

SPEAR

SPORT, PHYSICAL EDUCATION
& ACTIVITY RESEARCH

The Construction of Olympic Narratives

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Theoretical Backdrop

Humans lead storied lives. We live in, through, and out of narratives. We not only tell stories, but do things with them. Stories do things on, to, and for people in ways that can make a difference to our lives and in ways that can serve the interests of certain people, and undermine the interests of others. Which stories people take on board, tell, and perform is therefore important.

(Bruner, 2000; Frank, 2004; McAdams, 2006)

Olympic Narratives

The Games will revitalise East London

The Games will be a waste of money

The Games will inspire a generation of young people to take up sport

The Games will be a national celebration

The Games will promote London and the UK for tourism

The economic benefits of the Games will be spread around the UK

The Games won't benefit me or my region

Narratives aren't just Textual



What are Narratives?



(Somers, 1994)

Analysing Olympic Narratives - WHAT? (1)

➤ **Structural analysis:**

“...focuses on the way in which a story is put together. In doing so, it aims to tease out what type of story a person is telling – what plot unfolds, what might this plot do on and for people, and whose interests does it serve”

(Holloway and Freshwater, 2007, p. 85)

Analysing Olympic Narratives - WHAT? (2)

“When we go to a concert, unless we are musicians, we typically just experience the work; the performers, on the other hand, have done considerable “unpacking” in rehearsal to construct the unity we hear. Structural analysis of narrative requires the same level of scrutiny; we slow down a narrative account (so to speak)—step back from it—to notice how a narrator uses form and language to achieve particular effects”

(Riessman, 2008, p. 80)

Analysing Olympic Narratives - HOW? (1)

➤ *Performative analysis:*

“... relates to how the narrative is communicated, the ‘doing’ of narrative”

(Holloway and Freshwater, 2007, p. 86)

Analysing Olympic Narratives - HOW? (2)

“Stories...are composed and received in contexts...How do these contexts enter into storytelling? How is a story co-produced in a complex choreography – in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, and history and culture? Performance analysis attempts to deal with these questions...As a kind of hybrid form, the approach pushes the boundaries of what is and is not included in narrative analysis. It draws on and extends theoretical traditions that emphasize the importance of interaction, including which persons interests are served and how”

(Riessman, 2008, p. 105)

Visual narratives

- People might tell a story *with* images, or *about* images that themselves tell a story.

“Visual analysis can allow our interpretation of a given event [e.g. Olympics] to be thickened. Furthermore, images can be used to serve people’s interests, and thus an analysis of them can shed light on not just on what interests are promoted, but also on who these people might be. Equally, given visual images can be used to generate collective critique, an analysis of them can bring back to fore those people who challenge and resist dominant narratives.”

(Phoenix, Smith, & Sparkes, 2009)

Key Issues & Questions?

- How and why are narratives created and re-created?
- How are narratives received and interpreted?
- Whose interests do particular creations, receptions and interpretations serve?
- What and who gives life to and sustains narratives?
- How do narratives develop over time?
- How do narratives shape ideas in individual, social, political and public life?

SOME EXAMPLES OF OLYMPIC NARRATIVES...

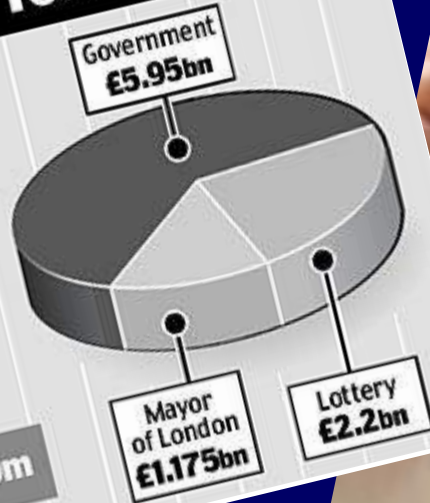
Daily Mail

24 HOURS A DAY

THE OLYMPIC BILL ... WHO PAYS IT

TOTAL: £9.3bn

Site and stadium construction	£3.1bn
Regeneration/infrastructure	£1.7bn
Contingency fund for overspends	£2.7bn
Olympic Delivery Authority tax bill	£840m
Extra security	£600m
Paralympics and sport coaches	£390m



The Games will be a waste of money

The Games won't benefit me or my region



“young in spirit, representing confidence, certainty and opportunity”



The Games will be a national celebration



***“Lisa Simpson
performing
fellatio”***

*The Games will be a
national embarrassment*



The Games will be a waste of money

“Inspiration” video



*The Games will inspire
a generation of young
people to take up
sport*

"Proud" video

The Games will promote London and the UK for tourism



A Work in Progress

➤ SUMMARY:

- Narrative analysis is about how and why the stories are told and performed, rather than any debates about whether they represent “truth”
- Analysis of Olympic Narratives is a very useful way of analysing the power and interests involved in hosting and capitalising on the Olympic Games
- A key part of the analysis yet to be undertaken is the way in which such narratives are received, interpreted, re-interpreted and re-produced.

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