

# **TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2012 LONDON CULTURAL OLYMPIAD: THE NATURE OF THE IDEOLOGY OF OLYMPISM IN THE DISCOURSE OF GREAT BRITAIN**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will seek to identify and evaluate the nature of the ideology of Olympism in the discourse of Great Britain which may act as a wider framework for the development of Cultural Olympiad of London 2012 Games. The contribution of Anglo-Saxon ethos in the construction of the ideology of Olympism in nineteenth century will be discussed, while it will be examined whether Olympism today still includes some specific values which have originated from the British history and development of sport. The transition from colonial to multicultural Britain will be a major issue for investigation in relation to the expression of the Olympic values and the nature of the Olympic ideology from a British perspective. The theoretical approaches of modernisation, cultural imperialism and globalisation will be used as the lenses through which the author will attempt to understand and evaluate the shifts in the nature of the Olympic ideology as expressed in the British context and in interaction with the wider global phenomena and changes in the contemporaneous historical, socio-political and economic contexts.

## **METHODS**

The current research adopts a critical realist ontology and epistemology and employs Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA), a variation of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), for the analysis of archival material and interview transcripts (Altheide, 1996). From a broader analysis of 301 texts written by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the sample of 13 texts dating from 1887 to 1929 have been utilised in understanding the contribution of British sports values in the construction of 'neo-Olympism', as being re-invented in the nineteenth century by the French aristocrat. Key persons in the management of the Olympic Movement in Great Britain have been interviewed (the British Olympic Association and its educational branch of British Olympic Foundation, the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, and the Centre for Olympic Studies and Research at Loughborough University). Finally, archival material from the British Olympic Association in relation to the development of Olympism in Britain has also been examined.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The birth of modern sport is credited to England, dating from the middle of the nineteenth century. Although at this time, games and sports were not the exclusive privilege of the British, Britain has been acknowledged as the society that developed them into their current forms. Many of the rules of sport were first codified in nineteenth century England, where their governing bodies were also established (Guttmann 1978; 1994). Coubertin admired England, and saw in it the continuum of Hellenism, "the virtue of Greek formulae [was] perfected by Anglo-Saxon civilisation" (Coubertin 1918: p. 272). The doctrine of imperialism had successfully been developed by the late Victorian visionaries who introduced to the 'under-privileged' peoples of the world the spirit of chivalry, fair play and good government through a games-playing code. The English Public School education system was the admiration of continental idealists.

Thus, Olympism shared values with English athleticism, which had been identified as a central component of the national ideology of Anglo-Saxonism, and had been related to the nineteenth century pre-eminence of the British Empire, "to the merits of this [English] education we may ascribe a large share in the prodigious

and powerful extension of the British Empire in Queen Victoria's reign" (Coubertin 1896: p. 308). An eclectic approach to Olympism, which combined the values of the re-invented nineteenth-century Hellenism, and the principles of the popular British 'imperial' athleticism were the main ingredients of 'Olympism' in the early years of the Olympic Movement, "the only way to ensure any relative long-term survival of the athletic renaissance then still in its infancy was to superimpose the immense prestige of antiquity on the passing fad of Anglomania" (Coubertin 1929: p. 573).

The transition to a post-colonial era and the shift from the certainty of modernity and the Enlightenment project to a more fragmented, pluralist and uncertain set of worldviews variously expressed in what have been termed 'late', 'high' or 'post'-modernity has certainly impacted upon the nature of Olympic ideology. In the British context, a move from colonial to multicultural Britain has been central in the interpretation of the Olympic values in the British context today. The 'amateur' ethos which has derived from the exclusivist Victorian sport context has long been outmoded, while a broadly humanistic expression of shared values in sport, developed through negotiated consensus, which agrees on broad statements of values, and nevertheless may be interpreted differently in different socio-political contexts seems to have become the new set priority (Henry, 2005).

It is in effect against the background of changing worldviews/ epistemologies that the philosophy of Olympism has developed over the years. Thus, the Cultural Olympiad of 2012 London Games should highlight the culturally diverse meanings and values associated with Olympic sport in the contemporary world and treat Olympism not as a set of immutable values, but as a process for consensus construction in terms of values in the world of global sport.

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