

The image features the Paris 2024 Olympic logo in a light blue color on a dark blue background. The logo consists of the word "PARIS" in a sans-serif font above the year "2024", where the zero is replaced by a stylized flame. The background is composed of several vertical panels with different textures and colors: a blue and gold geometric pattern on the far left, a dark blue panel with a pinkish-red diagonal stripe, a panel with vertical blue and pink stripes, and a dark blue panel with a light blue dot pattern.

PARIS
2024

Impressions of Paris 2024

How did sustainability show up?

David Stubbs

Most of the Paris 2024 sustainability story is unseen. The Organising Committee have made huge efforts through choice of venues, sourcing of goods and services and generally how they integrated sustainability into decision-making. Carbon accounting, management systems and procurement deals are all done behind the scenes. Overall, Paris 2024 have made important strides to build on the effort of previous Games and develop new areas of advancement for sustainability in sport. My question is, do these efforts cut through and get noticed on the ground?

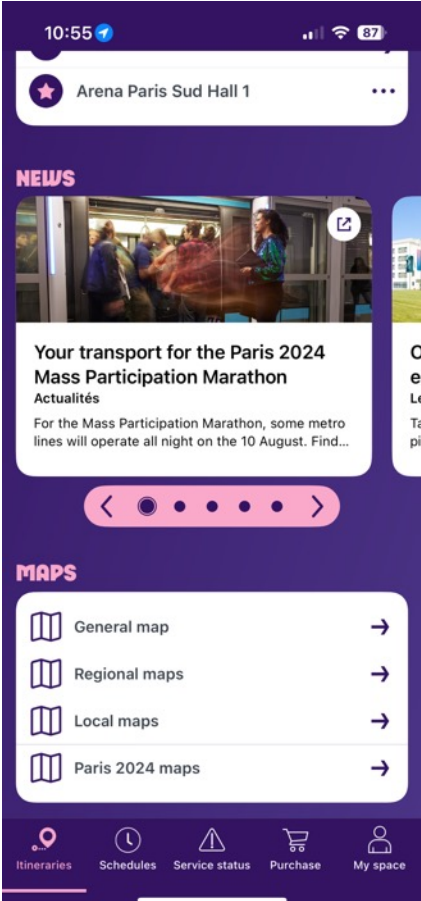
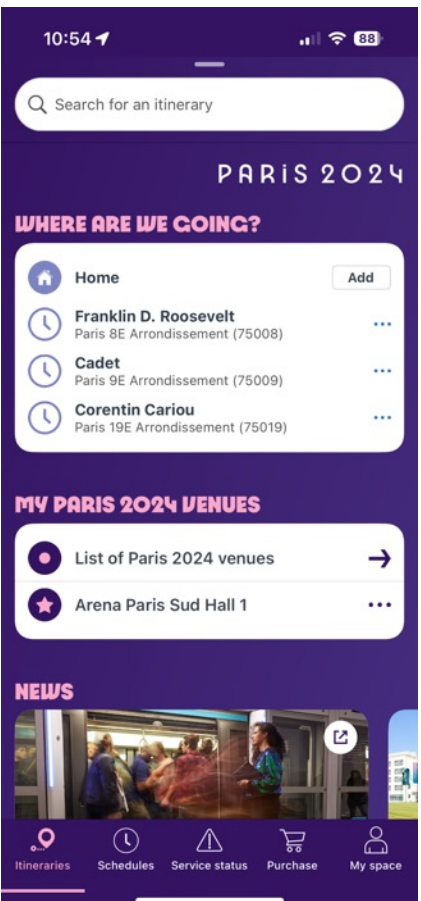
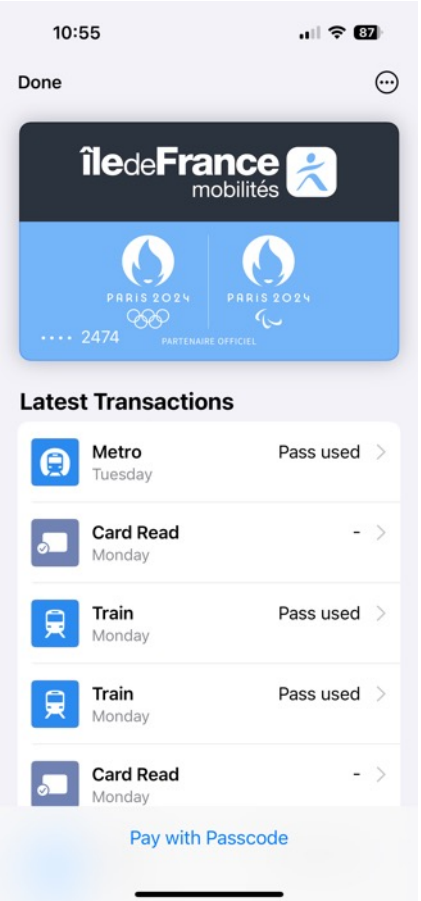
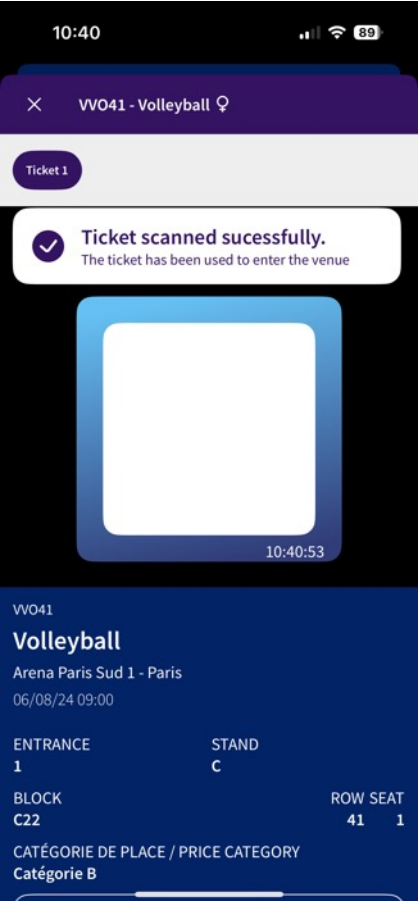
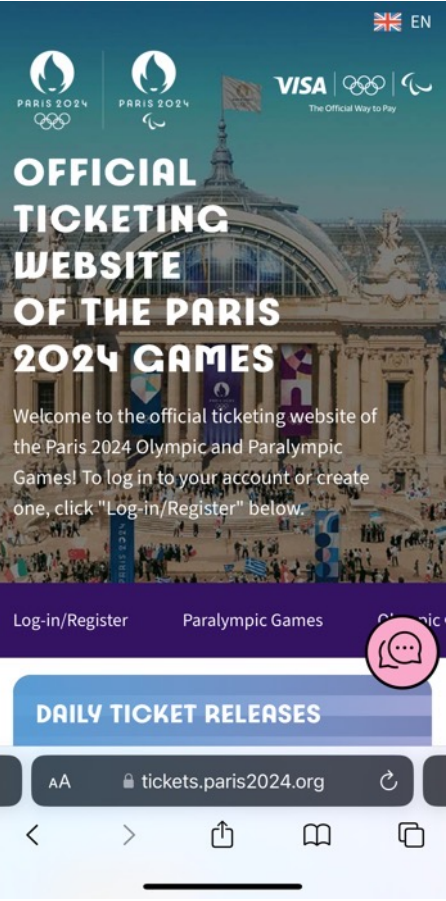
This note is purely based on my experience as a spectator during a 3-day visit to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. I travelled across the city, I experience three sports in three different venues, I went to a live site, saw the cauldron and watched mixed triathlon along with masses of spectators lining the route.

As former Head of Sustainability at London 2012 and a sustainability adviser to the International Olympic Committee (including being on the IOC's Evaluation Commission for the 2024 Games) I have plenty of inside knowledge of Olympic sustainability programmes. For this article, I have tried to put all that aside.

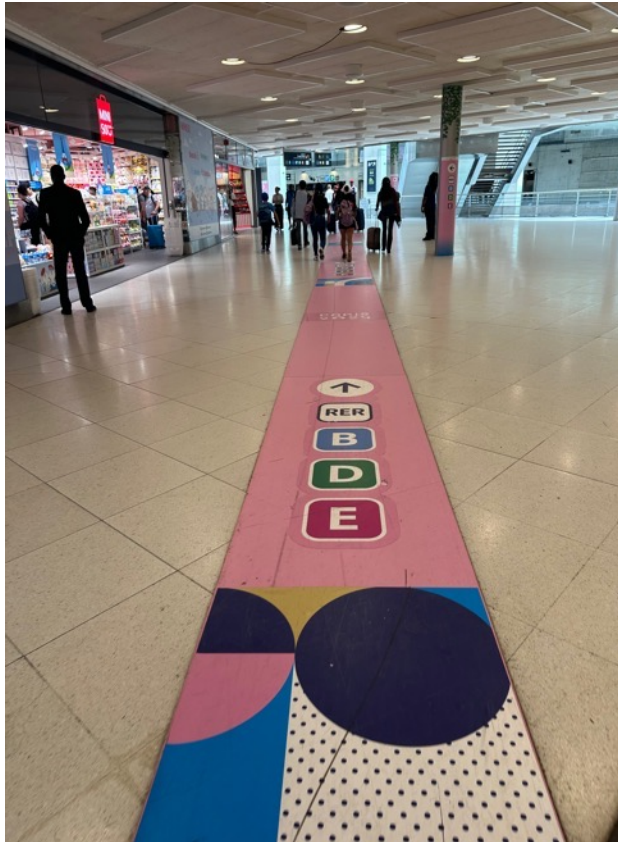


Gare du Nord concourse

Twelve years on from London 2012, I would obviously expect some differences in the spectator experience. Chief among these was digitalisation. I liked having digital tickets – and for those wanting a souvenir ticket, they could buy one. Apps for everything; sometimes almost too much, but for the tech-savvy, you could find all you needed to know. The travel pass was excellent – loaded onto my iPhone, just scan and go, and with itinerary planners to help you choose your route to/from venues. However, unlike in London, ticket holders had to pay for public transport. I didn't mind this (you cannot expect everything for free), but it was disappointing that Parisian transport prices were hiked for the Games period.



Signage and navigability were excellent. You didn't need to be familiar with the city to find your way around. From arriving at Gare du Nord, where there was clearly marked wayfinding throughout the station, it was always easy to navigate through the transport system. I liked that the in-train metro plans all clearly indicated the stops corresponding to specific Games venues. There were lots of generally cheerful city marshals at every transport hub and plenty of helpful Games volunteers along routes from Metro to venue.



Since 2017 when Paris 2024 was elected host city, it has been transformed thanks to Mayor Hidalgo's green policies. Loads of cycle lanes where before was just for motor vehicles. Mind, you have to look left and right, because cyclists now come at you from all directions.

Security and access to venues was very efficient and welcoming, despite the presence of armed police. I always felt totally safe. One venue had modern airport scanners, so you just walked through with no manual bag search. Digital ticketing worked. I remember for London 2012 we baulked at that, because we feared too many people would have trouble with it. Times have moved on.



The volunteers were welcoming, able to answer basic questions, and I liked their uniforms more than ours in 2012! They were drawn from all age groups and represented a good blend of French society. Ticket holders less so, which is a perennial problem for all Games – and indeed high-end sports events generally. The seat prices were eye-watering and that meant it was the wealthier white community and tourists buying the tickets, while the ethnic minorities made up the bulk of the transport, cleaning and security workforce – ever thus. However, it was also the same for the free events, so there is perhaps a deeper aspect of societal engagement – or lack of – at work here.



Venue look and feel were good. Clean layouts, good branding, obviously reusable for Paralympics later, and sufficient without being overdone. I did not get out to the more rural venues like equestrian, golf, mountain bike and rowing, but everywhere I saw had some nod to biodiversity. Even the most unlikely indoor arenas had approaches with good planting schemes, although a lot of credit for this must go to the municipalities. That is perhaps another outcome from using existing venues, where you can benefit from more mature landscaping.

I didn't notice much wildlife, but it was hot and high summer, so to be expected. What was nice was the lack of that constant hum from diesel generators. Using grid, renewable energy across all city venues made for a cleaner and quieter experience.



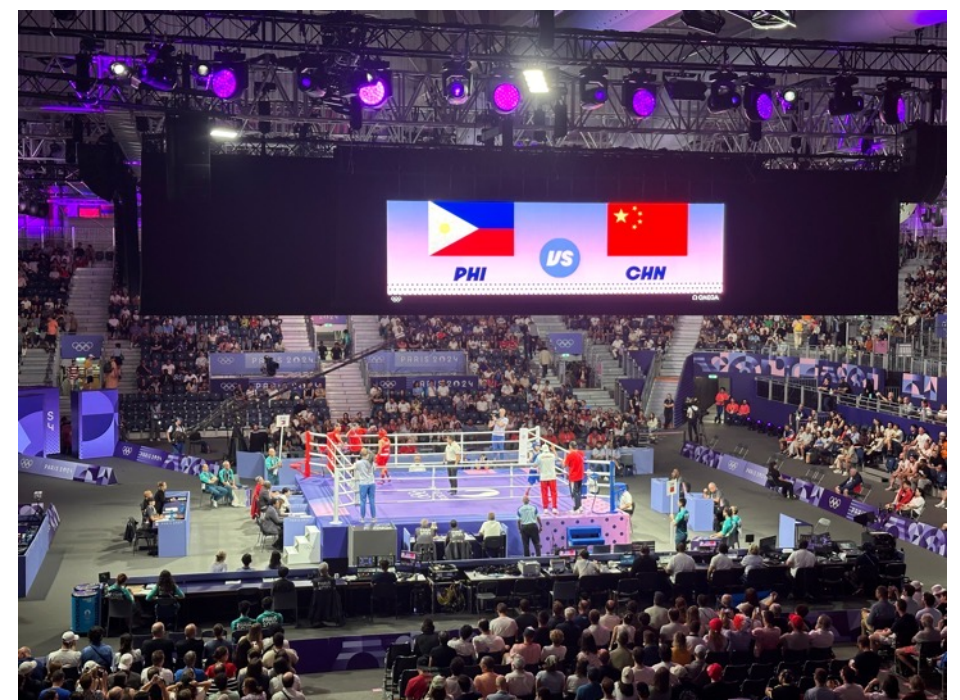
Approach to Stade de France



Approach to Arena Paris Nord

Well, the crowds weren't quiet, and the sport presentation was loud and upbeat – full-on entertainment mode. Spectators seemed to be having a great time – huge cheers for home athletes, but lots of cheering, clapping and waving for others too. One of the special things about the Olympic Games is that people get to see sports they would never normally go and see – if you can get a ticket you go, no matter what it is or who is playing who. Watching women's volleyball, China vs Turkey was not something I would have imagined enjoying, but I am glad I went.

Comfort: I had expected things to be even hotter than it turned out, but even so, for anyone seated outdoors without shade, it was pretty intense. This is something for future Games to address much more diligently. Los Angeles 2028 could be a real furnace.







Food: I had quite high hopes here. In London we had pioneered a “Food Vision” in which we would have a different style of public catering, with greater choice and well-sourced ingredients. Paris 2024 built upon this, but the offer at each venue I saw was quite limited, albeit with more vegetarian options. Interestingly, they had a no alcohol policy at all venues.

The main difference compared with London 2012 was that we had the Olympic Park, a destination in its own right, where people spent all day and had the opportunity to buy meals and drinks and chill out in the park.


In contrast, in Paris, their virtue of using mostly existing venues, meant the Games were dispersed and there was no, single large focal point, unlike our Olympic Park. Spectators in Paris would come for sport sessions and then disperse back into the city, where there are innumerable good eating and drinking places. Therefore, the in-venue catering requirement was really more of the snack variety. Cheaper to organise too.



In-venue menu boards

1. Club sandwich (jambon & emmental | ham & cheese) 9€
2. Wrap chèvre & miel | Goat cheese & honey wrap  9€
3. Hot dog végétarien | Vegetarian hot dog  12,5€
4. Sushi roll (saumon · feta | salmon · feta ) 12,5€
5. Chips 3€
6. Cookie · Brownie · Muffin · Cake  4€
7. Croissant · Pain au chocolat · Brioche 2,5€
8. Pop-corn sucré | Sweet popcorn 3€
9. HiPRO à boire saveur choco | Choco dairy speciality 4,5€
10. ACTIVIA Mix&Go muesli framboise | Muesli raspberry .. 3€
11. Magnum Amande | Almond 4€
12. SUPER TWISTER Parfums orange, fraise, citron |
orange, strawberry, lemon 3,5€

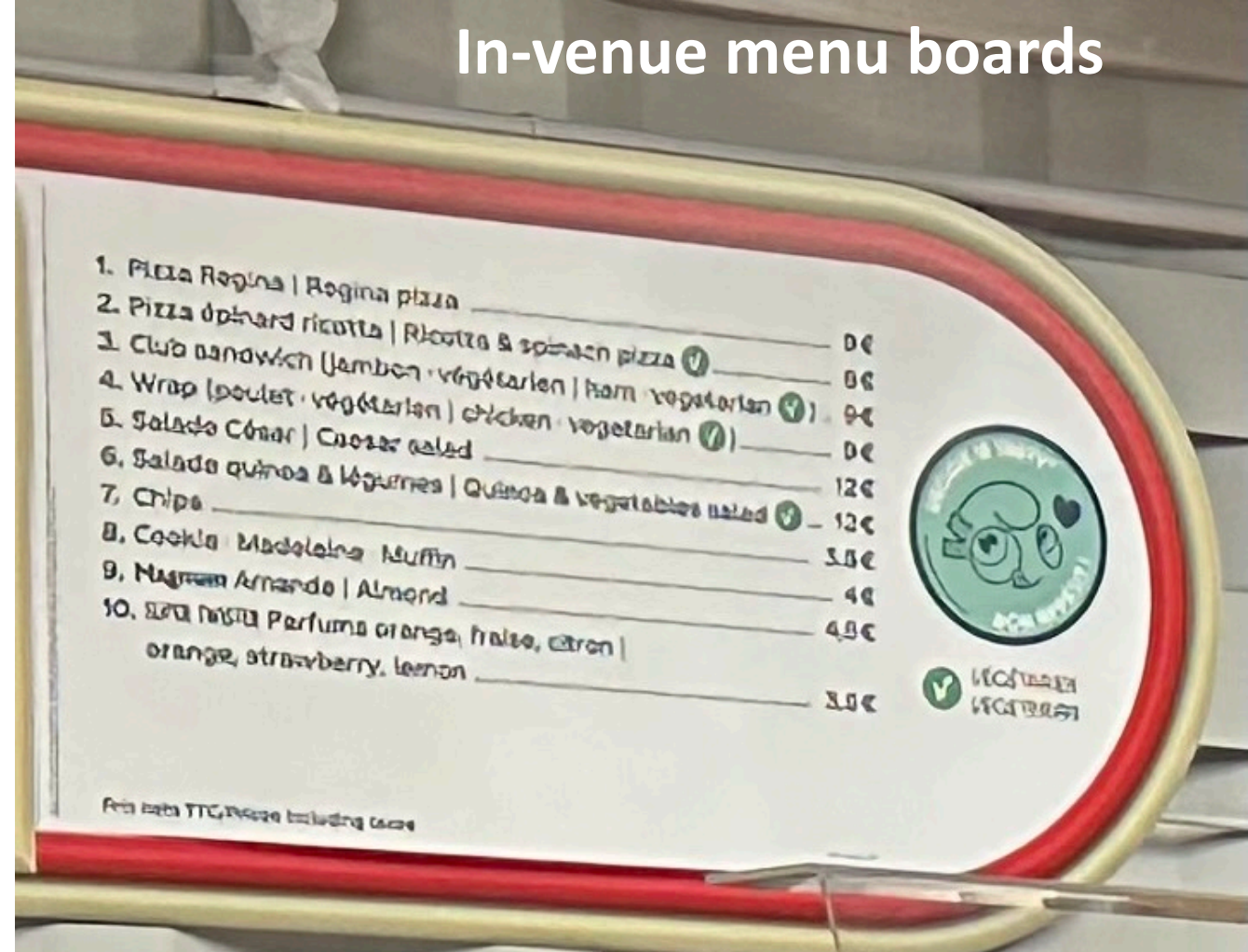


 VÉGÉTARIEN
VEGETARIAN

Prix nets TTC/Prices including taxes

NPA_X0031_FS

Activia et HiPRO sont des marques déposées par Compagnie Générale Danone. Retrouvez toutes les informations des ingrédients, valeurs nutritionnelles et sur les emballages et sur notre site danone.fr. DUFF 612 039 971 R.C.S. Nanterre, Under Armour France SAS Nanterre 552 199 296. Ben & Jerry's Homemade Holdings, Inc. 2010 - © Wendy Jackson 1992. Reg. trademark used in agreement with the trademark owner.





Regular bars and fast-food catering around Stade de France took lots of the trade. Not part of Games catering.

Digressing from my own experience, I did meet with some people who knew the athlete dining experience and they said it was poor quality – and that is being polite. If true, that is a big failure.

Interestingly, in our day we were heavily criticised because McDonald's was an IOC worldwide marketing partner, and therefore had rights to a presence in certain venues, including the Athlete's dining area. However, I remember speaking with athletes in London who told me that having finished their competitions and after all the self-denial of their years of training up to the Games, they were damn well going to treat themselves to a burger and fries, or whatever. The queue for McDonald's in the athletes' dining hall was always a sight to behold.

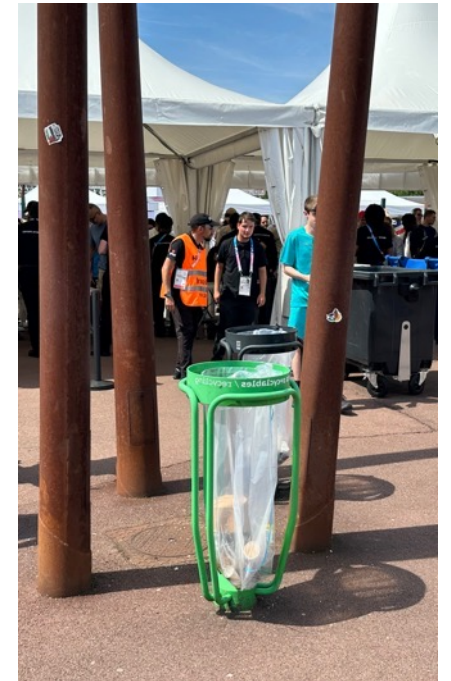
Looking ahead to Los Angeles 2028, the challenge will be even greater as, unlike Paris, you can't just walk out of a venue and find a cosy bistro nearby. At least the athletes will be accommodated at the UCLA campus, which should be a great experience for them – both in terms of dining and living conditions, as well as excellent on-site training facilities.



Next up is waste management. Here I was also disappointed. Front-of-house waste bins were rudimentary, sometimes oddly positioned and not always consistently labelled. In the grand scheme of things, the impact of poor waste segregation at venues is probably low, but it felt like a missed awareness raising opportunity.

Then we have the reusable cups saga. Due to French laws, handing out single-use plastic bottles is not allowed. The main solution was to provide soft drinks from soda streams (post-mix) and these were poured into reusable cups with a return deposit. As branded cups, there was an assumption that many cups would be kept as souvenirs. I am not convinced about this. In any case, the manufacture of reusable cups is not a saving of resources, especially when many do not get returned. Worse still were situations where servers had to open plastic bottles and pour contents into reusable cups. That may have been an unavoidable situation, but the optics were poor, which many people noticed.

Los Angeles 2028 will have to rethink this one. I saw events in the UK this summer where reusable cups were not branded to stimulate collection; on the contrary, all the messaging and infrastructure was around getting them back, so they could be reused at the event.





This is nice messaging and good imagery to guide people to put their waste in the correct bins. Even the bin sacs are colour coordinated.

However, these set ups were not consistently applied, sometimes poorly sited and the cardboard bins appear cheap and flimsy.

Did the city have an Olympic buzz? There were moments when I saw people crowded round TVs in bars and spilling onto the streets. Every bar had the Games on TV and there was an impressive turn out on the streets from the triathlon. The Parc de la Villette, where several National Olympic Committees had their houses, was absolutely packed and humming – huge queues too. Otherwise, however, it did feel a bit flat across many parts of the city. I didn't observe any cheerful banter on the metro, which is probably an effect of the dispersed arrangement of the venues. Or maybe I was on the wrong trains!



Local fans gathering round a TV screen



Queue for Club France, Parc de la Villette

I want to end on a high point. The cauldron and Olympic flame – or rather not a flame – were spectacular. I loved the nod to the heritage of the Montgolfier brothers and their hot air balloon. The use of electric lighting and water vapour to create an artificial flame was remarkable and was the culmination of a 15-year journey from when we first discussed with EDF the possibility of a “green flame” for London 2012. We didn’t achieve that, but hat’s off to EDF and Paris 2024 for creating something so symbolic and zero carbon.

That really did cut through and attracted global attention, exemplifying the sustainable Games approach promoted by Paris 2024.

