Olympic Legacy: Social and Cultural Regeneration

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Dr. Iain MacRury

ABSTRACT: This paper draws on examinations of some past Olympic cites and their legacies, as well as looking forward to London 2012. The paper draws out some examples of Social and Cultural legacies generated from hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In particular the paper will consider the notion of legacy as ‘narrative’; as a means for thinking and linking past, present and future trajectories of a city in its developmental path. The paper identifies both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ legacy processes in order to demonstrate the interaction of such relatively more or less tangible and intangible developmental gains in the life of the city. The paper considers the role of governance in developing legacy and distinguishes a conception of ‘legacy’ understood (merely) as a series of concrete outcomes – e.g. stadia and other facilities used or unused in the post Games phase - from a more positive understanding of ‘legacy’ seen (instead) as generating a momentum – a positive capacity within the life of the city to develop further projects, further connections and new networks, and one placing the Games, and indeed other mega events and its organisational arrangements as an integrative force within the broader transformational processes of city, region and nation. The paper contextualises the ‘legacy’ and regeneration issue with reference to a brief incident in Rio nearly 90 years ago, describing what was considered (at the time) a highly significant event: the visit to the city of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium in September 1920.
Introduction

In a recent call to the UK public to ‘take sport more seriously’ the writer David Goldblatt (2007) suggests that it is productive to understand sport as an increasingly valuable space for public and, we might add, international conversation. Sport is,

…a democratic carnival of play. The world of sport is one in which most of us at different times and in different ways are participants, spectators or commentators; it is a world in which we can delight in contradiction, a social space that is dependent on the state and the market but knows how to hold them both at arm’s length. This space, after all, is not merely where we play—it is where the good life must be lived (Goldblatt 2007)

It is in this spirit – of sport providing invaluable connective spaces for social, academic, political and cultural engagement as well as for practical debate about aspects of the good life, and indeed about the good city– that I will present this paper.

Thanks go to Lamartine Dacosta, Fernado Telles, Rejane Penna Rodrigues and our hosts SESCI for organising this seminar and for inviting my colleague Alv Demiranda and I from the London East Research Institute, to contribute. Thanks also to the other speakers and to the delegates who are making this such an interesting event.

I will be referring to conceptions of legacy developed in work undertaken with the Mayor’s office in London. As with this conference, the work was based upon the willingness of political institutions and academics to work together. This is, I’d argue, a key ingredient in legacy planning in itself – as the organisers of this conference have understood. The work was entitled A Lasting Legacy for London – but of course the extent of the London legacy remains to be seen.

Proto Megaevents: A historical parable of social regeneration

I will start with an anecdote that captures some small scale elements of ‘legacy’ and regeneration. By chance an article was printed in yesterday’s New York Times – following their habit of reprinting old stories. It caught my eye because it concerns Rio, and a type of what today might be called small scale event led urban
regeneration. You must forgive me for telling you a story about your city, which I like very much, but about whose history I know only a little.

On the 21st September 1920, as the *New York Times* of the day¹ reported, Rio de Janeiro’s enthusiastic population gathered to give an ovation to the arriving Albert and Elisabeth, the King and Queen of Belgium. The young couple were cast as the embodiment of a progressive European modernity. As Caulfield (2000:61) puts it, the King and Queen were:

‘Models of *sporty* and elegant modern youth, [who] sped about the city, each in their own automobiles, demonstrating their appreciation of the salubrious environment’ (my emphasis)

The Rio authorities had given over considerable resources to ensuring the city was a fitting emblem for their version of the future – as a capital of a modern, progressive metropolitan nation. The aim was to display,

‘a country of the future, a nation whose youth and vigour could sustain the progress of its transplanted European civilisation, even as Europe itself entered into decline’ (Caufield 2000:61).

In order for Rio to play host to this drama of past, present and future modernities – starring the visiting monarchs - a number of significant ‘regeneration projects’ were completed across the city: Public fountains were painted; Electric lighting replaced gas along the Rio Branco Avenue and Pinheiro Marchado street: Signature black and white stone sidewalks were laid at Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon: Renewed efforts enabled the successful completion of Niemeyer Avenue – to allow the visiting King Albert to drive his car between Leblon and Tijuca (Caufield 2000:50-51).

As it turned out these largely cosmetic changes of the 1920s could not, in the longer term, define the city and generate a lasting narrative of development. The superficially

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‘regenerated’ image that was projected of Rio through this proto-media mega event and through the idealised couple were insufficiently inclusive of the diversity and contradictions of Rio. This image could not credibly capture hearts and minds. The city image did not produce an integrative or authentic narrative of place, transformation and regeneration. The visit had no lasting legacy.

The 1920s effort at image building was a doomed attempt to emulate the social order of modern industrialised Europe (Caulfield 2003:61). Mere emulation of global models of modernity, then, as now, is unlikely to be a successful regeneration strategy.

New Global Audiences for Mega events and City Imagery

In the more democratic and post-colonial 21st century there is no dignitary, no monarch, not even a celebrity film star or rock band for whom the city would work to put on such a show. Today it is global mega events, such as the Olympic Games which operate, on an ever grander scale, inducing cities to work hard on image, and on real infrastructure, in various attempts to present a face ‘pare ingles ver’, or, as was said of the regeneration in Rio in 1920 – *fit for the king to see*.

Of course the notional ‘English’ referred to in the idiom no longer matter (if they ever did), nor (in this sense) do kings or queens. But the international media audience, not to mention powerful sports administrators – from the IOC or FIFA, as well as global sponsors and investors, appear to carry forward into the 21st century a capacity to occasion cites to seemingly remake themselves – to regenerate in grand acts of civil engineering and in the work of, what Rutheiser (1996) called “Imagineering” - in relation to the Atlanta Olympics project.

Contemporary cities working to change their image look to mega events, in the way that the visits of monarchs and other state officials used to provide an international spotlight. City legacies, I’d argue emerge when the mega event enables planners, stakeholders and communities to work collaboratively to develop and imaginatively articulate and communicate the creative truth of the city - globally and locally. This did not happen in 1920. But it could in 2016.
Mega event hosting has become a both badge of honour and passport to membership – a great prize greatly sought after. The contemporary mega-event has become the measure, index and pattern of a particular kind of modernity – not European as such, but rather global – and rooted in the extensive and competitive networks of global cities. But mega event legacies however must also find connection with the refigured local trajectories of place and space within the ‘legacy’ city.

**Megaevents matter**

I will turn now to London: Why, in London, are we so preoccupied with this intersection – between sport, politics, social life, culture and the market place? Obviously there will be the Olympics in 2012; but we must consider also the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow 2014, not to mention golf’s Ryder cup - to be held in Wales in 2010. There has even been a suggestion, from Gordon Brown, of a serious UK bid to host the 2018 World Cup. These mega events structure a part of our conception of the future development of the UK. It seems we need mega events to imagine the future – populations enjoy the hope that a mega event bid brings (even if they dislike the hype), and leaders enjoy the anticipation of a grand project. Whether cities win bids or not, it seems Mega events stand as important punctuation marks in the narrative of city and national development – and as orientation points in cities positioning within global relations, networks, and local self esteem and reputation.

I recently heard a paper describing the campaign to win the 2028 Olympics for Amsterdam – 100 years on from the 1928 Games. This account of long term planning revealed the city’s urge to link past present and future, to maintain global competitiveness, but also to think locally – to focus minds on the rising sea levels that threaten the city. I want to return to this theme later – but for now we can point to legacy being partly a matter of thinking the relations between past, present and future. This is an important function of mega event planning.

Were the UK to successfully bid for 2018 it would open up the prospect that by 2020 the UK and Brazil, between 2012 and 2018 will have each, in sequence, have hosted the two largest global mega events.
What legacies will be in place – and what will develop in 2020 and after? These are important preoccupations to think about now. In whatever case it is clear that mega events are significant components for cities thinking about the future – they make the future thinkable – but, also, they can reawaken a sense of history.

**London’s Aims**

London is currently preoccupied with some of the contradictions facing many affluent global cities–as it strives to become a city where (in whatever definition) the good life is lived. London is a multicultural city where there are significant disparities in wealth and opportunity, and where the East of London is the most intensive site of this relative deprivation. The Olympic Games has, for many, become a key emblem of the work of defining and re-developing London as a ‘Good City’ – not least in the Mayoral Elections which took place yesterday and where the 2012 Olympic Games and its ambitious legacy aims and high costs have been major sources of debate and controversy. What does the mega event promise?

The London and national governments are aiming at delivering demonstrable gains in relation to these 5 promises:

- Making the UK a world-leading sporting nation.
- Transforming the heart of east London.
- Inspiring a new generation of young people to take part in volunteering, cultural and physical activity.
- Making the Olympic Park a blueprint for sustainable living.
- Demonstrating the UK is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, visit and for business.

These 5 promises are intended to structure and focus the planning, prioritising, resources, delivery and evaluation of the Games and their legacies. The aims are ambitious – and expensive – but they are also wide reaching and open to interpretation and negotiation. Our work on legacy suggests that planning and consultation on legacy projects needs to be both effective – to deliver on time - and flexible enough to enable real dialogue between the various levels of Government, local communities and the delivery authorities.
Legacy depends upon developing a credible and sustainable story of regeneration, renewal and urban transformation for the various stakeholders – communities, business, politicians and sporting institutions. This, in turn depends on flexible and responsive governance of investment, planning and resources. Such local credibility is a major component in global image – not least, and as China has discovered, when heightened global information flows assure critical engagement with airbrushed images of the ideal mega event city.

**What is Legacy?**

Legacy is a process of passing on through the generations – the handing down of a gift, or the inheritance of knowledge, property or particular attitudes. The temporal nature of legacy, the idea of movement in time is useful to bear in mind. Legacy enacts a narrative, between past, present and future – for instance transforming the past nature of a derelict industrial space, in the present to enable future development. Legacy is narrative.

**Legacy momentum**

Because of this conception it is limiting to understand legacy as a prescribed set of outcomes. While it is useful to audit and track change, it is also important to be alive to the potentialities of legacy to go beyond planned outcomes – to develop positive (but also possibly negative) developmental trajectories within the city. This is why we refer to ‘legacy momentum’.

In the economic sphere Legacy Momentum refers to the capacity of the city and regional economy to continue an upward growth path following the immediate post-Games downturn in economic activity. The capacity to achieve momentum relates to several factors. First, the Games must complement an already existing regeneration plan that involves new phases beyond the Olympic event. Second, the knowledge-base derived from the preparation and staging of the event is not dispersed when the Games end but is utilised to promote further innovation with the city and region. Finally, the negative consequences and omissions from the Olympic-related
regeneration phase are addressed in subsequent urban development projects. Barcelona (1992) is the best example of a host city achieving Legacy Momentum.

**Hard and soft legacy**

As we heard yesterday in Holgar Preuss’s excellent paper, the impact of the Games on a city economy is both tangible and intangible. The intangible re-branding of a city may have subsequent tangible effects, especially through inward investment and the enhancement of entrepreneurial confidence and expertise (Barcelona 1992). The Games provides a significant catalyst for renewal; accelerating the completion of infrastructure projects (Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996, Athens 2004 and more modestly Sydney 2000). However there can be a risk that host city population emerges with a balance sheet of positives and negatives from a process of regeneration that happens to it rather than is shaped by it.

**Soft Socio-cultural legacy and branding**

- City/regional brand/image – locally and nationally/internationally (Haynes 2001; Preuss 2004; Burbank et al 2001; Cashman 2005:100-107))
- ‘Can do’ or ‘Can’t do’ approach – civic confidence, leadership, the “entrepreneurial city” (Burbank et al 2001)
- Political ‘message’ e.g. affirmation of nationalism or modernity
- Knowledge/skills retained – portable and transferable, from Olympic jobs, training and volunteer programmes (Panagiotopoulou 2005)
- Volunteer Ethos – leading to future volunteering or to other benefits
- Regional Pride/Image/Brand – for tourism and other related benefits.
- (Inter-)national Pride/Image/Brand - for tourism and other related benefits.
- Emergent networks for dialogue/social connectedness/ inclusion (Burbank et al 2001; Lenjisky 2002; Cashman 2005)
- Urban Culture – embellishment of city (Preuss 2004:92; Essex and Chalkey 2003; Baim 2007)
- Inspirational elite performance to encourage national pride and youth participation. (e.g. Baim 2007; Cashman 2006)
• Ecological / Green agendas (Cashman 2006) – “a new relation to nature” (Preuss 2004:93)
• Sporting experience, and memory (Cashman 2005; 1-52)

**Hard infrastructure and urban renewal**

• Housing, Olympic Village development (Cashman 2005; Munoz 1998; Oro Nello 1997)
• Transport connectivity and enhancement – greener, cleaner and more efficient (Cashman 2006; Essex and Chalkey 1998)
• Economic success (Preuss 2004; Cashman 2005: 83-109)
• Telecommunications infrastructure
• Sporting facilities permitting increased sports and other community activities/participation.
• The outward fabric of the city – cleaning and greening
• Hotel and other tourist and leisure venues – including night time economy

An aspect of legacy momentum is evident in a dynamic whereby Hard legacy turns into Soft and Soft legacy turns into Hard legacy. There is movement between intangible and tangible legacy gains. Some passage of time is required for the successful emergence of hard and soft social legacy to be confirmed. There is a tendency for hard legacy to become iconic and significant as monumental and tourist attractions. Soft legacy becomes hard as feel good factors, and governance structures and ‘can do’ attitude evolve to form productive social networks – and new projects. Barcelona is the indicative case here. Follow-up uses, as well as the symbolic, or soft legacy iconography of Olympic venues and places, are potential vectors for an array of subsequent legacy gains or socio-cultural “legacy momentum”, allowing, on the hard legacy side, the continued pursuit of sport, education and health gains for the host city populations, and on the soft legacy side, accentuating some aspects of tourists’ interest in the city; establishing a heritage element where previously little or no (sporting or Olympic) tourist heritage might have existed. Thus hard infrastructure, qua monument and “museum” can assure the persistence of the soft legacy of the host city’s Olympic “brand” - with whatever positive or negative connotations that may
have for visitors to, and residents of the city. Thus naming, mapping and figuring Olympic related venues and sites (Cashman 2006:156-7) post-Games can assist (marginally) in the work of ensuring the Olympic city-image, as it is remade – and remembered - through the Games (in so far as it is). If the Games have gone well the city will continue on and develop to be globally intelligible as a site of novelty, activity, enterprise and generative re-development; the reflex “white elephant” tag is the other side of this soft legacy coin.

These rather fluid dynamics should be understood however alongside clear purposeful planning. Planned-in legacy offsets “white elephant” syndrome in some cases. The post-Games use of infrastructure is an important guide to the success of the Games, and in all cases legacy needs to be built into initial conception, design and delivery of Olympic facilities (buildings, but also IT, governance, city brand management, and post Games maintenance contracts). Barcelona Olympic village, Atlanta business tourism, Sydney and Australian tourism and Athens transport systems provide indicative evidence.

**Governance**

Perhaps the crucial element in developing legacy is flexible and effective Governance of the project and in its relation to the city as it develops more broadly. This is typically achieved by means of complex negotiations between local, national governments; local pressure and interest groups, various communities and their representatives, corporate sponsors, businesses and other stakeholders. This was pursued with notable successes in Barcelona and Sydney. The definition and assurance of “legacy”, alongside cost, is typically at the heart of stakeholders’ agendas. There were some significant doubts about how well this balance was struck, for instance, in Atlanta.
Ongoing Assessment

Cities assess legacy in their own terms and as an important part of the governance process. Sydney offers a useful example. Caution is frequently urged in the face of cost overruns (e.g. Atlanta and Athens). However, to underestimate the impacts, direct or indirect, of Olympic legacy is to risk missing a unique opportunity in the life of the city and nation.

Cultural and Creative Industries

Mega events can stimulate industry diversification. This is important in London, arguably, where, for instance, there is an over reliance of Financial services. It is hoped that hi tech and green industries will develop from the Olympic park and the Olympic green agenda.

Another area of industry diversification is Cultural and Creative Industries. Legacy can stimulate new networks of cultural exchange and education and Renewed capacities for collaborative project development. The creative industries have a role to play as the city develops new integrative models for infrastructure design and legacy usage, developing a new and renewable sense of the city and its spaces.

To return to Rio: The insistence upon an inclusive and diversely cosmopolitan conception of Rio’s modernity as a key ingredient to any legacy and image making is relevant to the development of further creative industries. The rich creative and cultural life of the city must be tuned in to the development of any mega event – through its communities. If this can be managed flexibly and effectively then as yet untapped potentials in the creative industries will gain a unique global reach in the mega event arena and in trans-national media. More often, and alongside the widely respected labels, made in Brazil, or grown in Brazil, we will see global goods created in Brazil. This is a significant legacy outcome affirming and developing a distinctive place for Rio in the expansive global network of contemporary metropolitan cultures.
Conclusion: The London legacy opportunity

To develop a positive “Legacy momentum” from mega events requires planning, stewardship and continuity of vision. Legacy is not (only) a state achieved – a set of predicted outcomes – then to be capitalised upon. Instead it is a narrative of unfolding and continuing multiform achievement – generative and driven by a momentum born of economic stimuli, infrastructure development and the elaboration of “soft” factors and affirmed values, of communities and other stakeholders in the life of the city.