

Assurance of Sustainability in 2012 London Olympic/Paralympics through a Commission for a Sustainable London 2012

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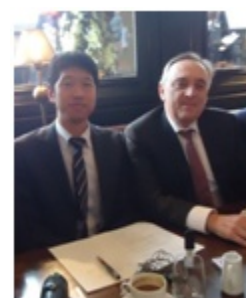
■ Overview

In this interview series, professionals who are involved mainly in the promotion of sustainability in Olympics/Paralympics are featured. This time we deliver our interview to Mr. Shaun McCarthy OBE, who was the chair of Commission for a Sustainable London 2012(CSL).

■ Promoting Sustainability from a Third-Party Perspective

Motohashi: I have heard that you were involved in the sustainability strategy of the London Olympics as a member of an independent body, Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 (CSL). Could you first tell us about how CSL was established?

McCarthy: CSL was an independent, official organization. One of the main promises that London made when it bid to host the Olympics was that “London 2012 would be the most sustainable Games ever” But in reality, sustainability was not well understood back then, and discussions often lacked accuracy. In order to make sure that this promise was fulfilled, they also promised to have an independent commission that assures the sustainability of the Games. That is how the Commission was set up.



Motohashi: What were the duties of CSL?

McCarthy: Some of our main duties were to assure the planning and progress of various

sustainability strategies for the preparation and operation of the Olympics and Paralympics, including design, construction, transportation, and merchandise supply, as well as to report on their results. Even though CSL was responsible for creating a framework for monitoring and evaluation, we also advised different organizations in charge of preparation and operation of the Games (e.g., LOCOG, ODA, TfL, etc.) on various issues. In doing so, we made it clear that our advice was only advice, and not enforcement. At the beginning, our main objective was to gain understanding of our role from officials, and to get them to trust the information we sent out. But with help from NGOs like WWF, groups of experts, and other government agencies, it gradually became possible to discuss a wide range of issues with various officials.

Motohashi: Was CSL granted any special authority in order to perform those duties?

McCarthy: No, we did not have any special authority. As Chair of CSL, I was obligated to report directly to the mayor of London and the Minister for the Olympics. Being able to bypass the bureaucracy and talk directly to political leaders, and being able to speak freely to the media and communicate with the public because of CSL's independence were enough. Each organization was required to provide relevant information to CSL, but it was heavily dependent on our relationships with officials of those organizations. Therefore, building good relationships was extremely difficult but important. The media sometimes asked us how we could call CSL an independent organisation as it is funded by LOCOG, ODA, GLA, and the British government. But, this is the same situation as a company hiring an auditor to give them an independent opinion, which, of course, assumes the existence of a trust relationship between the two.

■ A Network of Small Organizations and Big Contributors resulting in Big Changes

Motohashi: Could you tell us about the members of CSL?

McCarthy: CSL basically consisted of two expert assurance officers, and one assistant. It was a small but excellent team. There were also 12–14 volunteer commission members who gave 20 days of their time to CSL. I would have preferred them to be paid but this was not accepted. We also had a network of advisors available thanks to our excellent relationships with NGOs, other government branches, universities, and industry associations. For example, when we needed information on the relation between concrete and CO2 at an early stage of construction, we went to a civil engineering association seeking for technical advice. We did receive support from expert consultants for highly specialised areas that were beyond our knowledge and

experience, such as reassessment of labour skills during peak labour requirement periods, reassessment of design and procurement, and evaluation of BP's carbon-offsetting scheme, while the budget for use of specialist consultants was very small.

What I can tell from my own experience is that such a team should be compact and efficient to keep the cost low and avoid the criticism of wasting money. . Our funds, budget, and staff salary were all viewable on our website.

Motohashi: What do you think were important legacies of the London 2012?

McCarthy: First and foremost, it was the rejuvenation of East London, which was a physical and social legacy. We left an intellectual legacy as well. Through CSL's website, our sustainability legacy is now shared all over the world. Standards formed by the ODA are now widely applied to the construction sector in the UK and beyond. Other relevant industries have seen big changes as well: An event sustainability standard was instituted in the event industry, and a sustainable and healthy food procurement standard was introduced to the catering industry. I believe these would have never happened if it were not for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

■ Now is the Time for Action: The First Step is to Develop a Farsighted Plan under Strong Leadership

Motohashi: What are some of the important things for the successful delivery of sustainability in major events like Olympics and Paralympics?

McCarthy: As far as facilities are concerned, it is important to make sure that Olympic venues are prepared and constructed for the future and legacy, rather than for the sake of the games themselves. Post-Games management of the facilities should be also considered at an early stage. This was not done as completely as it should have been in London. Another regret is that LOCOG did not have a plan of energy control in advance, which caused a fair amount of unnecessary power consumption during the Games.

A big failure in ethical responsibility was that LOCOG's oversight of labour standards and product supply chains did not result in compliance with international standards. Play Fair, a group consisting of multiple NGOs, sent undercover workers to into factories in China for example, evaluate whether labour practices at factories meet ethical standards. Unfortunately, we failed this test. I am sure their undercover

workers will go to factories supplying Tokyo, too. They can be tough to deal with since they tend to see such global companies that are deeply involved in Olympics and Paralympics in a negative light.

Motohashi: Could you give message for Tokyo?

McCarthy: The first important thing in implementing sustainability is to have a top-level politician as a leader. In order for this to happen, the political leaders need to have a clear understanding of sustainability.

Then, it will be helpful to have an organisation like CSL to constructively involve many stakeholders and mediate among them. Without an organization like CSL, there will be conflicts among the parties involved. In London, various issues were discussed a lot among stakeholders, ODA, and LOCOG, and solutions were found before the issues were made public. And then, recommended solutions were published online on our website. You do need to ensure that the published information is shared in advance to all parties involved. Fairness and transparency are vital in building a trust relationship.

Also, in order to incorporate “legacy” into construction, you need to develop a plan as soon as possible. In our case, ODA decided on an overall strategy in 2006, which was seven months after London was awarded the hosting right, then on a general sustainability strategy in 2007. It was rather late in the game because contracts for the construction of the main venue were already signed by then.

Given the state of infrastructure development and situation of NGO activities, it is Tokyo that London is handing over the baton to. The time for action is now. Good luck.

Interview date: 25/Sep/2014

Shaun McCarthy OBE

Shaun McCarthy is an independent advisor, author and speaker in the field of sustainable business policy and practice. He was awarded an OBE for services to sustainability and the London Olympics by Her Majesty the Queen in her 2013 birthday honours list. Shaun has over 20 years senior management experience with large companies and 8 years' experience as an independent advisor to a wide variety of corporations and governments around the world, such as:



- Director, Action Sustainability, a niche consultancy business with a social enterprise mission to inspire sustainable supply chain management
- Advisor, Transport for London, expert advisor to the non-executive Safety and Sustainability panel,
- 2006–13 – Chair, Commission for a Sustainable London 2012, a ground breaking assurance body directly advising the Mayor of London and Olympics Minister

In addition to his OBE, he is Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply since 1995 and a Member of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment.