

# FRS – Japan Program

## The significance of holding Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games under Covid-19 threats

Interview with Maki Kobayashi-Terada



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### Question 1: What could be the significance of the Tokyo Olympic Games in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The Olympic and Paralympic Games celebrate humanity with an indomitable spirit facing challenges and with infinite potential. The Games are also a symbol of peace and unity. All the world is now living under common threats caused by Covid-19 bearing with physical distancing and numerous restrictions. We all work to overcome this crisis together. The global society can only cooperate in this endeavour.

In that context, Tokyo 2020 embodies what we hope for: the time when the world can come together again and stand united. The Games should be a celebration of humanity, of our resilience, of our solidarity, and of everything we will never take for granted again. Relying on Olympic values, these are

Games to celebrate the global recovery – the process of recovery – of the world.

In this, there is no significant change in priorities: Tokyo 2020 has always been at least in part perceived as “recovery Games”. Initially for Tohoku and Japan, after the dramatic 2011 tsunami, when the Games were attributed to Japan in 2013. Furthermore, today, they should mark recovery for the entire world. We may still need to have physical distancing and restrictions for ensuring safety for all participating. However, the Games will show that together united, we will succeed in bringing back our usual way of life and *joie de vivre*.

### Question 2: Can the 2021 Olympic Games still be an instrument of soft power for Japan?

Soft power is based on positive perceptions. We believe the Games, even in 2021 when the Covid-19 pandemic is not yet behind us and restrictions are still in place, can offer ample opportunity for demonstrating our values and

many positive points to – and through – those coming to Japan: athletes, spectators, world media and visitors.

In preparation for the Games, we developed more of our hard and soft infrastructure barrier-free for more civil society people to be actively involved: 96 % of railway stations with more than 3,000 daily passengers are now barrier-free; hotels are required to have more barrier-free rooms with the amended law; accessible routes or restaurants are easily found on a map with mobile application; multi-language application provides various necessary emergency and daily information. We aimed to promote Sustainable Development Goals through sustainable delivery, aiming for zero emission, and zero waste. Civil society and citizens were invited to participate in many projects, using, for instance, recycled materials such as creating medals from urban mining, victory podium with plastic wastes, or Tokyo 2020 staff uniforms material made from recycled plastic bottles. These new productions in relation to the organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games will demonstrate that a switch towards a no-waste society is possible and is here to stay after the Games.

We also decided to use technology to achieve a safe, secure, and smooth organization of the Games. These technologies go from face recognition system for all the participants to smooth transportation control. Technology will help spectators who cannot come to the stadiums and different venues to share the excitement but also send back cheers to the athletes.

More than 500 host-towns have been communicating with and studying about their teams and countries they are hosting from the very early stage. They plan to organize public viewing cheering their teams and continue exchanges and friendship after the Games.

Of course, this year, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we may have fewer spectators and media. Host-towns citizens may not be able to have close communications with the invited teams to preserve athletes' health and

physical conditions. However, the world's global focus will not disappear, and future-oriented ongoing communications will be preserved, as it is also the spirit of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. After the Games organization's trigger, soft power can be increased with trust and communications development in the long term.

Paradoxically, the fact that the Tokyo 2020 Games are also the first Games ever being postponed could add to such trust.

The postponement poses a huge logistical challenge. The same venues had to be secured for the same dates (364 days late). Processes have been simplified to reduce additional costs while preserving the necessary service levels with understanding from all to be affected, thus increasing efficiency. Now the organizers are focusing on a detailed process to secure a safe and secure environment for all, particularly for athletes to perform their best for their once-in-a-lifetime event.

To successfully organize such a world-class event under these circumstances will be a *tour de force*. It will show that, no matter what, Japan is a committed, efficient and reliable partner.

**Question 3: Is there a global future for major sports events in mature democracies? Are the public and population still interested in that type of events, or is it disconnected from their real interests and preoccupations?**

Many Japanese are enthusiastic to welcome world athletes. Eight hundred ten universities registered for cooperation with Tokyo 2020. More than 100,000 people downloaded educational material focusing on the Paralympic Games.<sup>1</sup> More than 500 cities registered to be host-towns. Towns with stadium and torch relay routes seized this

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<sup>1</sup> This campaign, organized by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), is called "I'mPossible", adding comma and change from the word "impossible".

opportunity to consider hospitality initiatives and how best to promote their places. Olympic and Paralympic Games are considered to offer great opportunities for visibility and exchanges with the world and the best entertainment. Nevertheless, it is also true that, as there are costs and constraints on these cities' regular activities, there are also criticisms.

Consequently, to convince citizens of the real value of the investment made for the Olympic and Paralympic Games is essential for their support. These investments are not only tangible ones, with noticeable and easily measurable out-comes: tangible investments also bring intangible outcomes, even though they are less visible. Criticisms are easy to make when the focus is on the costs of the Olympic Games. This is why cities aspiring to be host-cities have to clearly and transparently present how the Games will promote the city's value and is a good investment for the future. Paris 2024 and LA 2028 are evidence of the remaining significance and importance of this dimension. At the same time, we also need to convince the citizens that our delivery of the Games is cost-effective and sustainable. As for Japan, more than 80 % of the chosen venues for the Games are already in place, including those built for the Tokyo 1964 Games or temporary ones. Our Games will also be the first ones to follow the "Agenda 2020" of the IOC, aiming to maximize cost-effectiveness and promote sustainable Games for all. The first-ever postponement of the games has been a real challenge and helped us further cut costs down and simplify operations. We expect our joint efforts with the IOC and the IPC will benefit future organizing committees.

**Many Japanese are enthusiastic to welcome world athletes.**

**Question 4: What values would Japan like to project through the post-Covid-19 Tokyo Games?**

The most important values we would like to project are resilience and solidarity.

With them, recovery is possible. That has been the case for the Great Eastern Japan earthquake in 2011. We praise people's courage. We appreciate the strong support from the world. The whole world needs to be united now to overcome this global health crisis.

Unity in diversity is another significant value that we would like to project. Our society is stronger with the active participation of diverse talents and abilities. And, last but not least, hope, commitment, and engagement. Hope lights our way (this is our torch relay's motto), and strong commitment and engagement of the whole world will make the successful organization of these Olympic Games.

**Question 5: Is the economic cost of Olympic and Paralympic Games sustainable in the short and longer term for cities and economies heavily affected by the virus? What kind of economic and technological benefits can be expected?**

Mizuho Financial Institute estimated in December 2014 the total economic benefit of the Games as 30 trillion yen (equivalent to approximately 236 billion Euro), including the post-Games economic effects of attracting more visitors and investors as well as increased productivity, the result of the upgrading of cities operation.

Last year (the year 2020), Dr. Miyamoto, Emeritus professor of Kansai University, also estimated a possible loss of 4.5 trillion yen (approximately 35.6 billion Euro) if the Games are not held.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is not very easy to estimate to what extent expected economic outcomes will be realized. It depends on the development of the situation, including the possibility to travel and to freely cross borders. Whereas we were sure to achieve a surplus before the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, our new version of the budget (version 5) breaks even. This budget will be shouldered by Tokyo2020 (entirely

funded by the private sector), the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and Government of Japan. What we are sure of is that we will continue to save, try to reduce costs, and also work to gain additional revenues. We also expect that the Games' successful organization will help reinvigorate our society and our economy after the pandemic.

The Games will also be an essential trigger for long-term innovations. We use technologies to assist operations: we use self-driving buses in the Athletes' village; we manage smooth transportation operations with GPS; face recognition system for the entry of all participants will ensure safety and efficiency; we will introduce new applications to follow athletes' health conditions and new systems to detect the density in venues to prevent the risk of infections; we will use some robots or technological equipment to assist people working for the organization of the competitions. Technologies will also enhance experiences for spectators to enjoy better visibility of the athletes' performances and techniques during the Games.

All these practical applications of technologies will also help advance various peoples' participation to our more globalized super-aging society.

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