

Community organizations are key to an Olympic legacy.

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It is not at all clear why last Tuesday's editorial in the Sun questioned whether community organizations' should address the priority issues and challenges associated with the Games. Community organizations are keys to the 2010 Games sponsoring long-term change toward a more sustainable region. The community organization that is at the center of their editorial was the Impacts on Community Coalition (IOCC). The editorial called the IOCC's Interim Report Card on the 2010 Olympic Games redundant, wasteful, and unnecessary because the issues are well-known and long-standing and because VANOC is working on them. The editorial was wrong.

The main reason why we know that community organizations, like the IOCC, are critical to the Games contributing to regional sustainability is because they have had a role in the 2010 Games since the earliest days of Vancouver's bid for the Games. The IOCC was instrumental in the development of Bid commitments and the plebiscite on the Games. The IOCC vigorously pushed for both and both were instrumental in helping the Bid succeed and in creating a sustainability mandate for the Games.

The IOCC's central goal was then and is now to translate the positive and negative social, environmental, and economic effects of the Games into a long-term positive social change. The Report Card's reinforced the need for VANOC to again consult, this time in order to successfully address the implementation of the commitments. The 83 local community organizations that comprise the IOCC are a broad cross-section of the region's citizens, community leaders, policy makers, and academics. They support the IOCC because housing, civil liberties, financial transparency, and the environment continue to be Games-related concerns. The Interim Report Card observes the current evidence to suggest a troublesome future for these areas in relation to the Games. Ignored by the editorial, was the fact that it puts forward some recommendations for constructively addressing these concerns. The report is strong, concrete and practical, a way for a host of community organizations to comment both individually and collectively on the progress of the Games and help the Games be more sustainable.

Sustainability and the 2010 Olympic Games are inextricably linked. In fact, when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) committed the Olympic Games to sustainability, it did so by calling it the third pillar of the Olympic movement (sport and culture are the other two). The 2006 Winter Games in Torino paid attention to this principle when they bought carbon credits and set up renewable energy projects abroad in order to offset the over 100,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions that their venues and operations produced. Officials in Beijing did likewise when they signed an agreement with the United Nations Environmental

Program (UNEP) to reduce environmental pollutants and to raise public awareness. And the 2012 Games in London adopted the motto “Toward the One Planet Olympic Games” thus announcing to the world its commitment to becoming the first sustainable (summer) Games.

The 2010 Games has promised a distinctly social side to its sustainability mandate by making commitments, which necessitate a great deal of consultation and partnering. For example, the Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement states that VANOC and its partners are, like the IOCC, anxious to “maximize the opportunities and mitigate potential impacts in Vancouver’s inner-city neighbourhoods.” To do so, they will “work with and be accessible to an independent watchdog group that includes inner-city residents.” The IOCC and the Interim Report Card are providing ways to provide explicit benefits to IOCC and its unique sustainability mandate.

The first and most obvious benefit would be a reduced negative impact of the Games on housing, environment, and democracy. The Interim Report Card revealed a continued desire among the citizens of this region to reduce the impact of the Games. This is important step towards building a more sustainable community.

Secondly, although the Games are now the stuff of professionals, drugs, and politics they nevertheless carry with them strong symbolic meanings, especially peace. Sustainability, in being associated with the Games, is connected to these symbols of peace. Bringing together sustainability with peaceful initiatives to express concerns about the Games, like the Interim Report Card, can help to remove the divisiveness in our region.

Thirdly, the Interim Report Card’s emphasis on consultation in the 2010 Olympic Games can provide opportunities to educate citizens by showcasing the roles of consultation and dialogue in sustainability. Exhibiting the products of public consultations (e.g., the Interim Report Card) could serve to enhance visitors’ and residents’ understanding of sustainability. Such understanding is a vital component of building a sustainable region.

The Interim Report Card reveals what could be done to leverage the Olympic Games’ sustainability pillar for this region. We can imagine this document being used to establish an informed, intense, but ultimately healthy debate about the Games. We foresee the development of an infrastructure of organizations, which can generate subsequent reports on the arts, culture and transportation. These processes will enhance individual organizations by introducing them to community members that would be interested in providing their support. Both the process and the outcomes are good; being engaged is health-enhancing for the region because dialogue is increasingly central to society’s being more sustainable.