

The Urban Unbound: London's Politics and the 2012 Olympic Games

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Abstract

Global events such as London's 2012 Olympic Games raise questions about the ways in which embedded political arrangements take their shape from relationships that stretch across and beyond urban boundaries. In this article, the urban politics that we wish to capture is not one that is merely located in the city, but rather one that has to constantly take into account the mediated demands folded (as it were) into the urban arena. In the first part of the article, the corporate politics of an Olympic-related urban regeneration are outlined and then considered, first as a staged setting for interaction, a kind of placeless political engagement, and then as a more embedded spatial politics that takes into account the leverage of networked groups acting within and beyond the city. Following that, we explore the politics of regeneration when campaign groups and alternative coalitions of interest raise their own political demands by drawing on references outside of their immediate urban area and attempt to steer political dialogue in ways that extend the reach of urban politics. The urban politics at stake in this context, we argue, appears to work more through topology than a series of mapped connections; through actors registering their presence in ways that often dissolve the tension between inside and outside rather than define it in terms of separate political spaces.

Introduction

Since at least the time of Aristotle, the ‘city’ has been identified as the space of politics, a setting within which citizens are made and citizenship constituted. Indeed for some it is precisely this that defines the city — as an imagined set of political relations. Warren Magnusson (1996: 304) explicitly develops this understanding to identify what he calls ‘the “hyperspace” of politics’ or ‘the “global city” in which all of us live’, while Engin Isin (2002: 283) interprets the city as a ‘difference machine . . . that space which is constituted by the dialogical encounter of groups formed and generated immanently in the process of taking up positions, orienting themselves for and against each other, inventing and assembling strategies and technologies, mobilizing various forms of capital, and making claims to that space that is objectified as “the city” ’.

Within the broad urban studies tradition, by contrast, the analysis of urban politics starts from cities as they are, from the urban, setting out to understand and explain the nature of the political relations that are associated with the urban experience, rather than being defined through some pre-given set of administrative boundaries. This approach has generated a rich set of theoretically informed discussion, focused on the urban or urbanization as the material base of a particular politics. So, for example, David Harvey (1989a; 1989b) has identified structured coherence as the frame for urban politics and pointed to a shift from managerialist to entrepreneurial governance, Kevin Cox (1998; 2001) and others (Cox and Mair, 1989) have focused on issues of locality, local dependence, scale and the local politics of territoriality, Harvey Molotch (1976) and

others (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Jonas and Wilson, 1999) have highlighted the significance of what they have called the urban growth machine, and Clarence Stone (1993; 1995) and a host of followers (see e.g. Cochrane, 1999) have sought to capture the complexities of political negotiation through the concept of urban regimes. The 'new urban politics', whose legacy is helpfully explored by Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones (2011), falls squarely within this tradition.

From the former perspective, the city is defined by sets of political practices — the city is an imagined space constructed out of the interaction and negotiation associated with those practices. For the latter, politics is seen to emerge out of the detailed practices of urban living, which are themselves the product of an explicitly urban experience. For one, the space of politics defines the city, for the other it is the city as it is experienced that defines the space of politics (some of these tensions are explored in a rather different context by Barnett *et al.*, 2009).

In both cases, the permeability of city boundaries (i.e. the range of economic and social activities stretching across urban borders) is now more or less taken for granted. That tight territorial boundaries are rarely what they seem, however, has not diminished their significance as meaningful political entities through which institutional actors — from councils to mayors, chief executives to social workers, town planners to local community associations — define their day-to-day political practice. The spatial integrity that a fixed territorial dimension offers — that borders enclose, divide and exclude — sits uneasily, however, alongside the fact that the bounded spaces of the city are not at all what they appear to be. There is a nagging excess to the urban, where the political relations that construct the city as an urban political arena exceed the boundaries drawn. There is, in other words, a tension between the city understood as a political arena or figuration and the city as a bounded political space. Nowhere is this tension more evident than when it comes to accounting for how global events such as London's 2012 Olympic Games can be understood in an urban political context.

In the next part of the article, we explore some of the tensions that flow from London's 2012 Olympics, a global event explicitly identified with a particular city, yet widely understood to emanate from the demands of major corporate actors (seemingly with little relationship to the place). The politics of Olympic-related urban regeneration are outlined and considered, both as a staged setting for interaction — as a kind of placeless political engagement — and also as a more embedded set of spatial practices that reflect the leverage of networked groups and interests acting within and beyond the city. Following that, we explore further the politics of regeneration when local groups, rather than external actors, raise their own political demands by drawing on references outside of their immediate urban area and attempt to steer political dialogue in ways that extend the reach of urban politics. The urban politics at stake in this context, we argue, appears to work topologically through actors registering their presence in ways that often dissolve the tension between inside and outside, rather than defining it in terms of separate political spaces.

In what follows, our concern is not directly with the Olympics as sporting spectacle (see e.g. Perryman, 2012 for a critique and an attempt to offer an alternative vision), nor the way that London was (unproblematically) projected as a place of cosmopolitan multiculturalism in Danny Boyle's opening ceremony. Instead, more prosaically, the focus will be on the claims that have been made for the Olympics as a driver of regeneration. The purpose here is not to assess the extent to which the rhetorical claims of the boosters can be translated into reality, but rather to reflect in broad terms on the urban politics that is at stake.

London's global event: the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

The literature on the politics of mega-events and their significance for the settings in which they take place tends to emphasize the power of global neoliberalism. In that context the Olympics is identified as the ultimate free-floating festival of global

capitalism, defined by its links to globalized cultural and business visions, with little serious connection to or interaction with the locations in which it takes place, except perhaps in terms of the damage it does to local communities and local environments (see e.g. Roche, 2000; Greene, 2003; Shaw, 2008; Lenskyj, 2009). As Phil Cohen and Mike Rustin (2008: 296) put it: 'the Olympics is in reality a global festival on its neverending tour, rather than by any means a local or even a national event set on an international stage'. And, of course, the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2011: 10) helps to generate its own version of the same story, making grandiose claims to a universal philosophy of 'Olympism' and (remarkably) suggesting that 'The Olympic Movement is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the IOC, of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism' (for a more critical engagement, see Shaw, 2008: 57–66).

But, from the start, the London Olympics bid was explicitly justified in terms that stressed the potential for delivering a major programme of regeneration in an East London area of industrial wasteland with high levels of social deprivation (Poynter, 2009b).

'All development', it was said, 'would form part of an enormous and tangible legacy, ranging from sport and venues through to infrastructure and environment. [The Games] would form part of the most extensive transformation of the city for generations. And its legacy would transform one of the most underdeveloped areas of the country for generations to come . . . thousands of jobs would be created in construction, thousands more as the redevelopment moved ahead and created new businesses and communities' (London 2012, 2004 quoted in Vigor *et al.*, 2004a: 12). The broad ambition stated by the London boroughs most closely associated with the Games was to ensure that 'Within 20 years the communities who host the 2012 Games will have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours across London' (Barking and Dagenham *et al.*, 2011).

This remained a key aspect of the process as the sporting spectacle drew nearer. In November 2008 Sir John Armitt (chair of the Olympic Delivery Agency) spoke to a conference sponsored by London First (a business-based organization whose members include most of London's major employers) and confidently stated that 'London 2012 truly will be remembered as the "Regeneration Games" due to the scale of change that is being delivered' (Spillane, 2012).

Regeneration is, of course, a troubled and troubling concept. It promises a process whereby run-down areas of cities can be brought back into (profitably) productive use while simultaneously benefitting the usually economically disadvantaged who live there. But the tensions between these two implicit and sometimes explicit promises are often all too apparent, as the remaking of places also turns out to require the remaking or displacement of people who no longer fit (see e.g. Cochrane, 2007; Hatherley, 2010; Minton, 2012). One of the challenges for those driving regeneration is to find a means of forging a coalition capable of overriding the objections of those being displaced while generating the financial and institutional resources necessary to underpin the development. In this context, an Olympics bid can be seen to deliver on all sides, as enthusiasm overrides the objections and plans are framed to meet the apparently irresistible needs of Olympic development. Even an unsuccessful Olympic bid can be successful in delivering this — see e.g. Alberts (2009) on the legacy of Berlin's unsuccessful bid and Moses (2011) on the way that New York's unsuccessful bid was used as a platform on which to deliver classic forms of property-led regeneration.

As well as looking at previous Olympics, London's plans for regeneration explicitly sought to draw on the US experience while building on already existing development partnerships across the public and private sectors. This was reflected in some of the appointments made to key posts in the first phase of the process (to mid-2012). So, for example, Andrew Altman was appointed in 2009 to head the company responsible for delivering the legacy around the Olympic site in Stratford (the Olympic Park Legacy Company, now relabelled the London Legacy Development Corporation). His experience of large-scale regeneration, drawing in public and private sector interests,

comes from the US (where he had been deputy mayor for planning and economic development and director of commerce in Philadelphia prior to his appointment).

The earlier signature project on which his reputation was built is the Anacostia River waterfront regeneration project in Washington, on which he was director. The expectation was that this experience would transfer directly to East London. His anointment as one of the global urban regeneration elite was confirmed by Lord Richard Rogers, who acted as one of his referees. In his words, the Anacostia project, ‘which included the planning of a new stadium and arts centre, was nationally heralded by the American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association and the American Society of Landscape Architects as one of the most innovative urban redevelopment initiatives in the United States. The Anacostia Waterfront has similarities with the Olympic Park site having been dominated by industrial sites and suffering from a history of deprivation’ (LDA, 2009).

David Higgins’ route to his appointment as chief executive of the Olympic Delivery Authority in 2005 included a lengthy period as chief executive of Lend Lease, an Australia-based (but globally active) property development company responsible for the development of Sydney’s Olympic Park (as well as for Bluewater Shopping Centre, and more recently — although Higgins was no longer involved with Lend Lease by this stage — in large part for the Westfield Stratford City development, through which London’s Olympic Park is accessed). This may sound like a story of mobile professionals criss-crossing the globe, but it is also a story of the interpenetration of state and corporate interests, as Higgins (knighted in 2011) has seamlessly moved between sectors as well as countries — in 2003 he came to England to act as chief executive of English Partnerships (then the property development arm of government) before moving across to the ODA, and in 2011 he moved once more to become chief executive of the determinedly hybrid quasi-marketized Network Rail, whose interests in property development are increasingly significant (see e.g. Sheeres Davies Gleave, 2011).

Dennis Hone, who succeeded Higgins as chief executive of the ODA, may have had a less obviously global track record, but is linked into the strand of state-sponsored property development (whereby public agencies have defined themselves through their connections with the property sector), having passed through the Commission for New Towns and English Partnerships. Meanwhile Sir John Armitt (chair of the ODA) was drawn from Network Rail (of which he was chief executive between 2002 and 2007) and also had links with major engineering and structural projects through Laing and Costain.

The legacy of the railway industry runs right through the Olympic development — much of the land passed to the privatized London and Continental Railways in 1992 and the area has been the subject of a series of proposals, linked to the projected (albeit until now rather elusive) development opportunities associated with the rail connections to the Channel Tunnel (with the promise of Stratford International as a hub). Following a series of commercial failures, London and Continental Railways (LCR) was renationalized in 2009, with a continuing commitment to the ‘regeneration’ of the area through property development (working with Lend Lease on Westfield Shopping City and, continuing the relationship with Lend Lease, promising the development of the International Quarter, Stratford City as ‘an exceptional new metropolitan environment’; TIQ, 2013). The ‘regeneration games’ have helped to ensure that the long-term development vision (the vision of developers and the state) could be realized (Minton, 2012: xv–xvii). Anna Minton (*ibid.*: xxxi) draws attention to the ‘private nature of Olympic regeneration, predicated on the hope of rising property prices and land sales’. In his own rather more poetic critique of the process, Iain Sinclair (2011) places the Olympic developments in a longer-term history of ‘grand projects’ proposed by planners and developers, state and corporate interests for the Lower Lea Valley.

This means, of course, that certain activities have been targeted for removal, while attempts have been made to attract new ones that fit better with the new image, to the extent that it has been argued that the Olympic authority was able to act as a political ‘hegemon’ (Fussey *et al.*, 2011: 226). Mike Raco and Emma Tunney (2010) note the way

in which the urban regeneration agenda pursued under the Olympic banner worked to define the East End as both a 'problem' area and an area of opportunity — currently a 'problem' area, to the extent that the business activities pursued within it are defined as low-grade, but (following regeneration) offering the potential to reflect and reinforce the features that make London such a successful global city. They suggest that the Olympics bid was organized around a vision of the area that identified it as so problematic that only an event on the scale of the Olympics could be expected to rescue it from the condition in which it found itself. Juliet Davis (2011) carefully tracks the way in which a rhetoric combining a negative vision of deprivation, existing functions and dilapidation with a positive vision of the Olympics and future development was put together to justify the compulsory purchase orders that were necessary to clear the site.

So the promoters of the Olympics argued that 'the full transformation' associated with the Games would create 'conditions to attract new housing, business development, tourism and inward investment which will place this part of London at the centre of the city's growth in the coming decades. This will benefit local people and attract new residents and businesses, and accelerate regeneration plans for a much wider area' (DCMS, 2008: 37). In that context, it becomes difficult for communities to resist proposals which affect them directly because the success of the Games is identified as the overriding priority, and the post-Games legacy is supposed to bring benefits for the wider area — so, for example, in the case of the Clays Lane housing estate, despite a public inquiry and some initial resistance, tenants were relocated and the estate was demolished in 2007 to create space for the athletes' village (Fussey *et al.*, 2011: 215–6).

The 'village' itself was bought by Qatari Diar (the real estate arm of the Qatari Investment Authority, Qatar's sovereign wealth fund) and Delancey Estates (a UK-based property development company) with a view to further development as a residential neighbourhood based around long-term private rental, rather than purchase or social housing (which is being delivered by another agency, Triathlon Homes). Although the scale may be different, the prospectus being offered by the London Legacy Development Corporation for the Olympic Park as a whole was familiar enough from similar global urban development opportunities — perhaps not explicitly drawing on the language of the 'new urbanism' but unable to avoid its echoes, as promises are made for urban villages alongside references to walkability and the longer histories of London's architecture, parks and public spaces, and even the 'vibrancy' of the new East End (London Legacy Development Corporation, 2012).

Circling around the Olympics, therefore, has been a whole set of mobile professionals seeking to sell a universally applicable model of success (Cochrane and Ward, 2012). From this perspective, the story of Britain's Olympics bid has been put together to identify heroes and villains, celebrating the skills and vision of the negotiators and reflecting on the role of the International Olympic Committee, as well as the ups and downs of the process through the eyes of the bidding team (see e.g. Lee, 2006, which presents itself as the 'inside story' of the bid). Although apparently a story of British and London success, this is also very clearly part of a globalizing narrative, in the sense that it outlines a selling process that is replicable for other countries and other cities.

In other words, the Olympics can be interpreted as a global mega-event with the potential to undermine any narratives of place capable of generating alternative political possibilities. But even when viewed through the regeneration prism the Olympics story turns out to be more complex, since it is reliant on the more prosaic and familiar political practices that draw developers and state agencies together in place to deliver their grandiose visions and grand projects. In other words, rather than simply being some free-floating (corporate) global festival of sport, the Olympics, as we go on to show, also have to be understood through a connected politics of development that locates them in place, and always has quite distinct and distinctive localized features.

But this begins to raise fundamental questions about the nature of the urban political arrangements that take their shape from relationships that stretch across and beyond London. How, then, is such an excess to the urban best characterized?

A generalized polis?

One way of conceptualizing such arrangements is to draw a distinction between on the one hand the actual material city, the messy political associations and practices organized around, yet grounded in, the city, and on the other hand its virtual counterpart. Engin Isin (2002; 2005; 2007) does this by distinguishing between the actual city as *urbs* and the virtual city as *civitas* — a set of political associations which amounts to more than the sum of bodies which actually make up the city. The city is defined as a site through which the political lives of people are organized, assembled and administered, yet also rendered open to new possibilities and encounters. It is understood to be an ‘entity that is simultaneously both the concentration and diffusion of acts that are political’ (Isin, 2005: 377), defined through those acts and not any material or placed identity. As Isin (*ibid.*) puts it: ‘Rather than reducing the polis to the city I elevate the city to a generalized polis. If we are to free ourselves from spatial fetishism and historical reductionism we must rescue the city from its modern and contemporary usage as a place’. This, in other words, is a city that is resolutely unplaced and, in certain respects, speaks to the actions of the mobile professionals who negotiate outcomes in a largely ungrounded manner.

Reference to the city as a ‘site’, however, is itself ambiguous in terms of spatiality. If taken literally, the meaning of site has territorial (or ‘local’) connotations, even if whatever happens within its boundaries is emergent and transformed through networked connections. For Isin, however, it is the civic and political engagement around a variety of issues which enables cities to be sites for the enactment and performance of rights to the city. The stress is upon the placeless qualities of political engagement, a milieu of sorts, a staged setting where all manner of events unfold which may owe little or nothing to the idea that there is an ‘outside’ to the city (see also Schatzki, 2002). It may seem odd at first sight to think of such ‘global’ corporate actors as part of a generalized polis, but the staged setting of the Olympics and the sense in which London acts as a medium for this kind of boosterism lends itself to such an interpretation. Dialogical encounters are no less that, even when the dialogue is about forms of property development and regeneration. Whether such politics is as placeless as that, however, is more debatable.

Ash Amin’s (2004) relational reading of place and the city offers an alternative interpretation, in that he explicitly argues for a spatial register to the politics of the city. For him, neither the local nor the territorial provide a ground to the politics of place, rather such a spatial register is to be found in the politics of propinquity and the politics of connectivity. Both raise the spatial, or rather specific spatial configurations, to the very apex of what a politics of the city entails.

Here, in contrast to Isin, it is the spatial juxtaposition of difference that matters, not merely the fact of difference. Politics in the city, for Amin, is a field of agonistic engagement, where claims and counter-claims are traded, temporary coalitions formed and differences negotiated. The placement of different cultures, actors, needs and demands in close proximity produces a distinctive kind of place politics. But such a politics is not a mere stage setting for the formation of difference, it is in itself part of a wider set of relations which give shape to what happens and what is possible in the city.

On this view, the urban represents a distinctive nodal formation around which sets of relationships overlap, settle and come together. Some of the relationships that matter politically will be stretched across space, yet generate the co-existences and juxtapositions that fuel a politics of propinquity. Other sets of relationships may simply arise through living together in close proximity, but even the demands raised by groups may be less place-based in a simple territorial sense and more networked as a form of mobilization which is able to influence political agendas from the ‘outside’ as it were. The politics of cities and its negotiable forms, in this context, reflects a politics of connectivity; one that registers its presence through the intersection of relationships drawn from far and wide, yet which combine and settle in cities in very specific ways. In

the global policy language of regeneration, however, the tendency has been to gloss over how such a combination actually works and to stress instead the network of connections that underpin local outcomes.

Amin's politics of connectivity is effectively another way of talking about the 'excess' of the urban, the political relations that exceed the territorial boundaries drawn, yet give shape to city politics through a distinctive spatial register (see also Amin and Thrift, 2002). As with Isin, his account represents an attempt to sidestep the tension between the bounded material city and the messy political practices organized around and through the city, whilst retaining a spatial politics that makes a difference to what happens in cities. In the case of London's urban regeneration, however, it would seem that the spatial politics of the Olympics can be traced more through the overlapping connections and ties which cut across institutional and corporate formations than to any relationships materially rooted in place.

Massey's (2007) account of London as a world city offers a similar impression of an interconnected urban politics, but with a political responsibility for the excess, for the 'outside', built into the equation. The wider geographies of place that she develops start from the assumption that places are essentially arenas for political engagement which draw in others elsewhere, yet in doing so take on political responsibility for the connections drawn. In the case of the range of global corporate actors involved in London's Olympic-led regeneration, it would be difficult to argue that any responsibility they feel for the city's redevelopment has the interests of those displaced uppermost in their minds. For Massey, the unequal power relations that lie behind the interconnections between places reflect the different positions and capabilities of those involved at both ends of a connection, and point in this case to those engaged in property development and real estate, finance and sovereign wealth funds benefitting economically at the expense of local interests and community associations (see also Massey, 2004).

There is a sense in which a kind of globalized polity can be identified behind mega-events like the Olympics because of the way in which they are accompanied by international developers and property interests, financiers, architects and engineers. They constitute a powerful coalition of actors able to negotiate outcomes with state or quasi-state agencies, whose explicit purpose is often to work with them to achieve their development aims, in a context where governments are wholly reliant on them to deliver regeneration programmes of whatever kind. This may not be quite the politics of connectivity that Amin, or indeed Massey, had in mind, but the dominant leverage of those involved in corporate regeneration acting within and beyond the city is expressive precisely of the wider geographies that bind cities into a wider web of unequal interdependencies (see Allen, 2010).

But that does not mean to say that local coalitions of interest are always erased from the process, nor that global events such as the Olympics can only be mobilized by actors of a similar global, corporate, character. Local urban alliances have also been part of the Olympic legacy of London 2012, with their own distinctive spatial politics stretching beyond the city's boundaries.

Beyond regeneration

As already indicated, it is important to register that the language of 'legacy' was a 'local' as much as a 'global' one, as London's politicians sought to draw in the Olympics as a tool in their strategy, using international claims to draw down resources locally. Cochrane *et al.* (1996) similarly note the extent to which an apparently 'global' set of claims to win the Olympics for Manchester might better be understood as part of a grand coalition seeking to draw down national funding. The spatial politics involved on such occasions points to a more active entangled political process; that is, to attempts to mobilize both material and ideological resources drawn in from outside to redefine the

'local', but also in the process redefining how the Games may be conceived (see also Cook and Ward, 2011 who chart the way in which, in the case of Manchester, city officials involved in developing bids for first the Olympics and then the Commonwealth Games sought to learn through visits, meetings and networks).

In this context, Ken Livingstone (then London's mayor and a key actor in the process) claimed that: 'The Olympics will bring the biggest single transformation of the city since the Victorian age. It will regenerate East London and bring in jobs and massive improvements in transport infrastructure' (Livingstone, 2003 quoted in Vigor *et al.*, 2004a: 10). He went on to argue that 'I didn't bid for the Olympics because I wanted three weeks of sport. I bid because it's the only way to get the billions of pounds off of the government to develop the East End' (Livingstone, 2008 quoted in Raco and Tunney, 2010: 7). And the bid was always mediated through the wider sub-regional strategy for regeneration and development of the Thames Gateway, itself another attempt to mobilize resources and transform a part of London even if the Thames Gateway 'may be perceived as a patchwork of speculative developments rather than as a well specified and integrated plan for urban renewal' (Poynter, 2006: 28).

Alongside the many official statements and proposals have run a series of attempts and campaigns to fold political demands into the Olympics, to suggest how they might be reworked and reinterpreted to deliver what Raco (2004: 40) has called 'a socially oriented development agenda', even if he may himself now take a rather more sceptical position (Raco, 2012). The collection in which Raco's initial argument is to be found — *After the Gold Rush* (Vigor *et al.*, 2004b) — is just one example of an attempt to set out a programme for the Olympic legacy, which goes beyond the vision of state-sponsored privately driven regeneration (see also Poynter, 2006; Cohen, 2012). The New Economics Foundation similarly used the promise of the Olympics to fold in a series of demands focused on finding ways of enhancing 'local public goods' (MacRury and Poynter, 2009: 320).

But here there has also been scope for other forms of political and policy engagement, ones that reach out beyond local situated politics to draw in different sets of understandings. From the start, the apparently global politics of London in seeking to attract the Games always involved explicit claims-making around support from local communities, even if some community groups went on to suggest that the claims misrepresented the nature of 'consultation' events, raising complaints that particular voices were not heard (Fussey *et al.*, 2011: 212–3).

Mike Raco and Emma Tunney (2010) point out that the high media and political profile of the Olympics helped to create opportunities for local groups to raise their own profile, make new political demands and draw on references from outside their immediate area. Indeed, in some cases, mobilizing universal languages of social justice to make particular claims, while in others seeking to generate wider claims out of the apparently more localized politics of legacy. Raco and Tunney explore the role of groups representing small businesses in challenging some of the logics of redevelopment and regeneration. Even if their demands can often be met through enhanced forms of compensation or models of relocation, the vision being mobilized is one that points to different forms of community and different business models (see also Davis, 2011: 112–47).

The extent to which it is possible (and helpful) to understand these politics as 'more than local' is apparent in the experience of particular mobilizations, such as the campaign in the first half of 2012 against the building of a basketball training centre on Leyton Marsh, an area defined in planning documents as metropolitan open land (meaning that it cannot usually be developed). Because of the Olympics it was determined by the ODA that those rules could be overridden. But the campaign (Save Leyton Marsh) continued, protesting that there had been no proper consultation or environmental impact assessment and highlighting fears about what might be lost. They turned the language of the Games against those seeking to use it against them, questioning the interpretation of legacy: 'The Games have been sold on the back of the legacy it promises to leave and we

have already lost the entire East Marsh to a coach park and now we stand to lose Leyton Marsh as well. How much more open, green space must we give up for the Games?' (Save Leyton Marsh, 2012). 'Even if the building itself goes, the land will no longer be greenbelt and therefore cannot be protected from development' argued a member of the Save Leyton Marsh group (Bartholemew, 2012). An apparently modest local campaign (whose demonstrations involved up to 200 or so) was nevertheless confident enough to explicitly and directly draw on a wider set of understandings in the process — going so far as to link with the Occupy movement to help deliver an admittedly short-lived blockade against developers' vehicles in the form of a 'Community Support Camp' (eventually evicted following a court order on 12 April). Although campaigners remain unconvinced, the ODA has agreed to return the area to its original use and to contribute £65,000 to improving access and wildlife habitats (the campaign is being taken forward under the broader heading Save Lea Marshes, 2014).

While alternative agendas to those of corporate regeneration have had mixed success, they have been incorporated into wider political narratives. The Manor Gardens allotments (in existence since 1900) were finally removed in 2007 and replaced by landscaping within the Olympic Park, although following a lengthy campaign the allotment holders were relocated to a temporary site and it was promised that they could return following the Olympics (for a series of clips relating to the allotments, the campaigns around them and allotment holders' visions of the future, see *Spectacle*, 2012. The story, with all its ambiguities and uncertainties, is also told in Davis, 2011: 213–6). Meanwhile the Clays Lane housing estate (initially a full-fledged housing cooperative opened in 1984, but operated from 2005 under the aegis of the Peabody Trust) was ultimately demolished to make way for the athletes' village in 2007, despite a successful campaign leading to a public inquiry into the compulsory purchase order. The main direct effect of tenant action (through the tenants' forum Clays Lane on the Move) was that levels of compensation were raised (although only to rates still below what many thought appropriate) and a 'significant minority' of those who were rehoused 'felt badly treated' (SNU, 2008: 15).

However, the politics of the process (like that of the Manor Garden allotments) cannot be reduced to these details. What is remarkable is the way that the experiences of those involved have been picked up as part of a continuing critique of 'legacy' claims for the Olympics and the associated regeneration industry, as part of a much wider political challenge. They have, for example, been incorporated into a series of arts-based initiatives which set out to express the detailed and everyday experience of living locally with the Olympics, while also seeking to offer different ways of thinking about what might be possible. Art practices are mobilized to deliver 'spaces of dissent', providing ways of actively resisting the (seductive) attractions of the 'consensual icons and language' associated with the Olympics (Powell and Marrero-Guillamón, 2012: 19). In the case of Clays Lane itself, for example, this found expression in the Clays Lane Live Archive brought together by Adelita Husni-Bey in an exhibition at the Supplement Gallery in August 2012, as well as in the writing of Ian Sinclair (see also Hatcher, 2012; Husni-Bey, 2012). In this context, the particular is quite explicitly re-imagined as having an almost universal significance — somehow symptomatic of a globalized phenomenon.

London Citizens, a broad umbrella organization of community and faith-based groups (incorporating The East London Communities Organisation — TELCO), provides another example of an initiative that identifies locally but reaches beyond the local in defining the nature of its politics — or, as Michael Keith (2005: 170) puts it, 'foregrounds the familiar "local" but stretches transnationally', appealing 'to a global universalism that privileges a politics of identification with the familiar causes of concern and the *known local*' (see also Somerville, 2011: 50–1, original emphasis).

The origin story of London Citizens is itself quite explicitly concerned with drawing in practices from elsewhere, and specifically from the model of Alinskyite community organization and visits to Chicago organized in the wake of the *Faith in the City* report published in 1985. This led to the formation of the Community Organising Foundation

(along the lines of the US Industrial Areas Foundation), taking on the task of generating (and training) a cohort of community leaders (Brickley, 2008; Eversley, 2009; Jamoul and Wills, 2008). At the core of the political vision is the notion of ‘broad based organising’, of ‘alliance building across and beyond faith institutions’ (Jamoul and Wills, 2008: 2041). As Keith (2005: 170) sums it up: ‘faith based neighbourhood mobilisations have been transported to East London’. What is stressed is the importance of ‘doing’ in its own right, the benefit to communities of taking action on specific issues, in order to develop their own collective identity as much as to achieve particular ends (Jamoul and Wills, 2008: 2049).

In the context of the Olympics, London Citizens succeeded in obtaining agreement with the Olympics Delivery Authority that an attempt would be made to ensure that those employed by contractors will be paid at least the London Living Wage (LLW) (a ‘wage’ whose level is itself determined through London Citizens) (see e.g. Poynter, 2009a: 145; Fussey *et al.*, 2011: 122). Jane Wills (2013: A2) stresses the importance of seeing this as the product of longer-term ‘strategic intervention’ by London Citizens, ‘to make the most of the investment and development that was already going to happen’ rather than simply a reaction to events. Of course, such an agreement is not easily enforced or policed, and caveats were immediately apparent. As then ODA chief executive David Higgins said: ‘We cannot make the London Living Wage a blanket condition. However, for those tenders within London’s boundary, we will make it clear that we support the London Living Wage, and we will make it clear in the invitation to tender for ODA contracts that we want to see contractors adopting the best employment practices including trade union recognition, absolute commitment to health and safety and sufficient wage levels. These factors will be considered when we decide which contracts offer best value for money’ (ODA, 2007). But this did not mean that these issues simply went away or remained restricted to the Olympic event. On the contrary, the agreement made it possible to return to them on a regular basis.

So, for example, it became the focus of close questioning at a meeting of the London Assembly and David Higgins in 2009, when he had to both explain why outcomes were not as good as promised and indicate how better outcomes could be achieved. He went on to stress that ‘we have targeted those parts of the construction industry which are most prevalent not to pay the London Living Wage; for example the security guarding industry, typically, is an industry that does not necessarily cover the London Living Wage. We have over 400 employees on our site now in the overall guarding contracts, the 24-hour contracts, but we spend a lot of time negotiating with our contractors and suppliers in that area to ensure that everyone was paid the London Living Wage’ (London Assembly, 2009). In June 2011, according to the ODA, 64% of the workforce on the athletes’ village received the LLW, 9% did not and 27% preferred not to say; 81% of the workforce on the Olympic Park received the LLW, 9% did not and 10% preferred not to say (ODA, 2011).

The extent to which the six ‘People’s Promises’, set out by London Citizens and TELCO, and broadly endorsed (if not actually agreed in detail) by the 2012 bid team (Coe *et al.*, 2004), will be met remains uncertain, but they provided a focus around which it was possible to organize (particularly on the living wage and the delivery of affordable housing), while a National Skills Academy for Construction (one of the stated ‘promises’) has been established in Waltham Forest. Increasingly, London Citizens and TELCO emphasize their role in delivering jobs to local residents, working with the Olympic authorities and acting as a ‘conduit between the community groups and the Olympic authorities’ (Jamoul, 2012). There are tales of success, with particular groups and particular employers using ‘relational networks to screen and select candidates [at] recruitment events’ organized for contractors hiring *en masse* (Jamoul, 2012). Over 1,200 people are said to have obtained employment through this process — ‘the tried and tested method of relational organising’ (*ibid.*).

The aspiration for a community land trust actually in the Olympic Park (identified as one of the promises) may not have been achieved, but the East London Community Land

Trust (actively sponsored by London Citizens) is to be the first urban community land trust in England and is located in Bow, one of the Olympic boroughs not far from the Olympic Park. Neil Jameson, executive director of London Citizens, commented that 'we share [the mayor's] ambition to see it used to build a lasting legacy of affordable housing at the Olympic Park' (Wrelton, 2012). Phil Cohen (2012, original emphasis) has taken this a step further to argue for a wider vision in which residential and other development in the Olympic Park would effectively 'be handed over to a Community Land Trust through which strategic management powers can be vested in an annually *elected* board, with all residents *and* workers entitled to vote . . . The Land Trust decides development policy and its AGM becomes a popular assembly with a plebiscitary function more akin to what the Guild Socialists had in mind than the glorified committee cum business meeting it usually is'.

The urban politics of the London Olympics can thus be seen to have been in many respects shaped by ideas and practices of social justice and community action drawn from elsewhere that are quite distinct from those that have a global corporate brand. They are rooted in London (indeed a particular part of London), but they are also connected into wider sets of relationships that stretch far beyond London as a territorial entity and can be seen to reach out beyond the city, to fold in agendas, as it were, in an attempt to shape events within.

A relational politics of the urban

This kind of spatial politics perhaps comes closer to the politics of the city identified by Amin, as one of agonistic engagement, where demands are raised, temporary coalitions formed and relationships mobilized that stretch beyond city boundaries: a politics of propinquity fuelled by demands that are place-based but do not reflect a simple territorial politics. The wider geographies involved are likewise placed within a series of unequal interdependencies, but they also connect with agendas that can lessen that inequality and create new spaces of political opportunity. The manner, however, in which local actors have been able to reach out beyond the city to draw in practices that redefine the local, and for groups situated outside the immediate area to reach into London's politics in an attempt to steer political dialogue, is suggestive of more than a politics of connection. The sense in which political claims and demands from elsewhere have been lifted out and re-embedded in this part of London point to a spatial politics that is not simply about an 'outside' that is distant or separate from the city. There is a sense that not all politics is about physical face-to-face proximity, or between actors who are either located in London or based elsewhere, and that sense raises the possibility of a politics mediated through distanciated relationships that are already part of an urban polis (see also Allen and Cochrane, 2007; 2010).

Interestingly, Amin (2007: 104) has spoken about a spatial politics that cannot simply be mapped and the need to read the city 'simultaneously as a site of spatial circulation and radiation, and as a site of difference placed in close proximity'. This is suggestive of more than a straightforward cartography or topography of urban politics. Rather, it implies a topological politics in which physical distances are not necessarily a good indication of either the separation or proximity of the actors involved; where demands for a living wage for instance emanate from the 'outside', yet are already part of direct negotiations within the city. Such a relational politics suggests a different spatial register for the politics of the city; one that does not merely imagine that what happens elsewhere is connected to the polis, but rather conceives of the 'outside' as already folded into the political practices of the polis.

This is not to argue that a politics of connections does not have its place in an understanding of the polis. In isolation, however, it makes it just that much harder to capture the range of political interactions that lie behind the demands and claims that are

registered within the city: the composed spaces of engagement that reach beyond the urban, involving temporary coalitions formed through the interplay of lobby groups, consultancies and think tanks, as well as that of more conventional political groupings and interests. Political connections, as such, do not have to be conceived as lines which cut across territorially bounded areas, as much as mediated relationships which create the distance, near or far, between political actors (see Allen, 2009). In this topological take on urban politics, it is possible to think about the spatial reach of political actors as something which enables them to make their presence felt in a variety of relational ways.

Some urban entanglements may draw political actors, corporate entities as much as campaigning groups, within close reach to broker negotiations directly, rather than across a spatial boundary that places them outside of the city. What may look like the politics of connection in this context is perhaps better understood as a drawing together of corporate interests and government authorities, for instance, that are involved in distanciated or real-time claims-making and negotiations. Equally, part of the urban political interplay may take place indirectly, with such corporate players reaching into the politics of the city in an attempt to steer the development dialogue or shape it in such a way that only a narrow range of economic or social interests are served. The ability of such actors to make their presence felt through the legitimization of their interests may work, in this instance, through consultancy or lobby groups lifting out and embedding regeneration agendas formulated elsewhere. In such a way, events may be shaped within places like London by professionals practising elsewhere or by local actors reaching out beyond the city to fold in policy agendas formulated beyond their immediate locality (see also Young and Keil, 2010). The urban politics at stake in this context thus works through actors registering their presence in ways that may actually dissolve the tension between the inside and the outside the city, rather than simply connect the two or treat them as discrete spaces.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to reflect on the relevance of global events such as London's 2012 Olympic Games for urban politics when many of the relationships involved stretch across and beyond the city. The regeneration of parts of London on the back of the Olympic Games, and its associated politics, can be thought about as a staged setting for the interaction of global corporate interests and government authorities at a range of administrative levels, but the almost placeless nature of the political engagement involved makes it difficult to perceive the embedded nature of a spatial politics that took its shape through a wider network of unequal connections (in the manner than Amin and Massey have outlined). Such unequal interdependencies, however, are not simply restricted to corporate agendas; they may also connect with agendas that offer new spaces of opportunity for politicians, campaigning groups and alternative coalitions of interest that not only draw upon established connections, but also reach out to events and practices elsewhere to bring them into the political dialogue in an immediate and more direct manner. This, in our view, is suggestive of more than a cartography of connections that criss-cross the globe which come together in a place like London; it is suggestive of a relational urban politics that is mediated through distanciated relationships that are already a part of an urban polis, not separated from it by the barriers of distance. This is a politics that draws different actors within reach to make their presence felt in the urban arena, one that arguably is best captured through the lens of topology rather than topography (Allen, 2003; 2009; Cochrane, 2011).

A topological politics, in that respect, runs alongside a territorially based politics, yet helps us to come to terms with a changing political landscape where the city as a political arena is not only part of a wider set of political geographies, but is continually defined and redefined by decision-makers, interest groups and coalitions in a co-present fashion.

The differently mediated nature of urban politics that enables agendas to be folded in from the outside matters in this context, because it changes what can be demanded and how it may be negotiated. When the 'outside' is not distant in terms of miles/kilometres and real-time demands are commonplace, the city as a setting for political interaction and engagement may open up new voices and name new demands that previously were unable to gain a place. It is in this sense, we would argue, that a topological approach to the urban can make a difference to how we understand the place of urban politics.

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