
Vancouver's promise of the world's first sustainable Olympic Games

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Abstract. Vancouver has committed to host the world's first sustainable Olympic Games in 2010. This promise is in keeping with local policy trends in the Vancouver region toward visions of sustainability and with growing attention by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to environmental sustainability concerns. We demonstrate that interests in sustainability at local and international scales may differ markedly, however, resulting in a range of possible legacies for Vancouver and the international Olympic movement from the 2010 Winter Olympics. To move beyond the fruitless search for a universally acceptable definition of sustainability, we investigate different meanings of sustainability using the tool of the 'language game', originally devised by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Examining sustainability as a language game in the planning phase of the 2010 Olympics allows us to consider the potential and likely scenarios for sustainability wins and losses, internationally and in the local context. Four possible scenarios are considered. In the most optimistic scenario, sustainability language converges across the international and local language systems, aiding the development of sustainability in Vancouver policy, charting a course for Olympic cities to follow, and creating institutional change within the IOC as well. In the contrasting scenario, the failure to find common ground in sustainability pursuits could doom the concept both for future Olympic cities and for policy practice in Vancouver. Two other mixed outcome scenarios are considered as well. This analysis leads to insight into the boundaries of the meaning of sustainability in the context of a megaevent, in which, more than any particular demonstration project, the communicated message of sustainability may be the most lasting legacy.

1 Introduction

We take a partly retrospective, partly investigative, and partly speculative look at how the world's first sustainable Olympic Games are being planned for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics (hereinafter referred to as 2010). In doing this we locate the range and possible overlap of meanings for 'sustainability' in the context of both Vancouver-based and International-Olympic-Committee-based (IOC-based) plans for 2010. We posit the idea that key local and international actors are giving meaning to sustainability in the context of the Olympic Games in different ways, playing Wittgensteinian 'language games' suited to their scale of operation and particular agenda. In order to offer this analysis we retrospectively examine the work done by the host organizers and the IOC to incorporate environmental sustainability language into the Olympic Games planning process. Our investigation progresses toward a comparative and context-based understanding of the evolving meaning of sustainability in the Olympic Games, as international movement and as local legacy. We contend that, while it is understood that megaevents like the Olympic Games bring major changes to host cities, less understood are the ways in which host cities may also shape such changes. Here, we study

the potential paths of influence that international and local actors may have on one another in the course of attempting to institutionalize a new idea into the Olympic Games.

During the course of its over one-hundred-year history, the IOC has gradually become aware of the linkages between its future as a global institution and its ability to reflect changing global values, including the values of sustainability. Vancouver, a city region with a policy history of attention to sustainability, gained membership in the elite group of Olympic cities when it was granted the right to host 2010. Commitments made by the IOC and the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) for 2010 are the most ambitious in Olympic history, pledging a Games that will respect and will not diminish British Columbia's natural heritage, that will respect First Nations plans and sensitivities on their land, and that will

“ensure the benefits of the Olympics are available to all people, regardless of income or social position, and further, to ensure those most marginalized in society are not displaced or otherwise harmed by the Olympics” (IOCC, 2007, page 4).

The stakes of these commitments are high internationally as well as in the local context. Achim Steiner, the UN Under-Secretary-General, has stated:

“Mass sporting events, televised around the world, offer a great potential for practically demonstrating ... the power of sport to inspire improving environmental management ... in every sphere of life—potential that can inspire organizers of big audience participation events as well as governments, industry and individuals to also become champions for our planet ... I sincerely hope that the next Winter Olympics in Vancouver ... pick up the Torino torch en route to ... realizing sustainable sporting events and leisure activities across the world” (UNEP, 2006).

As an Olympic city, Vancouver has the opportunity to distinguish itself globally and to solidify its reputation as a sustainable city. Alternately, with the influx of global capital and imposition of IOC demands onto the existing planning culture, 2010 may mark the turning point for Vancouver away from its current development trajectory and toward standard, unsustainable, international development trends as experienced before in other Olympic cities (Burbank et al, 2001; Ley and Olds, 1992). Whatever the outcome, the stakes are high for the meaning and actualization of ‘sustainability’ within urban development and megaevent planning. We examine the language used in treatments of sustainable development locally in Vancouver and internationally in the IOC, in search of evidence for the enactment of one or the other of these conflicting visions as Vancouver's Olympic legacy.

It is not impossible for global and local versions of sustainability to converge in 2010. Indeed, the IOC's emergent interest in the sustainability of Olympic events and Vancouver's commitment to sustainability may entail significant scaling up and catalytic impacts, in terms of the richness and effectiveness of discourse, the understanding of sustainability in different development contexts around the world, and in terms of policies, standards, and behaviours in support of sustainability. However, as scholars of the relationship between multilevel governance and sustainable urban development have noted, the difference between what attaining sustainability would look like for Vancouver and what it would look like for the international Olympic movement is potentially great (Bruff and Wood, 2000; van Bueren and ten Heuvelhof, 2005).

To the extent that success in sustainability goals at the local scale depends on particular kinds of success at the global scale, and vice versa, differences of intention, interpretation, and action toward sustainability may stymie the potential for progress at either scale. For example, if sustainability is showcased for the first time as the primary theme for 2010 and is met with confusion, disappointment, or misunderstanding

by the world's viewers and visitors, there is a risk that the value of the term will decrease, and the IOC may see sustainability as a liability for future Olympic events. The Olympic movement could, in this scenario, put an indelible stain of cynicism on the concept of sustainability and its applicability to different development contexts, and this could also lead to reticence on the part of global development actors like the IOC to associate themselves with the term 'sustainability' and its implications. This paper invites a deeper, place-based understanding of policy development that will, with perseverance, lead to a more embedded and operational understanding of outcomes (Peck, 1999). The need for such an approach has been pointed to especially in the study of the evolution of sustainability governance, in which shifts at all scales of institutional organization, management, and integration are needed (Savan et al, 2004).

2 Sustainable Olympic Games as language games

The fact that neither local Vancouver nor international versions of sustainable urban development have been authoritatively and comprehensively articulated makes the stakes of this global matchup more monumental. Sustainable development, often shortened to sustainability, entered international development discourse in 1987. The 1987 Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, brought into focus the dialectical relationship between global poverty and environmental degradation, and made the case that conservation and protection of the natural environment had to be pursued in step with human and economic development (WCED, 1987). This two-pronged approach soon expanded to the three-pillar approach of sustainable development, integrating social, environmental, and economic progress (Roseland, 2005). Equipped with this holistic, integrative, and forward-looking framework, the language of sustainability has proven immensely popular in international development and increasingly so in national and local policy processes as well (Holtz, 1998; Keiner, 2006; Owens, 2001; Portney, 2003; Robinson and Tinker, 1998). For other scholars and practitioners, sustainability remains a frustratingly ambiguous, perilously contradictory, and/or eminently cooptable concept that damages more than it provides (Basiago, 1995; Pearce, 1994; Simon, 1981).

Among the groups attempting to settle the definitional debate about sustainability at the urban scale, Olympic cities may have a special role to play. Hosting the Olympic Games provides a nearly unparalleled global communications opportunity. Host cities, to an increasing degree, are also held up as global markers of the most that planning and development in today's context of global capital can achieve, and may in this sense set gold standards beyond which aspiring global cities fear to tread (Shoval, 2002). Given that a great deal of the blame, among scholars and policy makers alike, for the failure of the concept of sustainability to transform urban development, is placed by both scholars and policy makers upon the failure of sustainability to adequately communicate its message, Vancouver's promise for the world's first sustainable Olympic Games takes on the aura of a litmus test.

One popularly cited urban sustainability framework, backed by the United Nations Environment Program and intended for international adoption, is the *Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities* (2002). These principles were created in 2002, following Sydney, Australia's successful 'green' Games in 2000. The ten principles put forward relate to developing a vision and restoring what makes a city unique and to the role of governance and policy making. While Canada has not directly adopted the Melbourne Principles, the Prime Minister's External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities (2006) recently suggested a similar interpretation:

“Sustainability is most usefully regarded as a guiding principle, rather than a specific set of ideas applied in a single area such as environmental policy. The essence ... is to recognize that there are assets, costs and benefits not accounted for in market decisions and values. Sustainability looks to the public interest beyond narrow market decisions” (pages x–xi).

Vancouver is a city region in the process of emerging in its own unique global niche of style, landscape, and culture, tied strongly to the language of sustainability (Punter, 2004). In Vancouver, sustainability serves as model and framework for city and regional decision making as a whole (City of Vancouver, 2002; GVRD, 2006). Sustainability appears prominently in specific policy initiatives from sustainable neighbourhood development (City of Vancouver, 2005a), to nonmarket social housing (Bradley and Lee, 2005), to food policy (Mendes, 2006). Metro Vancouver, the regional authority (formerly known as the Greater Vancouver Regional District), operates by the Sustainable Region Initiative:

“the way of doing business that will keep our region the way we want it now, and 25 or even 100 years into the future” (GVRD, 2003, page 4).⁽¹⁾

In 2002 the City of Vancouver began to guide policy through a sustainability lens with the establishment of its ‘sustainability principles’, ten encompassing value statements and goals for equity, renewable resource use, collaboration, diversity, leadership, and fossil-fuel reduction (City of Vancouver, 2002).

Sustainability is thus a popular international, national, and regional policy term. The application of this framework in practice at different scales, however, has been less fruitful (Gibson, 2005). The relationship of sustainability policy and planning to challenges of equity and justice, putting limits on consumption and wealth, and improving the quality of life at different scales have all been subject to intense debate, primarily in the 1980s and 1990s (Anand and Sen, 2000; Campbell, 1996; Lélé, 1991; Rees, 1990; Satterthwaite, 1997). The result is that sustainability is both easy to agree on in principle and difficult to implement. Consequently, both the IOC and Vancouver may have internally justified but differing interpretations of sustainability when they showcase the sustainability Olympics to the world in 2010.

We investigate the use of sustainability in the context of the Olympic Games as a language game.⁽²⁾ The language game, or Sprachspiele, is a technique devised by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein to demonstrate the contextual nature of the meaning of all language. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1968) devised the language game as a means to understand his insight that there is no direct correspondence between words and real objects:

“Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games’. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don’t say: ‘There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all* but similarities, relationships and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look!” (page 66).

We often assume that the primary purpose of comparing definitions of terms is to understand the actual cast-in-stone referents of the terms. Instead, Wittgenstein argued

⁽¹⁾ The regional context is important because Vancouver is one of twenty-one municipalities under the regional authority of Metro Vancouver for sewerage, water, energy, and certain land-use and transportation-planning functions.

⁽²⁾ This methodological approach should be considered a type of discourse analysis, a method that has become popular among social and policy researchers to analyze policy practices and outcomes (Rydin, 2003). Our language-games approach derives from one of the philosophical originators of a discourse approach, yet, due to scope, it does not go as far as some uses of discourse analysis, which attempt to represent relationships of actors via discourse (Lees, 2004).

that, despite the way we use language to compare similarities and differences, we have no clear means of setting exact boundaries on meaning or defining limits on terms capable of superseding context. Meanings are not “‘read off’ something lying beyond the world [nor] is that meaning ... gleaned like an empirical object” (Klein, 2006, page 369).⁽³⁾ Instead, words may take on numerous different meanings, depending on how and by whom they are used. Each meaning can have its own legitimacy, provided that it has clear utility within the system in which it is used.⁽⁴⁾

Wittgenstein's further contribution is that this situation does not leave language users in the throes of relativism in which nothing is as it is intended. Indeed, the nature of language games is that the more we play, the more we may recognize the common rules that circumscribe our playing field of common contextual understanding. We know the game we are playing well enough to communicate with some measure of common meaning. The Olympic Games represent this kind of a game as much as they represent an athletic event, as reporter O'Hara-Byrne comments in relation to the play between the Government of Canada and VANOC: “there's a game being played here that's not played at the Olympics, it's called politics” (Newman and O'Hara-Byrne, 2006). It is language that guides the instrumental tasks of planning and hosting 2010 and the multiple layers of local, national, and international politics that accompany this.

Difficulties in arriving at a simple, straightforward, and universally acceptable definition of sustainability and sustainable development are often faulted for the lack of progress toward sustainable development decisions and outcomes (Keiner, 2006). Some see the definitional task as the essential first step in sustainability progress, that the merger of local Vancouver and IOC definitions of sustainability, in this case, is essential to sustainable development actions in Olympic events. Wittgenstein (1968) offers a different interpretation of the definitional task:

“How should we explain to someone what a game is? I imagine that we should describe games to him [sic], and we might add: ‘This and similar things are called ‘games’’. And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is?—But this is not ignorance. We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn. To repeat, we can draw a boundary—for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! (Except for that special purpose.) No more than it took the definition: 1 pace = 75 cm to make the measure of length ‘one pace’ usable” (page 69).

We can use this idea to think about the difference it might make in the Olympic Games planning process that actors employ varying concepts of sustainability in language games that define and enact certain interpretations of reality. In this view, the task of advancing sustainability in the Olympic Games is not a task of constructing a definition and rules with absolute accuracy and precision. This is an unrealistic expectation of language. Instead, by conceiving of language in play, we can establish a common ground of rules to guide fair action, but at the same time we can accept that many judgments can only be made as context demands, and greater precision need

⁽³⁾ Our use of Wittgenstein's notion of the language game in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1968) adopts an interpretation of this idea as representing the pragmatic strain in the later Wittgenstein, or ‘ordinary language philosophy’. This is to say that, although some of Wittgenstein's readers have cautioned against the use of his philosophy as an undergirding for social criticism and progressive political thought, our interpretation follows that of Pohlaus and Wright (2002) whose view is that “Wittgenstein, without giving us a specific program of political thought, creates potent possibilities for social criticism through paying attention to philosophy as an outgrowth of ordinary language” (page 804).

⁽⁴⁾ On the definitional debate about sustainability, it is not difficult to ascertain what Wittgenstein's stance might have been. Throughout his later writings he held that a term only took on meaning in the particularities of the context in which it was used (Crary, 2003).

never be articulated. The term ‘sustainability’ is a prime example of language ‘in play’ because it is notoriously malleable in its definition, application, and implications (Mebratu, 1998; Redclift, 1987; Robinson, 2004).

Investigating sustainability as a language game thus entails the analytical separation of usage of the term by actors at different scales of interest based on the steps being taken toward and/or away from sustainability. Our interest in the language games played with sustainability is not meant to trivialize the practice of sustainability in specific dimensions of resource conservation, climate change, reduction of toxic substances, housing choice, and other matters of material importance. Instead, our intent is to foreground the vital importance of language as the currency of communications, branding, policy, and decision making at local and international scales. Using a language games framework, our interest lies in how sustainability is described, defined, discussed, and defended by local and international actors in the 2010 planning process. Thus, we can begin to separate out what it would mean for actors at each scale to achieve different levels of sustainability progress or stagnation. Four possible scenarios can be outlined and their relative values can be compared. When comparing value, our primary focus is on what the different scenarios will mean for communicating sustainability to Olympic spectators and participants. At the same time, it has been impossible to avoid some judgment of the relative quality of different 2010 initiatives with regard to their qualitative ability to affect sustainable outcomes. Ultimate assessments of the value of each of these initiatives, however important, are beyond the scope of this paper. Before turning to these scenarios in the case of 2010, the next section establishes the history of environment and sustainability concerns within the international Olympic movement.

3 The emergence of environment and sustainability in Olympic Games bidding and planning

Table 1 outlines the major milestones in the evolution of environment and sustainability considerations in the Olympic Games. This timeline demonstrates citizen-driven actions to identify and to prioritize environmental considerations in Olympic bidding and planning. Consider, for example, the citizens of Tokyo voicing concerns about pollution and water quality for the 1964 Games (Chalkley and Essex, 1999), or about Denver’s refusal to host the Games in 1974, following citizens’ concerns that the Games would be detrimental to the environment (Chernushenko, 1994; Lenskyj, 1998). Despite these grassroots actions, it was not until the early 1990s, following international dialogue on sustainable development, that the environment became a formal consideration of hosting the Olympic Games.

In the early 1990s organizers of the Lillehammer 1994 Winter Games formally adopted environmental principles for the Games, following citizen outcry about the impacts of the Olympics on the environment. This act, coupled with world demand, convinced the IOC of the need to formally recognize the environment. As a result, in 1992 members of the IOC signed the Earth Pledge (Planet Drum, 2002).⁽⁵⁾ In 1994 the IOC furthered this commitment by adding ‘environment’ as the third Olympic pillar to the existing pillars of sport and culture, and the Centennial Olympic Congress officially added the following to the Olympic Charter:

“the Olympic Games are held in conditions which demonstrate a responsible concern for environmental issues and encourage the Olympic Movement to demonstrate a responsible concern for environmental issues, takes measures to reflect such concern in its activities and educates all those connected with the Olympic Movement as to the importance of sustainable development” (IOC, 2004, Olympic Charter, Rule 2, page 13).

⁽⁵⁾ The Earth Pledge mission is to identify and promote

“innovative techniques and technologies that restore the balance between human and natural systems” (Earth Pledge, 2005).

Table 1. History of environment and sustainability in the Olympic Games.

Year	
1964	Citizens of Tokyo voice concerns about pollution and water quality
1974	Denver citizens turn down the Games for environmental reasons
1987	Release of the Brundtland Report
1991	Lillehammer decides to formally pursue a 'green Games'
1992	International Olympic Committee (IOC) signs the Earth Pledge
1994	Lillehammer hosts the first 'green Games'; the environment is adopted as the third pillar of focus; United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)/IOC sign an agreement on sport and the environment
1995	2002 bid cities are the first to be officially evaluated on their environmental plans during the bidding process; UNEP/IOC host the first World Conference on Sport and the Environment
1996	Creation of the Sport and Environment Commission; the Olympic Charter is modified to refer to the environment
1997	UNEP/IOC host the second World Conference on Sport and the Environment
1999	Creation of Olympic Agenda 21
2000	Sydney sets a new global Olympic standard by hosting the 'green Games'
2001	IOC begins the process of setting economic, social, and environmental indicators
2003	Vancouver is selected as host city of the 2010 sustainability Games
2005	London Organizing Committee of the 2012 Olympic Games (LOCOG) wins the rights to the 2012 'one planet Olympics'; Beijing Organizing Committee of the 2008 Olympic Games signs agreement with UNEP for the 'greenest ever' Games and completes its initial OGGI report
2006	Torino hosts the 2006 Winter Games in an urban setting for better use of city centres and a recycling of sports infrastructure, and purchases carbon credits; UNEP signs an agreement to make the 2008 Beijing Games 'the greenest ever'; London 2012's sustainability policy is approved and LOCOG submits the OGGI study structure; VANOC completes its initial OGGI report
2007	UNEP names IOC and President Jacques Rogge 'Champions of the Earth 2007', citing Torino as a shining example

Two years later, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the IOC signed an agreement formalizing the Olympic Sport and Environment Commission within the IOC, with a sustainability education and advising mandate. This marked the first appearance of the language of sustainable development in official Olympic literature, and, as the Commission gained strength, the IOC expanded its evaluations of Olympic bids to include an environmental sustainability component (Kearins and Pavlovich, 2002).

Momentum around environmental issues increased and in 1996, at the 105th IOC session, the IOC approved a recommendation to:

“take a leading role with respect to the environment ... recognizing the unique opportunity provided by the regular celebration of the Olympic Games to emphasize the importance of the environment” (as quoted in Planet Drum, 2002).

Host cities responded with myriad approaches to addressing the environmental impacts of Olympic events. While some of these approaches have been quite successful, the lack of specific goals made delivering optional environmental initiatives more difficult in host cities that found themselves facing financial and time constraints. In response to this problem the IOC created semiformal guidelines parallel to those of *Agenda 21*, the celebrated formal outcome of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, in its *Olympic Agenda 21* document in 1999. This document not only addressed issues faced under the environment pillar, but broadly focused on socio-economic issues and on strengthening the role of major groups (Vancouver 2010, no date a) (see table 2).

Table 2. Objectives of Olympic Agenda 21.

Improved socioeconomic conditions	Engaging the values of Olympism and action on behalf of sustainable development Stronger international cooperation for sustainable development Combating exclusion Changing consumer habits Health protection Human habitat and institutions Integrating the concept of sustainable development into sports policies
Conservation and management of resources for sustainable development	Methodology of environmental action for the Olympic movement Protection of conservation areas and countryside Sports facilities Sports equipment Transport Energy Accommodation and catering at major sports events Water management Management of hazardous products, waste, and pollution Quality of the biosphere and maintenance of biodiversity
Strengthening the role of major groups	Advancement of the role of women Promoting the role of young people Recognition and promotion of indigenous populations

Because these documents represent stages in the development of criteria for hosting the Games in alignment with sustainability principles, both the Olympic Environment and Sport Commission's requirements for host cities and the *Olympic Agenda 21* were crucial for greater acceptance of sustainability within the Olympic community. Importantly, however, the IOC's policies were based mostly on existing business-environment protocols—that is, voluntary measures rather than explicit regulations. Greenpeace responded to this perceived oversight by publishing a set of guidelines in 2000. This document recommended that the IOC

“increase its capacity to advise, direct and pressure bidding and host cities to ensure that their environmental commitments [are] met” (Greenpeace, 2000, page 2).

Although the IOC did not formally adopt the Greenpeace guidelines, at the Fourth World Conference on Sport and the Environment the IOC signed another resolution, which urged all members of the Olympic Movement

“to continue and intensify their efforts in implementing environmental, economic and social sustainability in all of their policies and activities” (Athens Environmental Foundation, 2004).

To achieve this pursuit the IOC decided to measure the impact of the Olympic Games on the host city and its citizens and environs. Consequently, the IOC developed the Olympic Games Global Impact (OGGI) initiative, a methodological framework for standardizing the measurement of Olympic impact through economic, social, and environmental indicators (IOC, 2006).

Commitments by host cities to achieve ever greener and more sustainable events are varied and lauded by UNEP. Organizers of the 2006 Winter Games in Torino bought carbon credits from renewable-energy projects in India and Sri Lanka, and from an energy efficiency scheme in Eritrea, to offset nearly 67% of what venues and operations produced,⁽⁶⁾ and made modest innovations in the areas of waste reduction, water conservation, and green building design (Lord, 2007; TOROC, 2006; UNEP, 2005). Similarly, UNEP has signed an agreement to make the 2008 Beijing

⁽⁶⁾ This figure included estimates of emissions generated by athletes' travel to and from Torino, but not those of spectators (UNEP, 2006).

Olympic Games “the greenest ever” (UNEP, 2005). Organizers will work with UNEP to reduce environmental pollutants and to raise public awareness about such issues among the people of China. On 6 July 2005 London won the rights to host the 2012 ‘one planet Olympics’ (London 2012, 2005) under the banner of local and international sustainability. VANOC has chosen to highlight sustainability not just in its OGGI reports, but also through its vision, mission, and value statements (see table 3). Within the organization, VANOC has already used this formal commitment to sustainability to invest in a sustainability arm to operations, which has a broad focus on relationships with local First Nations, inclusion of marginalized populations, environmentally friendly building techniques and business operations, sustainable neighbourhoods, and ethical purchasing policies (IOCC, 2007). Both the IOC and VANOC have officially adopted the language of sustainability. The challenge now is to develop the rules and procedures to apply this language to practice in Olympic planning. The results from 2010 will show how the IOC’s and Vancouver’s definitions of sustainability communicate and translate into action.

Table 3. Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games’s (VANOC’s) vision, mission statement, and values.

VANOC vision	A stronger Canada whose spirit is raised by its passion for sport, culture, and sustainability
VANOC mission	To touch the soul of the nation and to inspire the world by creating and delivering an extraordinary Olympic and Paralympic experience with lasting legacies
VANOC values	<i>Team</i> : fair play, respect, compassion, accountability, and inclusion <i>Trust</i> : integrity, honesty, respect, fairness, and compassion <i>Excellence</i> : recognition, compassion, and accountability <i>Sustainability</i> : financial, economic, social, and environmental <i>Creativity</i> : innovation, flexibility, and adaptability

4 Four possible scenarios for sustainability progress or stagnation by 2010

Varying interpretations and contexts—different language games—of sustainability at global and local levels could either create new opportunities for communication or widen the gap between international and local visions. Because of these variable possible outcomes, international and local sustainability policies and processes could progress, stagnate, diverge, or converge, leading to two differentiable scenarios at each scale (see table 4). The standard of progress or stagnation we are using here derives from the collective judgment that will be cast by the local and international communities on 2010, as they have been on all Olympic Games, broadcast primarily through the media.

Table 4. Four possible outcomes for sustainability progress or stagnation in 2010.

Scale	International Olympic movement	Local policy context
<i>Outcome</i>		
Sustainability progresses	Raising standards for sustainability in Olympic cities	Sustainability thinking and policy becomes a competitive advantage
	a	c
	b	d
Sustainability stagnates	Sustainability attempts fail to inspire the Olympic movement	Capping the ceiling of sustainability innovations locally

If, from an international perspective, sustainability progresses through the vehicle of 2010, higher standards for all Olympic host cities will result. This could lead to global acceptance of sustainability as a necessary part of international athletics event planning and other international sporting organizations, such as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), could adopt similar standards.⁽⁷⁾ However, if international sustainability stagnates, the concept and its message will be seen as a failure, with the likely result of a loss of commitment from the IOC to address sustainability.

At the local scale, sustainability progress could further cement the institutional status of sustainability within official Vancouver policy, embraced as a competitive advantage as the city secures its Olympic status. If sustainability stagnates locally during the 2010 Games, however, sustainability innovations and progress made locally could risk being mothballed or overturned in favour of a new direction and organizing language for policy. This could have lasting impacts both on the built environment and on the collective energy of the communities in Vancouver that have united under the banner of sustainability to advance public welfare and quality of life.

These two opposing outcomes for sustainability at international and local scales open up four possible scenarios: a win–win scenario in which international and local sustainability progress converge, a lose–lose scenario in which international and local sustainability stagnation converge, a win–lose scenario in which divergent outcomes privilege international progress at the expense of local progress, and a lose–win scenario in which local progress occurs but at the expense of international stagnation on sustainability. The following sections examine the impact of each of these possible scenarios through the interpretation of different uses of the language of sustainability.

4.1 Win – win scenario: international progress/local progress

In the first scenario, international and local progress occur in tandem. Internationally, sustainability considerations become standard to Olympic events and essential components of successful Olympic bids, creating a channel for existing local sustainability policies to be implemented and new reasons for other would-be Olympic cities to learn from and build upon local progress toward sustainability in Vancouver. Sustainability policies and systems thus become Vancouver's competitive advantage.

A program that could be key in making this scenario come into being is OGGI. OGGI was created by the IOC in 2003 to better understand the positive and negative impacts of the Games on host nations and communities. Its stated objectives are to:

- measure the global impact of the Olympic Games;
- create a comparable benchmark across all future Olympic Games; and,
- help bidding cities and future organizers identify potential legacies to maximize the Games' benefits.

OGGI consists of a standard reporting system based on 154 distinct economic, social, and environmental indicators that measure conditions pre-Games and post-Games in the host city, region, and nation (van Griethuysen and Hug, 2005). While OGGI is not specifically framed in terms of sustainability, it is operationalized in a framework that is identical to that used by many sustainability indicator reports (Maclaren, 1996). OGGI indicator themes range widely, from atmospheric pollutants to sports team composition. As an example of the sheer amount of information captured by reporting on just one indicator within OGGI, the atmospheric pollution indicator reports on five different atmospheric pollutants (carbon monoxide, suspended particulates, fine suspended particulates, sulphur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide) for

⁽⁷⁾ UNEP's launch of the FIFA 'Green Goal' project for the 2006 World Cup in Germany is testament to the fact that this is on the agenda (United Nations, 2007).

six reporting sites across the entire Olympic Games geographical scope.⁽⁸⁾ Thus, the OGGI initiative is comprehensive, and yet the sheer volume of information can make correlating indicators to outcomes difficult.

The host organizing committee is responsible for developing a series of four indicator reports (baseline, pre-Games, Games, and post-Games for a span of eleven years). With standard indicators tracked before and after the Games, the IOC hopes to understand and compare their negative and positive impacts. In theory, a better understanding of the Games' impacts will help future host cities to plan Games that are integrated into long-term and balanced urban development, and will help the IOC to adjust its evaluation process of would-be host cities to ensure successful Olympic Games events:

“Based on the findings and analysis of the OGGI study from each Olympic Games, the IOC is able to integrate changes to maintain the long-term viability of the Olympic Games in keeping with the ideals of the Olympic Movement” (IOC, 2006, page 1).

The OGGI initiative demonstrates the IOC's interest in sustainability as a framework through which it can quantify and compare its influence on local conditions across time and space. The holistic reach of the sustainability framework chosen for the OGGI, including environmental conditions, employment, local elections, media coverage of Olympic events and community pressure groups, also implies an extremely broad and holistic realm of influence of the Olympic Games on every imaginable local trend. By setting up indicators for the Olympic impact across such a broad spectrum, the IOC has created a self-fulfilling prophesy, assuming a measure of causality that cannot easily be teased out of simple correlation effects of the Games. The substantial time series represented by the OGGI requirement provides a clear message that the IOC understands host communities' need for legacies that start before the Games and last beyond the closing ceremonies. It is a move in the direction of sustainability—that is, longer-term planning and a more realistic assessment of the impacts of megaevents as well as the time lags that often precede their felt impacts.

From the local perspective, OGGI presents a number of opportunities that could be considered sustainability 'wins'. The indicators framework of OGGI institutionalizes host community evaluation based on comprehensive sustainability criteria. By standardizing these indicators, OGGI facilitates community-to-community comparability as well. Communities already engaged in sustainability reporting, like Vancouver, thus have a head start in meeting OGGI requirements and the added value (over time) of additional means to compare indicators with those of other Olympic communities.

The most obvious utility of standard evaluation indicators for all Olympic host cities is to increase 'friendly' competition between cities, such that the local legacy of each successive Olympic Games is increasingly positive on a range of transparent metrics. This competition for continuous improvement offers each Games the opportunity to be the 'best'—and, for this, read 'most sustainable'—Olympic Games ever. The need for Olympic cities to engage in interurban learning networks, even as they compete with one another, has been noted (Surborg et al, 2006). This opportunity to share lessons within a well-defined elite network offers the potential to add leverage, marketing, and momentum to initiatives in a single city and to ensure the continued success of new initiatives. As the OGGI initiative is a new requirement that demands

⁽⁸⁾ It should be further noted that, despite the extensive array of information for this example environmental indicator, the environmental indicators present the fewest challenges to reporting amongst OGGI indicators in that most of the data already exist and are collected on a regular basis. At the opposite end of the spectrum, approximately half of the indicators required under the social dimension of the report are not measurable with currently existing data in Vancouver.

substantial research and analysis from local host committees, Vancouver has been in consultation with Beijing in an attempt to interpret and put in place the first iterations of OGGI collaboratively and efficiently. Vancouver has a longer history of engagement with the policy language of sustainability and indicators, offering Beijing an opportunity to learn efficiently from its Pacific neighbour. Beijing, in turn, offers Vancouver the chance to strengthen existing trade and development relationships.

The two local organizing committees share a common interest in adapting the OGGI indicators, as they have been developed to date, due to the challenges that the massive size of both Canada and China pose for the implementation of some OGGI indicators. The IOC developed the OGGI indicators to be measured at both local and national scales, which may be useful in smaller European countries but which are not necessarily appropriate in situations where the host community is geographically part of a much larger country. In a country as large as Canada, for example, pesticide use in Nova Scotia has very little bearing on the environment in Vancouver. A common interest in revising the OGGI indicators to maximize their relevance puts the Vancouver and Beijing organizing committees on common ground to exert pressure on the IOC around its interpretation of the OGGI framework.

The OGGI initiative has an additional likely impact on the language games of future Olympic bidding processes. As prospective hosts begin to include commitments to measure and assess OGGI indicators in their bids, all these bidding communities will also likely face pressure to express a commitment to realize a positive impact from the Olympics on social, environmental, and economic criteria, lasting well beyond the Games themselves. This pressure alone could spur significant creative thinking about leveraging the Olympic Games planning process for local—and perhaps national—sustainability results. The duration of OGGI provides considerable scope for creating programs to move trends in a positive direction. It is quite possible to envisage, as a result, stricter standards in contracting, oversight and transparency, labour agreements, environmental impact assessments, and inclusivity agreements for the poor, especially in cities where such standards have not existed previously. In short, if the OGGI indicators are consistent with sustainability, then the OGGI initiative could help to leverage sustainability locally within bid cities.

4.2 Lose – lose scenario: international stagnation/local stagnation

If it is possible to consider mutually reinforcing positive outcomes at local and international scales, it is also conceivable that mutually reinforcing negative outcomes could become the legacy of 2010. The implementation and material demonstration of the sustainability Games could lack lustre for the world and the community's perception of Vancouver, causing embarrassment for both Vancouver and the IOC. Such an outcome could tarnish both the international and the local reputation of the discourse of sustainability for hallmark events and for local policy alike.

Another innovative theme for the Olympic Games—a private sector theme—failed in the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. If, as happened in the case of the 1996 Atlanta Games, the uniqueness of a sustainability Games vanishes in the development rush, then Vancouver stands to be stuck with white elephants—like the speed-skating oval sinking into sandy soil and being in need of engineering upgrades in Richmond (Bennett, 2006); the gentrified downtown core predicated on the forceful removal of large numbers of disadvantaged people who were promised a way up at the bid process stage rather than a one-way ticket out of the way (Olds, 1998); and the new transportation infrastructure that worsens congestion, health, and air quality (Boei, 2006). In this scenario the Vancouver sustainability Olympics could become the pariah that the 'free-enterprise Olympics' became in the aftermath of the Atlanta Games.

The free-enterprise Games in Atlanta were a failure and an embarrassment, not only locally, but globally. True to the corporate-friendly history of Atlanta, and following on from the success of the first free-enterprise Olympic Games in Los Angeles, the 1996 Games were planned almost entirely by local corporate leaders. Organizers hoped that Atlanta would pave the way for future cities to rely exclusively on the private sector for funding, and, in so doing, would change the face of the Games toward a business pursuit rather than a public endeavour. Organizers placed business interests above community interests and, in so doing, displaced over seventy businesses, four homeless shelters, and a thousand homeless people (Whitelegg, 2000, page 806). Exacerbating the public relations nightmare was the Centennial Park project, which forcibly removed “the unsightly presence of Atlanta’s numerous poor and homeless residents” (page 803) while promising to add environmental amenities to a rundown part of the city. During the closing ceremonies for the 1996 Games, then-IOC President Samaranch broke with tradition and failed to call the Atlanta Games ‘the best Games ever’.

The City of Vancouver’s final key deliverable to Olympic Operations in its Olympic Strategic Plan is

“to encourage the IOC to permanently add sustainability as a fourth ‘Olympic pillar’, to the three existing pillars: sport, environment and culture” (City of Vancouver, 2006a, page 52).

All innovations run the risk of failure, however, and if the Sustainability Games fail to inspire as the free-enterprise Games failed before them, then the Vancouver Olympics may actually confound the inclusion of sustainability principles within Olympics and other hallmark events internationally. ‘Reputation risk’ is one of the main threats faced by both the IOC and Vancouver in 2010. In its Strategic Plan, the City of Vancouver takes this risk very seriously:

“It is incumbent on City Council and staff to do all within their power to ensure that through the role of Olympic Host City, Vancouver’s already-strong worldwide reputation is enhanced, and that the City makes the most of the potential opportunities the Games present” (City of Vancouver, 2006a, page 24).

At the same time, the City and all local partners in the planning and staging of the Games have a role to play “in the protection of the Olympic brand and marks” (page 11). If these reputations and brands are not helped by the advancement of sustainability, those responsible within all the affected organizations will doubtless be tasked with finding a new umbrella framework and organizing concept with less baggage and more potential.

Two risky elements in planning and executing the sustainability Games, the role of social inclusivity and the Southeast False Creek (SEFC) sustainable community and Athletes Village, will be dealt with in greater detail in the two scenarios below. Two other potentially explosive issues deserve a mention here for their failure potential as well: the issues of waste disposal and construction.

VANOC has set a target of zero waste for the 2010 Games (Vancouver 2010, no date b). Though not unprecedented as a principle,⁽⁹⁾ zero waste remains elusive in practice. The production of waste continues to increase in the Vancouver region, and, in fact, landfill capacity will be reached in 2008. While the regional government has identified and purchased a site for a replacement landfill, the provincial government—the Minister of Sustainable Resource Management—put approval of the use of this site on hold due to concerns about First Nations rights and title to the land in question (GVRD, 2006, page 25). The reality that Vancouver may not have a local waste

⁽⁹⁾ Other cities that have made commitments to ‘zero waste’ include the Regional District of Nanaimo, British Columbia (2006) and Canberra, Australia (ACT Commissioner for the Environment, 2000).

disposal site in 2010 puts the zero waste question in a context with more threatening consequences for a city region wishing to cement a global sustainability reputation.

Another key visible element of sustainability plans for VANOC is green building for Olympic venues. This element capitalizes on Vancouver's existing high standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified green buildings (City of Vancouver, 2005b). In the summer of 2006 VANOC was granted an increase in its construction budget from Can\$470 million to Can\$580 million to cover unexpectedly high materials and labour costs.⁽¹⁰⁾ In stark opposition to VANOC's green building pursuits is the troublesome issue of the four-lane highway being constructed by the Province of British Columbia through the ecologically sensitive Eagleridge Bluffs to improve road access from Vancouver to Whistler for the Olympics. Neither requests for dialogue about other options, nor legal suits from the municipality, nor resident protest encampments on site were able to effect change to this construction. On the contrary, twenty-one peaceful protesters were arrested and fined upwards of Can\$1000 each and three were jailed, including one 78 year-old woman, Betty Krawczyk (IOCC, 2007).

These and other risks, still on the horizon, conjure potential images of grand freeways in front of thinly shrouded clearcuts, heaps of trash beneath 'zero waste' banners on trash bins, uncompleted or unpaid-for buildings awaiting LEED credentials, and other unsightly scenes that loom large enough to overpower any green impression from 2010. As a set of policy goals, sustainability enables a city like Vancouver to set inspiring high sights. In operationalizing these goals, however, there is that much more room for Vancouver to fall short, to miss its message, and to fail to integrate a full suite of social, environmental, and economic initiatives. The experience of the Atlanta Games is a lesson that attention must be paid to high-profile substantive issues such as physical and social infrastructure as well as to image creation, because cities by themselves lack the power to deliver an image. To make sustainability clear to the world, Vancouver must translate it to the world's media messengers, many of whom have made a game out of twisting and appropriating this term for the past twenty years.

4.3 Lose – win scenario: international stagnation/local progress

Though useful for understanding the range of possibilities, completely synergistic successes and utterly dismal failures from both local and global scales are relatively uncommon in real events. More likely outcomes of 2010 for the discourse and pursuit of sustainability at international and local levels are mixed accounts. Polarizing again for purposes of clarity, we will consider two mixed-outcome scenarios in which the balance is tipped—in this next case, toward positive local outcomes, and in the case following, toward positive international outcomes—and we will consider what this means in the language of sustainability.

In the lose – win scenario, local progress towards sustainability could be made from 2010 despite international disinterest in Vancouver's local sustainability discourse and models. Here, Vancouver could become a leading 'brand' of integrated sustainability principles, policies, and behaviours, but not be able to translate this progress far beyond its geographic boundaries. This kind of progress would have little bearing on the international context if it does not speak to the needs of the IOC for protection and promotion of the Olympic image, making other host cities unlikely to follow Vancouver's lead.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A report from the BC auditor general has calculated a much higher final price tag for the Olympics, at Can\$2.5 billion, a figure that includes many costs not included in the VANOC operating budget, such as highway and transportation infrastructure improvements and costs of securing all this new infrastructure (Dowd, 2006; 2007).

Vancouver's pursuit of sustainability for the 2010 Games occurs in a context of higher orders of Canadian government that currently share an unquenchable thirst for 'sustainability' naming rights—the term appears as an organizing principle not only in the expected places like environment and natural resources ministries, but almost everywhere else, too, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2003) to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2006). In this context, sustainability could be a named characteristic of nearly any commodity, service, or concept, such that creating a recipe for the essential components of an Olympic sustainability system is either like cooking a smorgasbord—in which every imaginable ingredient is potentially available—or soup from a stone—in which no added ingredient can remove its peculiar taste.

In laying out its Strategic Plan for the Games, the City of Vancouver cites a guiding principle—ensure sustainability benefits. This is specified to

“include measures relating to environmental stewardship, social responsibility, accessibility, inner-city inclusivity, economic opportunity, liveability, sport development and health promotion” (City of Vancouver, 2006a, page 7).

Specific objectives are listed in the three areas of social sustainability, environmental sustainability, and economic sustainability, with the intent “to showcase to the world our substantial achievements” (page 21) and to create “a balanced urban environment that is conducive to the success of tourism and commercial enterprises, both large and small” (page 22).

For the IOC, by contrast, sustainability is interpreted much more specifically. In an interview, IOC President Jacques Rogge leans strongly on the environment leg of the sustainability stool in claiming:

“The IOC is very committed to its responsibility to promote sustainable development and the environment as the third dimension of Olympism, alongside sport and culture. The IOC has for instance been working with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for over ten years” (Halvorsen, 2006).

Vancouver's Inner-City Inclusivity initiative provides a strong example of the context of Vancouver's interpretation of sustainability that might well prove untranslatable in the international context. The statement, included in Vancouver's Olympic Bid, commits VANOC to include Vancouver's least fortunate residents amongst those who benefit from the Olympic legacy. These commitments derive from the existing tripartite governmental investment in the Vancouver Agreement, Can\$200 million from 2000 to 2010 to alleviate poverty in the city's worst-off neighbourhood, the downtown east side (Vancouver Agreement, 2005).⁽¹¹⁾ VANOC's Inner-City Inclusivity Steering Group intends to create strategies to ensure jobs for inner-city residents, no unreasonable rent increases or displacement, provisions for democratic protest, an alcohol and drug strategy, and accessibility of some venues to the poor and disabled.⁽¹²⁾

Compounding the challenges of inclusivity and further particularizing them in the Vancouver context, the downtown east-side neighbourhood is also home to one third of the city's First Nations people, who represent 30% of the homeless population (Cardinal, 2006). Owing to the visible disadvantage and marginalization of the

⁽¹¹⁾ The Inner-City Inclusivity initiative also derives from Vancouver's history of evicting households from low-income housing during Expo '86, when about 2000 rooms that housed low-income households were lost and when 500–950 low-income people were evicted to accommodate the tourist boom (Olds, 1998).

⁽¹²⁾ Local progress on this front remains in question. While ten inner-city lodging houses have been purchased to preserve their use, another twenty-two such hotels have been purchased in the past year by developers, likely for redevelopment, and other low-income lodging houses have been vacated “to make room for Olympics workers and other construction workers” (IOCC, 2007). The city's patience for democratic protest also appears to be wearing thin following visible and vocal civil disobedience at the past year's “countdown” events (Mackin, 2007).

region's First Nations, Vancouver's sustainability Games must include an approach to reconciling a troubled and unresolved history of abuse of First Nations peoples.⁽¹³⁾ While most First Nations in Canada have working relationships with federal and provincial governments, Olympic planning represents a unique opportunity for engagement with First Nations at the local government scale.

The 2010 Olympics will take place on the traditional territory of four existing First Nations: Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-waututh. Desires to showcase and demonstrate the value of the city's Aboriginal roots in 2010 have been acted on by VANOC through invitations to representatives from all Four Nations to engage with VANOC via the Sustainability and Aboriginal Participation Roadmap, the Sustainability and Aboriginal Participation Management and Reporting System, and the Four First Nations Multi-Party Agreement. These moves represent a union of sustainability and First Nations considerations in Olympic planning with no precedent in OGGI or any other IOC program. This is, at the same time, crucial terrain for long-term planning in the local context and perhaps not readily applicable to many other potential Olympic host city contexts around the world.

4.4 Win – lose scenario: international progress/local stagnation

The final scenario we consider tips the balance of progress toward the international, with stagnation at the local level: a win – lose scenario. Progress that occurs uniquely at the international scale would mean increased IOC and global media attention to the language of sustainability, and the potential to raise the floor of standard practice in hallmark events around the world. This scenario in 2010 would net no progress for Vancouver, if logistical and other pressures prevent sustainability innovations and promises from being carried through. In this case, the floor of standard practice may be raised but the ceiling for best practice would be capped.

Based on the success of the green Games in Sydney, and the IOC's understanding of sustainable development based on its collaboration with UNEP, successful sustainability Games in Vancouver would seem to require stellar environmental performance, and not an integrated approach to social, economic, and environmental spheres of sustainability. Though a daunting enough task, environmental achievement would fall significantly short of meeting the aspirations of 2010 for an operational definition of sustainability that integrates environmental performance with social and economic sustainability objectives—a new standard that is worthy of becoming the fourth pillar of Olympism. In terms of the work that sustainability promises to do for Vancouver, a legacy of good environmental performance would fail to disprove what social and economic justice critics of sustainability already suspect—that sustainability does not represent a comprehensive approach to urban development but only represents a repackaging of environmental concerns (Portney, 2003). As mentioned in the lose – lose scenario, despite the attention Vancouver 2010 planners have paid to the full breadth of sustainability practice to date, time and budgetary constraints may start to restrict these considerations toward what is required for a successful Games, first, and what is required to demonstrate innovation to the world, second. The continuing saga of planning for the Athletes Village in SEFC provides an example of the potential for Vancouver to narrow the scope of its interpretation of sustainability to meet international expectations without meeting local expectations.

SEFC constitutes eighty acres of former industrial land on some of the last remaining underdeveloped waterfront in the downtown area. The area was approved for development as a 'model sustainable community' in 1999. Following a great deal of

⁽¹³⁾ This responsibility in Canada and Vancouver to work toward reconciliation with First Nations peoples is, of course, shared by all 'new world' nations.

work by city staff as well as a wide array of citizen volunteers, the SEFC Official Development Plan was passed in 2005 (City of Vancouver, 2005a). The plan included targets of a one-third housing split for each of low-income, modest-income, and higher-income residents;⁽¹⁴⁾ a self-contained ground-source energy system; planning for car sharing and other alternatives to the private automobile; and a wide range of sustainability-oriented public amenities from schools to parks to religious facilities. These and other innovations were to be funded by the city's property endowment fund. The Vancouver 2010 bid committee also chose the first developed portion of SEFC to be the Athletes Village.⁽¹⁵⁾ At build out by 2018, SEFC is expected to house 14 400 people.

In late 2005 a newly elected, more fiscally, if not ideologically, conservative city council reduced the financing available for model projects, and particularly reduced targets for affordable housing and childcare provision. At two highly contentious public meetings on 20 December 2005 (which lasted 5 hours) and 7 March 2006 (which lasted 6 hours), the city council resolved

“to improve the economic sustainability of the [SEFC] development ... by adjusting the housing mix and other public amenities, with ... no adverse impact on the delivery of the Olympic Village for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games” (City of Vancouver, 2005c, page 6).

Citizens speaking at the meetings urged the city council to consider their actions in the context of the city's affordable housing crisis, the importance of the SEFC site as some of the last undeveloped land in the city, and the intention in the Official Development Plan for the neighbourhood to be a model and a showcase, which could be foregone with the proposed amendments. The second public hearing lasted until 1:30am, and, despite virtually all citizens present speaking in protest, the amendment was made to reduce the affordable housing component to 20% and to reduce the childcare facilities from five to three, both of which are city standards. More recently, the city has dropped its requirement for green roofs in the development over concerns that the British Columbia insurance industry may not insure them (Bula, 2007).

Many citizens lamented the loss of an opportunity to use the Olympic Games to advance better-than-business-as-usual practices, as expressed in this contribution to the public hearing:

“the amendments undermine the original vision of a housing mix that creates social inclusion and cohesion and prevents marginalization ... the City should use the Olympics as a way to get [provincial and federal government] funding” (City of Vancouver 2006b, page 3).

At the same time as sights are being lowered on the realization of a model sustainable community in SEFC, the city administration has created a new program focusing on internationalizing Vancouver's existing success in medium-density and high-density residential development as a means to draw international attention. The Mayor's EcoDensity initiative, as it is called, promotes new commitments to medium-density and high-density housing in order to reduce sprawl, to reduce the city's ecological footprint, and to improve “housing affordability by increasing the housing supply” (City of Vancouver, 2006c, page 4). The initiative boasts that,

“with the development of Southeast False Creek underway, an entire sustainable community is about to become reality” (page 1).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Low-income refers to households who spend 30% or more of their income on housing; modest income refers to singles/seniors with annual incomes of Can\$12 500 – \$45 000 or couples/families with annual incomes of Can\$54 000 – \$90 000.

⁽¹⁵⁾ In April 2006 this 2.6 ha parcel of land sold for Can\$193 million to the Millennium Group, setting both a local and a national record (Anderson, 2006).

It borrows from the success of the City of London's 'One Planet' campaign, invoking as a challenge:

"While Vancouver has made great progress in our efforts to become a sustainable city, we are not a one planet city" (page 3).

It appears that Vancouver has begun trading off best sustainability practice as measured by local expectations for internationally legible and comparable initiatives.

Maurice Cardinal (2007), author of the book *Leverage Olympic Momentum: Living and Doing Business in an Olympic Region*, makes a strong argument in a personal communication about how Vancouver could be adversely affected by the Games even if the event is an international success:

"Unfortunately, many people in past Olympic regions failed to appreciate, until it was too late, that when they [hosts] destroy marginalized neighborhoods and drive inhabitants away, they lose a valuable workforce, one that is needed to keep their community healthy. If you want to engage the business community, or anyone for that matter, you have to connect on a platform that impacts them directly—show them a benefit. In this case, the benefit is that they get to keep their workforce if they work towards helping create a responsible Olympic event" (personal communication).

To date, as demonstrated by the Sustainable Region Initiative, the Vancouver Agreement, the social sustainability principles, and other initiatives, Vancouver's work toward sustainability is markedly not divorced from its efforts to retain jobs and an economic base and to improve the quality of life of its most marginalized residents. Maintaining and, in fact, stepping up these integrated concerns for social, environmental, and economic benefit through the Olympic planning process is a challenge that local Vancouver Olympic planners face in order to realize leverage and gains in the long run.

5 Language games and systems of sustainability speak

Different language systems work to construct different meanings of sustainability through different uses. The four scenarios that we have just considered demonstrate the wide range of implications of the language games being played with the concept of sustainability in planning for 2010. Together, these scenarios constitute the contextual boundaries of what local and international bodies can expect as the post-2010 meaning and legacy of sustainability in Olympism. The win–win scenario demonstrates what, to Wittgenstein, was intersystemic language system convergence—two different language systems of the term sustainability that nonetheless are noncontradictory and can coexist with complementarity. Sustainability, in this most optimistic scenario, becomes an emergent property of the communication and action taking place between the local and global scales of planning for the Olympic Games. The lose–lose scenario demonstrates extrasystemic dissonance, a situation in which the two language systems being used exist in contrast to one another and in fact prevent communication, understanding, and action. The two mixed-outcome scenarios demonstrate the same kind of dissonance, but with productive outcomes for either the local or the international scale actors, respectively. The articulation of a common goal is stymied in the mixed-outcome scenarios, but the difference in the scale of action makes possible certain kinds of progress based on the context-specific expectations of either the local or the global, although this progress is not interpretable as such at other scales and in other contexts.

Thus, the analytical approach of the language game abandons a universal definition of sustainability in favour of seeking to establish boundaries around uses of sustainability in particular contexts, at particular scales. These scale-dependent and context-dependent boundaries can aid communication about and across interpretations

of sustainability. They also set some limits to what constitutes recognizable meanings and uses of the term. This approach lowers our analytical sights from expectations of exactness but can facilitate a more realistic understanding of the connections between language, policy, and action at different scales and in diverse contexts.

Given this sense of the different language games at play in planning for the 2010 sustainability Games, we can summarize the delineation between the meanings given to sustainability in the international context by the IOC and in the local context within Vancouver in table 5, based on the scenarios developed above.

In sum, international-scale and local-scale sustainability agendas have points of overlap and divergence. Clearly, the notion of sustainability as leverage for increasing economic competitiveness is shared at both scales. The following quote from the commercial director for the London Olympic organizing committee expresses the common perception of the role of sustainability for Olympic cities and for the international Olympic movement:

“[The 2012] Games focus very much on the environment and promote environmentally friendly products and services. There is an opportunity for car companies to get involved in that programme and for them to launch their new models ... this is going to be a fantastic platform. By 2012 this market will be starting to take off in a very big way” (Beard, 2007).

Equally, at both scales, sustainability is seen as a vehicle for economic competitiveness and as a key to overcoming barriers to economic growth in the long term. This move to equate sustainability and competitiveness strategies is seen as essential to global economic and cultural positioning. Of course, the actions and investments

Table 5. Comparing agendas for sustainability via the Olympic Games, International Olympic Movement, and Vancouver.

Sustainability language games for the International Olympic Committee	Sustainability language games for Vancouver
Find a captivating new brand for the Games that meets civil society expectations Act as a good guardian of the Games and its reputation and ensure their long-term viability Encourage learning, cooperation, and competition amongst would-be host cities to increase the status of hosting the Olympics Demonstrate the holistic and comprehensive positive impact of the Olympic Games Ensure the host city meets world-class standards and achieves continuous improvement in the Olympic event, increasing market share Demonstrate the continued relevance of the Olympic Games to changing global values, in the context of Olympic history and elite athletics	Begin a new era for the Olympic Games, with sustainability as the fourth pillar of Olympism Enhance an already good worldwide reputation for environmental values and high quality of life Engage in city-to-city learning and marketing with others in the elite club of Olympic cities Seize leverage for innovation, investment, and creative approaches to urban development Increase the city region's world-class status and its 'Vancouverism' or differentiability from others in this class Leverage federal/international resources for the pursuit of existing local policy agenda Institutionalize and promote local best practices in sustainability Prove that local best practices are available for international adaptation and dissemination Meet local expectations, particularly related to social inclusion and opportunities for First Nations

needed to pursue competitiveness qua sustainability at global and local scales are different (Sassen, 2005). As a point of comparison, broadcast deals for the Athens 2004 Summer Olympics were valued at US\$1.5 billion. Although the Winter Olympics have historically been a much smaller-scale event, the gap in the value of broadcast deals is closing, as the IOC estimates television rights for 2010 will generate US\$1 billion (Penner, 2007), of which Can\$401 million will be shared with VANOC (Dowd, 2007). Broadcast deals are growing to eclipse other aspects of Olympics revenues; between 2001 and 2004, television rights revenues contributed 53% of IOC ongoing revenues.

Identifying common interests in sustainability as economic competitiveness, then, is insufficient grounds for achieving convergence in defining and enacting sustainability because of the difference that scale makes. In fact, it is not a stretch to see how the IOC's interest in establishing sustainability impact standards for host cities, as through OGGI, and Vancouver's lobby for sustainability as a fourth pillar of Olympism, could work against the local host city's interest to develop a global niche for sustainability policy and practice. If all Olympic cities are 'doing' sustainability, what will differentiate Vancouver? Without market differentiation, what makes Vancouver a preferential destination for tourism or other investment over a growing number of cities 'doing' sustainability? Here, Vancouver should heed the warning offered by Mendes (2006) that:

"The pressure on Vancouver to 'compete or perish' in global markets does not make it unique. Nor is Vancouver set apart because the goals of competitiveness and sustainability are becoming increasingly entangled" (page 66).

The values-based dimension of sustainability interest at both international and local scales goes beyond the need to secure increasing market share, and serves as another point of partial convergence. For the IOC, like any international organization that attempts to operate in the public and non-profit as well as for-profit sectors, maintaining and upholding a set of globally relevant values is crucial to its legitimacy and to the reputation and continued work of those employed by and representing the organization. In Vancouver the quest for sustainability has assumed the status of a city-wide principle, a value upheld by many organizations and institutions, and a personal ethic of many vocal citizens. Sustainability as a values-based and ethical standpoint is reflected, for example, in each of the City of Vancouver's ten sustainability principles, beginning with "Today's decisions must not compromise the choices of our children and future generations" and "We are all accountable for our individual and collective actions" (City of Vancouver, 2002). For those individuals and groups that hold sustainability as an ethical value, a failure to implement sustainability projects in a way that moves beyond the norm of city practice in environmental, economic, and social domains, and in the integration of these three domains, would sorely disappoint.

Early signs of this disappointment are already evident from individuals within local organizations working toward an ethic of sustainability. Those who seek in a sustainable approach the integration of multiple concerns and agendas, and who recognize the practical difficulties of achieving this integration from their local work, are in a unique position to recognize the shortcomings of the global Olympic movement on this front. For example, the Fraser Basin Council, a nongovernment organization based in Vancouver that completed the first OGGI report for the 2010 Games, is in a key position to evaluate any potential evidence of integration within the measurement tools being used to advance sustainability. Steve Litke of the Fraser Basin Council, who directed this project, explains that, in his view, the OGGI indicators demonstrate consistency with sustainability, but not absolute correspondence:

“I do not think that OGGI will assess sustainability in a comprehensive, systematic or integrated way. I think OGGI will help to track some trends over time that relate to some elements of sustainability and OGGI will provide some information about whether trends are moving towards or away from sustainability” (personal communication).

In this view, international efforts to inject sustainability thinking into Olympic Games planning are seen as potentially valuable, but as unlikely to offer any new ideas or strategies to local sustainability work that preceded the award of the right to host 2010, and that will continue after the torch has been passed on to Sochi. To the extent that this local work may be affected in the future by the international reputation of Vancouver, however, international efforts to communicate and enact sustainability in 2010 may have a lasting local impact. Many host cities before Vancouver have learned that a city's leadership strategies and best public relations campaigns cannot by themselves determine global messaging. Communication that bridges local-scale and international-scale interests in and understanding of sustainability holds the most promise for capturing media attention to the sustainability aspects of 2010. The future of sustainability, as a principle and framework for urban development and as a potential pillar of Olympism, depends in no small part on the purposes to which such communication and messaging are put.

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