

Cohen, P. and Watt, P. (Eds.) (2017). *London 2012 and the Post-Olympics City: A Hollow Legacy?* London: Palgrave Macmillan

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Book Review

This book is a welcome addition to the literature around hosting mega sporting events with a case-study focus on the London 2012 Olympic Games. The book is largely framed within urban policy and sociology studies, and the complementary disciplines of sport sociology, sport management, and also sport development feature on an implicit basis. The organisational framework of the text is well thought through and there are contributions from leading authors in the two parent disciplines. The book is not intended primarily for a philosophical audience, however, it does discuss ethically relevant material – vis a vis –the ‘economic regeneration’ and ‘legacy’ narratives of bidding for, and hosting the Olympic games. The reader will not find any substantive ethical theory nor penetrative conceptual analysis of key themes like Olympism; but they will find engaging empirically informed critique of the post 2012 period, with a large focus on social justice.

In the opening chapter the editors (Cohen and Watt) set out the general rationale for the book, namely a more critical approach to evaluating the success of so-called mega sporting events. Their goal is to buck the trend of generic and misleading quantitative work with pre-prescribed parameters provided by key stakeholders (such as the IOC) usually produced very quickly after events. After some analysis of the concept of ‘economic regeneration’ the authors make a strong case for the inclusion of qualitative empirical work to supplement in evaluation.

Part one is themed around urban regeneration and is divided into two main chapters that discuss London 2012 as a mega event in context. Poynter’s chapter (2) provides a neat overview of the financial implications of the games. A descriptive analysis of the return-on-investment suggests that East London has benefited from the games in regard to key social policy areas (e.g., employment, transport). A more critical and nuanced analysis reveals that although the financial investment has created a visible legacy, hosting the Olympics has reinforced strong social divisions in terms of employment types and housing availability, namely young professionals living in privately rented accommodation. Chapter 3 is situated directly within the urban sociology literature. It again features a welcome critical counterpoint to the dominant ‘positive’ narrative on London 2012. The chapter is an ethnographically informed analysis of the [co]overt security and safety strategies at the games. The authors (Fussey and Coaffee) split the commentary into three main sections using a neo-marxist theoretical lens. The first charts the history, growth and neo-liberal seizure of security and safety management, and they make the case that the partnerships that accrue are less than

harmonious and (non)productive, only serving to protect the interests of large, corporate sponsors. The second section describes how securifying immediate and associated urban spaces using fringe investment capital is tokenistic and largely marginalises certain populations (e.g. the homeless). The final section asserts that the legacy of security and safety post-2012 is not sustainable because of the temporal nature of the games.

Part two is the densest section of the book and comprises seven chapters encased in a theme of the urban regeneration of East London. To this end, chapter 4 evaluates the housing legacy of London-2012. The authors (Watt and Bernstock) have produced a desk-based analysis of what is principally a dichotomy of social housing and private rented accommodation in East London. After documenting the perils with quasi-market involvement in these developments, the underpinning argument to the chapter is the deviation away from official indicators of the amount of social housing that would be available on new developments. Aside from the (much needed) reporting of overcrowding and untenable living conditions for large pockets of the East London population, perhaps, more importantly is the candid neo-marxist expose of the displacement of young people living in temporary accommodation due to the aesthetic gentrification of East London. Cohen's chapter 5 is another ethnographically informed narrative that is encased in a theoretical framework of communitarism and more explicitly, Putnam's (2000) idea of social capital. In blending the two concepts, Cohen devises the idea of 'hysterical materialism', which in simple terms is the interrelatedness of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. A case study of 'East Village' (one of the new housing developments near the Olympic village) unearthed social unrest between private and social tenants to the point where the idea of a 'whole community' was manufactured by the appointment of several community engagement officers. In chapter 6, Humphry's useful narrative provides a different perspective on the socio-spatial relationships in E20 via the use of ethnographic imagery. In critiquing the idea of E20 as an idyllic living space, the series of images depict the interplay that race, social-class and gender have on relationships between manual and professional workers and inhabitants. The chapter also argues that the legacy has fundamentally failed to include its Paralympic colleague in its footprint. Marrero-Guillamon discusses the fallacy of participatory consultation using the urban planning of Hackney-Wick as a case study. The crux of the argument is that the legacy's footprint on the area has left a supply in affordable workspace and not housing, which is an unintended consequence of the original plan. The author summarises by arguing that the idea of community consultation and participation in this instance has been illusionary at best, further muting certain voices because

of access requirements to forums and committees where consultation takes place. Chapter 9 presents three empirical case studies of the conception of community pre-and post-games. Weber-Newth discusses the influence of powerful stakeholders in the regeneration process due to neo-liberal priorities, further highlighting the social unrest at the demolition of the Clays Lane estate. The narrative then presents what appears to be a dichotomy between cultural and property-led regeneration that are informed by the competition between global and local interests. Fawbert follows an interesting trajectory in chapter 10 in producing a leftist positional commentary on the relocation of West Ham United to the Olympic Stadium post-games. Using Gramsci's 'cultural hegemony' as the theoretical lens, the chapter offers useful insights on what relocation means to a footballing fandom community. The leftist narrative offers useful insights on the legal and (more prominently) the cultural struggles that the fans faced as part of the move. Again, the illusion of participatory consultation features and Fawbert summarises by stipulating the multi-agentic motives of profitisation. The final chapter of part two is written by Gunter and is a concise reporting of (the lack of) youth transition and progression within (compulsory) education in East London. The empirical findings offer a useful socio-political slant on the implications of policy enactment in the area and the key message is that young people have suffered social exclusion because of the monopolisation of professional level employment in the area.

The final section of the text is themed around the social and health legacies of the games. Mike Weed opens part three, and chapter 11 is an evaluation of the legacy effects that London 2012 had on the health and physical activity levels of the UK population. The author documents that previous evidence has been inconclusive, however it was posited that the games did produce a 'festival effect' in which the desire to participate goes far beyond sport. A substantive section of the chapter critiques pre-and-post games sport policy, concluding that they can be rendered ineffective because of the negative impact the games had on sedentary populations. We return to an ethnographic research design in chapter 12, and the authors (Howe and Kerr) investigated the legacy of the Paralympic games from the perspectives of the mass media. Bourdieu's ideas provide the theoretical framework for the authors to investigate the journalistic habitus (i.e. the media's perceptions and dispositions) of the games. They make the case that the media frenzy around the Paralympic games has undoubtedly raised the profile of the games, and this was underpinned with evidence around significantly more live coverage on UK terrestrial TV. Howe and Kerr argue that these positive effects have even infiltrated media agencies, thus improving practice to become more inclusive and representative. The final

chapter of part three is an evaluation of the social legacy of both the Olympic and Paralympic games. A similar pattern of findings around lack of housing and employment were reported by Brittain and Mataruna-Dos-Santos. Perhaps more importantly, the mixed methods approach found that the general population of the host boroughs felt disenfranchised from the (planning) and hosting of the games and that the one key lesson for inhabitants of the Rio games would be to let them participate in informal commercial activity.

The final part of the book is opened by Cohen and Watt, and chapter 14 is basically a polemic on the Rio Games as being the most exclusionary in its history. They discuss the social cleansing that occurred in the redevelopment of Rio and the force that was used in the process of 'reclaiming' state control of several areas of the city. What follows is a manifesto of sixteen recommendations produced from an amalgam of agencies in opposition to the Rio games that seeks to at least reduce the exclusionary practices of stakeholders. The final chapter by Basurto is a qualitative study around event-led regeneration and the associated nation branding that a host city undergoes when staging a mega sporting event. Using Tokyo 2020 as a case study, the main theme of social cleansing surfaces once more, and Basurto argues that aside from the aesthetic appeal of urban regeneration, there is a discrepancy with the socio-spatial legacies of hosting such events.

In sum, the book offers a substantial body of evidence that contradicts the key principles of what hosting the Olympic Games can offer. As such, the book provides valuable material for the aforementioned disciplines (and practitioners) in discussing the values of the games and its ideals.