Cultural Olympiads & the Creative Industries: Local Engagement in Torino and London [i]

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The development of entrepreneurship and local talent in the Olympic host region is usually an important outcome of organizing mega events such as Olympic Games, World Expos or European Capitals of Culture. However, large-scale cultural events increasingly involve internationally recognised artists rather than local ones, in order to extend the scope of the event, attract international visitors and enhance media attention.

A record of the benefits for local cultural organizations is rarely kept and, when collected, data generally only consists of measurements of increased audiences, funding and production (Richards and Palmer, 2010). Moreover, the attraction of external firms and capital is one of the objectives of large cultural and sports events (Sacco and Tevano Blessi, 2007). However, the focus of this research is on local, small and micro firms, which are often the greatest contributors to creative innovation and cultural diversity (Jacobs, 1970).

The findings are based on research conducted in 2010 on the 'Role of the Olympic Games' Cultural Programme in Fostering Local Creativity' focuses on softer impacts, such as improved contacts, creative inspiration and informal learning. It does so by exploring local creative industry professionals' perceptions and feelings towards the Cultural Olympiad of Torino 2006 and London 2012.

In this context, this paper focuses on the creative industries, clustering of creative firms and their role in local development around Olympic Games planning and delivery. We argue that the role of such organizations has increasing value and importance for an Olympic programme, which reflect their growing importance in society more generally. As recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),

creative industries are becoming increasingly important components of modern post-industrial knowledge-based economies. Not only are they thought to account for higher than average growth and job creation, they are also vehicles of cultural identity that play an important role in fostering cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2006).

The primary data collection draws on a series of cultural events within the Olympic Games' and their role in fostering local creativity in the host region.

BACKGROUND

Scott (1999) describes how hubs of cultural capital, created by networks of creative and cultural industries located in specific places often attract individuals in search of a creative industrial atmosphere (Scott, 1999). Creative workers are attracted to areas where creative industries aggregate thanks to their 'creative buzz' (Drake, 2003), cool atmosphere, and the opportunities for creative inspiration they provide (Pappalepore et al. 2011). Place attributes, strong presence of creative firms as well as specialised schools and organisations all contribute to the reinforcement of a local cultural framework (Scott, 1999). One of the aims of this research is to

understand whether a programme of cultural events, such as the Cultural Olympiad, can play a similar role in the development of such an environment.

Previous research highlighted the role of face-to-face contacts between creative entrepreneurs in the production of a particular scene (Silver et al., 2006) or a communication ecology (Bathelt and Graf, 2008: 1947) mainly consisting of information, new knowledge and updates, as well as gossip and 'trade folklore' (Bathelt and Graf, 2008: 1947). Consumption venues such as cafes, nightclubs and galleries are seen as important in the creation of this atmosphere (Neff, 2005) as well as the presence of retail outlets, which create 'street level activity and animation' (Brown et al., 2000: 444).

In this respect, the concept of 'creative field' (Scott. 2006), elaborating on Bourdieu's (1983) idea of social field, is particularly relevant. Scott describes the creative field as 'a set of interrelationships that stimulate and channel individual expressions of creativity' (Scott, 2006: 8). These interrelationships are constituted by the networks of firms and workers, infrastructural facilities (research establishments, design centres, etc.), as well as local cultures, conventions and institutions (Scott, 2006).

In their study of media industries in Soho, London, Nachum and Keeble (1999) identify mutual learning processes as a critical advantage of being located within a cluster. Media industries in Soho appeared to be involved in 'processes of localised collective learning' (p. 13), achieved through social interaction in informal meeting places such as coffee bars, restaurants and pubs, which were

> instrumental in creating a sense of community, in fostering the mechanisms that turn this collection of firms into a single whole, and generating positive externalities for the benefit of the firms involved (Nachum and Keeble, 1999: 31).

One of the questions that occupies the present research is whether a series of coordinated cultural events – as constituted by a Cultural Olympiad programme – stimulates such mutual learning processes and the development of a creative field, with consequent positive impacts on the development of local creativity and creative networks.

The benefits of cultural events on local creative firms (such as cultural organisations) in most cases involve the direct procurement of artworks or performances. An example of an event that directly involves the participation of artists is the commission of artworks for public display, which become events in themselves (Richards and Palmer, 2010).

Such commissions can range from art installations, through film to performing arts and music. However, tourism and sponsorship development agendas often mean that large-scale cultural event organisers choose to prioritise internationally recognised artists over local ones. For instance, García (2004) describes how, in the celebrated cases of Glasgow 1990 (European Capital of Culture) and Sydney 2000 (Cultural Olympiad), the most emphasised aspects of their arts programmes were the spectacular and international ones.

Alternatively, when the French city region of Lille Metropole was the European Capital of Culture in 2004, amongst its major objectives was to balance international blockbusters with local events. The latter were staged by local creative firms and were embedded in the local culture. This approach facilitated a greater participation of local residents, the promotion of cultural innovation and support for local creative talent (Sacco and Tevano Blessi, 2007).

Another way in which creative industries may benefit from events is tourism development in the destination, which may generate future demand for creative outputs such as cultural products, as well as provide

enhanced access to a pool of consumers.

Increased visitation can also contribute to the 'buzz' or leisurely atmosphere, and provide opportunities for creative professionals to acquire and share outside knowledge. However, not all creative businesses see tourism development in a positive light. For instance, Molotch and Treskon (2009) in their study of the art scenes in New York's SoHo and Chelsea, described the negative attitudes of SoHo's art galleries towards the development of tourism:

> besides not buying, the tourists go into the galleries (and) laugh at the art (…) having the right kind of people around builds artists' and galleries' reputations. If the crowds are scene-unsuitable, they are a pollutant; this appears to be more generally applicable to spaces of the creative economy(Molotch and Treskon, p. 518).

In addition, to many small and micro creative businesses, tourism development may also signify gentrification and increased property prices, and thus represent a threat to the affordability of their working space.

The evaluation of the Culture10 event programme in the North East of England (SWQ, 2006a and 2006b) shows that cultural events can also positively impact the creative sector indirectly by providing opportunities for learning, networking and participation in activities which can generate ideas and new skills (SQW, 2006b). Such opportunities can happen

> formally through mentoring arrangements or informally simply through meeting some of the leading figures in their fields. The experience can generate new ideas, opportunities, contacts and confidence. It can include creative businesses as well as performers, for example working with experienced staging crew, lighting engineers, media experts. In short, events can be a vehicle for the region's cultural businesses to interact with national and international artists, performers and businesses' (SQW, 2006b, p. 21).

Finally, as noted by Smith (2008), creativity needs multiplicity, a flux of unexpected events (Scott, 2000) and spontaneity (Richards and Wilson, 2007). Cultural events could therefore play a key role in the production of such a creative environment. As seen earlier, vibrant, creative places that offer a stimulating cultural environment are regarded as attractors of talent and skills (Zukin, 1995, Florida, 2002) and,

for this reason, many cities have seen the development of a rich calendar of cultural events as an integral part of their development strategy.

This research extends this debate by exploring whether a series of coordinated cultural events may have a role in:

1) Encouraging mutual learning processes (Nachum and Keeble, 1999), thus a 'communication ecology' (Bathelt and Graf, 2008);
2) Developing a stimulating industrial atmosphere and / or a creative field (Scott, 2000); and
3) providing areas with the 'buzz' needed to attract new creative talent.

METHODS

To investigate these themes, two case studies were developed – the Torino 2006 Olympic Winter Games and the London 2012 Olympic Summer. In Torino, the cultural programme took place mainly in 2006 during the Games, while in London it began in 2008 and will culminate with a much larger festival in summer 2012 branded as *Festival 2012*.
The research methods consist of a qualitative e-mail survey with small and micro creative firms and face-to-face interviews with 12 creative professionals and two Cultural Olympiad organisers.

460 creative firms in East London and 250 in Torino were identified and invited to take part in the study. Out of these, 64 from East London and 58 from Torino agreed to fill in the online qualitative questionnaire (a response rate of 13,9% and 23,2% respectively). Based on a first qualitative analysis of the questionnaires received, 20 respondents per case study were contacted again and asked to take part also in a face-to-face interview.

The respondents selected at this stage were those who were (or had been) directly involved with the Cultural Olympiad and those who showed a particular willingness to express their views on the topic. Eventually, a total of four face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with creative professionals in Torino and seven (with 8 creative professionals) in East London. In addition, an interview was made with the artistic director of the Torino Cultural Olympiad and one with a coordinator of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

RESULTS

The Cultural Olympiads in Torino and London

The Torino 2006 Olympic Games were part of a strategy put in place by the city region of Torino to accelerate the transition from the post-industrial era to a service economy (IOC, 2007). The Olympic Games have contributed to the ongoing process of changing Torino's image from gritty, industrial town to one of creativity, youth and development, and to the rejuvenation of its tourism industry.

Consistent with these objectives, Torino was also the first Winter Olympic City to organise an extensive Cultural Programme parallel to the sport programme. The 200 events of the Cultural Olympiad – ItalyArt – were produced by the Ministry of Culture, the Region, the City, the Province and public agencies and institutions.

In London, the cultural programme ambitions were also extensive, aiming to be 'the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic Movements'.[1] As for all Olympic Summer Games since Barcelona 1988, London's programme lasted 4 years it started in 2008 and will culminate with the 1,000 events of the

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[1]http://www.london2012.com/cultural-olympiad

'London 2012 Festival' (June-September 2012).

However, different from any previous Olympic City, London's Cultural Olympiad will not be held in the host region only, but events will take place on a national level. This new approach represents a response to the government's key aim of dispersing the benefits of London 2012 to the whole of the UK. The sponsors include a range of major public and private organisations (chiefly, Arts Council England, Legacy Trust UK, Olympic Lottery Distributor, British Council, BP and British Telecom).

Creative professionals' views: perceived advantages

For Torino respondents, the most important benefits from participation in the Cultural Olympiad were the visibility and publicity that was afforded to them thanks to the higher visitation (especially for cultural venues) and the value of the Olympic brand. In addition, cultural events are seen as outlets for creativity and new experiences, which allow the development of fresh ideas:

> in terms of our internal creativity, of course it did [stimulate it] because [events] represent new experiences and they allow us to get fresh ideas; not so much from a communication point of

view, but from an exhibition point of view fresh ideas can come up

For artists and other creative professionals, such as designers, Cultural Olympiad events were an opportunity to showcase their products and to advertise the city's or area's creativity. By comparison, an interviewee (in London) noted how normally creative activities often happen 'behind closed doors', so that the creative atmosphere or 'buzz' are not visible from outside, but perceived very strongly by the creative professionals involved.

> I mean you've seen the outside of this place, it looks shambolic, but it's got all of this kind of creative stuff going on inside. And that's what Hackney Wick is. Everything is going on indoors and it's all behind closed doors. And the weekend you wouldn't know about from reading anything, "Time Out" or whatever, but it's party central as well. You can guarantee that you'll have something to do on the weekend.

Networking and improved connectivity were not seen as a consequence of participation in Torino, while they were mentioned by several respondents in London as a potential (future) benefit.

Interviewees and questionnaire respondents in both cases showed great emotional attachment to their location. As a consequence, enhanced local pride and increased visitation were regarded as very important outcomes of the Olympic Games, regardless of their personal return as businesses.

> With all the different people that are going to come to London and the fact that Londoners are going to feel extra proud that they live here, I think it's a really unique opportunity to widen the access to the arts that isn't there necessarily today (Co-director of an gallery space and arts organisation, London)

Similarly, Torino respondents noted that:

> 2006 was a great opportunity and Torino played their hand well. (...) the city supported the events and the initiatives, and this had a huge return, a big win, in which residents found their self-motivation. The gratification of seeing their city being able to do what it did, and doing it well.

Interestingly, one interviewee said that events are important because they stimulate local people to be proud not only of their city, but of its cultural offer:

[interviewer: and do you think that cultural events are important to foster local creativity?] Yes, absolutely. I think they create a local pride in what's created in the arts and the design field, across textiles, ceramics, jewellery, furniture. That is really important. (designer, London)

Networking and creative clusters' development

In both cities, creative professionals regarded networking as a very important component of their work.

It is always important to exchange ideas. To exchange opinions, to see what others are doing and perhaps collaborate. I do not believe in individual work, I rather believe in group work. And if group work involves different firms, it is certainly a positive thing because many heads can see many things, and many thoughts on one product can provide more possibilities (designer from Torino)

However, in Torino, greater networking and improved connectivity were not seen as a consequence of participation in the Cultural Olympiad. By comparison, London based participants indicated they had been able to create new contacts and collaborations thanks to the Olympic cultural programme, or expressed their hopes to achieve this through future participation.

In London, being based near the Olympic Park is seen by some as an advantage in terms of opportunities and, in particular, one participant describes how this proximity allowed the development of new projects despite not being officially involved with the Cultural Olympiad.

In contrast with this view, in Torino the firm's location is not perceived at all as a factor affecting the benefits derived from the Games and related events. In Torino, the present research shows no evidence of the development of new creative clusters as a consequence of the Cultural Olympiad or the Olympic Games (in London this aspect cannot yet be explored).

Nonetheless, Vanolo (2007) notes how in Torino, during the Games, two creative areas of Torino (Murazzi and Quadrilatero) attracted considerable media interest, thus portraying an image of dynamicity and buzz for the whole city of Torino.

Atmosphere

The Torino Cultural Olympiad included many open air events (such as concerts and performances on stage), an urban decoration programme and two sleepless nights (Notti Bianche) of

street and indoor events. This may have contributed to creating the 'atmosphere' described by many participants, regarded as the most important gain of the Olympics. Atmosphere was described as wonderful, fun, sunny, amazing, creative and marvellous, and it was linked to a number of factors, including: everyone was happy and excited, and strangers smiled at each other in the streets. One interviewee indicated:

> The positive aspect is the wonderful, fun, sunny and even creative atmosphere of that time. Torino changed day by day and I had the impression I was looking at it with different glasses, 3D glasses. Everything was valorised and enhanced: monuments, buildings, venues, squares... the whole city and especially the people. I'd say it has definitely been a very positive event.

Similar sentiments were expressed by an artist in a face-to-face interview:

> Amazing, amazing. Extraordinary. The excitement got everyone. Everyone participated, and you must take into account that Torino is a difficult city from an 'involvement' point of view, or at least it seemed to be. Because people from Torino are quite closed, quite wary. Instead, day after day, this thing involved everyone, in a very unique manner.

Also, a designer, asked about the atmosphere, commented:

> Marvellous, marvellous. Wonderful. Really, people from Torino had never seen such a beautiful moment. Because everyone you met on the street smiled at you. It really created a festive atmosphere. It was really great.

Interestingly, one interviewee in particular explicitly linked creative inspiration with happiness and working in a cheerful environment:

> '[a creative environment is…] an environment that should mainly be cheerful, which may seem banal but in my opinion is not. Because working in serenity, in harmony, in happiness, allows you to have a free mind, free to do things that are maybe very strange and that later have to be translated into real, feasible products. The ideal environment is definitely very cheerful'

The idea that a cheerful environment is conducive for creativity seems consistent with recent economics studies, which found a positive correlation

between happiness and work productivity (Oswald et al, 2009).

Concerns on the cultural programme

Not all the research participants had positive feelings towards the Cultural Olympiad, with some London respondents being the most critical. Three main concerns were expressed by London respondents: the lack of funding available to develop creative projects, the lack of information on opportunities available, and the quality and authenticity of the cultural programme.

Some respondents associated a lack of funding to the secondary role of the cultural programme in comparison with the sport events. For example, the artistic director of the Torino Cultural Olympiad notedthat 'during the Games all the attention is focused on the medals, the sport event, the champions'. Similarly, an artist who worked on the illumination of the city during the Games referred to the Cultural Olympiad as 'a series of secondary events'. According to him, the Cultural Olympiads,

> were pretty average because they represented a tool, an excuse, to give something to everyone, to allow everyone to work. So small, local businesses - which are very important because they are there throughout the year, for all the events, every year -

had something to do. As a consequence there was a parcelling, sharing of the work (...) but I haven't seen anything significant'=.

The 'parcelling' of events belonging to the cultural programme was noted also by the artistic director of the Cultural Olympiad who indicated that:

> there were too many micro-events that we organised to please everyone, to keep political balance. Perhaps a reduced offer would have been better. I also think that the cultural aspect of the Games should have contaminated the sport aspect more. A stronger link.

DISCUSSION

East London and Torino participants revealed a great emotional attachment to the place they lived. They all described their work locations as very creative environments, conducive of artistic inspiration. Both East London and Torino are former industrial centres which have heavily suffered following the decline of manufacturing and which were – until very recently – seen as unappealing tourism destinations.

Consequently, creative professionals of both places see enhanced local pride and increased visitation as very

important outcomes of the Olympic Games, regardless of their personal return as businesses. This aspect was felt very strongly in both places, but particularly in Torino where an interviewee even stated that residents found their 'self-motivation' thanks to the Games.

Nonetheless, the most important perception from Torino respondents when discussing the effects of the Cultural Olympiad on creativity was the Games time atmosphere. This is especially interesting in the context of this research, since one of the objectives that emerged following the literature review was an exploration of whether a series of coordinated cultural events may have a role in the development of a creative field (Scott, 1999) with consequent positive impacts on the development of local creativity.

The atmosphere during the Games, variously described by participants as wonderful, fun, sunny, amazing, creative and marvellous, seems to be linked to a number of factors, including the fact that everyone was happy and excited, and strangers smiled at each other in the streets. An interviewee in particular explicitly linked creative inspiration with happiness and working in a cheerful environment.

To this end, the development of such an inspiring atmosphere

may recasonably have been facilitated by the cultural programme, which included many free, open air events (such as concerts and performances on stage), an urban decoration programme and two sleepless nights (Notti Bianche) of street and indoor events.

As Smith (2008) suggests, creativity needs multiplicity, a flux of unexpected events (Scott, 2000) and spontaneity (Richards and Wilson, 2007). Evidence from this research shows that the festive atmosphere during the Games is seen by Torino participants as the most positive outcome of the Olympics, and a long lasting one too ('all what is left', according to an interviewee).

In London, this legacy dimensions was not explored, but this finding provides a key recommendation for organisers of future Games and related cultural programme: try to foster a cheerful atmosphere through the organisation of open air, visible and free events. While this observation may seem to endorse a glib appreciation for the role of culture, it may be a decisive factor in deciding which kinds of events to produce within a cultural programme, but also to encourage thought about how best to create the right atmosphere for distinct creative professional groups.

Such events can contribute to stimulate the development of a

creative field (made of various elements, including atmosphere but also cultural institutions, networks of creative professionals and others) and thus have a lasting positive effect.

The findings of this exploratory research reveal that the advantages of cultural events perceived by creative professionals transcend the tangible outcomes measured in terms of increased production and publicity.

Prior to this study, an events' evaluative research conducted in the North East of England (SWQ, 2006a and 2006b) found that cultural events can have an impact on the creative sector indirectly by providing opportunities for learning, networking and participation in activities which can generate ideas, new skills, contacts and confidence (SQW, 2006b).

The qualitative evidence collected within this research confirms some of these findings. For instance, an artist interviewed for the present study in London described cultural events as outlets for creativity, adding that they provide a 'deadline for motivation', while in Torino a participant noted that events 'represent experiences and they allow us to get fresh ideas'.

Several interviewees described how Torino's three Olympic weeks were packed with a 'mushrooming of cultural events'

(even too many, according to two interviewees). As confirmed by our respondents, this contributed to portraying an image of cultural buzz, especially among its residents (IOC, 2007). Interestingly, a designer from East London pointed out how cultural events 'create a local pride in what's created in the arts and the design field'.

Two key positive aspects of the Cultural Olympiad, and of cultural events more generally, seem then to be their role as ways to increase visibility and their potential to raise awareness of what is created in the arts field. This seems especially important given what the London based artist noted about Hackney Wick, where creative enterprise can give new energy to a deprived area.

Pappalepore (2010) also finds that creative clusters often fail to succeed as cultural quarters, because they lack platforms to showcase the area's creative production and its artistic buzz. The findings here suggest that the cultural events linked to the Olympic Games (whether included in the official Cultural Olympiad or not) could serve as a platform to promote the cultural activities happening in East London 'behind closed doors', and possibly contribute to its promotion as a cultural quarter.

However, it must be noted that not all the research participants had positive feelings towards the

Cultural Olympiad, with some of the London respondents being particularly critical. The three main concerns were the lack of funding available to develop creative projects for the festival, the lack of information about it, and the quality of the cultural programme. In London particularly, several participants expressed fears that most of the funding available will be directed to other regions of the UK or to large organisations.

The latter fear should probably be linked to the Mayor's objective to spread the benefits of the Olympic Games to all UK regions, which means that the Cultural Olympiad events can take place anywhere in the UK. This national reach ambition may seem a sensible idea for a country where the capital already features 40% of the national arts infrastructure, despite hosting only 12% of its population (Landry, 2005).

However, by organising the Cultural Olympiad on a national scale, London risks diluting resources and benefits, producing a fragmented image for the event, and creating confusion over what the Cultural Olympiad really involves.

When asked what she would suggest to future cultural programme organisers, the artistic director of the Torino Cultural Olympiad suggested the organisation of a programme with less coordinated events. The

Torino Cultural Olympiad had the advantage of involving many local small creative businesses, but according to its curator this led to a loss of visibility for the actors involved.

Yet there is no simple way to appease the spread of interests that surround cultural production. Thus, London interviewees feared that funding will only go to large cultural organisations. The 'small vs. large' issue is partly linked to the strict regulations that rule the use of the Olympic symbols and brand, which limit the number of projects that can be included under the Cultural Olympiad umbrella.

In London, organisers have tried to overcome this problem through the creation of an on-line 'Cultural Diary', where organisations can register any event they are organising for 2012 (from January throughout the year), whether it is part of the official Cultural Olympiad or not. By registering their events, organisations have the potential to be included in marketing campaigns that will be led by the Greater London Authority and Visit London in 2012.

In addition, the 'Inspire Mark' brand was created, adopting the London 2012 logo but without the Olympic rings, to allow the promotion of smaller projects (Lander and Crowe, 2010). After 2012, research will be needed in order to assess the effectiveness

of these schemes. H owever, this research has shown very low awareness of London 2012-related initiatives addressed at creative and cultural firms at present. Lack of information and the need to feel more involved are the most common complaints flagged by London respondents in relation to the Cultural Olympiad.

Some Olympic Games researchers point out the under-funding of cultural programmes, which are often treated as secondary events in comparison with the main sport programme. For instance, Shipway and Brown (2007) explain this lack of funding with reference to two main factors: the increasing costs of the Games to the host cities and the fact that the cultural programme rarely appears on the media.

Strict regulations where only one product per category can be associated to the Olympic Games (eg. McDonalds for food) also make the attraction of cultural sponsors even more difficult (García and Miah, 2007). As such, one may also recommend that future Olympic cities find more strategic ways to promote media coverage of the cultural programme – at least at a local and national level – with the aim of slowly increasing awareness for the benefit of future Cultural Olympiad editions in terms of funding and creative organisation' participation and satisfaction.

García (2004) contributes to this debate, adding that the cultural programmes' marginal role is ultimately related to the subordinate position occupied by the arts in relation to sport within the sphere of leisure (Stevenson, 1998). This theme was discussed also by some of our interviewees, including the artistic director of the Torino Cultural Olympiad, who noted the prominence of the sports during Games time.

The curator of a London based public art gallery also expressed doubts over the effects of the Olympic Games on cultural venues visitation. According to him, visitors attracted by such a large sport event are not the ideal audience for cultural venues because 'they are not the sort of people that would have come to England just to see art galleries (...) they won't be as enthusiastic as they should be'. This view reveals the mistrust some creative professionals feel towards the public that are attracted by sport events and it echoes the attitude of gallery owners described by Molotch and Treskon (2009: 518) in their study of SoHo, New York, where 'the tourists go into the galleries (and) laugh at the art'.

Thus, while sport event organisers seem to be sceptical of the potential contribution of cultural events - for instance, in terms of media attention and sponsorship development - some creative industries are doubtful of a sport event's ability to

contribute to their business. Perhaps a greater involvement of the creative sector prior to the event, more information on the potential benefits, and training on how to take advantage of such opportunities, could encourage artists and other creative professionals to have a more open and positive attitude towards such events.

In London, this was attempted through a programme of seminars organised by public bodies and individual local authorities to disseminate information on opportunities. However, this research revealed a very high level of disinformation and disappointment mainly due to lack of information. Again, in this context the media could play an important role in spreading information and in increasing participation of smaller businesses.

Finally, a major preoccupation for some creative professionals concerns the authenticity of the events included in the programme. While one London interviewee advocated the staging of blockbuster events, the majority see this possibility as a threat to the overall quality of the Cultural Olympiad. Although most London interviewees see tourism development and the regeneration of the Olympic Park area as opportunities, they also fear that the emphasis on image could negatively impact the selection of Cultural Olympiad projects. This would involve

giving priority to large established cultural institutions and more commercial forms of culture, at the expense of smaller, independent and more innovative creative productions.

For instance, certain Cultural Olympiad events in Torino were 'easy to consume' cultural products aimed to promote local industries and traditions (e.g. chocolate making) rather than to provide a real cultural experience (Vanolo, 2007). On the other hand, other projects were more innovative and sophisticated, so that the programme could cater for a wide range of audiences and contribute to the promotion of local creative talent on different levels.

As two London interviewees noted, the role of such large cultural programmes should not be limited to the development of elite forms of art; they should aim to promote local skills and make them accessible to a wider public, as well as give residents and visitors a chance to take part and be involved in cultural activities.

CONCLUSION

According to our study's participants, a programme of cultural events can contribute to local creativity in a number of ways. First, events represent an opportunity to develop, share and experience new creative products and fresh ideas; they are a 'deadline for motivation' and a source of inspiration. Secondly,

creative firms may benefit from increased visitation and publicity generated by participation in the event's programme or, more generally, by the staging of a mega event such as the Olympic Games in their city. However, a concentration of many events over a short period of time is seen as even more important, especially when most of the events are staged outdoors and free of charge. Such events contribute to the creation of a happy and festive atmosphere, which may facilitate creative inspiration and the development of a creative field.

Increased visitation, raised interest in the destination and atmosphere together contribute to local pride. Although these impacts from the Games are not directly related to their business, they nevertheless emerged as a very important perceived benefit of the Games and their cultural programme. East London participants also noted that cultural events play a key role in promoting the area's creativity, showcasing the local arts scene and making up for the noted problem of non-visibility of many creative industries, due to the fact that many cultural activities happen 'behind closed doors'. This finding suggests that events may indirectly contribute to the development of a cultural quarter.

On the other hand, a number of critical concerns were also flagged by participants,

particularly those in London. Lack of funding – which was often associated with the secondary role of cultural events compared to the sports programme as well as with the Mayor's decision to spread events across the UK – were the most strongly lamented by London participants. Others were the lack of information on the festival and related funding, and doubts on the quality and authenticity of the chosen events.

The negative consequences of such dilution of activity were also articulated Torino participants, where a large number of small unrelated events (involving many firms on the territory) were staged. This may have weakend the impact of the programme and the Cultural Olympiad brand, while creating confusion over the concept of the Cultural Olympiad. Instead, a coordinated and coherent mix of well chosen events, allowing for a combination of typologies (elite / mainstream; local / international) could represent the most useful approach.

Thus, organisers should aim to find the right balance between local involvement and attraction of media attention: while the former would contribute to local business development and to the promotion of local cultures, the latter would facilitate image enhancement and, possibly, the attraction of much needed sponsorships for future editions of the Cultural Olympiad.

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