

## Challenges for a Regional Cultural Programme of the London 2012 Games

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**The Olympic Games represent not only a sports competition but also a focal point for cultural celebrations and exchanges. This paper considers the potential for a cultural programme in Dorset, site of the London 2012 sailing events.**

The philosophy of Olympism is based around the protection of the principles of sport, culture and education, with the Games seeking to create respect for the following fundamental ethical principles: tolerance, generosity, solidarity, friendship, respect for others, and non-discrimination (Girginov and Parry 2005).

As set out by the founder of the modern Olympic movement, Pierre de Coubertin, the aim of the Games is to harness sport to promote personal and cultural change. To enable this, sports function via universal rules, which enable the promotion of international understanding, peaceful co-existence, and discrimination free practices (IOC 1998; Girginov and Parry 2005). Olympism is dedicated to engendering a better appreciation and respect for a multicultural

world through co-operation and friendly competition, which is imbued with respect for cultural and ethnic differences.

Hofstede (2001) defines cultural relativism as a non-judgemental attitude towards other cultures and, in the context of the Olympics, this attitude is not fostered solely through the interaction of Olympic athletes. Rather, the host-visitor contact also plays a crucial part, with impacts felt not just in spectators who may for the first time be coming into contact with the host nation but also by the host.

As Kim (1988) states, cross-cultural understanding and awareness grow through first-hand contact between two different cultural groups. Therefore, the receptiveness of the host is an important variable in the satisfaction level of the visitor, but also in the degree of culture learning that takes place. As Gudykunst and Kim (1984) note, if the host environment is receptive, it means that opportunities are offered to visitors to participate in social and mass communication activities. International travel can be a personally enriching experience (Hofstede 2001), with

one benefit being the cultivation of a non-ethnocentric value system in which all cultures are seen as valid (Bock, 1970; Bochner 1981).

Key in surviving in a multicultural world is the ability to understand, first, one's own cultural values and, next, the cultural values of others (Hofstede 1991; Gudykunst 1998). The outcome of international travel, including participation in the Olympic Games, could be the creation of what Bochner (1981) refers to as the intercultural mediator, who enjoys and promotes an inclusive and integrative world view. The link between such a mindset and the inferred outcome of a more peaceful society - one of the key aims of the Olympic movement - is made by Huntingdon (1993) who argues that the outcome for society of the international sojourn is potentially a reduction in world conflict, caused fundamentally by cultural not economic or ideological change, as people become more culturally mindful and relativistic.

Culture learning, one of the ideals of the Olympic movement, is facilitated through the staging of the compulsory Culture Programme, which runs alongside the sporting events, and provides visitors with the opportunity to learn about the culture of the host community. This paper argues that the

Cultural Programme organised by the host destination should be reflective and inclusive of the local community, so as to ensure an authentic representation of culture and to facilitate a long-lasting socio-cultural legacy.

In 2012, London will host the Olympic and Paralympic Games, with all but three of the events being held in greater or central London areas. Football will be a UK-wide competition, with stadia utilised within deliberately distinct locations - Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, London, Manchester and Newcastle. The sailing and windsurfing events will be held in Dorset (in Weymouth and Portland), located two hours from central London, and one of the seven counties of the South West region.

The county is internationally recognised for its unique countryside, villages, and a coastline that has received World Heritage status. In the context of the latter two events, the challenge for local organisations is to create a local Dorset-owned and themed Cultural Programme, which is distinguishable from the Cultural Programme created by London. While a similar argument can be made in relation to the other regional venues for football, this paper will focus on the West Country of the UK. In particular, this paper explores the benefits of a locally organised Cultural Programme, and

discusses the barriers that organisers might face.

### **Culture in the Olympics**

The promotion of culture as a component of the Games is part of the foundations of the Olympic Movement (Garcia, 2002), being central to the fostering of international dialogue and learning. The Olympic spirit, which embodies mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity and fair play (Girginov and Parry 2005), is nurtured not just through sporting activities, but also through the Cultural Programme organised by the host destination.

Each Olympic Games Organising Committee (including LOCOG, the London Organising Committee) is required by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to organize a Cultural Programme (subject to approval by the IOC), which should 'promote harmonious relations, mutual understanding and friendship among the participants and others attending the Olympic Games' (IOC, 1995:30 cited in Toohey and Veal, 2000; IOC 2004).

Cultural Programmes have been a feature of the Olympic Games since 1908, with content often, but not always, deriving from the host culture (Garcia 2002). The programmes have often been celebratory festivals used to capture the world's attention,

sending important messages for global society, particularly during opening ceremonies. According to Garcia (2002), programmes have ranged from strongly rooted national festivals, to international festivals.

A question posed by Garcia and Miah (2005) concerns whether or not the identities represented in programmes should be those of competitors or of the host, given that one reason for hosting the Games is to strengthen community confidence and cultural identities. Furthermore, they highlight different approaches to the presentation of the host culture, pointing to Barcelona 1992, which showcased Catalan as opposed to Spanish identity; and to Atlanta 1996, which celebrated the American South with an emphasis on regional representation. As Garcia (2002) states, successive cities adopted different approaches to the cultural component of the Games, and better regulation of the programme and a clearer definition of policy for the Cultural Programme could lead to a more consistent approach.

The UK mostly enjoys a multicultural mix of ethnicities (Bassnett 1997; Goodhart 2004), particularly in its larger towns and cities (The British Council 1999). The London 2012 Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) aims

to bring the Olympic ideals to life by producing a unique cultural and educational programme that consists of official celebrations and concerts of varying music, as well as a range of community cultural and arts events (London 2012 Ltd, 2004). The bid submitted by London stated that the UK is committed to using Olympic values to build bridges between its communities and the rest of the world. Such an expression conforms to the Olympic ideal to foster multiculturalism, which is defined by Bochner (1981) as a society in which different groups retain their basic ethnic identity, their practices, beliefs and language, while being united within an umbrella framework of national allegiance.

An example of a multicultural approach to the Cultural Programme will, according to the bid document for the 2012 Games, be seen in East London, where there will be a celebration of world youth culture with a programme of music, urban sport, design, fashion and dance to showcase the vibrancy and creativity of London's youth culture. In addition, for each day's medal ceremonies, entitled 'celebrating achievement through diversity', inspiration will be drawn from the traditions of London's various communities, as well as those from throughout the UK (London 2012 Ltd, 2004).

## **The Importance of the Cultural Programme**

While cultural and art programmes are cited as an integral part of the Olympic Movement, there is only limited mention of this in the Olympic Charter, which, under rule 40, states that 'the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (OCOG) shall organize a programme of cultural events which must cover at least the entire period during which the Olympic Village is open' (IOC, 2004: 80).

This declaration constitutes a mere three and a half lines of the 109 page Olympic Charter. It would appear that despite the original aims of De Coubertin, the Cultural Programme is considered a minor part of the Games compared with the sports programme. Escalating costs for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (from £2 billion to £9m billion between 2005 and 2007) mean that it is tempting to forget about the Cultural Programme. Money is allocated to construction, regeneration and talent development of athletes and the Cultural Programme is under funded. Yet, the Olympic Movement aims to be a humanistic project and, while Hinch and Higham (2005) suggest that the experience of sports events is informed as much by the display of local culture as by the sport itself, the

non-sporting cultural elements are also important to express.

Few people recognise the Olympics as a cultural festival and, indeed, the Cultural Programme rarely receives coverage in the media. Furthermore, cultural programmes are not considered truly influential in the winning of Games (ibid). Given this lack of media attention, organisers and audiences seem to lack an understanding of the function of the Cultural Programme, which has led to difficulties and dysfunctions (Garcia 2002), while the Games are rarely considered a failure if multicultural inclusiveness and national involvement do not materialise (Garcia and Miah 2005).

The lack of importance attached to the hosting of the Cultural Programme is further reflected in the fact that while the IOC has made it compulsory to organize a Cultural Programme, the literature on this aspect of the Games appears to be relatively sparse, and there is no literature on the content and delivery of the Cultural Programme in regional venues. It is for this reason that this paper shows a reliance on the writings of Garcia and Miah. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate discussion on the need for and the route to a decentralised Cultural Programme by considering the specific case of London 2012 and

the role that can be played by the regional centre of Dorset.

### **The Benefits of Dorset's Own Cultural Programme**

As host for some of the water-based events, Dorset will be responsible for organising a Cultural Programme running up to and during the Games. As Kelly (2005: 22) argues, 'if the world is coming to our doorstep, it's up to us to respond imaginatively. I do not want to start with London outwards. It has to be fanning in from all directions.' By extension, organisers need to ensure that the benefits of hosting the Games are dispersed outside the host destination of the London boroughs.

While there is a tendency to neglect the Cultural Programme, its potential benefits should not be underestimated. According to Kelly (2005), the Olympics is a festival that celebrates humanity, a cultural exchange that has the power to bring better world understanding, and cultural understanding, as well as improved national and local self-confidence (Garcia and Miah 2005). Therefore, the Games are not just about sport but about cultural stories, implicit in which is a need to take the focus on winning medals to 'an imaginative place in which culture is central' (Kelly, 2005, p. 22). Given the power of the Games to engender a sense of

community, defined by Gudykunst (1998) as an open, tolerant and plural society, it is crucial, as Garcia and Miah (2005) argue, that the local community is involved in the planning and staging of any Cultural Programme.

Arguably, the most sustainable of the Games' various legacies is its cultural legacy (Garcia and Miah 2005). Yet, to be long-lasting and meaningful to the community, the Cultural Programme should reflect and include the local community. Garcia (2004) states that the way to ensure sustainable legacies is by grounding major sporting events in a Cultural Programme that is representative of the local and regional host community. As such, organisers of the Cultural Programme for London 2012 need to ensure that cultural distinctiveness is reflected in Dorset's own cultural activities, so that dominance by London and, thereby, alienation on the part of locals, is avoided.

The 2012 Games provide a unique opportunity for the respective communities of Weymouth and Portland to ensure that local inhabitants are central to the hosting and organizing of distinct cultural events, which may not only increase local self-confidence but also become a catalyst for meaningful and long-lasting intercultural understanding (Garcia and Miah, 2005). Culture

in its widest sense is a crucial part of the regional fabric (CSW 2004). Culture South West (CSW) uses what it calls an inclusive definition of culture, embracing all those activities that help improve both the quality of people's lives and the way they feel about their communities; that impact increasingly on the economy; that attract visitors; and that add to a sense of belonging for residents. This refers to the arts in their various forms, film and moving image, play, sport and physical activity, spiritual life, the appreciation of landscape and the historic environment. This then conforms to Scollon and Scollon's distinction (1995) between high culture, which refers to intellectual and artistic achievements (see also Williams 1981), and anthropological culture, which refers to the customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organisation and daily practices of a distinctive group (see Hofstede 1991).

The two most prominent organisers of Dorset's Cultural Programme will be Culture Southwest (CSW) and South West Regional Development Agency (SWERDA). Other key organizations include the regional cultural agencies within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Arts Council England, South West English Heritage, South West Museums Libraries and Archives Council,

South West Screen, South West Tourism and Sport England South West. The cultural activities and assets of the South West are, thus, crucial to the region's attractiveness (SWERDA 2004). In 2001, visitor-related expenditure in the South West reached £8.8 billion, of which approximately 10% was spent on attractions and entertainment (CSW 2004).

The Olympic Games have the power to bring communities together (Garcia, 2002). Dorset has a population of approximately 400,000 and the demographic constitution is far less diverse than London. Neighbourhood figures for Dorset gathered from the decennial census in 2001 show that 98.74% of the Dorset population is from a white ethnic origin group (ONS, 2001). As Dorset and London are very different in terms of ethnicity and local culture, the Cultural Programme created by Dorset needs to be distinct, not just from London but also from the region in which it is located, if visitors are to be confronted with an honest image of Dorset life and society.

One way, in which a unique and faithful representation can be guaranteed is by involving the local community in the programme and design of joint cultural activities, thereby fostering a sense of

empowerment and ownership. Events should offer a 'stage' for local involvement, not just a showcase for elite sports. Local ownership of the programme will increase community spirit: the hosting of a local Cultural Programme will imbue in the community both a sense of civic pride and confidence and a strengthened cultural identity that according to Garcia and Miah (2005) justify hosting the Games. Clearly, these benefits will not be realised, if the local community does not recognise itself in the Programme presented to visitors.

One of the IOC's aims is to promote a positive legacy for the host city and to encourage initiatives that blend sport and culture (IOC, 2004). One of the ways in which the community is encouraged to get involved in the Games is often through volunteering. Indeed CSW champions the importance of voluntary involvement in the region's cultural organisations and activities (CSW 2004), as this offers a chance to bring people together and create a sense of citizenship and ownership (Garcia and Miah 2005).

The importance of volunteering, and the role this can play in promoting social regeneration should not be underestimated. The hosting of events is often linked to a sense of pride and self actualisation amongst the

resident population (Fredline, 2005). It takes local people to breathe life into local programmes, which can assist with the wider regional aims of developing a strong community destination.

The creative industries and cultural tourism are vital for the Southwest economy and its self-confidence; they are instrumental to attracting visitors (SWERDA 2004) and in engaging with local community artists. Culture South West (2004) argues that a shared commitment to culture provides something that makes lives better and communities more vibrant across the region. The involvement of the latter in the organisation of the Cultural Programme will consolidate creative networks. Indeed, the official report on the Sydney Games suggests that a legacy of the Cultural Programme was shown in longer term benefits for Australian artists and art companies, such as the commissioning of new works including plays, musical works, dance works, fine art print portfolios, publications and anthologies (Cashman, 2006).

An effective Cultural Programme in Dorset provides the opportunity to promote the image of the South West, nationally and internationally, seen as one of the strategic aims of the regional development agency, SWERDA. The creation

of new icons, such as The Eden Project in Devon and the National Maritime Museum in Cornwall, and plans to improve access to historic areas, like Stonehenge, all contribute to this by attracting thousands of additional visitors to the region each year as well as new businesses and new jobs. London 2012 provides an opportunity not only to re-brand the county of Dorset as a desirable tourism destination, but also to 'refresh' the appeal of 'Brand Dorset'.

The goal of image enhancement will be furthered by the global broadcasting of the backdrop of the world heritage coastline in Dorset and its world class sailing waters that will host the sailing and windsurfing events. Olympic images are long-standing, as argued by Garcia and Miah (2005), who refer us to the view of Barcelona from the diving venue in 1992, or the Sydney Opera House and the Parthenon in Athens acting as the stage for the marathon, triathlon or road cycling in 2000 and 2004. The Dorset heritage coastline will provide one of those memorable backdrops in 2012, which will leave a lasting legacy of civic pride in the host community in Dorset.

### **The Challenges of Organising a Local Cultural Programme**

To allow culture to play an important role in preparation for



London 2012, there is a series of challenges that need to be overcome. Some of these barriers have been previously identified by Garcia (2004). In the Dorset context, one challenge will be to overcome the low visibility and awareness of the Cultural Programme amongst the population of Dorset, and amongst the local, regional and national media. Secondly, there is an apparent lack of appreciation or understanding of the relevance of the Cultural Programme within the structure of the Olympic Games. Therefore, there is a need to inform the public of the philosophy of Olympism and the implicit relevance of a Cultural Programme, and to work with the local and regional media bodies, to ensure that cultural activities are advertised and fairly represented among the many Olympic images.

The economic and environmental impacts of sporting events are often highlighted, although one of the legacies of Sydney 2000 included an improved sense of community and a greater national confidence (Garcia 2002). If cultural events are expressed using locally recognisable symbols, the sociocultural legacy will be more sustainable (Garcia 2004). There would also be the sense that the events are staged not just for the benefit of the larger corporations but also for the host community. Dorset can and should use the Olympics to

celebrate its role as host destination; it is crucial that the design and application of the Cultural Programme are devolved to a regional and local level. A major challenge for the South West region will be to gain support for and to integrate a local Cultural Programme into the overall London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games preparations, so that it is not distanced from the higher profile sporting preparations.

Another important consideration is how arts activity can enhance the experience of participation in the Olympics (Garcia 2004). Garcia suggests that Cultural Programmes provide a unique opportunity for greater social inclusion, so important in all areas of life in Britain today, and a high priority on the current government agenda. This approach may contrast with the views of many, who see the Olympic Games as predominantly for top athletes, sports fans, or overseas tourists, reflecting a tension between commercialism and social change (Girginov and Parry 2005).

A stated aim of CSW is to raise awareness of ethnic minority contributions to the region's culture. If such an aim is to be achieved at a local level, then it is necessary to consult these groups in the organisation of the Cultural Programme. Equally, CSW states that it recognizes the work of

other regional and sub-regional bodies to move religion and spirituality further up the cultural agenda. Therefore, whilst not overlooking the implicit challenge this presents in the context of a global event like the Olympics, one might anticipate that the local cultural programme will endeavour to reflect the religious diversity of the local population.

Finally, this paper recognises that a challenge for future Cultural Programmes in Dorset is in realising the intangible benefits of Olympic-related social and cultural impacts and the difficulty in providing quantitative measurements of their progress (Garcia, 2003). People often judge programmes and events by the return on investment and economic impact etc (i.e. medals won, new stadia and facilities, increases in sports participation, reduced obesity etc). It is clearly difficult to identify a tangible output of community cohesion and identity, thus the cultural aspects are often undervalued, or not even valued at all. Nevertheless, this paper argues that measuring the legacy of the London 2012 Games must include studies of the effect on the culture and spirit of the host population (Cashman, 1999 cited in Garcia, 2003).

## **Recommendations for Action to Increase Regional and Local Involvement**

To conclude, this paper identifies a series of general initiatives that could foster local involvement in the Cultural Programme of the 2012 Games as well as specific projects that could be delivered at a micro level, as they relate to the Dorset region:

- The establishment of a scheme to encourage school children to 'adopt a nation' for the Beijing 2008 summer Olympic Games. Students would then build on this concept by researching the culture of their chosen nation, and monitoring the progress of their country's athletes leading up to the London 2012 Games.
- Local educational establishments in Dorset should be encouraged to fully engage with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to embrace schemes of enrichment and development activities for young people from the most deprived areas of Dorset. This would assist with one of the key development areas identified by Garcia (2004) on how arts and cultural activity can lead to greater social inclusion; enhancing the experience of participation in the Olympics amongst certain excluded groups within British society,

previously identified by Collins (2003).

- The Arts Institute, which has a very strong reputation in the Dorset and South West arts community, could be encouraged to develop exhibitions with an 'Olympic' theme.
- Bournemouth University should be enabled by London 2012 to include the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as an integral part of its annual 'Diversity Day', taking the form of a 'Bournemouth University Olympic Day', promoting the ideals of Olympism and multiculturalism.
- Research should investigate whether arts and cultural activities in Dorset can be linked with other upcoming major sporting events, including world championship, European, and National events, or Olympic test events that will take place in Dorset over the next few years.

Future cultural and educational programmes at a local level should involve the teaching of many core educational values identified as being closely related to the Olympic Movement such as the enjoyment of physical activity, fair play, multiculturalism, and 'being the best that you can be'.

However, there are concerns about the appropriateness of the Olympics infiltrating the classroom, of branding children via the Olympics, bearing in mind that Olympic educational programmes are often sponsored by official affiliates, which have the indirect aim of promoting brand loyalty.

In March 2007, South West RDA and Sport England South West published the 'South West England Legacy Strategy for the 2012 Games', exploring opportunities in the areas of business, tourism, culture, sporting participation, and community involvement. The cultural element of the regional plan from Culture Southwest proposes an overarching theme of international friendship and inclusion, seeking to deliver a series of cultural projects. This paper suggests that this regional strategy could be further modified to deliver localised cultural projects in the county of Dorset between 2008 and 2012 (and beyond). There follows an outline of some proposed projects adapted from the South West regional legacy strategy, entitled 'The Dorset Cultural 12 for 2012'. Suggestions include:

1. A Dorset Youth Dance Festival in 2009 (post Beijing 2008).
2. Projects with the Jurassic Coast arts Strategy, linking

- sport, world heritage in Dorset, and culture;
3. A local 'heritage conference' in 2010, hosted within the county;
  4. Opening and closing ceremonies at all sailing events at Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, and national sporting events hosted in Dorset;
  5. A town in the county (possibly Bournemouth, Poole, Weymouth and Portland) to host an 'Olympic Film Festival' in 2011;
  6. Dorset media (TV, radio and press) to focus, monitor and track local emerging talented athletes and hopefuls in the Cultural Olympiad following the 2008 Beijing Games;
  7. Iconic arts projects in Dorset with Olympic themes, developed in conjunction with both the Arts Institute in Bournemouth (a higher education institution with a nationally recognised profile), and other further education institutions and colleges;
  8. The delivery of a county-wide digital legacy, mapping the journey from bid to delivery for future generations. This could be developed as a collaboration between several further and higher education institutions within the county;
  9. Create and develop exhibitions and educational programmes around the county linking the 2012 Games, local Olympic and Paralympic athletes, as part of Dorset's heritage;
  10. A series of county-wide events, organised by all local authorities in Dorset that inspire the youth in the county while linking sport, art and the Olympic and Paralympic ideals;
  11. Closer links with LOCOG centrally, promoting the rural and coastal aspects of Dorset, promoting the natural environment and beauty of the county;
  12. Education projects, as part of the school curriculum that link schools across Dorset, promoting the educational values of Olympism.

These twelve suggestions focus at a local level within the county of Dorset, as the host destination for the sailing events for the 2012 Games. This paper suggests that similar local and regional Cultural Programmes should be encouraged throughout the UK, if the 2012 Games are to be recognised as a truly national event, rather than one centred solely within London.

## **Conclusion**

This paper suggests that sport attractions and sporting events in Dorset offer a useful tool for the strategic development of Dorset as a destination. However, it is important that the county offers visitors authentic cultural

experiences that are not distorted by an emphasis on the commercial aspects of the Games in central London. It is important that Dorset's Cultural Programme is embraced locally and does not turn into a 16-day sporting and marketing event. It is also important that the cultural fabric of Dorset is not diluted by the commercial aspects of the 2012 Games. This argument is equally pertinent to the Paralympic Games that follow.

The Cultural Programmes associated with the Olympic Games should receive a higher priority on the regional and local agenda moving towards 2012, having previously been under promoted and having received limited political support (Garcia and Miah 2005). The success of sports events should be measured in terms of both economic and social impact, however inadequate attention is paid to this area and there is little evaluation of the socio-cultural legacy of an event (Garcia 2003). This paper argues that the consideration of culture should sit alongside sport, health, transport, economic growth and environmental issues and should form an essential part of the preparations for 2012.

There is a need to review the Cultural Programmes of previous Games and develop new directions for the Cultural Programme at a local level that

can begin to break down barriers between sport, education and culture. The inclusion of diverse cultural activities and initiatives that are locally grounded has the potential to facilitate a strong sense of ownership amongst the Dorset host community. An authentic and local Cultural Programme in Dorset, delivered in association with sport, will help facilitate a range of community benefits including education, improved health, culture learning, citizenship, community creativity, key life skills, physical development and sporting success. The 2012 Games will thus be more than just a sporting event; they will represent a means to express individuality, civic pride and cultural understanding, which will endure beyond the hosting of the sporting events.

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