London’s Olympic legacy and the Imagine methodology

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# London’s Olympic Legacy and the Imagine Methodology

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## Abstract

In 2010 Future of London commissioned academics to work with representatives from the London Boroughs, to consider the legacy of the Olympic Village taking shape in Stratford, in the East End of London.

The exercise, in the form of a workshop was to:

- Review the current context/situation;
- Prioritise issues;
- Envisage future options;
- Explore and develop relevant sustainability indicators;
- Develop a forward plan for community development.

This paper describes the process adopted in the analysis of the Olympic Villages transformation from World Media Site to a sustainable part of the Greater London metropolis. The methodology applied, Imagine, is described and some of the key outputs from the analysis and design of legacy process are described. In conclusion the paper examines the oeuvre of projects of this kind when set against the challenges of longer term sustainability.

**Key words:**

Olympic Legacy, Sustainable Community, Imagine Methodology
**Background to Future of London and to the Olympic Legacy**

The London Olympics is a major urban regeneration project with a budget of £9.345 billion. The Olympic site itself, adjacent to the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Stratford in the East of London (see Figure 1) will have a major impact on the city as a whole. To some extent, the legacy of the Olympic site is already being planned and developed by the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC). The OPLC set out their own objectives as:

> **Insert Figure 1 about here**

“Assisting the Government and the Mayor of London in fulfilling some of the legacy promises made in the bid to host the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Securing the timely development of the Olympic Park site as a high quality and sustainable mixed community

Promoting social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities

Securing the long term development and management of the Olympic Park site and venues in ways which provide lasting national and local sporting, cultural, education and leisure benefits and which preserve the site’s Olympic heritage

Working with partners to contribute to long-term economic growth and prosperity in the wider area

Levering in private investment to maximise and provide best value for the public purse

Promoting sustainable development, community involvement and equality of opportunity”


The implicit admission within the objectives of the un-attainability of all the legacy promises set out in the original London Bid is disheartening to some, but the emphasis placed on sustainable community is clear and repeated. Also clear is the
on-going Government focus on legacy. In 2011 Hugh Robertson, Minister for Sport and the Olympics said:

“We are already seeing the legacy of London 2012 even before the Games have begun. Businesses around the UK have been helped through the tough economic climate by winning contract opportunities linked to London 2012. To take one example: the wave-shaped design of the Aquatics Centre roof was manufactured by a business in Newport, using steel fabricated in Gateshead, Motherwell, and Scunthorpe.”. (Government_Olympic_Executive 2011 page 3)

With sustainability and legacy in high profile. Future of London is an agency with a keen interest in the sustainable legacy of this huge project. On its website, FoL describes itself as:

“a Borough led initiative that is focused on developing skills, sharing knowledge and best practice, and stimulating new thinking across the London practitioner network. Urban regeneration policymakers across London are currently facing unprecedented funding and delivery challenges. Future of London provides them with a forum to engage with one another and other urban regeneration specialists to consider how major projects can be developed and delivered over the coming decade.” (http://www.futureoflondon.org.uk/about/)

From July 27th to August 12th 2012 the London Boroughs will need to meet the challenge of the Olympic Games. This means, along with other things, dealing with the impact of the games in terms of a vast range of factors, tourism (Weed 2006), health and transport (for example in terms of health and transport: McCarthy, Ravelli and Sinclair-Williams 2010), a sustainable sports legacy for all (Girginov and Hills 2008) and commerce (Kenyon and Palmer 2008) to name but four challenging areas. London will also need to deal with issues pertaining to the legacy of the Olympic site. Previous studies have shown that legacy can be a significant issue. Sadd and Jones (Sadd and Jones 2008) suggest that the London Olympic project is one of the biggest urban regeneration projects in Europe. This development is already
having an impact on the lives of residents and this is not always positive. The notion of the legacy is contentious. Andrew Boff, London Assembly Conservative Spokesman on the Olympics said in 2010:

“Have we paid £9.3 billion merely to build the Olympic stadium and the sports venues? Unfortunately, leisure facilities alone are not enough to regenerate east London. The Olympic authorities use the word ‘legacy’ in every sentence they utter, yet they never bothered to plan the legacy or invest any of the money in the local communities next to the Olympic site.”

http://www.london.gov.uk/media/press_releases_assembly_member/andrew-boff-attacks-%E2%80%9Cnon-existent%E2%80%9D-olympic-legacy

In 2010 Future of London commissioned academics from the Open University and the University of Kingston to work with representatives from the London Boroughs, to consider the legacy of the Olympic Village. Specific focus for the engagement was legacy and sustainable community.

**Introduction to the Imagine Methodology**

Imagine is a methodology designed to allow community to assess its own sustainability in its own terms. It arose from a frustration with existing, top-down approaches to sustainability (Bell and Morse 1999; Bell and Morse 2001; Bell and Morse 2004; Bell and Morse 2005) and was originally applied in coastal community work in the Mediterranean (Bell and Coudert 2005). Intended to be more community usable and less of a research tool than earlier approaches (for example Systemic Prospective Sustainability Analysis or SPSA), it is depicted as a perpetual process of sustainability review (see Figure 4). It was published by Plan Bleu (Bell and Coudert 2005) and was released by Plan Bleu as a ‘self help’ pack with a teaching guide and CD with powerpoint slides.

*Insert Figure 2 about here*
Imagine has been applied in a range of contexts. It has been used in Coastal Area Management Programmes (CAMPs) in Slovenia and Cyprus (Maher 2006; Kalopedis 2007) from January 2005 – August 2007 and subsequently described in publication (Bell and Morse 2007; Bell and Morse 2009). During this process communities were engaged, indicators emerged and the sustainable agenda was debated. To demonstrate the level of impact Imagine achieved, the recommendations from Cyprus included:

“1. To establish Imagine as a de facto means to improve local participation in sustainability issues”. (Kalopedis 2007 pages 3-4).

The recommendation to include Imagine as a “de facto means to improve participation” suggested that the approach was significant and arguably, had capacity to enhance community engagement in national policy forums and to be adopted more widely than just a project device. The experiences in Cyprus and Slovenia suggested the approach could be adopted at a wider and higher level within Government and be included as a means to support local engagement in a more process managed (rather than project based - for issues in the project use of sustainability objectives see: Bell and Morse 2007) approach. However, the issue of the longevity of the approaches application within communities and its capacity to be handed over in a ‘learned and applied’ manner have been a concern.

Imagine has continued to develop in the UK in the form of the Creating Sustainable Communities (CSC) course. CSC, containing Imagine, is a taught version of the Method and is at present being adopted and applied within Higher Education in the UK. It constitutes a response to a current UK policy concern that localism is key and community sustainability is central to the sustainability of society itself. This response is also related to what Archer (Archer 2007) has called the ‘internal conversation’ which guides the patterns of social mobility in contemporary society. The CSC course was intended to develop, at a community level, both the internal and external conversations – aiding concepts of social coherence and linking to more general issues of equality, democracy, development and equity (for a more detailed review of this see: Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).
Sustainable Communities and notions of Big Society are relatively new concepts, emerging as has been shown, as policy influencers for the UK Government. This arguably started in 1998 fuelled by the report ‘Towards an Urban Renaissance’. Lord Rogers was invited to chair an Urban Task Force to review problems faced by Britain’s towns and cities. The report made a number of recommendations, including the need to promote inter-disciplinary working. Rogers asserted: “the teaching in professional skills is excellent. The main problem is a lack of inter-disciplinary learning with a strong vocational element. The evidence is that it is generic rather than technical skills that are in short supply” (Rogers 1998 page 161). This finding was reinforced in two further reports, the Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities (Egan 2004) and the Arup (ASC 2007) report ‘Mind the Skills Gap’. These identified the generic skills needed in greater detail and evaluated both their absence within and across the key professions tasked with implementing policy for sustainable communities.

The experience of Imagine in the context of the CAMP projects, arguably shows that it has applied generic skills and helped people to understand their community environment in an inter-disciplinary (systemic) manner. Imagine was considered by the UK Homes and Communities Agency to be potentially a useful vehicle to teach community participation and this is the method which was subsequently applied in the Future of London workshop. It has also been used successfully with professional practitioners, in a postgraduate and CPD context to develop a better understanding of their working practices and the barriers to interdisciplinary working presented by the professional compartmentalisation of service delivery (Bell 2008; Bell 2011).

**Review of the Imagine Workshop process as applied**

**Imagine – the method**

The Imagine process shown in Figure 2 provides an overview of the method. Communities (e.g. academic groups, communities of place, communities of practice or transient communities of common interest) are encouraged to explore issues associated with sustainable development specific to their context. Based on the
experiences of those participating, the process takes the participants through four
cognitive processes: reflection, connection, modelling and action planning – an
action learning cycle (Kolb 1984). In overview Imagine takes the participant through
a five stage process:

- Understand the context
- Agree Sustainability Indicators and bands of equilibrium
- Develop the AMOEBA and scenario making
- Review and Meta-scenario making
- Publicity, publicizing and marketing the message

These various stages will be described in more detail in subsequent sections.

If the process is fivefold, the main tools comprise:

- Rich Pictures of original context and of future scenarios
- Hierarchically graded Tasks and Issues
- Establishing bands of sustainability
- AMOEBA diagrams of current, past and future realities – back-casting
- Action planning

These are described in detail shortly. Imagine is intended to encourage a process of
reflection to facilitate participants co-understanding of the issues in the community
in question.

More specific to the exercise, Imagine was to be applied in a workshop in order to:

- Review the current context/ situation;
- Prioritise issues;
- Envisage future options;
- Explore and develop relevant sustainability indicators;
- Develop a forward plan for community development.

The Imagine workshop for Future of London was scheduled for 6th and 7th October
2010. Over the two days, approximately 40 representatives from each of the London
Boroughs were to engage in a process of review. The stated objectives of the
workshop were to:
“give participants a wider understanding of what sustainable communities and organisations can and should be and to develop generic skills for knowing and understanding what constitutes such a community.

More specifically, the aims are to:

• Promote and support the acquisition or improvement of generic skills including:
  o breakthrough thinking
  o inclusive visioning and innovative thinking
  o team working and networking
  o stakeholder management analysis
  o decision making.

Explain clearly what the IMAGINE methodology is and does and how it should be used.

Provide participants with all the tools necessary to undertake an IMAGINE analysis within their own context.” (Workshop programme).

The main outcomes of the workshop are presented at:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/c-scaipe/sets/72157625447771118/, here, we want to present some of the key approaches used and major ideas developed by the participants.

**Imagine - the process**

As already described, the Imagine workshop for the 40 representatives of the London Boroughs used five process tools to achieve five ends:

*Insert Table 1 about here*

The 40 delegates were randomly allocated into one of six groups and first asked to review the current context of the Olympic site in terms of the sustainability of the community in the longer term. In short, how does this area ‘feel’ right now. The groups were asked to report their findings by means of a Rich Picture .. a form of diagram which obeys few rules but attempts to minimise written word but maximise
group activity and co-thinking. Figures 3, 4 and 5 show three Rich Pictures drawn from the groups at this stage.

Insert Figures 3, 4 and 5 about here

The interpretation of Rich Pictures is dealt with at length elsewhere (Bell and Morse 2010), in this paper we wish to constrain our review to the manner in which the groups interpreted the area and represented it in symbolic metaphor.

In one picture we see the Olympic Rings containing vignettes and world views. The globe comes to London, the clock ticks, activity is undertaken, hopefulness and despair, the included and the excluded, prosperity and want. A view of potential. In the second picture the Thames is the linking factor, work is manic, bridges are built, lines criss-cross the landscape. In picture 3, demolition happens, hopeful people wait to see what will happen, the river is again the organising theme for the narrative, money is made.

In all cases the pictures tell stories of hope and potential, the groups seem to be fairly positive in their consideration of the current state of affairs.

Rich Pictures allow groups to draw what they often will not write and will not talk about .. they are a means to arrive at an acroamatic or hidden / esoteric side of an issue. As Wigley states, ‘drawings are seen as a unique form of access to the thoughts of the people who make them.’ (Wigley in De Zegher & Wigley, 2001).

From our experience it appears that drawing is helpful in immersing participants into the activity in hand. Talking and drawing happening simultaneously seems to establish and reinforce the collaborative nature of the process. The drawing also allows participants to literally bring and record their contributions into a ‘shared space’ – which then allows the authors and external viewers to both read and critique the initial output, positing new connections/ issues / and allowing for further reflection. In the second move of the workshop, the groups are asked to consider the main tasks and issues which are evident. Tasks are the things to do, issues are the significant problems or obstacles which might get in the way. The intention at this
point is to get the groups to ponder on what might emerge as threats to legacy and the sustainability of the communities depicted in the Rich Pictures. In Figure 4 these tasks and issues are shown, represented in post-it notes on the diagram itself. Issues range from: ‘Retention: people moving up and out’, ‘Social Responsibility: caring about where you live, ownership, etc..’, ‘Engagement: difficulty of access, possible disillusionment..’, etc. Tasks arising include: ‘Travel/Transport planning’, ‘Corporate involvement’, ‘Employment and skills strategy to match jobs in the area’. These are all very focused on the kinds of issues a major investment brings with it.

The Rich Pictures have been the catalyst for some deep thinking about the problems and opportunities which urban renewal can offer. One of the other groups represented their tasks and issues in their own terms as things that must happen and things that must not happen. These items are shown in Figure 6.

*Insert Figure 6 about here*

In this Figure the narrative is extended. There are clear items which must follow for the legacy to be in place: facilities open to all, clear action plans and roles, housing and jobs. The things that must not happen are equally clear: no gentrification of the area, local centres around the village site must not be allowed to decline, facilities becoming disused. Here the group allow themselves to also think more globally about the potential for climate change and recession to impact. This second stage of Imagine has allowed the groups to come out of the picture drawing to focus on key concerns and actions.

The third and fourth stages of Imagine provide the groups with the potential to establish a vision of sustainability which is transparent and subject to quantification by means of indicators. The ambition of the two stages is to provide an accountable and evidence based logic for understanding how the issues and the tasks are changing over time. An underlying tension in the approach is to move away from knee jerk and anecdotal forms of policy formulation and rather engage in demonstrable and measurable means to assess sustainability. In order to do this, the
groups are asked to present the tasks and issues in a tabular format and, for each one, to consider what would be the highest and lowest sustainable values for that item. Figure 7 shows one such table taken from group 4. In the Figure the group has collated their tasks and issues into four domains of ‘identity and ownership’, ‘mixed and stable community’, social infrastructure’ and ‘connectivity’. As an example of the exercise, for the issue relating to people within the locality selecting their local school first (which in turn is an indicator of local provision being valued), the indicator is the % of the population doing this, and the sustainable band is set between 50% and 100%. In this case the actual value at present is 65% which indicates that at present local schools are, in the view of this group, sustainably supported.

Looking down Figure 7 it can be seen that many of the indicators current values are shown to be within the upper and lower bands which are defined as sustainable. It can be seen that some are not – e.g. the % of households within 5 minutes walk of green space .. this sustainable should be between 70% and 100% .. but the group sets this at present as being nearer 30%. This would become a target for future action to improve the locality.

With bands of sustainability (or, as they are called in Imagine: Bands of Equilibrium’), established for the indicators which measure the sustainability of the tasks and issues, the next stage of Imagine is to represent this as an amoeba diagram. The diagram for Group 4 is shown in Figure 8.

*Insert Figure 8 about here*

The amoeba diagram shows dramatically and quickly a local perception of sustainability. If the red ‘amoeba’ which tracks the indicators set up in the previous exercise were to fit perfectly within the ring .. then the site would be defined by the group as ‘sustainable’. An odd shaped amoeba of any kind is by definition unsustainable. With Figure 8 we see a variably shaped amoeba with clear underscore in some areas (within the band) and over-score in others (outside the band). Within
or outside the band defines the indicator value as being unsustainable by deficit or excess.

The groups are also asked to back cast and produce an amoeba diagram of some historical point to give a sense of a point of reference for the current situation. Group 4 did this and selected 1950 as their point for comparison. Many of the indicators that are shown unsustainable in 2010 are show sustainable in 1950. This process is useful in helping the group to think about the current situation, the nature of society in 2010 and the impact of the Olympic village.

The main point of this stage of the workshop is to arrive at a sense of how sustainable the current community is and where effort should be expended in order to encourage greater sustainability in future. The final stage of Imagine attempts to address this.

The groups are now encouraged to produce an amoeba and a Rich Picture of the future. These diagrams for Group 3 are shown in Figures 9 and 10.

*Insert Figures 9 and 10 about here*

By use of the Rich Pictures and amoeba, the group can now place themselves at some future point (in this case 2020) and demonstrate what this looks and feels like. The idea behind this part of the workshop is to get participants to consider the future from the standpoint of both an informed present (based on the indicators generated, these in turn being developed form tasks and issues emergent from a review of the context), and an imaginative conceptualisation of a possible future. This blend of evidence based reflection and futurescaping should provide those attending the workshop with a sense of practical insight into the legacy issues facing the Olympic site. In this case, Group 3 identify that many issues of connectivity and social cohesion may be addressed and that the area may be working as a magnet to inward investment, families and positive globalisation. The scenario amoeba amplifies these points, indicating some clear movement towards the sustainability band in the areas of recycling and biodiversity.
The workshop exercise, over two days, allowed the forty delegates to explore the Olympic legacy in terms of personal views relating to sustainability. The next section of the paper goes on to discuss some of the outcomes emerging from this process.

**Discussion concerning main outcomes from the workshop**

In 2008, in an editorial the Journal of Quality and Participation addressed the issue of Governance as a form of social responsibility (Editorial 2008). The editorial compares the ISO 26000 framework with that of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission. Together, the frameworks cover principles of accountability, transparency, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholder interest, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behaviour, respect for human rights, participation, consensus orientated, responsive, effective and efficient and equitable and inclusive. Whilst noting that there was a great deal of overlap between the two frameworks, the editorial suggests that:

“it’s clear that good governance is a by product of the values or principles an organization adopts, the strategies it puts in place to set direction, the policies it creates to establish boundaries, and the processes it applies to conduct operations. Furthermore, successful governance requires both leadership and management, where the former fosters collaboration and stakeholder focus and the latter ensures appropriate monitoring and enforcement.” (Editorial 2008 page 22)

These frameworks are useful rubrics to hold up against the outcomes of workshops such as that held for Future of London. Ultimately the future of the urban development zone created by the London Olympics will be in the hands of the Londoners who go on to own the site. It will be long after the cameras and visitors have left that the legacy will be finally judged. The Imagine process attempts to draw stakeholders into a social responsible assessment and planning exercise relating to long term sustainability. And, this sustainability is not ‘handed down’, but generated by the delegates in the room. This does raise the prospect of inclusion, consensus building, participation, and several more of the framework headings suggested by ISO 26000 and UNESC however, no matter how compelling the exercise, no matter how inclusive the process and no matter how dynamic and insightful the outcomes,
the process becomes robbed of meaning and academic if the insight is not followed through by a sustained commitment. The key question for FoL is: ‘what do we do with and how do we extend the meaning of the work undertaken?’ Or, ‘what is the deeper point of exploring a sustainable future if the commitment to sustained intervention is not present’. These questions are developed further in the final section.

**Conclusions and lessons for other legacy projects.**

Elsewhere the notion of the Projectified World Order (PWO) is established as a contemporary means to achieve short term results, on limited budgets and to a strict timeline (Bell and Morse 2007). The great strength of the PWO is its ability to generate results under financial and strategic control. To some extent PWO thinking emerged as a response to what many had considered the excesses of late twentieth century public sector projects (often in ICT) which time and time again came in over budget, over time and not delivering (Bignell and Fortune 1984; Lyytinen and Hirschheim 1987; Wilson 1997; Hyde 2000; Lesca and Marie-Laurence 2008). PWO offers sanity and control to public and private sector managers. By specifying what is needed in advance, what outcomes will look like, who will do what and when and then, in applying formidable measurement processes for project management (surely the growth sector of all growth sectors in public sector continuing professional development programmes over the last ten years) such as exemplified by the PRINCE2 methodology (Bentley 2005; Bentley 2005; Harris 2005) audit trails can be set in place and managers can feel a degree of confidence in their risk assessment of tricky new endeavours. However, the downside of PWO tends to click in when the worldview of endeavour changes. If the goal is short term, fixed budget, easily identifiable outcome related then maybe PWO works. But, in contexts of the long term (surely what sustainability is primarily about?), un-assessable budget and moving/ variable goals PWO cannot work – it is not of the same oeuvre.

The great success of the build of the Olympic Park has been its conformity to an effective and talented PWO team process. Working to the deadline, with the budget and on known goals the PWO / Olympic park oeuvre is a perfect fit and the project is
and has a right to be proud of its growing achievement. The issue changes on August 13th 2012, when the PWO oeuvre concludes and the open system of real time lives and perpetual obligation to communal values clicks in. At this time, if the thinking is still PWO then the legacy may well miss its mark and the sustainability of the Olympic Park may fail to materialise as it should.

The Imagine process as expounded in this article, allowed a group of planners and Local Government officials to consider the London Olympic Legacy. In a more abstract sense they also examined the frontier between short term success of the Projectified World Order as expressed in this project and the longer term, issues of sustainability in the East End.
References.


Figure 1. The Olympic Park

http://0.tqn.com/d/golondon/1/0/m/r/-/-/olympic-park-map.jpg
Figure 2. Imagine
Figures 3, 4 and 5. Rich Pictures from the Groups.

Group 1

Group 3

Group 6
Figure 6. Tasks and Issues for Group 1

**MUST HAPPEN**

- Legacy facilities well-managed + open to all
- Clear roles/action plans/economic function defined for all local centres + site itself (incl. creation of additional permanent draws)
- Define + deliver carefully balanced mixture of housing (ensure good management)
- Jobs, business + training opportunities targeted @ local people

**MUST NOT HAPPEN**

- Complete gentrification (one group people leave, another arrive)
- Local centres decline
- Visitors coming into the park and leaving → no leakage to wider area
- Facilities becoming disused or unavailable to local people
  - Severe climate change
  - Adverse global economy
Figure 7. Indicators from Group 4

**INDICATORS**

1. **Identity & Ownership**
   - % of people who give same answer
   - % of people happy to wear a badge/bag

2. **Mixed & Stable Community**
   - % people living in area for over 5 years
   - % family homes (3+ BED)
   - % people from a single ethnic group
   - % people receiving regular bus
   - % people paying higher rate tax

3. **Social Infrastructure**
   - % people within locality putting local school first
   - % people walking to school
   - % of community facilities (pubs, social clubs, youth centres) within 5 minutes walk
   - % of households within 5 minutes walk of green open space

4. **Connectivity**
   - % of people from outside the area (within 4 or 2 miles) coming to the park at least once a week
   - % of people from within park going somewhere within 2 miles at least once a week

**LOWER**

10% 50%

**UPPER**

50% 100%
Figure 8. Group 4 amoeba diagram
Figures 9 and 10: Amoeba and Rich Pictures of Group 3 scenario
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