



London 2012: 'Legacy' a Trojan Horse

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Abstract

This paper is a critical analysis of the urban geographies of London 2012, the so-called Regeneration Games. London won the bid to host the 2012 Olympics on the basis that existing communities and cultures of East London would profit from urban regeneration; the promise of 'local legacy'. Using the analogy of the Trojan horse, we demonstrate that the benevolent empty signifier 'legacy' disguises the



politically dubious aspects of mega-event and strategic planning, especially its controversial aspects such as escalating costs, privatisation and displacement. We zoom in on 3 empirical cases – a rowing club, cultural hub, and festival – in the neighbourhood Hackney Wick Fish Island in East London to demonstrate that there was (and remains) a disconnect between the rhetoric of politicians and Olympic planners, who promised both citywide and local ‘legacy’, and the actual legacies (after-effects) of the Olympics. With a focus on the process, construction, or *making of* legacy within the local context, our analysis reveals that Olympic planning creates irresolvable contradictions in scale, which cannot be resolved in favour of existing communities. The alignment of Olympic planning with neoliberal spatial practices means that neighbourhood needs can never truly be met.

Keywords

London 2012; legacy; community; culture

Introduction

"The Olympics offer a pretext for waging war on the poor, an opportunity to celebrate the segregation of humanity rather than unity, and a politics of forgetting" (Springer, 2015, 636).

The Olympic Games – as discussed in this journal – are necessarily both political and divisive, as neatly worded in the quotation above. With each new cycle of Summer and Winter Games in which athletes achieve ‘personal bests’ and animate crowds, there is also a new cycle of Olympic violence, urban colonialism and divided communities. In the five years since the staging of the summer Olympic Games 2012 in London’s East End, academic accounts have critiqued the Games from various perspectives – in light of housing (Bernstock, 2014), securitisation and governance (Fussey, 2015), and from a local community and cultural position (Cohen, 2013). Most recently in ACME, Andrew Foxall (2013) and Simon Springer (2015) addressed the challenge for host-city residents to mount counter narratives to the dominant visions of place projected by Olympic authorities. The overwhelming response from the critical left is that the *spatial*, *social* and *political* implications are what matters in an analysis of London 2012; critical reflection must focus on structural inadequacies.

While critical scholars have demonstrated that questionable narratives are part and parcel of Olympic urbanisation (Gaffney, 2013; Gold and Gold, 2013; Weber-Newth, 2017; to name just a few) – it remains a collective task to strengthen these accounts, unpack the complexity and ambiguity of underlying mechanisms, and provide new empirical insights within particular settings. Our aim in this paper is to continue the conversation started by Foxall and Springer in ACME about the geographies of Olympic inequality, by zooming into case studies in London.

With focus on 3 empirical cases – which we call ‘encounters’ – we argue that there was (and remains) a disconnect between the rhetoric of politicians and Olympic planners, who promised both citywide and local ‘revitalisation’ and ‘legacy’, and the actual legacies (after-effects) of the Olympics. Our wider goal is to bring to light the dubious relationship between neoliberal political tendencies and their workings within the London 2012 apparatus, and also the pressures on planners to serve this system. Our analysis is particularly relevant to debates within critical geography, sociology, planning and urban studies; more specifically we integrate themes that will interest gentrification and mega-event scholars. As touched on above (and expanded below), existing work has made the link between legacy rhetoric and the Olympic mega event. What remains unclear is *how* exactly legacy is produced, who decides *what* legacy is, and *who* benefits. Our focus lies on the process, construction, or *making of* legacy within the local context of Hackney Wick Fish Island. In doing so, we combine three key debates (legacy, mega-event and strategic planning) with detailed empirical material ‘on the ground’. Our contribution therefore rests primarily on elaborating and bolstering

existing critical debates, and using the metaphor of the Trojan Horse to frame our empirical examples.

We start with a brief review of existing literature on the urban geographies of the Olympic games. We then develop a theoretical understanding of London 2012 as a staged mega event and a project driven by 'legacy' goals – but ultimately a paradigmatic exercise in strategic planning. Thirdly, we introduce our case study-area, Hackney Wick Fish Island, and outline our methodological approach. Fourthly, we empirically examine three situations where the Olympics interacted with a specific local context, which we understand as 'encounters'. The first empirical section (encounter one) focuses on how 'community' is imagined and contested through a newly constructed bridge. The second empirical section (encounters two and three) examine how local 'culture' has been conceptualised firstly in the White Building, a new cultural venue, and secondly how it was overshadowed through the cancellation of Hackney WickED, a grassroots festival. To conclude, we discuss our fundamental concerns: how exactly can we understand the shifting category of 'legacy'? How has 'legacy' been negotiated and constructed within a web of existing power relations?

Urban Geographies of the Olympic Games

Commercial interests have long overshadowed the vision of Pierre de Coubertin (founder of the modern Olympic movement) to promote cultural understanding and peace. The Olympics now involve professional athletes, tourism, television rights and corporate sponsorship, and most crucially for this discussion, a competitive bidding process followed by significant material restructuring of the winning city's urban space. The 'historic' mega event is now intertwined with local politics as cities hope to channel investments and promote urban regeneration (Poynter, Viehoff, and Li, 2016). With these developments, there is persistent critique that the Games – as a brand – have become overtly commercial and part of 'celebration capitalism' (Boykoff, 2014). In conjunction, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) mission has evolved, with a demand for the Olympics to generate *positive impact* – otherwise framed as 'legacy' – even after the Games move to their next host city. The increasing importance of 'legacy' reflects the aim of producing tangible long-term benefits for hosting the games, whether for local residents, a city or a nation.

The (growing) connection between Olympic Games and urban geographies is well reflected in the current literature. Chalkley and Essex (1999) argue that cities are using the Games to catalyse urban programmes and policies, with significant local impacts. They state; "the scale of urban investment required for the Games has become so great...that the concept of sport as a means of spiritual renewal has given way to sport as a means of urban renewal" (1999, 202). Andranavich and Burbank (2011) suggest that we are now in the fourth 'urban geographical phase' of the Olympics Games; a phase in which local politics and the geography of the games is tightly intertwined and where the Games *must* include

the idea of legacy. This existing body of literature is rich in drawing out various aspects of ‘legacy’, ranging from historical lineage of the Games and legacy (Leopkey and Parent, 2012), contextualising Olympic legacies cross-nationally (Andranovich and Burbank, 2011; Laueremann, 2015), and analysing the connection between legacy and urban development (Coaffee, 2012; Davies, 2012; Weber-Newth, 2014). Despite the differing foci, the literature as a whole demonstrates that ‘legacy’ should be analysed as both multiple and fluid (Kassens-Noor et al., 2015). In other words, there is no formula for determining “*the Olympic legacy*” (Andranovich and Burbank, 2011); the Games are largely used by cities in reference to local space, as a mechanism to reposition themselves in the changing global economy within a specific context.

We suggest that long-term strategic planning for London (involving infrastructure, transport and large-scale development) gained public and political consensus by being smuggled in under the guise of the mega event London 2012, specifically under the banner of ‘legacy’, which was translated on the local level as ‘community’ and ‘culture’. Put simply, ‘legacy’ was the Trojan horse that masked the big vision for London 2012, especially its more contentious or controversial aspects (such as escalating costs, privatisation and displacement). We translate this conceptual frame to the local level, via specific empirical encounters, demonstrating the finer *process* – or *making of* – legacy. In order to examine this process on the neighbourhood level, we focus on ‘community’ and ‘culture’ – two concepts that were vital in converting ‘legacy’ to the local arena.

The so-called Regeneration Games (Macrury and Poynter, 2008) provide an interesting case to explore legacy, because since the 2000 Sydney Games, bidding cities are *required* to outline sports and non-sports legacies into their bid books (via Olympic Games Global Impact Studies, OGI). Having bid for the Games in 2005, London 2012 is therefore one of the first Olympic Games to formally integrate ‘legacy planning’ into its Olympic concept. The geographical arena of east London would not just provide a blank canvas but also experience a local and inclusive Olympic legacy. Hosting the 2012 Games was a way to create value for the urban region of the Lower Lea Valley, by focusing on the “local urbanizing of the global games” more than any other mega-event before (Short, 2008, 323). By scrutinizing this ‘legacy’ as it is actually experienced in the neighbourhood of Hackney Wick Fish Island, east London, we produce an account that is more nuanced than the official one. Analysis of the empirical data demonstrates that ‘legacy’ was a construction or empty signifier with a vast amount of symbolic value, laden with positive connotations.

Taking a broader perspective, we argue that London 2012 sits in a continuum with the top-down strategic spatial planning schemes that prioritise wholesale city growth over localised needs. We demonstrate that the model is being fashioned within the context of the re-emergence of neoliberal space governance (Haughton, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck, 2013, 231; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009).

London 2012: Framing 'Legacy' as a Trojan horse

The metaphor of the Trojan horse references a story from Greek mythology, and is used to describe something deceptively benign; a trick that causes a target to let down their guard and invite an enemy into a protected bastion. In this section we demonstrate that 'legacy' can be considered a Trojan horse; a concept used to disguise or conceal the most commercially crass aspects of London 2012 as a mega event and the more radical strategic planning (broader political and economic plans) that would transform East London's urban environment. The metaphor is useful to better understand that 'legacy' was *made*; planning professionals crafted the neat legacy container as a transport vehicle for something far more complex than its singular appearance reveals. The contents of the container (similar to the soldiers inside the horse) were essentially hidden from public view as legacy was widely celebrated as a victory for London. Like in Troy, sceptics were often dismissed as spoiling the party.

As this paper demonstrates, the making of legacy was a deceptive manoeuvre because it presented the Olympic legacy as an apolitical 'gift' bestowed upon the people of East London by the government and the IOC (Macrury and Poynter, 2008), while in practice the neoliberal agenda that underscored legacy undermined and flattened local practices from within (*lived* community and culture). Our frame provides the conceptual apparatus to deconstruct the evolution of 'legacy' in this paper, but also provides the necessary tool for going beyond the London case.

A web of actors and agencies contributed to crafting the Trojan Horse. London 2012 was a complex and evolving planning project; it involved those responsible for strategic coordination, monitoring and delivering (UK government, the Mayor of London, LOCOG, and British Olympic Association) as well as delivery bodies (such as the Olympic Delivery Authority and London Development Agency). Planning for legacy began as early as 2003 in the bid phase, and evolved to land assembly, master planning, and then planning of the 'legacy communities' (Brown et al. 2012: 236). The point to be made here is that the Trojan Horse (legacy) was constructed and refined over a significant time span, from various perspectives. However, one of the central agencies responsible for planning and framing legacy was the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC), which evolved into the Mayor of London's London Legacy Development Committee (LLDC). The LLDC's unrivalled assets and powers in planning becomes evident when considering that the agency is simultaneously landowner, developer and planning authority for the Olympic site itself and the surrounding areas (until 2030). As such the LLDC is central in this discussion. The LLDC were able to manoeuvre and direct planning in the local arena; responsible for translating the bid book plans into planning on the ground, with contact to local stakeholders. In the analogy it is local residents and businesses being deceived – often unaware of the strategy being implemented that affect their everyday life. The deception, we argue, is part of capitalist practices, in the sense that the urgency to attract global events (capital)

has the known logical consequence of displacement (accumulation by dispossession¹).

Paul Watt (2013: 105) discusses how the 2012 Olympics can be understood through the lens of accumulation by dispossession. He argues that Olympic regeneration produced antagonistic class relations in London's East End not only in terms of individuals or corporations with wealth and power threatening the capacity of lower-income groups to live in the city, but also in terms of creating discursive categories and spatial discourses of class, place, community and belonging. In this process, social injustices are becoming more visible to those who lose out, which leads to a perception of the London 2012 Olympics being "not for us". This analysis is useful here, as it helps us to refine specific social, political and economic practices rooted in London's variety of capitalism. Linking this back to the Olympic planning, Christopher Gaffney (2013: 3935) states: "The discursive frames found in candidate dossiers are ever more similar, eliding the nuances of the urban and social fabrics in their hosts in order to appeal to the ideological imperatives of mega-event rights holders" – we see the ideological imperatives based on a neoliberal growth logic.

Legacy

Today, legacy debates are *the* defining discourse of 'responsible' Olympic mega-event hosting (Miah and Garcia 2013, 142), drawing on core considerations such as sustainability and social inclusion. This means the language of 'legacy' has the power of political consensus and thus ability to change the frame of political negotiation. Mapping the complexity of legacy is also important when considering the paradigms that Olympic authorities, town planners and politicians within the LLDC have no choice but to negotiate. More specifically it gives a sense of the constraints that city and spatial planners are working under, such as tight deadlines for infrastructure delivery.

The London 2012 'legacy' was framed specifically with focus on the East End, but also focussed on a broad range of indicators, from economic legacy (growth of the city), to health legacy (youth involvement in sport) and physical legacy (land use and built structures). The organising institutions of London 2012 promised a unique way "to improve the lives of the residents within the five London boroughs who would be acting as hosts" (Sadd, 2009, 266). This local focus was entrenched in the first bid-documents, which presented an image of the 2012 Olympics lifting the East End out of post-industrial decline following decades of underinvestment (Poynter, 2008, 133 ff.; Wales, 2012; Thornley, 2012). While the public rhetoric on 'legacy' left little space for criticism (Newman, 2007, 258),

¹ Here we refer to David Harvey's (2003) 'accumulation by dispossession' thesis. We understand accumulation by dispossession as a description of how capitalism, in its quest for accumulating profit, restructures urban space, for example via privatisation.

the reality at ground level is much more ambiguous. Research shows that the Olympic Games and subsequent intensified regeneration in east London have resulted in unwanted 'legacies' such as the displacement of local residents and businesses from the areas where new sports venues were built (Davis and Thornley, 2010; Raco and Tunney, 2010), as well as rising land-values and forced displacement in the areas neighbouring the Olympic Park (Bernstock, 2014; Watt, 2013). Empirical research reveals a gap between Olympic rhetoric and local reality (Cohen, 2013), specifically a tendency for overlooking local creative communities (Pappalepore and Duignan, 2016). Consequently, in scrutinising the London 2012 'local legacy', we follow Helen Lenskyj's suggestion that 'legacy' should be questioned in terms of who wins and who loses (2002, 107). The theoretical frame we propose here is that the concept of legacy acted as a discursive glue precisely because the core IOC value of 'legacy' represented *everyone* winning from London 2012.

The Mega event

Mega events are "large-scale cultural events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche, 2000, 1). While mega-events are pursued as a strategy for stimulating local economic growth, developing infrastructure and boosting a city's image, commentators suggest that these projects are pursued by city elites as part of a global capitalist growth agenda (Newman and Thornley, 2011; Raco, 2014). Olympic Games are a paradigmatic example of the mega-event, combining the symbolic 'show' aspect of the Games themselves with significant international sponsorship and infrastructural development of the host city through the construction of sporting facilities and the extension of transport networks (Leopkey and Parent, 2012; Müller, 2015). As Christopher Gaffney (2013) states:

Mega-event projects are typically of such a large scale and the processes used to develop them so distant from the people who will both finance and be impacted by them, that once the documents are signed...there is frequently no chance given to those most affected by them to give input or to organise and react (Gaffney 2013, 3935).

Within these parameters, London 2012 was presented as a catalyst for wholesale urban transformation in the East End of London (Vijay, 2015). While critics highlight the negative short-term effects of mega-event transformations such as displacement (Silvestre and de Oliveira, 2012), the framing of the London 2012 mega-event under the banner of a benevolent 'legacy' conceptualised it as a *new* model of transformation with a long-term trajectory and a local focus.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a process defined by its citywide approach, ordered sequence of operations, and key actors (public and private) working towards an overall goal. It focuses on certain geographical areas within the city and can exist

in various forms, including master plan, regional plan and mission statements (Newman and Thornley, 2011, 10). A major flaw in strategic plans is that they often ignore particular interests, localities, population groups and spatialities (Swyngedou, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002). This is especially true for strategic planning within a neoliberal context, where urban development aims to catalyse real estate development, private profit and a competitive global economy (Imrie and Lees, 2014). In the UK especially, it has been argued that the renaissance in strategic spatial planning has been aligned with politics of unsustainable growth and social exclusion, signalling the emergence of “neoliberal space governance” (Haugton, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck 2013, 231).

London 2012 can be positioned in a continuum with the top-down strategic spatial planning schemes. This becomes increasingly clear if one considers the Convergence Plan for London 2012 (The Mayor of London, 2011). The Plan aims to “equalise” the east and west of London in social and economic terms within the next 20 years. This city-wide scale indicates that London 2012 followed a strategic planning agenda. The plans for convergence fit snugly into the aims of the London Plan, a spatial strategy for London initially adopted in 2004, which fundamentally provides a model for developing the UK capital as an exemplary world city with strong economic growth. Although the London Plan does list “social-inclusion” as part of its overall objective, economic regeneration remains a powerful theme: “Every sector of the economy will benefit from the staging of the Olympic Games... [T]he whole of the UK will gain from the prosperity generated by the Olympic Games” (LOCOG 2004, 25). While this emphasis on economic growth does not undermine the specifically local and community-oriented model of Olympics discourse, it does show that east London neighbourhoods were not the *only* agendas, or even the most important ones within the regeneration plans. ‘Legacy’ discourse is key to this ‘inclusive’ strategic planning agenda because it legitimises vast expenditure and wholesale regeneration, justifying the impact of the mega-event on existing neighbourhood structures. In the critical urban studies literature London already has a reputation for its “‘growth first’ logic premised on market expansion and encouragement of investment in land and property markets” (Imrie and Lees 2014, 17).

We argue that it is through the relationship between legacy, mega-event and strategic planning that this “growth first logic” is newly enacted. We use ‘community’ and ‘culture’ as a tangible way to understand legacy as the spatial, imaginary and political agenda of London 2012. These two concepts are central to the discussion of ‘legacy’ largely because London’s Olympic planning professionals used these concepts to present the Olympic policy framework. The next section briefly outlines the methodological approach taken to examine the link between the conceptualisation of legacy in policy and ‘on the ground’.

Methodology

We draw on empirical data collected in the neighbourhood Hackney Wick Fish Island in east London. The neighbourhood was chosen because it is located directly adjacent to the London 2012 Olympic site (see Figure 1) and is consequently part of the so-called Olympic Fringe. Hackney Wick Fish Island represents the disadvantaged local context, which the Olympic legacy was supposed to remedy. Hackney Wick Fish Island can be divided into two, both spatially and administratively. The northern part (Hackney Wick) is part of the



Figure 1. View over Hackney Wick from Overground Station with Olympic stadium visible in background (March 2012). Photograph: Francesca Weber-Newth

London Borough of Hackney, and is dominated by two housing estates: Trowbridge Estate and Wick Village. The southern part (Fish Island) is within the administrative remit of the borough of Tower Hamlets, and was once a thriving industrial enclave. Industrial decline and restructuring throughout the 1970s and 1980s resulted in artists creating flexible 'live-work' spaces in many of the ex-industrial units (Brown, 2012) – Hackney Wick Fish Island has been heralded as the area housing “the highest concentration of (art) studios in Europe” (Budish et al., 2009). While the topographies of the neighbourhood’s two halves reveal

distinct characteristics, there is a common neighbourhood experience: census data (GLA, 2011) scores Wick ward and Bow East ward – of which Hackney Wick and Fish Island are part – as two of the most deprived in London (40.8% and 47.5% of dependant children are in out-of-work households respectively, compared with a national average of 18.1%).

We used methodological triangulation drawing on more than 40 open-ended interviews, a focus group, and participant observation. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted with a range of social actors involved in the process of urban change: Olympic planners, residents, Hackney and Tower Hamlets politicians, businesspeople and activists. A loose topic guide was used for all interviews, focusing on how the interviewees perceived changes in the neighbourhood. The guide was adjusted according to the position of the interviewee, which meant the interviews took the form of ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Cloke et al., 2004, 155), allowing space for interviewees to expand on their own thoughts. The interviews were conducted in locations convenient for the participants, ranging from office boardrooms to a community centre, cafés and interviewees’ homes. All of the interviews were recorded on Dictaphone and subsequently transcribed. Data analysis consisted of familiarising ourselves with the information before drawing out themes and patterns (Dey, 2007, 167). The themes ‘community’ and ‘culture’ can be seen as codes that emerged inductively via the interviews and observations and during transcribing. These were recurring themes not only in accounts of urban transformations as communicated implicitly and explicitly by interviewees, but also appeared within policy documents, often as a justification for urban regeneration.

We chose to analyse the complexity of ‘legacy’, in three specific micro encounters in Hackney Wick Fish Island: Eton Mission Rowing Club, the White Building and the Hackney WickED festival. There were various situations that could have been chosen (e.g., the Trowbridge Estate, Leabank Square or Stour Space), but the three encounters discussed here were selected because of their relationship with specific aspects of the London 2012 ‘legacy’. The rowing club is affected by the Olympic ‘legacy’ project of constructing bridges over the canal to increase ‘connectivity’ between existing residents and the Olympic site. The White Building, an LLDC-funded project, is representative of London 2012’s planners strategy of marketing the neighbourhood as a ‘cultural quarter’, spurred by the publication of the ‘Creative Potential’ report (muf architecture/art, 2009). The yearly Hackney WickED Art festival, produced by local artists, is a concrete example of grassroots community organising in the neighbourhood – a kind of ‘localism’ that London 2012 planners had hoped London 2012 activities could support and develop.

The aim of this paper is not to carry out a comprehensive analysis of ‘legacy’ in the neighbourhood but rather show how the trajectory of ‘legacy’ has begun to unfold since 2012. We explore the deeper meanings of ‘legacy’ via encounters, a perspective that acknowledges that these meanings are specific to

individuals and groups, and may change over time. There are clear limitations to this approach, particularly the timing of our study so close to the Games themselves, and our approach to 'legacy' as 'bottom-up' rather than in its full, long-term trajectory. Consequently, we acknowledge that the three encounters discussed in this paper – the rowing club, the White Building and Hackney WickED – are both selective and partial; the 'winners' and 'losers' of London 2012 are relative and will change over time. Yet local perspectives are necessary in order to reveal the micro-scale effects of mega-events; only through a combination of micro and macro studies on the legacy of London 2012 will it be possible to understand the scope of its planning impact and societal meaning.

Culture and Community 'on the Ground'

The examples we discuss (encounters 1, 2 and 3) give an insight into communities and cultures that had the potential to be taken by planners as exemplary existing 'local practices', but which were largely side-lined in favour of a focus on a strategic citywide agenda. They provide valuable insights into fields of interaction between local practices and legacy planning.

Encounter 1: 'Community', the Bridge and Eton Mission Rowing Club



Figure 2. Eton Mission Rowing Club on the left with bridge to the Olympic Park on the right (April 2017). Photograph: Anne Briggs

Clashing definitions and visions of 'community' have been the cause of conflict between LLDC planners and members of the Eton Mission Rowing Club

in Hackney Wick. *Who* and *what* constitutes ‘community’ are the key issues. Eton Mission is a small, privately run rowing club, which has had its boathouse located at the Lea Navigation canal since 1934. A dispute began between the LLDC and the Club, when an ‘Olympic legacy’ bridge was planned and constructed directly next to the boathouse (see Figure 2). The bridge opened in August 2013, giving residents in Hackney Wick access to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and Olympic sports facilities. Vice-versa, in the future the bridge will also give residents from the five newly constructed neighbourhoods on the Olympic site access to Hackney Wick. The LLDC planners framed the bridge as part of a local Olympic legacy based on community inclusion; they see the bridge as a means of relaxing the hard borders defined by the canal, opening up Hackney Wick from being an enclave of poverty. However, the bridge is perceived by the rowing club members as a subversive act of displacement, they object to the bridge on the grounds that given the public access and regular footfall, they will not have enough space to manoeuvre their boats safely into the water. The rowing club members argue that the bridge threatens their very existence; the club may be forced to close.

Analysis might point to the narrow concerns of the rowing club, and the fact that its few active members – to date only sixteen – perhaps do not warrant the label ‘community’. Arguably, the rowing club members want to retain the status quo, safeguarding their secluded corner of Hackney Wick rather than embracing change and democratising access. However, one member showed quiet optimism as to embracing Olympic-led changes, specifically in regarding the new communities of the Olympic Park development as potential new rowing club members and seeing ‘regeneration’ in the area as an opportunity to expand and renovate the boathouse. But these potentials were largely overshadowed by their exclusion from the planning process:

Basically we need them to tell us what they’re going to do, but they won’t, because they know we won’t like it. So they just sit there and the months just roll by. We had a meeting with the LLDC two years ago, and absolutely no feedback at all. Well that’s good communication isn’t it(!) (Member of Eton Mission Rowing Club, interview 19.08.2012).

This indicates that the LLDC, who ‘plan for the future’, are leaving current users excluded, which suggests that the LLDC falls short of its own claims for inclusion:

Development should...maximise opportunity for community diversity, inclusion and cohesion; should contribute to people’s sense of place, safety and security. [It should be] designed to meet the needs of the community at all stages of people’s lives and should meet the principles of lifetime neighbourhoods (LLDC, 2013, 10).

Our analysis demonstrates that – at least on an abstract or discursive level – existing communities are very much part of the Olympic ‘legacy’ agenda. But ‘legacy’ in real terms, within a neighbourhood context, is subject to power

relations, producing winners and losers. The central aim of London's Olympic Legacy was to value 'existing communities' and encourage health and fitness (Girginov and Hills, 2008), which means the Mission Rowing Club could have been an ideal flagship project. However, the location of the bridge, threatening the Club's ability to operate, suggests LLDC planners are prioritising city-wide strategic goals, most obvious in the aim for 'connectivity' via bridge infrastructure. The fact that this overall goal is harming a particular existing community, indicates that the language of 'legacy', initially couched on 'local' terms in order to justify this regeneration intervention, shifted after 2012 to support a more traditional top-down planning agenda.

Olympic policy and planning documents indeed reveal a shifting definition of community, specifically in terms of scale – which explains our empirical findings and substantiates our analysis. While the original emphasis in the Bid documents was clearly geared towards benefits for *existing* communities, the scope widened over time, with the most recent documents emphasising a commitment to 'community' as conceptualised on a national rather than neighbourhood scale (The Mayor of London, 2011, 7). This shift seems a manoeuvre by the planning experts and politicians to suit a particular political rhetoric. It indicates that 'legacy benefits' are not stable categories, but produced and distributed through power regimes using politics of scale. This analysis suggests that the promise made by Olympics planners – that the legacy they were creating would benefit the existing 'community' of east London (LOGOG, 2004, 19) – can be understood as a rhetorical strategy to communicate the benevolent face of the mega-project to the public, expressing that investment would have a long-term impact on *real people*, and would not merely produce an abstract 'legacy' or infrastructural improvements and facilities only for tourists and the whole of the city.

What complicates the situation is that many LLDC planners and local borough employees are themselves cynical of wholesale Olympic regeneration, critical of the tensions between citywide strategic goals and local needs, and aware of the contradictions of participation within planning. In other words, they are attuned to the tensions and (power) dynamics inherent within our conceptual frame – specifically the fact that the staged mega event of London 2012 and its top-down strategic plans can dominate 'legacy goals' according to a 'growth first' logic. One Hackney Borough Councillor candidly explains how these tensions become problematic within the limited Olympic timescale: "The great thing is that [development] happens in four years. The downside is that's fucking shit because it's happening so quickly... You lose the soul, you come back to the world of market economics" (interview 08.09.2011). He suggests that the solution is finding the right balance between social, economic, cultural and physical spaces, but maintains that London 2012 provided the council with a great opportunity:

I made it very clear to my political colleagues and council officer colleagues that this is an opportunity of such a ferocity, of such a scale, that it must be understood that...we are on this wagon and [if]

we decide to get off, we will never get back on it. If you try to stop this wagon, it will squash you. You cannot stop it... [T]he challenge for the people who are organising it is to try and always insure that they never ever lose sight of the local in amongst the global (interview 08.09.2011).

The councillor articulates a warning that the open and flexible nature of ‘legacy’ should not result in mega event goals and strategic planning losing sight of specific neighbourhood needs, or as he puts it, ‘the local’. The fact that the councillor describes this balancing act as a ‘challenge’ attests to the complexity of ‘legacy’ on the ground, and the political tensions. His perspective highlights the ambiguous role of Hackney council, who must abide by the rules of the IOC, yet try to use the Olympics as an opportunity to deliver and consolidate policies developed before the London Bid was won. The tensions the councillor describes between local and ‘global’ forces, which we understand as a ‘growth coalition’ (MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999, 509), are precisely the tensions evident in the bridge encounter. The construction of the bridge in Hackney Wick suggests that the LLDC planners had to weigh up and choose between interests, ultimately projecting their definition of ‘community’ to align with strategic planning goals and a definition of ‘legacy’ that goes over and above the needs of one particular group in Hackney Wick (the Eton Mission rowing club). The councillor’s comments at first glance suggest that planners were capable of making a choice; *either* focusing resources on supporting existing community structures (‘the local’) *or* being attentive to broader London goals that would reiterate London’s position on a global stage. However, if we presume that the Olympic project as a whole, and Olympic planning specifically, align with neoliberal spatial practices (in this case concretely via ‘legacy’), arguably this creates *irresolvable* contradictions in scale, which cannot – due to the nature of London’s variety of capitalism – be resolved in favour of existing communities. Put simply, as a zero-sum game, Olympic planning could never truly meet neighbourhood needs in Hackney Wick Fish Island. In the councillor’s terminology then: “the challenge for the people who are organising it...[to] never ever lose sight of the local” was perhaps more to do with small-scale interventions and mitigating the worst excesses of strategic planning, rather than presenting a genuine choice.

The difficult position of planning professionals in delivering local ‘legacy’ is also highlighted by an officer of Hackney Council, who describes himself as “the *now* of strategic planning” in Hackney Wick. He explained the tensions between people who want to keep the area as an island within itself and “an awful lot of urban designers and planners – people doing the long term visioning – who are desperately trying to stitch it all back in” (interview 22.09.2011). His own frustrations with the process and speed of planning are revealed when he describes the lack of transparency and communication with the existing community as “the tragedy of planning”, indicating that state employees are not only concerned with the implications of planning policy on the ground but are also critical of planning

structures. The ambiguity of participation is revealed when he describes the council's attempt to engage with community members, who he perceives as often disinterested in public consultation: "I mean it's a unique situation in Hackney Wick. Wick ward has amongst the most diverse demographic in London, but that bit in Hackney Wick is really quite old and really quite white, so it's quite interesting, a lot of people are quite inward-looking in many ways" (interview 22.09.2011). This perspective reveals the complexity of planning for local 'legacy', specifically when 'the local' or 'the community' is not always as engaged, dynamic or open as hoped by planning professionals, some of whom are trying to loosen the dichotomy between the winners and losers of urban regeneration. Nevertheless, the example of the new bridge in Hackney Wick exemplifies the planner's re-scaling of the concept of community, from an existing community (in real terms, the rowing club), to 'community' imagined on a strategic global city level. Our analysis demonstrates that this stretching of the 'community' definition is part of a flexible conceptualisation of London 2012 'legacy', primarily serving a competitive neoliberal growth logic².

Encounters 2 & 3: 'Culture', the White Building & Hackney WickED

'Culture' was presented as the means through which London 2012 could reach and engage 'the local communities' of east London, a way to express 'legacy' on a neighbourhood level. 'Culture' is also at the heart of the strategic development of London; the London Plan promotes the cultural and creative industries as "central to the city's economic and social success" (GLA, 2011, 126). The Olympic Games played an integral part in London's Creative City Strategy (Pratt, 2010, 17) and culture was given a central role in its legacy plans: "The Mayor will ensure culture plays a full role in securing the legacy of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, both in relation to physical infrastructure, design and public art projects but also in terms of engaging with communities and young people, particularly those in East London" (The Mayor of London, 2010, 152).

The White Building was conceptualised as securing a 'local legacy' and nurturing 'culture' on the Olympic Fringe. The White Building is a new cultural centre with studios and exhibition space, a pizzeria and a microbrewery, located along the canal, not far away from Eton Mission Rowing Club (see Figure 3). According to the operators, the building is a "key part of the arts-led strategy for the legacy of the Olympic Park and surrounding area" (thewhitebuilding.org.uk), and since opening in 2012 has been widely described as a popular and trendy place (Moore, 2012). Hackney Wick Fish Island is known as the area housing "the

² The discussion here focuses on a 'community' primarily comprised of older, white, working-class individuals. However, it is important to note that existing communities in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney are differently affected by, and have different responses to neoliberal politics in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. Paul Watt (2013) discusses young peoples perceptions of inclusion and exclusion framed by Olympic legacy.

highest concentration of (art) studios in Europe” (Budish et al., 2009), and the White Building draws on and embodies this creative capital. The LLDC financed the project, studio-providers SPACE organise the day-to-day running of the building, and a local café manages the food and drink.



Figure 3. The White Building (July 2013). Photograph: Francesca Weber-Newth

The White Building provides Olympic planners with a way of opening up the neighbourhood to the public; a model project signalling that Hackney Wick Fish Island is a ‘creative cluster’. Crucially, the White Building was conceived by LLDC planner’s in 2008 as a way to save the neighbourhood from wholesale redevelopment by private investors. The project was a way for a select design team within the LLDC to show the higher-level LLDC executives that regeneration could take another (‘culture-led’) route in this neighbourhood, drawing on the existing strengths of the area rather than allowing for large-scale demolition. As our interviews with local residents make clear, however, the White Building demonstrates planners’ narrow conceptualisation of culture (and community) on the ground.

One Hackney Wick resident describes the White Building as well-designed and popular, stating that it “genuinely does give something back into the community”, but also highlights that it does not have the public role of other,

similar projects in the neighbourhood (such as the exhibition space and café Stour Space), because it was planned by the LLDC rather than developing bottom up:

It's just a bit corporate really... The White Building is like [the LLDC saying] 'Okay, we're going to commission a project in Hackney Wick Fish Island, we're going to have a restaurant/bar space. We're going to have a local person to rent that out, and have studio space'. It ticks all the boxes, but it cost a lot of money to do. There's something odd about it. It's trying to mimic the character of the thing that it is. It's an industrial shed, but check out the nice red netting with the lamb's-wool insulation that fireproofs the asbestos or whatever. I totally see why they did it, for pragmatism. They needed to do their own building, because it's their own identity (Hackney Wick resident, interview 03.09.2013).

The resident suggests that while planners 'ticked all the boxes' in order for 'legacy' to prioritise 'the local' (a local manager, catering to artists, industrial shed aesthetics etc.) – that this attempt ultimately failed for pragmatic reasons, namely the LLDC's need to bolster their own identity within the political game of strategic mega event planning. The strategic goal of the LLDC in the neighbourhood – their self-presentation as a benevolent 'local actor' – ultimately superseded focus on satisfying the needs on an existing 'community'. That is not to deny that the White Building is seen as a valuable part of Olympic planners' 'legacy' investment in Hackney Wick. Yet, as the resident explains later on, the elements of the White Building that are most respected by residents are those run by people well-known and respected in the area: "it has a good bar, but that's not necessarily [the LLDC], that's Tom and Crate".

The development further provides a concrete example of how the promotion of 'creatives' must not be mistaken from the promotion of 'artists' (Lees and Melhuish 2013, 10). An artist who lives in the neighbourhood explained:

[Hackney Wick] was quite a tight knit. Everyone knew each other and that's kind of fallen apart a little bit. Just because I guess that's what happens when a new influx of people comes. People get pushed out and it's the same old story over and over again... It's like what Cameron was saying, from Stratford to Shoreditch. I don't know exactly what impact it would have, but I do know that people locally, from here, wouldn't have much room in it (interview 06.08.2012).

'From Stratford to Shoreditch' references David Cameron's government-led initiative to connect the technology start-up cluster of Old Street (Shoreditch) to Hackney Wick, in particular to the former Olympic International Broadcasting Centre (now called 'Here East'), which is to provide a new digital quarter for so-called 'creatives'. Yet the target group imagined to benefit from this initiative, are a specific group of IT and web solutions experts who have been displacing another group of 'creatives' – the fine art community – many of whom moved to Hackney

Wick in the mid 1990s having been outpriced in other more central London locations (signalling the first wave of gentrification in Hackney Wick). The Old Street initiative highlights a tendency of the LLDC to gear development policies towards the professionals with relatively stable incomes, who are able to afford spaces like the White Building.

The White Building demonstrates that while LLDC planners were perhaps well-intentioned in creating a space for 'creatives', the project is simultaneously a vision of who the planners thought belonged to the regenerated Hackney Wick Fish Island of the future. The concept of 'culture' as expressed by the White Building is based on the narrow idea of creating a middle-class hotspot in the local area. This analysis suggests that the project missed a valuable opportunity to include and align existing structures and local artists. Regeneration of the neighbourhood via London 2012 investment is less about the inclusion of existing strengths and more about the commercialisation of 'culture' through a new cultural hub for 'creatives'.

Our conceptual frame provides depth to this analysis. Although the umbrella of 'culture' has the potential to translate abstract legacy plans to the local level, it seems to follow a top-down strategic approach where the promotion of physical infrastructures as cultural signposts is more important than the inclusion of existing local cultural strengths. Cultural signposts are crucial within strategic planning as they can boost the image of a neighbourhood and stimulate local economic regeneration. A café in this sense is a business creating capital; especially one that has high-end prices rather than geared towards attracting an inclusive clientele, and thus aligns with an urgent competitive growth agenda. Consequently, the White Building shows a scaling up of 'culture' – indicating the difficulty of transferring Olympic-led investment to existing structures without making a claim to citywide relevance. As the officer of Hackney Council states:

In theory you should be able to exploit [the Olympics]; sponsors, media stories, whatever else we'd like to do. There's just that disconnect I think, between running this mega global event and the real micro level area. You even ring up LOCOG and say 'can you do a talk' and they'll say 'oh yeah, it's a host borough talk, is it?' I'm like, 'no it's just here, your neighbours in Hackney Wick', and they'll be like 'oh, well that's too small an area'. It's just amazing really (an officer of Hackney Council, interview 22.09.2011).

This frank statement is a clear indication as to the politics underscoring 'legacy', specifically the way that the needs of 'the small' local arena can be easily overlooked when priority lies in the overall strategic goals of city-wide planning. However, as the quotation of the Hackney Council officer demonstrates, the different scales at which the professionals are working makes attention to both 'local' and 'city' (or even 'global') scale an almost impossible task. In this sense, considering the constraints in resources, scaled-up definitions of 'culture' as well as 'community' are continually likely to win in the London 2012 narrative – even if

effort is made to try and include existing local structures. This analysis helps understand the local and global as in competition with each other, if considered within a frame of neoliberal growth.

The White Building shows that instrumentalising 'culture' was a tactical manoeuvre by a group of planners, to prevent crass property-led development. Nevertheless, our empirical investigation shows that the White Building plays into the agenda of the 'growth coalition' through its expression of 'culture' that largely excludes existing artists. Our analysis, guided by the complex relationship between 'legacy', mega event and strategic planning, indicates that the promotion of 'culture' in this marginalised neighbourhood of east London goes hand in hand with the promotion of the neighbourhood's image, through a very particular 'creative' community. The cost of this strategy, we have shown, is social exclusion.

The Hackney WickED Festival 2012 represents another missed opportunity for London 2012 planners to support existing cultural structures and create a genuinely 'local' legacy. First organised in 2008, the Hackney WickED (hackneywicked.co.uk) is an annual celebration of the grass-roots art scene, a chance for both artists to open up their gallery and studio spaces to the public and heighten their visibility, and for visitors to see what is going on behind Hackney Wick's warehouse facades. The increasing attention of this festival, celebrated in the summer every year since its founding in 2008, brought more than 40,000 people into the area in 2011. Hackney WickED is now well established and has the potential not only to raise the visibility of the area but also to connect the diverse communities in Hackney Wick.

The organisers of the Hackney WickED festival were well aware of the Olympics and the Cultural Olympiad, and the potential opportunities to work together. However, as one of the organisers stated: "You've got the Cultural Olympiad but they've never funded anything for Hackney WickED and they didn't even come to our exhibition...they all received an invite, but nobody came" (interview 17.07.2012). Considering the aim of the Cultural Olympiad to create a legacy for the host boroughs (LOCOG, 2011), the frustration expressed by the organisers seems reasonable. Another organiser of the festival and curator of the Elevator Gallery, flagged up another crucial point; the forced cancellation of the Hackney WickED in its usual form in 2012. The mechanisms underscoring its changed format (in the Olympic year of 2012) provides an insight into the priorities of the Olympic planning authorities regarding *which* specific culture, and *whose* 'local' was given the spotlight in London during the games. Although the local festival organisers wanted to benefit from the physical and temporal proximity of the Olympics, they were not able to do so. It seems plausible to suggest that Hackney WickED would have been the perfect opportunity for LLDC planners to cooperate with the local community, given the organisational structure and the willingness of the local artists.

The Cultural Olympiad for London 2012 was conceptualised as a generator of local involvement in order to secure the success for the regeneration games' much-praised legacy. However, this goal seems to have been unsuccessful, if one of the neighbourhood's most successful cultural activities – the arts festival Hackney WickED – was unable to operate as usual during the Olympic Games summer in 2012.

The umbrella concept 'culture' had potential to translate the abstract legacy plans to the local level. However, our third empirical encounter suggests a more regular top-down approach where the promotion of large-scale and spectacular 'culture', for example in the form of the Olympics' opening ceremony took precedence. Crucially, this cultural event (with mass popular appeal) represented a lineage of national 'culture', and could be mediated across the global stage. The focus on performing and boosting a narrative of national rather than neighbourhood culture substantiates our idea that the relationship between our three pillars; legacy, mega event and strategic planning is part of a politically motivated game, whereby the language of 'culture' is part of presenting a benevolent 'legacy', which in reality represents a new intensity of city-wide strategic planning.

Conclusions

When discourse around London 2012 as the 'legacy Games' began, there was an understanding that existing communities and cultures, like those in Hackney Wick Fish Island, would profit from urban regeneration. Our empirical insights reveal a disconnect between the rhetoric of Olympic planners and politicians, who promised both city-wide and local legacy, and the actual legacies at the neighbourhood level. Coming full-circle back to the debates within ACME, our empirical discussion supports the idea of a collective amnesia – or a "politics of forgetting" (Springer 2015, 636) – inherent within London 2012 Olympic planning.

This paper provides a way of linking together long-standing planning debates centred on mega-events (Müller, 2015; Newman and Thornley, 2011; Raco, 2014; Roche, 2000) and strategic planning (Haugton, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck 2013; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Using the Trojan horse analogy, we demonstrate that the politically dubious aspects of mega-event and strategic planning are disguised by the benevolent empty signifier 'legacy' – through a clever discursive manoeuvre. We flag up the importance of scale (specifically 'up-scaling') within the equation, specifically the interpretation and translation of 'legacy' *originally* on a local scale, and later to a citywide and even national scale.

Legacy is the concept that ties together the various elements of our analysis. Legacy has become a central frame for Olympic planning, anchoring policies and programmes to long-term goals. As cities are increasingly using the Olympic Games to catalyse urban development, and as a means to reposition themselves within a changing global political economy, legacy has appeared on various political scales – from national and city level, to the local arena. As other scholars

have pointed out, legacy is fluid, changing its face over space and time (for example, Andranovich and Burbank, 2011). What remains unclear is *how* exactly legacy is produced, who decides *what* legacy is, and *who* benefits. To fill this gap, we analyse the *making of* legacy in Hackney Wick Fish Island.

The first encounter reveals the slippery definition of 'community' through a new 'legacy' bridge. While planning professionals were under pressure to create 'connectivity' between the future residential communities on the Olympic site and existing residential structures of Hackney Wick, an existing rowing club was disregarded as a legitimate 'community' and faces possible displacement. Encounter two, the White Building, highlights a similar process, whereby the official aim of the project – to foster existing 'artistic cultures' – was side-lined in order to provide a consumption space for middle-class 'creatives'. The third encounter focuses on the grassroots Hackney WickED festival. Despite marketing the neighbourhood as a 'hub' for grassroots artistic activities, LLDC planners failed to support the festival organisers, who were forced to change the existing format of the festival in 2012.

The three empirical encounters highlight a common dynamic. They demonstrate that the 'growth coalition' of planning professionals and politicians strategically defined both 'culture' and 'community' – up-scaling the concepts in order to amplify the political and strategic relevance of the neighbourhood. These priorities indicate that the intention was to further growth-oriented goals, rather than serve the existing 'cultures' and 'communities' that existed in the neighbourhood before the bid in 2005. These local processes demonstrate that shifting categories underscored the *making of* London's Olympic legacy. While our analysis makes sense of the political nuances and tensions, revealing the local agendas within strategic planning, the empirical data discussed here questions the existence of a sensitive 'local legacy', and therefore also the success of London 2012 for the local arena. There is also a larger lesson to be learnt, which is relevant beyond the London case. Our analysis not only demonstrates the power of the so-called 'growth coalition' in shaping the direction and content of urban restructuring, but also lays bare the complex power relations underscoring local planning processes, often cementing the gap between the winners and losers of urban regeneration (see also Müller and Pickles, 2015; Vanwynsberghe, Surborg, and Wyly, 2013).

In the infamous Greek tale, the Trojan horse is a trick, planned to be destructive. In Troy this was a clear war situation, with intentions undoubtedly malicious, fixed on victory. The nature of the political deception that this paper analyses is slightly different, and is related to specific manifestations of capitalism as practiced in London, which include neoliberal entrepreneurial governance and city branding politics. Consequently is not our aim to name-and-shame or blame individual planners or agencies for strategic manipulation. Our analysis demonstrates that Olympic planning creates irresolvable contradictions in scale, which cannot – due to the nature of London's specific social, political and

economic practices – be resolved in favour of existing communities. The alignment of Olympic planning with neoliberal spatial practices means that neighbourhood needs can never truly be met. In this sense, the global scale of the London 2012 Olympics necessarily meant that the most vulnerable groups would largely be displaced by urban planning decisions, with only minor concessions possible. Within the logic of accumulation by dispossession the stream of gentrification automatically means that certain histories, narratives and social structures are eroded, a process that has been well documented for the last fifty years (Smith, 2002). The development agencies responsible for legacy planning must therefore be held accountable for the consequences of their *inaction* to a certain extent; the displacement of vulnerable strata was inevitable, even if individual planners did not intend to harm local populations.

The empirical findings we present perhaps come with little surprise given London's dominant position on the global stage. Our findings show what happens when authorities take a certain path, namely using mega events to pursue citywide strategic goals and thereby flattening lived local practices. Nevertheless, it is possible that London 2012 was taken as a warning sign. Since 2012 potential Olympic host cities Berlin, Boston, Oslo and Stockholm have all pulled out of the bidding process after citizens voiced resistance – in Krakow, Hamburg and Munich citizens voted against hosting the Olympic games in referenda. These different moments of resistance suggest a heightened sensibility and caution towards the consequences of mega event led development. Perhaps London 2012 has served as a warning – after all, the Trojan horse can only be effective once.

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