

Foreword

The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games were widely acclaimed as one of the most spectacular sporting events ever held, not least as a result of the sumptuous and dazzling opening ceremony and the high standards of competition from athletics and swimming to horse-jumping and yachting.

But what of the environment which along with sport and culture is the third pillar of Olympism? How did these Olympic and Paralympic Games rate in terms of sustainability and their contribution to a green legacy for Beijing, China and beyond?

This report discusses the environmental measures taken by the organizers and assesses their effectiveness and lessons learnt, all of which will be useful for those planning future Olympic and other sporting events.

It compares the commitments made in Beijing's 2000 bid to the actual outcomes and sets these within the challenges of a rapidly emerging economy that in recent years has seen double digit growth.

The report, compiled by independent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) experts in consultation with non-governmental organizations, the Beijing Municipal Government, the Beijing Environment Protection Bureau and the Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee, concludes that many of the promises were met, if not exceeded in some cases.

In addition, a lasting environmental legacy has been left in terms of new, energy efficient and eco-friendly buildings and venues. Some 90 per cent of the city's wastewater is now treated as a result of a \$17 billion investment. Some 200 factories have switched to new kinds of cleaner production.

New roads, railway and metro lines have been built in an effort to encourage cleaner public transport systems. Fifty thousand old taxis and 10,000 buses have been scrapped and replaced with new ones. The city invested in a 4,000-strong fleet of buses powered by natural gas – among the largest in the world. And 30 million trees and rose bushes were planted in an effort to green the city, among many other initiatives.

Air quality, a major worry for both the organizers and the athletes at the time, was dealt with via a mixture of forward-looking planning measures backed by short-term ones such as controls on private and public vehicles.

Whether these air quality gains can be maintained into the future remains a key challenge for the authorities. Certainly one innovative measure introduced for the 2008 Games—subsidized fares for public transport—is being maintained through 2009.

I believe this assessment will also be essential reading for the International Olympic Committee and the organizers of Vancouver, London and Sochi as they strive to realize their Olympic goals and set the environmental record-breaking bar ever higher.