



# Eyeballs, soundbites and plings: understanding participation and engagement in the Cultural Olympiad

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# **Eyeballs, soundbites and *plings*: understanding participation and engagement in the Cultural Olympiad**

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## **Abstract**

This paper looks at measures for cultural participation and engagement, in relation to UK cultural policy and cultural programming for the London 2012 Olympics. It considers the meanings and interpretation of these terms specifically in relation to the evaluation framework for the WE PLAY programme in the North West of England, an initiative funded by Legacy Trust UK and part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

The paper reviews methodologies for understanding arts participation and engagement used within evaluation and evidence-based policy making. It argues that in spite of the dissonance between arts and sports within Olympics programmes (Inglis 2008) and claims of its deleterious impact on arts funding, particular within the regions, London 2012 has engendered creative programming which strategically deploys the Cultural Olympiad to satisfy local cultural policy objectives and which demands a sophisticated understanding of participation in order to articulate its role within these agendas.

## **Key words**

Participation, arts, Olympics, play, evaluation

**Word count** 7933

## **Introduction**

This paper looks at research methods for understanding *cultural participation* and *engagement* and their effects in the context of UK cultural policy, with particular reference to plans for the London 2012 Olympic Games and its associated cultural programming. Following a brief examination of recent research in the UK and an historical overview of cultural programming for the modern Olympics, it considers these terms and their application more specifically within the context of evaluation research for the WE PLAY regional cultural programme in the North West of England.

## **Engaging and participating in the arts**

The ‘eyeballs, soundbites and plings<sup>1</sup>’ of the title to this paper refer to alternative methods used to measure, attribute and encourage participation in arts and cultural events. In principle, it has never been

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<sup>1</sup> Plings’ is an online search engine advertising opportunities for cultural engagement for young people by collating information offered by local authorities and other partners. It stands for ‘**p**laces to go, **t**hings to do’. It has been

easier to understand arts participation, in terms of the range of data and research in the UK on how people take part in, watch, listen and are aware of arts activities. Particularly under the New Labour government, the development of research instruments, methodologies, agencies and discourses about the ‘why, where, who and what’ of arts engagement has been profligate, as the technologies of New Public Management have fallen into full swing at local and national levels and for a variety of market and policy driven motivations (Belfiore, 2004; Gray, 2007, 2009;). The Arts Council England has commissioned a range of research-led initiatives, from the national surveys of arts attendance and participation, including the Taking Part survey (led by the Department for Culture Media and Sport, encompassing a broad definition of cultural activities, including sports, heritage, museums, libraries and archives, arts attendance and participation, DCMS 2010a), the routine analyses of market research data such as the Target Group Index (TGI ) and the large-scale Public Value research exercise (Arts Council England 2008a) as well as the multitude of evaluation research projects on individual arts initiatives which attempt to assess their relationship to arts audiences and participants.

The involvement of academic researchers by policy makers has arguably broadened the methodological and epistemological armoury for understanding participation (e.g. Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). Secondary analyses of large, time series datasets, such as Taking Part, are also providing information of the factors that lead to greater propensities to take part in arts activities, as well as to provide data for geographical comparison (at a regional level). The survey allows government and non-departmental public bodies to measure the take-up of cultural and sporting opportunities by adults (16+) from “priority groups” as one of six indicators for a composite Public Service Agreement target – PSA21: “to build more cohesive empowered and active communities”, led by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Participation is defined as taking part in two or more different cultural or sport sectors at the required frequency of participation (DCMS 2010a). Its recent outputs have identified some very slight changes in adults participation as well as highlighting regional differences, however it is when the data is used with other data to examine specific research questions rather than merely track indicator change, that it demonstrates more use value – for example, the use of TGI and Taking Part data alongside industry data to look at the rise of popularity in live music in the UK (DCMS 2010b).

These datasets have been employed to provide mechanisms for mapping audiences through the development of an arts-specific market segmentation tool: Audiences Insight (Arts Council England 2008b). This tool – targeted at arts organisations as well as cultural service delivery and commissioning by local government – provides a framework of 13 audience segments which assign socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics to types of arts participants and attenders (rather than the more common applications of ACORN & MOSAIC profiling tools which making assumptions on populations’ cultural lives on the basis of socio-demographic markers). Arts Audience segments can be mapped onto geographies (for example, the proportion of people in the North West region of England assumed to belong to the ‘Dinner and a Show’ segment is 21%, slightly higher than the national average – op cit).

At regional and local authority levels, there is a range of arts audience development agencies which provide research services to help arts organisations understand and know existing markets and develop new ones. There is also a panoply of audit instruments for data gathering and providing evidence of the value of service delivery against broader indicators of change, as well as project monitoring tools, impact and outcomes assessment frameworks and other ways of assessing and capturing the outputs of cultural programmes. When combined together with socio-economic data and local area profiling they provide a reasonable assessment of demand, take-up and propensity to engage in arts activities, mapped to localities down to ‘ward’ or Local Administrative Unit level 2 (previously NUTS 5), at least in terms of art form and frequency.

The take up of digital technologies by arts organisations and consumers has led to recent research on participation in the arts through online and other digital means (Arts Council England 2009a, 2009b). The Taking Part survey has contributed to this research, with data on use of computers to create art and the internet to find out information about arts organisations and programming. Somewhat frustratingly, given the increasing use of data gleaned from social networking media to understand consumer behaviour by commercial organisations, there is a paucity of information on behaviour relating to creative content online, including how much of consumers consider the content of online and mobile digital technologies to be artistic (Arts Council England 2000b).

There have been significant developments in understanding in economic participation in the arts and cultural industries, following the rise in creative industries mapping from area-based economic impact of the arts studies (Myerscough 1988) and the New Labour take-up of Australian models onwards (e.g. DCMS 1998), although there is continuing disagreement over the best definition of the sector as mapped by Standard Industrial Classifications despite the many mapping studies undertaken. Models for understanding the economic contribution of the arts continue to be debated, not least through considerable recent investment into methodological practice by the DCMS Culture and Sport Evidence (CASE) programme (DCMS 2009).

There has been a rise in impact assessments which estimate the value and projected legacies of events programming, most commonly to demonstrate the efficacy of these events in adding value to local economies (and, less commonly, other social policy agendas) and hence the rationale in finding repeat funding. They are often based on immediate or short-term outputs from programmes, rather than looking at longer term effects, in order to meet deadlines for resource development. Economic benefits are identified through the additional expenditure of visitors attracted to locales by events and the direct and induced effects or the ripple effects of injection of this expenditure into local businesses supply chains. In order to calculate these multiplied effects, there has to be some understanding of numbers and types of events attendees, and ideally primary research on actual expenditure, motivation (and attribution to the event itself) for attendance, and assessment of supply chains.

The battery of models and methods for assessing impacts aside from those associated with economic participation reflect the broadening instrumental values ascribed to cultural events, including the proposition that engagement with events may lead to increased participation. Indeed, the success of London 2012 bid is predicated in part on the presumed effects it will have in engaging the nation in sport and physical activities, backed by evidence of the rise in sports retail at Games time in previous years – for example, the claim of 135% rise in swimming goggles sales in the UK as Britain performed well in swimming medals in the Beijing 2008 Games (Thompson 2008). It remains to be seen if participation in the Cultural Olympiad will provide similar evidence of increases in arts and cultural engagement.

### **The Olympics and cultural programming**

The study of large-scale cultural programming has proliferated in line with the propagation of festivals and events themselves, involving academic and applied research across a range of disciplines and analytical approaches to understanding its form, impact and relevance to social and economic policy; for example, economic development (Mann Weaver Drew & De Montfort University 2003) tourism (Richards 2000), cultural value (Snowball & Webb 2008), operational management (O'Brien & Garcia 2009) and impact in-the-round (Langden & Garcia 2009). Similarly, the cultural programmes of sporting mega-events such as the Olympics and Commonwealth Games has become a topic of academic study, notably in the work of Garcia (2008) and Inglis (2008) discussed below. For the purposes of this paper, key points from these comprehensive accounts include: the relationship between arts and sports and how they are articulated through the cultural programming associated with the Olympic Games, the influences

on the different models and modes of delivery; the formalisation and articulation of ‘Olympic values’ through this programming; the engagement or otherwise of the arts sector, and the instrumental value which the Cultural Olympiad has for policy-makers and others.

Inglis provides maps out key stages in the ‘generally vexed history of culture at the Olympics’ (Inglis 2008: 464) which identifies lessons for those interested in the outcomes of a pragmatic symbiosis of arts and sports in cultural events and programming. He adopts the concept of ‘structural differentiation’: the premise that social order in Western modernity is increasingly complex involving a multitude of discrete and isolated components that operate as social fields, including law, education, politics, and the arts, with the consequence of specialization in these fields, which in turn impacts on how people perceive themselves in relation to their labour and cultural practices. This differentiation is in evidence in the arts-sports nexus; Inglis traces the line from the original Olympics where little distinction was made between arts and sports to increasingly separate regulatory and operative spheres of arts and sports today. He applies this interpretation - that modern Olympics are confounded by the legacy of this divide from nineteenth century industrialization – to the case of previous Cultural Olympiad in the Sydney 2000 games, in order to derive lessons from which the London 2012 Games might learn.

The original conceit of the ancient Olympics, comprising less distinguishable practices combined in a ‘festival assembly’ which includes religious rites, sporting competition and artistic performance, proved hard to replicate in the context of a social order that involved increasing structural differentiation, as was the case for the modern Olympics movement. The primary manifestation of arts at the Olympics in the first half of this century was that of arts competitions, following an Advisory Conference in Paris in 1906 which specifically recommended that multi-form competitions such as pentathlons could provide a platform for the fine arts to find equal footing with sports. In addition, city-based programmes of arts events designed to entertain the visitors to host cities during Games time, to lever tourism economies.

This competition model was dropped by the London Games of 1948, having suffered from a series of factors which forced the antagonistic bedfellows of arts and sports further apart. One of these was the increasing structural differentiation of the arts itself, as the developing avant-garde of the 1930s and 1940s rejected the ‘bourgeois’ competition standards of the Olympics machine, which dictated the constraints of content through its selection of themes and choice of judges, leading members of the arts world to reject participation in these Olympic arts as beneath their dignity. A further factor was the incompatibility of values attached to arts and sports in relation to amateurism and professionalism, which was manifest in the entry of professional artists into the arts competitions, contravening the amateur intrinsic values held in ‘Olympism’, the doctrine of the Olympics movement prescribed in the writings of its modern founding father, Pierre de Coubertin (IOC 2000).

Paradoxically, the ‘Nazi Olympics’ of 1936 set the model for the Cultural Olympiad in the latter half of the twentieth century, and remained the dominant format for cultural programming in all later Games - of propaganda, mass participation, spectacle and scale of ‘state elite manipulation’. Large-scale programming of this type became enshrined in IOC guidelines in the 1950s which stated that it should be in the vicinity and at the same time as the Games, and should make the most of publicity opportunities. This accompanied a shift from attention on ‘the arts’ to an articulation of culture, as ultimately

more tractable to political manipulation than those afforded by the more inflexible term ‘arts’ ... [as an element of the] state’s cultural patrimony, to use them for propagandistic ends or to commercialise them as part of the state’s tourist industries (Inglis 2008: 468).

Another epoch of cultural programming at the Olympics follows the Barcelona games in 1992, which initiated the mode of four-year Cultural Olympiad programmes culminating in large-scale festivities in the Olympics year, including but not exclusively at Games time, and increasingly with an ‘outreach’ arts

audience development agenda as well as the continuation of spectacle of mediated national identity to a global audience (Garcia, 2008; Inglis 2008). These two latter aims were not without their inherent and profound tensions when considered as dualities: research on the Sydney Olympics identifies compelling evidence of the prioritisation of media-friendly spectacle of the opening ceremonies, in funding, publicity and media attention over the platform for cultural production, celebration of the arts and engagement with local audiences and producers in the run-up programme and accompanying Arts Festival (Garcia 2001, 2009).

The commercial and symbolic importance of mass media representation of Olympics activities and the ease with which cultural strategies can be transmitted and translated through the media cannot be underestimated. The media value, and mediated values, of these activities are intimately intertwined in their capacity to communicate meaning to the international stage and shape public opinion and perceptions on the proficiency and identity of host places, their cultural policies and values. The interests of not only media companies, sponsors and other commercial interests but also policy makers, cultural producers, artists (and presumably audiences, spectators and participants) are both quantified and qualified in relation to their role in the host city's 'socio-cultural briefing', as seen through the frame of media coverage:

The host cultural policy-makers will tend to define their local culture on the basis of media production mechanisms. As such the focus will be on those identity signs more suitable for audio-visual expression...Typically, the issues deemed to be more representative or appropriate to showcase the host culture will be selected and those considered to be negative or misleading will be rejected. The selection process will also be conditioned by what can better suit the media production process (Garcia 2008:362-3).

Clearly this has implications for the format and content of cultural programmes. The types of arts programming permissible are dependent on their perceived proximity to the core mission of the Olympics, in spatial terms, in terms of being *present* and perceptibly at the heart of the action (and the media coverage), particularly during Games time, or in how they *place* participants within this action; in aesthetic terms, particularly in relation to how well they work audio-visually, on screens, as photographic material and through other forms of media coverage, and in semiotic terms in relation to how they can best convey the dominant meanings of the Olympics, particularly in relation to national identity and place marketing for tourism objectives.

In the rest of this paper I look at the empirical case study of the WE PLAY programme to consider how regional cultural programming fares against these criteria – away from the centre, outside of the 'heart of Games action' – and how it can be measured in terms of its *strategic* value to broader policy objectives such as economic development, social inclusion, audience development, image and place-making, principally through providing the means for participation and engagement.

### **London 2012: playing for Legacy**

The winning of competition to host the 2012 Olympics was announced by Jacques Rogge, the President of the International Olympics Committee, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2005 at 12.48 British Standard Time and relayed all world-wide by live link from the Raffles Hotel complex in Singapore. The announcement was met by the waiting televised audiences with scenes of great jubilation in Trafalgar Square and other public sites, although this was sadly overshadowed by the devastation caused in the capital and elsewhere by the terrorist attacks on the London transport system within less than 24 hours.

The successful bid, beating Moscow, New York, Madrid, and in the final announcement, Paris, was perceived to have particular strengths in its articulation of links to the Olympics movement and legacy value to London and to the nation, particularly for tourism, regeneration and for increased participation

and social inclusion in sport and physical activities (Oliver 2005). For many in the UK arts sector, the announcement of the successful bid was received with caution and concern for potential negative impact on the arts as a drain on other lottery-funded causes, in particular the voluntary sector (Coaffee 2008). Remembering other maligned *grand projets* such as the Millennium Dome, heralded with similar triumphalist claims of social inclusion, celebration of the country's cultural achievements and regeneration of the same area in London (McGuigan and Gilmore 2000), commentators voiced concern that the Olympics could only lead to the ring-fenced prioritisation of resources over other activities, such as the arts, to the centre and away from the regions, particularly in the face of (expected) incremental hikes in public funding of the Olympics infrastructure. This anxiety has continued, alongside other familiar complaints concerning the management and leadership of the Olympics decision-making bodies, the rising costs of the Games and the attack they impose on grassroots sports and culture (Culf 2006; Tusa 2007; Hansard 2007). It is only slightly mitigated by the role of a successful Olympics can showcase the UK arts scene to the world, and that, at least on a temporary basis, there may be an improved arts economy from employment and services to the cultural programme during Games time.

So what of the plans for London 2012? The above account suggests there are three main modes of cultural programming: the opening ceremonies, other activities happening at Games time, and a four-year programme called the Cultural Olympiad. London 2012's cultural programming follows these relatively closely. The opening and closing ceremonies aim to include spectacular cultural content, the specifics of which are closely guarded by the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG), although there has been speculation about a 'Modern Britain' theme (Magnay 2010). The Games-time cultural programme is *The Festival in 2012*, which runs from Midsummer Day until the last day of the Games period, focusing on London but to include content and projects from the regions. The programme is led by a prestige team of arts managers and Board, chosen for their leadership skills and previous experience of heading up cultural festivals and major cultural institutions, including Manchester International Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, the English National Ballet, and the Sydney Olympics (Brown 2010).

The Cultural Olympiad four-year programme consists of a range of large-scale national schemes including nine themes, from disability arts programming - *Unlimited* - to youth-targeted positive activities campaign *Somewhere to*, a World Shakespeare Festival and a public art scheme called *Artist Taking the Lead*, funding a major commission in each English region, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (which comprise the Nations and Regions Group, formed to support strategic communications from regions to the centre). These are funded by a mix of agencies, primarily through lottery funding and including the Legacy Trust UK, a body formed specifically to administer a "lasting legacy" from the London 2012 Games-related activities, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the DCMS and Arts Council England (reputedly began with leftover funding from the Millennium Commission). The Legacy Trust also funds region-led programmes – one per Nations and Regions Group member – and it is through this funding that the majority of Cultural Olympiad activities taking place outside of London are derived.

### **The North West Legacy Trust cultural programme**

This programme was developed after an intensive period of local consultation over themes, priorities and funding with cultural partners by the Creative Programmer for the region, formalised in a business plan. It has the cross-cutting theme of *play* - "a creative, physical and social activity and form of enjoyment, experimentation and exploration for people of all ages and backgrounds" (Culture Northwest 2008:1). It aims to engage with and bring benefits to the public and professionals across and beyond the region, and identifies a number of 'target groups' which it hopes to serve, including: young people (defined here as 14-25 year olds); cultural audiences and consumers; residents of the region; visitors to the region; the Disability community; the business sector, and sector-specific international communities. It also has some targets for 'engagement outputs' (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Types of engagement and participation targets**

Type of engagement	Numbers of Participants			
	2009	2010	2011	2012
Audiences: Live events & programming*	143,000	184,000	230,000	335,000
Outreach and online participants **	80,000	100,000	110,000	110,000
Artists, creative and community participants	6,080	6,500	7,240	8,240
Public realm & online engagement	430,000	680,000	940,000	1,200,000
Total ***	229,080	200,500	347,240	1,635,240
Overall total engagement outputs	659,080	880,500	1,287,240	2,853,240

\* Does not include any figures for WE PLAY Expo

\*\* Figures include participants in conferences, online forums, interactive projects etc

\*\*\* Does not include figures from public realm, web awareness, marketing outputs

*Source: WE PLAY Business Plan for Legacy Trust (2009-2010)*

The programme's objectives are:

- A sustainable step-change in the region's creative and cultural sectors that resonates beyond 2012
- Quality, grass root participation and creativity particularly involving young people
- New creators and volunteers involved in the region's creative and cultural sectors
- Three annual programmes going forward post 2012
- A new strategic region-wide delivery partnership - the Legacy Producers' Group (Culture Northwest 2008:4)

It comprises three annual programme strands and a one-off Games-time programme:

*Abandon Normal Devices (AND)*: a new digital media and film festival which is delivered in multiple sites over the year by a partnership of three existing arts organisations – Cornerhouse, the Manchester-based arts centre, FACT in Liverpool and Folly, a digital arts agency based in Lancaster – all of whom specialise in screen-based visual arts plus the exploitation of digital technologies in creative production and mediation.

The thematic focus for AND is 'Body and Economy'. This is intended to invoke consideration through artistic practice of philosophical, aesthetic and bio-medical aspects of the 'body', with reference to the Olympics movement, sport, athleticism, disability and modification, as well as the challenge to embodiment presented by digital technologies. AND is linked to the Legacy Trust theme of 'Knowledge and Society', and includes on- and off-line forums for debate and learning, emphasising art's intersection with research and development.

*Lakes Alive* Delivered by Kendal Arts International in partnership with Manchester International Arts, this is an outdoor arts programme, which "aims to establish Cumbria as the national 'centre' of excellence for outdoor arts, as well as making a key contribution in the region to social legacy through the Cultural Olympiad" (CRESC 2009). It draws on established practice in outdoor arts (sometimes called 'street arts'



or ‘street theatre’) in the North West region, such as the 1990s Streets Ahead events in the Greater Manchester area and street performance activists, Welfare State International, who settled in Ulverston, Cumbria in the 1980s (Fox 2002).

These cultural producers helped to define the art form in terms of its ability to invoke and animate localities through engaging places and communities in creative activity, and through placing spectacular displays of theatre, dance, acrobatics, comedy, parade and promenade, costumes, fire and other forms of lighting, into town centres and rural places. They pride themselves on the celebratory capacity of the art form, as well as its potential to surprise, impress and entertain through scale and extraordinariness.

Lakes Alive offers a good strategic fit with the themes of ‘Arts and Culture’ and ‘Play and Space’ which frame the Legacy Trust and Programme objectives respectively. It also chimes with local stakeholders and funders, who can identify the potential benefits to rural tourism, community engagement and economic development in Cumbria, particularly in the relatively deprived towns of Whitehaven, Barrow-in-Furness and Carlisle to the west and north of the sub-region, which are off the Lake District tourist trail. Evaluation of the first year programme ‘Reach for the Sky’ suggests 75,000 people attended the various events, an estimated 44% from outside the local area, bringing an additional £2.4 million into the local economy (CRESC 2009: 21). Moreover, the evaluation survey findings suggested that attenders included greater numbers than might have been expected from lower socio-economic groups, including those who don’t ordinarily patronise the arts, suggesting “outdoor arts has purchase in areas where the traditional arts have struggled to make inroads” (CRESC 2009: 23).

The primary mode of engagement with Lakes Alive is attendance of outdoor, free events. There is also an artist development programme, including a summer school for street arts performance and production, aiming to raise standards and capacity in domestically produced outdoor arts.

*Blaze* Managed by Lancashire County Council, this programme aims to encourage the participation of young people in the creative production of new work which explores cultural and sporting themes, and in turn engage them in active lifestyles and place shaping. It aims to develop models of good practice in youth-led cultural activity, and involve the young participants in documenting and shaping the process as far as possible. Thematically this strand falls under ‘Sport and Wellbeing’ (for the Legacy Trust) and ‘Routes and Trails’ (WE PLAY).

The strand will deliver a series of events programmes as well as an online platform for social networking, learning resources and project management, although it considers the model and the impact on young people as cultural producers to be the primary outputs from the initiative rather than the events or their audiences per se.

*Blaze*’s mode of engagement is the use of arts participation as social inclusion and positive activities for young people, instrumental arts policy deployed at a local level which emphasises the role of arts and sports participation in addressing anti-social behaviour, crime, community cohesion, health and wellbeing. Participants for *Blaze* have been ‘recruited’ through youth groups and third sector organisations. The programme aims to develop skills and support routes into training, employment and education for young people, accordingly evaluation of the programme will focus attributes of the programme which build participants’ competencies in organisation, leadership and production.

The government pilot to promote positive activities to young people, ‘Plings’, is based on research which suggests a key barrier to participation is lack of promotion in ways relevant to young people (DCSF nd). Using the (online) places and spaces already inhabited socially by young people, the initiative aims to increase participation, and methods it has developed may also be employed by *Blaze* & other youth-led activities in the WE PLAY programme.

*Expo 2012* The programme also includes plans for a showcase event which begins as the Games end in 2012 and forms part of the forthcoming Preston Guild celebration activities, which commemorates the historic granting of ‘Guild Merchant’ status to the city 800 years ago, decreed as a city-wide event to be held every 20 years. These festivities have been allied to the opportunity to stage an Olympics event, and have secured the services of the Creative Director of the Culture10 programme in the North East England as the Preston Guild festival director.

**Table 2: Main types of participation opportunities**

<b>AND</b>	<b>Lakes Alive</b>	<b>Blaze</b>	<b>WE PLAY 2012</b>
Screenings Exhibitions Conferences & Salons Commissioning and production processes Public realm installations (including temporary installations and ‘live art’) Online (including artists’ projects and user-generated content, discussion and debate forums) Research and development	Outdoor participatory events (e.g. processions) Outdoor performance (spectator events) Indoor events (ticketed) Residential summer school Commissioning and production processes Research and development	Outdoor street theatre performance (promenade) Outdoor events (fixed) Public realm installations Research and development Commissioning and production processes Ongoing project participation	Screenings Exhibitions Conferences & Salons Commissioning and production processes Outdoor participatory events (e.g. processions) Outdoor performance (spectator events) Indoor events (ticketed) Public realm installations (including temporary installations and ‘live art’) Online (including artists’ projects and user-generated content, discussion and debate forums) Research and development

Source: *WE PLAY programme documentation*

### **Evaluating participation in WE PLAY<sup>2</sup>**

To demonstrate that these programme strands meet their objectives – and in line with the culture of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment prevalent publicly-funded arts sector, particularly in relation to delivery with local authorities (Gray 2009) – the original business plan proposed a research framework to support the formative and summative evaluation of the programme<sup>3</sup>. This identifies a range of quantitative and qualitative measures to indicate the progress of the programme and its various strands against agreed objectives, and appropriate research methods and instruments for data collection, case

<sup>2</sup> This section draws substantively from the WE PLAY Evaluation Framework and Research Strategy report (Gilmore and Miles 2010). The author thanks the commissioners of this work – Catherine Armstrong, Arts Council England, and colleagues in the project team – Andrew Miles, Ruth Melville, and Lucy Daly - for permissions to use this material.

<sup>3</sup> A consultancy brief, to develop this framework and a strategy to implement it, was commissioned by the Programme Team at Arts Council to a partnership of two teams of academic researchers from the University of Manchester and University of Liverpool drawing on their experience in relevant academic and applied research projects, including Impacts 08 longitudinal research programme for Liverpool European Capital of Culture (see Impacts08: 2010) and the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRESC) Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion research (see Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo-Cal, & Wright 2009).

studies and statistics, which will also be used in advocacy and promotion of the achievements of the programme to funders, stakeholders and to the general public. Four categories form the basis for the framework to act as a heuristic focus for the outcomes the programme hopes to achieve. These are in turn: *product*, *profile*, *partnership* and *participation*, and it is the latter which this paper focuses on, not least as it can be argued that most other impacts are contingent on participation taking place.

Participation and engagement with the WE PLAY programme can be ‘indicated’ in a range of ways, to demonstrate the substantive numbers and types of audiences and participants, where they came from, how they took part, whether they do so regularly and how they feel about their experience. The aims and approaches of the programme strands and the content they are delivering vary considerably, however, including: digital and virtual participation (e.g. through blogs, internet forums, interaction with online content), coincidental and unplanned participation (e.g. watching outdoor arts whilst out shopping in Barrow, or interacting with a public realm installation in Liverpool), involvement in commissioning and producing (e.g. as a youth participant in Blaze) through to more formal and traditional types of participation such as film and theatre-going (see Table 2).

Numerous types of data collection are proposed: event type-based ‘postcard’ surveys; a longitudinal panel survey; a cross-programme sample survey in 2012; and strand-specific activities that focus on types of participation that are particular to each strand. The first three methods are concerned with providing information which can be comparable across the events, whilst the fourth is specific to each programme strand, and managed internally by their teams (usually as part of marketing activities).

The strand-specific evaluations take a number of forms. For example, Abandon Normal Devices is currently developing new digital technologies to monitor what other arts and culture sites its own web traffic goes on to visit. Lakes Alive has used filmed vox pops which to evoke the immediate experience of its audiences through illustrative ‘soundbites’, in addition to questionnaire surveys and focus groups in particular locations, with volunteers and participants. Blaze plans to engage young participants in their programme in documentation and self-evaluation, using online communications platforms, such as ‘plings’ and ‘nings’.

### **Key issues arising from developing the evaluation framework**

The following section discusses the evaluation framework in relation to wider considerations for cultural programming in the context of London 2012 and the policy context in the UK.

#### *Capturing Modes of Engagement*

The diversity of ‘participation opportunities’ poses particular methodological questions in terms of different modes which audiences and participants may engage. The predominance of screens, for films and online/digital work, in the AND festivals frame participation as viewing 2D images, prompting consideration of how this type of engagement can best be quantified as well as qualified. One method commonly used in advertising is the counting of ‘eyeballs’ which have had access (if not actual sight of) these screens: the first festival reported 635,000 ‘eyeballs’ over the period of the festival in Liverpool in 2009, as pedestrians and car passengers passed the big screens (Live Sites) in Liverpool City Centre that host short films promoting AND.

Website ‘hits’ and ‘click-throughs’ are ways of capturing data on numbers of interactions with online content, including blogs and forums; however these, like ‘eyeballs’, translate into large figures to the satisfaction of funders and promulgators of ‘mass participation’ (adding an additional million to the target outputs for WE PLAY, see Table 1) but with the potential to misrepresent actual engagement and produce misleading assumptions about resulting impacts. There are rapidly developing opportunities for sophisticated data capture and analysis techniques, such as use of Google Analytics, and Twitter trending

and search data, but these are playing catch-up with the even more rapid advances and take up of social media platforms and are underrepresented in current arts and cultural research and evaluation approaches.

A further mode of participation is debate and learning, particularly in AND which promotes its salons which bring together philosophers, scientists, artists and technologists to engage the public “in dialogues around new norms in relation to sport, new media and alternative economies for culture, science, the body and the state” (Lander & Crow 2010: 40). Evaluating the content and impact of these kinds of participation poses considerable challenge to evaluators, outside of accounting for those who have attended.

Furthermore the sheer number of events and activities in the public realm prove difficult for evaluation research, not least in terms of estimating attendance, but also in terms of the boundaries of events and the intentionality of participation, as discussed below.

### *Assessing motivation*

With many of the events associated with 2012, not least the Legacy Trust funded events of Cultural Olympiad, the emphasis is on outdoor, accessible events which promote involvement from all members of the community. Outdoor non-ticketed arts events, such as the majority of events in the Lakes Alive programme, provide the opportunity for accidental or incidental participation:

For example, the buy-in associated with ticketed events indicates a premeditated motivation that is absent in the incidental engagement suggested by ‘coming across’ a public realm installation. However, other types of participation opportunities across the We Play programme, such as a street performance for example, will combine both dedicated and passing participants. From this, it follows that the principal variable for an indicated typology of participation should be ‘intention’. Is engagement deliberate or incidental? (Gilmore & Miles 2010:16)

If the aim of the evaluation is to show whether modes of engagement increase participation of a more frequent, intense or interactive form, or introduce audiences to other art forms, it requires data revealing intentionality of participants, what their expectations were, how these shaped their experience and the potential of this experience to provide a positive impact. Interestingly, qualitative evaluation research already conducted for the Lakes Alive programme suggests that the ‘surprise’ element of happening across an arts experience in, say, a market town centre in the Lake District, may deepen impact particularly in terms of sense of place, through overturning expectations about what usually happens in these places.

Connected to this was the sense that Kendal was leaving its previous image behind. Many people felt that Mintfest had put Kendal ‘on the map’ in a very different way: ‘Shows it’s more than a market town’...‘There’s more to it than Mintcake’ (CRESC 2009:19).

### *Quality and time*

The quality of the participant experience is particularly difficult to measure. One proposed method is to consider proxy measures through the ‘time’ indicators:

We can then distil some measure of the quality of participation by using ‘time spent’ at the event/on the practice as a proxy for intensity of engagement. In this way, we can also generate measure of impact in terms of developing engagement, for example if an incidental attendee at an outdoor spectacle subsequently stays for an extended part or the whole of the event, or if a participant in a blog is a regular contributor or is engaged in

this practice because of their attendance at a prior programme event (Gilmore & Miles 2010:16).

This echoes Pinnock (2009), who argues for the development of time indicators as a measure for impact assessment as a metric for cultural value. Through his consideration of the provenance of mainstream economics and its adoption into the paradigm of cultural economics, Pinnock establishes that the prevalent monetary metric, or proxy, negates the opportunity for proper consideration of the conversational development of taste, a key factor in the derivation of value in the arts.

Cultural consumption is not an instantaneous act. It has temporal consequences and temporal prerequisites – the prior development of cultural tastes (Pinnock 2009: 53).

Consideration of time as a resource invested by participants implies different measures for participation, including repeat visits, frequency, duration, and longitudinal study of subjective experience of engagement, which can take into account cumulative acquisition of knowledge and formation of taste.

A further challenge for participation research is the perceived quality of the arts experience being delivered. Formative evaluation of ‘quality’ is incredibly important to programmers, not least as one objective is to develop sustainable activity rather than a one-off celebration in 2012. The formal system for assessment of quality at project level by the cultural team at LOCOG is granting of an ‘Inspired By’ marks (the branded symbol of acceptance onto the official Olympics platform, allowing access to online marketing and the 2012 logo).

With respect to public perceptions on quality, will be addressed through qualitative responses and satisfaction ratings in questionnaire surveys, however for artists and programmers, the judgement of quality of artistic content most likely to be understood through responses by arts critics, and requires analysis of media commentary. Research-intensive forms of discourse and textual analysis are recommended, particularly in relation to online media, as content analyses usually adopted in media valuation techniques provide only a form of accounting (e.g. references to events, column space allocated). The potential for using media narratives as proxy measures for cultural impacts of large-scale events has been demonstrated through research on Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 (Garcia 2006; Miah & Adi 2009; Impacts08 2010). There is considerable scope for further rigorous research which examines how programming of this type and scale is received critically and how, if at all, it contributes to art form development.

#### *Olympism and legacy*

Finally, there is the issue of context to the WE PLAY programme as part of the Cultural Olympiad programme, its relationship of the value-systems of the Olympics, and the awareness and reception of participants of this context. The careful construction of a programme articulated around the theme of *play*, allowing metaphor and allusion to sport, competition, experimentation and innovation, explicitly drawing on values articulated in the Olympics movement which were deliberately researched and woven into the structure of the programme, aims to achieve a desirable merger. The values assigned in London 2012’s interpretation of ‘Olympism’ can be easily collapsed into those of the current cultural policy context (social inclusion, increasing and broadening engagement, leadership in the arts, mass participation, place marketing and so on) and these objectives are both predictable and inclusive of local interests, including those of funders and, hopefully, participants themselves. In turn, the evaluation framework responds by providing means (measures and data) to assess whether these outcomes, and hence ‘legacy’ are achieved. Arts managers are now adept at responding with almost Pavlovian tendencies to policy (i.e. funding-driven) contexts, and have developed incredible capacity to translate potential structural constraints – including those railed against by the avant-garde of the 1930s who opted out of Olympism - into opportunities for new work. Whether the artists involved, the audience or participants understand or

realise that this has been ‘in the name’ of the Olympics is in many ways inconsequential, so long as the legacy looks likely.

### **Conclusion**

It is difficult to predict how much of the WE PLAY programme will be recognised as part of the cultural programming for London 2012 by those ‘at the heart of the action’. Whether or not any of its content makes the ‘big screen’ of the Olympics media machine, the primary stakeholder audience for evaluation – Legacy Trust, the Cultural team at LOCOG, the DCMS and Arts Council England – are unlikely to request or remark on any more complex information than a summary of quantifiable outputs, including estimates of audiences and participant figures and evidence of successful management of programmes in terms of budgets and funding leverage. It is at the locally where real impacts will be felt, and hence where the evaluation research on participation is required. The methods, measures and issues discussed here are driven by the interests of local stakeholders who want to show how the opportunities provided by London 2012 monies can be strategically deployed to make new programmes of work, involving new partnerships and modes of delivery, to engage audiences and participants in more productive and collaborative ways. As such, the intentions behind an Olympics programme themed around ‘play’, and its evaluation research, are concertedly serious.

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