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# Lessons from abroad



Cathy Freeman lights the torch at the start of the Sydney Olympics in 2000

## The 2000 Sydney Olympics is a story of missed opportunities, writes Sue Halliday

Of all the marvellous dilemmas of any Olympics, the day-after syndrome is the worst! And there's no pill to deal with it. As everything is packed away, the exuberance of the events, the achievements of the athletes, the millions of visitors and the way London and Londoners responded is suddenly in the past. The Olympics is, after all, just a two week festival, and the Paralympics another event for a few weeks. Then there's nothing. Big buildings. Happy memories. Over and out.

Much has been made of London's Olympic legacy planning, and, despite some minor criticism, London has done an excellent job of finding ongoing roles for the buildings constructed for the sporting events. London has established a Legacy Development Corporation, a Legacy Trust, and the Department of Communities and Local Government has focused considerable effort towards the rejuvenation of East London. In addition there are many billion pounds worth of

committed and prospective investments around the Olympic village. The Thames Gateway renewal is underway.

This is a most impressive start. For legacy should indeed be planned from the beginning and driven independently of the Olympic planning and organizing teams who are immersed in the imperative and excitement of the opening deadline!

In Australia, the Sydney 2000 Olympic experience was a classic case of missed opportunities. So much effort went into the site and event itself that long term city transformation was ignored. Of course, we now hold a legacy of stadia, hotels, and exhibition centres, but it took us ten years to really face the reality that legacy does not happen on its own. We assumed that the Olympics would bring an economic investment boost that never happened; we assumed that it would result in a tourism boost that did not happen; we assumed that the Olympic site would always be full of people, but for years the Olympic mall stood vast and empty. We ran the 'green' games and made great headway in sustainable construction requirements for the Olympic buildings, but the construction industry abandoned these initiatives as soon as they could after the games. We had fantastic public transport arrangements introduced during the games which were abandoned afterwards. And finally, like London, our games were located

on an industrial backwater site (an old abattoir, brickworks and munitions storage facility) but unlike London, there was no commitment to plan in parallel for the transformation of the whole region around the site in order to maximize the benefits from the Olympic investment. It took ten years to finally have a plan for the future of the site and we still have no plan for the future of the region.

London has learned from the lessons of Sydney and other Game cities, and looks well on the way towards post Olympic renewal. But will investment funds still be available after the games? Do the people of Stratford and surrounding suburbs feel that their neighbourhoods are better as a result of the Olympics? Will they actually have more long term job opportunities afterwards and more infrastructure, both social and economic? Will the Olympic site and village form a new, lively suburb that works as a community? This is what legacy is about....taking the Olympic Games and using it to transform the city.

The party will pass. The legacy is forever. 🏏

**Sue Holliday** is a City Planner and Economist. She is Managing Director, Strategies for Change, an urban strategy consultancy and Professor of Planning Practice at UNSW. Sue was the Director General of Planning in NSW from 1997 to 2003, and was chief planner of the 2000 Sydney Olympics

## Hosting the Olympics does not necessarily lead to increased grass roots sports participation, writes Sakis Pappous

One of the most prominent key pledges set out from the organizers of the 2012 Games was to make the UK a world-leading sporting nation and to increase sport participation.

Lord Coe, chairman of the London 2012 organising committee, has stated his hope that the Games are not just about the medals table but also about more people taking part in sport at a grass roots level: the so-called 'soft legacy'. The goal set by the UK government was to increase the physical activity level by at least two million in England by 2012, a goal that has been regarded as over-ambitious by experts in sport sciences.

Previous studies show no evidence that a Big Mega Event is by itself sufficient to inspire a sustained increase in grassroots participation. In general, major sporting events do produce a temporary increase in participation. It's what is known in sports science as the "Wimbledon effect", when tennis courts in July each year get packed

but some months later the participation drops.

From looking at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, we observed that the host city obtained some tangible legacies in terms of transport infrastructure and urban regeneration, while the benefits in terms of an increase in grass root sport participation are questionable.

Our research at the University of Kent showed that five years after the Games finished the numbers of those exercising regularly in Greece had fallen to below pre-Games levels.

There was a short-lived increase in sports participation in Greece between 2003 and 2004 of six per cent. However, five years after the Games, the percentage of people saying they exercise regularly had plummeted by 13% to a level that was significantly lower even than the period before the Games.

What is evident from the statistics is that rather than producing a lasting impact on a generation of people who are

excited about sport, the Games in Greece had at best only a temporary impact on participation in sport and physical activity.

The data for the Greek population suggests that if a broader strategy towards an active lifestyle is not implemented and kept up in the post-Olympic period, then sporting excitement on its own will not sustain participation. In fact, there may be a reduction and possibly a 'rebound effect', where participation drops to levels lower even than during the pre-Olympic period.

Frequently, after a frenetic investment to sports during the pre-Games period, governments carry out very important drastic cuts in the funding of sport in the post-Games era and this affects sport participation levels. A coordinated plan and a broader strategy towards an active lifestyle should be implemented, specially targeting this 2012 generation of children who will participate in the whole celebrations and excitement of hosting the Olympic Games. The Olympics have the potential to become a 'motivator' for children. And children's early experience in physical activity and sport are crucial for 'returning' to sport in their adult life. 🏆

**Dr Sakis Pappous** was the Supervisor for the Organizing Committee of the Athens 2004 Games

After a short spike after the Athens games, levels of participation began to fall