The concept of olympic cultural programmes: origins, evolution and projection

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Summary

1. Origins: the ideal role of cultural events in the Olympic Games

The idea of holding a culture and art festival within the Olympic Games celebration is embedded in the very foundations of the Olympic Movement. This movement was founded in 1894 by French Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who sought to revive the ancient Greek tradition of quadrennial celebrations of athletics and the arts held in Olympia from 776 B.C. to 395 A.C. Hanna describes that in the Ancient Games, "athletes, philosophers, scholars, poets, musicians, sculptors and high-profile leaders displayed their talents, in what de Coubertin called the spirit of Olympism" (1997:72). Good (1998) specifies that Olympism was often defined by de Coubertin as the simultaneous training of the human body and the cultivation of the intellect and spirit, together viewed as manifestations of the harmoniously educated man. Upon this basis, de Coubertin's dream was to create an environment in modern society where artists and athletes could again be mutually inspired. From this, it can be concluded that de Coubertin brought the Olympic Games back to life hoping to develop an internationally recognised marriage between art and sport. In support of this ambition, the Olympic Charter establishes that the three main components of the Olympic Movement are "Sport, Culture and Education" (IOC, 1999:8).

The ability of de Coubertin to co-ordinate and attract the attention of critical decision makers around the world led to the re-birth of the Games in 1896 –Athens– and to their continuation in 1900 –Paris– and 1904 –St Louis–. Nevertheless, none of these Games incorporated arts alongside the sporting events. In order to encourage a reflection on this situation and change the pattern, the Baron convened a 'Consultative conference on Art, Letters and Sport' at the Comedie Française in Paris, 1906. De Coubertin invited artists, writers and sports experts to discuss how the arts could be integrated into the modern Olympic Games. The invitation stated that the purpose of the meeting was to study "to what extent and in what form the arts and letters could take part in the celebration of modern Olympic Games and become associated, in general, with the practice of sports, in order to profit from them and ennoble them" (Carl Diem Institute, 1966:16). As a result of the conference and in order to ensure the association of the arts with sports, de Coubertin decided to establish an arts competition that was to be part of each Olympic Games celebration (IOC, 1997:92). This competition was called

the 'Pentathlon of Muses' and would award medals in the categories of sculpture, painting, music, literature and architecture.

In order to prepare the first 'Pentathlon of Muses', a commission was set up by the Olympic Organising Committee of the host city that was going to stage the following Games, London 1908. Nevertheless, time constraints and disagreement over content restrictions provoked the cancellation of the 'Pentathlon' at a late stage (Burnosky, 1994:21-22). The idea of an Olympic arts competition was therefore not implemented until the Stockholm Games in 1912.

2. Evolution of the Olympic cultural program: from competitions to exhibitions

2.1. Stockholm 1912 to London 1948: Olympic Arts Competitions

From 1912 in Stockholm until 1948 in London, arts competitions were organised in parallel to the sporting competitions and artists, like athletes, competed and won gold, silver and bronze medals (Good, 1998; Stanton, 2000). Regulations and contest parameters changed considerably though, due to difficulties in defining the different competition sections and problems in defining the most appropriate subject for the works presented.

As such, the competition sections changed from the five areas composing the 'Pentathlon of Muses' to a long list of sub-categories in late years. Moreover, the appropriate theme for Olympic artworks was also a controversial area as it was discussed whether or not to restrict the entries to art works about sports. Initially it was compulsory to present a sporting theme, but this proved difficult and limiting in areas other than architecture or design for sports buildings (Burnosky, 1994:23). Also problematic was the non-universal or localised nature of the arts competitions, as most judges and competitors were European and very rarely was non-western art awarded a medal (Burnosky, 1994; Hanna, 1997; Good, 1998). Other problems were related to transport difficulties, inconsistent support from the Olympic organising committees and many limitations resulting from the regulation of amateurism in the Olympic Movement. The latter implied that, as in the case of athletes at the time, the participation of professional artists could not be accepted. This was problematic because all

artists were considered professional in their devotion to their vocation (Hanna, 1997:74, referring to an IOC document from the 44th IOC Session in Rome, 1949). Arguably, the insistence in allowing the participation of 'amateur' artists only, diminished the quality and interest of the works presented.

Hanna adds that perhaps most disappointing was the poor audience participation, especially considering that de Coubertin wanted cultural events that would inspire discussion and the promotion of ideas.

> *"Cultural celebrations based on sport were increasingly irrelevant; people watch sport in real competitions, but their interest did not extend to sport in art. [...] The context of world wars itself was a new point of departure for arts and an approach to life, especially in the context of experiments with totalitarian European nations; artists sought a new expression as the physical had to be transcended".* (1997:74)

In this context, it is interesting to see that, in contrast with other host cities where Olympic arts manifestations had played a minor role, the so-called "Nazi Games" of Berlin '36 staged a cultural festival of unprecedented size and nature for which, as indicated in the Berlin Games official report, an ambitious publicity campaign was created,

> *"Because of the slight interest which the general public had hitherto evidenced in the Olympic Art Competition and Exhibition, it was necessary to emphasise their cultural significance to the Olympic Games through numerous articles in the professional and daily publications as well as radio lectures."* (The XIth Olympic Games Berlin 1936, Official report quoted by Good, 1998:19)

In this case, the Olympic art program, which was closely linked to the Olympic ceremonies, was used as a propaganda tool for the German National Socialists.

As stated by Burnosky, the 1940 and 1944 Olympic Games were not held because of World War II. Nevertheless, at the time when the Games were re-established in London 1948, the organising committee succeeded in holding arts competitions (1994:33). After the cultural program ended, the British Fine Arts Committee that had been set up on occasion of the

Games compiled a "report of juror's suggestions for future arts contests" (ibid). This was intended for use as a guide to organising future arts competitions (Good, 1998:20). As Good explains "the recommendations included reducing the number of arts categories" and concluded that the "interest in the exhibitions would be greater if they were more closely linked up with the Games themselves and if a more intensive press campaign had been organised" (ibid).

By 1950, the problems and difficulties noted above were perceived to be far greater than the benefits and achievements brought by the Olympic art competitions. To review the situation, a long discussion process took place within the IOC from 1949 in Rome to 1952 in Helsinki. As a result of this controversial process, it was decided that from 1952 on, the presence of the arts in the Olympics would take the form of cultural exhibitions and festivals instead of competitions.

2. 2. Melbourne 1956 to Sydney 2000: Olympic Arts Festivals and Cultural Olympiads

The first official Olympic arts festival was held at the Melbourne 1956 Games. According to Hanna a Fine-Arts Subcommittee was elected in 1953 and, afterwards, a Festival Sub-Committee in 1955. The festival had two major components: one of visual arts and literature, and another one of music and drama. As Hanna describes it, "exhibitions and festivals were staged simultaneously in the weeks leading up to and during the Games and featured local, national and international artists and performers" (1997:76). A special book on Australian arts was published after the Games, entitled 'The Arts Festival: a Guide to the Exhibition with Introductory Commentaries on the Arts in Australia' (Good, 1998:29). The Official Report of the Melbourne Games concluded that "the change from a competition to a Festival was widely welcomed, since the Festival provided a significant commentary on Australia's contribution to the Arts" (ibid).

However, after Melbourne, successive cities had very different approaches to the cultural component of the Games either in length, organisation, objectives or themes. Moreover, despite the changes, most Olympic arts committees found similar problems to the ones found by organisers from 1912 to 1948. In this regard, Good argues that the shift from competitions to exhibitions did not increase awareness about the art festivals because it did not study or

analyse the "management issues" that had been repeatedly raised in the official reports of prior Games (1998:31). Moreover, these problems might have been accentuated by the absence of an international arts organisation comparable to the sports' international federations in its ability to co-ordinate and support Olympic arts initiatives (Masterton cited in Good, 1998:30). Arguably, the latter point could be seen as the reason why the evolution of the Games cultural programs has been so variable and unstable since its origins.

A further development in the concept of Olympic cultural programming occurred at the time of the Barcelona'92 Games. The organisers of these Games set a new precedent and established the model of the Cultural Olympiad, a program for cultural celebrations that lasted the four years separating the previous Olympic Summer Games in Seoul '88 from the Games to be hosted in the city in 1992. Guevara (1992) has explained this ambitious decision by referring to the organisers' strategic intention to use the Games to improve the city's urban landscape and assist in its international projection far beyond the Games staging period. The four-year format has been sustained by following summer Olympic host cities, from Atlanta'96 up to Athens'2004. This format has provided greater opportunities for creating an impact but, notably, as discussed in the following section, it has also brought further challenges to organisers.

3. Current issues and projections for the Olympic Cultural Programs

3.1. Management and promotion of Olympic cultural programs

The changeable nature and consistency of the Olympic arts program has been studied by Guevara in her comparative analysis of the cultural component of the Olympic Games from Mexico '68 to Barcelona '92. In her dissertation, Guevara (1992) points out the radical differences shown by the Olympic Organising Committees in their commitment towards the arts. These differences are contrasted in terms of the duration of the festivals, their management structure, their objectives, and their themes and artistic programming. Find below a brief review of the information provided by Guevara.

The duration of the festivals has varied throughout the years from three weeks –Moscow ’80– to four years –Barcelona ’92, Atlanta ’96, Sydney 2000, and Athens 2004–. As a middle term, the Mexico ‘68 arts festival lasted one year, the Rome 1960 festival held exhibitions during six months and Los Angeles ‘84 lasted ten weeks (Guevara, 1992).

The management organisation has varied from central management to shared management, state management, private management and mixed management.

- Guevara considers that there has been “central management” when the cultural program has been the responsibility of the organising committee. This has been the case in Mexico ‘68, Munich ‘72, Seoul ‘88 and Sydney 2000.
- “Decentralised management” or “shared management” has occurred when the Olympic cultural responsibilities have been the obligation of the Olympic Organising Committee in partnership with other organisations either private or public. A representative case was Montréal ‘76, where Canadian provinces were in charge of designing the arts programs while the cultural department of the Olympic Organising Committee was in charge of the logistics.
- “State management” has occurred when one or various public bodies control the cultural program, as was the model for the management, planning and production of the Moscow ‘80 Games arts component.
- In opposition, the clearest example of “private management” has been Los Angeles ‘84. On that occasion, the Olympic Organising Committee was established as a private company and its cultural department hired co-producer agencies to organise the arts events.
- Finally, there have been some cases of “mixed management” such as in Barcelona ‘92, where a special organisation for the cultural program was created with name *Olimpiada Cultural SA* (OCSA). OCSA was at the same time separated and dependent upon the Olympic Organising Committee (COOB): on the one hand, it had an administrative committee composed of Public Administration representatives independent of the organising committee; on the other, OCSA’s Board of Directors was presided by the Major of Barcelona, who was also president of COOB.

In terms of objectives, Guevara (1992) distinguishes five major and non-exclusive categories: 1) acknowledgement of the city artistic and cultural capacities, 2) improvement of the city cultural services, 3) showcase of the country cultural diversity, 4) international projection and 5) change of image.

- The first objective was paramount to Munich '72 and Los Angeles '84. Both cities were already linked to important cultural circuits and counted on the appropriate budget to present a great festival of international significance.
- The aim to use the Games as an opportunity to improve the city cultural services is said to have been the major drive of the Barcelona '92 Cultural Olympiad. The initiative to present a four year festival responded to this aim and intended the involvement of many relevant sponsors and public bodies to have a long lasting impact on both national and international audiences.
- The showcase of the country folklore and cultural diversity was a fundamental factor in the design of the Mexico '68, Montreal '72 and Moscow '80 cultural program. The three of them presented events with a high national and folkloric content.
- The aim to get an international projection was especially remarkable in Seoul '88 and Barcelona '92. In Guevara's words, the Games brought both cities the opportunity to be known world-wide and so, they combined the local expression with marked international communication strategies.
- Finally, the objective to achieve a change of image is considered to have been key in the cultural agenda of cities such as Munich and Seoul, both of them capitals of countries with a marked military past needed to change international stereotypes (Guevara 1992, section III).

The themes and artistic programming of Olympic cultural programs have traditionally responded to the defined objectives. As such, they have varied from strongly rooted national festivals to international festivals and from a focus on popular events to a focus on elitist manifestations. As an example, Mexico '68 presented a year-long national and international festival while Montreal '76 presented a small scale but highly popular spontaneous festival with a marked national character (MacAloon cited in Guevara, 1992, section V). On the contrary, Los Angeles '84 was a great scale, well promoted festival focused on elite national

and international events with few open-air popular manifestations (ibid). Seoul '88 also presented some international elite artists but combined them with many other popular events. Remarkably, Munich '72 is said to have been paradigmatic in the configuration and production of the arts festivals because the festival was completely integrated within the Olympic sporting events. Munich understood the Games as a cultural event in itself and presented the arts manifestations in an open and spontaneous way. This was particularly evident in the so-called 'Avenue of Entertainment' which was composed of street theatre shows, mimes, clowns and acrobats (Burnosky, 1994:47) and incorporated performances focused on the interpretation of sports through art (Kidd. 1999).

Finally, since the instauration of the Cultural Olympiad model, a common feature has been the design of thematic festivals, one for each year of the event. In Barcelona, the themes evolved from a 'Cultural gateway' in 1988, to the 'Year of Culture and Sport' in 1989, the 'Year of the Arts' in 1990, the 'Year of the Future' in 1991 and the 'Olympic Art Festival' in 1992. Atlanta also covered a wide range of subjects during the four years of festivals, arranged into two main themes: 'Southern Connections' at a national level, and 'International Connections'. Finally, Sydney offered a taste of the many and diverse Australian cultural communities through presenting an indigenous festival in 1997, a festival dedicated to multicultural groups and the waves of immigration in 1998, and international festivals in 1999 and year 2000.

3.2. Challenges and potential contributions by the IOC

Presently, the IOC maintains its commitment to ensure the survival of the concept of Olympic cultural program as an event additional and complementary to the sports competitions. Notably, the promotion of 'culture' as a critical component of the Games has been a constant in all discourses by former president Juan Antonio Samaranch. In 1994, this emphasis resulted in the opening of a renovated and very ambitious Olympic Museum, a venue that welcomes the display of all sort of arts and cultural elements related to sport and the Olympic Movement. Nevertheless, the radical transformations and variable nature of Olympic Arts Competitions, subsequent Olympic Arts Festivals and the recently established Cultural Olympiad initiative, seem to have affected the ability of Olympic organisers and audiences to understand the function and purpose of a cultural program integral to the Olympic celebration.

Existing IOC regulations and guidelines emphasise that, to become an Olympic host city, it is compulsory to organise and promote a cultural program acting in parallel to the sporting competitions. These regulations currently appear in the Olympic Charter (Rule 44: Cultural Programme) and in the official guidelines for the host city candidature (Theme 13. Cultural Program and Youth Camp). However, none of these regulations, guidelines and recommendations seem to clarify which is the exact function that a cultural program for the Games is expected to accomplish and how its success or failure can be evaluated or studied by the IOC after its implementation. This has led to a series of problems, difficulties and dysfunctions that are affecting the preparations of current Cultural Olympiads as much as they affected prior Olympic cultural programs taking place throughout the century.

Traditionally, there has been a large gap between the eagerness of potential host cities to propose activities for the cultural Olympic program at the bid stage and the readiness of the chosen Olympic organising committee (OCOG) to implement them. This gap might be a direct result of the ambiguous description of the cultural program in the Olympic Charter guidelines. At present, the only clear statement in the Charter is the fact that the cultural program is a compulsory element in the staging process of the Olympic Games (IOC, 1999: 68-69). However, the role of this program is defined in extremely broad terms and no specific performance indicators are provided for the OCOG to follow. This situation has allowed a great freedom of action and interpretation and has contributed to incite very ambitious cultural bid proposals. Nevertheless, this is also the source of remarkable discontinuities in the OCOG's commitment to realise them, especially when the question of budget and resource allocation is debated.

As well, Olympic cultural programs, whether they have been organised by an independent institution or by a department within the OCOG, have had difficulties to sustain their association with other Olympic activities and to benefit from the Games' extensive promotional opportunities. This indicates that there may exist a conflict that prevents the integration of the cultural program within the overall Olympic Games preparations. Ultimately, this suggests that, although the Olympic Movement aims to be a humanistic project encompassing "sport, culture and education" (IOC, 1999:8), the reality of the Olympic Games staging process shows a total predominance of sporting issues over the rest. The prior

statement is reflected in the operational structure of the OCOG where, as described by Guevara (1992), the team in charge of the cultural program tends to be structured almost independently with respect to the rest of the organisation. This does not only provoke an understandable separation of the cultural program from the departments in charge of sporting competitions but also from the departments in charge of Olympic ceremonies, marketing, communications, media and institutional relations. This lack of cohesion of programs and activities has led to an unnecessary duplicity of resources.

Finally, it is relevant to note the continuous and remarkable difficulties to guarantee appropriate fundraising for respective cultural programs. This may be a direct result of the way the current Olympic marketing strategies have been designed. None of the fundamental sources of Olympic revenue –the successful world-wide Olympic sponsorship program (TOP) and the national sponsorship programs or the sales of television rights-, include concrete references which favour investment in or coverage of Olympic cultural activities. In this context, considering the low status of the cultural program when compared to such activities as the sporting competitions, the ceremonies and the torch relay, it is to be expected that Olympic sponsors will almost unanimously tend to invest in the latter areas rather than in a cultural program. On top of that, the exclusivity principle lying behind all Olympic marketing arrangements has traditionally limited the possibility of getting alternative cultural sponsors other than public entities.

All these considerations make a case for a better regulation of the cultural program management and production system. More specifically, it calls for the creation of a more clearly defined IOC cultural policy that will protect and enhance such an important but misunderstood dimension of the Olympic Games. This policy should not impose limits on the creative freedom of the Olympic host city, but should help guarantee its applicability. For example, the policy should guarantee the commitment of the OCOG to the Olympic cultural program when promises are made at the bid stage. It should encourage a better integration (if not a fusion) of cultural, educational and sporting activities within the Olympic frame, especially through a better co-ordinated use of Olympic communication tools and, possibly, an improved interaction between the planned Cultural Olympiad and other programs such as the ceremonies, the torch relay or the Olympic education activities. Finally, it should facilitate the

task of getting appropriate funds to realise the program, and this means the inclusion of new clauses in the existing Olympic marketing guidelines oriented towards the support of Olympic cultural programs.

As a final and encouraging note, recent initiatives developed under the auspices of the IOC and the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, indicate that there might be some opportunities for leveraging the presence and relevance of Olympic cultural programs in the near future. A good example has been the celebration of an international Forum on 'The IOC and its Cultural Policy' in March 2000 at the Olympic Museum. The forum followed the decision to merge the previously existing Olympic Cultural Commission with the Olympic Education Commission to give birth to the current Commission for Olympic Culture and Education. This joint program is supposed to assist in the enhancement of the role and visibility of cultural matters within the Olympic Movement. The results of these actions are still to be realised, but they embody an interest to solve the contradictions behind the traditional "Olympic sport, culture and education" discourse and may assist in generating new regulations to protect and promote the notion of Olympic Cultural Programming.

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This paper offers a perspective on the origins and evolution of the concept of Olympic cultural program. The two initial sections present a review of the historical background of the cultural program, from the initial conception by Pierre de Coubertin up to the last implementations on occasion of the Barcelona'92, Atlanta'96 and Sydney'2000 Games. The historical review is complemented by a brief revision of the current challenges and prospects that the program, now denominated "Cultural Olympiad" or "Olympic Arts Festivals", holds within the Olympic Movement.

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