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The 'summer of discontent': Exclusion and communal resistance at the London 2012 Olympics

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ABSTRACT

London 2012 promised local small businesses access to lucrative Olympic event-tourism and visitor trading opportunities. However, as urban spaces were transformed to stage live Games, many local stakeholders found themselves locked out. We focus on one 'host' community, Central Greenwich, who emerged negatively impacted by such conditions. 43 in-depth interviews and secondary evidence reveal that this was a community determined to resist. Few papers have extended the concept of resistance to the context of mega-events so we examine why communities resisted, and how physical tactics and creative resistance were deployed. Although efforts afforded some access for local businesses - they proved too little, too late. We develop and present a '*tactics for resistance*' approach, a series of 'hard' and 'soft' tactics businesses could use to encourage proactive, as opposed to reactive, communal resistance required to protect local interests and afford access to opportunities generated by temporary mega-event visitor economies.

1. Introduction

Mega-events are complex projects that exist and flourish by garnering significant political-economic support from the upper echelons of government, quasi and non-governmental bodies (NGOs) (Chalip, 2017). They epitomise the conscious effort made by sports policy and senior managers to catalyse new and existing urban policies and projects. Large-scale development projects, like the Olympics, are by and large a 'choice development strategy' (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2015) - cities do not have to bid and host them. Years, if not decades, of meticulous planning go into preparing a bid, with national organisations like the British Olympic Association (BOA) in the UK requiring a mandate from central governments to submit an application. However, the efficacy of such projects to achieve initial well-intended objectives have been questioned, and critiqued, and a number of hopeful host cities now seek referendum-like approval from their citizens before bidding (Dempsey and Zimbalist, 2017). This activity has, however, illuminated the extent of public resistance against the Olympics, where strident international (e.g. DemocracyNow (2018), GamesMonitor (2018), RioOnWatch (2018)) and national campaigns, like 'NOlympia' in both Munich and Hamburg and 'No Boston Olympics', have successfully sought to veto government attempts to host (see CityLab, 2017 for a detailed case).

For cities successful in securing the rights to host, a constellation of sports, policy, private and public bodies and interests adjoin to execute a project that will significantly impact, and disrupt, the day-to-day lives of individuals and collective organisations within and beyond the chosen host city. This is particularly so for those situated within close proximity of neighbourhood spaces officially chosen to play host. In the preceding decades, and certainly since the turn of the 21st century, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and national organising committees (NOCs) have placed extensive emphasis on social and economic regeneration and development at the heart of project objectives –as both an immediate outcome and a longer-term so-called 'legacy' (see Olympic, 2020 agenda – IOC, 2018). Positive developmental outcomes intertwine inextricably with moral virtues extolled within the 'Olympic Movement' itself and inscribed into the 'Olympic Charter'. The IOC's overarching aim: to herald a vision of 'respect for universal fundamental ethical principles (…) banishing any form of discrimination with regard to a country or person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender, or otherwise which is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic movement' (IOC, 2013, p. 54). Yet, Zimbalist (2015) argues that little evidence suggests the Games has served to end or suspend hostility between nations or to improve the relationships between national governments and their populaces – in fact, quite the contrary.

Aptly, conflict of an ideological, political, social and economic

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nature emerges as a direct result of the rather extraordinary conditions that typify the multifaceted unequal developmental effects of mega-events (OECD, 2008). Theoretically, such projects have the power to 'orientate', 'connect' and 'integrate' global (and local) communities (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). However, numerous authors argue that they exacerbate conflict and division within the host city (Raco and Tunney, 2010). As a result, the ability and efficacy by which mega-events achieve reasonable and [well] distributed developmental benefits is questionable (Viehoff and Poynter, 2015, pp. 109–123). Critical economic geographers like Harvey (1989) argue that entrepreneurial projects, speculative in nature with little evidence of positive social and economic returns on investment, serve to divert public attention and funds away from fundamental socio-economic challenges in the neo-liberal city. Zimbalist (2015) claims that mega-events are an 'economic gamble' that excludes individuals and communities without the social and economic capital to participate and leverage such an opportunity. Effectively, they favour those with the influence and power to participate (e.g. Horne, 2007), and disserve those less visible who do not (Raco and Tunney, 2010).

Emphasis on certain intended 'desired' outcomes may serve as a 'smoke and mirror' effect (Garcia, 2004), or perhaps a placebo (Rojek, 2014) that conceals parochial interests (McGillivray and Frew, 2015). Pappalepore and Duignan (2016) argue that a rhetoric of positive local inclusion, community participation and developmental outcomes may simply serve to justify the event and help negate resistance efforts across the host nation, city and soon to be official event zones. Yet, empirical evidence points to the way such projects may favour a narrow sub-section of society - namely those interests that align and intertwine with those who wish to profit from the Olympics' occurrence (Raco and Tunney, 2010). As such, it can be argued that project plans are drawn up embodying the 'sectional interests' of more desirable, prosperous and upwardly mobile citizens (e.g. large-scale business owners and property developers) considered 'synonymous with the well-being of the city', speaking on behalf of their fellow citizens (Gruneau, 2002, pp. 9–10). McGillivray and Frew (2015) therefore question the foundational ethical principles of mega-events, and the actions of their policy makers and project managers as a far cry from the principled, virtuous departicularised moral positionality projected by the Olympic Movement and Charter. Following the Sydney 2000 Games Vigor et al. (2004) stated that the Games has seen a progressively 'fundamental change in philosophy' (2004: 5). We argue, and our empirical analysis suggests that such change represents an on-going focus toward commercial logic and profit maximisation, whereby mega-events simultaneously step back away from (particularly locally rooted) social responsibilities and offer an illusion of inclusivity.

Brazil's 2014 FIFA World Cup and Rio's 2016 Olympics illustrated such challenges (e.g. Vox, 2016). South America's Olympic project received notable media and academic criticism, alongside urban protestation found across the city, in touristic areas like airports, and inside specific urban zones to be affected by the diversion of funds away from, and displacement of, indigenous favela and slum communities (e.g. Strange, 2013; Euromonitor International, 2013; O'Neill, 2014; BBC, 2015). As a result, strategic task forces of Olympic planners (and 'pacification' forces) took hard, physical action against urban dwellers who refused to be displaced – breaking down local resistance efforts (see Talbot, 2016 graphic analysis). Yet, somewhat ironically, Rio claimed that:

> ' … the Olympic Games should serve the city, rather than the city serving the Games and to be an 'inclusive' Games' (Rio Candidature File, 2009: 9).

Pappalepore and Duignan (2016) argue that such contradictions frequently typify the dichotomy between 'rhetoric' and 'reality' in mega-events. However, commentators have claimed that there is a significant lack of academic research, and focus on the complex, localised and often idiosyncratic urban impacts on host communities and those voices marginalised at the heart of Olympic zones, specifically during the live staging periods (e.g. McGillivray and Frew, 2015; Pappalepore and Duignan, 2016). We present the case of Central Greenwich, an officially designated UNESCO World Heritage site and established as one of London's key touristic sites - home of some of the UK's leading attractions (e.g. National Maritime Museum, Cutty Sark) according to the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions ALVA (2018). The paper contributes by presenting an in-depth, empirically driven analysis of the experiences of one specific small retail and hospitality business community promised a summer of event-tourism trade opportunity, yet found themselves unable to leverage. As a result, we identify how locals resisted against Olympic strategies designed to restrict them from accessing such opportunity. The paper amplifies their narratives, examines through an analysis of 'hard' and 'soft' tactics how and why they resisted, and subsequently proposes a series of '*tactics for resistance*' for future communities to proactively resist and support the effective (re)distribution of event (tourism) benefits (Ziakas, 2014). As a result, we draw on and advance the under-utilised concept of resistance within tourism studies. Specifically, the work of de Certeau (1984) is adopted as a means to theorise local acts of resistance towards the 'strategies' of dominant powers in a mega-event tourism context. We suggest there is insight to be gained by applying concepts of local 'tactics' to the Olympics to develop a theory of practice that considers the relationship between local resistance, stakeholders and powerful strategic manoeuvres.

Empirically driven, this paper is guided by three key research questions:

1 What are the reasons behind local acts of small business communal resistance in the 'live staging' periods?
2 What are the tactics and resistance mechanisms deployed by small businesses at the host community level?
3 How far are such acts of resistance effective in redistributing event-related benefits and/or in negating challenges?

Structurally, the following sections provide an in-depth analysis of the specific ways host communities, specifically small businesses may find themselves locked-out of event-tourism trade opportunities, and how planning practices often transcend and ignore local interests. We draw on these economic and spatial exclusions as a prelude to explain why host communities have and continue to resist the very presence and execution of mega-events. The literature review shifts to a focus on the concept of resistance, specifically how and why 'communal resistance' has materialised in the context of mega-events. Afterwards, we present a detailed methodology, followed by empirical findings and analysis in light of our theoretical frame. We close by articulating our main contributions, namely the extension of key conceptual and practical aspects in the context of mega-events, managerial and policy implications, and proposed future avenues of research.

2. Economic and spatial exclusions of mega-events

Defined as having a 'dramatic character' of 'international significance' (Roche, 2000, p. 1), mega events symbolise and manifest as extraordinary forms of event-led policy. They have been described as an exogenous shock, serving to fast-track urban policy (Faulkner et al., 2001). Catalysing developmental outcomes features as a core objective of all mega-events, and emerges as a key direct - and hoped-for - aspect of achieving a successful urban legacy in the context of London (2012) (House of Lords, 2013). Yet, speeding up development and execution of policy, may serve to transcend everyday consultative [democratic] processes of inclusive and progressive urban governance. Host cities and project actors target places and spaces for specific action under the guise of immediate deadlines and short timescales - swiftly and effectively. Yet, such processes do not always satisfy the short-term interests of host communities at the epicentre of Games planning - particularly