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How to leave an Olympic legacy

Using the past and the present to deliver the future

London's successful bid for the 2012 Olympics was built on ambitious goals, not only to hold the best and greenest Games ever, but also to leave social, physical and cultural legacies that would benefit a deprived part of London and the UK as a whole. But the history of the modern Olympic Games is littered with legacy disasters: facilities that are never used again, budgets that take years to pay off and regeneration that fails to materialise. It's easy to build an Olympic stadium; it's much harder to stop that stadium turning into a permanent symbol of waste and poor planning as soon as the Olympics and Paralympics are over.

The London 2012 committee set the bar particularly high, pledging to use the Olympic Games to promote better public health, encourage more citizens to volunteer and become part of their community, and develop lasting employment, tourism and economic benefits. But previous host countries have set similarly ambitious targets, and the results have been patchy, to say the least. Lillehammer failed to achieve projected tourism levels after the 1994 Winter Olympics, the diving and baseball facilities built for the Atlanta Games have long since been torn down, and it is proving impossible to fill Sydney's Stadium Australia, even for national sporting events. There have been successes—Atlanta benefited from urban regeneration, and Athens, despite the last-minute delivery and teething problems, now has a better transport infrastructure—but no Games has delivered on everything it promised.

With an increasing emphasis on transparency, especially where large amounts of public money are involved, there are no places to hide. In 2012, London will become the first city to host the Olympics three times, and scrutiny will be intense. If London is going to improve on the record of past Olympics hits and misses, then it is critically important to get things right.

Getting the planning right

Planning for the future is, not surprisingly, complex and challenging. In the first instance,

Abstract

Setting the Agenda for an Evidence-based Olympics is a RAND Europe report that reveals how our rigorous research and analysis can help policy and decision makers to address the immense challenges of London's Olympic Games. RAND Europe explored the evidence base from past Olympic Games and other major events and developed a meta-analysis that reveals some of the hard questions that must be asked across a range of topics if sensible, effective and valid decisions are to be made for London 2012. Taking this a step further, we outline research frameworks for transport and security, demonstrating how to put the evidence base into the context of London in the present and London in five years' time.

decisions are informed by what has happened in the past, the evidence base. But making a decision for the future based on evidence from the past is a paradox. Almost by definition, we know that one Olympic Games will never be the same as another—the number of Olympic sports changes, as does the number of events and the number of athletes taking part. For example, softball and baseball have been dropped from the 2012 programme, and whereas approximately 10,500 athletes were expected at the 2004 Olympics in Athens, in the end 11,099 showed up to compete.

Planning for an uncertain future requires not only a sound evidence base, but also a methodology that allows us to analyse the evidence in the context of what is happening now and what might be happening five years down the line. We used the evidence base of previous Olympic Games and other mega-events to analyse 13 key policy areas, identifying some of the questions that the London 2012 legacy goals will inevitably raise. The figure shows how goals turn into hard questions.

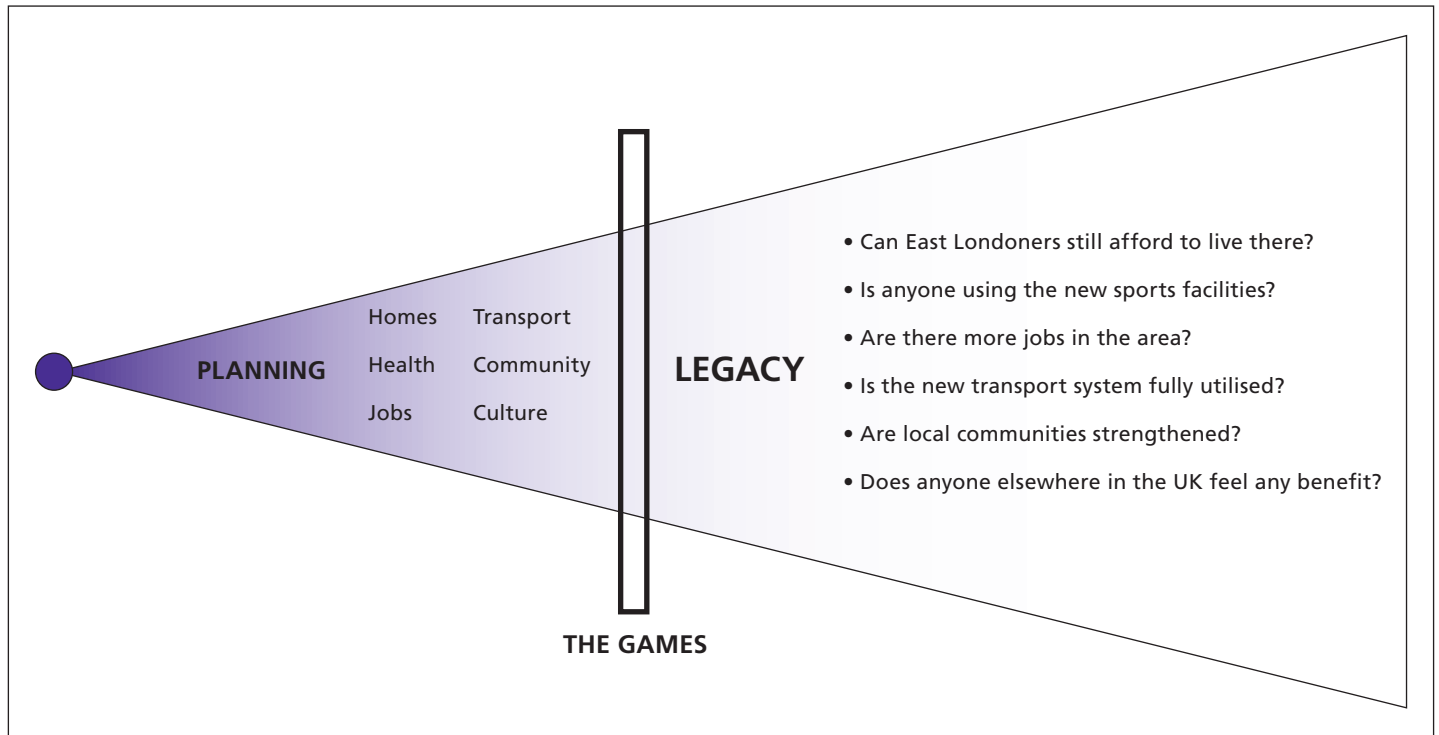
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Asking the right questions helps us to focus efforts on the most important issues for each area under consideration and build a research agenda that captures not only the uncertainties in each area, but also the crossovers and connections between them, for instance, between health and infrastructure, transport and jobs, and transport, security and health. We applied our modelling techniques to develop thinking in two areas, transport and security, to take a deeper look at how our methods can inform the planning process.

With an estimated 21.7 million passenger trips taken during the Athens Games in 2004, it is clear that all available modes of transport will be under intense pressure in London in 2012. The proposal to ban all car travel to Olympic venues adds to the complexity, and crowd management will become a critical part of transport planning. Our report raises important questions about the transportation challenges London faces and suggests how our modelling methods can be used to formulate ways of addressing those challenges.

Security is an issue that presents seemingly intractable problems. The security situation changed the day after the winning bid was announced, with the 7 July 2005 bombings

on London's transport networks. It can reasonably be expected that the situation will change again before or during 2012, but the difficulty is in predicting the nature of that change. RAND Europe's security team has previously developed a future scenarios model for a government department, and this report demonstrates how the model can be modified and applied to create a deeper understanding of potential security threats to London's Olympic Games. Greater understanding of potential threats today will be an important component of strategies to mitigate the risks in the future.

A good legacy

Big projects bring big challenges, and organising and running the Olympics is just about as big as it gets. *Setting the Agenda for an Evidence-based Olympics* demonstrates the need for rigorous research and analysis to anchor decisions not only in the past and present, but also in a plausible future. It shows policymakers, organisers and implementers a way to create the right foundations for the decisions that will determine the success or failure of London's Olympic Games and the legacy that they leave behind. ■

Further RAND reading (available on www.rand.org/randeurope/publications):

Evidence-based Olympics team. (2007) *Setting the Agenda for an Evidence-based Olympics*, Cambridge, UK: RAND Europe, TR-516-RC.



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