**London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics Resource Guide**

# Social Legacy of the Olympic Games

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## Introduction

The concept of Olympic legacy has become firmly established as central to the Olympic movement since early 2000. It is also an increasingly contested political issue and a field of research. This is somehow surprising given that the whole *raison d’etre* of modern Olympism, as articulated by Pierre de Coubertin, was to use sport for the betterment of the world. The Olympic Games were the highest expression of this vision.

While the roots of Olympic legacy thinking can be found in the early writings of de Coubertin and a number of International Olympic Committee (IOC) policies, such as Olympic Solidarity from the 1960s and Sport for All from the 1980s, it was not until the late 1990s that the idea of Olympic legacy gradually turned into a major concern for the Olympic movement. This concern grew out of an historic process of Olympic growth and a number of recent events including the increasingly financially, socially and environmentally unsustainable gigantism of the Olympic Games model and a need to compensate for the negative development caused by this growth. A further reason has been the gradual democratization of the Olympic movement which required a greater transparency and accountability on the part of all stakeholders. The IOC’s moral concerns first found expression in *Agenda 21,* a policy response to global environmental issues raised at the Rio world summit in 1992 (IOC, 1992). This was followed by practical measures including instigating a bi-annual world congress on sport and the environment in 1995 and the Sport and Environment Commission in 1996, as well as capping the number of sports and athletes taking part in the Games since Sydney 2000.

Academic attempts to draw attention to the concept of Olympic legacy date back to the early 1980s (Ritchie, 1984), but the first concerted attempt to discuss this concept was made in 2002 under the patronage of the IOC at a Symposium on Legacies of the Olympic Games (1984–2000). The Symposium acknowledged that defining legacy was difficult and that the concept had a number of meanings, and offered the following loose definition of legacy:

“Olympic legacy ... is multi-disciplinary and dynamic – changing over time – and is affected by a variety of local and global factors. Therefore, while being difficult to define, it is a local and global concept, existing within cities, regions and nations, as well as internationally. Moreover, it is fundamental in the understanding of the mission of Olympism in society.” (International Olympic Committee 2002, p.2)

The idea of Olympic legacy has been gradually rationalised politically (new rules in the Olympic Charter 2003 and IOC Manual for candidate cities 2001), legally (through the Host City Contract between the IOC, the host city and the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (OCOG)), and scientifically (the Olympic Games Impact (OGI) project, 2006, which measures the economic, environmental and social impact of the Games through a set of indicators over a period of 12 years and four reports).

Although the notion of legacy did not feature in any of the previous three UK Olympic bids (Birmingham 1992, Manchester 1996 and 2000), the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games played a key role in further shaping the legacy thinking and set up new standards for mega-events’ organisers. The London 2012 bid was built on the premise that the Games will be used to promote sports participation across the country and for all groups. Both the bid committee and the UK government, as a major stakeholder in this project, promised to use the Games to inspire the country’s people to become more physically active and to improve their lives. This was the most ambitious project in the history of the Olympic Games in terms of both its scope and level of change, as, in order to be implemented successfully, it has to address not only people’s behaviour but also deeply-rooted social structures and relations. The conceptual, political, economic and logistical challenges which this undertaking presented were enormous and continue to generate heated debates.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games not only provided the first full blueprint for Olympic legacy – from inception to delivery – but also made an important lesson very clear: Olympic legacies are not given but socially constructed. Hosting an Olympic Games does not automatically bring social or economic legacy to the host city and country, rather these have to be strategically planned and leveraged.

Despite the political, legal and scientific rationalisation of the Olympic legacy concept, and various attempts to clarify it (Cashman 2006, Dickson et al 2011, Girginov and Hills 2008, Preus 2007) it remains a contested and under-theorised concept. The seeming rightness of concerns about legacy underplays the contested and complex aspects of the concept which can be defined and operationalised according to multiple interests and objectives. For example, MacAloon (2008) analysed the semantic features and pragmatic consequences of the legacy concept and warned about the dangers to the Olympic movement posed by an emerging and predominantly anglophone transnational group of professional legacy consultants. Those self-proclaimed legacy managers operate with the narrow interpretation of the English term ‘legacy’ with its emphasis on the present’s contribution to the future and ignore the vast accumulated historical, cultural and moral capital, which is implied by the French word for legacy ‘heritage’.

Figure 1 and Table 1 show the growth of Olympic legacy-related publications in English language. Given the political, economic and social significance afforded to the London Games, it is not surprising that nearly half of all contributions to this field have come from UK-based scholars. It has to be noted that while sophisticated methodologies have been developed to measure the economic and environmental impacts of the Games, the social legacies have proved much more difficult to operationalise and capture. Regardless of its contested nature there seems to be agreement that Olympic legacies generally fall into five categories – sporting, social, environmental, urban and economic – and can be in tangible or intangible form.

The current resource guide includes a combination of sporting and social legacy of the Games. This is because in reality social and sporting legacies such as inclusion, awareness (social) and participation in sport (sporting) are mutually constructive. A review of literature on social legacies of the Games suggests that most studies tend to address two key issues – (i) what is legacy and (ii) how legacy is interpreted and measured. Therefore, this guide includes a number of texts that provide specific methodologies for measuring social (and other) legacies and impacts. The next section looks into the different types of social legacies before introducing the bibliography on the subject.

Figure 1: Growth of academic Olympic legacy publications – 2002-2013.



Source: Web of Science (June 2013)

Table 1. Country of origin of Olympic legacy publications

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  Country | No | % |  |
| England | 44  | 48.352  |  |
| Usa |  13  | 14.286  |  |
| Australia |  9  | 9.890  |   |
| Canada |  7  | 7.692  |   |
| Italy |  4  | 4.396  |   |
| Greece |  3  | 3.297  |   |
| Ireland |  3  | 3.297  |   |
| Brazil |  2  | 2.198  |  |
| North Ireland |  2  | 2.198  |  |
| Peoples r china |  2  | 2.198 |  |
| Total | **91** | **100%** |  |

Source: Web of Science (June 2013)

## Types of social legacies

Originally, the social legacies of the Games tended to be interpreted mainly as sporting legacies in terms of number of participants and new/upgraded facilities. Table 2 shows the current IOC conceptualisation of sporting legacy. As mentioned above, Olympic legacy is an evolving concept which is shaped by the interactions between academic research, OCOGs’ and host cities’ practices and IOC policies. The current thinking about the social legacies of the Games covers a range of areas including culture and education as well as respect for some general ethical principles such inclusion and cooperation, human dignity, mutual understanding, the spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play, while rejecting all forms of racial, religious, political and gender discrimination (IOC 2012). Recently, there has also been a trend towards shifting the scholarly gaze from evaluations of legacies to a more strategic focus on how to leverage different opportunities presented by the Olympic Games and mega-events in general. Academic literature started to emerge related to issues such as the potential of sports events for generating social capital among host communities, the social leveraging of the Games for community building and the value of knowledge transfer. The scope of this guide is limited to the sporting, health and exercise, and cultural legacy of the Olympic Games.

Table 2. IOC categorisation of sporting legacies

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Infrastructure | Population |
| New permanent venues | Increased sport participation |
| Updating of existing facilities | Increased sport development |
| Increased/rehabilitated training ground/playing fields | Developmental training programmes (participants, coaches, officials, administrators, etc.) |
| Sporting equipment | Sport ‘ambassadors’/role models |

Source: IOC (2012, p.59)

The bibliography that follows presents mainly texts that have not been included in other Olympic legacy bibliographies. These are listed under a separate section in this guide. This bibliography is divided into three sections: academic texts (i.e., books and articles), reports (research documents commissioned by various agencies), and bibliographies and web-based resources.

## References

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## Annotated Bibliography

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This is the first comprehensive report on the social, economic, sporting, health and cultural meta evaluation of a single Olympic Games commissioned by the UK Government. The above link provides access to the methodology of the evaluation of impacts as well as to the findings in a series of reports.

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This is the most comprehensive report today on the health legacy of an Olympic Games. It is based on several years of systematic research and shows how the Games can be used to reshape the health system and public awareness in a vast country like China.

 Hills, L., Bradford, S. and Johnston, C. (2013) *Building a Participation Legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Disadvantaged Areas.*

This report concentrates specifically on the participation legacy of the London Games on young people in disadvantaged areas.

Legacy Trust UK [http://www.legacytrustuk.org/legacy/evaluations/?pg=2](http://www.sportanddev.org/en/toolkit/latest_publications/) [Accessed 1 March 2014].

This is the website of the Legacy Trust created specifically with the mission to help deliver social, health and cultural legacies of the London Games. The link below provides access to a number of impact/legacy reports across the UK:

London Health Commission and London Development Agency (2004) *Rapid Health Impact.* Available from: [www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=61057](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/reflections-cultural-olympiad-and-london-2012-festival) [Accessed 1 March 2014].

This report evaluates the health impacts of London hosting the Olympic Games.

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This report offers a London-specific perspective on legacy of the Games on various aspects of life including sport, health and culture.

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This report offers a comprehensive discussion on the social legacy lessons learnt from past Games as well as on anticipated London Olympics.

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Weed, M., et al (2012) *The Engagement of Further and Higher Education with the London2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Realising Ambitions and Achieving Long-Term Benefits*. Available from: [https://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/whatwedo/fundingandinvestment/specificfunds/olympicgames/the-engagement-of-further-and-higher-education-with-the-london-2012-olympic-and-paralympic-games-realising-ambitions-and-achieving-long-term-benefits.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/assets/osc%20section/pdf/lres_7e.pdf) [Accessed 1 March 2014]

This report analyses the social impacts of the engagement of the UK HE sector with the London 2012 Olympics and draws a number of conclusions about who benefited and how.

### Bibliographies and Internet resources

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