

Academic Institutions and the Olympic Movement

Miquel de Moragas

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona



The Centre d'Estudis Olímpics (CEO-UAB) publishes works aimed to facilitate their scientific discussion. The inclusion of this text in this series does not limit future publication by its author who reserves the integrity of his rights. This publication may not be reproduced, neither partially nor totally, without the author's permission.

This paper was presented in the V Forum on Sport, Education and Culture Forum by the IOC undertaken in Beijing, in October, 2006.

Ref. WP106

To refer to this document you can use the following reference:

Moragas, Miquel de (2006): Academic institutions and the Olympic Movement [online article]. Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics UAB. [Consulted: dd/mm/yy] http://olympicstudies.uab.es/pdf/wp106_eng.pdf

[Date of publication: 2006]

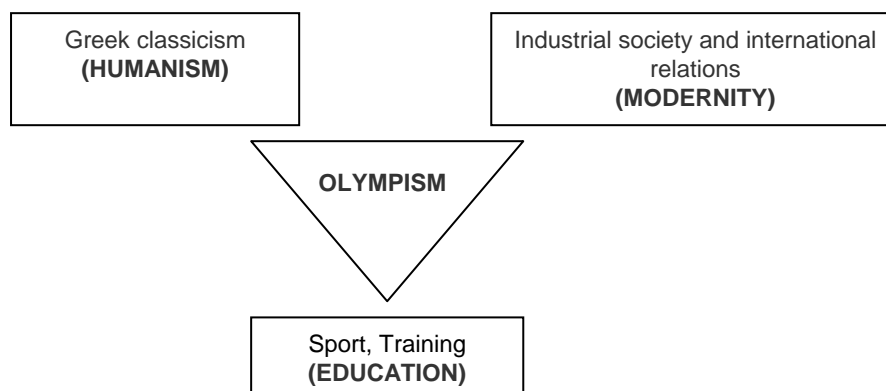
Table of contents:

1. Antecedents. Relations between the academic world and the Olympic Movement	4
2. Actors in Olympic Research	5
3. The institutionalization of Olympic research in the Universities and the establishment of Olympic Studies Centers (OSC)	6
3.1 Centers of reference	
4. How can this new interest in the Olympic Games by Universities be expanded?	8
4.1 The impact of the Games on modern society	
4.2 The transversal nature of the phenomenon and the inter-disciplinary approach required	
4.3 The uniqueness of the Olympic phenomenon in a globalised world	
4.4 The multicultural nature of the Olympic experience	
4.5 The ethical value of the object of study	
5. How does academic research benefit the Olympic Movement?	11
5. 1 Functions of research	
6. Some conclusions and recommendations	12

1. Antecedents. Relations between the academic world and the Olympic Movement

Relations between the academic world and universities and the Olympic Movement date back to the congress of the founding of the International Olympic Committee in the Sorbonne University, Paris in 1894. I am not solely referring to the solemn setting of that University's great hall, but to the conviction of the founder, Pierre de Coubertin, that the Olympic Movement, as a sporting-cultural phenomenon, would find its identity and adapt to the modern world through the knowledge developed at the universities.

The concept of "Olympic Studies Centre" was actually formulated by Pierre de Coubertin shortly before his death in 1937: "I think that an Olympic Studies Centre [...] would help more than anything in the maintenance and progress of my project and in protecting it from the diversions that I fear may affect it".¹ Following on from this initiative, Carl Diem created the International Olympic Institute in 1938. In this early stage, "Olympism" referred to a blend of three main values: Greek classicism (humanism), the value of sport in the education of young people (education) and new international relations of industrial society (modernity), thus transferring the early experiences of the universal expositions to the Olympic Games.



This tradition would later inspire the foundation of the International Olympic Academy (IOA) in 1961, which has since continued to adapt its objectives to the emerging demand for knowledge concerning the Modern Games, fulfilling an important educational role and serving as a meeting point for scholars, both at international level, in Olympia, and national level with the establishment of the respective National Olympic Academies.

From the 1960s onwards, in line with the celebration of successive Games, historical studies of the Games (especially the Modern Games) began to flourish with special attention given to international relations and the political circumstances of the Olympic experience.² At the same time, a number of university researchers,³ also carried out major research on Pierre de Coubertin and his philosophy.

¹ Handwritten letter from Pierre de Coubertin reproduced by LANDRY, F. & YERLES, M. (1996): *The International Olympic Committee – One Hundred Years: the idea, the president, the achievements*. Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, p.318.

² This activity culminated in 1991 with the creation of the International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH) (<http://www.isoh.org/pages/index.html>).

³ Landry, Fernand, Marc Landry, Magdaleine Yerlès (1991): *Sport...: the third millennium = le troisième millénaire : compte rendu du symposium international, Québec, Canada, 21 - 25 mai 1990*. Sainte-Foy : Les Presses de l'Université Laval

In confirmation of de Coubertin's intuition, these academic contributions have proved decisive for preservation of the Olympic spirit and for the configuration of the Olympic Games' identity as a major worldwide cultural phenomenon.

Academic activity in relation to Olympic Studies underwent a major expansion and diversification at the end of the 1980s: new actors, new areas of activity and new research themes, together with greater institutional commitment on the part of the universities.

It is important to highlight that this increased involvement grew from earlier initiatives taken by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In 1982, under the Presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch, the Olympic Studies Centre and Museum were opened on Avenue de Ruchonet in Lausanne. Later, in 1993, with the inauguration of the new Olympic Museum in Ouchy, the original centre took on new roles in resource management for promotion of Olympic studies, including new services (video library, photo library, library, documentation service) and, significantly, with the creation of the Research Council comprising internationally prestigious university scholars, the promotion of a new policy of links with universities and academic institutions and the funding of the postgraduate research grant programme (1999-).

2. Actors in Olympic Research

The growing importance of the Games throughout the 1980s in terms of scale and impact, led to increased academic interest both on the part of institutions with directly related to the Olympic Movement and the Games and independent academic institutions with an interest in more general Olympics-related social phenomena.

The organisation of the Games requires a vast body of applied research (in terms of R&D), on the part of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Organising Committee (OCOG), as well as on the part of the participating institutions (mass media, sponsors, licensees, public bodies in host countries, etc.). Part of this research work is assigned to private consultancies, yet an increasingly large proportion goes to or arises from research work in the universities.

However, it is not only organisational matters that are the object of Olympic studies; the associated emerging social challenges also require research. Examples are the advent of such phenomena as growing commercialisation, arising with the move from amateurism to professionalism, the challenges posed by boycotts used as weapons of confrontation between political blocs, the political and cultural commitment of the organising cities, and the new intercultural approaches to definition of the Olympic Values.

MacAloon, John J. (1984): *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Müller, Norbert (coord.) (1986): *Textes choisis / Pierre de Coubertin*. Zürich ; Hildesheim [etc.] : Weidmann.

Thus, academic research is not limited to applied research; rather three other major fields complement it: historical research; study of the social and cultural context of the Games (humanistic research); and prospective studies.

But who are these academic actors and how can we classify them? In an initial approximation we can distinguish between:

- Research groups, or individual researchers, in any branch of the social sciences (historians, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, etc.) that choose to study some particular aspect of the Games.
- Formally constituted Olympic Studies Centres.
- Specialised sports science centres with specialised Olympic Games programmes.

3. The institutionalisation of Olympic research in the Universities and the establishment of Olympic Studies Centres (OSC)

University activity in the area of Olympic Studies in general involves a large number of actors, both formal and informal, some of whose work is clearly Olympics-related, and others that work in the area on more of an occasional basis. The result is a vast variety of initiatives, with higher or lower levels of institutionalisation. However, the last decade has seen a major increase in university initiatives to create specialised Olympic Studies Centres, many of which arise from the experience gained by host or candidate cities.

The starting point for this process can be traced back to Korea and Canada at the time of preparations for the 1988 Summer and Winter Olympic Games held in Calgary and Seoul, respectively. In February 1987, the University of Calgary organised the conference “The Olympic Movement and the Mass Media: past, present and future issues”. While in August 1987, the First International Conference on the Olympics and East/West and South/North Cultural Exchange in the World System⁴ was held in Seoul with participation by major figures from the social sciences.

The year 1989 saw the establishment of the International Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of Western Ontario.⁵ That same year, clearly influenced by the Seoul experience, the Olympic Studies Centre of Autonomous University of Barcelona (CEO-UAB) was established.⁶ The model established by these pioneering centres was consolidated over the following years with the establishment of OSCs in other host countries: the Australian Centre for Olympic Studies in Sydney,⁷ the Olympics and Mega Events Research

⁴ International Research Academy for Olympics and Intercultural Studies Inje University <http://www.olympic.inje.ac.kr/>

⁵ <http://www.uwo.ca/olympic/fset1.html>

⁶ <http://olympicstudies.uab.es/>

⁷ Initially established as the Centre for Olympic Studies of the University of New South Wales, and now known as the Australian Centre for Olympic Studies (ACOS) (http://www.business.uts.edu.au/olympic/about_us.html)

Observatory in Torino⁸, the Centre for Olympic Studies at the Beijing Sport University and the Humanistic Olympics Studies Center at the Renmin University in Beijing,⁹ and the Centre for Olympic Studies & Research at Loughborough University in Great Britain.¹⁰

In recent years, more and more universities have expressed an interest in establishing such centres. The *Networking in Olympic Studies: research report* identified a total of 23 such initiatives,¹¹ most of which in Europe.

3.1 Centres of reference

The aforementioned multiplication of Olympic Studies Centres means that it is now desirable to develop indicators that measure quality, avoiding reductionist, or inappropriate use of the term “Olympic Studies Centres”.

The above-mentioned report¹² sets out 6 main indicators for this area:

- **Research** (the Centre's research activity, especially its participation in international research projects)
- **Documentation centre** (library, video library, photo library, historical archive services)
- **Teaching and training**, (Educational programmes at a range of levels: undergraduate, postgraduate, professional training)
- **Dissemination** (organisation of congresses, seminars at national and international levels)
- **Publications** (the centre's own publications, external publications through editors and journals)
- **Web site** (production of updated original contents, links to network actors and other materials)

Satisfying all of these indicators indicates a high level of institutionalisation, and therefore, a solid level of support from the university, from Olympic institutions or from the relevant public administration. This explains why the majority of these initiatives are found in Olympic host cities, in candidate cities or in countries with long Olympic traditions.

Finally but no less importantly, it must be pointed out that these Centres are the tip of the iceberg of the large critical mass of international university researchers working in the field of Olympic studies. It is important to highlight that these centres serve as necessary platforms for dissemination and, indeed, for the production of their research work.

Until now, the forms of organisation and information exchange among all these actors had been rather spontaneous, largely through the standard academic channels (academic books and journals, research seminars, conferences, etc.). These exchanges have taken place thanks to initiatives organised by the

⁸ Olympics and Mega Events Research Observatory (<http://www.omero.unito.it/>)

⁹ <http://www.c2008.org/>

¹⁰ <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sses/institutes/cos/index.html>

¹¹ Moragas, Miquel de [et al.] (2005): *Networking in Olympic Studies: research report*. Barcelona: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics, CEO-UAB.

¹² Ibidem

Olympic Movement (IOC, Organising Committees, IOA) but also, and very significantly, thanks to the commitment of a range of scientific associations (ICSSPE,¹³ IASI,¹⁴ IAMCR¹⁵, etc.) which have included Olympics-related themes in their international conferences and congresses. And also thanks to initiatives of the Olympic Studies Centres themselves.

4. How can this new interest in the Olympic Games by Universities be expanded?

This interest in the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement by universities can be explained by various factors, including the following:

1. The impact of the Games on modern society.
2. The transversal nature of the phenomenon and the inter-disciplinary approach required.
3. The uniqueness of the Olympic phenomenon as a case study for interpreting globalisation processes.
4. The multicultural nature of the Olympic phenomenon.
5. The inherent ethical value and social commitment of the object of study.

4.1 The impact of the Games on modern society

Olympic research, without losing interest in the historic dimension (ancient and modern), has expanded its subject area in line with the transformation of the Games into “mega-events” and their ever-expanding impacts: social, cultural, economic, political, media, urban development, environmental etc.

Today, the Games are the main “mega-event” of our times, involving considerable international participation, and having a major impact on the host city, with a complexity that grows on an unprecedented scale from one edition to the next. No other event, with the unfortunate exception of war, inspires such interest on the part of the global media. Nobody should be surprised then that the Games should be a subject of great interest to so many universities.

4.2 The transversal nature of the phenomenon and the inter-disciplinary approach required

The modern Olympic Games impact on a huge variety of sectors and a vast network of activities. This makes them a privileged observatory for the study of modern society.

The table below sets out the range of subject areas within the general field of Olympic Studies, illustrating its importance in terms of social science studies.

¹³ The International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) (<http://www.icsspe.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=5c987b5f11389806a92d0a384b02894e>)

¹⁴ International Association for Sport information, (IASI) (<http://www.iasi.org/>). In April 2001, the IASI, in collaboration with the Olympic Museum, organised its 11th congress on the theme “Sport Information in the Third Millennium”, with a number of papers on the subject of Olympic documentation¹⁴ (<http://www.iasi.org/congressproceedings.html>).

Olympic Studies- Thematic fields for research

<p>THE ECONOMIC APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Economy / Marketing _Management of the Games _Planning & bidding process 	<p>THE HISTORICAL-POLITICAL APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Politics & International relations _History (the Ancient and Modern games) _Legacy
<p>THE ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _The Environment _Urbanism & Architecture _Technology _Transport & mobility _Tourism 	<p>THE SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Cultural aspects (Identity, diversity, multiculturalism) _Rituals analysis _Communication, Media & Internet :Art & design
<p>THE APPLIED SPORT SCIENCES APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Sport & physical activity _Health / Medicine _Doping control 	<p>THE LEGAL-PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Ethics _Philosophy of Olympism _The Olympic Movement _Law & regulations
<p>THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Volunteers _Labour _Social aspects (participation, exclusion, etc.) 	<p>THE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _Olympic education _Training _Dissemination of Olympic values _Research policies

It is not only the scale and thematic wealth of the Games that stimulates interest among university researchers. This interest also arises from the great complexity of the systems that characterise the phenomenon and from the possibility afforded to study key issues of the contemporary world.

4.3 The uniqueness of the Olympic phenomenon in a globalised world

The modern Games provide us with a privileged observatory for interpretation of the opportunities and contradictions of what we call the “global world” (in terms of communication, culture, politics and economics). This is combined with the added attraction of constantly changing host cities, from Seoul to Barcelona, from Barcelona to Atlanta, from Atlanta to Sydney, from Sydney to Athens, from Athens to Beijing, and from Beijing to London, and so on, thus facilitating analysis of the local-global relationship, which is so characteristic of our times.

Further, as a great mega-event, the holding of the Games leads to questioning of a number of key or central concepts of modern society. For example:

- The culture of peace and Olympic Truce
- Nations, nation-states, cities and international relations
- Sustainability and the environment

¹⁵ International Association for Media and Communication Research. Section Media and Sport, (<http://iamcr.org/>)

- Diversity and cultural identity
- Inequalities and solidarity
- Social exclusion and integration (gender, disability, social origin)
- Mobility (immigration, transnational market) and sport
- Urban renewal and social justice
- Etc.

Finally, the Games can also be seen as a paradigm of the knowledge society. It would be difficult to find a more explicit example of the “material” transcendence of “immaterial” elements. All this interlocking mesh of activities (and investment) is ultimately based on a set of symbols and rituals associated with athletic activity, with narration of its defeats and victories.

4.4 The multicultural nature of the Olympic experience

The current conditions in which the Games are organised – a context of unprecedented international participation (Athens 2004 set the participation record with 201 Olympic Committees), and intense international media attention, pose a major cultural challenge for the Olympic Movement highlighted by the following three examples:

- Interpretation of the Games by the international media.
- The conceptualisation of the Cultural Olympiad and the Olympic ceremonies.
- The ongoing revision of Olympic philosophy, in keeping with new concepts emerging in the cultural diversity debate.

Attention should be drawn to the great responsibility resting on the Olympic Movement in the context of the present-day worldwide debate on human rights and cultural diversity and, more specifically, the opportunity to lead the world of sport in contributing to the objectives of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions¹⁶ recently approved by UNESCO.

4.5 The ethical value of the object of study

To the above factors we must also add another that goes beyond the merely epistemological and concerns the area of ethics of research: the identification of teachers and researchers (of which there are hundreds) with Olympic ideals, for altruistic reasons and because they see them as socially necessary.

Consequently, this research work can easily become a task of disseminating values, or of providing a critique of the contradictions occurring in Olympism, in line with Coubertin's aims when first suggesting the role for an Olympic Studies Centre.

¹⁶ http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=11281&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Therefore, the frontiers between Olympic research and Olympic education are intertwined and interconnected in multiple ways.

5. How does academic research benefit the Olympic Movement?

We have now considered why the academic world is interested in the Olympic phenomenon, but in order to complete this analysis a second question must be asked: in what way can academic research be of benefit to the Olympic Movement?

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the main contribution of the “academic world” to the Olympic Movement should not be seen simply in terms of immediate functional utility. However, this does not mean that academic study does not lead to knowledge of functional and strategic interest to the Movement. Olympic organisers, even consultancies, use much of the knowledge generated by academic study, most of which is public and freely available, as a basic source of information.

I would suggest that the contributions of the academic world to the Olympic Movement lie in the following nine areas:

5.1 Functions of research

1. **The Interpretative function** (identifying and defining the values and functions of the Olympic Movement in the modern era).
2. **The Prospective function** (analysis of endogenous and exogenous trends which will affect sport and the Olympic Movement in the future).
3. **The Applied function** (providing advice to Olympic institutions regarding functional and organisational needs).
4. **The Historical function** (studying and documenting the history of the Olympics, as a fundamental resource for knowledge of the identity of the Games).
5. **The Critical function** (studying deviations, contradictions, and dysfunctions of true Olympism).
6. **The Informative function** (adapting knowledge to the various dissemination needs of the Olympic system: media, Organising Committee, museums, publications).
7. **The Educational function** (applying knowledge on the Olympic phenomenon to educational programmes, especially those on education in values).
8. **The Cultural function** (interpreting Olympism in a non Euro-centric way, on the principle of diversity and intercultural dialogue).
9. **The Legacy function** (consolidating collective memory of the Games as part of the immaterial heritage of humanity, facilitating the exchange of experience).

As examples of functional applications of this research, let us consider the following possible contributions of universities to host cities:

- Feasibility studies (prior to candidacy)
- Master Plan (organisation, time-scales and resources)
- Resource planning (economic, technological and urban resources)
- Training programmes (experts, technicians, volunteers, translators)
- Environmental studies
- Support to health policy
- Basic research for cultural programmes
- Conceptual design of ceremonies
- Implementation of educational programmes
- Documentation
- Evaluation and interpretation of the legacy

6. Some conclusions and recommendations

The Olympic Movement derives direct and indirect benefits from the existence of hundreds of scholars around many different countries and continents.¹⁷ This academic contribution is, to a large extent, a voluntary one, from the basis of firm ethical convictions in keeping with Olympic values.

The Olympic Movement must appreciate this contribution as a valuable resource for innovation and adaptation of its identity in the modern world.

Yet, the Olympic Movement's attitude should not be a merely passive one, but rather it should commit itself to its own research and development policy (R&D) which, while respecting the autonomy of the universities and research centres, would work to channel the knowledge generated in such a way as to favour its own objectives.

To this end, I would suggest the following criteria for optimisation of relationships between the Olympic Movement and academic institutions:

On the part of the Olympic Movement:

1. Facilitate the necessary information to researchers in the social sciences, both in terms of archive material (history) and events (accreditation of academic observers at the Games).
2. Strengthen the Olympic Movement's study and documentation platforms (OSC, IOA, Olympic Museum, Conferences), thus creating bridges to the university and the academic activity in general.

¹⁷ Though not claiming to be exhaustive, the Olympic Studies Directory (CEO-UAB) identifies almost 500 academic researchers. (<http://olympicstudies.uab.es/directory/main.asp>).

3. Promote the creation and consolidation of Olympic Studies Centres in different continents as platforms for exchange (networks) between university actors.
4. Contribute to the development of research groups in those regions of the world with lower levels of research activity and fewer specialised centres. This means a specific promotion policy for Africa, Asia and Latin America, highlighting the need to increase cultural diversity in the interpretation of Olympism and the Olympic Movement.
5. Harness the critical mass of university experts in order to manage the multiple research needs of the Olympic Movement, while also indirectly strengthening the continuity of university research on the Games.
6. Promote Olympic Studies (research, documentation, publication, training, conferences) as basic activities within the cultural programmes of Olympic cities.
7. Facilitate bridges between research and Olympic education programmes and dissemination, more generally.

On the part of the universities:

1. Incorporate subjects related to sport and the Olympics into research programmes, as major cultural and social phenomena of our times.
2. Incorporate subjects linked to sport and the Olympic Movement into undergraduate and postgraduate syllabuses.
3. Consider the main problems facing the Olympic Movement as research priorities, including sustainability in sport, management of mega-events, their cultural dimension and, in a word, their adaptation to the new global and knowledge society.
4. Ensure the continuity of Olympic research by establishing inter-university collaboration programmes, ceding pride of place to the universities of each new host city, thus ensuring transmission of the legacy of the Games.
5. Promote inter-university collaboration, especially comparative studies, at global level, as a means of providing support for a new understanding of Olympism from the perspective of cultural diversity.
6. Place a priority on the transfer of research results to Olympic education programmes.

7. Harness information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, constructing a network of Olympic portal sites with the aim of extending and sharing knowledge with all interested parties, placing a priority on regions where research is less developed.

The challenges for such collaboration between universities and the Olympic Movement are extremely clear in the preparatory run-up to the Beijing Games of 2008. This Forum – given over to sport, education and culture – is evidence of the great potential of the conceptual contribution which the academic world can make to the Games, to meeting its functional needs, but even more so, to multicultural interpretation of the Olympic values in the contemporary world.