

DEIRDRE SNEEP

# BUILDING TOMORROW: THE CONSTRUCTION OF OLYMPIC VENUES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE PRELUDE FOR THE 2020 TOKYO OLYMPIC GAMES

In 2020 Tokyo will host the Olympic Games. Being a host city to this global event has a long-lasting impact on the cityscape and its inhabitants, which starts already during the preparation years before the event and is of influence years, even decennia, after the event has finished. The construction of the 2020 Olympic stadiums, the athlete accommodations, and other various improvements of the built environment to host the Games are already in the process of considerably changing the city. With a slogan like 'Discover Tomorrow' Tokyo has to make sure the city uses all of the innovative, state of the art technology and design it can offer to make sure it is able to realize the promotional image of itself and build the city of the future.

The Olympic venues are actively discussed among the Tokyoites: on one hand it is thought that a mega-event such as the Olympics will bring all kinds of benefits to the city (in economic as well as social terms), but on the other hand there has been a prominent voice of protest from the Tokyoites since the very start against the Games in general, but especially also against the construction of the new venues. The city seems to be divided in those that are in favor of the Olympics and the changes it brings to the city, and the hangorin – the anti-Olympics. With the Olympics rapidly approaching, Tokyo seems to be torn between the supposed positive and negative effects the event will have on the city.



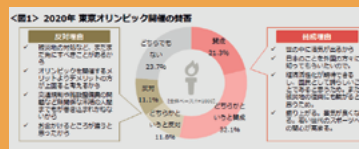
**Image 1** A scene from the promotional video for Tokyo 2020 shown during the closing ceremony in Rio 2016 shows a futuristic night view of the city, decorated with traditional, 'exotic' elements.

Source: the official Olympic Channel (Youtube Channel).  
Uploaded September 25, 2016.  
<https://youtu.be/ssc5eLjLoMQ>



**Image 2** Conceptual image for the Olympic Athlete Village (currently under construction) which will run on hydrogen power, shows a high-tech, sustainable architecture.

Source: Tokyo Olympic Candidate file, 2012.



**Image 3** A 2017 poll among 1000 Tokyoites shows 53 % in favor of the Olympic Games in Tokyo, and 23 % against the Olympics.

Source: Cross Media Gate News, 29 May 2017.  
<https://www.cross-m.co.jp/cromegane/to20170529/>



**Image 4** Protestors against the Olympics in front of Shinjuku Station, 23 January, 2016. Still from a video capturing demonstrations in Shinjuku, shot by the Han Gorin no Kai (anti-Olympic movement).

Source: ken23qu (Youtube channel) uploaded January 25, 2016. <https://youtu.be/YJ-BZz0HJ0K>

This research project, by using an interactionist approach, takes a closer look at the preparations and staging of the 2020 Tokyo Games, taking the actions and opinions of the Tokyoites regarding the preparations for the Games as a starting point, using ethnographic methods. By looking at the urban construction processes that accompany the Olympics and analyzing how the national government, local government, and citizens react to and deal with the transformation of Tokyo into the 'city of technology' for 2020, this research will not only deepen the understanding the political engagement on a local level that accompanies the staging of a global event like this, but will also deepen the understanding of modern Japanese society as a whole as it traces the preparations for a historic event and construct an image of Japan as country of innovation to present to the world.