

THE WORLD IN LONDON

FINAL EVALUATION

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY AND THE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION

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SUMMARY

Background

The World in London was an exhibition of 204 portrait photographs and accompanying stories of Londoners from each of the 204 countries competing in the Olympics. The exhibition was shown in Victoria Park, East London, for 17 days of the Olympics, during which 200,000 people exited past the exhibition. It was up on Park House in Oxford Street, Westminster for five weeks, during which 1.2 million people walked past the photographs. In addition, the World in London website had 31,473 unique visitors. The World in London had an education component, which reached 193 pupils at eight schools, and has sent out resources to a further 100 schools.

Challenges of the assignment

Evaluating The World in London was challenging because:

- In common with other public art exhibitions, the audience was uncontained and difficult to contact.
- Intended outcomes are intangible: perceptual rather than experiential or action based.
- There were a large number of other arts events happening during the Olympics. The Culture Diary, which we also evaluated, registered 4,498 cultural events across 33 boroughs, including 1,763 free cultural events and 3,827 event organisers across the public, private and non-profit cultural sector.
- The subject is sensitive and personal. The exhibition is concerned with increasing the understanding of multi-culturalism.

This remit goes well beyond the usual exhibition evaluation.

Methodology

Overall some 1,004 people answered detailed questionnaires about The World in London:

- 169 website visitors during the exhibition.
- 95 members and subscribers emailed after the exhibition.
- 25 sitters/participants.
- 574 of residents of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets.
- 7 teachers from the educational project.
- 134 pupils.

Reach

The population poll found that 41% of the local population went to Victoria Park to watch the outdoor television during the Olympics. More women than men said they went to Victoria Park. People were more likely to have gone to Victoria Park if they are young, from Hackney rather than Tower Hamlets or Newham, and ethnically diverse. The data suggests that Victoria Park attracted a wide mix of people in terms of educational background.

The World in London attracted media coverage in 88 publications in London and around the world.

Recall

53% of local residents who had been to Victoria Park during the Olympics remembered the photographs three months later. The recall rate is higher for those who are older, and from Newham, rather than Tower Hamlets or Hackney. Perhaps this is because these groups are less familiar with Victoria Park, and less common experiences are more memorable. There is no consistent pattern in recall across ethnicity or educational level, which indicates that the photographs are meaningful across different backgrounds and/or that other factors affect recall.

Memorability

71% of website respondents said the photographs are memorable, which is above the recall rate, presumably because some of the park visitors didn't see the photographs and because predicting memorability is not the same as remembering. The World in London exhibition was judged to be memorable because of the size, number and quality of the images, the link to real people, the stories, the concept and the link to the Olympics. Respondents also commented that some photographs were more memorable than others.

"It is memorable because of the strength and quality of the images, and the diversity of approaches, as well as the large scale public presentation. This was one of the best cultural projects generated by the Olympics."

"I noticed them and still remember them three months later. They made an impression."

Stories

88% of website respondents read the text about the photographs. The average number of stories read was 40.4. 75% of respondents said the stories changed the way they saw the photographs. The stories challenged visitors' assumptions, especially any stereotyping, added depth, helped interpret the photographs, made the exhibition more personal, emphasised the link to London and provided insight into the photography.

"Eventually I found myself in these pictures."

“Even the vaguest context gave a sense of undeniable depth. It became more than a photograph, it became a story.”

Emotional impact

The most common emotions created by the photographs are feeling inspired, more connected to other people, more connected to London, impressed, proud and happy. Compared to other exhibitions, The World in London is higher in respondents feeling connected to people and place, which is consistent with the objectives of the exhibition. The World in London is also high in feeling inspired. This is positive because it confirms evidence we have found elsewhere that the arts can be especially powerful as a medium for advocacy because they increase rather than deplete energy, they excite people rather than causing them to switch off.

The concept

79% of subscribers, 78% of local residents and 94% of people who saw the exhibition in Victoria Park said it was a good idea to have this exhibition during the Olympics/at an Olympic Live Site. It was a good idea because: it promoted London and welcomed visitors, celebrated diversity, personalised the Olympics and embodied Olympic values, added interest, reached out to a large audience, improved the setting of the venues and balanced all the advertising.

Among residents, women, 18-24 year olds, Hackney residents, White people and people with a mixed background were particularly likely to say that the idea was good.

“The whole world is here in London. That’s amazing. And to see it visually manifested like this is immensely moving. And it makes you very proud.”

“The Olympics was a brief time during which Londoners were by and large in a good mood and receptive to inspiration. It was a good time to get this message across.”

“Photographs are more beautiful than a television programme or a book, and people will reflect on this exhibition in many different ways, and have to think harder rather than being presented a singular viewpoint as people expect from a documentary or book.”

“The Olympics brought the world together, and the exhibition brought the world together - they seem like a good match.”

Messages

The World in London was successful in communicating its message about diversity. Website visitors described the overall impression of the exhibition as difference and similarity, a positive and complex image of diversity, humanity and beauty. 71% of subscribers said it was clear why there were 204 images, although a few commented that it was not immediately apparent: it took them a while to understand. 80% of local residents who saw the exhibition in Victoria Park received a message celebrating diversity. 34% of residents who saw the exhibition, in whatever

form, received the message that London is the only place with people from all 204 countries of the Olympics living in it. 83% of residents who saw the exhibition in some form said that the photos gave a positive impression to them, with particularly high figures for those who saw the exhibition at Victoria Park or The Photographers' Gallery (88% and 87% respectively).

"They were all really eye catching and beautiful. I spent a long time looking at them. I hadn't even heard of a lot of the countries and was surprised that there were so many. Some were blank though."

"The photos were all beautiful as were the people in them. It sent a good message about uniting everyone together."

"This was the very best in portraiture; the familiar revealed as unfamiliar, the face in the crowd as individual and yet global."

"It was interesting seeing the different countries that were represented. It was a pleasant change to see normal people and not the normal group of 'celebs'. I thought the photos were a good idea."

"It was really interesting to see so many different nationalities have settled here, and to read about each person, such a human story."

"They represent the people that live in the area. This would help local residents feel included and worthwhile."

72% of pupils understood diversity as "our similarities and differences from each other".

Mechanisms for impact

49% of subscribers said that it is reasonable to think that an exhibition like this could change the viewer's opinions about London's diversity. All the sources suggest that the exhibition was a particularly effective medium for talking about diversity because of the immediate impact of visual images, the sustained contact between visitors and the photographs, the accessibility of the medium, and the complexity of the interaction with and between visitors, which encouraged thought.

78% of subscribers said the exhibition was not controversial. The exhibition was not polemical: it was stating a fact: that the 204 nations live in London, and that London is different because of this. This message was relative easy to communicate and led to visitors questioning their assumptions and stereotypes. The message was powerful as a tool for social change because it was simple, and a mixture between the new and the familiar. Its factual nature meant that the message did not generate resistance.

"Photography makes us work, and engage in unfamiliar ways which promotes thought (and pleasure, repulsion, stimulation) in a stronger way."

“The execution matched the premise. The diverse culture of London portrayed by diverse portraits of Londoners. Simple and beautiful.”

“The photos are portraits of individuals who, as far as I can see, chose to represent themselves how they see fit so shouldn't be stereotypical in any way.”

“The photos showed the subjects in their own environments, wearing their own clothes. I felt it was very real, instead of playing to (conditioned) expectations.”

“There are more different cultures in London than most people are aware of.”

“The 'realness' challenged stereotyped views. Nothing does this more effectively than a picture.”

“Some pictures were so different from what one's conceptions of that country are.”

“Together, the photos speak of the multiculturalism in London. It looks like a world of possibilities in a sea of faces!”

“All of the photos convey in different ways a message about London being a cultural hub and a welcoming city for people of various cultures and ethnicities.”

“I would run past the photos nearly every day in Victoria Park. Other people there are not in the art/photo design industry but took great interest in them and would discuss them with others.”

Impact on sitters/participants

96% of a sample of participants said they definitely enjoyed being part of The World in London. 80% of respondents said being part of The World in London exhibition was an important experience for them. All respondents looked at the exhibition. More than half went to The Photographers' Gallery. All respondents said that The World in London exhibition was the kind of exhibition they would enjoy looking at. Only 20% of respondents thought the exhibition was controversial. 76% of respondents said they feel they have a relationship with The Photographers' Gallery.

Organisational impact

76% of subscribers said this public project is the kind of thing they think The Photographers' Gallery should be doing. This is because of the large audience reached, the potential social impact of the exhibition and the scope to support a wider range of photographers, including emerging photographers.

“Exhibitions of this type help to break down social barriers by exposing the viewer to an art form that is not elitist. A large majority of people have a camera today and could, with some determination, participate in this form of creativity themselves.”

The Cultural Olympiad

57% of respondents said that the arts/cultural activities that accompanied the Olympics enhanced the sporting events. 32% said that arts/cultural activities neither enhanced nor detracted from the sport. Only 2% said that the activities detracted from the sport. The arts broadened interest and ownership, embodied the Olympic values, gave context and helped to create a special atmosphere.

Overall, 39% of respondents had heard the term 'the Cultural Olympiad'. Men are more likely to have heard of the Cultural Olympiad, possibly because they watched more sport.

"Many Londoners found it difficult to get tickets for the actual events, and even those of us in host boroughs felt quite distant from the actual Olympic events, so to have a wider range of activities encouraged a feeling of inclusivity."

"The arts meant the experience was more rounded and better than any Olympics I've seen."

"The Olympics isn't just about sport: it's about the world coming together to compete fairly. The arts and other activities added to the general atmosphere and the welcome London gave to visitors."

"These events meant that people who lived in London but weren't able to get to/be directly involved with the Olympics could really engage with the atmosphere and spirit of the Games."

"The Olympics is more than just a sporting event, it's a celebration of us all. Art/culture expresses that."

Profile of respondents

Our respondents came from a wide variety of backgrounds. The population poll, which was the largest element of our evaluation, was a broad reflection of the local community. Subscribers, who were the smallest element of the evaluation, are 52% professional photographers, but 25% are not involved in the arts in their everyday work.