

Tokai University European Center

Olympic games, national identity and politics in relation to the Tokyo Olympics

Lecture by Professor Hans Bonde



On January 15, Tokai University European Center (TUEC) hosted the first lecture of 2020 in collaboration with the Denmark-Japan Society, with an aptly chosen Olympic theme for the occasion. Professor Hans Bonde of the University of Copenhagen was invited to speak on the Olympic Games and how they are related to displays of national identity.

Professor Bonde began his lecture by presenting his research findings on how countries utilize opening ceremonies to express national identity and nationalism. The focus for this lecture was to use previous opening ceremonies as subjects of analysis, enabling discussions on what to expect from the Japanese hosts for the 2020 games. This included not only a look back at the Tokyo Games of 1964, but also more recent events. Especially the Beijing Games in 2008 and London Games in 2012 served as prime examples of two very different displays of national soft power: The “tightness” of the Beijing games and the “looseness” of the London games.

Attention was also given to the political nature of the Olympic games. Having grown to become the world’s largest sports event, the Olympics are a unique opportunity for hosts to show a carefully choreographed display of national identity directly to viewers around the world. This political use of the

Olympics has been a part of the modern games since its start in Athens in 1896, and for the modern Olympic Games the question is therefore not *if* the hosts are going to display political messages, but rather *how* they want to display them. Speaking of Tokyo 2020, Professor Bonde expects the Japanese hosts to emphasize an image of sustainability and green politics for the games alongside the juxtaposition of tradition and technology as seen in tourism campaigns.

The lecture drew a full house at TUEC with a lively Q&A session after the lecture. A very informative and insightful event that opened up for a lot of thoughts regarding the upcoming 2020 Tokyo Games.

2020 is also an important year for the TUEC and Tokai University. Not only is there an increased interest in Japan and all things Japanese due to the intensive media coverage of the Olympic Games, the year also marks the 50-year anniversary since the establishment of the TUEC in Vedbæk. To celebrate this, TUEC and Tokai University are working with Danish partners to launch several initiatives in 2020 to further increase the collaboration between Japan and Denmark.