

**Trans-urban networks of learning, mega-events and policy  
tourism: The case of Manchester's Commonwealth and Olympic  
Games projects**

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## **Abstract**

Using Manchester's Olympic and Commonwealth Games bids, this paper examines how and why city officials learn – acquire knowledge that is used to make change – from other places about mega-events and events-led regeneration. It reveals how Manchester's public and private sector elites visited various cities to compare and to learn as part of their bid assembling activities. It also highlights how other cities' representatives have visited Manchester to learn from its hosting of the 2002 Commonwealth Games bid. The paper seeks to build conceptually on existing work on the New Urban Politics (NUP), entrepreneurial urbanism and mega-events by addressing the links between cities competing with, and learning from, elsewhere. Drawing on the growing work on making urban policies mobile, it reveals the trans-urban underpinnings of entrepreneurial urbanism, making a case for taking seriously the circuits, networks and webs in and through which urban knowledge and learning is constituted and moved around.

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“[W]hile general lessons can be learnt from the experience of their predecessors, the [Olympic Games] organizers inevitably face a steep learning curve by virtue of having to assemble from scratch the teams required to bring the Games to fruition and to establish their specific working practices. Logistical difficulties will emerge, mistakes will be made, and deadlines will be tested.” (Gold and Gold, 2008, p. 303)

“Many of the innovations and investments designed to make particular cities more attractive as cultural and consumer centres have quickly been imitated elsewhere, thus rendering any competitive advantage with a system of cities ephemeral” (Harvey, 1989, p. 12)

“So, ‘local’ policy development now occurs in a self-consciously comparative and asymmetrically relativized context. The boundaries of local jurisdictions and policy regimes would seem, therefore, to be rather more porous than before” (Peck, 2003, p. 229)

## 1. Introduction

Seeking to embody the new go-getting and entrepreneurial spirit that was permeating the public and private corridors of power in the city, Manchester City Council in 1990 unveiled a new slogan: ‘making things happen’. As well as highlighting the new attitude of the city, such wordplay also sought to shake off the Council’s association with municipal socialism and its image of bureaucratic, parochial local government with little business acumen (Cochrane *et al.*, 1996). From the late 1980s onwards, attempts to revive a city experiencing deindustrialisation, unemployment and poverty would be spearheaded by aggressive place marketing and the regeneration of its city centre and selected run-down neighbourhoods (Ward, 2000a; Peck and Ward, 2002; Williams, 2003). Its governance would also subsequently be reconfigured with emphasis placed on ‘joined-up working’ between public and private agencies and the introduction of a bewildering array of public-private partnerships (Peck and Tickell, 1996; Quilley, 1999; Ward, 2000b).

Perhaps its most hyped entrepreneurial, partnership-based projects were the (unsuccessful) bids for the 1992, 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games and the (successful) bid for the 2002 Commonwealth Games. For Bob Scott, the chairman of the Olympic and Commonwealth Games bidding committees, the bids sought to unleash the “miraculous regenerative powers” of the Games to Manchester (quoted in Isaac, 1992, p. 12). Hosting the Olympics or

Commonwealth Games, so the story went, would help firmly (re)connect Manchester into the global economy by providing an unprecedented global platform on which to promote a positive image of itself as well as to encourage gentrifiers, investors, and tourists from elsewhere to the city (Carlsen and Taylor, 2003; Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2003).

The Olympic and Commonwealth Games projects were central elements of the transition to the New Urban Politics (NUP) associated with the economic development of Manchester, simultaneously altered by and altering the way things were done in the city (Cochrane et al., 1996; Quilley, 1999). A related but far less understood aspect of Manchester's NUP was its position in trans-urban networks of learning and the ways in which such networks of learning informed the Games projects and the governance and regeneration of Manchester more widely. As this paper will detail, Manchester's Olympic and Commonwealth Games projects were, and continue to be, deeply embedded in these trans-urban networks of learning. On the one hand, Manchester officials would seek inspiration from, visiting in the process, a number of other Commonwealth and Olympic cities from Los Angeles to Lillehammer as part of the Olympic and Commonwealth Games projects. On the other hand, Manchester's hosting of the 2002 Commonwealth Games and the associated regeneration of East Manchester would also serve as a point of reference for other cities seeking to host major sporting events and regenerate inner city areas.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to provide a partial insight into how and why city officials learn – acquire knowledge that is used to make change (Campbell, 2008; McFarlane, 2009) – about mega-events and events-led regeneration from other places and what role and importance *visiting* these places has in the learning process. To do this, it will consider how and why Manchester's Olympic and Commonwealth officials learnt from other Olympic and Commonwealth cities, and how and why officials from elsewhere have visited Manchester to learn from the experience of hosting the Commonwealth Games. The paper is in three sections.

The first synthesises existing work on the relationship between economic development, bidding and hosting mega-events, and the mobilisation of urban policies. The second discusses the assembling of Manchester's Olympic and Commonwealth Games bids and the way those in the city learnt from the experience of other cities. The third turns to Manchester as a city that other cities' officials have visited and from which they have learnt. Taken together, the paper offers a glimpse of the trans-urban micro-politics of entrepreneurial urbanism and, to paraphrase Manchester's old slogan, how things are made to happen<sup>1</sup>.

## **2. Assembling the Games: Mega-events, entrepreneurial urbanism and learning from elsewhere**

The Summer and the Winter Olympics and the Commonwealth Games, as Chalkley and Essex (1999, p. 369) have noted, are “much more than... sporting competition[s]”. Since the modern day revival of the Olympics in Athens in 1896 and the start of the Commonwealth Games in Hamilton (Canada) in 1930, they have made an increasingly large imprint on the political, economic and social fabric of the host city as well as those cities who failed in their bids to host the events. Focusing on the Olympics, studies have shown that from the 1950s onwards and particularly so after the Barcelona 1992 Olympics, organisers have used the Games to realise what Gold and Gold (2008, p. 302) have called, “wider ambitions” for the city, viewing it as a

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws upon a wider research project examining the use and ramifications of economic development study tours in and out of Manchester. On this theme 20 interviews were conducted with three groups of public and private officials who (a) worked in Manchester and visited elsewhere on a study tour, (b) visited Manchester as part of a study tour, or (c) helped arrange or host a study tour in Manchester. These are complemented by documentary analysis of ‘fact-finding’ reports and minutes and various newspaper, magazine and online reports of the visits. A triangulation of these methods provides a rich insight into the rationale behind the visits, the activities that took place on them, the ‘lessons learnt’ and their wider political-economic context.

catalyst for urban development and transformation (see, for instance, Chalkley and Essex, 1999, 2004; Gold and Gold, 2007a, 2008). A “politics of fantastic expectations” (Eisienger, 2000, p. 326) surrounds the Games whereby elites ‘common-sensically’ state that hosting the Games *will* bring private and public investment, tourism, jobs and opportunities for place promotion to the city. Using the example of Berlin’s failed attempt to host the 2000 Olympics, Alberts (2009, p. 508) argues that the Olympics also provides a positive legacy for failed bid cities, giving them “an opportunity to carry out or speed up urban development projects that might otherwise not be realized or only much later.” The Games are presented as parachuted panaceas for a variety of urban ills, and legitimised as being ‘good for all’ (Black, 2008; cf. Logan and Moloth, 1987). However, these claims have been heavily challenged by some scholars and social movements who point to the large public cost and its often regressive impact on the quality-of-life for disadvantaged communities in the city. In seeking to provide a welcoming ‘festival’ atmosphere and an investable Games city, urban elites have reprioritised their social agendas. Gentrifying unattractive neighbourhoods, evicting and displacing low income residents and businesses, and punitively policing the homeless, protestors and other ‘unnerving’ populations have become increasing used repertoires for ‘delivering’ (Greene, 2003; Ward, 2003; Lenskyj, 2008; Chamberlain, 2009).

The Olympic and Commonwealth Games can be seen as part of a wider set of ambulatory ‘mega-events’ – or ‘hallmark events’ as they are also known – alongside sporting World Cups (e.g. football, cricket, rugby), Expo and World Fairs, the European Capital of Culture among others (Gold and Gold, 2005). They can also be viewed as one instrument of many through which the New Urban Politics (Cox and Mair, 1988) of entrepreneurial urbanism is being played out (Owens, 2000; Ward, 2003). With the hosting of the Games being ambulatory in design and the bidding for the Games often being highly competitive, they are symptomatic of – if not a much more frenzied variant of – the intensification of inter-urban

competition whereby cities aggressively compete with one another to actively inward investment. To use Harvey's (1989) phrasing, they embody a *politics of place* which prioritises the flirtatious appeasement of privileged elites elsewhere over the needs of local populations. They are entrepreneurial in the sense that they are pump-priming economic-development orientated strategies but also because they are highly speculative (Jessop and Sum, 2000); they take what Gold and Gold (2007b, p. 6) call "a seldom-admitted gamble" with no guarantees that they will bring the cited economic and social benefits to the city. The Games are also reflective of the new power structures of urban governance whereby the private sector has become increasingly involved in bidding and organising the Games, alongside occupying a more prevalent position in governing cities and distributing services more widely. The private sector are enticed by the potential for future profiteering with their presence legitimised by arguments that they will bring increased private sector commitment and funding as well as their efficiency, creativity and understanding of the market (Cochrane *et al.*, 1996; Surborg *et al.*, 2008).

The apparently 'mundane' material and discursive practices of doing Games bidding and delivery has been commented upon (see, for instance, S. Ward, 2007; Swart and Bob, 2004). The issues of 'good practice' and the circulation of 'expertise' within Games governance, however, have received only passing attention. Monclús (2003), for instance, reflects on 'the Barcelona model' which many associate with its hosting of the 1992 Olympics. He argues that although the model has been widely cited as a singular entity, its constitutive elements are rarely fixed as it circulates, being moved from one city to another. Surborg *et al.* (2008), meanwhile, briefly highlights how as part of the bidding and preparation for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, the Vancouver Board of Trade brought in former Olympic (public and private) organisers from other (mainly Anglophone) places to advise and make presentations in the city. These studies aside, the issues of comparison, expertise, learning, and policy movement have yet to receive the attention they deserve within this literature.

One body of work that has begun to address these concerns is that emerging on the mobility of urban policies. Drawing on, but advancing considerably, work in political science on policy transfer (see, for instance, Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Stone, 2004), it considers how and why policies and practices situated in particular towns and cities are ‘mobilised’ and re-embedded into new political-economic contexts (e.g. McCann, 2004, 2008, forthcoming a; McCann and Ward, 2009, 2010; Cook, 2008; K. Ward, 2006, 2007; S. Ward, 2006, 2009; McFarlane, 2009). It shows that those involved in the making of ‘local’ policy often do so in a self-consciously comparative and relational manner, and that learning from elsewhere is not entirely without historical precedents (Nasr and Volait, 2003; Rogers, 2009). McCann (2004) demonstrates how best practice guides and league tables are frequently used in order to select places worthy of attention and emulation, while Cook (2008) and K. Ward (2006) note how city officials are often drawn to places that are held up as regeneration ‘success stories’ in the media. Furthermore, these studies show that the processes through which policies are transferred are never simply ‘copy and paste’ operations, often involve a myriad of people and institutions, and rarely have the same outcomes in their emulator’s locality (Peck and Theodore, 2001; Stone, 2004; McCann, forthcoming a).

As noted in McCann and Ward (2009, forthcoming), a useful way of conceptualising urban policy mobilities is through the productive tension between *territoriality* and *relationality* which involves the dialectical “study of how urban actors manage and struggle over the ‘local’ impacts of ‘global’ flows and also the analysis of how they engage in global circuits of policy knowledge.” It views policies as being simultaneously fixed, or embedded in place, and in motion. One aspect of this making mobile of policies that has yet to be fully theorized is the role of policy tourism, whereby officials from particular places visit other places to look, learn and listen (McCann, forthcoming a). Although ‘fact-finding trips’ or ‘study tours’ as they are commonly known are a common feature of contemporary urban governance (Ward, 2010),



relatively little is known about their performance, role in urban governance or their ramifications. To consider these issues further we turn to an analysis of the Commonwealth and Olympic Games-themed ‘learning and lobbying’ visits undertaken in and out of Manchester since the mid-1980s.

### **3. Manchester learns from other cities**

In February 1985 a story circulated around the British media that the then-Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher together with her Sports Minister, Neil MacFarlane, were impressed by the profit making, privately run and financed Los Angeles 1984 Summer Olympic Games. So much so that they privately thought that the UK, or more precisely London, should consider bidding for the forthcoming Olympics (see, for instance, Evans, 1985). On hearing this news in Manchester, Bob Scott, a well-connected theatre manager, decided that the Olympics must be hosted outside of the capital city – in his view, Manchester. In a matter of days he assembled a private sector-dominated bid committee that would attempt to win the rights to host the 1992 Summer Olympics in Manchester. The City Council would not commit public money but did support the bid. Scott, like Thatcher, was impressed by the profit-making and, most importantly, the private sector running and financing of the LA Olympics bidding and planning, something that he would attempt to emulate – in part because Thatcher made it clear that any UK Games bid should be private sector-led and financed. The decidedly neoliberal LA Olympics marked a radical departure from the Communist era Moscow 1980 Olympics and the state-funded, debt-ridden Montreal 1974 Olympics, and in the minds of those in Manchester, London and elsewhere it demonstrated that the Games could run at a profit with little imprint on the taxpayer’s pockets (see Gold and Gold, 2007).

The LA Olympics would become an important point of reference for Manchester's 1992 bid and would continue to resonate in the subsequent bids. Not least because Scott clearly admired Peter Ueberroth, the former travel entrepreneur and chief organiser of the post-bid preparations for the LA Olympics. So much so that he, perhaps with a touch of irony, later stated in an interview, "I've read his book and I dream of being Peter Ueberroth" (quoted in Isaac, 1992, p. 12). As well as reading Ueberroth's (1985) autobiography, *Made in America*, Scott would seek out the methods of the LA Olympics from two key sources. First, Scott hired the Manchester branch of Arthur Young, led by Rick Parry, to act as management consultants for the 1992 and 1996 bids, a role the LA branch of Arthur Young did for the LA Olympics (Reeves, 1989). As part of the contract, Scott and his team would have exclusive access to Arthur Young's LA Olympic files and Arthur Young would prepare a report on how to emulate the success of the LA Games (Ellis, 1985). Second, Scott, Parry and other officials at Arthur Young visited Los Angeles on a post-Games 'fact-finding trip' to meet senior officials who ran the Games and to inspect the venues. They toured the facilities, spoke to those overseeing the project and reflected on how to translate these findings into some concrete proposals for Manchester. In doing so, Manchester sought to reproduce a long-standing tradition for future host cities delegations and, more recently, bidding cities delegations to visit Olympic cities before, during or after the event. During the LA Olympics, for instance, delegations from three future Olympic hosts and ten Olympic bidding cities were in attendance (Los Angeles Olympic Organising Committee, 1984). As Rick Parry noted, the trip not only provided an insight as to what to do but also what not to do:

"In Los Angeles the intention was to make a profit. When you visit there now it is difficult to find any trace of the games. We can learn from their expertise but our aims are different. We want the games to provide a sporting legacy for Manchester

and Britain. We want to build new facilities which will be used by the people of the area. It will do wonders for the city.” (Quoted in Palmer, 1985, p. 7)

Manchester’s developing plans for the 1992 Games stressed the long-term legacy that the Olympics would have on the city-region. In particular, it would improve the sporting facilities and regenerate the still-floundering city region, particularly the west of Manchester where the Olympic Stadium and main Olympic Village (athletes’ accommodation) were planned. This, as Parry noted, juxtaposed with the more ‘in-and-out’ approach of the LA Games (see also Andranovich *et al.*, 2001) and as a result, it was LA’s private sector-led board composition rather than its legacy aims that would prove the largest influence on Manchester’s Olympic project.

Ultimately, Manchester’s 1992 bid failed; it did not get the nod from the British Olympic Association (BOA) in 1985 to be the British ‘candidate city’ put forward to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) vote, where the members of the IOC would anonymously vote for the host city. Birmingham, who won the BOA vote, subsequently finished fifth out of six candidate cities behind the winner Barcelona.

Manchester would bid again for the 1992 and 1996 Olympics (Cochrane *et al.*, 1996, Law, 1994). This time the Council was more involved. This change in level of participation reflected a broader shift in emphasis in UK city politics:

“Most British cities, most local governments in the 1980s, had become very introspective... It was about focusing on internal problems rather than about how we solved the real problems of the city... There was a process of having to go out and sell Manchester, and to think, ‘what have we got to sell?’ This changed our thinking process” (ex-public sector member of the Olympic Game bid committees, interview, December 2009)

The city received the official nomination of the BOA and was short-listed by the IOC. However, it lost the final IOC vote in 1990 to Atlanta for the 1996 Olympics. And in 1993, with a bid for the 2000 Olympics which moved the proposed central sporting facilities and Olympic Village to redundant industrial land in the east of the city, Manchester would once again lose out in the IOC vote, this time to Sydney (for an outline of the BOA and IOC voting see Figure 1).

LA was certainly not the only place visited as part of the three Olympic bids. The promotional documents for the 1996 and 2000 bids fondly talked of the “globetrotting” conducted by the private and public sector members of the bidding committee, as well as its ‘bid ambassadors’, such as Bobby Charlton, the former Manchester United footballer, and Princess Anne, the president of the BOA. As an ex-public sector member of the Olympic Game bid committees remembers:

“I don’t know how many times I went to Barcelona ... it must have been six or eight times. I went to Atlanta two or three times because the IOC meet in different places so you are not only talking to the... places that won the Games you were talking to but also the cities that were trying to get them at the time, such as Melbourne and Toronto. You also learn from what they are doing.”

**Figure 1: BOA and IOC voting for the 1992, 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games**

**1992 Olympic Games**

**BOA vote**, London, 12 July 1985

Birmingham 25 (votes); Manchester 5; London 2

**IOC vote**, Lausanne, 17 October 1986

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Barcelona (w)	29 (votes)	37	47
Paris	19	20	23
Brisbane	11	9	10
Belgrade	13	11	5
Birmingham	8	8	Eliminated
Amsterdam	5	Eliminated	-

**1996 Olympic Games**

**BOA vote**, London, 19 May 1988

Manchester 20; Birmingham 11

**IOC vote**, Tokyo, 18 September 1990

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Atlanta (w)	19	20	26	34	51
Athens	23	23	26	30	35
Toronto	14	17	18	22	Eliminated
Melbourne	12	21	16	Eliminated	-
Manchester	11	5	Eliminated	-	-
Belgrade	7	Eliminated	-	-	-

**2000 Olympic Games**

**BOA vote**, London, 24 April 1991

Manchester 28; London 5

**IOC vote**, Monte Carlo, 23 September 1993

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Sydney (w)	30	30	37	45
Beijing	32	37	40	43
Manchester	11	13	11	Eliminated
Berlin	9	9	Eliminated	-
Istanbul	7	Eliminated	-	-

Note: Within the IOC vote, each IOC member has one vote. A candidate city wins if they have an absolute majority of the votes. If no city has an absolute majority, a new voting round will take place with the lowest scoring city from the previous round eliminated. New rounds will continue until a majority winner occurs.

(w) = winner

One newspaper reporter joked in 1989 that “Robert Scott’s diary for next year contains details of more flights abroad than the logbook of most airline pilots” (Davenport, 1989, p. 8). Post-BOA vote, the deceptive simple goal of the 1996 and 2000 bids was to convince each member of the IOC to vote for Manchester to be the host city. As all the other bidding cities had realised, producing glossy documents and videos was not enough; frequent face-to-face contact was deemed essential in order to gain their trust, personalise their promotional message and develop pseudo-friendships. As with every candidate city, IOC members were invited to visit Manchester where they would be met by a delegation of local elites, view staged ‘community events’ and shown around the city. During the bidding for the 2000 Olympics, John Major, appointed Prime Minister in November 1990, would also hold receptions for IOC members, marking a departure from the ‘hands off’ approach by his predecessor Margaret Thatcher during Manchester’s 1992 and 1996 bids (Law, 1994). Learning from past Olympic bidding campaigns elsewhere, Manchester officials also visited the IOC members. Visits to individual IOC members were conducted as were visits to events where several IOC members were attending<sup>2</sup>. Their visits included the Summer Olympics in Seoul (1988) and Barcelona (1992), the Commonwealth Games in Auckland (1990), the Winter Olympics in Calgary (1988) and Albertville (1992) (which were also attended by IOC members), as well as other events such as IOC sessions and regional meetings, and the congresses of numerous sporting federation and associations (Hill 1992, 1993).

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<sup>2</sup> The issue of IOC members’ visits to candidate cities and visits by bidders to individual IOC members would become global news in November 1998 when it was revealed that as part of Salt Lake City’s successful campaign to host the 2002 Winter Olympics a small number of IOC members used these visits to ask for, or accept, expensive gifts for themselves and their families from bidder in return for their vote (Mallon, 2002). From December 1999 IOC members would be banned from both visiting candidate cities and from arranging meetings with candidate city representatives outside of sanctioned international sporting events and meetings. A small ‘Evaluation Commission’ would make one trip to each candidate city for four days each and their technical evaluation report would be given to IOC members prior to the vote ([www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)).

The primary focus for the majority of the ‘globetrotting’ trips was to lobby rather than to learn. IOC members would be cornered in corridors and taken out for drink and meals, wooed with talk of envisioning strategies and legacies. Mobile face-to-face lobbying has been a long-standing practice in Olympic bidding, with Manchester officials often jockeying with other bidding committees at these event for the attention of IOC members. To quote the journalist Matthew Moore (1988, p. 17), “the press[ing] of prawns and an ample supply of liquor on anyone who has a say in who should host the games... [is] part of the lengthy political and social process that any city aiming to host the games must master”. Nonetheless, the visits to Summer and Winter Olympics, as interviewees have noted, were to a degree Janus-faced as lobbying mixed with learning (although the learning ‘face’ was certainly smaller than the lobbying ‘face’!). Although much time was spent in hotel lobbies seeking ‘chance encounters’ with IOC members (S. Ward, 2007), Manchester officials attended the Observer Programmes at most of these events. Run by the local Organising Committees, the Observer Programmes offered the chance for hosts-in-waiting and bidding committee officials to see close-up the ‘behind-the-scenes’ working of the Games and opportunities to liaise with the host officials. Being there, networking, socialising provided opportunities to learn and reflect:

“It’s the things that people don’t put into the reports, on the Internet, those insights into what they have done either in getting the Games, winning the bids, or regenerating the city, which they will tell you over a glass of lager in a bar at 11 o’clock at night” (ex-public sector member of the Olympic Game bid committees, interview, December 2009)

A learning-focused visit in 1988 made by Scott to Lillehammer, a town of 25,000 inhabitants in Southern Norway, which had just won the bidding for the 1994 Winter Olympics, seemed to leave a big impression on Bob Scott. In Scott’s words, the trip *confirmed* to him –

rather than *taught* him – the tactics through which to win the IOC vote. It also confirmed to him that the IOC can vote for ‘less-global’ cities (such as Manchester):

“The first thing I did when I got back to Manchester [from the Seoul 1988 Olympics] was to call the people from Lillehammer and make an appointment to talk to them. I spent two days there. I’m the only city that did that. That’s amazing to me. They confirmed some things for me: Timing is critical. And if you peak too soon or too late – if IOC members visit so early they forget you or so late they have already made up their minds – you’re dead.” (Quoted in Johnson, 1990, p. 18)

Summarising an interview with Scott, Christopher Hill (1992, p. 112) also noted the impression that the Lillehammer visit had made:

“Scott was much encouraged by a visit [to Lillehammer]... It was two and a half hours from the nearest airport; it had fewer inhabitants than there were members of the Olympic ‘family’, and on the day before the vote experts had considered it a rank outsider. However, Lillehammer’s lobbying strategy fitted very well with that being developed by Manchester: their team had confirmed that it was necessary to have a different marketing message for each IOC member and that the main objective must be to gain their trust and friendship, and they were convinced that the bidding team must be very small to avoid confusing the members.”

Learning from elsewhere, therefore, was not only about the *content* of the bid, but also its *presentation*. The Lillehammer-come-Manchester lobbying strategies did not prove effective for Manchester and after losing the Olympic bid at the third attempt in Monte Carlo in 1993, it was



quickly decided that Manchester would concentrate on bidding for the 2002 Commonwealth Games. It was felt that with consecutively low IOC voting numbers, another Olympic bid would be ineffective. Nonetheless, in the words of Bob Scott, Manchester needed to “continue to ‘think big’” (quoted in Rodda, 1993, p. 11). Although seen as less prestigious, a Commonwealth Games bid would utilise the built-up bidding expertise, and rekindle hopes of regeneration through the hosting of a mega-event. Echoing the 2000 Olympic bid, a (reduced-sized) stadium and indoor arena in East Manchester, an Olympic-sized swimming pool and a Games Village in the City Centre were the main construction works planned. A number of pre-existing arena and sporting venues across Greater Manchester would be utilised. The Games Village – which would be converted into student accommodation post-Games – was ultimately never constructed with existing university accommodation temporarily used as the Games Village instead.

Instead of the BOA and IOC, Manchester would have to convince the Commonwealth Games Council for England (CGCE) and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) of its worth. Competition was less intense than during the three Olympic bids with much less ‘globetrotting’ conducting during the bidding stages. Manchester beat London by 17 votes to 7 at a meeting with the CGCE in February 1994 to become the English candidate city, but was the sole candidate for the CGF vote. Following an evaluation visit to Manchester by CGF members in July 1995, Manchester was awarded the 2002 Games in November 1995. Despite the lack of competitors, trips were conducted to various CFG meetings and events that CFG members attended including the Victoria Commonwealth Games (1994) which all CGF members attended and where, once again, lobbying took precedent. These visits were seen as necessary as Manchester officials still needed to convince the CFG that it was a worthy host and they were aware that new candidate cities could appear at almost any time.

After Manchester was awarded the 2002 Games, Bob Scott stepped down as chair of the committee with Robert Hough, the chairman of Manchester Ship Canal, replacing him. Learning from elsewhere would become a key part of the preparations for the Games. For the organisers, this was necessary due to their lack of first-hand experience planning *post-bid* a major multi-sports event and the limited guidance offered by the CFG. It also stemmed from a belief that it was unwise to ‘reinvent the wheel’. Once again, they sought out (and were regularly offered) the services of professionals with experience of working on multi-sports events and a number were employed in-house or as consultants. One interviewee noted that Manchester sought to take advantage of the emergent specialist and highly-mobile labour market, or “caravan of consultants” as he put it, which “goes around the world... from one sporting event to another” (ex-private sector member, Manchester Commonwealth Games Ltd, interview, November 2009). In addition they visited more places and people hosting major multi-sports events. Large delegations from Manchester visited the Atlanta Olympic Games (1996), Sydney Olympics (2000), Edmonton Youth Championships (2001) and made several trips to Kuala Lumpur before and during the 1998 Commonwealth Games.

With the voting finished and lobbying no longer required, the composition of the delegations changed with newly employed ‘operational’ staff replacing the celebrity ambassadors who frequented the visits made by the Olympic bidding team. At these events, they would focus on the specificities of how to implement a well-organised Games focusing on seemingly all aspects of Games operations most noticeably transportation, security, accommodation, sponsorship, the volunteer schemes, ticketing, merchandise, catering, ceremonies, media, and wider city cultural events. At the Sydney Games, a number of Manchester delegates took the role of volunteer workers to gain ‘hands on’ experience of staging the Games (Manchester Commonwealth Games Ltd., 2000).

Lengthy and finely detailed reports were written after the trips to Kuala Lumpur and Sydney focusing on the positive and the negative aspects, and the “lessons for M2002”. Unlike the generally upbeat Sydney report, the Kuala Lumpur report was extremely critical about numerous aspects of its running, notably the lack of training and poor treatment of the volunteers, something that should be repeated in Manchester (Manchester Commonwealth Games Ltd., 1998). The “lessons for M2002” in both went from very specific issues such as the location of sponsorship advertising inside and outside of the venues to more overarching, more abstract lessons. The Sydney report, for instance, demanded that: “Delivering a technically proficient sporting event in itself is not enough, we must create a sense of theatre, of occasion” and detailed how this must be achieved, *a la* Sydney: “We need to dress the City, we need banner banners and effective signage, we need to have information about the Games readily available in a variety of media, we need live, non-sport events to complement our programme” (Manchester Commonwealth Games Ltd., 2000, p. 5).

Manchester would also take advantage of the wider moves by the IOC and the CGF to develop more formal structures to facilitate ‘knowledge transfer’ between Games as part of wider concerns that ‘good practices’ were not always being drawn upon by subsequent Games organisers. Following the Sydney Olympics the IOC paid the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games to write one hundred best practice ‘manuals’ on how to and how not to stage the Games, documents which would circulate internationally as well as in the offices of Manchester Commonwealth Games Ltd (Lehmann, 2000). The IOC’s knowledge transfer programme has expanded since 2000 and now involved the publication of best practice guides; the organising of seminars featuring keynote speakers from previous Games and the IOC; and, from Athens 2004 onwards, centrally orchestrated Observer Programmes and Secondment Programmes at each Games. The CGF would also develop a similar knowledge transfer system,

its centrepiece being a Commonwealth Games Observer Programme, the first of which took place at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

#### **4. Other cities learn from Manchester**

Manchester's Observer Programme commenced during the week before the Games. Fourteen groups in the process of bidding for, or planning, major sporting events attended the Programme (Johnson, 1990). The participants included officials due to host the Athens Olympics (2004), the following Commonwealth Games in Melbourne (2006), and the Abuja All African Games (2003). Also present were officials representing New Delhi, Singapore, and Hamilton, Halifax and Montreal in Canada all with a view to bidding for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, as well as a South African delegation bidding to host the 2010 World Cup. The Observer Programme involved visits to all the sporting, media and accommodation sites used during the Games. It also involved two seminar days featuring presentations and question and answer sessions with all of the senior organising officials, as well as social functions to 'network' with the Manchester officials, CFG officials and other participants. The participants were then free to watch the Games the following week.

For the local organisers and the CFG, the Observer Programme overcame the logistical and organisational problems caused by hosting several important groups, who wanted to see broadly similar sights and ask broadly similar questions. It also offered the hosts a chance to showcase their plans and facilities as the Commonwealth Games were about promoting Manchester to the world. What is more, the visitors were not viewed as competitors *per se* as there were no plans for a 'mega-event' to be held in Manchester in the foreseeable future. And, of course, the Observer Programme also provided a good networking space for those working

on the Manchester team to meet potential future employers working on major sporting events elsewhere.

For those officials seeking to host the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the Observer Programme was seen as a potentially valuable conduit through which to lobby and learn. One member of the Hamilton delegation reasoned that “it really is a starting point to learn and spread the word that your city is serious on bidding and hosting the Games” (interview, October 2009). Furthermore, he argued that it offered an invaluable opportunity to speak to people who knew how to bid for and organise a Commonwealth Games, providing advice on “potential landmines and co-ordination issues” and offering “a road map to organise your Games”. For those visiting Manchester who were in the process of planning stages of organising a major sporting event – and echoing Manchester’s post-1996 study tours – it was viewed as a good opportunity to learn about the more intricate and mundane ways in which a sporting event could be run, how the wider regeneration and boosterist city programmes could be rolled out, and how the two could be integrated (Melbourne City Council, 2002). Such specificities, it was argued, could not be gleaned from the broad-brush media coverage of the Games (interview, ex-councillor, Melbourne City Council, October 2009).

While the closing ceremony took place on 4 August 2002, the study visits to the Commonwealth Games facilities and to East Manchester more widely did not finish there. Numerous planning, architecture, housing and regeneration themed study tours have focused on East Manchester. This comes at a time when Manchester – and East Manchester in particular – has become a ‘mecca’ for planning and regeneration study tours fuelled by its internationalising reputation for ‘best practice’ regeneration (Peck and Ward, 2002; Williams, 2003). Such tours have been organised by professional organisations in the UK (such as the Royal Town Planning Institute and BURA) and abroad for whom study tours have been a long-standing method of professional learning. Individual professionals and organisations from the UK and abroad (such

as Hamburg City Council) have also arranged to visit East Manchester to see the regeneration schemes first-hand. The tours have often involved walking tours and presentations by officials from the council, university and New East Manchester Company (the Urban Regeneration Company) whose well-rehearsed “protocols and packaged procedures... [are] efficient for the hosts and also edifying and enjoyable for the guests” (McCann, forthcoming a, p. 22). The focus here is not on the practicalities of bidding for and planning a multi-sports event, but regenerating a deprived inner city community.

Bidders and planners of major sporting events have continued to visit Manchester post 2002 to look, listen and learn. Several officials from Hamilton have revisited Manchester after the Games (Kernaghan, 2003, 2009). The rationale behind these trips stressed the ‘common problems, common solutions’ of the two cities whereby both have sought to combat industrial decline through Games-led regeneration, a strategy that Hamilton has continued to seek through bidding (unsuccessfully) for the 2014 Commonwealth Games and bidding, together with Toronto, for the 2015 Pan American Games. The city was also assisted by developing friendships between officials in the two cities (interview, official, City of Hamilton, October 2009). A small number of visitors involved in the preparations for the London 2012 Olympics have also visited Manchester including a team from the Greater London Assembly seeking to learn how small businesses could benefit from the London 2012 Olympics (Greater London Assembly, 2006). In addition, the South African Portfolio Committee on Transport who, with legislation to construct municipal transport authorities passed in early 2008 and the 2010 Football World Cup looming, visited in 2008 to consider how metropolitan transport authorities could ease transportation problems during major sporting events (Portfolio Committee on Transport, 2008). And finally, officials from the forthcoming Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games have visited Manchester in summer 2009 following political and media criticism over their varied ‘exotic’ study tours that until that point had not included Manchester. Scottish

Ministers and Games officials visited London, Vancouver (2010 Winter Olympics hosts), the Commonwealth Youth Games in Pune, a Rugby Sevens tournament in Dubai, and Barcelona where the Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond pronounced that “[t]here’s probably no better place on earth to look to for inspiration than Barcelona, where the 1992 Olympics transformed the city into the vibrant and successful place it is today” (quoted in Dinwoodie, 2008, p. 3). A point to which Frank McAveerty, a Labour Member of the Scottish Parliament, responded:

“The SNP [Scottish National Party] cabinet seem to be running their own Harlem Globetrotters. But sometimes the nearest place is the most sensible one. Manchester and Glasgow have much in common – and the east end of Manchester is benefiting in the way that we would expect the east end of Glasgow to benefit. There is a lot to learn and I am astonished that SNP ministers haven’t chosen to go there, instead of these more exotic locations.” (Quoted in Gardham, 2009, p. 9)

This reveals that learning from elsewhere is an inherently political and selective process, involving decisions about where to go, who to speak to, and where to cite. And as Stephen Ward (2008) has argued with reference to the models of waterfront redevelopment, the popularity of places as best practice models shifts across space and time. With the ever-growing list of subsequent multi-sports events elsewhere (not least the much-hyped and nearby London 2012 Olympics) and, of course, the expected long shadow of the current recession, it is likely that the use of Manchester as a source of Games inspiration will decline. It remains to be seen, however, whether Manchester will continue to be a source of inspiration and study tour destination for urban regeneration more widely and, if so, what lessons it will be seen to offer in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

According to Campbell (2008, p. 4) ‘the notion of learning... has been given too little attention in urban policy circles.’ We would concur. In light of this, the paper has argued that comparison and learning from other places is a key aspect of the New Urban Politics (Cox and Mair, 1988). City officials have sought to learn from other places in order to compare their own performance and to improve their competitiveness. The foundational work on entrepreneurial urbanism by Harvey (1989, p. 10) observed the “repetitive and serial reproduction of certain patterns of development”. His work and that by others at the time, such as Logan and Molotch (1987) and Stone (1989), successfully revealed the ways in which territorial alliances of different stripes formed to protect exchange values and to maintain the conditions for capital accumulation. What this body of work underplayed was the ways in which *urban* politics is both territorial and relational. Cities are parts of circuits, networks and webs in and through which they compare and learn. It is through these that the “serial reproduction” about which that Harvey (1989, p. 10) writes takes place, as cities as territories are constantly being assembled, disassembled and reassembled: fixity and motion *a la* Harvey (1973).

In light of these comments, this paper has sought to present a different sort of account of contemporary Manchester, a city about which much has been written in recent years. Drawing upon McCann (forthcoming b, p. 18), it has sought to demonstrate that in order to understand Manchester’s Olympic and Commonwealth Games projects, we must recognise how it is “constituted by the very real and very local concerns of [Manchester]... but it is also shaped by travels to, stories from, and relations among a range of other places. The city’s... policy and the politics that surround it are studded with these ‘parts of elsewhere’ and are, therefore, both territorial and global-relational assemblages”.



Two important points about the making mobile of urban policies can be drawn out of this paper. First, with regard to the *methods* of learning, it has shown that visiting other places is seen as a valuable learning technique. Being *there*, so to speak, has not been diminished by the growth in mediated information that is available over the internet. Gaining a ‘first-hand’ sensory understanding of how things actually look and work as well as a (potential) opportunity to meet the ‘experts’ and ask focused questions is still valued by those in the business of urban policy-making. Nonetheless, as the case of Manchester’s Olympic and Commonwealth Games projects have also shown, such visits are frequently used *in conjunction* with other methods of learning such as the employment of people with related experience elsewhere, the commissioning of ‘fact-finding’ reports, the reading of best practice guidance, media reports and broadcasts, and the attending of ‘how-to’ conferences and seminars (McFarlane 2009; McCann, 2010; Ward, 2006, 2007, 2010).

Second, this paper also expands upon geographical critiques of political science policy transfer studies which “tends to assume that policies are transferred from one place to another relatively intact while ignoring the modifications and struggles that occur along the way” (McCann, forthcoming b, p. 5; Peck and Theodore, 2001; Cook and Ward, 2010). In particular, it has strived to show that policy transfer does not necessarily involve a single, linear and literal policy movement from place A to place B but can involve places using a multitude of points of reference elsewhere in terms of what to do and what not to do. Those involved in the Games visits in and out of Manchester were not single-mindedly focusing on what is happening in one destination but were thinking about, reading about, visiting, discussing and comparing various places elsewhere. There are multiple points of comparison, multiple trans-urban networks of learning, both of which are constitutive of contemporary urban governance. This at the very least suggests a need to continue re-thinking territoriality *vis-à-vis* relationality in the New Urban Politics literature.

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**Figure 1: BOA and IOC voting for the 1992, 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games**

**1992 Olympic Games**

**BOA vote**, London, 12 July 1985

Birmingham 25 (votes); Manchester 5; London 2

**IOC vote**, Lausanne, 17 October 1986

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Barcelona (w)	29 (votes)	37	47
Paris	19	20	23
Brisbane	11	9	10
Belgrade	13	11	5
Birmingham	8	8	Eliminated
Amsterdam	5	Eliminated	-

**1996 Olympic Games**

**BOA vote**, London, 19 May 1988

Manchester 20; Birmingham 11

**IOC vote**, Tokyo, 18 September 1990

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Atlanta (w)	19	20	26	34	51
Athens	23	23	26	30	35
Toronto	14	17	18	22	Eliminated
Melbourne	12	21	16	Eliminated	-
Manchester	11	5	Eliminated	-	-
Belgrade	7	Eliminated	-	-	-

**2000 Olympic Games**

**BOA vote**, London, 24 April 1991

Manchester 28; London 5

**IOC vote**, Monte Carlo, 23 September 1993

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Sydney (w)	30	30	37	45
Beijing	32	37	40	43
Manchester	11	13	11	Eliminated
Berlin	9	9	Eliminated	-
Istanbul	7	Eliminated	-	-

Note: Within the IOC vote, each IOC member has one vote. A candidate city wins if they have an absolute majority of the votes. If no city has an absolute majority, a new voting round will take place with the lowest scoring city from the previous round eliminated. New rounds will continue until a majority winner occurs.

(w) = winner