# Research Report: Towards London 2012

## Non-accredited Media, Cultural Discourses, and Olympic Host City Identity[i]

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**At an Olympic Games, most media representatives are managed via an official accreditation system, but since the Sydney 2000 Games, an increasing number of non-accredited media have emerged. This paper summarises our British Academy funded research on the role of the non-accredited media at the Olympic Games, involving primary data collection at the Torino 2006 Olympic Winter Games and pre-Olympic Beijing during 2006.**

In previously funded British Academy research,[1] we identified the non-accredited media facilities and provision as a central part of the Olympic delivery mechanism and a

particularly interesting phenomenon because it operates in an ambiguously defined space within the organizational structure of an Olympics. We argue that managing the non-accredited media is central to the capability of an Olympic host to control the narratives surrounding their Games. We also claim that there are subversive qualities to the non-accredited media, which challenge the Olympic infrastructure.

## Research objectives

The two primary objectives of this research were to (i) update the empirical evidence through which we have conceptualized the emergence of non-accredited media at an Olympics Games and (ii) to transfer the knowledge to London 2012 and other parties in the Olympic family.

To address *Objective 1*, research took place in Torino during the time of the 2006 Olympic Winter Games and in Beijing during

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[1] See Garcia, B. and Miah, B. (2004) 'Non-Accredited Media, the Olympic Games & the host city: The British Academy 2004 project', *Culture @ the Olympics*, vol 6, issue 1, pp. 1-7.

2006, two years before the 2008 Olympics. This extended from previously funded BA research at Athens 2004 Olympics and earlier work by the researches on Sydney 2000 and Salt Lake City 2002. In Torino, we undertook ten semi-structured interviews with non-accredited media centre (NAMC) stakeholders and key host city representatives, including the Lord Mayor and the head of culture at the City Council. We also embedded ourselves within the NAMC community, gathering, reviewing and analysing relevant documents, recording observations, attending press-briefings and working within the centre as any other journalist.



Torino Piemonte Media Centre

In Beijing, we also undertook a series of interviews with various stakeholders and programmers, including directors of the Beijing International Media Center and various officials from the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games. In addition, close collaborations developed with academics at the Communication University of China and Renmin University,

which proved essential in unravelling the complex array of media and wider communication issues arising from the Beijing Games preparations.

For *Objective 2*, our activities varied somewhat from our initial proposal, though the original budget intentions stand. Within the two years of the project, our research became known to various organizations who were, themselves, more actively pursuing London Olympic preparatory events.

To this extent, our planned workshops were substituted with various other forms of transfer of knowledge to London 2012 stakeholders. The first of these was through direct access to the London 2012 Culture, Ceremonies and Education (CCE) team. We gained close access to this committee during the research period and were able to attend various closed, team meetings through which we could discuss our findings with them.

This took place on a bi-monthly basis, partly funded by the inviting London 2012 representative (including the Chair of CEE, the CEE Director, the Head of Culture and cultural advisors, the Head of Education and education officers, the head of Ceremonies) and became an integral part of our own early research for London's preparations.

We also were contacted by various organizations who sought our expertise on matters related to the unofficial channels through which institutions could participate. In particular, the Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA) partnership, who have established an Information Hubs and Media Centres initiative building on our non-accredited media research.



Jude Kelly and Jonathan Edwards at the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad update

Other 2012 stakeholders across cultural and educational fields, such as the PODIUM group, have drawn on our expertise from this research to formulate their strategies for accessing Olympic-related platforms, even though they are outside of the organizational framework of the host committee.

At the end of 2007, our research has also provided a frame of reference for some of the thinking framing the recently established regional Creative Programmers posts, which are part of the plans for a national Cultural Olympiad.

## Main findings

There are three central findings from our research in Torino and Beijing, each of which raises new questions about our subject area. The first is to have documented and conceptualized the growing prominence of the NAMC in facilitating Games time news. The second is to reveal the rising presence of 'new media' journalists who report live from the Games and how this might challenge the control of Olympic intellectual property. The third relates to the particular characteristics of Beijing's Games and how this invites new questions about the role of foreign journalists within China and the place of non-accredited media within the Olympic infrastructure.

Narratives about the Olympics arise largely from the stories filed by the mass of journalists—press and broadcasters—who attend the Games and spew forth accounts of what occurs on and off the competition ground. Who those journalists are, what they do, and how they are channelled through the Olympic world each has implications for what is represented and what the billions around the globe see and read. As such, the issue of defining who is a journalist, what rights they have, and how they are served and managed is crucial, since it will play an important role in determining control of the

platform. Yet, the concept of "the journalist" has changed and, with it, the management tasks of the Olympics and its host cities. Nevertheless, our newly expanded concept of the journalist has resulted in more than increased demand for media guidance, information and facilities.

Since the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, our research has tracked the rise of the non-accredited journalist, to investigate how they are placed within the Olympic infrastructure. We have found that their involvement occupies a mixed-zone of regulation, which falls outside of the Organizing Committee, but which is managed by the local host city through its own volition (ie. without formal Olympic authentication).

At the Torino Olympic Games – the second Winter Olympics in history where facilities have been provided for non-accredited media – the numbers of journalists and the level of provision was extraordinarily superior to the previous Winter Games. On the approach to Beijing's Games, we found that the Organizing Committee has a much closer relationship to the NAMC than for previous Games and the expected numbers of journalists is also growing significantly (ie. Sydney 2000 = 5,000; Athens 2004 = 7,000; Beijing 2008 = expected 11,000).

These figures are remarkable when one considers that the number of accredited journalists is fixed by the International Olympic Committee at 20,000. Thus, by London 2012, the number of non-accredited journalist could nearly equal the number of accredited journalists.

The next phase of our longitudinal research in this area examines the Beijing Olympic Games period to ascertain how the non-accredited media are treated in the particular context of China but also in the emerging problematics of online publication and pervasive reporting.



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The closer relationship indicated between the Beijing Organizing Committee and the NAMC indicates, in part, China's own path through managing journalists, but also speaks to the growing prominence of the NAMC and its vulnerability of being brought under Olympic official regulation. Also, at this stage, it is unclear whether the new, temporary Chinese 'Olympic' legislation to give

greater freedoms to foreign reporters will translate into actual additional freedoms or, indeed, whether the proposed two-year period of this legislation could extend beyond the Olympic period. Such a phenomenon could radically transform the relationship between China and foreign journalists, thus signalling a momentous shift in domestic politics. We aim to track this process through the non-accredited media, whose work occupies the more controversial space within the Olympic media infrastructure.

## Follow up research

In May 2008, we have been awarded grants by the Carnegie Trust and the Universities China Committee in London to follow up this research during the Beijing Olympic Games in August 2008. Emerging findings from this additional work are being  published throughout 2008 and early 2009.

## Publications emerging out of this research

Miah, A. Garcia, B. and Zhihui, Tian (2008) 'We Are The Media. Non-Accredited Media & Citizen Journalists at the Olympic Games' in: Dayan, D. and Price, M. (Eds) (2008) *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*, University of Michigan Press (pp. 320-345)

Garcia, B. (2007) 'Living the multicultural Olympic city: Cultural policy and planning in the Sydney 2000 Summer Olympic Games', in: Gold, J.R. & Gold, M.M. (Eds) *Olympic Cities: Urban planning, city agendas and the World's Games, 1896 to the present*. Routledge, pp.  237-264

Miah, A. & Garcia, B. (2007) Non-Accredited Media, Olympic Games and the Host City. in *Sport & Media*. [translated into Chinese-Mandarin]

Garcia, B. and Miah, A. (2006) 'Ever decreasing circles. The profile of culture at the Olympics' in:  *Locum Destination Review* (n 18) (pp. 60- 63)

Miah, A., Garcia, B. & Zhihui, T. (2008) Beijing's Non-Accredited Olympic Media, *Culture @ the Olympics*, 10(1), 1-4

Miah, A. (2007) No Go Logo? London 2012's Branding Hurdle, *Culture @ the Olympics*, 9(3), 14-17

Miah, A. & Garcia, B. (2006) The New Media at the Olympics: Citizen Journalists and the Non-Accredited Media, *Culture @ the Olympics*, 8(7), 1-7.