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« Sports in Museums of Archaeology and History »

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ICOM-ICMAH conference on "The sustainable future of Architecture and History Museums"

Round Table

Sports Museums, through the variety of their collections, are a testimony of history and of societies. This responsibility requires to carefully select and display the works in order to truthfully represent history. Media and publicity are attracted to sports event and the "sports show" seduces the public, but as museums it is important to give neutral testimony and identify the righteous presentation mode of the collections, even through digital devices to convey and maximize the effect of the atmosphere of an event on the public.

Participants :

- **Burçak Madran**, Chair of ICMAH (burcakmadran@gmail.com)
- **Marie Grasse**, Curator and director of the Musée National du Sport and vice-chair of ICMAH, workshop coordinator (marie.grasse@museedusport.fr)
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Report on

SPORTS IN MUSEUMS OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

August 28th, 2022, Prague

- **Kyoko Raita**, « Les Musées de Sport en tant que miroirs des sociétés »

This presentation addresses the challenges faced by the museums in Japan that focus on the Olympics. The structure of the presentation is as follows. First, I will briefly introduce the current situation of sports museums in Japan. Next, I will discuss three key issues to be addressed by sports museums as mirrors reflecting society. The first is the need to collect sports materials that reflect the zeitgeist and society. The second is the importance of giving sports materials a place in Olympic history. The third is a proposal on the need to redefine sports materials.

According to databases managed by the Japan Society of Sport History and the Japan Sports Arts Association, there are between 70 and 150 sports-related museums in Japan. This may seem like a very large number. The reason for this is that these databases include all museums that deal in various ways with material related not only to modern sport, but also to all physical activities, such as toys, traditional performing arts, ethnic sports, health, automobiles, specific people, specific competitions, etc.

Of these museums, five deal with the Olympics or Olympic history.

- The Sapporo Olympics Museum is characterised by its focus on Olympics education for young students who visit there.
- The Japan Olympic Museum and the Chukyo University Sports Museum exhibit materials that tell stories / so visitors will learn and think about Olympic history, including episodes concerning ancient Greece and Pierre de Coubertin.
- The Prince Chichibu Memorial Sports Museum and Library houses a large collection of materials on the history of the Olympic movement in Japan from the early 20th century.



So what are the key challenges for these museums to function as mirrors of society from the perspectives of politics, power and human rights?

The first point is to consciously collect sports materials with characteristics that reflect the Zeitgeist and society. Let me show you an example.



Chukyo University Sports Museum collection

The two images on the slide show the phonograph needle cases sold in Japan before the cancelled 1940 Tokyo Games. One of the two has the US and UK flags on it, while these flags are scraped off from the other case on the right.

Considering the historical backdrop, the case with flags of enemy countries might not have been acceptable in Japanese society. On the other hand, the flags of Manchukuo, the puppet government of the Japanese military, and Nazi Germany are present. These provide information that leads visitors to think about power and politics in the wartime period and democracy. We are reminded by this example that there are societies where Olympic symbols can exist side by side with this type of mentality in times of war.

I use the phrase 'Olympic materials that directly reached the general public' to describe these types of materials, and I collect them with an awareness of their importance.

The second point is to give the materials in collections a place in Olympic history. Recently, the Chukyo University Sports Museum organized a special exhibition looking back on the first anniversary of the Tokyo 2020. In Japan, there were controversial arguments for and against about holding the Games during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, in addition to the typical Olympic materials such as the torch, we showed a chronological table showing the periods that Japan spent bidding for and hosting the Olympic Games since World War II. In fact, Japan has spent the bulk of years, with the exception of just several years, during the period since 1945 engaged in bidding and preparing for the Olympic games. This kind of data provides an opportunity for visitors to consider the historical position of the Tokyo 2020 Games.

The third point is that we must realize that, generally speaking, sports materials collected in museums, such as medals, sports equipment, uniforms, and Games souvenirs are simply archives of peripheral sports materials.

Many of these materials are privately owned by athletes, their families and others. This means that there is a high possibility of dissipation, and we must address this issue.

In addition, peripheral materials are not, of course, the sport itself, neither do they serve as core materials that convey sporting humanity. In order to portray the relationship between sporting humanity and society, we have to rethink and redefine what sports materials are. The redefined sports materials might include oral histories of athletes and stakeholders and digital data on body movement.

Finally, I would like to summarize this presentation and make some suggestions. I believe that sports museums are places where the lights and shadows of society are reflected through Olympic history. To make the challenges of sports museums sustainable, organizational and institutional measures should be taken to prevent the dissipation of privately owned materials.

It is also important to create an international network to collect oral histories of athletes and stakeholders for a deeper understanding of Olympism. Furthermore, methodologies for handling and archiving digital data on body movement as sports materials also need to be considered.

- **Christian Rudolf Wacker**, "Olympic Museums shape Olympic history"

The notion Olympic History consists of the term History and the adjective Olympic. Olympic describes all topics related to ancient Olympia and/or the Olympic Movement at large. Olympic History is the study of the Olympic past. The notion Olympic History comprises past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of these events. Olympic History is largely, but not exclusively related to the subfields Social History, Cultural History and People's History

32 Olympic Museums

The Olympic Museums Network's main objective is to increase the promotion of the values of Sport and the Olympism by:

1. Sharing information and best practices
2. Encouraging cooperation on common issues encountered by the members
3. Working on common projects, in particular in relation to exhibitions, educational program, events, collections management, communication and commercial development
4. Finding ways to work in common in order to improve the efficiency and achieve economies of scales to the benefit of the members of the network

Olympic charter

Modern Olympism was conceived by Pierre de Coubertin, on whose initiative the International Athletic Congress of Paris was held in June 1894. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) constituted itself on 23 June 1894. The first Olympic Games (Games of the Olympiad) of modern times were celebrated in Athens, Greece, in 1896. In 1914, the Olympic flag presented by Pierre de Coubertin at the Paris Congress was adopted, it was raised for the first time on April 5th of 1914, at the inauguration of the Chatby stadium in Alexandria. It includes the five interlaced rings, which represent the union of the five continents and the meeting of athletes from throughout the world at the Olympic Games. The first Olympic Winter Games were celebrated in Chamonix, France, in 1924.

- **Marie Grasse**, "Sports and Power: exposing stories to tell History"

The National Museum of Sport, like many societal museums, is a witness to history. Two aspects need to be taken into consideration. First, which history are we talking about? Through which objects from collections have been preserved over time? Secondly, how to showcase them, with or without digital means?

Indeed, over time, we realize that sport is often instrumentalized by politics... In 1936, we can see how a totalitarian regime exerted pressure on the International Olympic Committee: Jews were excluded from participating in competitions because they were not allowed to belong to clubs.



*Wrestling champion Emile
Poilvé picture and oak
crown from the 1936
Olympic Games in Berlin*

Sport is ambiguous due to the quasi-religious fervor in which the crowd is called to participate. Because it has become increasingly visible with the development of means of communication - radio, television, etc. - many are tempted to exploit it. Its co-optation is not only the work of totalitarian regimes... Anyone who can exploit its visibility attempts to do so, such as John Carlos and Tommie Smith raising their fists on the podium in Mexico in 1968, or terrorists using it as well, in Munich in 1972 or Atlanta in 1996... Meanwhile, Eastern countries used this visibility to promote their regime, often resorting to widespread doping of their athletes. The media weight of sport attracts both

politicians and advertisers, especially since today the "sports spectacle" entices entire crowds to participate. Here, the torch from 1936, there a jersey, or a photograph by Raymond Depardon, all bear witness to these moments in history.



*Showcase of supporters' items at the
French National Museum of Sports*

Next, the question arises regarding the presentation of these stories and collections as witnesses in a museum. Indeed, while sport represents spontaneity, movement... the collections, like relics of moments and emotions, are static, lifeless, and silent... The National Museum of Sport has just unveiled its new permanent exhibition. It tells stories that bear witness to history.