

Beyond the Slogan: There are many ways to *Inspire a Generation*

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By their very nature, slogans are both constrained by and operate through brevity and, in this sense, ostensibly provide an opportunity for each individual Games to communicate something unique about their staging of the world's largest sporting and cultural festival.

Slogans of some of the previous Olympic Games have attempted to communicate ideals of harmony; Beijing 2008 with 'One World, One Dream' whilst Barcelona 1992 focused on relations between participating nations with their slogan 'Friends Forever'.

100 days before the start of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the much anticipated official slogan was launched at an event in Kew Gardens, London announcing that the Games would '*Inspire A Generation*'. Strategically, the slogan reflected LOCOG's desire to foster a legacy of youth sports participation, a motif that



Photo of the London 2012 campaign '*Inspire a Generation*' by Monsieur Président on Flickr

resonates with the broader aspirations of the Olympic movement and which also would later cohere with Glasgow's bid for the 2018 Youth Olympic Games.

While slogans are an important branding device for any Games, to what extent has the public's experience of inspiration aligned with the way in which this slogan was originally conceived and communicated? In this article, I examine two key aspects of this discussion.

First, I consider why there has been an absence of the 'inspiration' rhetoric within the cultural dimensions of the Olympic programme and how this might have been a lost opportunity.

Second, whilst attempting to convey a shared vision of the staging of the Games, I discuss how the language of the slogan has been *variously* utilised in the discourse of, artists, politicians, and athletes and constituted in different ways. This is perhaps most obviously played in relation to the nuances surrounding the Olympics and Paralympics.

As the elite sporting spectacle of London2012 began, the idea of inspiration seemed to align with an emphasis of the Games as ‘principally a set of sports competitions’ (Miah and Garcia, 2012). Politicians, media, athletes and others, speculated over an almost utopian vision of sport, in which young people were suddenly inspired to participate in sport following the iconic images of the medal success of British athletes and seemed to fit with Lord Sebastian Coe’s vision for the slogan:

It is everything we have been saying since starting this incredible journey. It is the heartbeat and the very DNA of our organisation...It is also a rallying cry for athletes to come to the UK, to perform at their very best and to inspire the world (Cited in *The Sport Review*, 2012)

Whether or not the Games will have any lasting legacy in terms of increased rates in youth physical activity and sport

remains to be seen. Yet, there is scant evidence to support the claim that hosting the Games has created such a legacy elsewhere. Yet the London 2012 slogan encapsulates the conviction that it might be remarkable in doing so.

Undertaking physical activity for other reasons such as the pleasure of movement, or experiencing a connection with ones body or environment, can be quickly lost in the presence of the sort of elite performances celebrating during London2012. Indeed, the gap between the elite, cyborgified images of athletes at the very top of their sport is a distant reality from the varied and often more nuanced motivations for sustained participation in sport and physical activity at all levels.

Perhaps one of the less celebrated successes of London2012 are the examples it has offered of events within its culture and artistic programmes providing unique and more meaningful ways for the public to engagement with movement. Physically fit, sculpted and idealised bodies dominate our cultural landscape and, according to Pronger (2002), may actually diminish the bodies transcendent potential.

Alternatively, cultural performances such as Sue Austin’s *Creating the Spectacle*, part of the London 2012 *Unlimited* programme, use remarkable artistic events to expand the possibilities of how we think

about our bodies, movement and relationship with the our environment beyond such instrumental and techno-scientific (Pronger, 2002) visions of 'sporting' performances.

Creating the Spectacle involves a series of performances by Austin in a self-propelled wheelchair, which takes place underwater in a swimming pool. The emphasis on joy, movement and freedom, not only challenges dominant views of disability, but alludes to the transcendent values of movement and physical activity (Pronger, 2002); of the pleasure of movement, the feeling of being in the water, the relationship we have with our environments.

Other examples of performance art have provided a mechanism for actual public participation through different motivations such as an engagement with the environment. As Miah (2012) notes, London 2012 Festival piece *Speed of Light* involved hundreds of runners wearing fluorescent light suits creating shapes around the landscape of Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh and the audience were active participants, descending across the hills with light sticks as walking aids.

These performances speak to the value of contemporary arts practices in not only conveying something about our culture but providing inspiration to engage with physical activity which might resonate with closely with people's everyday lives, most of

whom do not live in the world of the elite athlete.

The word 'inspire' has routinely figured in the interviews, speeches and marketing campaign of many over the last couple of months. Even, the head of the Institution of Engineering and Technology hoped the opening ceremony would inspire young people to take up engineering as a profession (Peacock, 2012). However, perhaps the most interesting example is the way in which 'inspiration' has been constituted in the discourse surrounding the Paralympics in ways not so present in relation to the Olympics. Thus, Baroness Grey-Thompson suggested that the Paralympic Games will 'inspire a generation to think differently' about disability. Similarly, Tim Hollingsworth, Chief Executive of the BPA said

We hope these Games inspire a real change and momentum in the Paralympic movement.... But it will also be about inspiring non-disabled people to see disabled sport and disabled people differently.

Here, inspiration has not only been about the legacy of youth sport, but focused also on challenging society's views. It is not simply the 'elite' performances or athletic heroes, which are the focus of inspiration. Rather, it is individual and collective narrative, the stories of the personal journeys and

struggles, which are presented as being 'inspirational'.

London 2012 has certainly been a success in terms of attracting more spectators, participants, media sponsorship than previous Paralympic Games. Synergies between Paralympic and Olympic activity have also been realised, for example through the use of a single design for main cultural pictograms (See Garcia, 2012).

Media campaigns within the cultural landscape have played a significant role in the visions of disability articulated during the lead up to and during the Paralympics. Perhaps most notable is Channel 4's 'Meet the Superhumans', a 90 second promotional advert starring members of the Paralympic GB team, which involves cutting edge film sequences and slow motions shots and accompanied by the track 'Harder than you think' by hip hop band Public Enemy.

The trailer gives clear indication of the importance of narrative in the campaign for inspiration, incorporating controversial scenes such as a bomb explosion and a car crash as indicators of the personal stories behind the performances.

'Meet the Superhumans' has captured the public's imagination in terms of how we are to think about 'inspiration' in the context of the Paralympics, focusing not just on athletic heroes but also on

overcoming 'personal struggles' in ways that 'sustain the explicit contemporary discourse of Paralympic empowerment' (Peers, 2009: 653).

However, the individual and collective stories weaved throughout the coverage of the Paralympics are constituted through particular narrative forms which do not always allow us to understand the chaotic, disruptive and often regressive experiences of illness and/or disability and, instead, give the impression of coherence and progression.

Frank (2005) describes this as a 'quest' narrative; a story of illness or disability in which the individual journey involves meeting suffering head on. As Smith and Sparkes (2007: 91) observe, 'they accept impairment and seek to use it'.

There is not space to discuss the implications of the different ways of 'storying' disability and their potential for challenging dominant and oppressive views of disability. Rather, the point here is that attempts to 'Inspire a Generation' have occurred through narrativised constructions of Paralympians, infused into popular culture (billboards, social media, advertising), with significant discursive effect.

However they are (re)appropriated, London 2012 demonstrates the significance of Olympic and Paralympic Slogans

in shaping the discourse around the global festival and their slogan to 'Inspire a generation' expresses purpose and intention that may yet be 'inspirational' to future Games hosts.

It is unfortunate that the London 2012 slogan failed to pervade the non-sporting dimensions of the Games, particularly since the involvement of the cultural sector had been vast across the Olympiad. While many of the events that were created around the cultural programme may still lead to such inspiration, the absence of a connected marketing campaign to promote such values is further evidence that the sport and culture aspirations of an Olympic Games organizing committee need further joined up thinking across the primary branding structures.

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