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### Counting eyeballs, soundbites and 'plings': arts participation, strategic instrumentalism and the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad

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## Counting eyeballs, soundbites and ‘plings’: arts participation, strategic instrumentalism and the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad

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This article examines cultural participation, its metrics and ‘drivers’ as they are defined through cultural programming for the London 2012 Olympics. The meanings and interpretation of these terms are considered by examining the development of an 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. It argues that in spite of the dissonance between arts and sports within Olympics programmes and claims of the 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 as well as meeting broader interests in ‘legacy’ from the Games. Such ambitions require the development of appropriate methodologies for understanding arts participation and engagement for the purpose of evaluation and evidence-based policy making, a particular challenge for such a complex range of activities, sites and settings for arts participation.

**Keywords:** arts participation; Olympics; strategic instrumentalism

### Introduction

This article looks at the development of an evaluation framework for Legacy Trust We Play programme in the North West of England, which comprises a four-year series of events, commissions and projects which is part of the London 2012 Olympics cultural programming. It considers these activities in relation to *arts participation* and *engagement* and their presumed effects and considers how arts programmers construct typologies of participation when developing their programmes which support their strategic interests, and help them to access resources and create opportunities to commission new work. It also discusses the issues and complexities in demonstrating whether these audiences and participation rates and types have been achieved and how participation has achieved desirable effects, through monitoring and evaluation research.

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 programmes. In principle, it has never been easier to understand arts

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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). Arts Council England 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 2010), 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.

These exercises have primarily been driven by the concerns of state cultural policy which has sustained an interest in social inclusion and widening participation and a focus on the instrumental benefits of participation – for example, to communities, neighbourhoods, individual health and to the economy – during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The development of national Public Service Agreements under New Labour for reducing social exclusion and measured by indicators aiming to capture increases in participation rates in targeted populations has been mirrored at local and regional levels in the UK, although there have only recently been the data collection mechanisms with which to confidently articulate actual or potential participation rates at a local level (DCMS 2010, Arts Council England 2008b). Measures have also been developed for demonstrating the economic value of the arts as a public good, not least the considerable recent investment into methodological practice by the DCMS Culture and Sport Evidence (CASE) programme, which included a systematic review of literature on the drivers and value of engagement in culture and sport and which considered methodologies for articulating the policy value of cultural participation on subjective well-being in economic terms (DCMS 2009). More recently, arts funders and agencies are paying increasing attention to the impact of technological development on arts participation, particularly through digital and online media and this has been reflected in research exercises on participation profiles and behaviour in digital and virtual environments, as well as the response of artists and arts organisations to these new opportunities for marketing, audience development, art form innovation and business development (Arts Council England 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, National Endowment for the Arts 2010).

As festivals and events have become increasingly popular formats for delivering artistic and cultural programmes, so have studies which attempt to measure their participation, value and impact particularly in relation to local economies (and, less commonly, other social policy agendas) to make visible the rationale for repeat funding. In order to meet advocacy deadlines for resource development, assessments of value tend to focus on immediate or short-term outputs from programmes, rather than looking at longer term effects. In these cases, economic benefits are usually understood as the additional expenditure of visitors, attracted to locales by events, and the direct and induced effects or ‘ripple’ effects of expenditure into local busi-

nesses supply chains; although cultural economics methods such as contingent valuation and Willingness-To-Pay are sometimes used to explore the economic value of cultural goods, these techniques remain less common for festivals and their economic impact assessment (Snowball 2008).

Events are also assumed to produce longer term benefits to their participants and their localities, and a new category of 'legacy' research which hopes to predict future impacts and behaviour has found currency as the label for this canon. 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 was predicated on the presumed effects the Games 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 a 135% rise in swimming goggles sales in the UK because 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; indeed, it will only 'be seen' if longitudinal research tracking robust measures of participation is undertaken post-event.

### **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 and De Montfort University 2003) tourism (Richards 2000), cultural value (Snowball and Webb 2008), operational management (O'Brien and García 2008) and impact in-the-round (Langden and Garcia 2009). Similarly, the cultural programmes of sporting mega-events such as the Olympics and Commonwealth Games have become a topic of academic study, notably in the work of Garcia (2008) and Inglis (2008). Their accounts are discussed below, in relation to 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' (2008, p. 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 specialisation 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 industrialisation – 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, p. 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, 2008).

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, pp. 362–363)

Clearly, this has implications for the format and content of cultural programmes and the co-option of local cultural practices into the meta-frameworks of the Olympic Games. 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 and construct a globalised consensus of *meanings* of the Olympics, particularly in relation to acceptable versions of national identity and icon images of place for tourism marketing objectives.

The case study examined here – the Legacy Trust We Play programme in the North West of England and its evaluation – can be considered an attempt to demonstrate 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, and appropriate 'content' for the Olympics, principally through providing the means for participation and engagement. The programme was carefully constructed to provide activities which reached across the spectrum of instrumental benefits, and accordingly its evaluation was commissioned as a mechanism to demonstrate whether these results are being produced and whether claims for future legacy can be assured.

### ***London 2012: playing for legacy***

The winning of the competition to host the 2012 Olympics was announced by Jacques Rogge, the President of the International Olympics Committee, on 6th July 2005 at 12.48 British Standard Time and relayed worldwide 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, Holmes 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 2012s 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 the *Unlimited* disability arts pro-

gramme to youth-targeted positive activities campaign *Somewhere to*, a World Shakespeare Festival and a public art scheme called *Artist Taking the Lead*, which is producing a major commission in each English region, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (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 funding was made available for proposals, to be put together by Nations and Regions' Creative Programmers, whose posts were established and placed in regional bodies (such as the Regional Cultural Consortiums) in 2007 after the success of the London bid. Their job has been to stimulate interest and activities which could sit under the Olympics brand to take place in the regions in the run-up to 2012, producing a *national* programme of cultural activity the first attempted by an Olympic Games. Activities are included in the programme by complicated branding system which awards voluntary and community programmes and projects 'Inspired By' marks and officially endorses activity as part of the Cultural Olympiad. Endorsed projects receive marketing through the Olympics mechanisms at a national level. The Legacy Trust monies therefore presented not only additional funding for the arts, but also a chance to lead these programmes into the Olympics.

### **Creating a cultural programme for legacy in the North West**

The We Play programme was developed after an intensive period of local consultation over themes, priorities and funding with cultural partners led by the North West Creative Programmer, which was formalised into 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, p. 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); existing cultural audiences and consumers; residents of the region; visitors to the region; the disability community; the business sector, and sector-specific international communities.

The programme's objectives were identified in the business plan as:

A sustainable step-change in the region's creative and cultural sectors that resonates beyond 2012.

Quality, grass-roots 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, p. 4)



Table 1. Types of engagement and participation targets of We Play programme.

Type of engagement	Numbers of participants			
	2009	2010	2011	2012
Audiences: live events and 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 and 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

Source: We Play Business Plan for Legacy Trust 2009–2010.

\*Does not include any figures for Expo 2012.

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

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

The business plan also established categories of engagement and participation which it presumed the programme would serve and included targets for ‘engagement outputs’ (see Table 1). Delivery of these targets would be through three annual programme strands and a one-off Games-time programme, called Expo 2012. These were developed to fit the various themes which emerged through consultation as articulations of Olympic values, and included ‘Body and Economy’, ‘Play and Space’ and ‘Routes and Trails’. They were also curated to provide a range of arts activities and a spread of geographical locations in the region.

The *Abandon Normal Devices* (AND) festival is a digital media and film festival delivered in multiple sites over the year by a new partnership of three existing arts organisations – Cornerhouse, the Manchester-based arts centre; the Foundation for Arts and Creative Technologies (FACT) in Liverpool; and Folly, a digital arts agency based in Lancaster – who specialise in screen-based visual arts plus the exploitation of digital technologies in creative production and mediation. This programme was created to ‘push the boundaries in moving images and digital culture [and] initiate film making by amateurs and professionals’ (Culture Northwest 2008, p. 2). The festival’s thematic focus of ‘Body and Economy’ was 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.

The *Lakes Alive* outdoor arts programme in Cumbria draws on established practice in the art form (sometimes called ‘street arts’ or ‘street theatre’) in the North West region, which included 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.

The programme objectives are articulated locally not just in terms entertainment but also as an offer to stakeholders and funders, in the form of 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, p. 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 do not ordinarily patronise the arts, suggesting 'outdoor arts has purchase in areas where the traditional arts have struggled to make inroads' (CRESC 2009, p. 23).

*Blaze* is the only programme strand to be managed by a local authority and 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. *Blaze's* mode of engagement is the use of participatory arts as force for social inclusion and the production of positive activities for young people; an unashamedly instrumental arts policy deployed at a local level which emphasises the role of participation in addressing anti-social behaviour, crime, community cohesion, health and well-being. Young people as cultural producers are the primary outputs from the initiative rather than the events or their audiences per se and participants 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 focuses on the attributes of the programme which build participants' competencies in organisation, leadership and production.

Abandon Normal Devices, Lakes Alive and *Blaze* are primarily reliant on public funding rather than ticketed income, and have complicated funding bases and stakeholder relationships. These include local authority interests in the strategic commissioning of culture for social impacts, national bodies such as Arts Council England and the Legacy Trust who are concerned with programme efficiencies, art form development, and the Olympic authorities such as LOCOG, who have an interest in the potential of the programme strands to supply content for a national Cultural Olympiad programme.

### Evaluating We Play

To demonstrate that these programme strands meet their objectives, the original business plan proposed a research framework to support the formative and summative evaluation of the programme.<sup>2</sup> This was to identify a suitable 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 studies and statistics, which would also have a functional role 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 programme's objectives: *product*, *profile*, *partnership* and *participation*. It is the latter that provides the focus for discussion here, not least as it can be argued that

most other impacts are contingent on participation taking place. Participation and engagement 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).

This spectrum of opportunities to take part in and engage with the programme suggest a similarly wide range of data collection and research methods through which to observe, capture and assess participation patterns and profiles. The evaluation framework for the programme is however fairly standard to existing market research and evaluation models and includes event-based 'postcard' and questionnaire surveys, a longitudinal panel and an audit of data collected by the delivery organisations. There is little resource available for extensive qualitative research, although there is innovative practice within the research design, including a longitudinal panel respondents, providing a series of qualitative interviews of local stakeholders which include 'non-participants' of the programme and other cultural activities. The different programme strands have also developed alternative approaches – for example, the Abandon Normal Devices festival developed a social media platform to monitor what other arts and culture sites its own web traffic goes on to visit. The Lakes Alive strand uses filmed vox pops to evoke the immediate experience of its audiences through illustrative 'soundbites', and Blaze plans to engage young participants in their programme in documentation and self-evaluation, using online communications platforms, such as 'plings' and 'nings'.

Overall, however, the market research-style survey dominates, in part due to resource constraints but moreover due to familiarity with the method and the kinds of data and analysis it can produce, on both the part of the arts organisations and the primary stakeholder audiences for evaluation. Triangulation of online and offline survey and box office data, combined with contextual data on existing audience and place profiles through segmentation classifications such as ACORN and Arts Audience Insight (2008b), is proving to be relatively successful in providing communicable outputs for benchmarking the cultural programme. For example, the programme data so far demonstrates increasing participation – 60% increase in those 'experiencing' the programme (i.e. being an audience member) and 57% in creative participation from the first year to the second – with 300,000 people engaging with the programme overall. Nine hundred thousand people have been 'exposed' to the programme strand activities, either online, via Big Screens or other public spaces outside the confines of the events themselves. Further analysis, using segmentation and local area profiling, suggests the programme is reaching 'traditionally hard-to-reach' audiences, such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, young people and lower socio-economic groups at levels which are proportionate to the North West population (Corkery 2011).

Table 2. Main types of participation opportunities.

AND	Lakes Alive	Blaze	We Play 2012
Screenings	Outdoor participatory events	Outdoor street theatre performance (promenade)	Screenings
Exhibitions	(e.g. processions)	Outdoor events (fixed)	Exhibitions
Conferences and salons	Outdoor performance (spectator events)	Public realm installations	Conferences and salons
Commissioning and production processes	Indoor events (ticketed)	Research and development	Commissioning and production processes
Public realm installations (including temporary installations and 'live art')	Residential summer school	Commissioning and production processes	Outdoor participatory events (e.g. processions)
Online (including artists' projects and user-generated content, discussion and debate forums)	Commissioning and production processes	Ongoing project participation	Indoor events (ticketed)
Research and development	Research and development		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.

### *Capturing modes of engagement*

The market research models work well to demonstrate broad strategic objectives and provide some statistics on how audiences are engaging with the programme; the diversity of 'participation opportunities' however poses methodological questions in terms of different modes which audiences and participants may engage. For example, the predominance of screens, for films and online/digital work in the AND festival frame participation in this festival as encounters between spectators and 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, calculated by the numbers of pedestrians and car passengers estimated to have passed the big screens (live sites) in Liverpool City Centre whilst broadcasting short films which were commissioned by AND. Similarly, website 'hits' and 'click-throughs' capture data on numbers of interactions with online content, including blogs and forums; these, like 'eyeballs', translate into large figures (adding an additional million to the target outputs for the programme overall, see Table 1) which may be to the satisfaction of funders and promulgators of 'mass participation', but which prevents a more nuanced understanding of how casual exposure in the public realm and online participation with arts programme content may (or may not) interrelate. There are rapidly developing opportunities for sophisticated data capture and analysis techniques, such as the use of Google Analytics, Twitter trending and other social media search data, but these 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 and Crow 2010, p. 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, and mask the 'buy-in' associated with ticketed events which may indicate a premeditated motivation (Gilmore and Miles 2010, p. 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, qualita-

tive evaluation research 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, p. 19)

### *Quality and time*

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

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 and Miles 2010, p. 16)

Pinnock (2009) argues for the development of time indicators as a measure for impact assessment and 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 pre-requisites – the prior development of cultural tastes. (Pinnock 2009, p. 53)

Consideration of time as a resource invested by participants implies different measures for participation, including dwell-time, repeat visits, frequency, as well as longitudinal study of subjective experience of engagement which can take into account cumulative acquisition of knowledge and formation of taste. These data are available through survey methods to populate proxy measures and provide a more detailed narrative of how people engage and participate in arts events, how different elements of participant experience – marketing, happenstance, intimacy or surprise, may relate to each other and how they may impact on taste and forthcoming experience and engagement – albeit they are no substitute for qualitative data or in-depth analysis outside of the budgets of most arts organisations.

A further challenge for Cultural Olympiad research is perception of the quality of the arts being delivered, particularly in how it is perceived by others in terms of critical acclaim amongst the arts sector as well as a ‘market’ of participants. The formal system for assessment of quality at project level by the cultural team at LOCOG is granting of the ‘Inspired By’ marques (the branded symbol of acceptance onto the official Olympics platform, allowing access to online marketing and the 2012 logo). This marque was established in part as the Olympic rings can no longer be used to brand cultural or educational activities since brand exclusivity for the Games has been

tightened in recent years to preserve commercial interests (Garcia 2008). In order to gain the marque a rigid set of conditions must be met, including an absence of any commercial funding or interest, and a rigorous application process to a dedicated LOCOG team. As a marker of quality designated by committee, the ‘Inspired By’ marque is somewhat ambiguous and circular – not only was it almost entirely valueless in its inception but even as it acquires some prestige through increase use, its value is dependent on a wider interpretation by the public of what association with the Olympics actually means and whether they understand and associate their engagement with the Cultural Olympiad.

The judgement of quality of artistic content can also be understood through analysis of arts criticism and 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 explored through research on Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 (Garcia 2006, Miah and Adi 2009, Impacts08 2010). The fiercest and perhaps best-placed critics are often one’s peers, however, and the ‘vexed history’ and tense relations between the arts sector and special programming for the Olympics described above suggest that London 2012 could provide considerable scope for further research on how programming of this type and scale is critically received and how, if at all, it contributes to art form development.

#### *Olympism, evaluation and the production of legacy*

In conclusion, it is worth returning to the conditions and context of the production for regional Cultural Olympiad programming, its relationship of the value systems of the Olympics, and the strategic adoption and, following Gray (2007), policy attachment of these values in the case of the We Play programme. 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 was no innocent project. The combination of Legacy Trust objectives and other stakeholder interests and the complicity of arts delivery partners and organisations in the Creative Programmer’s translation of these interests and their construction of a tight weave of programming designed to serve these demands, presents the We Play programme as a form of ‘constitutive instrumentality’ (Gibson 2008). This strategic instrumentalism on the part of the programmers requires a focus on increasing participation and the production of social effects and benefits compliant with both the legacy of instrumental cultural policies agendas under New Labour and the less prosaic but equally complex interests of the Olympics in mediating local cultural practices and interests in arts infrastructure and audience development, through a filter of ‘Olympic legacy’.

With regard to the ephemeral ideologues of Olympism, these are somewhat elliptic: the importance of whether the artists involved, the audience or participants understand or realise that their experiences have been part of the Olympics movement is difficult to discern pre-Games, and may prove negligible in any final summing up. Despite this, arts organisations delivering the We Play programme are set on becoming part of the 2012 Festival, as it provides an international showcase, peer endorsement, global marketing and access to further commissions and resources. Arts

managers are now adept at responding with almost Pavlovian tendencies to policy (i. e. funding-driven) contexts, and to translate potential structural constraints into opportunities for funding and commissioning new work. The commissioning of the evaluation framework is a productive part of this instrumentality, providing the means and measures to evidence participation and its effects, albeit with the caveats and complexities discussed here.

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 however unlikely to request or remark on any more complex information than a summary of easily quantifiable outputs, including estimates of audiences and participant figures, plus evidence of successful management of programmes in terms of budgets and funding leverage. Local stakeholders constitute the more strategic target audience for evaluation research which can articulate the narrative of participatory cultural programming and its potential legacy at a local level – the councillors who are interested in engaging with young people, the town centre manager who has seen the cultural tourism impacts of street arts performance on local trade, the artists who are provided with platform for new film and media commissions. 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 play out in local cultural policy contexts, and be strategically deployed in 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 a regional Olympics programme themed around ‘play’, and its evaluation research, are concerted and serious.

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### Notes

1. ‘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 ‘places to go, things to do’. It has been created by social research cooperative, Substance, and piloted in 20 local authorities in England (DCFS nd).
2. 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 *et al.* 2009).



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