

Journalist : Banners have multiplied in the streets of Tokyo over the past few years : “The Olympic Games Kill the poor”, “Tokyo Radioactive Games? No way?”, “No olympics!” Demonstrations are organised downtown each month. Some Japanese started protesting since they learnt that Tokyo would host the Olympic Games, in 2013, but now, these groups of demonstrators are joined by a great part of the people : according to a survey of Japanese television channel NHK, published in December, more than 60% of the population want the event to be cancelled or postponed for a second time, after a first postponement last year, due to the Covid crisis. And still, The Olympic Games shall take place from July 23rd to August 8th, that’s what assures the government. It is a way to “prove that humanity defeated the Covid-19”, according to new prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. It would be the last chance to maintain the event, a decision even members of the Olympic committee are worried about. Indeed, the health situation is “very severe” nowadays in Japan, said the Prime Minister on January 4th. a state of emergency could enter into force next weeks in the area of the “Great Tokyo”. The goal is to curb the spread of the virus in the capital, at two hundred days of the opening ceremony.

And yet, seven years ago, the announcement of Tokyo as the hosting city of the Olympic Games rejoiced the Japanese representatives of the Olympic committee:

The Olympic flame had even been enlightened last year, on March 12th, in Greece during a ceremony

The event was generally popular among the population. Four and a half million of tickets had already been sold, as well as the TV rights. A huge amount of money, since the event is supposed to be broadcasted in more than two hundred countries.

However, way before the pandemic, voices began to rise on different issues related to the organisation of the Olympics. In 2019, a protestors’ collective called Okotowa Link was created in Tokyo to denounce the way the event was run by the authorities. Its founder, Satoshi Ukai, explains its purposes :

Satoshi Ukai : Okotowalink is a mixture of social movements. It is an ad hoc coalition against a product considered as harmful to the collective social life of the people. There are many movements that have existed for a long time and accept people from different backgrounds, and that gives OkotawaLink a very wide diversity in terms of interest, sensitivity or logic. There are people who are opposed to sports culture in general, former athletes who challenge the current form of the Olympic Games. Between these two categories of people, there is a very great diversity within the movement”.

Journalist : The collective criticizes the fact that the Olympic Games were developed in Japan at the expense of a part of the Tokyoites :

Satoshi Ukai : Tens of homeless people used to live in Meiji park, one of the biggest parks in Tokyo, which disappeared to enable the construction of the new Olympic stadium. Social housings which had been built 50 years ago were demolished, hundreds of residents were moved, even two women who had already known the same situation at the time of the 1964 Olympics !

Construction works for the stadium, the Olympic village and other buildings linked to the event went faster and faster, imposing an unbearable workload for the workers. There have been several cases of work accidents and dead workers.

Journalist : According to the collective, the true benefits of the event would return to a small group of investors :

Satoshi Ukai : The Olympic village turns into apartments for riches. In this district of Tokyo, housing speculation increased very quickly last years.

Within OkotowaLink, protestors sued Tokyo authorities against the way all of it has been done. The case is in progress.

Journalist : And the Olympic Games would even cause environmental damages, not only in the capital city :

Satoshi Ukai : Impact of the Olympics on the environment exceeds the city of Tokyo. Some championships are also organised out of the capital, in Fukushima for example. Most of all, we denounce the fact that trees were cut in Indonesia and transported here to help build the Olympic stadium.

Journalist : Satoshi Ukai also denounces the diversion made by the government, drawing japanese' attention on the Olympic Games, whereas the social and economical issues of Fukushima's catastrophe have not yet been solved.

Satoshi Ukai : Before Tokyo was chosen as the hosting city of the 2020 olympic Games, the majority of the population was very skeptical about a sport event as huge as the olympics, seven years after Fukushima's catastrophe, while the Japanese's minds were still confused. But once Tokyo was chosen, the former prime minister Shinzo Abe really

threw himself in the Olympics project, and he even lied in front of Japanese and international audience, claiming the Fukushima situation was totally under control. Yet, the decontamination of the area was very selective, just to make up a good image of Fukushima's rebuilding for TV channels and the international medias. Now, more and more Japanese are hostile to the Olympics because they're tired of the lies of the Government, what we call here "sportswashing".

Journalist : Protestations reunited a minority of Japanese within Okotowa Link, "about 300 people" in 2019, according to Satoshi Ukai. But the pandemic since crystallized discontent across the country, all the more as the bill of the games raised sky high partly because of the coronavirus. As recalls Jules Boykoff, a researcher specialized in the Olympic Games issues.

Jules Boykoff : Japan, as Tokyo prepares to host the 2020 Olympics and 2021, where the cost has just been through the roof. Initially it was supposed to cost 7.3 billion dollars, and now according to an audit by the Japanese government itself, it's more like 25, 26, 27 billion dollars, and then you add a couple billions more for the delay. And you might even get more if the Olympics actually roll around, it it roll around.

Journalist : And this health crisis has become the main issue for the Olympic Games opponents

Satoshi Ukai : The Olympic International Committee proves his incapacity to understand the health situation which affects the whole world while the Olympic ideals should stand for humanity and public health. Evidence is mounting that the contrary is happening.

Journalist : And according to Satoshi Ukai, the destiny of the next Olympic Games really depends on the health crisis evolution

Satoshi Ukai : It mainly depends on what will happen in the world in the next few weeks. Therefore doctors and nurses are already vigilant because they were supposed to work as volunteers. With the arrival of the pandemic, and the consequences of the health situation, Tokyo is in serious danger of collapse.

Journalist : Before becoming a researcher, Jules Boykoff was an athlete of the US soccer team during the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. That's why he then became a

specialist of the question, lived in Rio de Janeiro before the olympics and met people affected by the event.

He has a clear cut point of view on the subject : he wishes the cancellation of the games

Jules Boykoff : Postponement was certainly an option, but there were serious downs including for mental health of the athletes, it's very difficult to have the Olympics postponed, then have to sit around and train and wonder what is going to happen or not. I still do believe that a cancellation is the right course of action right now.

Journalist : For the moment, the Olympic International Committee chose to remain optimistic though. Making a speech on New Year's day, its president, Thomas Bach, expressed his hope of having "unforgettable games", asserting that Tokyo was "the best prepared Olympic city ever".

Thomas Bach : These Olympic games will be the light at the end of the tunnel. They will be a celebration of solidarity, of unity, of human kind, in all our diversity. I can say that we have managed to turn these challenges into opportunities. We have strengthened the role of sports in society. With our "stay strong, stay active, stay healthy" campaign, by organizing the world's biggest digital Olympic workout. In one single day, Olympic day, half a billion people were introduced to this important role.

Journalist : If the CIO and the City of Tokyo manage to hold the Olympics, OkotowaLink's protestation against a whole system may continue despite everything. As Satoshi Ukai explains, protestors around the world develop close links for the purpose of the next Olympics, Paris 2024 and Los Angeles 2028.

Satoshi Ukai : Relations are more and more strong with the demonstrators in Paris and Los Angeles. Therefore the future of the Olympic Games institution as a whole will be decided by 2028. The legitimacy of the Olympic Games will be more and more contested.

Journalist : Protest will continue, and the demonstrator already expect the coming support of new groups.

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