

# The Olympic Games in London 2012 from a Swedish media perspective

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## Introduction

Important missions for the Olympic movement is sport for all; development and education through sport, women and sport (increasing participation), peace through sport and environment and sport (<http://www.olympic.org/olympism-in-action> 2012-06-05). The missions are pointing to the Olympic movement being socially responsible and can be interpreted in terms of the Olympic movement being concerned with issues of internationalism (an important goal since the beginning), gender equity and sustainability (a late comer). A legacy based on these missions is of course welcome. As media is a significant actor when it comes to the experience for a majority of the audience the legacy is, however, likely to be influenced by media representations. *The purpose of this presentation is therefore to analyse whether the mission of the Olympic movement can be seen in the Swedish media representations of the London Games 2012, focusing three aspects: internationalism/nationalism; gender; and sustainability.*

## Background and research questions

It has been pointed out that even though the Olympic Games are a global event they can be represented in media in many different ways depending on cultural contexts (e. g. Puijk 2000). Not the least newspapers tend to provide a national reading (Bernstein 2000). A first question for this presentation is: *Can Swedish media representations of the Olympic Games 2012 be interpreted as national or international representations?*

Previous studies have demonstrated that women are underrepresented when it comes to the amount of media coverage of sports events. Generally they receive less than 10 percent of the newspaper coverage (e. g. Markula 2009). The media coverage of women has, however, grown as female athletes have been more accepted (and women's participation have been promoted by the IOC) and there are studies demonstrating that successful athletes, regardless of gender, are covered more than others in a national context. In that way nation seems to overrule gender (Wensing and Bruce 2003). Still male dominance in sport is seen in media as female athletes are marginalised, trivialised and sexualised (e. g. Tolvhed 2008, Markula 2009). A second question for this presentation is: *Can Swedish media representations of the Olympic Games 2012 be interpreted as representing gender equity?*

In the London 2012 the legacy of the Games was expressed as a promise for the Games to be an inspiration of an increased physical activity and to tackle wider social and economic issues as exclusion, obesity and unemployment (among others Girginov and Hills 2009). Whether the London Games 2012 will leave such a legacy in London or Great Britain, is debated. The promise can, however, be interpreted as a promise of concern for sustainability. *Whether the Swedish media representations have been concerned with the question of sustainability, is the third question for this presentation.*

## Materials and methods

In order to analyse how the Olympic Games 2012 are represented for a Swedish audience articles from one daily newspaper (Dagens Nyheter) and one tabloid paper (Aftonbladet) will be used as source material. Articles on the Olympic Games have been collected from 6th July 2005, when London was chosen as the host of the Olympic Games 2012, up until 30th March 2012. Key words for the search were "London"+"OS" and "London"+"Olympiska spelen"(Olympiska spelen (OS)=Olympic Games). The presentation is part of a more comprehensive study that will cover the period 6th July 2005 until the finishing of the Games 12th August 2012. In addition the study will include articles on the Paralympic Games for the same time period. Findings regarding the Paralympic Games are not presented here

During the period there have been 221 articles in *Dagens Nyheter* and 57 in *Aftonbladet*. The quantitative presentation is in three themes: internationalism or nationalism; men or women and sustainability or other issues.

Diagram 1: Swedish media representations of the Olympic Games 2012, national or international

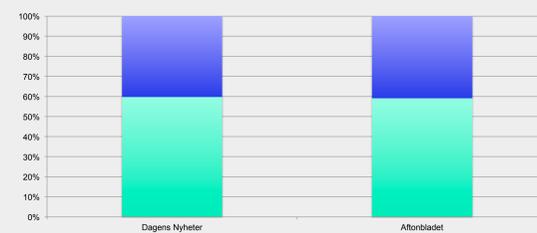
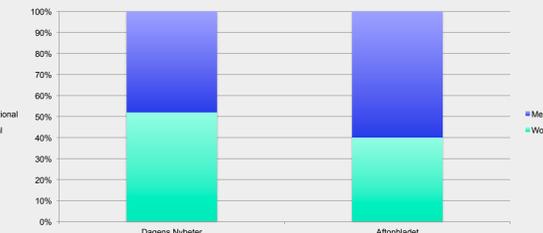


Diagram 2: Swedish media representations of the Olympic Games 2012, women or men

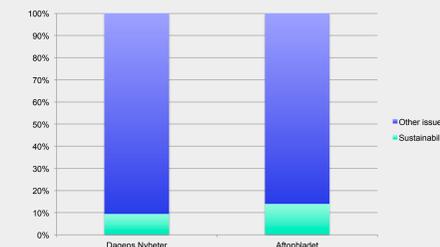


## Results and discussion

In **Diagram 1** it is demonstrated that there are more articles regarding national issues than international issues in both papers. The difference, however, is not that big – articles regarding international issues amount to about 40 %, as I see it the media representation can not, at the first glance anyway, be interpreted as being a national representation in difference from what is suggested by Bernstein in another context (Bernstein 2000). A common theme is successful athletes whether they are Swedish or of another nationality.

In **Diagram 2** it is demonstrated that women are represented to a greater extent in the papers examined than what has been pointed out by previous research on other contexts. In the morning paper, Dagens Nyheter articles on women in the Olympic Games amount 52 %. In the tabloid paper, they amount to 40 %. In difference from previous research (e. g. Markula 2009) the Swedish case seems to stick out. In addition it is not easily concluded that gender overrules nation, as suggested by Wensing and Bruce (2003).

Diagram 3: Swedish media representations of the Olympic Games 2012, sustainability or other issues



In **diagram 3** it is clearly demonstrated that sustainability has not been a big issue for the Swedish media. When it has been an issue articles have been concerned with the economy of the Games, not the least in relation to the financial crises, rather than social, economic or environmental sustainability.

## Conclusion

Even though the Olympic movement is promoting issues in connection to internationalism, increased female participation and sustainability it is questionable whether the London Games will leave this legacy. In this presentation it has been pointed out that media is a significant actor when it comes to the experience of the Games for a majority of the audience and it is suggested that the legacy is likely to be influenced by media representations.

Here Swedish media representations of the Olympic Games 2012 have been studied in three respects: internationalism or nationalism; women or men; and sustainability or other issues. The number of articles in relation to the three themes suggest that Swedish media may represent the Olympic Games 2012 differently from what previous research has concluded for other Games and other countries. In Swedish media there seems to have been more articles on international issues and on women than has been demonstrated by previous studies. This may point to that Swedish media representation is more international and more gender equal than other media scenes. The latter possibly explained by a more gender equal sport situation in Sweden than in many other countries. In order to explain the differences, however, certain aspect have to be taken into consideration. Primarily, it is important to acknowledge that previous studies have been concerned with other contexts: other Games as well as other countries. Secondly, this study has covered media representations from the date when London was given the Games up until march 2012. The study will be continued in order to cover the Games too, and it is possible that media representations are different during the actual Games and that this can explain the different results. Thirdly, a fact that has to be problematised is that even though there are several articles on international issues as well as women athletes it is not proven that the content of the articles point to internationalism or gender equity. The conclusion of this presentation is only based on numbers; not a content analysis. Further studies of the contents of the articles have to be done in order to see whether the Swedish media representations are different from the international ones as presented by previous research. Finally, it is important to remember that the patterns pointed out here are related to the Olympic Games, not sport in media general. A majority of the sport pages generally cover men's football.

## References

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