

Sustainable Development, Shock and Awe? London 2012 and Civil Society

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ABSTRACT

There is a disconnect between the top-down, elite, nature of sports mega-events and the ostensible redistributive and participatory sustainable development agendas staked out by BINGOs (Business-based International Non-Governmental Organizations) such as the contemporary International Olympic Committee (IOC). Focusing specifically on the London 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, we argue that, for all the environmental technology advances offered by sports mega-events, their dominant model remains one of a hollowed out form of sustainable development. Despite significant technical and methodological innovations in environmental stewardship, the development model of the London Olympics remains predicated on the satisfaction of transnational investment flows. We discuss what this means for claims about the staging of a 'Green' Olympic Games.

KEYWORDS

civil society, mega-events, Olympic Games, sustainable development

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Mega-events planning is, according to Hiller, ‘top-down planning’, conceived by elites, running to fixed completion dates, in which the ‘idea of citizen participation is [...] primarily merely responding to a plan conceived by others’, relegated to the role of after-the-fact consultation (Hiller 2000, p.193). More widely, in their discussion of mega-projects, Flyvbjerg *et al* (2003, p.5) argue that civil society ‘does not have the same say in this arena of public life as it does in others; citizens are typically kept at a substantial distance from megaproject decision making’. In the case of the forthcoming London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (henceforth: the London Games), this appears to present something of a paradox, because though the vast physical infrastructure development of the Games is integrated within the long-term Thames Gateway urban regeneration ‘mega-project’ designed to address east London’s chronic housing needs, London’s winning pitch to host the Games was specifically based on the promotion of social diversity and community involvement; and because, in line with developing trends in both IOC and (latterly) FIFA sporting mega-events, London seeks to host the first ‘sustainable’ Games. In the words of David Higgins, CEO of the Olympic Development Authority, London 2012 will be ‘remembered not only as two weeks of fantastic sporting action, but also as the “Greenest Games” in modern times’ (London 2012, 2007).

As Mol and Zhang argue in forthcoming work on Beijing, Olympic Games can function as powerful ‘sustainability attractors’ for the diffusion of environmental technologies and technical norms; in their analysis, hosting the 2008 Olympics has accelerated environmental reform in Beijing, with the Games acting as dramatic time-space compressions of wider

dynamics in environmental policy (Mol & Zhang, 2011). Sports mega-events thus provide a platform for economic growth oriented approaches to environmental protection and amelioration, in a process cognisant with 'ecological modernisation' (Hajer 1996, Mol 2000, pp.48-50). In this scenario, the IOC (and also FIFA) function as regulatory authorities for the development and dissemination of environmental best practice and sustainable technologies, facilitating the creation and growth of new markets. One sense in which we should see mega-events therefore is through their capacity to act as powerful agents of technology transfer and technical norm diffusion, with a wide mimetic potential in both geographic and public policy sector terms, allied to a demonstration effect designed to encourage positive, individual lifestyle changes amongst civic populations.

But as Mol and Zhang also recognise, this premise is based on standards, regulations, and knowledge transfer, but does not address one of the fundamental aspects of sustainable development: the inclusion of civil societies in deliberative or participatory forms of decision-making. Though sustainable development is a notoriously plastic concept (see for example Dobson 1998, Mawhinney 2002, pp.1-24), most definitions emphasise the relationship between social organisation, economic development and resource preservation in at least some form; the IOC accordingly emphasises the importance of social equity and 'social and political development' alongside biodiversity, resource management, and economic growth (IOC 1999, p.17). In an autocratic regime such as China, it is perhaps unsurprising that the technical aspects of sustainability were privileged over the democratic and redistributive ones. But for the London Organising Committee (LOCOG), 'sustainability is fundamentally about people and how we live; it is not simply a technical discipline' (LOCOG 2009, p.9), promising to deliver environmental best practice (methodology,

technology, materials, systems) whilst becoming the first summer Olympics to ‘embed sustainability into our planning from the start’.

The apparent paradox is thus between the top-down, elite nature of mega-events and the sustainable development agenda promised by London 2012. In the light of this paradox – or what we will argue to be one of a number of the *systemic contradictions* of mega-events – we seek here to set out both conceptual and empirical clarification and analysis of London 2012, focusing on the symbolic operation of mega-events in late capitalist societies. In the first section, we address the peculiar time and space configurations of sports mega-events, which we argue operate on the same structure as the ‘shock and awe’ of disaster capitalism identified at the heart of neo-liberal political economy by Naomi Klein (Klein 2007). We then set out the sustainable agenda of London 2012, investigating the multiple meanings and appropriations of sustainable development in the context of the specific event. We then discuss civic inclusion in terms of the specific local land use problems raised by the Games, focusing on the questions of differential actor resources and of the exploitation of planning procedures in the Manor Gardens and Greenwich Park controversies in particular.

We argue that, for all the environmental technology advances offered by mega-events as global showcases, London 2012 offers only a hollowed out form of sustainable development. Despite significant technical and methodological innovations in environmental stewardship, the development model of the London Olympics remains predicated on the satisfaction of transnational investment flows, and civic actors, whilst providing social, cultural and economic Games *opportunities*, are – spatially and procedurally – excluded from the design and definition of *what these opportunities should be*.

I Space and Time, Shock and Awe

Sports mega-events are an active expression of a globalising neo-liberal political economy. One of their well-known features is that, for a limited period of time, they create restrictions on certain forms of movement, public (and commercial) expression, and other cultural, artistic and sporting projects. Indeed, critical studies of Olympic developments have typically focused on the displacement of settled populations and the disruption of accepted legal and social norms in order to ensure a beautified, redeveloped and efficient event space. Localised land ownership and use conflicts are an engrained (and seemingly endemic) chapter of the Olympic narrative, whose features are the mass eviction of (often poor or migrant) resident populations and the reform or de facto suspension of established planning procedures in the pre-event phase; the introduction of highly restrictive regulatory and legal instruments to ensure public compliance with the stipulations of local and global organisers during the event itself; and the continued displacement of the previously settled populations through infrastructural transformation and social gentrification in post-event phase. Geneva-based NGO COHRE has worked since Seoul (1988) on evictions, producing a series of critical reports (COHRE 2007, 2008), academic studies (Olds 1998, Greene 2003), and interventions with global institutional actors (Rolnik 2009); the non-respect of planning procedures has been highlighted in a series of studies (e.g. Hall 2001 on Sydney, Karamichas 2005 on Athens, Whitson 2011 on Vancouver); the securitisation and corporatisation of event space at successive Games, and the concomitant suspension of civil liberties, has similarly been highlighted (e.g. Tajima 2004 on Nagano, Cunneen 2000 on Sydney, Schimmel 2006 on Salt Lake, Klein 2008 on Beijing).

Between Beijing in 2008 and London in 2012 we have moved from CCTV (China Central Television) to cctv (closed-circuit television) and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to monitor peoples movement, as the tangible security risk sports mega-events pose leads to an accompanying array of novel security and surveillance measures (Boyle & Haggerty 2009). Restrictions on the use of certain phrases and words are required to avoid ambush marketing when IOC and organising committee (OCOG) rely so heavily on the sponsorship of global corporations. Whilst the Olympics is meant to be about much more than simply sport, the cultural activities associated with it tend to take second place, whilst other sporting events have to accommodate the event by changing their schedules.

In several ways, then, the staging or hosting of sports mega-events promotes neo-liberal forms of governance and the neo-liberalization of space (Peck & Tickell 2002), and thus has clear similarities with the ‘shock doctrine’ informing public policy in the wake of social, ‘natural’ and economic disasters (Klein 2007). Although the idea that capitalism advances on the back of disasters, or violent circumstances, is not a new one – Marx (1867/1973) wrote at length in *Capital* about the extra-economic coercion required to bring about primitive accumulation in the 18th century in Western Europe for example – Klein’s book is a valuable insight into recent history, arguing that the use of shock is a technique for imposing an ideology (what she calls the free market fundamentalist ideas underpinning neo-liberal economic thought and policy). The shock doctrine is also a philosophy of how political change can happen and be brought about; charting the rise of free market fundamentalism over the past 40 years reveals that when ideas are unpopular, advocates of free market neo-liberalism have exploited shocks to help push through their policies without popular democratic consent. The product is what Klein calls ‘disaster capitalism’ – a form of

capitalism that uses large-scale disasters in order to push through radical neoliberal capitalist policies and its related privatization agenda for (formerly) public services.

We want to suggest that sports mega-events can be viewed as the apparently benign twin of disaster capitalism's shock therapy, involving their own shocks and generating their own forms of awe. Substantial parts of cities and other areas designated for the events are disturbed for years by the construction projects, debt accumulation, restructuring and other disruptions of space and time. Indeed, despite the IOC's apparent wish under Jacques Rogge to move away from favouring gigantism in Games staging (see, for example, the recommendations of the 'good governance' Study Commission to the 2003 Prague IOC meeting, Pound 2003, p.23, p.35), recent decisions for summer Games hosting have consistently chosen the most expensive and extensive project on offer (Beijing, London, Rio de Janeiro), whilst overlooking relatively compact bids (Paris, and especially Madrid). We want to suggest that these decisions reveal a fundamental tension between the requirements of event staging and of legacy creation, between short-term demands and the impact necessary for transformative cultural change and infrastructural development. Affected urban areas accordingly face the imposition of temporary extra-legal forms of governance, which then dissolve after the event leaving 'legacies' that have to be dealt with. In London, the ODA, charged with building the site and facilities, with the powers of an urban development corporation, can act as its own planning authority within the Olympic precinct area, whilst LOCOG is a private company established to run the events until they finish in September 2012. Sports mega-events promote the use of vast amounts of public money for private gain into a civic obligation (and therefore make it difficult to criticize without being portrayed as unpatriotic, or a 'naysayer'). With sports mega-events however the shock is largely not

perceived as trauma but as a festival and global media spectacular (Gaffney 2010). Winning a bid to host a mega-event, putting the fantasy financial figures of a bid document into operation, dealing with the proposed location before and dealing with it after the event has taken place, are just some of the moments where shock and awe is generated by sports mega-events.

II London 2012 and Sustainable Development

Since Sydney in 2000, claims from organising committees to have staged or to be about to stage the 'greenest' or 'most sustainable' Games ever have become familiar, as have, latterly, pledges to make Games 'low carbon' or 'climate neutral', whilst the IOC has (since the mid-1990s) developed substantial internal organisational and procedural capacity for maintaining this emphasis (IOC 2007, pp.1-2). London 2012 is thus no exception to the developing rule. Indeed, under its five headline themes (climate change, waste, biodiversity, inclusion, and healthy living), London 2012's sustainability agenda is designed to be transformative in four aspects. First, organisers are committed to making the Olympic Park a 'blueprint for sustainable living' (DCMS 2007, p.16), whilst Games preparation aims to establish and benchmark new environmental practices with transferrable applications for the Olympic movement and future sports events staging (mega or otherwise). Second, it aims to construct the most visible part of the much larger Thames Gateway project, a crucial and strategic development in the growth of the city to the east, in similar terms: as a design template for low carbon living, simultaneously responding to a series of social, economic and infrastructural problems which beset the five Olympic boroughs of Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. Third, it aims to inspire spectators and civic populations to volunteer, to give to the community, and to become healthier and fitter

(Girginov & Hills 2008), and to make a series of positive personal changes to maintain more environmentally efficient individual lifestyles. As LOCOG put it, the intention is to use the ‘power of the Games to influence change to encourage vast numbers of people to be aware about their carbon footprint and do something about it’ (quoted in London Assembly Environment Committee 2008, p.11). Finally, hosting a successful, sustainable Games is key to the government’s plan to make the UK, and the south-east in particular, into a beacon site in a globally competitive environmental technology sector. For LOCOG CEO Paul Deighton, ‘UK businesses involved with the Games therefore have a golden opportunity to showcase innovation and new sustainable services, products and technologies’ (quoted in DCMS 2006).

Beyond the rhetorical, visionary discourses of political authorities and Games delivery bodies, the main substantive commitments of the sustainability plan include for the ODA to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions (measured against 2006 Building Regulation standards) for Olympic construction projects, achieved through efficiencies in energy generation and distribution, and the decarbonisation of transport. At the micro level, LOCOG’s energy efficiencies include, in addition to the high-profile partnership with EDF Energy to develop a low carbon Olympic Torch and cauldron, a commitment that 20% of Games-time electricity be generated by new local renewable sources, and that the Olympic vehicle fleet set low emissions standards (London 2012 2009, pp.18-19). The ODA has a commitment to reclaim 90 per cent of material from Olympic Park demolition work for reuse and recycling; LOCOG has committed to a policy of zero-waste to landfill during Games-time (London 2012 2009, p.34). Just over two years ahead of the Games, organisers claim considerable success. There are, of course, important caveats: the commitment to generate energy from ‘local’ renewable sources plays relatively loosely with the definition of local,

taking London – and not the Olympic boroughs – as its base point; the reference to 2006 Building Regulations means that energy efficiencies would in fact be short of the zero carbon standard set for 2016; there is insufficient use of biomass (London Assembly Environment Committee 2008, pp. 13-14); the Olympic Park’s CCHP (combined cooling, heat and power) ‘Energy Centre’ is designed to work with biogas, but will run on natural gas during the Games, and meeting long-term targets will be dependent on the compliance of the contractor (CSL 2009, p.10). Nonetheless, London 2012 can already point to a series of achievements: 97 per cent of the material from demolition of the Olympic site was reclaimed for use in the construction of the Olympic Park (ODA 2009a, p.5); in November 2009, the ODA was achieving transportation to site of 60 per cent of construction materials (by weight) by rail or water transport; Olympic Park sports venues are designed to use at least 40 per cent less water than equivalent buildings, whilst the Aquatics Centre will recycle the water for cleaning the swimming pool filters to use in flushing toilets (ODA 2009a, p.7, ODA 2009b); non-HFC cooling systems will be used in the Energy and Aquatics Centres (London 2012 2009, p.21).

Moreover, the sustainability plan goes beyond technical standards and targets, and includes the development of a methodology for calculating the carbon cost of the Games. Sports mega-events do not just create a persuasive, mediatised space for knowledge transfer and environmental problem-solving; they also carry a carbon cost and create material environmental impacts. Organisers are clearly mindful of the reputational costs both of negative publicity and of environmental damage, and typically seek both to minimise environmental impacts and to negotiate them against carbon remediation and sequestration schemes such as offsetting; since the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, OCOGs have

used some form of carbon offsetting scheme to mitigate carbon emissions, whilst a parallel, if more limited version of this process has been visible in FIFA World Cup Finals. Yet the methodology of such 'carbon-neutral' schemes has tended only to address the most superficial of carbon expenditures. The German 2006 Green Goal campaign only included event-time emissions within Germany itself; the Turin Winter Games's HECTOR methodology included event emissions from transport, waste management, accommodation and sports facilities; Vancouver 2010's much heralded offsetting scheme covered only the 'direct' emissions of Games staging such as athlete travel, venue construction and facility heating; the South Africa Green Goal 2010 methodology includes the international air travel of participants and spectators, but only calculates the embodied carbon of stadium materials and construction (and not of other infrastructures constructed for the Finals), and then only as allocated to 'event time', with responsibility for mitigation deferred to future generations.

In contrast, London 2012 has not set a 'carbon-neutral' goal, has abandoned the highly contentious practice of offsetting, and has developed a carbon footprint methodology calculating emissions 'when they happen', producing a reference footprint from the point of the bid win to the closing Games ceremony, assuming development as set out in the bid dossier. Unsurprisingly, this reference footprint, at 3.4 million tonnes CO₂e (or around 0.5% of annual UK emissions), dwarfs those calculated for previous Winter Games or WC Finals, which have typically oscillated around the 100kt CO₂e mark (excluding Beijing); unsurprisingly also, especially given the extent of infrastructure development for the London Games, more than half the reference footprint is produced by infrastructure and venue construction in the Olympic Park (CSL 2009, p.17, London 2012 2009, pp.17-20, p. 101). In

contrast, BOCOG calculated a carbon footprint of 1.2 million tonnes CO₂e for the Beijing Olympics, of which only 2% was ascribed to venue construction (UNEP 2009, pp. 103-7).

The advanced picture is thus one of a progressively robust methodology: the ‘bid to event’ calculation clearly provides advances on the methodology developed and applied for sports mega-events until now, not only in its comprehensive nature and scope, but also in its use of footprinting as a prospective impact assessment (thus enabling Games delivery decision-making) rather than as a simple post-event reporting tool. London 2012 estimates that, with avoidance and reduction measures, the total residual footprint it will ‘own’ will be reduced from 3.4 to 1.9 million tonnes CO₂e, achieved as a result of concerted effort to use existing venues (around 60%), low carbon technologies, renewable energies, and to reduce emissions wherever possible. Of course, none of this has been achieved by London 2012 alone. The footprint methodology is heavily reliant on the work of Best Foot Forward, a private consultancy company specialising in carbon accounting and sustainability. The Games’ initial aspirational sustainability framework, *Towards a One Planet Olympics*, was drawn up by the London 2012 Bid Company in collaboration with two environmental NGOs, the major transnational NGO WWF, and the lesser-known BioRegional, a small, non-membership, professionalised NGO. Post-bid, the framework was developed into a sustainability policy and subsequent plan, agreed by the Olympic Board, whilst the CSL, an independent monitoring and advisory body reporting directly to the Minister for the Olympics and the Mayor of London, was established for progress reporting.

In other words, the sustainable development strategy has relied for conception and delivery on what, in the language of project delivery, are known as public stakeholders: highly

professionalised NGOs with a culture of working with corporate actors on long-term projects. For both NGOs and mega-event organisers, the potential benefits of such integration are clear: NGOs provide scientific expertise which may generate constructive solutions to difficult design and implementation problems, but they also have the capacity to confer moral authority through their ideational systems, and democratic legitimacy through their popular representativity, especially where they are membership based (see Uhlin 2009, p.7). Because of these attributes, environmental NGOs are thus increasingly regarded as key stakeholders toward the initiation and implementation of environmental programmes in sports mega-event planning (though we must differentiate between regime types and specific local contexts whilst making such broad assertions). Since Sydney, national and transnational environmental NGOs (such as WWF and Greenpeace) in particular have been able to use their strategic advantages to raise expectations and persuade event organisers and corporate sponsors to adopt new technologies and materials (for example over the use of PVC in construction, or the climate change effects of HFCs in cooling systems).

III Conflict over Urban Space

Olympic developments do not just have immaterial impacts: they also have direct, material, spatial impacts as sites are identified for staging and redevelopment. In the past few Olympic cities, Olympic villages have characteristically been situated in highly diverse or working class neighbourhoods with mostly low income occupancy, as host cities have chosen places and communities which have been somewhat marginalised from the mainstream or centre of city life. They are either physically or socially peripheral and more usually both. Despite the language of emptiness and dereliction that occupies the planning rhetoric for the Games, there have in fact been people living in, working in and using these 'brownfield', 'empty' or

'run down' sites, who have suffered displacement as a result. In these cases displacement is direct (COHRE 2007). The development of the London 2012 Olympic Park has revealed similar displacements, if on a relatively small scale: up to 1,000 people were required to vacate the Olympic Park site, 425 from residential dwellings (the Clays Lane Housing Cooperative), a traveller community, and allotment holders on the Manor Gardens site in Hackney Wick. Many residents were re-housed satisfactorily: the key problems however were that those who were moved were split up, resulting in the dispersal of a local community, and that they then went to the top of local authority housing lists, with the result others may have had to wait longer to be re-housed or were placed in housing of less suitable stock (Smith 2008, p.54).

This does not however mean that land use conflicts caused directly by London 2012 event urbanisation have been insignificant. NOGOE (No to Greenwich Olympic Equestrian Events), a local community action group, has since mid-2008 contested LOCOG's planning application with Greenwich Council (approved in March 2010) to stage the equestrian and modern pentathlon events on Greenwich Park in south London. For NOGOE, siting these events in Greenwich Park (within the Greenwich Maritime World Heritage Site) would bring major social, archaeological, and environmental costs, leave no urban legacy (a temporary 23,000 capacity arena would be constructed), and is perverse when compared to the capacity of, for example, Windsor Great Park to host the event (NOGOE 2010). Within the Olympic Park, the key (though not only) issue has been the fight to save the Manor Gardens Allotments.

The allotments were established at the start of the twentieth century by one Major Arthur Villiers, as part of his Eton Manor estate. A social philanthropist, Villiers organised boys' clubs for deprived children; the plots were to be bequeathed in perpetuity for use by local working class families. London's bid directly threatened the site; after a brief hiatus in summer 2005, the eighty ploholders learned that they were to be evicted to make way for a concourse between Games venues. Two years later, the ploholders were evicted, but not before attracting widespread publicity, submitting a Downing Street e-petition (to 'Incorporate rather than demolish' the site within the Park) with nearly eight thousand signatures, obtaining a judicial review in the High Court, forcing the London Development Authority to delay their eviction by six months (busing ploholders through security) and to identify, construct and move them to a new site in Waltham Forest (despite public opposition and an initial planning application defeat over the enclosure of public land), and to promise a return to the initial location two years after the Games. As one commentator, Lise Autogena, has observed, the situation is ironic:

in the midst of an area in need of regeneration, this is a sustainable land use which could feed into growing, learning and sharing food and culture, and which contributes to education, mental health, and sustainable land management [... its] very existence seems so entirely consistent with the philosophies of a green Olympic Legacy Park, which itself aims to deliver on environment, biodiversity and sustainable communities (quoted in Beunderman, n/d).

Indeed, it is striking how both campaigns – MGS and NOGOE – have consistently underlined the Olympic planning proposal as 'inauthentic': for the latter, equestrian events should not be

sited in Greenwich Park not just because of potential acid grassland erosion and the small size of the site, but because there is no tradition of equestrianism in the Borough, and because LOCOG is simply seeking a symbolic image of 'heritage' for communicational purposes; for the former, the ODA is evicting a vibrant, diverse, rooted community in order to replace it with a sterile, landscaped park and an ersatz projection of social cohesion (LOCOG's volunteering and 'diversity' agendas). Emphasising the historical spatial legitimacy of the site, the social and cultural integration of the ploholders, and the quality of the food grown, the MGS campaign in particular thus connects with wider contemporary cultural resonances in western publics over the importance of ethical and sustainable food consumption in an era of globalised industrial food production, often articulated in terms of locality and authenticity (DuPuis & Goodman 2005, Patel 2007, Goodman 2009).

Yet what these cases tell us about the nature of Olympic sustainability is arguably less to do with the land use itself and more to do with decisional process. We can even at this pre-event stage point to the importance of differential resources in such disputes, the absence of inclusive decision-making procedures, the importance of event time as a driver for the imposition of a resolution, and the emphasis on event communicational strategies over existing community organisation and culture. Of course, the importance of political resources to effective mobilisation is extensively covered in the social movement literature. But what is perhaps more interesting here is what the campaign tells us about the nature of resources deployed on each side (the allotment holders on the one hand, the London Development Authority on the other), and thus of the procedural and ideological operations of the London 2012 Olympic enterprise.

Manor Gardens had little legal protection. Though the 1925 Allotments Act formally requires a ministerial decision for the sale of statutory allotment land, the status of Manor Gardens was unclear, and in any case, the 2006 London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act gives regional development agencies the power to over-ride any 'enactment regulating the use of commons, open spaces or allotments' in order to prepare for the Olympics (HMG 2006, p.26). But it is not just the disparity in legal status between developer and opponents that was obvious. It is striking here that campaigners lacked material resources – the MGS estimates that the campaign costs about £10,000 in total, over three years. Though the MGS has a website (www.lifeisland.org), this was essentially (save for a few of the more active and engaged allotment holders) outward facing: many of the allotment holders neither used nor wanted to use email, Internet or mobile phones. Organising a phone tree to mobilise MGS members was out of the question: indeed, many of the allotment holders came to the allotment precisely because it was a refuge against the encroachment of the electronic world into their lives. When architects and planners from the LDA eventually came to the site to present their alternative location plans, they were startled to find that they could not plug in their laptops and present their powerpoints. Conversely, Julie Sumner recalls that when members of the committee were invited to a meeting at the LDA headquarters in St Katherine's Dock, many practiced the trip beforehand (interviews with author). Geographically, it is a short trip; culturally, an enormous distance, and a source of anxiety for many MGS members. The gulf in financial resources is equally obvious: a Freedom of Information request lodged by 'Charlie', one of the most active and persistent campaigners throughout and after the site conflict, has revealed that the cost to the LDA of preparing and equipping the new site at Marsh Lane alone is in excess of £1.8 million.ⁱ

The resource gap is thus material and symbolic, and is also temporal. In his discussion of the ODA's planning application for the Olympic Park, Monbiot has highlighted the mass of documentation (over 10,000 pages of new applications), the insufficiency of the arrangements to make the material available for public consultation (website crashes, lack of hard copies, poor public notification), and the limited timeframe available for reading and understanding and formulating a response to the documents (a formal six weeks, but in practice much less) (Monbiot 2007). NOGOE's charges are similar: the November 2009 planning application for Greenwich Park contained 3000 pages of 'technical documentation';ⁱⁱ obtaining information from LOCOG was difficult because as a private company, it is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act (NOGOE 2009).

IV Sustainable Development in Context

Seghezzi argues that we should eschew trying to establish a single, universal definition of sustainable development, instead seeking to place our analysis and understanding of its meaning and operation within its own context; claims to sustainable development, he argues, are highly contingent and site-specific (Seghezzi 2009, p.552). Moreover, the IOC (which has adopted the broad definition of the Brundtland report) is not prescriptive; its definition is not necessarily that of the host organizing committee. A key question we should ask therefore is, if 'sustainability is fundamentally about people and how we live', *how* is it fundamentally about these things in the specific time and space of London 2012? What might it mean in terms of Olympic process as well as outcome? In other words, London 2012 raises the central question of the extent of active citizen co-production, of the form and extent of democratic participation in its definition, negotiation, and implementation. Indeed, though conceptions of ecological democracy have frequently focused on the collective negotiation of

environmental risk (see for example, Dryzek 1999, p.266, Eckersley 2004, p.111), the extent of civic transformation continually stressed in London's Games documentation and communication, from bid to event preparation, suggests at least theoretically that one of its central missions is the creation of an inclusive popular dynamic around environmental sustainability.

We should make two points here. The first is that the approach engendered by London 2012 to sustainable development is an essentially top-down approach, that its operational scope is very limited, and that the extent of civic engagement in its production has been extremely narrow. Even environmental NGOs, increasingly regarded as key stakeholders in the initiation and implementation of environmental programmes in sports mega-event planning, have been effectively replaced by a technocratic monitoring body. The CSL (which has the statutory advantage of being empowered to demand information from organising bodies) has taken the lead role post-bid in ensuring compliance with the sustainability agenda; it thus is able to a great extent to take over the traditional NGO advocacy and oversight role; accordingly, in the post-bid phase, WWF has tended to concentrate on liaising with corporate sponsors, whilst BioRegional remains engaged on built environment aspects of Games preparation, such as working with the contractors on the Olympic Park.

Whilst we would agree with the CSL that a 'sustainable Games is synonymous with a low carbon Games' (CSL 2009, p.13) and would recognise the considerable effort already placed by London 2012 into reducing its carbon footprint, we would also ask whether a sustainable Games is synonymous with *more* than a low carbon expenditure, about *more* than creating paradigm shifts in the construction, catering, and merchandising industries – such as whether

it involves the creation of new lateral civic solidarities, the critique of the organisation and function of social, economic and political systems, the reduction of social inequalities, or the attempt to find and develop innovative, deliberative or participatory democratic forms. The Games are designed to bring collective social benefits (themselves contentious), but it is also clear that whilst civic publics have been factored into the outputs and implementation strategies of Games decisions, they have rarely been factored into the definition of the Games or Games projects. The role of civic organisations and publics is one of implementation and support, not one of definition and decision. The lesson from London, as from other Games before it, is that sustainable development is conceptualised as ‘best practice’, ‘best available technology’, ‘green growth’ and so on; it is not a question of challenging the compatibility of economic growth with environmental remediation, nor of constituting environmental citizenship as democratic deliberation.

We are not necessarily suggesting new forms of democratic participation. Even in the terms of the existing planning processes, it is noticeable that though the ODA has been active in outreach, public meetings has evidently had little impact in project design and decision-making (as opposed to social inclusion in design and delivery); and that even where there have been concerted (if belated and reluctant) attempts by the ODA to resolve planning conflicts through dialogue, the imbalance in resources has been such that civic participation has been highly circumscribed. The Manor Gardens conflict is revelatory not simply because of the way that it reveals the ideological design of Games staging, but because of its revelation of the procedural assumptions that guide site identification and preparation. Here, London appears to be of a piece with previous experience; for Andranovich *et al* (2001; see also Burbank *et al* 2001), citizen participation and democratic accountability in decision-

making for the respective Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Salt Lake Games were notoriously absent.

The second point is to ask what a low carbon Games means in the context of the outputs of London 2012, or indeed in the shape of successive Summer Games. The London Olympics, originally costed at £2.4 billion, is now budgeted at over £9 billion of public funding, during a global economic crisis.ⁱⁱⁱ We should thus ask to what extent a six year scheme of construction for a four-week festival of sport can rightly lay claim to being ‘the most sustainable Games ever’? Indeed, members of concerned NGOs that we have talked to typically stress that the incoherence at the heart of the project – the staging of a single, short-lived, event requiring vast public works as a ‘sustainable Games’ – can (only) be justified in terms of its capacity to bring about social and cultural transformation. For the CSL, this lies chiefly in advances in methodology, materials and systems in construction, the plastics industry, and so on. Yet we are concerned at what this means for the definition of a politics of sustainable development, which might open up the possibility of a socially-inclusive environmental citizenship beyond the direct, time-pressured concerns of service and event delivery. Indeed, it seems to us symptomatic of the nature of social participation imagined by London 2012 that the recruitment and training of the 70,000 volunteers required for the staging of the Games is to be managed by McDonald’s; in other words, to be subsumed within the IOC’s corporate branding and sponsorship rights agenda, and run by a TNC synonymous with standardisation, top-down control, employee deskilling, job insecurity, environmental exploitation, de-unionisation, and poor nutritional quality. Despite London 2012’s emphasis on a ‘volunteering spirit [that] will spread wider than the Games themselves as we encourage everyone to give their time to help others’ (London 2012 2010), it is clear

that the emphasis here is not on cultural change, civic participation, or ‘healthy living’, but rather on market-driven service delivery, with the disbursement of public funds legitimised by the creation of social and ethnic representativity.

The criticality of delivery is problematic in further respects. Behavioural change is a key narrative of mega-events, extending well beyond London 2012; but there is little or no evidence that this has been achieved through major event programming, whilst reliable and comparable data collection from previous iterations and similar events is a key problem (see Collins *et al* 2009). Moreover, Karamichas (2011) has recently argued that the evidence of neither Sydney (widely praised as the ‘first Green Games’) nor Athens (widely derided for its poor environmental record) points to the existence of a positive causal correlation with institutional and cultural change towards environmental sustainability. Even if we accept the possibility of Games staging as a ‘cultural spike’ in the terms set out by the organisers, then this pre-supposes the existence of both a domestic and global event governance regime with the capacity and will to ensure that it is implemented. Yet, at the global level, the IOC (and, indeed, FIFA) steadfastly refuses to play such a role, devolving responsibility for methodology and standards to OCOGs. Public post-event compliance, reporting and monitoring is weak to non-existent.

But it is perhaps even more striking that, from a vantage point of two years prior to the London Games, this absence of long-term governance capacity is equally apparent at the domestic level. NGOs that we have talked to argue that the ‘ready on time’ culture of the Games has obscured the necessity of post-event transmission. On one level, there are few mechanisms for diffusion of processes or practices between mega-event iterations, beyond

the official IOC mechanism to share knowledge between host cities. There has to date been no active strategy of event learning, of diffusing the sustainability principles of London 2012 to future mega-events, such as on social inclusion and footprinting, and it is not in the remit of the CSL to present its data to the IOC. In the absence of institutional leadership 'legacy transition' becomes the responsibility of NGOs and government. But on another level, it is a question of an absence of consideration as to how the processes of cultural change are to be funded and brought about, about how civic populations are to be involved and included in changing existing cultural practices and defining new ones, other than by the top-down demonstration effect of event spectatorship. Again, the lack of a strategy is patent.

The concept of a 'sustainable Games' thus emerges as less a benign paradox than a systemic contradiction of advanced late-modern capitalist democracies. Blühdorn and Welsh have recently set out a provocative research agenda in environmental sociology, seeking clarification and analysis of the mechanisms through which such democracies 'try and manage to sustain what is known to be unsustainable' (2007, p.198). In our view, the Games is a fundamentally unsustainable event, and not simply because of the evident contrast between a decarbonisation agenda and the IOC's corporate partnership promotion of individual mobility and consumption-based lifestyles, and the massive infrastructural programme and associated high carbon expenditure seemingly required to stage the Games (if recent staging decisions – Beijing, London, Rio de Janeiro – are an accurate guide). This is fundamentally because the Games functions temporally to engineer a crisis of deliberative structures: the immutability of the deadlines, the stakes of the reputations, the primacy of delivery, and the scale of the watching audience engender a systemic violence to existing or potential participatory democratic structures, from planning processes to established civic

freedoms. The criticality of legacy creation demands large-scale transformative projects; the primacy of delivery renders civic deliberation impossible. Shock and awe indeed.

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Endnotes

ⁱ London Development Agency, letter of 10 March 2008 in response to FoI request of 11 February 2008.

ⁱⁱ Collective email communication, 13 December 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Not including other infrastructural costs that put the total spend in Stratford at closer to £20 billion.