

MORE THAN GAMES: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN TORONTO'S BID FOR THE 1996 SUMMER OLYMPICS

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Events surrounding the bid by the City of Toronto to host the 1996 Summer Olympics reveal diverse and often conflicting views concerning the nature of community involvement in the planning and staging of the Games. The official documentary record - that is, the print materials prepared by the City of Toronto Committee of Department Heads Olympic Task Force and by various community groups - provides evidence of these diverse views. Moreover, the official record demonstrates how Olympic sport is increasingly viewed in the context of a complex set of social policies and practices, and not simply as a high performance sport spectacle.

The printed texts to be examined include documents circulated by the Olympic Task Force during January and February, 1990. Reports from seven funded intervenor groups (Canadian Folk Arts Council, Citizens for a Safe Environment, Federation of Metro- Tenants' Associations, Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront Coalition; Supportive Housing Coalition of Metropolitan Toronto, Women Plan Toronto, People United for Self-Help (Ontario), and the World Society for the Protection of Animals) will be analysed, as well as material from other community groups.

Community involvement in Toronto

The 1960s marked an era of increased political awareness and activism among disadvantaged social/cultural groups throughout North America. Toronto has a history of successful grassroots action dating back several decades. Examples include parent involvement in educational decision-making; citizen action to stop the construction of expressways, incinerators and high-density, high-rise developments; community-based campaigns to preserve neighbourhoods and to eliminate polluting industries; and women's community activism on issues of violence. Strategies for community involvement ranged from radical approaches such as public demonstrations, sit-ins, and the kinds of creative acts of civil disobedience that Saul Alinsky and his colleagues popularized, to more liberal approaches such as letter-writing, petitions and deputations (Alinsky, 1971; Amer, 1980; Keating, 1975).

Many of these initiatives have produced long-term systemic changes which ensure at least a moderate level of citizen participation in municipal and board of education politics. For example, advisory committees with parent and community representation are responsible for many programming and policy decisions in the recreational facilities that are housed in Toronto public schools and staffed by the city's Parks and Recreation Department. Given this history of community involvement in decisions affecting Toronto residents, it is not surprising that many community groups, both old and new, put the Olympics on their political agendas in the late 1980s after the City of Toronto announced its plans to bid for the 1996 Summer Games. Such groups soon found, however, that their understanding of community involvement differed significantly from the views of the International Olympic Committee, the Toronto Ontario Olympic Committee (TOOC), and the City of Toronto Committee of

Department Heads Olympic Task Force (hereafter Olympic Task Force).

The International Olympic Committee

The Olympic Charter comprises the rules and bylaws of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). According to the Charter, the IOC has “supreme authority” and jurisdiction over “every person or organization that plays any part whatsoever in the Olympic movement.” All contracts and agreements affecting the Games must be approved by the IOC.

IOC procedures for bidding and hosting the Olympic Games make little if any provision for community involvement, with the possible exception of the Olympic Cultural festival, which by its nature calls for considerable volunteer participation. However, even the cultural programs are ultimately controlled by the IOC. Plans must be submitted three years before the games, and the IOC reserves the right to approve the entire sports and cultural programs, including such events as the opening and closing ceremonies. Furthermore, volunteer participation in staging the sport and cultural programs does not necessarily ensure a meaningful level of community participation in planning and decision-making.

Despite the commonly avowed political neutrality of international sport - “Let’s not mix sport and politics” - the Olympic Games have frequently been the site of political activism, both minor and major. Hence, in its guidelines for candidate cities applying for the Olympic Games, the IOC recommends that each city address the question: “Can you guarantee that no political meeting or demonstration will take place in the stadium or on any other sports ground or in or near the Olympic village(s) during the Games?”

While the safety of athletes, spectators and workers is obviously a key concern, IOC pressure on host cities to suppress public protest may in fact contribute to its escalation, as citizens’ rights to public assembly and freedom of speech - rights that most Canadians view as fundamental and irrevocable - are temporarily suspended. The 1988 Economic Summit Conference in Toronto, with its accompanying street sweeps, graffiti cleanups, military air surveillance and highly visible police presence, produced widespread public opposition. Such a response may have foreshadowed similar community-based resistance to Toronto’s Olympic bid.

The Toronto Ontario Olympic Committee

TOOC was established in 1985. In August 1986, City Council unanimously declared Toronto’s interest in hosting the Games, and TOOC, under legal agreement with the City, became the city’s agent in bidding for the Games. Any recommendations made by TOOC had to be approved by City Council before they were implemented, and so there was an indirect route for Toronto residents, through their elected representatives, to participate in this process.

Had the bid been successful, the City of Toronto, together with the Canadian Olympic Association would have been required to enter into a contract with the IOC, and, within six months, to form an Organizing Committee (not TOOC) that would subsequently join as a party to the contract. No other group would be party to such a contract; federal and provincial governments, for example, are not required to sign any agreements with the IOC. In Toronto’s case, however, City Council’s Olympic Commitment required that firm financial commitments from the federal and provincial governments be in place by April 1990. This

strategy of obtaining guaranteed federal and provincial support allowed Ontario and Canadian voters some voice in the decision-making through their elected representatives.

TOOC's composition was by no means representative of the community. In May 1989, it comprised two women and 19 men; of these, there were ten corporate, seven government and four high performance sports representatives- On February 9, 1990, a letter from City Council to TOOC Chair Paul Henderson stated: "to ensure that TOOC appropriately reflects Toronto and to achieve the objectives of the Toronto Olympic Commitment [City Council] wishes the persons whose names and addresses are set out below to be appointed as Directors of TOOC 1996 Inc." On February 12, four new women and nine new men were appointed to TOOC, and two other positions for representatives from organizations were named. However, since TOOC's major task, the preparation of the bid, was completed twelve days before these late appointments, and since the eventual Organizing Committee would not necessarily include TOOC members, this was a somewhat empty gesture.

Initially, TOOC indicated some general support for the goal of public participation. Paul Henderson's letter to City Council, dated October 6, 1989, stated: "Working together with all segments of our diverse society can only enhance the quality of life for all residents of this unique city." An October 13 memo from TOOC to City Council recommended "approximately \$100,000 for public meetings dealing with key aspects of the Games, and approximately \$6000 for community associations to host meetings," but indicated minimal support for intervenor funding.

However, a letter from Paul Henderson to City Council, dated October 18, on the topic of the September 21-22 Council decisions asserted that "to expend meaningful dollars on environmental studies on a rowing course ...is totally inappropriate at this time." And, on the topic of public participation, the letter stated: "The council should know that we always had monies in our budget to ensure that the citizens of the region were kept informed by means of a brochure..." Finally, in relation to the community relations officer, TOOC offered to cost share the position with the City, but concluded: "We do not believe the other items are necessary at this time." The "other items" included the public participation process.

TOOC's involvement in the public meetings is itself illuminating. At the first meeting (November 16, 1989), chaired by Mayor Eggleton, the panel comprised councillors and City staff. Paul Henderson himself presented the third deputation of the evening, and began by stating "I would like to talk to you as an Olympian. I am happy to see so many tall ones (sic) in the audience. They are rowers... I would like to talk about Olympians - they are all environmentalists." In addition to the transparent tactic of exploiting this avenue for community involvement to promote a TOOC agenda, Henderson was criticised, in a Toronto Star editorial and elsewhere, for trying to stack the meeting (Bread Not Circuses, 1990).

A November 14 Toronto Star article reported on Henderson's campaign for "fair" media coverage for Olympics. He asked sponsors to pressure local press to create "that positive image at home.... I need your help with the Toronto media, especially the newspapers" ("Fair" media coverage", 1989). In the same vein, in January, 1990, TOOC took out advertisements in Toronto papers and television, promoting the bid through the slogan, "Go For It."

Further evidence that TOOC's understanding of community involvement was fundamentally different to City Council's is to be found in a December 18 letter from Ron Bertram, TOOC Chief Operating Officer, to Herb Pirk, Chairperson, Olympic Task Force:

We have always stressed the community involvement and dependence on significant volunteer support in our bid... we are recommending a series of volunteer working committees which would be established to provide advice and support to the Organizing Committee staff on key operational issues [involving] in the range of 65 to 70 committees and subcommittees requiring volunteer service from at least 600 to 700 people for most of the six-year planning period” (pp.5-6)

However, to use the unpaid labour of thousands of volunteers is not the same as public participation; in fact, it is more likely to constitute exploitation.

A telling exchange took place at the January 3, 1990 public meeting in Ward 7. According to the official minutes, a question from the floor asked “Has TOOC applied any of the objectives of the Olympic Commitment? Why not?” An unidentified official responded by saying, “TOOC is the Bid Committee and will not be the Organizational Committee.” However, in theory at least, the IOC requires the Bid Book to incorporate complete and final planning and budgeting, and preparation of the Bid Book was in TOOC’s hands.

There was clearly some confusion about the finality of the Bid Book. In its intervenor report, the Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront Coalition stated “In our many interviews with officials [it was stressed] that 30% of the bid book in the case of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympiad was changed following acceptance of the bid by the IOC. This fluidity underscores the need for more effective citizen participation” (pp.7-8). It went on to say: “The process of putting together the Bid Book is highly fluid, and driven by verbal (rather than written) commitments... The results of this perceived flexibility and fluidity are scepticism and distrust in portions of the community” (Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront Coalition, 1990, pp. 17-18).

Similarly, Councillor Korwin-Kuczynski’s statements at the November 16, 1989 public meeting on environment/waterfront issues reassuringly portrayed the bid as open to change. Concerning Toronto venues for Olympic events, he stated, “Whatever goes forward in the Bid Book is not carved in stone. These venues can be changed.” Yet a letter from City Solicitor Dennis Perlin to Herb Pirk, Chairperson, Committee of Department Heads, Olympic Task Force, dated January 12, 1990, clearly stated that “the Sports Venues proposed by the City in the Bid Book cannot be moved or otherwise modified without the approval of both the international federation or federations for the sport or sports affected and the IOC.” Furthermore, the City’s requirement of guaranteed provincial and federal funding would probably not permit major changes in the location and construction of facilities and housing.

City Council and the Olympic Task Force

At its meetings on September 21 and 22, 1989, City Council adopted the Toronto Olympic Commitment which included 30 objectives to be met if the bid were to proceed. On the question of public participation, the Olympic Commitment included the following: a series of evening public meetings; descriptive information (multilingual); community meetings in neighbourhoods where venues are proposed; a public meeting of the Executive Committee; a commitment to achieving a representative organizing committee; intervenor funding; and a full social impact study focusing on ethnocultural groups, people with disabilities, the homeless, young people, the sporting community, the native community, people on fixed incomes and the business community (Toronto Olympic Commitment, 1989).¹

The Committee of Department Heads Olympic Task Force (Heads of the Legal, Health, Planning, Finance, and Parks and Recreation Departments), established in January, 1989, took responsibility for addressing some of these objectives. The Task Force's public participation consultant, hired in July 1989, developed a workplan for public participation and intervenor funding in early October. The plan included: five public meetings; evening meetings of TOOC with the public and the Task Force; an evening public meeting of executive committee; a regular schedule of TOOC meetings open to public; five ward meetings; a brochure; and intervenor funding.

As early as June 1989, intervenor funding had been proposed by Bread Not Circuses, a coalition of anti-poverty activists, trade unionists, women's groups, community agencies and others opposed to the bid. The Coalition sponsored the first public hearing in early September, 1989, before the first city-sponsored public meeting (Bread Not Circuses, 1990).

The Bread Not Circuses Coalition argued that, unlike Olympic supporters, whose cash reserves were in the millions of dollars, critics of the bid had almost no funding. The request was refused in June and July, but was part of the City's September endorsement of the Olympic Commitment and the public participation plan that was approved in October. However, the Coalition, a group that was particularly well equipped to prepare a research report on the social impact of the Games, was not funded.

"Properly established not-for-profit organizations" were eligible to apply for intervenor funding. They had to demonstrate that they intended "to serve clearly identified and recognized community needs of citizens." The research areas identified were: housing, tenant protection, environment, waterfront, financial issues, labour issues, multiculturalism and race relations, as they related to the Olympics. (Intervenor Funding, 1989).

The timelines for applying for intervenor funding gave a 10 day turn around (six working days and four weekend days) from time of City Clerk's request for proposals to the October 30 deadline for submissions. Not surprisingly, many community groups found it difficult, if not impossible, to organize a meeting and produce an adequate proposal in such a short time. Most community groups, by definition, operate on a shared decision-making model; whereas one or two partners in a conventional consulting company might draw up a proposal in a matter of days, a community-based group needs time to meet and to achieve at least some consensus regarding such a proposal.

On November 2, City Council allocated intervenor funds as follows: Canadian Folk Arts Council, \$5,000; Citizens for a Safe Environment \$10,000; Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, \$5,000; Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront Coalition \$15,000; Supportive Housing Coalition of Metropolitan Toronto, \$15,000; Women Plan Toronto, \$10,000; People United for Self-Help (Ontario), \$5,000; and the World Society for the Protection of Animals, \$5,000.

Of the \$100,000 fund, \$30,000 was not allocated. No funded group investigated the two crucial issues of labour and race relations which had been clearly identified in the original proposal. Only one of the seven groups dealt specifically with women's issues. Of the ten groups whose proposals were rejected, two - the BASIC Poverty Action Group and Parkdale Tenants' Association - endorsed the Bread Not Circuses Coalition, and, along with three other groups (Artists/Environment Forum, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport Toronto Chapter, and the Bread Not Circuses Coalition itself) were publicly known as critics of the bid.

Public Participation

There is a clear sense from the official records and transcripts of, the public meetings that there was significant opposition to the proposed Olympic bid, & pressed through written and verbal deputations, questions from the floor and general discussion. Residents unaffiliated with any group, as well as individuals representing Bread Not Circuses, Artists/Environment Forum, Abused Women's Shelters, and other groups repeatedly expressed their substantive concerns about the social impact of the Games, as well as their dissatisfaction with the public participation process. In the words of one resident, "This process is not conducive to getting the right kind of feedback from the public. I would hope that . . . we do not have City Hall style subcommittee practices imposed on public meetings. Many people are intimidated by this process" (Perlman, 1989). Others complained that the meetings simply confirmed the "fait accompli" nature of the process.

The heavily print-dependent public information campaign was also a source of concern. Some \$180,000 (in contrast to the \$70,000 distributed to intervenor groups) was used to develop and distribute thousands of copies of a four-page information flyer "Olympic Update," available in five languages, which presented the plans for public participation, identified proposed Olympic venues, and provided details of funding and costs.

For those individuals whose names were on the public participation mailing list, printed material received during even one short period (January 8 to February 26, 1990) totalled a stack of paper over 3 inches high. As the Waterfront Coalition report noted, "We are concerned that information giving and education of the community around the bid not be construed as participation" (Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront Coalition, 1990; 16).

These "tons of paper," in the view of one written deputation, constituted "an attempt to pawn off conspicuously biased marketing 'hype' as real information" (Askin, 1989). A particularly blatant example was the TOOC Proposal for the 1996 Summer Olympic Cultural Festival, replete with hyperbole about the merits of Toronto: "a sweeping and rewarding choice of artistic possibilities," "a dazzling arrage of national and international performances," and "one of civilization's most daring experiments". (TOOC Proposal, 1990; 1, 7, 10).

Access to information posed problems to many community groups. A member of Citizens for a Safe Environment, a group which had received intervenor funding, stated at the November 16, 1989 public meeting that she had trouble accessing documents relating to Task Force meetings and Olympic Committee meetings. Task Force chair Herb Pirk explained that some issues were confidential because they were "real estate matters" and assured her that documents were available in his office any time. As noted in the Waterfront Coalition report, the problem appeared to lie not with responses to requests for specific documents, which were usually accessible, but with requests for documentation regarding specific issues.

Intervenor Reports

The seven funded groups ranged from the Canadian Folk Arts Council, with its uncritical multicultural emphasis, to the highly political Citizens for a Safe Environment (CASE). No intervenor report gave unqualified support to the bid, and most expressed concerns about neglected issues and negative social impacts. Intervenor reports were forwarded to the appropriate city department, and each responded in a report to Council dated January 25, 1990 (Recommendations, 1990). This document included all the recommendations developed

by intervenor groups, but in terms of endorsing or implementing the recommendations, several intervenor groups experienced a high “failure rate” at the hands of department heads.

The Folk Arts Council surveyed 103 cultural organizations and reported that only two were not “overwhelmingly positive.” However, concerns were expressed by some respondents regarding housing, the homeless, transport, traffic, day care, social needs and environment. The report expressed the conviction “that the Games would personify Toronto’s international lifestyle and multi-flavoured demographics” (Canadian Folk Arts Council, 1990; 1). As might be expected with a group that promoted the apolitical “Metro International Caravan” approach to multiculturalism, there was no discussion of race relations or the impact of the Games on marginalized racial minorities, and no recognition that members of these groups are overrepresented among the homeless, unemployed, and victims of violence. The term “multi-flavoured demographics” trivializes the experiences of these people.

In response to the Canadian Folk Arts Council, the Olympic Arts Advisory Committee (in the absence of an appropriate city department) endorsed the group’s proposals in principle and proposed that a representative from the group sit on one of its subcommittees.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals stated that it had prepared its report on the assumption that the bid would be successful, but expressed concern that no one on TOOC represented environmental concerns. The City’s Medical Officer of Health subsequently recommended representation from the environmental movement on the Organizing Committee and proposed an amendment to the Olympic Commitment to include a plan for animal welfare.

People United for Self-Help in Ontario stated that they did not see their role as either endorsing or rejecting the bid, but focused on its failure to address access issues for people with disabilities. The Commissioner of Housing responded to the group’s recommendations by proposing ongoing discussion and consultations, while the Planning and Development Department endorsed its proposal for integrated housing. Department Heads also recommended that the Toronto Olympic Commitment be amended to include disabled under social equity.

The Supportive Housing Coalition urged that the Olympic Commitment incorporate the resolution of the housing crisis as one of its objectives; the City’s Housing Department subsequently recommended ongoing discussions between staff and provincial officials concerning the group’s recommendations.

Metro Tenants’ Association and the Waterfront Coalition developed a number of recommendations for minimizing the negative impact of the Games on housing and the environment. In response, the City’s Housing Department recommended discussion involving Metro Tenants’ Association and the province, while the Public Health Department accepted the Waterfront Coalition’s offer of access to its research.

Two groups, Women Plan Toronto and Citizens for a Safe Environment, stated that the City should withdraw the bid and use the public funds on urgently needed local projects, such as environment management, social housing, job training, public recreation and transit. A second option from Citizens for a Safe Environment proposed “an environmentalist Olympics plan” to maximize the possible beneficial effects. The Public Health Department subsequently accepted this group’s offer to make its research on environmental issues available.

Since Women Plan Toronto were unequivocally opposed to the bid, their proposals were reported, but not incorporated into any of the recommendations from Department Heads. In the absence of any intervenor input regarding gender equity, the City's Director of Equal Opportunity presented a number of relevant recommendations for sexual and social equity, specifically in the areas of employment, communications, sport and cultural programs and access to programs and services.

Public Participation: Intervenors' Experiences

Both the Metro Tenants and the Waterfront Coalition expressed serious concerns about the inadequacies of the public participation processes. As the Tenants' Association pointed out:

We are also disturbed that those who raise concerns such as ours are labelled as "nay-sayers." This leads to negative feelings all around and further divides the community. The "hype" surrounding hallmake events is such that it becomes more difficult as time goes on to effectively raise legitimate concerns. Opportunities for genuine public input into the Olympic bid have been few and far between. The public consultation process has been farcical in its brevity and disorganization.

Similarly, citing feedback from ten community organizations and a number of individuals, the report from the Waterfront Coalition stated the problem of obtaining up-to-date information on the bid. On the issue of public participation, it reported:

The overwhelming feedback from area residents, resident, ratepayer and community-based special interest groups, and some experts and officials interviewed, indicates strong concern that community participation in the planning and decision-making leading up to the Olympic Bid has been virtually non-existent (p.7).

Public Participation: The Bread Not Circuses Coalition

In its roles as "official opposition" to the Olympic bid, the Bread Not Circuses Coalition focused on two themes: poverty and need for democratic participation. It stressed that the needs of the people of Toronto - housing, good jobs, childcare, a safe and clean city - should come first; that scarce resources should not be wasted on "mega-projects"; and that all the people of Toronto should have direct involvement in the decision-making process (Bread Not Circuses, 1990).

The Coalition held press conferences and made numerous media appearances, often meeting with hostile confrontation from reporters. Flyers were distributed at a number of marches, rallies and demonstrations unrelated to the Olympics (such as the Free Trade rally and the Ontario Coalition of Abortion Clinics demonstration), and copies of the Anti-Bid Book were sold at these kinds of events. For a time the group produced weekly information flyers called "Bread Alerts" mailed out to about 1,000 supporters. The endorsement of the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and York Region in September 1989 provided added strength in numbers and support.

The Women Plan Toronto report included many of the arguments against the bid developed by the Bread Not Circuses Coalition, and one of the Coalition leaders was among those interviewed by the authors of the report. Women Plan Toronto was also one of approximately fifty community groups and 1000 individuals who endorsed Bread Not Circuses,

which, as noted above, did not receive intervenor funding.

Despite media hostility and some public resistance to any critique of the Olympics, Bread Not Circuses did much to raise Toronto residents' awareness of the potential problems associated with the hosting of the Olympics. It succeeded in turning public debate to the issue of poverty and the lack of democratic participation, at a time when the official community consultation processes and education campaigns were perceived by many to be inadequate.

What about sport?

It has been obvious from the preceding discussion that the actual Olympic sporting program had a relatively low profile during the community consultation process. Two exceptions to this trend were the Bread Not Circuses Coalition and Women Plan Toronto; in addition, the report of the Director of Equal Opportunity proposed a study of gender equity in Olympic sports and events (Lenskyj, 1990).

The Bread Not Circuses Coalition Anti-Bid Book included a critical analysis of high performance sport as a business, and the Olympics as a television spectacle, with no necessary relationship to community sport and recreation programs or facilities for Toronto residents (Bread Not Circuses, 1990; 20). Similarly, Women Plan Toronto's report questioned the potential benefits for women athletes and provided extensive evidence of gender inequality in the Olympics: fewer sport and events for women, few female coaches, ideological constraints on female participation, and the sports media's sexist biases towards female athletes (Women Plan Toronto, 1990; 29-31).

For most of the individuals and groups involved - both supporters and critics - key concerns revolved around the social impact and legacy of the Games, not the Games as simply high performance competition or sporting spectacle. The economic impact, for example, constituted a key concern: supporters portrayed Toronto's hosting of the Games in terms of increased job opportunities, a legacy of housing and recreational facilities, and a healthy financial surplus, while critics pointed to the debt incurred by other host cities, and the negative economic impact on already disadvantaged groups such as the homeless and those living in poverty.

This highly politicised response to the Toronto bid was in part a consequence of current economic and housing conditions in Toronto, and mistrust and cynicism directed at elected representatives. More importantly, much of the response was generated by the conviction among many members of Toronto's communities that citizens have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Since the 1960s, North American community-based movements involving women, Blacks and ethnic minorities, working class people, and gays and lesbians have enabled members of these groups to develop effective strategies for meaningful citizen participation. The Toronto experience demonstrates the significance of these trends for any Olympic bid.

Notes

1. A comprehensive discussion of the results of the social impact study conducted by Jim Ward and Associates is beyond the scope of this article. A future article analysing how textual discourse distorts subjective experience (re the public participation process) is planned.

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