



EVENT-LED REGENERATION: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND STAKEHOLDER DECISION-MAKING IN LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

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Abstract

Appealing to politicians and other interests, the hosting of mega-events as a competitive city strategy is a controversial topic since there are several environmental, social, economic and urban risks involved. Nonetheless, there is a widespread trend towards the use of mega-events to promote a city, stimulate the local economy and regenerate rundown post-industrial areas and communities. City governments thus develop event-based strategies in order to increase city attractiveness and (re)position themselves in the regional and world city hierarchy. However, a set of questions arise about how to regulate pro-growth strategies within sustainable urban development imperatives. The success of mega-event led regeneration lies in a more inclusive approach which considers the cultural values of the 'local'. In practice however, many cities bidding for mega-events do not adopt or consider this approach and limit their efforts to the event site, external visitors and to short term branding exercise. By the nature of competitive bidding, most aspiring cities are of course unsuccessful (and some re-bid again and again). This study examines the contradictions between sustainable development and competitive city agendas through a study of mega-event led regeneration and explore the changing landscape and communities resulting from mega-event led regeneration. Regeneration in the Lower Lea Valley where the London 2012 Olympic Games will be staged is analysed as a case study area.

Research methods include document analysis, semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders in the planning and organization of London 2012 and observations. The primary research analysis provides a sound base from which the planning of more sustainable major events can be undertaken in the future and the evaluation of their impact more fully measured across a wider stakeholder community.

1. Introduction

In many respects, regeneration has become a major element and driver of urban policy since the late 1970s. In a broader sense, urban regeneration is considered as a dynamic process of physical, social, environmental and economic transition. It is a normative process where policy makers and others agree on what an urban area should look like, how it should 'perform' and the practical process whereby visions for these places come into action (Raco & Tunney 2010).

The aim and emphasis of urban regeneration projects has changed in different periods. From the 1980s, there has been a shift in urban governance system from a managerial to an entrepreneurial structure which means that urban governance has started to adopt

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entrepreneurial strategies such as new ways to foster and encourage local development and employment growth; instead of the managerial practices of earlier decades which focused on the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations (Harvey 1989, p.3) . Therefore, boosterist policies as the main feature of urban entrepreneurialism have started to gain more attention from city and central governments as a result of globalisation and the imperative for place competitiveness. Peck (2005) suggests that regeneration projects have an important role in urban development since policy-makers develop various strategies in order to increase city attractiveness, (re)position their cities in the regional and world city hierarchy and also, provide new gentrified work, leisure and housing for the 'professional managerial' (B. Ehrenreich & J. Ehrenreich 1979) and the more recently identified 'creative' class (Florida 2005). Cities have consequently started to expand their marketing policies (Ward 1998) to create and change their image to attract more tourists, businesses, inward investment and service industry workers.

On the other hand, sustainable development principles and sustainable community planning and aspirations have become core components of urban regeneration policies since the beginning of the 2000s. Since UNCED (1992), more than 2,000 local governments have implemented Local Agenda 21 (LA21) Plans indicating that the sustainability agenda has started to be taken seriously at the local level because at local level it is easier for governments to integrate economic, social and environmental professions so as to facilitate sustainable policy developments (Newman & Kenworthy 1999). It is now obvious that sustainable development is not only an environmental concern, but it also has economic, social and governance (and cultural) dimensions (Dalal-Clayton & Bass 2002; Hershgal 2008).

In the UK, the holistic approach to regeneration inferred by the term 'sustainable' fits in the 'agendas of inclusiveness, multiagency partnerships, and the shift from government to governance' (Jones & Watkins 1996, p.1416). Deindustrialisation has left considerable vacant, derelict, brownfield and waterfront areas where there are numerous development challenges and opportunities (DCLG 2008). However, in the 1970-80s, powerful, localist quango agencies applied 'fast-track' initiatives to make sure that property-led regeneration projects were delivered in designated sites with minimum local opposition and involvement (Cochrane 2007; Raco & Tunney 2010). Without this local democratic planning process, Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) were able to focus on converting these spaces into highly visible regeneration areas (Raco & Tunney 2010). By the early 2000s, the tension between sustainability and development is highlighted in national and international documents and policies. During the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, world leaders agreed to mobilise and increase the effective use of financial resources and achieve economic conditions for poverty reduction and sustained economic growth. Also, Tony Blair suggested that 'development, growth, and prosperity need not and should not be in conflict with sustainability' in Securing for the Future Report (DEFRA 2005). The report suggests that it is important to maintain a more competitive economy, to compete internationally and also, build a sustainable community which is possible by improving the knowledge and skills base of everyone.

In order to strike a balance between competitiveness policies and sustainable development, stakeholder partnership and community involvement are considered to be the two main components of sustainable urban regeneration. Among different types of urban

regeneration models such as property-led, retail-led, housing-led and design-led regeneration; event-led regeneration has had a greater economic, tourism, physical and socio-cultural impact and meaning (e.g. self image, identity) for host cities when compared to their relatively short duration (Ritchie 1984). According to Harvey (1989), when some events are used as a tool for urban regeneration, they give the host city the opportunity to produce a new and entrepreneurial image, internally and to external audiences. In this frame, mega-events being normally one-off, high profile festivals, sports competitions or trade fairs held for a limited time in which the built environment has global and symbolic significance and attract national and international interest - investors, media, tourists (Getz 1997; Ritchie 1984; Roche 2000) have distinctively bigger impact on urban regeneration and related governance policies.

In the context of mega-event based regeneration, Getz (2009, p.65) suggests that multiple stakeholder perspectives are essential when analysing the outcomes of such events and all stakeholders have to be in consensus in order to deliver sustainable events. In order to understand how event policies are realised, it is important to know how different actors are involved and interact (Hall & Rusher 2004). Accordingly, a set of questions arise about how to regulate pro-growth strategies within sustainable urban development imperatives. Sustainable events are arguably the ones that can fulfil crucial social, cultural, economic and environmental roles that people value (Getz 2009). However, an important deficiency has emerged - as cities try to adapt the same strategies for their social, environmental and economic regeneration, irrespective of each city and region's cultural assets, architectural capital, political organizational and economic structure. This study examines the contradictions between sustainable development and competitive city agendas through a study of mega-event led regeneration and explore the changing landscape and communities resulting from mega-event led regeneration. Stakeholder decision-making structure in the regeneration of the Lower Lea Valley where the London 2012 Olympic Games will be staged is analysed as a case study area.

2. Conceptual Framework

Broader research methodology adopts an integrative approach in which built environment, social structure and stakeholder organizations are studied together. In order analyse sustainable development in any regeneration project, it is important to understand the relation of these three components with each other. The research uses multiple theoretical perspectives, sources of data and methodologies to analyse cases. Changes in built environment, social structure and stakeholder organization are analysed in connection with each other, not as single units. Each aspect is evaluated accordingly with the changes in others to understand the complex structure of the regeneration in the area in a holistic way. While analysing the relation between organisation structure and community, participation between two bodies is considered as the main element. Inclusion of local and cultural values on the changes in the built environment and the extent local communities are involved in regeneration decisions are one of the sustainable development factors in a regeneration project. Finally, the effect of stakeholder decision-making strategies on built environment and different regeneration policies are analysed through stakeholder interviews and document analysis which is the focus of this paper. (See the Figure 1).

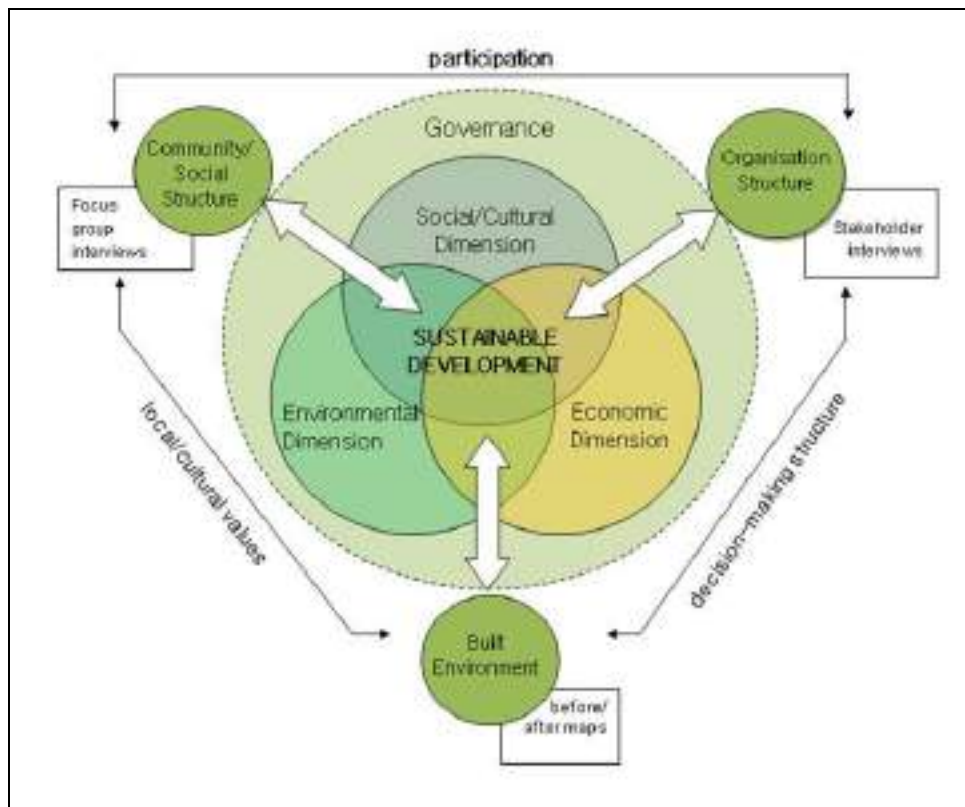


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Work-in-progress)

3. Case Study: London 2012 Regeneration Games

The Olympic Park is located within the Lower Lea Valley, in the Boroughs of Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. It is situated around the River Lea, bordered by the A12 in the north and Stratford High Street in the south (See Figure 2). The Park is primarily situated on contaminated and derelict land. Much of the land is fragmented and divided by waterways, sewers, overhead pylons, roads and rail lines.

The area is also home to some of the most deprived communities in the country. According to the English Indices of Deprivation 2010, three of the Host Boroughs still contain the sixth, seventh and the fourteenth most deprived wards in the country respectively Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham². East London also experiences significant levels of unemployment roughly twice the English average: with Hackney 16.4 per cent, Newham 13.5 per cent, and Tower Hamlets at 11.8 per cent³. The area has one of the highest levels of black and ethnic minority populations in the capital.

From 2012, the area will be providing valuable resources to local communities and visitors. The Olympic Village will accommodate 17,000 athletes and officials during the Games. After

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1871208.pdf>

³ London Divided Income inequality and poverty in the capital, 2002: static.london.gov.uk/mayor/economy/docs/london_divided_all.rtf

the Games, it will leave the legacy of around 2.800 new homes, parks, and community facilities which will form the first phase of a far wider regeneration and development of the whole Olympic Park. Five new neighbourhoods will be established around the Park, each with its own distinct character which will involve up to 11,000 new homes where 35% will be affordable and 40% will be family homes⁴. This regeneration will be supported by new schools, infrastructure, roads, transport, and community and health facilities in the local area.



Figure 2. London 2012 Olympic Park Map in year 2012

4. Methodology

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with the decision-making stakeholders of London 2012 Olympic Games as a research methodology. Interview questions are directed towards understanding plans undertaken to develop the mega-event strategy, the response to the mega-event led regeneration, reasons behind decisions made, expectations from regeneration, relationships with other stakeholders and opinions about public participation. Before deciding on the interview questions and questionnaires, research indicators are determined and related

⁴ London Legacy Development Corporation: <http://www.londonlegacy.co.uk/the-park/homes/>

questions are decided to reach the information about the indicators. Determined indicators are as follows: changes in organization structure led by mega-event, organization structure of the mega-event, leadership, representativeness, conflict resolution, success factors, legacy and lessons learned, changing community structure, mega-event as a catalyst for social, economic and physical regeneration and public participation. Interview questions are also considered in relation to the Meta-Evaluation of the Impacts and Legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games study and necessary adjustments applied.

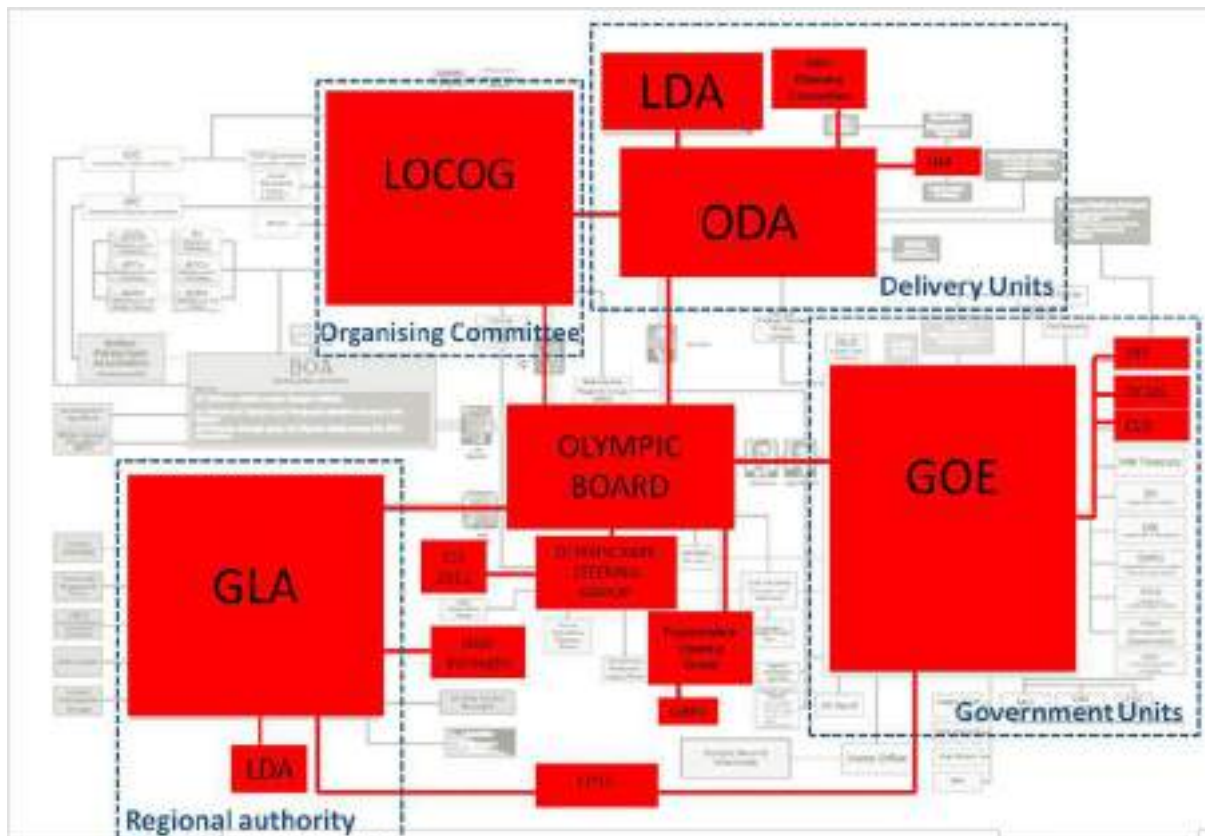


Figure 3. Regeneration Decision-making Structure of London 2012 Olympic Games

Investigation of the stakeholder interviews including deciding on the contact database and questionnaire design started in May 2010. A contact database is being created of the case study organisations, intermediaries and key informants (See Figure 3). Before starting interviews, a letter is emailed to the central regeneration and mega-event contacts. The letter indicates the intention to conduct further research in the area and ask support for the research (including access to key people, policy and other non-public documents, e.g. ‘grey’ material). The contacts are telephoned/e-mailed and agreed contacts participate in the study. 24 interviews have been conducted with 20 institutions. Additionally, 10 informative meetings have been held with university members doing research about London 2012 Games, research institutes and community relations staff. These meetings helped to figure out different perspectives and reach a broader scale documents and reports in this area.

5. Preliminary Results

The overall vision of the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games is "to host an inspirational, safe and inclusive Olympic and Paralympic Games and leave a sustainable legacy for London and the UK" (CSL2012, 2010). The six resulting strategic objectives are:

- To make the UK a world-class sports nation: elite success, mass participation and school sport.
- To transform the heart of East London.
- To inspire a new generation of young people to take part in local volunteering, cultural and physical activity.
- To make the Olympic Park a blueprint for sustainable living.
- To demonstrate that the UK is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, to visit and for business.
- To develop the opportunities and choices for disabled people.

Regarding the vision and objectives, it is clear that leaving a sustainable regeneration legacy in the East London is one of the most crucial targets of the London 2012 Olympic Games. In terms of social and economic regeneration, hosting the London 2012 Games helped to raise aspirations, offered training, apprenticeship and volunteering opportunities for local people. Moreover, it is expected to have employment opportunities in the area before and after the Games. Chief Planner in London Borough of Hackney thinks Media Centre is the biggest piece of land that potentially can generate employment in the borough. It is expected that the area around Media Centre will turn into a high-tech hub and create employment for locals. Hackney representative says "it is an amazing capacity and with the government decision of Hackney, being the heart of the high-tech digital companies focusing and clustering in the borough, that potentially targeting one end of in Hackney other end in Shoreditch". Similarly, Councillor in London Borough of Newham highlights the importance of job creation and education in the borough with following words: "For us employment is very, it is crucial. You can have a flat but if you've got no job, it's no good. That's the first thing. The second thing is improving education in the Borough, driving up standards in education". Income levels, employment, educational achievement, housing and health may be regarded as major signifiers of a community's well-being. Targets in these areas may be achieved in a variety of ways and take place over a timescale that extends several years beyond 2012 and the Games themselves.

In terms of organisation structure, sustainable regeneration covers the schemes of inclusiveness, multiagency partnerships, and the shift from government to governance. GLA interviewee supports this by saying "delivering the Games is a multi stakeholder proposition, it has to be, and we've found that obviously there's a number of challenges, different organisations have different organisational priorities and, and managing some of that it has been basically a lot of effort". As different actors from a range of fields were involved in the Olympic Board, "heterarchy" which can be defined as ruling through diversity (Jessop 1997) was sustained at some point however; knowledge transfer was not completely achieved. LDA interviewee thinks that the park will be better than before but will not have the integrated model that was planned in the beginning because of the deficiencies in organization structure

saying “So you’ll end up with a special park, you’ll end up with great housing around you, but what you won’t have the integrated model that you wanted in the first place”.

Moreover, several stakeholders agree that the responsible body of the Games should have been a transparent, public sector institution which is accountable to tax payers. GLA interviewee says “I would say that I think it would have worked better if there was one delivery organisation, so if LOCOG, the role, the functions of LOCOG and the functions of LDA could have been brought together in one organisation, that’s public sector organisation and therefore publically accountable”.

6. Conclusion

It is hoped that the findings and primary research analysis will also provide a sound base from which the planning of more sustainable major (‘mega’) events can be undertaken in the future and the evaluation of their impact more fully measured across a wider stakeholder community. This may go some way towards what Getz proposes as a model of sustainable events (2009) and for which this study will contribute empirical evidence and conclusions which may be further developed in subsequent research.

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