

# Some questions about evaluating the urban legacy of Olympic Games

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Explore three hypotheses based on  
experience of past games

Some comments on London

## Hypothesis 1

- The issue of legacy is so vague that it is not possible to reach a clear objective overall conclusion.

(Provides the opportunity for inflated claims and political selectivity).

- History of seeking urban legacy – Barcelona – before that transport infrastructure in Rome (1960) and Tokyo (1964)
- London claims its legacy has received more attention than any previous Games
- However OECD Review of the London Olympic legacy (2010) says greater clarity is needed as its 'legacy' bundles together so many disparate issues.

## Different aspects of legacy

- Image of city.  
How to quantify?
- Employment generation – short term (e.g. construction) and long term (e.g. tourism)  
Assessment controversial in past Games.
- Physical legacy.  
Different aspects – transport, venues, athlete's village, regeneration.  
(e.g. compare transport and stadium legacy in Athens)

## Legacy at different scales

- City as whole – e.g. tourist attractions, Major Park.
- Particular area/neighbourhood – e.g. regeneration.
- Specific developments – e.g. stadiums.

Each aspect of legacy and scale will involve different groups of people

## Hypothesis 2

- There is a 'dark side' to legacy that is often overlooked.

Beyond 'white elephants'.

(Difficult to measure – quantifiable aspects get more attention)

## Negative aspects of legacy

- Resource shift. Focus of investment on Olympics is detrimental to other projects and locations.
- Housing impact. (Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions, Geneva, 2007)
  - Street cleansing – homeless
  - Forced evictions (great variation)
  - Increased rent levels – move.

## Gentrification – the wider debate

- **GOOD.**

Greater social diversity with middle classes and young.

More money in neighbourhood

Upgrading of physical fabric and environment.

- **BAD.**

Big building footprints destroy local scale.

Increased property values and rents - unaffordable for local community = displacement.

Potential for divided community - 'bubble effect'

New services – e.g. retail/leisure – not related to local needs

## How relate to Olympics?

- Much of the claimed regeneration legacy rests upon the positive aspects of gentrification.
- Are the negative aspects being addressed? They probably require positive intervention.
- If asset maximisation at end of Games to pay for overspend = more reliance on market = faster gentrification.

View of legacy strongly linked to view of gentrification process

## Diversity

- Different people effected at different scales
- Different groups effected in different ways by gentrification.

Low income, high income, existing residents, incomers, developers, owners, renters, young, families, old, West Ham supporters, haters of football, etc.

Legacy different for different people – need for disaggregated evaluation. No single verdict.

## Hypothesis 3

- **Much of the urban legacy attributed to the Games would have happened anyway.**

(Difficult to isolate the impact of the Games from the ongoing political, economic and planning processes)

Variation in past Games.

- unblock processes – e.g. bureaucratic, political will, local opposition. Barcelona?
- Just one event in ongoing urban programme. Beijing?

## London

- Regeneration plans in place before Bid won in 2005 e.g. London Plan 2004
- Transport infrastructure planned/implemented before Olympics (Jubilee line extension, High Speed Rail, Docklands Railway, Cross Rail)
- Real estate interest already there because of better accessibility and proximity to City/Canary Wharf. (e.g. Stratford City/Westfield Shopping Centre)

## Stratford City Development

- Planning permission in 2004 before winning of Olympic bid.



Westfield – ‘Europe’s largest shopping Mall’ opened Sep 2011

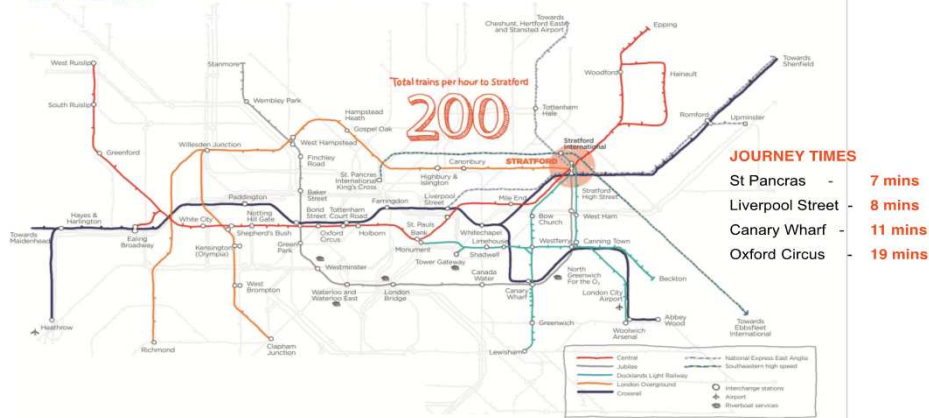


The International Quarter  
4M sq ft offices & hotel  
Opening 2015



## Stratford City International Quarter Publicity

### BY RAIL



- In London Case I would argue that Hypothesis 3 can be upheld.
- i.e. the Area would have regenerated regardless of Olympics.
- The claims that regeneration is a direct result of the Olympics are often exaggerated.



## So finally.....what is the main London Olympic legacy?

- Individual buildings – stadiums etc.
- Otherwise more **process** than concrete.
  - 1) Contribute to changing image of area
  - 2) Speed up ongoing processes, e.g. gentrification.
  - 3) Focus minds – get agencies and governments together.
  - 4) Provide political and financial security.

Fixed timetable – helped regeneration endure world financial crisis and changes in political leadership at national and London level.