

Using the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics to promote health and social wellbeing

The Games won't increase the numbers of people doing sport

Often there appears to be confusion between elite sport, Sport for All and physical activity. Watching elite sport does not seem generally to encourage people to take up sport themselves. The link with getting them to be more physically active, as part of their everyday lives is even more tenuous, e.g. by walking to the shops rather than taking the car.

“Hosting events is not an effective, value-for-money method of achieving either a sustained increase in mass participation or sustainable international success.”

The above passage is a quote *The Times* (1) took from the *Game Plan* (2), an official UK Government report.

The Times went on to look at all the Olympics between Barcelona in 1992 and Athens in 2004 (3). There was little or no increase in participation in sport in any of them.

Even Jennie Price, the Chief Executive of Sports England has said: "... no Olympic host nation has ever managed... a sustained increase in sports participation." (4)

The London Games could have some social benefits... and negatives

“There is little statistical or economic evidence to suggest that ... regeneration impacts (from Olympic Games) are significant.”

This is another passage *The Times* quotes from the *Game Plan*. (5) However, there are a range of plans to use the Olympics for social purposes. *The Big Issue* has written about how homeless people have become involved in the official Personal Best programme (6). This teaches them first aid and crowd control. They are guaranteed an interview to become a volunteer for the Games. It is hoped that this will help them find work.

The BBC's *Food Programme* looked at how construction workers involved in building facilities for the Games are being helped to eat more healthily. (7) The official Games website at www.london2012.com/index.php also describes other potential benefits.

- 1) However, there is also a health downside of large scale sporting events. For example, see www.sexanddrugsandrocksandhealth.com/page30.htm for how drinks and alcohol advertisers used the 2010 World Cup to promote their products. McDonalds, Coca Cola and Cadburys are all official 2012 sponsors (See www.london2012.com/about-us/the-people-delivering-the-games/international-and-uk-partners/index.php).

No doubt producers of TV sets and programmes will also do their best to encourage people promote passive sports watching even more during the games. Public health needs to ready to address these threats.

The Good News: What you can do

- 1) Be realistic. Don't expect many people to do more sport as a result of the London Olympics and Paralympics. Perhaps research who might be influenced and if it is cost-effective target them. (But for an example of organisations who are using the Games to promote physical activity see www.onenortheast.co.uk/page/2012culture/index.cfm)

- 2) There is an official Inspire programme around involvement in
 - Sport
 - Culture
 - Education
 - Sustainability
 - Volunteering
 - Business

Further details can be found at www.london2012.com/get-involved/inspire-programme/index.php

Also see

www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projects+and+initiatives/Games+inspired/Create+Games+inspired+volunteering+opportunities

- 3) The Health Impact of the 2012 Games: A Screening Health Impact Assessment of the North East's draft vision for the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games 2012 suggested a number of spin-off from the Games (8):
 - “There is also potential for development of businesses supplying the games, an increase in skills and a benefit to tourism and regional image which could all indirectly improve health.
 - There will be an opportunity to update and develop some of the NHS service provision, particularly to establish high quality sports medicine services in the region
 - There is also potential to reduce inequalities if participation can be greatest where there is greatest need. In particular, the equality of the Paralympics with the Olympics for these Games should help reduce stigma from disability”
 - “If the North East benefits from improved facilities, such as Gateshead International Stadium, or one or more of the facilities are relocated to the area after the Games, there is a possibility that people would visit the area to view them. There is also a prospect that such facilities might be adapted to meet specific health requirements in the region. Facilities should be targeted

at disadvantaged groups and communities, not solely for elite sports people. This would again have a small positive health impact and legacy” (9)

- 4) *The Marketer* magazine looked at how companies that didn't win the right to be the Olympic sponsor for their particular product, e.g. beer, sometimes did better than those who did, using so called 'ambush marketing' (10). This was because they had to be more creative and responsive to their target audience as a result. The idea that the Games nine official sponsors include McDonalds and Coca Cola which seems a strange choice one in the first place. Perhaps with a little creativity the Games are an opportunity to get 'ambush discussion' going about values and the wider determinants of health in a consumer society. The issues to look at could include
- Gender e.g. the role of women in sport
 - Young people and sex (e.g. see articles about sex in the Olympic Village such as <http://news.scotsman.com/ViewArticle.aspx?articleid=2546876>)
 - Rights and perceptions of people with disabilities
 - Competition and its role in society
 - Drugs and their role in society
 - Who are good role models?
 - Sport as entertainment versus participative sport
 - Elite sport versus Sports for All
 - Physical activity versus sport
 - The role of advertising
 - Sponsorship by producers of unhealthy goods of health events (The London 2012 list is at www.london2012.com/about-us/the-people-delivering-the-games/international-and-uk-partners/index.php)
 - Ecological issues e.g. see <http://superniche.org/>
- 5) People who want to present a different version of sport might want to contact New Games UK via www.newgamesuk.org/index.html New Games encourages creating games where everyone can join in and not feel excluded because they aren't 'good enough'.

Much of the above also of course applies to the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and any successful bids for football tournaments in the UK in the years ahead.

Using the Cultural Olympiad

The London Games also has a cultural dimension. The below section is taken from www.london2012.com/get-involved/cultural-olympiad/values-and-themes/index.php

London 2012 is integrating the cultural aspects of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games into a single cultural programme, while taking the opportunity to showcase the increasingly vibrant disability arts movement.

The Cultural Olympiad aims to:

- Inspire and involve the widest range of London and UK-wide communities
- Generate sustainable long-term benefits to our cultural life
- Create outstanding moments of creative excellence across the full range of performing arts and creative industries
- Connect future generations with the UK's artistic communities and with their peers around the world
- Promote contemporary London as a major world cultural capital
- drive tourism and inward investment and use the creative industries to boost economic regeneration
- Embrace the Olympic movement values of 'excellence, respect and friendship' and the Paralympic movement vision to 'empower, achieve, inspire'

The Cultural Olympiad is for everyone. Its values are:

- Celebrating London and the whole of the UK welcoming the world – our unique internationalism, cultural diversity, sharing and understanding
- Inspiring and involving young people
- Generating a positive legacy – for example through cultural and sports participation, audience development, cultural skills, urban regeneration, tourism and social cohesion and international links

The Cultural Olympiad reflects and supports a number of themes around bringing together culture and sport. These are:

- Encouraging audience participation
- Making public spaces exciting through street theatre, public art, circus skills and live big screen sites
- Raising environmental sustainability, health and well-being issues through culture and sport.
- Honouring and sharing the values of the Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Creating unique collaborations and innovations between communities and cultural sectors
- Supporting the learning, skills and personal development of young people through links to our education programme

Every project in the Cultural Olympiad will fully display the first three core values and adopt at least three of the themes.

The site explains however that the London 2012 Organising Committee is not a funding body. There are suggestions however as to who approach for help.

References

- 1) THE TIMES, 2008. *World Cup Bid Undermined By Absence Of Sporting Gain*. 2 December 2008.
- 2) CABINET OFFICE, 2002. *Game Plan*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office Available from: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/strategy/assets/game_plan_report.pdf (Accessed 26 July 2010)
- 3) THE TIMES, 2008. *Tarnished Legacy*. 2 December 2008.
- 4) SPORTS ENGLAND E-BULLETIN: THE LATEST FROM THE PITCH *Richard Lewis appointed as Chair of Sport England*. February 20 2009.
- 5) THE TIMES, 2008. *World Cup Bid Undermined By Absence Of Sporting Gain*. 2 December 2008.
- 6) THE BIG ISSUE, 2009. Home Stretch. *The Big Issue*. March 30- April 5 2009. Page 42.
- 7) *The Food Programme*, 2009. Radio, BBC Radio 4. 6 April.
- 8) CHAPPEL, D AND BAILEY, K., 2006. *The Health Impact Of The 2012 Games*. Page ii. Newcastle, UK: North East Public Health Observatory Available from: www.dur.ac.uk/ne.pho/index.php?c=1593 (Accessed 26 July 2010).
- 9) CHAPPEL, D AND BAILEY, K., 2006. *The Health Impact Of The 2012 Games*. Page8. Newcastle, UK: North East Public Health Observatory Available from: www.dur.ac.uk/ne.pho/index.php?c=1593 (Accessed 26 July 2010).
- 10) THE MARKETER, 2009. Ambush Marketing. *The Marketer*. February 2009, page 6-7.

All websites listed accessed 26 July 2010, except for www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projects+and+initiatives/Games+inspired/Create+Games+inspired+volunteering+opportunities which was accessed 19 January 2011

Mark Burns. www.sexanddrugsandrocksandhealth.com January 2011