

Handing over the

FLAME



As Vice Minister for Sport in the Brazilian Government, LSE alumnus Dr Luis Fernandes (above) is responsible for planning the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. He spoke to **Hilary Weale** about the development opportunities for Brazil that these bring.

While the UK sinks back after the logistical triumph of London 2012, which surely exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of Lord Coe and his colleagues at the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, the Vice Minister for Sport in Brazil has arguably a mightier task ahead. He has to prepare the country for both the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and the FIFA World Cup two years before that.

A daunting challenge it may be, but having visited London during the Games – a trip that included meetings with Ricky Burdett at LSE Cities, to learn from his involvement in the early stages of planning London 2012 – Luis Fernandes is determined to make the events count.

“Brazil is a developing country, so these events are an opportunity to intensify and implement very massive public investments in infrastructures, investments that would have to be set up independent of the Games but which would probably have taken much longer if we had not been hosting both sporting events,” he says.

It is why Brazil worked so hard to gain the right to host both the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016. “It has given us the opportunity to invest in the transport infrastructure, an urban mobility initiative, modernisation of airports, ports, telecommunications and energy infrastructures, public security systems and so on,” Dr Fernandes says. “So we have been planning both events with all this in mind, and while they will of course serve the events, they will also represent a legacy for the Brazilian people and be a stimulus for national development.” National, because there are 12 host cities for the World Cup, reaching from the Amazon jungle to the southernmost point, and from east to west.

The plans have been built with environmental as well as social and economic sustainability at their heart. Dr Fernandes explains: “For the World Cup, we voluntarily introduced environmental certification as a criterion for stadium-building, so our 12 stadiums have international environmental certification and FIFA, based on this initiative, has now established these standards as the benchmark for all the World Cups in the future.

“As a result, there are a number of very creative and technological solutions, such as water re-use from rain, use of renewable sources to supply the stadiums’ energy requirements, recycled materials from the demolition of old stadiums, efficient use of new materials, and supply chains of organic food for the events. These practices will apply to the Olympic Games as well,” he insists.

Dr Fernandes undertook research for his PhD at LSE, and is a professor of international relations by

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profession. Does he think that global sports events are useful in building and sustaining international relations between participating nations? “The global impact of hosting such an event in the 21st century is incomparable to when England hosted the 1966 World Cup, or Brazil the 1950 World Cup, or London hosted the 1948 Olympic Games. New technology brings the world much closer together to see what is happening, and technological convergence in telecoms makes each spectator a transmitter of information: spectators can use cell phones or iPads and transmit what they are watching to friends and family back home. So each spectator is like an antenna, capturing images from the country and sharing them with people all around the world. That is international relations understood in a broader sense, not only relations among states but relations among people of different origins and areas of the world getting to know each other and understand each other.”

The other way in which international relations can be seen in the sporting context is borne out by Dr Fernandes’ own position. He has been in government for many years, thanks to the common practice of including technical and professional experts in cabinet, as well as elected politicians. “I learnt a lot when I was a student at LSE, and I’ve been in government positions for the past 14 years, which has permitted me to transform into public policy a lot of theoretical issues that I would discuss as an academic, and that were part of the discussions that I had at LSE as a research student. So I feel I’m very fortunate because few people are able to transform theoretical concerns directly into public policy.”

However, if most of his previous governmental posts have related directly to science, technology, innovation, economic development and sustainability, why was he asked to be Vice Minister for Sport in 2012? “I was called into it exactly because of my academic and government experience – science, technology, development issues – to incorporate this approach into the planning of the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016.”

His new job has brought with it a significant increase in his public profile, as he is well aware: “Brazil is very passionate about sport, but especially

passionate about football. So although I was in very important government positions before – probably in a technical sense more important positions than I hold today – they’re not one per cent as visible as the position I now hold. Some decisions that I made before would pertain to a more reduced universe of people like universities and innovation companies, but everybody is interested in the World Cup and Olympic Games, and in football in particular everyone thinks they know more than anyone else: our population is 193 million, so we say that we have 193 million head coaches, each one thinking that they know more about football than whoever’s in charge of the national team!”

What motivates Dr Fernandes are the opportunities for national development: “The returns are fantastic, the possibilities are enormous. It’s an historic opportunity for Brazil: two games, two global events with two years between them in a developing country. It’s a huge window of opportunity for us.” ■



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