation.

### **Historical antecedents**

Since its establishment in June 1894 during the founding congress of the modern Olympic Games held in the Sorbonne, the International Olympic Committee has developed and maintained relationships with the academic world. The development of Olympic Studies, which was first proposed by Pierre de Coubertin in 1937, was made reality through the work of Carl Diem in 1938 and was closely related to the foundation of the International Olympic Academy in 1961. The establishment of the IOC Olympic Studies Centre and Library in 1982 in Avenue Ruchonnet, Lausanne, and its incorporation to the Olympic Museum opened in 1993 played an active role in the promotion and support of Olympic Studies, as well as the creation of institutionalised initiatives at universities such as "Olympic Studies Centres" at the end of the 80s that specialised in the study of the Olympics.

### **Diversity of actors and initiatives**

The growing significance of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement in society has resulted in increased interest from a wide range of organisations, groups and individuals in analysing these phenomena from an academic point of view and in disseminating Olympic knowledge.

**Olympic Studies Centres, research groups and individual experts** developing research lines on the Olympics are examples of initiatives established at universities. **Legacy institutions** that preserve the memory and hold documentation produced by OCOGs are examples of initiatives resulting directly from Olympic Games. The **International and National Olympic Academies** promote the study and dissemination of the Olympics and the Olympic Movement. **Sporting libraries** having developed collections dealing with the Olympic Games and **scientific**

**associations** having included the Olympics as an area of interest are further examples of the diverse nature of actors contributing to the development of Olympic Studies.

### **Need for cooperation**

Relations between these diverse actors have developed in a relatively fragmented and *ad hoc* way, resulting in certain inefficiencies such as lack of coordination, overlapping of activities and problems in achieving effective dissemination.

The need for cooperation in order to solve certain imbalances has also been evident, in particular related to the under-representation of African, Asian and Latin American actors, highlighting the need to increase cultural diversity in the contemporary interpretation of Olympism and the Olympic Movement.

### **Networking, production and dissemination of knowledge**

The basic form of exchange in Olympic Studies is knowledge and information. Activities undertaken in the area of Olympic Studies have led to the delivery of products and services of direct interest for the continued development of the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games.

The challenge facing the Olympic Studies Network, and in particular the **IOC Olympic Studies Centre** at its epicentre, is how to effectively develop and manage relations between the actors that currently form part of it (or could potentially in the future). The Olympic Studies Network has the potential to become a tool through which Olympic-based knowledge can be managed. Moreover, the concept of a more structured network would also bridge the knowledge gap between the academic world and the Olympic Movement.

## **2 | Key research findings**

### **Nature and functions of the network**

The results of this study highlighted the need to identify roles and responsibilities of the different network members. The importance of reaching a certain level of initial planning for the development of networking tools and activities in Olympic Studies is also highlighted. This would provide continuity and visibility for those activities already undertaken by network actors, as well as facilitate the inclusion of new actors and the promotion of new activities of interest for the development of the network.

### **Core network primary function**

A network model is proposed that maps relations between actors. Due to the complexity and diversity of the network, the establishment of a core network is proposed whose primary function is

the monitoring of the activities undertaken by a wider network. The wider network comprises actors involved in the generation and dissemination of knowledge in Olympic Studies.

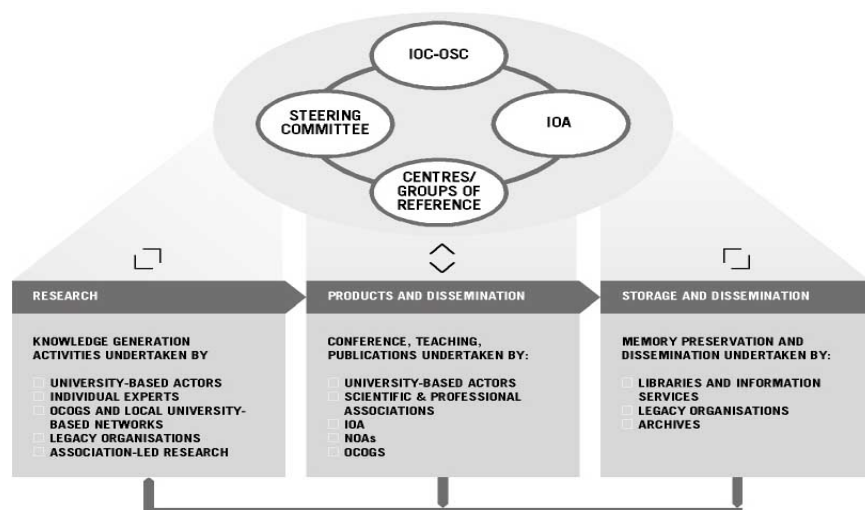
**Recommendations and tools for the initial development of the network**

Specific tools are recommended that would enable the successful initial development of the network at this initial stage facilitating the identification of network actors and the promotion and support of research, teaching and dissemination activities. The ultimate aim of these tools is to facilitate the flow of information, knowledge and pool resources within the network, as well as to build an Olympic Studies community.

The results also highlighted imbalances in terms of functional and cultural representation in the existing Olympic Studies Network. Recommendations are made as to how these imbalances could be redressed by supporting key network actors and Olympic Studies initiatives.

Suggestions on priorities for development are proposed from a short-term perspective in order to ensure the successful development of the network at its initial stage. Finally, priorities for further research and development are recommended, particularly in terms of maximising the potential use of the Internet.

Olympic Studies Network | relational model



### 3 | Analysis of Olympic Studies actors and activities

#### Methodology, information sources and results

The methodology adopted combined primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The main data sources included organisational publications and documents, as well as existing academic research. Leading actors in Olympic Studies were contacted in order to obtain primary data as well as a more strategic perspective, including the IOC Research Council members.

The results are divided into two main parts:

- 3.1. Olympic Studies actors;
- 3.2. Olympic Studies activities.

#### 3.1| Olympic Studies actors

The study identified, for the first time, the high diversity of Olympic Studies initiatives at an international level. Profiles were established for each of the Olympic Studies actors according to the background and development of activities undertaken, existing activities were mapped and the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the actors' contribution to the development of Olympic Studies were evaluated. The analysis produced concrete recommendations regarding the actors' potential future roles in the development of an Olympic Studies Network.

##### Actors in Olympic Studies

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- IOC Olympic Studies Centre
- University-based institutional initiatives
- IOA and National Olympic Academies
- OCOGs and hosting organisations
- Individual experts
- Scientific and professional associations
- Libraries and information services

##### 3.1.1. IOC Olympic Studies Centre

Since its creation in 1982, the IOC Olympic Studies Centre's contribution to Olympic Studies has been key in terms of dissemination and preservation of Olympic knowledge by providing access to the biggest Olympic collection in the world, funding research projects through the Postgraduate Research Grant Programme as well as collaborating with associations, universities and NOCs in the development of joint projects, conferences and symposia.

The IOC Olympic Studies Centre should play a mediating role between the IOC and the other actors of the Olympic Studies Network, ensuring knowledge generated by actors reaches the IOC and the Olympic Movement, whilst supporting and stimulating certain activities in the network.

By contributing to the development of the Olympic Studies Network, the IOC Olympic Studies Centre would promote a multicultural approach to the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement,

and would contribute to the dissemination of Olympic values and the development of the “Olympic brand”.

### **3.1.2. University-based institutional initiatives**

Since the late 1980s an important number of institutional initiatives, Olympic studies centres, research groups and academic groups, have developed at universities focusing their activities and interests on the Olympics. Results show a high level of diversity among initiatives, including those focused on the Olympics in particular and those on sport in general. Olympic focused initiatives differentiated according to levels of formalisation, including institutionalised initiatives and research groups.

It is worth highlighting the importance of Olympic-focused institutionalised initiatives that had strong links to a specific edition of the Olympic Games. Meanwhile, other initiatives have a multidisciplinary approach, while others focus on a specific area in Olympic Studies.

University-based actors play a key role in the development of Olympic Studies as well as in the promotion and maintenance of an existing informal network. Universities participate in knowledge generation through both humanistic and applied research, as well as in the dissemination of knowledge via publications, conference participation, local and online activities.

The main recommendations for university-based actors were:

- Identify and promote key university-based actors that could become reference points in Olympic Studies both in geographic and/or thematic terms.
- Encourage activities involving cooperation between university-based Olympic Studies initiatives, both at regional and international level.
- Develop university involvement in Olympic Studies in geographical priority areas, as a starting point for future key actors' development, in particular in Latin America, Africa and South Eastern Asia.

### **3.1.3. The International Olympic Academy**

The International Olympic Academy (IOA) functions as a multicultural interdisciplinary centre that aims at studying, enriching and promoting Olympism. As a lead institution in Olympic Education, the IOA should continue as a key link between the area of Olympic Studies and Olympic Education. Results highlight the key role of the IOA in the process of education and training those experts focusing their activities and research lines on the Olympics.

Recommendations for reinforcing the role of the IOA and its contribution to the development of Olympic Studies include:

- IOA should play a key role in the promotion and development of Olympic Studies in priority areas through the establishment and development of NOAs and by facilitating the participation of individual experts, particularly young researchers, in its sessions.
- Reinforce the cooperation of the IOA with university-based actors in the production of educational material, co-organisation of events and exchange of students and professors.

#### **3.1.4. National Olympic Academies**

National Olympic Academies, as organisations within the Olympic Movement with a clear educational vocation, could play an important role in the interrelationship between Olympic Education and Olympic Studies as part of a global network. National Olympic Academies provide an important link between the Olympic Family and grassroots level activity in the practice of sport as well as in Olympic Studies.

Suggestions provided for NOAs regarding Olympic Studies relate to:

- Facilitating a two-way flow of information by identifying and sharing information on local Olympic Studies actors at the international level, while simultaneously disseminating international information within their respective countries.
- Promoting the use of Internet, and in particular e-learning programmes, as key tools for the development of these activities and the promotion of Olympic Education.

#### **3.1.5. Organising Committees of the Olympic Games, Olympic cities and legacy-related institutions**

Organising committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) are key actors in the production and dissemination of Olympic information and knowledge. Other host city organisations (particularly universities) form part of a sub-network directly or indirectly through OCOGs.

The organisation of Olympic Games generates research and educational interests, both at local and international level, as well as Olympic documentation. OCOGs have a long established tradition of collaboration with university actors and have implemented knowledge management programmes. However, due to the intense pressure during preparation stage, Olympic Studies-related activities can become a sideline or a very low priority.

Considerations for the development of Olympic Studies in host cities include:

- Maintain strong links between OCOGs and universities in terms of research, production of educational materials and training of volunteers and personnel.
- Collaboration between OCOGs and universities from host cities with other key network actors at the international level in facilitating joint research, particularly comparative studies, teaching activities and in the dissemination of information from the host city.



- Planning for legacy-related organisations by host cities institutions and OCOGs through the entire process of organising and staging the Games to ensure the preservation of Games' memory.

### **3.1.6. Individual experts in Olympic Studies**

This group includes academics, members of the Olympic Family, journalists and writers as well as other individuals that have been involved in the study and dissemination of Olympic knowledge. These experts are key actors in the development of Olympic Studies in terms of scientific, media-oriented and practical knowledge generation, as well as in public opinion formation.

University experts provide multidisciplinary and/or unique expertise as well as an autonomous perspective from outside the Olympic family, and are often reference points for media organisations. It is important to differentiate between those that have developed long-term research lines, and those that are involved in Olympic Studies in a temporary or *ad hoc* way.

The fundamental roles of the network would be the improvement of opportunities to bring together experts from diverse Olympic-related thematic areas, the development of tools allowing the identification of expertise, and the provision of support to individual experts lacking resources to participate in the network.

Network development recommendations involving individual experts include:

- Promoting and supporting activities that enhance the generation and exchange of knowledge amongst individual experts and other actors in the network through activities such as conferences, research (in particular postgraduate), publishing and teaching initiatives.
- Supporting individuals that are at risk of exclusion from the network, particularly those from geographical priority areas and young researchers.

### **3.1.7. Scientific and professional associations**

Formal associations and informal groups bring together individuals and/or organisations sharing an area of interest in sport and/or the Olympics at an international and/or regional level. Currently, networking occurs through a combination of associations none of which deals specifically or comprehensively with the specialised needs of those involved in Olympic Studies.

Results identified three types of associations that deal with the Olympics or could play a potential role in the development of an Olympic Studies Network:

- Sports-related associations bring advantages in the dissemination and development of Olympic Studies in terms of number and diversity (international representation and thematic approach) of members.

- Olympic-specific associations provide specialised activities within the field of Olympic Studies.
- In addition, virtual networks could be a tool for community building.

Specific recommendations for associations include:

- A continuation but intensification of existing relations between key network actors and the sport or wider thematic associations, maximising the use of existing tools to raise the profile of Olympic Studies in wider academic circles.
- The development of existing communities of actors in the field of Olympics by increasing their multidisciplinary scope and promoting new network tools (newsletter, online information sharing and discussion forums), as well as the regular organisation of conferences.

### **3.1.8. Libraries and information services**

An important group of actors hold Olympic collections providing services for enhancing access to Olympic information. Its main contribution to the development of Olympic Studies is in the gathering, preservation and dissemination of information on the Olympics. Actors from this group were mediators between those searching for Olympic information and those generating and/or holding this information, thereby facilitating research and teaching activities.

Some of these identified actors play a very active role in the dissemination of Olympic information, especially the IOC Library, Documentation Service and Archives. However, there is a need to develop Olympic collections in key geographical areas with limited access to Olympic documentation such as Africa, Central America and Asia, and the provision of services targeting a global audience.

Results suggested the following action:

- Strengthening cooperation among actors for the development of on/offline, local and global services to be provided to those actors involved in Olympic Studies and to the network.
- Promotion and support for the development of Olympic collections in priority geographical areas and for those actors with difficulties to access to information resources.
- Optimise access to the collections held at the IOC to researchers.

## 3.2 | Olympic Studies activities

The interests of actors involved in Olympic Studies have resulted in a series of activities that are central to the development of an Olympic Studies Network. Products and activities generated through research enhance the dissemination of Olympic knowledge to the global Olympic Studies Network and the Olympic Movement in general. These activities include:

| <u>RESEARCH</u>   | <u>EDUCATION</u>   | <u>DISSEMINATION</u>  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Research projects and areas of interest</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ University-based teaching and training programmes</li><li>▪ Olympic Education programmes</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Conferences, congresses and symposia</li><li>▪ Publications</li><li>▪ Information and documentation products</li><li>▪ Olympism on the Internet</li></ul> |

### 3.2.1. Research

Olympic research contributes to the critical mass of the accumulated historical, social, cultural and educational value of the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement. Research activities are commissioned and/or undertaken by a variety of actors and have different aims and outcomes.

Although research undertaken into the Olympics is multidisciplinary, imbalances exist in fields of interest and certain areas of research are dominant. There was also a lack of joint projects providing a multicultural approach. Strong subnetworks did already exist, which were based on thematic interests and personal contacts, characterising the network of research as largely temporary, informal and based around projects of individuals scholars and universities.

Productivity is relatively high but difficulties exist in the promotion of and access to research findings, as well as to reach key decision makers. The mayor challenge for research is to reduce the gap between university research, the IOC and the Olympic Movement, as well as sporting organisations and the media.

Conclusions highlight the need to:

- Effectively identify knowledge generated through research and facilitate its dissemination in order to promote Olympism and improve the management of the Olympic Games.
- Develop new and currently underdeveloped areas of research.
- Identify research projects matching IOC needs.
- Promote joint research projects providing multicultural approaches that contribute to the interpretation of Olympism.
- Support research activities on the Olympics, in particular those undertaken in geographical priority areas and by young researchers.

### 3.2.2. University-based teaching and training programmes and Olympic Education

**Teaching and training programmes** are key activities for introducing people, particularly youth, to the Olympic phenomenon, as well as providing a means to promote and disseminate knowledge. Teaching activities on the Olympics usually take place as part of diverse undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the local level, although several examples of international teaching initiatives were identified. Regarding training programmes, most are related to management issues. Teaching and training programmes can be used by Olympic Movement organisations as tools to educate professionals and leaders.

Although some of the existing initiatives, such as the IOA Postgraduate Seminar on Olympic Studies, have a long tradition, there was limited evidence of cooperation between actors, as well as a limited use of technologies to develop Olympic e-learning programmes.

Results obtained highlight the need to:

- Promote and strengthen cooperation between actors (e.g. exchange programmes).
- Support and develop training activities by recognising training programmes and promoting the inclusion of Olympic-related courses in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
- Promote the use of new technologies and the Internet and their application to education,
- Provide support services for resources and contents for those teaching and training programmes on the Olympics.

On the other hand, considerations regarding **Olympic Education** focus on the International Olympic Academy and in particular NOAs in terms of their contribution to the development of Olympic Studies and their collaboration with other actors in the Olympic Studies network.

Within this wider framework, specific recommendations proposed include:

- Support for the establishment of new NOAs in developing countries, particularly Africa, Latin America and Asia, as an initial step for the development of Olympic Studies in the area.
- Encouragement of the cooperation between NOAs and university-based actors for promoting teaching and educational activities, as well as research programmes on Olympic Education.
- Establishment of education programmes at all levels in the educational system in collaboration with university centres.
- Promote the application of new information technologies in the dissemination of educational material and programmes.

### 3.2.3. Conferences, congresses and symposia

Scientific meetings are key activities that provide a meeting point for debate among different actors involved in a certain issue, as well as one of the most active tools for sharing and disseminating research findings. Scientific conferences facilitate community building, allowing the identification of

new individual experts and new research projects, as well as the reinforcement of personal contacts between network actors ensuring network success.

The organisation of Olympic-related scientific events goes back to 1904 with the holding of the Olympic Lecture Course. Since then, Olympic issues have been covered in Olympic-specific conferences, sport conferences or wider thematic conferences organised by a wide range of organisations. The IOC has supported various conferences, regular international events have been promoted by university Olympic Studies centres, and academic events have been successfully held within the framework of the organisation of an Olympic Games.

Although aims and nature of these events vary, they are considered by network actors as a major opportunity for exchange and dissemination. However, the results showed geographical imbalances in the hosting of events, a lack of long-term continuity for non-institutionally supported events and limited development in the use of new technologies for content dissemination.

Suggestions were made to:

- Promote the organisation and continuity of Olympic-specific scientific events by supporting a joint regular scientific conference focused exclusively on the Olympics.
- Promote the organisation of Olympic-related conferences in host cities, which should form part of the Cultural Olympiad programme.
- Promote and support wider areas scientific events that include Olympic-related issues.

### **3.2.4. Publications**

Commemorative books, scholarly books, research reports, institutional magazines, peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings are among the main tools for disseminating Olympic knowledge. Formats and typology of the documents vary according to the aims and target of the publication. The publication of general and scientific knowledge material increases during Olympic years, reflecting the level of attention paid by academics, media and society in general to the Olympics.

The IOC and its Olympic Studies Centre have assumed an important role in publishing their own Olympic material as well as externally produced contents, including activity reports, conference proceedings and research reports. Other organisations active in Olympic publications within the Olympic Movement are National Olympic Committees, which focus their publications on educational-oriented material with a national focus, and Organising Committees of the Olympic Games, which constitute one of the main authors of Olympic publications. University related actors and experts are one of the main producers of Olympic scientific knowledge, based on research findings, which is mainly published through scholarly books, journal articles and conference proceedings.

Results showed difficulties in accessing Olympic publications due to limitations in the distribution and dissemination process. It should be highlighted the still low level of free distribution through the Internet. Imbalances also exist in terms of the variety of languages used in publications.

Therefore, suggestions proposed are based on:

- Creating opportunities for bringing together authors to work on the development of joint Olympic publications and ensuring periodical works allowing the identification of up-to-date research findings.
- Supporting initiatives for the elaboration of quality documents providing multicultural approaches to the Olympic phenomenon.
- Improving the distribution of publications, including the promotion of online publishing.

### **3.2.5. Information and documentation products**

Olympic Studies, as a global and multidisciplinary area of study and activity, requires tools and products facilitating access to reliable information and documentation, including bibliographical databases, digital collections, other full-text products or directories and Internet portals. The IOC and other Olympic Movement organisations, libraries and information services and universities are the key actors in the development of information and documentation products on the Olympics.

Bibliographical databases enable the identification of Olympic related publications. Although Olympic content is included in sport and general commercial (e.g. *SportDiscus*) and non-commercial databases (e.g. *Heracles*), an exhaustive and geographical/idiomatic representative source does not exist.

Online directories and databases containing reference-type data on the Olympics have been produced with the support of the IOC, such as the *Olympic Studies International Directory* (CEO-UAB) and the IOC Olympic results and medals database. However, most of these initiatives lack institutional cooperation and a long-term orientation.

The increased use of the Internet has boosted the development of Olympic digital collections by the IOC, the IOA, university actors and the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, which collectively constituted the major digital collection on the Olympics. Although differences in terms of contents and target, initiatives characterised by non-commercial approach but a limited number of idiomatic representation.

Existing experiences provide opportunities for the future development of products and services targeting a global network of Olympic Studies.

Recommendations are proposed in terms of:

- Strengthening cooperation among actors in order to avoid overlapping and repetition of contents.
- Developing products and services facilitating pooling of resources and the control and accessibility to reference-type information on bibliographical production.
- Supporting the development of digital collections on the Olympics

### **3.2.6. Internet**

An Olympic Studies Network would inevitably form part of a technology based 'network of networks', the Internet, which provides an important potential for the establishment and development of an international Olympic Studies Network. However, in 2005 the usage of Internet as a medium for networking between actors is still very irregular, including a few initiatives that take the maximum advantage offered and a majority that could be considered as being at a low level of development.

Results showed Internet is mainly used for institutional public relations purposes, with limited applications for educational and content dissemination purposes. Limitations were identified in terms of technological development and the provision of various idiomatic versions of the contents. However, best practices highlighted the potential opportunities provided by the Internet for the development of a global Olympic Studies Network in terms of interactivity, cost effectiveness and content provision.

The following is suggested to maximise these opportunities:

- Promote the pooling of existing Olympic content on the Internet by network actors.
- Encourage and facilitate the establishment of websites for all those actors that still do not have one, or do not use for educational and dissemination purposes.
- Develop a portal (or rather 'portal of portals') to provide systematic access to knowledge produced by the Olympic Studies Network actors.

## **4 | Conclusions**

While the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement in general have been objects of study for an increasingly wide variety of actors, the products and activities undertaken by these actors have contributed to increased understanding and the development of knowledge in the field, as well as the diffusion of Olympism on a global scale.

The main results of this study stress the need for the Olympic Movement to assess and value the role and importance of Olympic Studies. The main recommendations made aim to contribute to the development of Olympic Studies activities through a more structured and defined, yet dynamic and

flexible network. This network should function through activities undertaken in an efficient and effective way, maximising resources and expertise to bridge the gap between Olympic Studies actors and the IOC and the Olympic Movement, and to the mutual benefit of all those involved.

By way of conclusion, Olympic Studies should continue developing hand-in-hand with the Olympic Movement.