

Olympic legacies and city development strategies in London and Rio; Beyond the Carnival mask

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Legacy has risen up the Olympic agenda in the 21st century as a rationale for hosting the Games and for the spatial transformations of cities that have accompanied this. In particular the 'urban legacy' of Olympic city building has been evident in host cities influenced by global policy models such as the 1992 Barcelona games. From 2003 'promoting a positive legacy' was added to the IOC Charter and became a criterion in assessing bids. Yet there is no agreed definition of legacy and it is therefore a complex and contested concept open to many different interpretations and the subject of political debate and action over its conceptualisation and realisation.

Equally contested is how legacy is to be interpreted and understood. While some academic accounts have been geared to how to achieve legacy within normative policy discourses (see for example Davies, 2012; LERI, 2007) others have taken a much more critical stance focusing on the displacement and lost alternatives that constitute the 'dark side' of legacy (Thornley, 2012; Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2013). This is often accompanied by a theoretical understanding which sees mega-events and their urban transformations as manifestations of neo-liberal urbanisation, entrepreneurial governance and the entrenchment of socio-spatial polarisation. Following Hardy (1999), mega-events and their legacies are the 'carnival mask' or 'circuses' (de Souza, 2012) which act to soften and hide these unequal processes. Depicting the spread of Olympic city-building as a result of the top-down transfer of a universal urban policy has become common (Gibbons and Wolff, 2012b).

The need to avoid a deterministic and mono-causal view of neo-liberalism which forecloses possibilities for alternatives is well rehearsed in the literature (see for example Peck J and Theodore N (2010) along with the need to build understandings of urban processes from a wider range of cities than the post-industrial north (Parnell and Robinson, 2012). More recently work has begun to explore the contribution that thinking with assemblage can bring to these debates (Brownill et al 2013, McCann and Ward, 2011) focusing on how a concept such as legacy is made through the bringing together of ideas, actors, projects, governance models etc. 'into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation' (Anderson and MacFarlane, 2011 p124). Assemblage refers not just to the form of projects but the strategies of assemblage aimed at holding together these diverse elements. It affords the possibility that within these contradictory and contested processes spaces may therefore be opened for alternatives. Yet assemblage has been criticised for moving from criticism to description and for potentially over-emphasising the possibilities for reassembling space (Brenner et al 2011). This paper therefore explores the possible contribution an urban assemblage framework can make to build a more nuanced but still critical lens through which to review mega-event legacies.

Drawing on discourse analysis of secondary documents and interviews with key stakeholders this paper explores these debates by analysing how legacy has been made and remade in two cities; London and Rio. It focuses on the spatial practices of legacy (masterplans and frameworks, and stadia and other major projects) and their governance. It reveals the different narratives of legacy that have evolved and clashed over time, how the contradictions between these have been held together by complex and shifting governance arrangements and how this remodeling has been made real through a variety of spatial practices of assembly. It also critically explores whether in these contingent and shifting process spaces exist which can be opened up to explore alternatives.

The paper concludes by discussing how thinking critically with assemblage can be a useful tool in understanding the complexities and nuances in what is happening on the ground without losing sight of wider relations of space and power.

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