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Innovation, Sochi 2014 and the Olympics: A Creative Discourse Practices Approach

Abstract

From its very inception, the Olympic Movement has been more than a sporting event, focusing also on culture and creativity through initiatives such as the Cultural Olympiad. I thus take a departure from traditional Olympics scholarship and make a preliminary attempt to theorize the Games not only as a sporting spectacle but also as a platform for social, political and technological innovation. I suggest the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games are a particularly important case study because of international protests against the Russian host because of its government’s support for legislation targeting homosexual rights. As previous Games such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics suggest, international controversy can be a significant motivator for innovation and creative discourse practices, both among Olympic stakeholders and among those social groups who creatively problematize certain International Olympic Committee and Olympic host nation policies. By drawing on critical discourse analysis, I study several case studies of how a diverse set of stakeholders engage in Olympics-related innovation. These include: how host cities construct creative self-images through Olympics branding; how technological innovations are communicated through the Games and Games-related media; and, how social groups creatively problematize certain Olympic policies) in order to make a case for understanding the Sochi Olympics not simply as a site of global protest, but as an opportunity and platform for developing and circulating innovation and creative discourse practices.