

The *Real* Olympic Games Sponsorship, Schools, and the Olympics— the Case of Coca-Cola

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Abstract

Corporate influences on educational systems throughout the globe are yielding a host of intended and unintended consequences. While some educational systems welcome the participation of corporations and some even model how they operate after various corporate models, we argue there are serious calls for concern. Nowhere is the influence of corporations on school-based education more visible and more misunderstood than during the Olympics. As we move towards the Rio Olympics in 2016, this article draws on empirical work about school-based enterprise education in the run-up to the London Games in 2012. This helps us to consider the impact of school-business partnerships, by focusing on a critique of corporate sponsorship to make visible the hidden legacy of the Coca-Cola Company's interest in the Olympic and Paralympic Games in previous games, particularly during the London 2012. The article examines the role (and control) of corporate sponsors in reaching school-aged young people through enterprise education that appear to advance the 'corporate capture of childhood' (Beder, 2009) in ways that are hitherto under-researched. Drawing on Bakan's (2005, pp. 1-2) notion of duality in relation to the corporation as a (positively portrayed) person, yet legally obliged to pursue self-interest in generating profit, the article suggests the Olympics as the ultimate branding prize, the real legacy of which is often masked and misunderstood.

Introduction

When unveiled in May 2010, the mascots of the 2012 Olympic Games, Wenlock and Mandeville, were the subject of debate and ridicule in respect of the design,

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the design costs and the appeal of these futuristic and arguably indefinable ‘characters’. One feature that emerged at that time (From was the idea that these mascots were designed to appeal directly to children—to encourage them to feel part of their Olympics, to inspire them to experience affinity with perhaps the major sporting event of their lives. As the impact and lasting legacy of hosting the Games in the United Kingdom unfolded, the role of multi-national corporations as Olympic sponsors, created branding connections with young people’s experiences of, and attachment to, the Olympics. These connections were developed in a number of ways by forging links with schools in the run-in to the main event. While this kind of activity was not new or exclusive to the Olympics, we were interested in its scope for the accumulation of branding capital, and its potential legacy, in a country that hosted the Games.

This article is developed in four sections. First, it introduces the context and the research project that inspired this article. Second, it briefly outlines the nature of 21st century partnerships between public and private bodies and how these connect with Sklair’s (2001) analyses of corporate social responsibility and global citizenship. Third, it examines the specific case of Coca-Cola and its sponsorship of the Olympics. This includes findings from a study that examined Coca-Cola’s relationship with schools, and an exploration of the nature, contours and motivational issues around private sponsorship in a neo-liberal ideology, whereby ‘the state makes a grim alignment with corporate capital and transnational corporations’ (Giroux, 2005, p. 210). Finally, we argue that, in the context of the Olympic Games, the corporate capture of young people’s minds is facilitated through a pervasive marketing opportunity and form of cultural invasion (Freire, 1972). In this sense, we concur with Holt’s views on the contribution of branding to the maintenance of culturally produced ‘myth markets’ (2006, p. 374) that help to maintain the status quo where ‘iconic brands...[act as]...the tireless proselytizers, diffusing these myths into every nook and cranny of everyday life’ (Holt, 2006, p. 376). Here we make clear how this is demonstrably the case, even in arenas like schools which are afforded, at face value at least, state protection.

In this context, Holt’s suggestion of iconic brands as ‘mercenaries, following ideological demands wherever the action is’ (Holt, 2006, p. 374) in order to sustain the ideological status quo, offers a useful frame for discussion of the legacy of the Games. The potential legacy was sold to a consuming host population as an opportunity for country-wide economic growth, with benefits in health and well-being that are in keeping with the ideals of the Olympic movement. However, we argue that the alleged altruistic case for Olympic sponsorship to support human flourishing, harmony and global peace can best be understood as support of product placement and fierce brand protectionism that enhanced the reputation, trust and value of corporate iconic brands, one of which was Coca-Cola.

The nature of contemporary public private partnerships (PPPs) is such that they involve an uncritical acceptance of business imperatives and the valorisation of private partners, which obscures their ‘real’ interests. ‘Corporate social responsibility’

is linked to the idea of a corporate duality whereby, 'the corporation' has the rights of a (socially responsible) person whilst being legally obliged to engage in the pursuit of profit and self-interest above all (Bakan, 2005). This duality is useful analytically in the context of a global event like the Olympic Games as it acts as a foundation for the corporation to develop its public 'persona' as an 'altruistic' corporate philanthropist. The Games allow an intensification of activity and a strengthening of opportunities to promote 'hero-corporation status'. The promotion of shared ideals and mutual interests in global community development (Sklair, 2001) illustrate how a corporate ethos can be presented as fully complementing the Olympic Movement.

This persona compares to economic imperatives and market reasoning that ultimately drives sponsorship of the Games. It appears that for companies like Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Samsung, signing up as a 'world-wide partner' (London, 2012) brings profits and thus, sponsorship breeds success. However, this should be viewed alongside wider commercialisation processes (see Ball, 2007), that add a further 'layer' to the 'corporate capture of childhood' (Beder, 2009). In a world where identities are mediated through the consumption of goods and the kind of status that is accrued through brand affiliation (Giroux, 2009; Holt, 2004) children and young people are suggested as a 'primary source of redemption for the future of capitalism. Erased as future citizens of a democracy, kids are now constructed as consuming and saleable objects' (Giroux, 2009, p. 42). Thus, the promotion of commercial interests, hidden within seemingly innocuous and subtle processes that are aligned to the moral pillars of institutions such as schooling and the Olympic Games, appears to contribute to a kind of hegemonic fusion of neoliberal citizenship which privileges but is not limited to, particular ideologies.

Whilst it is not possible here to present a developed general discussion on the nature and contours of contemporary corporate capitalism, it is useful to isolate some important currents in its organisation that are relevant to our main arguments. One such current in the contemporary context is the promotion of 'partnership', especially between the private and public sectors.

There are three important aspects of partnership that appear interesting in relation to branding and the Olympic partners. Firstly, the Olympic Movement is arguably a good example of the sort of Public Private Partnership (PPP) envisaged for new public services over the past two decades. Indeed it is perhaps the oldest example of a PPP. Secondly, it is also noteworthy that partnership is always portrayed as 'progressive' and profit is rarely, if ever, fore-grounded. Lastly, in facilitating the creation of partnerships, the state becomes an enabler rather than a provider of services and 'and the power of the market is harnessed to serve the public interest' (Blair, 1998, p. 7).

The Coca-Cola Company has the longest-standing partnership with the Olympics Movement and has sponsored 'the Games' since they were held in Amsterdam in 1928. This brings specific privileges, in allowing the company to forge 'partnerships' with schools on a national level and therefore gain access to children under

the auspices of its Olympic partner privilege. This creates a parallel process in the organization of Olympic sponsorship and the generation of profits for partner companies, whereby:

[A] corporation's legally defined mandate is to pursue, relentlessly and without exception, its own self interest, regardless of the often harmful consequences it might cause to others. (Bakan, 2005, pp. 1-2)

In respect of a critical consideration of sponsorship and the Olympic Games, the corporation is characterised by an important co-identification of interests and its promotion as a global 'citizen'. Crucially, corporations develop a wide range of marketing tools from obvious advertisements and direct activity to less obvious sponsorship of sporting events (Sklair, 2001, p. 88). Unsurprisingly perhaps:

Whilst not alone in this, Coca-Cola was certainly a global leader in most forms of marketing for its ubiquitous product. The Coca-Cola logo adorns a remarkable range of activities and objects not least the world's most popular sports [], and countless other events...that meld the company and its products into the very fabric of everyday life all over the world. (ibid)

For example, it was the Coca-Cola Company that put Santa into a red suit, therefore the Olympics is simply another key mechanism through which to consolidate brand success. Olympic sponsorship is promoted as community investment, an altruistic and socially responsible activity. In this sense, the Olympic movement does the hard work in promoting its ideals, while sponsors become the 'iconic...ideological parasites' (Hart, 2006, p. 374) involved in high level resourcing that promotes those ideals through what could be described as complimentary globalising myth-making practice.

This broadens product reach, which in the case of Coca-Cola means 'virtually all permanently inhabited parts of the planet' (Sklair, 2001, p. 169). Yet, the promotion of partnership, portraying corporate sponsorship investment as 'giving something back', means this sort of activity often escapes critical scrutiny. The case of the Olympic Games helps to demonstrate that companies are prepared to pay good money for the 'feel good-deed factor' that is actually built into sponsorship arrangements. On the surface, this could be regarded as a win-win arrangement between the Olympics and its sponsors. The Games receive high level, and much needed, funding in exchange for product placement and advertising. However, as we have alluded to earlier, the contours of this relationship are not straightforward and the prize is literally worth a fortune.

Trentmann (2009) cautions against reducing debate about branding and consumption to a post-1960's discussion of globalisation and technological advance. Tracking the history of global consumption, Trentmann reminds us of the 'global flow of commodities' (2009, p. 211) that have come and gone since the 15th Century. However, when brought into the mix, the impact of the 20th Century constructions of young people are important in thinking about how consumption and the market

has changed their experiences of life. For example 'branding has played an enormous role in convincing generations of young people that instead of simply buying goods, they were buying lifestyles, worldviews, ideas and images' (Giroux, 2009, p. 56) as part of their search for identity. This adds another dimension to the discussion of corporate sponsorship and convinces us of the importance of making visible the purposes of sponsorship of the Olympics, in order to reveal, and perhaps even challenge the development of a hidden legacy that offers a political narcotic (Holt, 2006) to help those in power to retain their power.

In the context of the Olympics, powerful corporations work relentlessly at blurring any distinction between marketing and socially responsible activity. Coca-Cola, offers evidence to reinforce notions of community citizenship and 'common good' values. For example, buying the marketing rights to the Harry Potter movies for \$150 allowed the company to lay claim to 'core values and attributes' of the Potter franchise (Beder, 2009 p. 39). Thus, the Olympics provide an opportunity *par excellence* to take this reinforcing of common good and citizenship values further as 'corporate social responsibility' but it is also an opportunity for improving sales, brand loyalty and the acceptance of market driven, company values. In this light, we now consider the case of Coca-Cola as a TOP Olympic Partner, involved in enterprise education in the build-up to the Games in Great Britain.

The Research Project

The initial empirical research that underpins this critique was undertaken in a school in Scotland. Both the UK and Scottish government (in relation to the 2012 Olympics and the 2014 Commonwealth Games) envisaged a particular, demonstrably 'hands on' role for business in schools that promote values of enterprise and entrepreneurship among students. To this end, enterprise education or 'enterprise in education' was developed in line with a general thrust towards increased business involvement. As with the UK Government's focus on enterprising education (Davies, 2002; HMSO, 2008), the Scottish Government strategy for enterprise in education, *Determined to Succeed* (DtS), sought to recognise and promote the benefits of the 'can do, will do attitude' at the heart of enterprise values (Scottish Executive, 2003, p.2; Bryan & Granville, 2011). In line with the demands of a *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) in school education, it was suggested that DtS 'creates environments where enterprise can flourish and involves business and education working together' (Scottish Government, 2008).

Consequently, Scottish school pupils are routinely exposed to enterprise values and engage in entrepreneurial activities. These are suggested as preparing them for the world of work and helping them to gain knowledge and understanding of how business works. We suggest that business involvement in schools reflects a series of priorities in respect of the economic climate of the 21st Century and its dominant ideological proclivities.

This research was designed to explore how the values of enterprise were promoted in schools and how businesses responded to their new responsibilities and the opportunities that come with increasing involvement in enterprise education. Although not presented here in full, the study offered a snapshot of the current role of business in Scottish schools. It also analysed the impact of DtS on school life, pedagogy and the activities of the businesses involved. The study included two multi-national corporations, one established local business and one new business specifically created to respond to the opportunities presented by the emerging enterprise education agenda. Data were gathered in focus groups, interviews and through participant observation at one event that was hosted by Coca-Cola. In light of this, a detailed document analysis focused on this company was subsequently undertaken to inform knowledge that underpinned development of ideas that are explored in this article.

The findings suggested that Coca-Cola's 'Olympic' efforts in schools was overtly about striving to 'give something back' to local communities, which in being realised provided an ideal opportunity to promote Coke's interests in making profits through reinforcement of the idea of altruistic Olympic support. Whilst the removal of excessive branding from the school-scape and the limits placed on advertising, branding and direct marketing to school children were faithfully adhered to, findings suggested that teachers and pupils perceived a series of joint-benefits and mutuality of interests in the processes of business engagement. So, despite these overt benefits, the access to young minds being granted to corporations like Coca-Cola was problematized and identified as a concern by teachers involved in this study. In the context of the Olympic Games, such concerns add a layer of complexity that is both important and underplayed.

Corporations, Partnerships, and Social Responsibility

Playing the Olympic Games in School

In order to fully explore how some of these processes are 'played out' in reality in schools it is important to explore them from a concrete empirical perspective and it is that we now turn to. Early on in the study the Coca-Cola Company (as Coca-Cola Enterprises) emerged as an important partner in Scottish schools. The company was involved directly in supporting curriculum-based projects in Home Economics, 'enterprise education' activities and, in particular, organizing a programme of visits to the company's dedicated Education Centre. In addition, Coca-Cola promoted other, largely 'extra-curricular' activity in the shape of national schools' competitions and challenges. In recent years, these activities have served to showcase Coke's 'good work' in respect of the Olympic Games. In both cases, the company suggests that it makes a clear and altruistic commitment to social responsibility and the development of good corporate citizenship:

This all comes out of our corporate responsibility and sustainability department, where we have to be giving something back to the local community...It's got to do with ethos. And for all the people who think that all we do is make sugar-filled fizzy drinks and make you drink them, they're suddenly realising that you know we have choice p. we have...water to energy drinks and everything all through the middle...So the whole idea is getting the people in to see that we're not an evil, sugar-filled company. (Education Officer, Coca-Cola Enterprises 2010)

Notwithstanding the bizarre concept of selling bottled water even when it is available 'on-tap', companies like Coca-Cola are able to use such activity to serve their own interests which can and does have a sound economic foundation and effect. It also influences wider perceptions:

Corporate promotion does not necessarily aim to sell goods directly, but to foster brand loyalty in children over time, through familiarity gained from exposure to corporate brands and their positive association with school activities, as well as implicit messages about branded products. (Beder, 2009, p. 61).

The Real Business Challenge—Rhetoric versus Reality

One of the most important ways that Coca-Cola's Olympic 'tie-in' was promoted was through 'The Real Business Challenge' where students participated in often simulated tasks, frequently in their own time. Although promoted as 'real business experiences' and crucial 'world of work' learning, the findings suggested these were of limited value (for example, all work roles were managerial), save the positive promotion of the company. Yet, these are useful to consider in the context of this article.

The *Real* Challenge of 2009 involved designing a product—a fictitious new drink to be launched for 2012 - and developing a marketing and distribution strategy. This was largely a 'paper exercise' and the main student task was in presenting ideas. In addition, while it was promoted that students would work directly with experts from Coca-Cola, in reality the teams competed to go through to a final that involved five schools in pitching to 'experts' who were runners up in the BBC's *The Apprentice*, a reality TV show. Yet, this sort of activity drew praise at the highest level:

Activities such as The Real Business Challenge provide an invaluable opportunity for students up and down the country to gain the enterprise experience and the confidence that they need to succeed in the world of work. (Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, quoted in Haringey Council, 2010)

The 2010 *Real* Business Design Challenge involved designing an Education Centre at the Coca-Cola Sidcup site, 'close to Olympic Park' (Enterprise Education Officer Coca-Cola Enterprises, 2010) which 'will be hosting CCE's stakeholders during the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games' (Coca-Cola Enterprises Ltd 2010c, original emphasis). This was promoted in a particular way and cast in a positive light:

It's a Real Legacy for the Olympics...An education initiative supporting schools across Great Britain...the whole idea over the next three years is that we get the project into every single secondary school in the UK...This challenge tick[s] all the boxes' to meet [enterprise education] obligations it's at the heart of [our] Olympic work. (Enterprise Education Officer 2010)

Two points are worthy of note in relation to these 'challenges.' First, whilst they are not about soft drinks in an obvious way, one teacher who participated in this enterprise education study suggested 'big names do attract a wee bit of excitement' (High School Enterprise Teacher, 2010) and the promotional material distributed to schools was heavily branded. In this way, iconic brands were still able to proliferate, even in settings where branded vending machines banned (such as in Scotland and Wales) alongside direct marketing of carbonated soft drinks in schools. Secondly, most of the resources such as the necessary PCs, laptops, digital cameras and such-like, were all provided by the school. Much of the activity was classroom-based with little obvious direct engagement involving the global corporation, outside of glossy promotional material aimed primarily at teachers.

Such contests appear characterised as involving limited investment (both financial and practical) while offering large sponsor returns. They also reinforce Coca-Cola's Olympic association yet their connection with the Games per se, is tenuous. This illustrates how 'today, corporations use 'branding' to create unique and attractive personalities for themselves' Bakan (2005, p. 26) and 'corporations' brand identities are 'personification[s]' of 'who they are and where they come from' (Timon quoted in Bakan). In this context it becomes clear that association with the Olympics is being used to the advantage of Coca-Cola, where challenges under its auspices may be regarded as straight-forward commercial opportunism that promotes the company in ways that would be otherwise unavailable including normally protected groups, such as children. The insights from this analysis suggested three topics related to Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics—spirit, ethos, and principles. Discussion of how these topics contributed to the successful sponsorship of the Games facilitated conclusions to be drawn about the corporate capture of childhood and suggests possibilities for critical myth-busting.

1. The Olympic 'Spirit' Promoting Shared Values

The Olympic Games are unrivalled by other major sporting events in respect of an underpinning philosophy, a globally inclusive ethos, a strong set of values and an all-encompassing positive spirit. The Olympic Movement is based on fundamental principles that shape and define the goals of Olympism. Unlike any other global cultural event, the Olympics are organised and promoted as positive, unifying, life affirming and potentially world changing in its aims and, of course, its rhetoric. Across the world, people have grown up with key principles that remind us of the spirit of the Games.

The first Olympic principle is the philosophy of balancing 'body, will, and

mind' (International Olympic Committee, 2010, p. 44) and the benefits of sport in 'the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity' (ibid). Intrinsically connected to this is the fundamental principle of respect for human rights, 'friendship, solidarity and fair play...and freedom from discrimination of any kind' (ibid). Important also, especially from the point of view of this article, is the ideal that sport, culture and education are blended for the common good and the 'educational value of good example' (ibid).

If ultimately the Games *are* a 'commercial event' and the role of the International Olympic Committee is to ensure 'the priority of sport in a commercial environment' (International Olympic Committee, 2010, p. 10), then sponsor's products should not 'conflict with or be inappropriate to its mission of the spirit of Olympism (ibid, p. 45).

2. *Coca-Cola and the Olympic Ethos*

As the Coca-Cola Company has become synonymous with major sporting events, it is perhaps not surprising that its partnership with the Olympic Games is the longest continuous relationship as an Olympic sponsor. In effect, this connects to the consumption of soft drinks and market capture:

Coca-Cola refreshes Olympic athletes, officials and spectators with its beverages during the Olympic Games. (Olympic.org, 2010)

Very few brands have the lasting power of appeal and recognition that Coca-Cola enjoys throughout the world and the Olympics is the ideal place to showcase that power...it offers more than 400 brands and more than 2,600 beverage products in more than 200 countries...' (Seeking Alpha, 2008)

But partnership also brings capacity to build the company's positive association with the Olympic values:

The optimism and spirit of hope of the games matches the refreshment of our brand exactly. (Ted Ryan, Archives Collection Manager for Coca-Cola quoted in *The Independent*, 2008)

As an organisation, the Coca-Cola Company shares the Olympic Values which embody the discovery of ones abilities, the spirit of competition, the pursuit of excellence, a sense of fair play and the building of a better and more peaceful world. (Coca-Cola Company, 2009)

[Coca-Cola] has developed a strong tradition of creating programmes and events to bring the spirit of the Games to consumers in Olympic host cities and around the world. (Olympic.org, 2010)

These examples show how the Olympics present a unique opportunity to develop an economically and culturally valuable reputation. Thus, it should come as little surprise that the partnership between Coca-Cola and the Olympic Games

was extended in 2005 until 2020, taking it to an unprecedented and unmatched level. Indeed despite shifts away from this by other global brands, support was unequivocal p. ‘Coke has not in the least reconsidered its Olympic sponsorship’ (Coca-Cola’s Director of Worldwide Sports and Entertainment Marketing quoted by Balfour and Jana, 2008).

Yet, closer inspection of Coca-Cola’s reasons for supporting the games and embracing the Olympic spirit helps to illustrate what is really sought from sponsorship, even when it appears to promote shared values:

...We support the Games for numerous reasons, primarily because we share the values that, in addition to the vision of a better and more peaceful world, encourage the discovery of ones abilities and promote the spirit of competition, the pursuit of excellence and a sense of fair play...Beyond creating *sheer economic impact from our marketing investments* in the Games, we have steadily worked hand in hand with the Olympic Family to enhance the mission of the Olympic Movement and its reach to an ever-growing audience. (Coca-Cola Canada, 2010, emphasis added)

This citation shows that the driver in seeking profit is not hidden but remains well camouflaged among the rhetoric of shared values. Thus, consideration of sponsorship highlights a possible rational and the ideological drivers that underpin Coca-Cola’s motivation to become an Olympic partner.

3. The Principles of Coca-Cola’s Olympic Sponsorship: The best Advertising Money Can Buy?

Given that it is not unusual for companies like Coca-Cola to openly seek to tie products into a set of values that it promotes, this intrinsically connects what it sells to the Olympic ideal. It is not difficult to find the motives underpinning sponsorship in company rhetoric p. it is about positive association and improving market position through ubiquity and pervasiveness. And yet sponsorship is regulated and seemingly based on the ethical principles that are promoted as underpinning the whole Olympic Movement. At face value there are strict sponsorship regulations that seek:

To ensure that no advertising or other commercial message in or near the Olympic venues is visible to the Olympic Games venue spectators or to the Olympic Games broadcast audience. No advertising or commercial messages are permitted in the Olympic stadia, on the person of venue spectators, or on the uniforms of the Olympic athletes, coaches, officials, or judges (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 45)

Yet sponsorship does allow for open connections between the iconography of the Olympic Movement and globally-recognised brands. This delivers a commercial impact, not least in respect of product proliferation and the pervasiveness of corporate symbolism. So, in theory, sponsorship is expected to enhance experience ‘and provide the youth of the world with opportunities to experience the Olympic

ideals at the global and local levels' (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10). Such rhetoric tends to underplay central processes of marketing and creation of brand loyalty as a means of bringing economic impact from investments. It is not clear how these impacts are monitored. Yet, it is also suggested:

Sponsorship support contributes to the success of the educational, environmental, cultural and youth-oriented initiatives of the Olympic Movement...Sponsors develop advertising and promotional activities that help to promote the Olympic ideals, heighten public awareness of the Olympic Games and increase support for the Olympic athletes. (International Olympic Committee 2011 p. 10)

Companies like Coca-Cola accrue benefits in using athletes and national sports teams, as brand 'ambassadors' who are obliged to promote products. This often involves justifying particular consumption routines that they link to prowess:

It's going to be a busy two years for me, but obviously the main focus is going to be London 2012, so I'm just really focusing on getting ready and performing and improving year upon year and [Coca-Cola brand] Powerade will play a big factor in that. During a session I don't like to drink a big litre bottle of water. I like to get some liquid into me but also some carbohydrate, so Powerade is a nice amount of liquid that I can sip at during the session and it makes a big difference. (GB Athlete, Jessica Ennis, quoted in *Coca-Cola Enterprises*, 2010a)

In this sense, both brand and ethos are well served, despite strict controls on 'using' Olympic connections that are seemingly enshrined in the ethos of sponsorship. Yet, clear market imperatives that cannot be ignored. The 'corporation is granted the rights to specific Olympic intellectual property and Olympic marketing opportunities in exchange for financial support and goods and services contributions' (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10) and this is fully exploited:

Each level of sponsorship entitles companies to different marketing rights in various regions, category exclusivity and the use of designated Olympic images and marks. (International Olympic Committee, 2012)

The main way that sponsorship is controlled is through the lucrative 'TOP' worldwide sponsorship programme which in the period 2005 to 2008 provided a revenue of US\$866,000,000 compared with US\$279,000,000 in the years 1993 to 1996 (International Olympic Committee 2010 p. 6). Since 1985, this programme has fostered 'long term corporate partnerships...[granting]...exclusive global rights on services and products in specific categories' (International Olympic Committee 2011 p. 45). It is designed 'to maximize support for the Games through the minimum number of partnerships and sponsorship programmes are controlled "to ensure that partnerships are compatible with the Olympic ideals' (ibid). Ostensibly this means TOP sponsors have the privilege of ensuring their products are not only solely available but are also the only ones *visible* in and around the Games.

Although this may seem largely unproblematic it is important to recognise the

level of control that this allows sponsors to exercise in respect of competitor brands. Again, Coca-Cola provides a clear demonstration of how seriously this exclusive provision and brand protection is taken. In 2009, a struggle between the London Committee and Coke began when it became clear that the former sought a super-market partner and opened negotiations with Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury about setting up a Games supermarket. There was reported resistance to this by Coca-Cola who feared it 'might jeopardise its own publicity efforts' (banmoco.co.uk, 2009).

This level of control and protectionism is built in to sponsorship principles p. 'the Olympic Family works to preserve the value of Olympic properties and to protect the exclusive rights of Olympic sponsors' (International Olympic Committee 2011 p. 10). Feasibly this means a bottle of Pepsi could be confiscated and its possessor ejected from Olympic events. Whilst this might seem an extreme example, evidence suggests this principle is being rigorously enforced. For example, in the 2010 FIFA World Cup Finals a group of 'Orange Girls' wearing dresses sporting the logo of *Bavaria Beer* at a first round game between Holland and Denmark drew a hail of publicity when they were ejected from the stadium and later charged with 'carrying out an unlawful marketing ploy' (*Daily Mail*, 2010). Budweiser was the official sponsor and their rights were being enforced.

To an extent these examples challenge the notion that having only a few sponsors strikes a balance and limits the commercialisation of the Games through minimising branding. Alternatively, we suggest this allows for the proliferation of certain global brands like Coca-Cola. Crucial then, whilst it is claimed that sponsorship arrangements are designed 'to prohibit the uncontrolled commercialisation of the Olympic Games' (International Olympic Committee, 2011, p. 10), controlled commercialism is clearly acceptable even if this means resorting to criminal proceedings. Importantly, our evidence suggests that corporations like Coca-Cola see a clear, if subtler, role for schools in such processes.

Partnerships and Profit—Coca-Cola's Successful Sponsorship

Interestingly, some sponsors ended their association with the Olympics after the Beijing Games in 2008. Whereas Beijing had presented an attractive opportunity to access emerging lucrative Chinese markets especially in the face of Chinese state restrictions imposed on advertisers and marketers which meant that official sponsorship was the only method through which to create brand awareness and develop corporate identity (*iStockanalysis.com*, 2009), London, on the other hand, is a mature market. In the context of brand proliferation and pervasiveness, it is understandable therefore why sponsor companies are 'walking away' (Balfour & Janna, 2008). Yet, Coca-Cola strongly defended its financial support for the Olympics stating 'we believe and they believe in a mutually beneficial association' (Coca-Cola Chief Executive quoted in *SportsBusiness.com*, 2010). This suggested a need to

examine the nature of benefits and association inherent in corporate sponsorship in relation to the principles and values of partnership.

The longevity of Coca-Cola's association/partnership with the Olympics is important and its judgement to continue as a sponsor has proven valuable to company success. Neither the economic crisis of the 1930s nor post war austerity saw Coke's interest wane and even the effect of sugar rationing (or indeed because of it), during the 1948 'Austerity Games' in London, did not dampen Coke's sponsorship efforts:

...partly brought about by the company's shrewd decision to stick with the Olympics throughout the Great Depression and the Second World War, on the assumption that the best way to market itself globally would be to sponsor a global competition. (*The Independent*, 2008)

Thus, the company can argue a positive impact through its historical role as a socially responsible corporate actor across much of the twentieth century. However, it can also be argued that Coca-Cola depended on its earlier Olympic sponsorship to grow the carbonated soft drinks market as it continues to do, to-day. We can see evidence of this in Coca-Cola's rhetoric (in this case around the creation of a commemorative glass bottle):

With such a heritage [of sponsorship] its wonderful that Rankin has created such a powerful and iconic image on the iconic Coca-Cola glass bottle which symbolises the spirit, excitement and anticipation of the 2012 Games. (Coke Marketing Director, Cathryn Sleight cited by Coca-Cola Great Britain 2008, emphasis added)

Nevertheless, as alluded to throughout, sponsorship is not simply about symbolism and positive historical reputation. It is about improving the 'bottom line', sometimes in the face of reverse trends. For example, at the same time as US markets have fallen, sales in Canada, where Coke was sponsoring the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, grew (*SportsBusiness.com*, 2010). In terms of growth, the post-Beijing experience demonstrates further success, where 'unit case volume was up by 29% in the last quarter of 2008 and five million more bottles of Coca-Cola daily were supplied to Olympic venues in Beijing than in Athens in 2004' (*iStockAnalyst*, 2009). Indeed, it has been reported that China has become one of Coca-Cola's largest and fastest growing markets (*Seeking Alpha*, 2008) and whilst consumer spending on soft drinks in China has more than doubled since 2001, and is still comparatively low (*iStockAnalyst*, 2009), it is eventually expected to surpass the US market.

Important too is that sponsorship of large scale international events helps also with the global 'reach' that is suggested as crucial to corporate growth (Sklair, 2001) and the promotion of positive messages. For example, in the lead up to 2012, the company's explicit sponsorship of the Olympic Torch Relay, over 70 days in May, June and July included national and local daily exposure associated with this event described by former head of marketing for the IOC as, 'the single most sought after marketing opportunity' (Payne, as cited in Bloomberg, 2015). This additional sponsorship shows the pervasive nature of Coca-Cola's involvement and suggests

wider, market-driven imperatives. For example, in discussing this element of the company's Olympic sponsorship, the Managing Director of Coca-Cola Enterprises, Simon Baldry was unequivocal:

We're focused on building long term category plans with our customers to grow soft drink sales in Great Britain. We know that our sponsorship for London 2012 will energise this work. Adding the London 2012 Olympic Torch Relay will accelerate this, and enable us to connect CCE's trade partners with our worldwide Olympic sponsorship at a local community level in the build-up to the 2012 games. (quoted in Coca-Cola Enterprises Ltd., 2010b)

Similarly, the 2010 World Cup exemplified the ability to develop reach through sponsorship whereby Coke sponsored the tour of the Trophy in the run-up to the finals in June 2010 (*FLEXNEWS*, 2009). This resulted in a tour of the whole continent rather than just the host country, South Africa, which was similar to a Coca-Cola-sponsored continental tour in 2002, when the finals were held in Japan and South Korea. Interesting in this regard is that 54% of the world's teenagers and 47% of the world's population are in Eurasia and Africa although soft drink consumption is *below average* (ibid).

It is questionable therefore whether this sort of approach fully adheres to the principle that sponsors should not 'conflict with or be inappropriate to its mission of the spirit of Olympism (International Olympic Committee 2010 p. 45) and the promotion of universal human rights. Clearly this serves to demonstrate how the rhetoric of sponsorship may not necessarily be matched in reality.

Loyalty building and brand recognition are crucial and commercial prerogatives at the heart of corporate sponsorship which in turn illustrates an absence of altruism and challenges the notion of philanthropic endeavour. This is important in schools contexts, where the exclusive use of the Olympics' distinctive symbolism and insignia are intrinsically embedded in processes that create a 'layering' of recognition, acceptance, loyalty and, indeed, in terms of encouragement and celebration of global corporate brands. Of all those brands, and of the 'TOP' Olympic Sponsors, Coca-Cola is furthest advanced in its activities but is only one example of many corporate sponsors/games partners.

Sponsorship and association with a credible global event creates new opportunities to negotiate through any negativity and to swim with the tide of public opinion. Thus, the case of the Olympic Games helps to illustrate how adeptly Coke adapts to changing world context. London 2012 provided a useful illustration of the necessity of sponsorship and helps to create understanding of dual processes that were contradictory in promoting a positive ethos and valorising companies alongside the promotion of self-interest and profit.

The London Games in 1948 were depicted, in the context of post-war rationing and economic hardship, as the 'Austerity Games'. London 2012 was portrayed as the 'Regeneration Games,' where the clearance of formerly derelict sites and the

progression of a massive building programme transformed the urban landscape. The Stratford area, where most of Olympic Park was situated, demonstrates the sort of legacy of infrastructure development and long term opportunities for part of East London that had neglected through the building of the Millennium Dome on the other side of the Thames. The creation of 2800 new dwellings, a new water park, new sporting venues and improved rail network plus 100 acres of land for development (UK Government, 2012) on previously polluted and low-grade industrial land has brought new life into a run-down area of London.

The Olympics were suggested as the motivation to ‘finally get a grip on this opportunity’ to regenerate a blighted area of East London (UK Government, 2012). Yet, the leader of neighbouring area, Waltham Forest, which also hosted Olympic events has suggested the Olympic Park Legacy Company faced challenges in respect of crime figures, poverty and deprivation, mortality and morbidity in order to demonstrate lasting benefits for the community in the long term, as an illustration of success (Waltham Forest, 2010). It is in respect of such a legacy that the Games are justified in terms of cost to the public purse in the face of criticisms related to Government spending of over £9 billion on the Games. This was compared to the £3.9 billion that it estimates it would cost to eradicate child poverty (Barnardo’s cited in BBC News 2007).

Clearly then, there are positive public benefits associated with hosting the Olympics. Yet, the notion of legacy has become crucial in balancing these benefits with state funded spending and the controlled access of corporate sponsors to specific events, such as the Olympic Torch Relay. As with Glasgow, in its hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 2014, the long-term beneficial significance in terms of spatial regeneration and cultural transformation may not become apparent for at least 20 years.

Although outwith the scope of this article, more research and increased dialogue is needed in order to understand the change processes that underpin this idea of legacy in relation to the Games as a catalyst for community regeneration. Most overtly sold as bringing a positive impact, the creation of new infrastructures, housing and such, leads to displacement of people through process of gentrification that can be interpreted as either urban renewal or social cleansing of poor neighbourhoods. This overtly positive message overrides any suggestion of critique. As processes of sponsor-valorisation, allow for the hagiography of sponsor-corporations that might be otherwise unavailable, gratitude for financial support of athletes, local organising committees and the Olympic movement generally can, and does, mitigate any alternative reading of what is happening. Sponsors, like Coca-Cola, have the future of the Games, their success and the long term legacy in their hands.

Three years on from London 2012, the altruistic question of sponsor/partner involvement and legacy remains problematic for Rio 2016, where concerns about crime, pollution and utilities underpin commentary that suggests, ‘the “Olympic Legacy” in Rio has been criticized for serving mostly the interests of the private

sector and the wealthy' (Kaiser, 2015). Further, Coke continues in its TOP partner role and is lead sponsor in the torch relay alongside Nissan and Bradesco. Sponsoring the torch relay for the 11th time, the Vice-President of Coke in Brazil suggests, 'It allows us to stretch time because we bring the Olympic Games prior actually to the games themselves' (Camelier, 2015) to show the importance of this pre-event event!

It is perhaps unsurprising that official criticisms of such corporations are muted or non-existent. This may also explain why the activity of sponsors in schools in relation to the Olympics is not fully scrutinised and in some cases celebrated. Our research raises questions about such activity for example in considering the extent to which they are driven more by sponsors than any real embrace of the Olympic 'ideal.'

Conclusions

We have shown that corporate sponsorship of the Olympic Games ensures access to children and young people for sponsors and, as the longest serving Olympic partner, Coca-Cola is adept at taking advantage of this. Overall, Coca-Cola's effort to be perceived as a responsible citizen through corporate social responsibility activity masks the 'naked' pursuit of profit, by aligning this iconic brand with the Olympic ethos. This was evident in respect of Coke's enterprise activity in schools. It is suggested that this is either not recognised by the State and Olympic Bodies or ignored because this type of partnership is crucial to the Games sustainability within current neoliberal frames. To challenge it would contradict the notion of corporate altruism. Yet we assert a need to remain alert to the subtle and novel ways that corporate interests are promoted in the context of a (if not *the*) global event.

Further analyses of the Olympic Games, in 2012 and beyond, or in similar sporting arenas, needs to explore how sponsorship becomes embedded in a set of values that appears to help legitimise the activities of multi-national corporations. The reliance on companies as event partners makes their activities difficult to critique. Yet, these seemingly innocuous processes should be rigorously examined, not least in respect of their underlying ideological premises. On the one hand, it is clear that since the early 20th Century at least, sponsorship has been a key feature of the Games, thus, it is possible to argue that without some altruism on behalf of global corporations the Olympic Games would not exist. On the other hand, it is important to recognise that this kind of sponsorship is not value free, and it facilitates important marketing opportunities and the development of factors like 'top of mind recall' and the exercising of control market competitors.

This kind of partnership/sponsorship glorifies a particular world-view in working with children in schools and across communities that may act against their long-term interests and contradicts ideologies that underpin a social and democratic purpose for health and well-being, equality and indeed, the stated Olympic ethos. There remains a question of whether validating the TOP Partner brand brings an impact

on the Olympic 'brand' itself as both sustainable and vulnerable. Our purpose in writing this article is to ensure that such questions are asked about the nature and contours of business engagement with schools in the context of Olympic sponsorship.

The Olympics create scope for companies like Coca-Cola to demonstrate their social responsibility credentials in ways that would otherwise be unavailable and unthinkable. In taking a critical position, we do not intend to place an embargo on all sponsorship of the Games or other major events. Nor do we suggest that Coca Cola's motives are any different from other corporate partners/sponsors. Instead, we seek to make clear the ideological and market driven purpose of such sponsorship, in order to raise consciousness to the struggle against corporate cultural invasion (Freire, 1996). We suggest that by reducing the myth making effects of branding as the ultimate prize, we can reclaim a focus on the Olympics' potential for creating the possibility of democratic gold.

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