

## **The 2012 Olympics and Its Legacies: State, Citizen, and Corporate Mobilizations of the Olympic Spirit**

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The notion of *legacy* was intrinsic to London's 2012 bid, drawing upon the Olympic spirit in the form of personal challenges designed to motivate and mobilize individuals and communities in Britain and around the world. However, with the economic crisis and change in government in 2010, a distinct discourse of *economic legacy* also emerged. This increasingly saw the citizen mobilization associated with the Games in terms of the opportunity to promote the UK as a partner for trade investment. This article explores the state, citizen, and corporate mobilizations motivated by the Olympics. It analyses the structures and discourses supporting a changing conceptualization of legacy, with particular reference to the international communication strategies designed to co-brand national promotion with the Olympic spirit.

*Keywords: Olympics, soft power, public diplomacy, nation brands, national promotion*

### **Introduction**

The notion of *legacy* was intrinsic to London's 2012 bid, drawing upon the Olympic spirit in the form of personal and collective challenges designed to motivate and mobilize individuals and communities in Britain and around the world. Following the announcement of the host city in 2005, it was widely believed that the strong emphasis on urban regeneration in East London, continued use of the venues, and the health benefits of increased sporting participation had been integral to the success of the bid (CMSC, 2007, p. 31). However, with the economic crisis and change in government in 2010, a distinct discourse of *economic legacy* emerged. This increasingly saw the citizen mobilizations associated with the Games, which were conducted by autonomous actors largely for their own purposes and interests, rearticulated in terms of an overarching national interest that was typically framed as "an unparalleled opportunity to promote UK business, trade and inward investment" (FAC, 2011, pp. 3–4). The interpretation of *legacy* as qualities passed on to future generations seamlessly evolved into the notion of an economic bequest. As Prime Minister David Cameron stated shortly before the opening ceremony, "my mission for London 2012 . . . [is to] turn these Games into gold for Britain" (Lister, 2012).

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This shift is clearly captured in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's (FCO's) changing international communication policies for promoting the Games abroad. These were initially defined as *public diplomacy* activities, which sought to provide a layer of support to autonomous actors working to the Olympic agenda that would enable "the effective achievement of their own strategic objectives" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 20). However, following the change of government in 2010, the FCO's Olympic promotional activities were redefined as a *soft power* policy designed "to deliver the greatest international impact for our strategy" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 19). The shift from "their" to "our" goals reflects a fundamental change in communicative style, which is suggestive of significant discursive and structural changes to the purpose of activities conducted in support of the legacy. Most importantly, the shift seems to represent attempts to rearticulate diffuse state, citizen, and corporate mobilizations motivated by the Olympics into a single political agenda centered on national prosperity.

This article has two main aims. First, this discussion may be placed within an existing body of research on Olympic legacies, which typically focus on a particular research discipline and an associated form of legacy. For this study, the discipline is international communication, and the associated forms of legacy are communicative practices aimed at international audiences. The first aim is, therefore, to map out the evolving legacy discourse and practice in relation to international communication policies to better understand how the notion of legacy developed in both discursive and practical terms between the period of the bid and the Games themselves.

Second, there can be little doubt that the promotional policies for 2012 capture a significant instance of changing power relations. New structures for international communication were created by the government to support the institutionalization of its economic legacy agenda, utilizing subtle differences in terminology such as *public diplomacy* and *soft power*. The second aim of this article is, then, to map out and interpret the political-economic structures and strategies that developed in support of the Olympic promotional campaign to better understand the institutional power relations underpinning these changes in British international communication policies for 2012.

The guiding research questions may be summarized as:

- In what ways did the discourse and practice of *legacy* substantively change from the time of the bid to the Games?
- How did the political-economic structures that supported the Olympic promotional campaign change during this period, and in what ways did these changes institute new power relations?

In terms of method, this study conducts a qualitative, interpretive study of British international communication policies. This involved a mixture of personal interviews and document studies collected into case studies of individual legacy activities. The data were then analyzed thematically to observe patterns. Selection of materials included all online and print publications made available by the relevant organizations, supplemented by Freedom of Information Act requests made by the author. Due to space constraints, only the most characteristic examples relevant to the themes of the article are included.

### Literature Review

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) charter makes limited allusions to the notion of legacy, with just one relatively broad objective in its mission statement: "to promote a positive legacy from the Olympic Games to the host cities and host countries" (IOC, 2013, p. 17). Research building on this notion has sought to link legacy discourse to questions of the Olympics as a sustainable "movement" existing outside of the competition itself (Beacom, 2012, pp. 55–56; MacAloon, 2008). From this perspective, the "innocent language of legacy" may be considered a measured response to the excessive commercialization of the Games as a sporting mega event (MacAloon, 2008, p. 2068). However, it is also a development that relies on the ambiguous association of the Olympics as a social movement and societal heritage, and upon the ultimate sustainability of these intangible, inspirational resources for future generations. As such, it represents a discourse that is both *magical* (in a transformative sense) and *managerial*; it is an example of ubiquitous, uncontroversial rebranding that serves to obfuscate the corporate Olympic brand tarnished by aggressive co-branding and the 1999 Salt Lake City bribery scandal (MacAloon, 2008).

This approach is useful because it signals an extension and normalization of branding practices beyond the time frame of the Games themselves. Legacy becomes an additional opportunity to shape synergistic brand identities between host cities and nations, actors engaged in the broader Olympic movement, and the most desirable aspects of the Olympic spirit. This places national promotional activities in the spotlight, since sporting mega events are often seen to provide an "enabling condition" for orchestrated nation branding opportunities (Hülse, 2009; Lee, 2010; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Previous critical/cultural research into nation brands has sought to analyze the ways in which national identities are commercialized in branding practices, but few have analyzed these processes in light of the legitimacy afforded by the Olympics as an inspirational *movement*, in contrast to the already highly commoditized Games (Aronczyk, 2013; Kaneva, 2011, 2012; Pamment, 2014; van Ham, 2002). When explicitly linked to the provenance of the Olympic spirit, legacy discourse and practices can be interpreted in terms of the synergies and the "transfer of imagery and brand equity" afforded in the symbolic conjoining of Olympic and host city/nation aspirations (Anholt, 1998, p. 395).

Legacy is, therefore, a complex signifier of how the history and provenance of the Olympic spirit is projected onto the host nation's characteristics via the vehicles of citizen mobilization, corporate sponsorship, and place branding. Within this overarching signification, the terms *public diplomacy* and *soft power* were used by the FCO to encapsulate subtle changes in the intentions behind 2012's legacy. Public diplomacy traditionally refers to a one-directional process in which programs are created by an international actor to influence foreign citizens who might in turn influence their governments in ways conducive to the success of desired foreign policy goals (Cull, 2008). More recently, definitions have evolved to encompass concerted efforts by international actors "to understand cultures, attitudes and behavior; to build and manage relationships; and to influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values" (Gregory, 2011, p. 353). As such, use of the term in relation to sporting mega events has been considered relatively unproblematic (Murray & Pigman, 2014; Pope, 2014). Use of the term *public diplomacy* by the FCO during the early legacy activities supports an interpretation of the Olympic movement as inspiring citizens in ways that can promote social and political change. Legacy can,

in this respect, be considered a distinct public diplomacy outcome connected to the activities of organizations working within the Olympic agenda.

*Soft power* refers to processes of attraction and persuasion designed to elicit cooperation, and it is considered to arise from the attractiveness of a country's values, culture, and policies. States hold a soft power advantage when (1) their culture and values match prevailing global norms; (2) they can influence how issues are framed in global media; and (3) their credibility is enhanced by domestic and international behavior (Snow, 2009). Hosting the Olympic Games could be considered a soft power opportunity par excellence: The Olympic spirit temporarily acts as a global norm; an estimated global audience of 4 billion dominates international media viewing; and—assuming all goes according to plan—the host country's credibility is raised, and the world is momentarily interested in its culture, traditions, and organizational skills. Soft power theory contends that such temporary advantages may be “converted” or “transposed” into other spheres of power such as international trade; hence, use of the term tends to signify an interest in outcomes, understood as the bottom line (Nye, 1990).

The differences between these terms can help disaggregate aspects of international power relations—for example, through identifying distinctions and convergences between public diplomacy, soft power, and branding discourse and activities. Nation branding captures the early part of the campaign, in which the bid team worked closely with the idea of the Olympic Village as a sustainable place, and with its legacy for East London acting as a form of unique branding for the bid. Once the bid was won, the initial Olympic legacy strategy then emphasized cultural and social change through inspiration and investment in infrastructure. This was termed a public diplomacy campaign on the basis that the actors conducting the activities were working to their own goals, often bypassing governments and directly inspiring foreign citizens to improve their lives through the symbolic value of the Olympic movement. Soft power, on the other hand, is typically seen as a state resource equivalent to military and economic strength, which is generated through institutions and citizens (Nye, 1990). This seemingly minor shift in discourse implies a process by which 2012's temporary boost to national credibility can—potentially—be transposed to other sectors. The latter part of 2012's economic legacy strategy explicitly sought to convert international interest in the Games into economic outcomes for the United Kingdom under a new sense of national interest. The following discussion is divided into these three periods, reflecting three discursively distinct phases of the international Olympic legacy communication strategy.

### **Branding London 2012 With Legacy**

The Olympic bid was part of the Labour Party's 1997 election manifesto, and its development was intrinsically connected to attempts to institutionalize nation branding insights across government. The Panel 2000 Task Force, established in 1998 by Foreign Minister Robin Cook as an advisory group for modernizing Britain's image abroad, convened to coordinate “the projection and promotion of the UK's image, values and policies overseas” to “increase the impact of and respect for British foreign policy and values” (FCO, 1998). Among its recommendations was a call to submit applications for sporting mega events as an integral facet of maintaining a strong image. “Even if unsuccessful,” the panel argued, “these bids can have a positive impact on perceptions of Britain” (FCO, 1998, p. 9). The decision to host the Olympics (alongside unsuccessful bids to host the FIFA World Cup) was an integral aspect of New Labour's

image politics that foreshadowed more fundamental and widespread changes to the relationship between foreign policy and branding.

Following its formal submission in late 2004, FCO posts began the process of lobbying for London. All posts nominated a London 2012 representative who would design a program of activity and build a relationship with their country's IOC members. They were expected "to develop these relationships to their full potential" (FCO, 2004, Annex B). Posts were also encouraged to place articles in local media, develop website content, display promotional items at embassies (including a video), and distribute booklets and other promotional materials. Furthermore, all heads of mission were requested to meet with the 2012 committee for a "tailored briefing" when next back in London (FCO, 2004, Annex B).

*Objective:* Officials should not overtly lobby IOC members for the London 2012 bid. But if the subject can be brought up in conversation, it would be appropriate to indicate the strength of support for the bid from the Government, and to highlight its merits. (FCO, 2004, Annex D)

The core messages of the bid, not surprisingly, fit within the overall themes of British public diplomacy since the task force, including a focus on modernity, multiculturalism, and diversity rather than heritage and tradition (Beacom, 2012). Branding strategies were integral to this process. A series of "key messages" were distributed to posts to provide the background arguments for the sustained public and private lobby. These emphasized claims about the transformative legacy of the event: "*Transform: the lives of many in the UK. . . . Thousands of new homes and 10,000 new jobs*" (FCO, 2004, Annex D). A second series of messages provided more detailed background on questions such as costs and infrastructure, including a series of claims about the legacy in terms of sporting infrastructure and sustainable urban regeneration (FCO, 2004, Annex E). It may be observed, therefore, that legacy discourse was particularly relevant to the UK's overall image strategy at the time, which was to point to Britain's role in the present and future rather than to its history.

The IOC's analysis emphasized the importance of legacy to London's bid concept, noting, "London has proposed Games based on providing world-class facilities and services for the athletes, and a legacy for sport and the community through new and enhanced facilities and a greater emphasis on sport and physical activity" (IOC, 2005, p. 64). Indeed, following the 1999 Salt Lake City bribery scandal, the notion of legacy was part of the way in which the IOC was rebranding itself away from the view of the Olympics as a soulless corporate event, and London's bid team was quick to recognize and exploit this opportunity (Beacom, 2012). The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee argued that the "legacy planning . . . was more central to London's bid than it had been to any previous host city bid" and felt that it "may have been decisive in the award by the IOC in Singapore" (CMSC, 2007, p. 31). The committee's consideration of how the legacy was being implemented covered the regeneration of East London, the new sporting venues and Olympic stadium, the legacy for participation in sport, the Cultural Olympiad, the Olympic trust fund for schools, and efforts to expand the benefits of hosting to the rest of the United Kingdom. Each of these was to be conducted by separate actors with their own interests in achieving certain goals. The notion of economic legacy was also raised, focusing mainly on job creation due to the construction work and the potential income from tourism. Noting analysis that tourism levels often reduce

during these kinds of events, the committee concluded, "There will be an economic benefit to be gained from hosting the Games, but it may not be quite as large as people expect" (CMSC, 2007, pp. 4, 39–41).

**Figure 1. The Olympic legacy. From Department for Culture, Media & Sport (2008).**

Promise 1: *Make the United Kingdom a world-leading sporting nation.*

- Inspiring young people through sport
- Getting people more active
- Elite achievement

Promise 2: *Transform the heart of East London.*

- Transforming place
- Transforming communities
- Transforming prospects

Promise 3: *Inspire a generation of young people.*

- Giving time and expanding horizons
- New cultural activities
- Engaging and learning
- Going global

Promise 4: *Make the Olympic Park a blueprint for sustainable living.*

- A model of sustainable development
- Inspiring sustainable living

Promise 5: *Demonstrate that the United Kingdom is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, visit, and for business.*

- Improving business
- More jobs, improved skills
- Making the UK more welcoming

Shortly afterward, a comprehensive list of five promises (or "key legacy outcomes") was published (see Figure 1). This list was divided into 15 objectives, and the objective to demonstrate that the United Kingdom is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, visit, and for business was further defined as the intention to "contribute to increasing and sustaining growth in UK business, including small to medium-sized enterprises" (DCMS, 2008, p. 61). Although it predominately focused on the ability of UK businesses to earn Olympics contracts—for example, in construction—it also discussed:

Promoting the UK overseas. Our economy benefits when foreign companies choose to invest here. London 2012 provides a unique opportunity to showcase the UK as *the* place to do business. The Government . . . is developing strategies to use the Games to optimise the potential for inward investment and export capabilities. (Department for Culture, Media & Sport [DCMS], 2008, p. 62)

A follow-up document outlined how the legacy outcomes would be evaluated. For the above objective, the outcome indicators included overall attendance at events, "overseas perceptions of the UK from surveys," "international comparisons of UK conditions," "FDI investment in businesses" and "capital intensity in economy" (DCMS, 2009, pp. 29–32). These measures proposed a direct link between the popularity of Olympics events, foreign perceptions of the UK, the competitiveness of British industry, and decisions for foreign direct investment, trade, and tourism. The earliest period of the campaign therefore brought the notion of legacy to the very fore of the bid, carefully branding 2012 as an event that would have a lasting and measurable impact upon the United Kingdom, with the assumption that this would offer some moderate economic dividends.

### ***The Olympic Public Diplomacy Strategy***

Overseas promotional work for the Olympics began in earnest in 2009. The Public Diplomacy Board reviewed "all available research" into the UK's international reputation and found that there was much to be positive about. Britain was seen as "fair, innovative, diverse, confident and stylish," but also, at times, "arrogant, stuffy, old-fashioned and cold." The Public Diplomacy Board set this as the underlying agenda for the FCO's pre-Olympic Games public diplomacy strategy: "we want to showcase modern Britain as the open (welcoming, diverse, tolerant), connected (through our involvement in the UN and G20, politically, geographically, in terms of trade and travel), creative and dynamic place it really is" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 20). The board settled upon four objectives: to use London 2012 as a "catalyst for changing perceptions," to "increase the UK's influence," to "support Public Diplomacy Partners in the effective achievement of their own strategic objectives," and to work with the wider diplomatic network in new and exciting ways (FAC, 2011, Evidence 20). Striking in these objectives is the implicit and familiar process through which communication influence was believed to function in the British public diplomacy context: *to change perceptions, which in turn increases influence in ways that supports delivery of business objectives* (Pamment, 2013). Hosting the Games was, therefore, seen as an opportunity to boost perceptions of Britain abroad, and legacy was essentially the result of organizations drawing upon 2012's opportunities while working to their own international strategic priorities.

This was a relatively small-scale effort, however. Fifty-two activities were conducted by the FCO under the *Olympics* account heading during the financial year 2009–2010 at a combined cost of £1.7 million. These ranged from almost £400,000 spent on purchasing rights for imagery and footage to promotional events held in more than 20 cities. The cost of most of these events ranged from a few hundred pounds to several thousand, with a handful costing more than £20,000. A similar number of events took place the following year, leading to a total of 117 Olympic-themed public diplomacy initiatives in 84 countries between 2009 and early 2011 (FAC, 2011, Evidence 20–21).

See Britain (Through My Eyes) was the centerpiece of the early Olympics international communication strategy, costing £275,000. It was considered "an exercise in soft power with the aim of delivering . . . a programme of public diplomacy events and activities" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 20). The campaign would showcase British values through 30 short films featuring prominent foreigners based in the UK, such as Pakistani cricketer Mushtaq Ahmed and French celebrity chef Raymond Blanc. Besides speaking directly to their countrymen and -women about why they liked living in the United Kingdom,

each film conveyed specific messages tailored to what their countries supposedly needed to hear, and was tied to a bilateral launch event of some kind (FAC, 2011). Perhaps the most striking aspect of this campaign is its similarities to the unsuccessful Shared Values Initiative launched by the United States following 9/11 (Kendrick & Fullerton, 2005; Kennedy & Lucas, 2005). Nonetheless, it demonstrates strategies to improve perceptions of Britain and British culture as a form of legacy.

Other public diplomacy campaigns focused on symbolic actions. In March 2010, overseas staff at embassies and partner organizations were encouraged to run a mile as part of Sport Relief, a branch of the British charity event Comic Relief. £26,000 was spent from the Olympic fund to produce event packs with "equipment such as start and finish banners and advice on how to maximize press coverage" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 29). Nearly 4,000 staff participated, raising £43,000 for 55 charities. According to evaluation data, news media exposure reached hundreds of thousands of people, and the campaign "resonated with posts and prompted a surge in activity and enthusiasm" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 29). The British consulate in Jerusalem sponsored rally events with £15,000, including Palestinian women's team the Speed Sisters, aiming to demonstrate that the United Kingdom is "modern, cool, relevant, inclusive and collaborative" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 28). Metrics suggest coverage in more than 1,000 news articles with a reach of over 300 million. Taken together, these small-scale public diplomacy activities conducted by the FCO seem publicity oriented and focused on improving foreign perceptions as an end in itself.

A more substantive example is the Cultural Olympiad, a four-year program aimed mainly at the United Kingdom, although there were important international dimensions to it. It began after the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, with the aim to "encourage more people, particularly children and young people, to experience and participate in cultural activity" (Arts Council England, 2013, pp. 28–29). Although it was the 30th Cultural Olympiad to be held in conjunction with the Games, London 2012 was the first to establish it as a major event in its own right. The total budget for four years of the Cultural Olympiad was £126.6 million, about 1.3% of the total £9.3 billion budget of the Games as a whole. For the organizations involved in delivering these events, such as the British Council and Arts Council England—alongside a number of bodies representing museums, libraries, the nation and regions, and local councils—it offered "a unique opportunity to reinforce the UK's reputation as a world leader in culture," with a cultural legacy capable of "raising young people's aspirations for years to come" (CMSC, 2007, Evidence 75; DCMS, 2008). A cultural legacy was therefore promoted independently by actors working to their own goals and according to their preferred means.

Events included a World Shakespeare Festival, music concerts, theater groups, art exhibitions, and an architecture showcase. The torch relay, handover ceremonies, and opening and closing events were included within the cultural remit. A particular focus was placed on diversity and community events. For example, a program called Collective Conversations brought Somali and Sudanese refugees to the Manchester Museum, where they were filmed engaging with artifacts "from their cultures" (DCMS, 2008, p. 44). In relation to the Paralympics, the Cultural Olympiad also promoted "inclusion and disability equality" (DCMS, 2010, pp. 9–10). The original bid had included a major overseas initiative called the *Olympic Friendship*, "a full-size, ocean-going clipper, crewed by young people, artists, philosophers and students" that would travel the world on "a journey of discovery" (London 2012, 2004, p. 173); perhaps not surprisingly, this idea was dropped in early 2008.

The Olympiad culminated in a 12-week London 2012 Festival prior to the Games and an International Cultural Summit directly following them. Most of these events were free of charge. As part of the London 2012 Festival, a project called Rio Occupation saw 30 Brazilian artists contributing more than 250 works of art and performances across London over 30 days. Five thousand foreign artists representing each country in the Games participated in more than 1,000 events in London with the support of the British Council, and a total of 25,000 artists contributed to the festival as a whole (British Council, 2012; DCMS, 2010). In total, the final review claimed "over 43 million public experiences of Cultural Olympiad events," across 177,000 activities in over 1,000 venues across the United Kingdom. In addition to participation at the events, substantial national and international media coverage was also reported (Arts Council England, 2013).

Despite these impressive metrics, a Parliamentary committee argued,

Whilst some of the events which comprised the Cultural Olympiad itself were undoubtedly well received, we have seen no evidence to suggest that there has been any coordinated, properly resourced attempt by Government to use this potential to deliver a distinct cultural legacy from the Games. (House of Lords, 2013, pp. 85–86)

In other words, although the Cultural Olympiad used the Games as an opportunity to promote a cultural legacy, there was some doubt as to whether it achieved any kind of lasting, sustainable legacy linked to the national interest. It is interesting to note that this particular House of Lords inquiry from 2013 reflects post-2010 political changes in the relations between autonomous public diplomacy activities and coordinated soft power activities. For much of the Cultural Olympiad period, there was no expectation of a "distinct" cultural legacy for the UK separate from the Games.

A second major initiative was International Inspiration, a campaign aimed at schoolchildren in the United Kingdom and a number of developing countries with the aim to "inspire a generation." It was launched in 2007 as a flagship sporting legacy program that used the "Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect and the Paralympic values of courage, determination, inspiration and equality" to focus on sports education, learning about foreign cultures, and connecting young people (British Council, 2012, p. 15). The events were supported by UK Sport, the Department for International Development, UNICEF, the British Council, and Comic Relief, and took place in 20 countries, including Brazil, India, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Turkey, and St. Lucia. Programs included "Rights for young women and girls," "Peace and community cohesion," "protecting and safeguarding children," and "public health." It was the first Olympic program of its kind and has since been formalized as an international development charity aimed at influencing policy makers, practitioners (i.e., schools, clubs, and coaches), and participants in sport (IN, 2014). The advocacy campaign claims to have influenced the development of 36 physical education policies in 12 countries and provided sponsorship for new sports facilities in 20 countries. A total of 125,000 trainers, including 28,000 young leaders, received training in physical education, training standards, inclusion (including for women and people with disabilities), and leadership. The participant component has reached more than 15 million children (France & Jenkins, 2012; IN, 2014).

A specific example tying the Olympic legacy to international development may be seen in the Go Sisters initiative in Zambia (ranked 124 out of 137 in the Gender Equality Index). This initiative was aimed at equipping young women with “leadership skills, public health knowledge, sexual, reproductive and women’s rights, inclusive practice, school sponsorship, and entrepreneurship” (Kay, Palmer-Felgate, Mansfield, & Chawansky, 2013). With £500,000 of Department for International Development funding over five years, Zambian nongovernmental organization EduSport was supported in the delivery of training to 2,272 “peer leaders” (mainly girls) capable of cascading their knowledge to more than 25,000 children. This program supports a model of “sports development” using the Olympics and education around sports as an opportunity to address broader social issues.

An alternative approach may be seen in the wider program delivered by the British Council. It worked with the BBC to facilitate 2,500 school partnerships reaching 1 million children, with a program of English language promotion activities aimed at developing the children’s interest in other languages and cultures through sports themes. An English for the Games project reached 11 million children and involved a competition during spring 2012 for children to “show creativity in a second language” by creating presentations about the Paralympics. Under the mantra “London 2012—Connecting People Worldwide,” culture, education, and language programs involved participants from 133 countries, and 500,000 members of the public attended British Council-supported events (British Council, 2012). The Paralympic legacy itself was integrated into these and other activities and focused on raising the profile of people with disabilities, encouraging their continued participation in sport, and improving perceptions toward them. A year later, it was argued that the Paralympic legacy had been successful in boosting interest in elite Paralympian athletes but that wider benefits had not necessarily materialized (Walker & Topping, 2013).

### **The Olympic Soft Power Strategy**

The public diplomacy phase saw organizations such as the FCO, British Council, and Department for International Development working to their own remits, using the Olympics as an opportunity to run programs of events largely similar to their usual work. *Public diplomacy* was a term favored by the Labour government. Public diplomacy involves, in the words of the FCO, moving beyond traditional government-to-government channels to “talk to NGOs, think tanks, opinion formers, young people, businesses and individual citizens” (FCO, 2012, np). The activities involved independent organizations using the concept of the Olympic movement to pursue their own objectives, with some governmental support. In its report published in March 2010, the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee noted that public diplomacy had a “central place . . . in the FCO’s work” and marked its approval for the addition of the foreign secretary as chair of the new Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy oversight board as exemplifying public diplomacy’s deservedly increased profile (FAC, 2010a, pp. 29–30). However, following the general election in May 2010, funding for public diplomacy programs was cut, the Olympic fund was abolished, and scholarships were substantially reduced (FAC, 2010b, p. 14). Moves to decentralize the Communications Directorate (which had only been centralized in 2008) led to the end of discretionary budgets for public diplomacy, which in practice meant the removal of a pool of around £5 million to support such initiatives—including the Olympics.

The overall picture for the operationally independent public diplomacy partners was equally bleak. For its strategic planning between 2010 and 2015, the British Council was told to expect its grant-in-aid funding to fall by 25%. The Chevening Scholarships program granted 600 to 700 scholarships per year between 2010–2011 and 2013–2014, down from 1,100 in 2009–2010. The BBC World Service began major relocation and cost-cutting exercises which saw five foreign language services and 450 posts closed during 2011 (BBC World Service, 2012, pp. 3–6; FAC, 2011).<sup>2</sup> There was also a freeze on the government's £540 million annual marketing and advertising budget between 2010 and 2015. In short, Britain's overseas promotional apparatus, which had enjoyed a decade of growth in both budgets and stature under Labour, was hit by substantial austerity savings. These cuts took place in the lead-in to the Olympics, just as the public diplomacy strategy was hitting its stride. The cutbacks did not go unchallenged. The Foreign Affairs Committee argued,

The UK currently performs well in the global contest for soft power, but that contest takes place in an increasingly crowded field and against increasingly well-resourced competitors. Trading off the advantage the UK currently enjoys in that field—and all the benefits, tangible and intangible, that come with it—in exchange for relatively minor savings on the FCO balance sheet would be the worst sort of false economy. (FAC, 2013, p. 45)

Decentralization and integration meant the end of discretionary public diplomacy budgets. It also meant a new conceptual framework. Whereas public diplomacy had been the preferred term for British international communication, the coalition reconceptualized the priority as to “use soft power as a tool of UK foreign policy” (FAC, 2011, Evidence 87). The shift from public diplomacy to soft power represents important political and structural changes that had some significant impact on promotional practices. The soft power strategy sought to “convert” international interest in the Olympics into economic results via a new discourse of economic legacy. This was conceptualized as an Olympic “soft power legacy, building a wide network of influential relationships which will have a lasting effect by increasing British influence” (DCMS, 2010, p. 7). In this new formulation, the Games:

offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to showcase the best of the UK's culture, creativity, industry and innovation. . . . If we make the most of this defining moment we will boost national self-confidence, enhance the UK's reputation abroad and fully exploit the opportunities for growth offered by hosting the Games. (DCMS, 2010, p. 7)

Hence, by late 2010, the public diplomacy objectives for the Olympics had evolved in line with new objectives introduced by the Coalition government. Olympic objectives now focused upon promoting the national interest and reputation, bolstering prosperity, contributing to national security through harnessing the appeal of the Olympics, and increasing levels of coordination between government departments. Interestingly, use of the soft power concept helps characterize the Coalition government's implicit understanding of these processes. Public diplomacy made way for the Prosperity Agenda, which demanded unity in the pursuit of “commercial opportunities.” The Coalition's external communication

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<sup>2</sup> The BBC World Service is funded from the license fee as of 2014–2015.

strategy was dominated by the promotion of a unified national identity geared toward generating wealth in a globalized international society (FAC, 2011, Evidence 19). Olympic Minister Jeremy Browne observed, "Trade and commercial opportunities will be a major focus for all our Posts in the run up to 2012" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 38).

With the decline of centralized public diplomacy planning at the FCO and a renewed political emphasis on economic returns, direct leadership would come from Downing Street, with the new unification of promotional assets managed from Number 10. It is notable in this context that 2009's objective "To support Public Diplomacy Partners in the effective achievement of *their own strategic objectives*" became "seamless" cross-department cooperation "to deliver the greatest international impact *for our strategy*" following the change of government (FAC, 2011, Evidence 19–20, 40, emphasis added). Together with the GREAT campaign, which was the branding vehicle for promotional coordination, this represents the single most significant realignment of British international communication policy since the late 1990s (Pamment, 2014).

In the context of austerity, promotional activities for the Olympics increasingly focused on the "good news story" of the relatively smooth preparations. "No or low cost ways of doing business as well as increased use of commercial sponsorship" became the order of the day (FAC, 2011, Evidence 23). The Olympic Delivery Authority commissioned a documentary on the building of the Olympic Park called *Going for Green*, which represented one of the remaining initiatives in the sustainability/green legacy. Following some discussion between ministers, the FCO, and the Foreign Affairs Committee, the *national interest* objective referred to above was amended with "and to seek opportunities to use the London 2012 story for the promotion of environmental good practice and green growth" (UK Government, 2011, p. 12). Despite this, it would seem that the green aspects of the legacy slipped down on the agenda.

Far more prominent was the government's Prosperity Agenda, centered on a new Prosperity Directorate within the FCO working in tandem with UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. UKTI took the lead in developing an international business program for London 2012. The first aspect of this was a British Business Embassy at Lancaster House, "chosen to appeal to a target audience of investors with whom we want to build relationships" (UKTI, 2011, p. 66). The embassy had its own FCO ambassador whose job was to build relationships with foreign business leaders during the Olympics. Four thousand delegates from 63 countries attended embassy events during an 18-day program that featured "sector summits" in the areas of advanced engineering, life sciences, the creative industries, infrastructure, and retail among others. UKTI claimed that the embassy and its connected overseas events generated £5.9 billion of "additional sales"; however, the attribution of deals has traditionally been a problem for UKTI's evaluation of its work (UKTI, 2013). UKTI also ran a campaign called *Host2Host* aimed at securing contracts for British companies for £90 billion worth of construction opportunities in forthcoming major sporting events around the world (FAC, 2011, Evidence 38). The government argued that "The Olympic Games is not only the greatest sporting event but also the biggest corporate networking event in the world"; hence, "despite the current economic circumstances, the London 2012 Games offer an exciting opportunity which we are well-placed to seize" (FAC, 2011, Evidence 22–23). The Foreign Affairs Committee was not overly impressed and noted the conceptual slide in legacy discourse:

the overall message conveyed by the FCO's campaign is somewhat bland and ill-defined. We recommend that the campaign should focus on sending out one overarching message. That message should be the one successfully deployed in the UK's original Olympics bid, that London is an open and welcoming city, and that the UK is a diverse, inclusive and friendly country—that both London and the UK are, in a word, generous. (FAC, 2011, p. 22)

This message of welcome did find its way into the strategy, but was assimilated into the economic agenda. As part of the enhancement of Britain's ability to welcome visitors, VisitBritain began a £100 million four-year marketing campaign in mid-2011, called *You're Invited*. This project focused on the welcome tourists receive upon entering the United Kingdom, and the 100,000 volunteers involved in welcoming visitors to the Games were a further aspect of Britain's purposive branding as a friendly country. However, in light of the structural changes noted above, VisitBritain's campaign was swiftly rebranded as GREAT Britain— *You're Invited*, and the original goals of 4 million visitors spending £2.3 billion and creating 57,000 job opportunities were quietly assimilated into the launch objectives for the GREAT campaign (see Pamment, 2014; VisitBritain, 2012, 2013).

Cameron announced GREAT in September 2011 as a brand identity that would be used by embassies and other government departments as part of their day-to-day commercial activities. GREAT emerged in the spring of 2012 to fill the void left by the cuts to the public diplomacy budgets as a political initiative directed by Number 10 in close consultation with the Treasury. Its *raison d'être* was explicitly one of coordination, a results-based approach, and demonstrable value for money: "We are rationalising all of Government's international activities to promote Britain abroad into a single, unified campaign to gain more impact and make sure we are getting better value for taxpayers' money" (GREAT Brand Library, 2013, p. 1). It was framed as a "once-in-a-generation" showcasing of the UK timed to make the most of the Olympics, thereby granting the opportunity to "shape international perceptions and help deliver long-term trade and tourism benefits" (FCO, 2012, para. 1). It was considered, "A key tool in the generation of economic benefits during and after the Games . . . [and to] make the most of the economic legacy" (Her Majesty's Government, 2013, p. 44). Since the government was unable to use Olympic branding in its promotional work, the GREAT brand acted as a useful co-branding tool capable of generating synergies of imagery between governmental promotional activities, national identity, and the Games themselves.

The crucial point is that GREAT emerged as the branding component of a soft power structure precisely as the old public diplomacy structure was dismantled. Although the annual £5 million of discretionary public diplomacy budgets were removed before the Olympics as part of the FCO's contribution to austerity, £37 million was allotted to this new approach to be divided out to bidding organizations pending approval—and monitoring—by the GREAT board. The campaign was organized centrally by the Cabinet Office, and government departments such as UKTI, the FCO, VisitBritain, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, and the British Council were involved in delivery (GREAT Brand Library, 2013). Most striking in this respect is the lack of civil society representation and wider public input, and the extended corporate representation in GREAT through its Private Sector Programme Board. This was justified by the campaign's economic remit; because it has narrow targets related solely

to trade, it would not need wide public consultation, but it did require increased private sector participation. It could, therefore, be argued that an economic agenda with limited public accountability formed the new British soft power strategy, enabled by the proximity and co-branding opportunities afforded by the Olympics.

It would be unfair to suggest that other, relatively autonomous legacy activities did not exist. For example, the BBC World Service ran an eight-month campaign called London Calling, which aimed "to celebrate all things London," with the BBC as the "curator." The tagline was "the city of 2012, brought to life by the BBC" (BBC Global News, 2012). The idea was to leverage the "competitive advantage" of the BBC's geographical base in London and to "take ownership of spotlighting London to global audiences" under the concept "only the BBC can bring the cultural richness of London in 2012 to the world" (BBC Global News, 2012). Both GREAT and the FCO held exploratory discussions with the World Service over its role in the national promotional agenda, but this never developed into a formal collaboration and the World Service designed London Calling without any substantive input from the government. However, elements of the national promotional culture recur. As with around 15 years of efforts to modernize perceptions of the United Kingdom, the campaign was a "vehicle to energise the BBC World News brand and counter negative perceptions it being old-fashioned and stuffy. London 2012 was a positive, vibrant and dynamic story" (BBC Global News, 2012, p. 1).

The content lived up to its premise of bringing stories from London to the fore. *My London* featured interviews with prominent individuals for whom London was a major factor in their lives, including Richard Branson, Stephen Fry, Jerry Springer, and an African king who enjoyed anonymity in the big city. *Great Expectations: Living in the Shadow of London 2012* focused on the everyday lives of people in Hackney, near where the Olympic Village was being built. It featured local interviews and reactions with residents, discussions of multiculturalism and diversity in North London, investigations of issues such as crime and gangs, and an interactive map of the local community featuring snapshots of the people and sounds. *The Wealth Gap: The View From London* investigated inequality in London in the context of the riots and antibanking sentiment. *Song By Song By London* explored the "musical soul of London," exploring the locations featured in popular music. These and other documentaries such as *The Human Race*, *Destination London*, and *Faster, Higher, Stronger* built a strong corpus of human interest stories centered on London. The BBC considered the campaign to have been a resounding success for promoting both London and BBC News (BBC Global News, 2012). However, efforts to promote the rest of the UK were criticized; for example, although 15,000 new jobs and £1 billion in investments were created in London, just seven jobs and £30 million in investments occurred in the North East (House of Lords, 2013).

The latter phase of international communication witnessed a shift toward a soft power strategy that emphasized the economic legacy of the Games. Other activities did not cease, but their usefulness was increasingly seen through the prism of a national interest defined by prosperity. These changes can be interpreted as a response to the change of government and economic crisis, but it is also interesting to note how the structures governing international communication changed in terms of funding, objectives, and emphasis. Legacy discourse was, in many respects, a victim of these political circumstances at the same time as it was a driver and motivator of activity.

### Discussion

In answering the first research question, the discourse and practice of *legacy* changed substantively from the time of the bid to the Games. The various legacies documented here included green, cultural, developmental, sporting, social, and infrastructural to name but a few, and—crucially—they were pursued by organizations and individuals committed to those goals. The striking point is the ways in which much of the individual character and many of the distinct goals of these activities were leveraged to support an economic legacy, which gradually became the focal point of the government's promotion of the Games. Branding covers the earliest formulations of legacy, particularly through the idea of branding 2012 as a legacy-led Games. A public diplomacy strategy, conducted in a relatively autonomous—but also piecemeal and inconsistent—manner, characterizes the middle stage of how the legacy was promoted. A soft power strategy, emphasizing the position of all activities and institutions within the national interest, sought to transpose international interest into economic outcomes. Together, these concepts help unpack how 2012's legacy evolved from a convenient, somewhat opportunistic means of exploiting vulnerabilities in the Olympic brand, to its formulation as a movement capable of rejuvenating a region and population, to targeted interventions in foreign societies utilizing sporting opportunities, to an economic bottom line. With the Games now seemingly eternally associated with corporate sponsorship, it appears that the Olympic movement, too, with its legacy projected far into the future, has succumbed to this agenda.

For the second question, it is clear that the government actively established new structures that substantially altered the power relations between participating organizations. The creation of the GREAT board, for example, reflects a tightening of activity in support of trade goals. The Coalition's Prosperity Agenda became the overarching legacy goal of the Olympics, and institutional structures and strategies were amended and rearticulated to reflect that. Funding was also used to reshape the network, enabling some actors to expand their work while limiting the participation of others under the remit of a national interest defined by economic outcomes. More important is to consider power relations among the international audiences under discussion. Many of the public diplomacy activities sought to empower foreign citizens with reference to the motivational opportunities afforded by the Games and legacy discourse. They were, in many respects, participants in public diplomacy campaigns that offered mutual benefits, often with the UK providing funding. Much of the discourse surrounding the soft power strategy, on the other hand, viewed foreign citizens as trade opportunities. Although the government would no doubt consider this to also be of mutual benefit, it nonetheless raises questions of who and what the Olympic legacy is for. Rather like the bloated corporate nature of the Games themselves, it would seem London 2012 subjected legacy to a conceptual slide from an idea that motivates and inspires citizens around the world to an overwhelmingly corporate agenda. International communication strategies were the site of this struggle, and it remains to be seen what the legacy of 2012's legacy will be for future Olympic Games.

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