OLYMPIC CITIES: 2012
AND THE REMAKING OF LONDON
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Olympic Cities: 2012 and the Remaking of London

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Preface
Iain MacRury and Gavin Poynter

The Olympic and Paralympic Games is the most important global event in the international sporting calendar. Entering the competition to host the event is not a decision to be taken lightly. Indeed, the bid to stage the Games is in itself a public declaration about the identity and aspirations of the city, and the nation, in which it occurs. What the spectator assigns to memory may vary from images of a black power salute or a terrorist incident to an unexpected victory or a great race. The enduring nature of the image of the event itself is but one dimension of the Games. The pre- and post-event phases create different kinds of dramas. The scale and cost of the contemporary Games demands its organisers to deliver a variety of non-sporting outcomes or legacies for the host city and nation.

Legacy has multiple dimensions, tangible and intangible, that can only be explained and effectively analysed by reference to the social, economic and cultural conditions of that time. Our book examines these conditions, digging beneath the image and the immediacy of the event. It is less about the sociology of sport and more about the sociology of the city; how a sporting mega event captures a moment in time and enhances our understanding of cities and contemporary social, cultural and economic change.

To date, many studies of Olympic cities have served instrumental purposes, seeking to evaluate the specific impact of the Games on a city or nation’s economy. Relatively few have attempted to move beyond the cost/benefit format that typifies such work; those that do have focused upon economic, cultural, anthropological and sociological interpretations of the event and a few have examined the history of the Olympic movement, breaking with the sanitised version of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).1 This book draws upon a range of interdisciplinary approaches, including case studies from recent host cities, in order to identify the common and distinctive characteristics of the social changes that hosting the event have illuminated and catalysed. In this sense, the Games are a vehicle for a comparative study of cities and their approaches to urban development and renewal. There is though another dimension. The Games take place in a city but their coverage is global. By hosting the Games, a city is seeking to affirm or secure a new status as a ‘global city’.

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1 Examples of wider ranging academic studies include Senn (1999) and Guttman (1992).
Over recent years, particularly with the advent of the problematical concept of globalisation, the city has become an important focus of study for diverse academic disciplines – cultural theorists, anthropologists, environmentalists, sociologists and economists amongst them. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in less developed nations has been marked by the emergence of global cities in the developed and developing world. The global city is characterised as playing an increasingly significant role in the economies of ‘western’ and ‘emerging’ states. As manufacturing industries shift between different developing nations and regions – carrying with them the often exploitative labour practices and smokestack industries of earlier western industrialisation - the global city in the advanced nation, it is argued, provides a focus for the emergence of new, clean knowledge-based service industries. The city brings proximity so that knowledge may be shared; creates districts in which the clustering of industry-specific expertise takes place and offers the advanced communications infrastructure required to support innovation (Castells 1997; 2006). The global city, and those that seek such status, appear in the twenty-first century to be the key to providing the platform for international economic success. This contemporary ‘good press’ for the city stands in sharp contrast to the 1970s and 1980s when, in the advanced nations, the city was widely seen to be the harbinger of social decay, falling populations and economic depression (Parkinson and Boddy 2004: 1). A study of recent Olympic cities is, therefore, multi-layered. It must capture the narratives associated with the specific host city and relate these to the changing perception of the city as a source of economic and cultural dynamism rather than as a symbol of social decline and decay.

This book addresses the complex multi-layered approach required to analyse Olympic Cities by dividing into four sections. The chapters contained in Part 1 address the broader themes arising from the Olympics as the major mega event of the twenty and twenty-first centuries. The chapters present an overview of the Games and their role as catalyst of urban development and social change. The philosophy underpinning ‘Olympism’ is examined with a critical eye. The end of industrialism in advanced societies may also herald the end of those values associated with modernity and the Enlightenment, values that strongly informed the thinking of the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin. For de Coubertin, the Games represented a popular celebration of science, reason, progress and the striving for perfection. The Olympic Movement symbolised a universal spirit that rose above the specific interests of nations. In the twentieth century such aspirations were thwarted by the competing interests of the world’s dominant nations; with the Games used to contest the dominance of a particular ideological outlook – Fascism against

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2 Problematic in the sense that as Hirst and Thompson (1996) argued the concept of ‘globalisation’ encompasses ‘a wide variety of views’. For a discussion of the concept in relation to mega events, see Roche (2000), especially chs 7 and 8.
Democracy in 1936 and Democracy against Communism over the decades of the Cold War. By contrast, in the twenty-first century, Olympism faces different kinds of challenges not least ‘from within’, its conversion from a material form of global Event to a reified form as ‘a brand’.

Part 2 provides insights into the cities that have been hosts to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in the period 1988 to 2008; a period of 20 years during which five Games (at the time of going to press) have taken place. Seoul (1988) represented the last Olympics to take place during the Cold War whilst, arguably, Barcelona (1992) represents the opening of a new, post cold war phase when cities began to utilise the Games as a major catalyst of urban regeneration and renewal, a process that flowed from the uneven transition toward the post-industrial service-based economy experienced by all advanced industrial nations. Whilst Atlanta’s (1996) hosting of the Games borrowed much from the approach of Los Angeles (1984); Sydney (2000) and Athens (2004) may be seen as being more in the image of Barcelona. The scale of investment in the city for the Beijing (2008) Games dwarfs those of other cities and is symbolic of China’s announcement of its entry onto the world stage as a key economic and political power likely to challenge US global supremacy in future decades. The developmental trajectory of the cities is sketched in each chapter, touching upon the pre-event phase and concluding with comments about the legacy of the Games.

Part 3 focuses upon London (2012), and offers some detailed insights into the intentions and consequences of hosting the Games for the city from the perspective of being within the ‘pre-event’ phase. During the writing of this book, many significant developments have taken place concerning London’s preparations, especially in relation to the cost of the Games and the domestic and international impact of public concerns over human rights in China and the UK’s role in assuming responsibility from Beijing for continuing the spirit and festivals of Olympism in the period leading up to 2012. Contributions to Part 3 attempt to address issues and concerns that are likely to retain their resonance and topicality throughout the years to 2012, and possibly beyond. Several dimensions of London’s experience are examined with authors, in particular, focusing upon the potential for realising the ambitious socio-economic and cultural regeneration of East London, the main location of the Olympic Park.

East London is a relatively deprived region of the city where traditional manufacturing industries and an extensive docklands area experienced closure and de-industrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s. Regeneration has occurred in specific spaces and places over the past twenty five years. This process of decline and renewal has been matched by the fluidity of the area’s population, with movement inwards and outwards creating a uniquely multinational and multi-ethnic population. East London experiences a heady mix of social inclusion and exclusion and poverty and wealth. It was these conditions that the London Olympic bid was designed to address – an ambitious programme of urban renewal backed by both central government and the City’s Mayor.
The chapters in Part 3 focus upon several of the dimensions of renewal and regeneration in East London; the real and imagined opportunities and challenges facing the local population, enterprises and the city, local and national governments.

Part 4 draws some conclusions about Olympic Cities and their legacies – cultural, social, economic and environmental – comparing recent experiences of hosting the Games and providing some reflections upon the role of mega events in catalysing urban development. The authors reflect, in particular, on the use of such events to promote what might be called ‘good city building’ – dynamic economies, social inclusion and connectedness and a high quality of living. Olympic cities experience an acceleration of infrastructural and social renewal at a pace that is more rapid than ‘normal’ development. The Games places stringent demands upon planners, developers and builders to meet pressing construction deadlines; the resulting transformations can accentuate existing social divisions or serve to reduce them through the opportunities presented by the creation of improved transport infrastructure, extensive housing developments, the adoption of ‘green’ agendas and the creation of new employment opportunities.

Alongside this ‘hard’ legacy there is also an intangible or ‘soft’ legacy for the host city, reflected in estimations of its enhanced or diminished international status and esteem and its desirability as a place to visit, live and work. Hosting the Games presents opportunities for the political, social and business elites of the city to re-present globally and domestically an official version of nationhood and nationalism, to legitimate in the popular imagination a particular set of social and cultural values that may otherwise have found little resonance with the population of the host nation (Roche 2000: 9). Such outcomes are particularly relevant to host cities in the twenty-first century, a period when all the old certainties of the social formations of industrialism seem to have disappeared. Evaluating these outcomes is a complex affair. In part 4, the authors explore the relationships between hard and soft legacies and how these impact upon the long term, post-event, development of the Olympic city.

References

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*Iain MacRury and Gavin Poynter
June 2008.*
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PART 1
The Modern Games
and Social Change
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What are the Olympic Games? Obviously, they are the world’s leading festival of sports. The International Olympic Committee, the legal owner of ‘the Olympic Games’, likes to refer to the Olympic Movement as the collective social embodiment of the sporting ideals to which it is committed. It traces these ideals and this commitment all the way back to the Olympic Games of ancient Greece, which were revived in 1896 after a 1,500 year lapse of time by the visionary Pierre de Coubertin. Coubertin provided the philosophy for this new movement. Paragraph Two of the Fundamental Charter of the Olympic Games includes his formulation:

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the quality of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. (http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/missions/charter_uk.asp)

Consistent with this proclaimed commitment to moral and aesthetic values, the modern Olympic Games are framed by ceremonies. These include the worldwide procession of the Olympic Flame, carried by athletes and notables for hundreds of miles in many countries, the choreographed opening and closing Ceremonies, attended by thousands and viewed by billions on television worldwide, and the medal presentations to the successful contestants in every field of sport represented in the Games, with their national anthems and flags. All this gives the Games an aura, an aspect of the sacred in the broadest sense of that term.

It thus seems a triumph in its own right to be the host city and nation for the Games, when the four-yearly prize is awarded. The competition to welcome the Olympics to one’s country seems an opportunity to contribute

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1 There is a considerable literature about Coubertin and the development of Olympism (see, for example, Loland 1995). His writings are available as de Coubertin (2000).
to, and share in, something of honour and value, to be a distinction for the hosts, and a source of pride for its citizens. This is perceived to be the case for the London Olympics of 2012. It is expected that the nation, city, and even the East London region of the city, as places, and countless enterprises, organisations and individuals, will share in the aura and bounty which the Games is to bring.

However, the controversies surrounding the processing of the Olympic Flame for the Beijing Olympics of 2008 have already reminded us that the Olympic Games are about more than Games. The Chinese government, like most governments who host the Olympics, hope that the Games will show off their country and, in this case, their capital, to great advantage. Major architectural developments and urban improvements have been undertaken to provide a worthy showcase for the Games, and to place its host country and city in the forefront of modernity. Yet while the Chinese government pursues this agenda, Tibetans and their sympathisers follow a different one. ‘Does a nation which is deficient in its respect for human rights have a moral entitlement to hold the Games?’ was the question they choose to put to the world. They took the opportunity posed by the display of the Olympic Torch through many of the world’s cities, over a period of several months, to assert their cause. The immense global visibility of the Olympics, now the essence of its commanding position as a world spectacle, was thus also turned into a resource for protest, which transformed what was originally envisaged as a ‘showing of the Olympic flame’ in many local and at most national contexts, into a political demonstration, which gathered participants worldwide as each phase of the display of the Torch was shown on television. Nothing could have more clearly demonstrated that the Olympics Games is an event with dimensions wider than those of sport.

Remarks made by the International Olympic Committee about the risks to the ‘Olympic Brand’ incurred by these scenes of protest revealed the commercial aspects of the Games, as the conflict between the Chinese government and its Tibetan and Tibetan-sympathising opponents revealed its political dimensions. It was indeed surprising to see the term ‘brand’, whose origin lies in marketing but which has now become an almost universal signifier of reputation, used without embarrassment about an event whose essence was once defined as being above considerations of commerce.

In reality, the ‘Olympic Movement’ and its proprietary International Olympic Committee is an institution of a very particular and modern kind, committed to its own advancement, as are most worldly and even many spiritual institutions. The Olympics are difficult to characterise, compared with many more familiar types of entity. The Olympic Games are ‘stateless’, though they depend always on finding a territorial location within nations, and on the support of Local Olympic Committees, sporting associations, and governments, in many nations. It is not a profit-making corporation operating in a straightforward commercial market, even though it is highly
dependent on transactions with the corporate world, and generates and spends vast sums of money during its four-yearly cycle of Games. Nor is it a governmental organisation, though it depends on the support and involvement of governments, without whose commitment and investments no significant Games would take place.

The Olympic Games belongs to an emergent type of ‘globalised’ institution, operating in both an international market-place, and an intergovernmental space of cooperation, competition, negotiations, and rules. It also occupies an important cultural and even moral space, as a celebration of a sphere of values, now recognised and cultivated across the world. One can hardly give an account of contemporary popular culture without recognising the great importance in it of competitive sport. This involves as its primary activity the cultivation and development of many kind of physical and bodily prowess, strength, speed, and grace. Thus the Olympics exists in the sphere of markets, of states, and of culture, occupying, with other comparable entities, an increasingly large space in these hybrid worlds.

Sport and Contemporary Culture

Any adequate description of popular culture now has to take account of the leading role of competitive sport within it. In earlier days when the term culture was mostly used to refer what to we now call ‘high culture’, it was usual to think of sport as belonging to a different and indeed lower sphere of life. But the redefinition of culture which has taken place in the last fifty years, intellectually informed by anthropological ideas of culture as an inclusive description of a way of life, and by a democratic rejection of cultural hierarchy, has changed all that. In so far as what we term the culture of a society is now taken to include all its forms of expressive and symbolic behaviour, its scope is much broader. Culture, in Raymond Williams’ phrase, has become ordinary (Williams 1958). It includes not only its high literature, music, art and drama, but also its popular literature, music, and its mass media. And not only these explicitly artistic forms of expression, but also, for example, the forms of design, cuisine, fashion, and the patterns of everyday speech prevailing in a society and its sub-cultures. This is because it can be seen that all these social activities are recognisably patterned and shaped in every society in relation to its prevailing ideas of the beautiful and the ugly, the normal and the deviant, the refined and the vulgar, or whatever particular normative antitheses hold sway in a given social order. When Delia Smith in her television cookery lessons shows her audience how they can make attractive dishes which nevertheless allow them to take ‘short-cuts’ or to ‘cheat’ by the standards of haute cuisine,
she positions her programme in a definite cultural niche, one which seeks to make reasonable quality achievable within everyday limits of time and skill. It is clear that in any such broader conception of culture, sport has a central place.

Sport involves as its primary activity the cultivation and development of many kinds of physical and bodily prowess, strength, speed, and grace. To acknowledge that sport has an important place in many cultures is to reject the devaluation and denigration of the bodily and the physical, compared with the mental and the spiritual, which was a long-standing aspect of both Christian and Enlightenment cultures.\(^3\) When the Olympic Movement sought in the 1890s to identify itself with the original Olympic Games of ancient Greece, it was proposing the revival of norms and values which had been largely forgotten in the intervening eras. (The physical cults of the Roman period, with the central place that they gave to armed combat to the death, were regarded with greater ambivalence, because of Christian notions of the sacredness of human life, and the fact that Christians had at one time been prime victims in the Roman arena.)\(^4\) And while the traditions of sports since the Greeks give a central place to competition, which is as central to the Olympic Games as it ever was, the idea of the cultivation of the body and its capabilities and aesthetic properties is broader than this. Dance and keep-fit have developed as broadly-based activities, parallel to those of sports themselves, in part expressing a reaction by women against the idea that physical activity and culture has to be competitive for there to be any point in it.

The great sociologist Norbert Elias (1939/1978) and his disciples developed an argument which gave a place to sport as part of the ‘civilising process’ which has taken place in western societies since the Middle Ages. Elias argued that the inhibition and cultural regulation of bodily impulses and appetites – the development of rules governing the bodily functions of eating and drinking, spitting, defecation, physical violence, sexual behaviour – had been a central feature of the emergence of ‘civilised’ social forms,\(^5\) which depended on the normal observance of complex and usually hierarchically ordered social

\(^3\) Thomas Dixon’s *From Passions to Emotions* (2003) gives an account of the negative view of the passions taken by St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas from the first tradition, and by Descartes at the start of the second.

\(^4\) The revival of the ‘Olympic ideal’, in the 1890’s, coincided with the beginnings of modern archaeological investigations of the ancient world, and shared some of the same implicit preferences for ancient over Christian values as were expressed in the philosophy of Nietzsche.

\(^5\) Iain MacRury has pointed out to me that the curbing of spitting is indeed now a preoccupation of the organisers of the Beijing Olympic Games, in pursuit of a ‘more civilised lifestyle’. See http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/beijing/n214259657.shtml.
norms. In this context, Elias and Dunning (1986) at the University of Leicester were able to show that sport had become an essential element in the ‘civilising’ process of inhibition and sublimation. In competitive sports, violence, aggression, competition and conflict were given a modulated and regulated form. (This is also incidentally true of homoerotic attraction and desire, both in the bonding of teams, and in the love and admiration of sporting heroes, which find a tacit place in sports.) It is a commonplace now that it is better that nationalistic antagonisms should be played out in international sporting championships than on the battlefield. The violent passions aroused both on the field of competition, but, more strikingly, among thousands of sports fans and followers, shows how powerful the sentiments of antagonism which are given expression in sporting competitions can be. Sport can sometimes be a focus of symbolic social integration and conflict-resolution, as the celebration in France of the triumph of its multi-ethnic football team in the 1998 World Cup showed.

These analyses enable us to see sports, the Olympics included, as occupying a key place in the expressive life of societies and the different groups of which they are made up. Sports encode social values and social differences, and become prisms through which some of the central preoccupations, both aesthetic and moral, of a society, can be perceived. The role of professional boxing as context for the assertion of identity by black citizens of the United States is a famous example. At a recent stage of this development, Muhammad Ali’s prowess, articulacy, and persona were hard to imagine outside the context of the contemporary challenge by black social movements to white hegemony which Ali’s career both reflected and contributed to. The game of cricket has been and continues to be (with the current challenge of the Twenty20 competition...
in India to the established values of the game\(^9\) an intense representation of the cultural conflicts arising from the British Empire and its ending, in which antagonisms to the former dominant British power have been enacted in their different ways by Australians, West Indians, Pakistanis and Indians, to name the most obvious, each with their different histories and moments of heightened conflict. Several fine books have chronicled this development, among the most sociologically perceptive being those by C.L.R. James (1963), Ashis Nandy (1989) and Mike Marqusee (2005).

Thus more than exceptional talent at a particular sport is symbolised and celebrated in the success of champions. Leading sportspersons become emblems of, what is deemed to be, admirable in human life, offering models for emulation which seem more accessible to audiences than most other forms of achievement. And this emblematic function is highly variable, in relation to the norms and ideals of a particular place and time. Bobby Charlton, George Best and David Beckham seem to belong to different cultural generations (even though Charlton and Best were near contemporaries in age) in terms of the qualities and talents for which they were each admired – Beckham having been admired as much for his role as a style-icon, and for his celebrity life and marriage, as for his talents and achievements as a footballer.

**Mega Sporting Events and the Olympics**

The Olympics shares its place at the pinnacle of international sporting events with many other global competitions and festivals – for example the World Athletic Championships, the Football and Rugby World Cups, and the Formula One Motor Racing Championship, to name only the largest of these. We can add to these the Continent-wide competitions in many sports – the European Football Championship, or the Five-Nations and Tri-Nations tournaments in Rugby Union – and the immense number of international competitions of different kinds – test matches between competing cricket nations, League and Cup competitions between leading city football clubs, and the great City Marathons. These latter are perhaps the most democratic of all these major events, since unlike others these allow ordinary citizens to run in (ostensibly)
the same races as the leading performers, weakening the boundary between competitor and spectator as no other great sporting event does.

Maurice Roche (2000) in his pioneering book, has linked the Olympics and other international sporting events to a larger phenomenon, that of the Mega-Event, Expo, or Festival whose emergence with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the many similar and subsequent Expos significantly preceded the Olympics. These events have a long ancestry in the great trade fairs of early modern Europe. Always such events were occasions for symbolic as well as actual exchange – making artifacts or commodities known so that they could become elements in future trade, as well as selling them there and then. Modern Expos like the Festival of Britain of 1951, or the Brussels Exhibition of 1958, or the Seville Expo of 1992 were symbolic showcases, opportunities for virtual tourism in both time and space which could be accomplished through exhibition pavilions and their displays, at a single location. Expos became identified with the expression and advocacy of modernity itself, in their architectural forms and in the technologies they exhibited. The function and significance of these international shows has diminished as it has become possible for more people to travel widely, and for television and the media to disseminate images and representations more effectively than by gathering displays in one place.

But whereas multi-purpose international expos may have declined relatively in their global significance, by contrast the great sporting events have grown. Indeed they have become a significant mode of production and consumption in their own right, generating significant investments and expenditures, and large flows of people, commodities, and of images and information.10 This is

10 What has happened is that international expos and festivals have specialised by function. Trade exhibitions (Motor or Boat Shows, Book Fairs etc.) are a major sub-industry. Leading cultural festivals like Edinburgh and Bayreuth continue to thrive, and almost every city seeks to create some event of its own of this ‘festival’ character. There is a more carnivalesque tradition, an expressive alternative to high cultural forms, now in Britain, exemplified by Glastonbury and the Notting Hill Carnival. Even the political gatherings of statesman can accrue some symbolic value to a city. The G7 economic summit held in Naples in 1994 is credited with providing the opportunity for its mayor at the time, Antonio Bassolino to achieve a major improvement programme in its city centre, and for changing the image of the city (for a time at least) as a tourist destination. And summit meetings of political leaders have also been occasions for massive protest demonstrations, against globalisation itself, as at the Seattle WTO conference in 1999, and at the G8 meeting in Seattle in 2002. Theme parks, with their focus on children, families and young people, occupy yet another niche in this varied market. These are the descendants of travelling funfairs, but need permanent locations because of their expensive technical and thematic installations. (It thus becomes more feasible for the customers to travel to the largest fairs, than for the fairs to travel to the customers.) The Disneyland parks became the market leaders here, being able to make new use of the existing asset of Disney film icons. Incidentally, the change of
clearly one global business in which the British are keen to occupy a prominent part, perhaps in consequence of their retreat or defeat in many others. Success in bidding for the 2012 Olympics has been followed by Prime Minister Gordon Brown announcing his support for a European Football Cup bid for 2018, and soon after that, in November, came the announcement of Glasgow’s success in bidding for the Commonwealth Games in 2014.

The Olympic Games has vastly expanded, as a global enterprise, as a consequence of the development of electronic media of communication, especially television, of travel affordable by millions, and of the emergence of national and international markets which make it commercially advantageous to attach the images of commodities – soft drinks like Coca Cola, Nike sports shoes and clothing – to sports like Formula One or football – and to iconic sportspersons. The commercial sponsorship of the Olympics, and its diffusion through commercial contracts with mass media organisations, has become one of its central foundations, as important as its backing by states. As tourism, global media, and mass consumption of commodities of all kinds have grown, so events like the Olympics have become major engines for their propagation and exploitation. This nexus of commercial and media activity has created a new context of motivation for individual sportspersons and their entourages of trainers and advisers, since it is now possible through international sporting success for a very few individuals to join the ranks of the super-rich and famous, as almost never happened even 25 years ago. Sport has become a central instance of the new global phenomenon described by Robert Franks (Franks and Cook 1995) as the economic law of ‘winner takes all’. This means that the mass-visibility through the media of those deemed to be the best has amplified their potential rewards by multiples over those competitors who do not achieve this global visibility, and whose recognition and thus economic opportunities are confined to more localised, sectoral or niche markets.

As one would only expect, it is organisations as well as individuals who have taken advantage of this new market situation. The great football clubs – Real Madrid, Barcelona, Juventus, A.C. Milan, Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal – have been protagonists in this economic reorganisation of sport. Football has led the way in the transformation of sports enterprises from being at best medium-scale businesses, organised in rather primitive ways by successful businessmen in a city or region who sought public recognition, into aesthetic from the displayed raw mechanical power of previous top sites like New York’s Coney Island (developed in the 1920s when suburban rail connections to New York were established) to the later themed and styled ‘experiences’ of Disneyland and Disneyworld signifies a shift from industrial age to post-industrial iconography, parallel to that between the exposed machinery of the motor-bike to the panelled form of the motor scooter. International sports festivals are now only the largest of what has become a vast genre of international shows and gatherings of different kinds. It has become ‘a Society of Spectacle’ (Debord 1967) in many senses.
listed public companies or as the private property of international capitalists like Roman Abramovich or the American owners of Liverpool and Manchester United. Cricket is following this pattern, with the challenge of the Twenty20 competition in India to the national and international organisations which hitherto controlled the game. Often this more ‘rational’ and ‘professional’ form of development leads to conflict with established elites whose authority is threatened by these developments. The economic law of ‘winner takes all’ operates at this institutional as well as individual level, since the globally successful organisations (which may still be called clubs or teams but which are in substance corporations and brands) can achieve followings through the global media which the less successful can only dream of. The splitting-off of the Premier League from the Football League in 1992 was a crucial early step in this development.

It would be somewhat naïve simply to lament here the ‘contamination’ by multi-nation business of a sphere of sporting values which was previously pure and uncorrupted. Sports have never existed in isolation from the societies in which they took place. They have always been intermeshed with significant interests in every society in which they have been practised. Sports are usually, among other things, symbolic representations of aspects of ways of life which societies and groups wish to celebrate, and through which they may wish to assert their identities against others. What is new in the contemporary situation is not that social forces ‘external’ to sport are influencing this hitherto autonomous sphere of life, but that the forces and interests now in play are so distinctively market-oriented in their character, as the corporate institutions of capitalism have become so much more powerful relative to others.

For example, the Olympics of ancient Greece were celebrating and cultivating, in part, martial as well as what we might think of as innately sporting virtues. The javelin, after all, is in its origin and essence, a spear, used in war. The gladiators in imperial Rome were playing out the endemic cruelties and heroisms of a society whose lifeblood came from military conquest. The tournaments of medieval courts were testing grounds for another kind of martial prowess, particular to a nobility who alone in that society fought on

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11 However, at a recent meeting of the British Psychoanalytical Society’s Applied Section, former England captains Mike Brearley and Mike Atherton said that they believed the Twenty20 competition would benefit the game, and would generate renewed interest in its traditional versions, especially if the latter became once again accessible on terrestrial TV. Cricket was recognised by the International Olympic Committee in 2007, but will regrettably not be included in the 2012 Olympics, even as a ‘demonstration sport’. Instead, the Olympic archery competition will be staged at Lords Cricket Ground. http://content-uk.cricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/326855.html.

12 Not only have gate receipts fallen for English football clubs in the lower divisions, but it is now reported that spectator support for most Premiership clubs with the exception of the top five or so has been declining too.
horseback. Sports in these epochs were more closely tied to the inculcation of warlike capacities and habits of mind than they have subsequently become. The pro-sports muscular culture of the English public schools since their development in the nineteenth century was however conceived as character formation for future military officers and imperial civil servants.

We have earlier discussed the influence on different sports of class cultures and the social ambitions associated with them. Boxing has been noteworthy for the possibilities it has given for underprivileged citizens to achieve recognition, success and triumph over representatives of more established groups. This has been the case for different immigrant groups in the United States – Americans of Italian descent such as Rocky Marciano and the great line of Afro-American fighters from Joe Louis onwards. The Peacock Gym, in Canary Wharf in East London, is a continuing shrine to the fighting achievements of working class East Enders. In his classic *Beyond a Boundary*, the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James (1963) described the symbolic appropriation of the quintessentially English and upper-class game of cricket, by black West Indians, who showed themselves able to play the colonising white man’s game better than its inventors, and on their territory too. Soccer was for long a context in which working class men could achieve a measure of fame, dignity and success within their community. But until the 1960s when the maximum wage for footballers in Britain was abolished, players were able to earn little more than skilled artisans even if they were attracting tens of thousands of spectators and followers. Horse racing in England has long been celebrated as a cultural space which uniquely brought together, or at least into some proximity, members of the aristocracy who find in the bloodlines of horses a symbolic counterpart to their own veneration of breeding and bloodstock, and pleasure-loving members of the proletariat who could find in a day at the races, a flutter, and perhaps the rare opportunity to rub shoulders with the toffs. ‘Derby Day’ is the traditional epitome of this symbolic joining together of opposites on a shared field.

So there has never been a ‘pure’ world of sports, only sports differentially shaped by specific communities. Some sports have found their symbolic space within circumscribed social spheres, allowing or inviting little border-crossing. Polo or grouse shooting are examples. In some sports, such as cricket in England, there was an awkward coexistence between different classes playing the same game, enshrined in the distinction between amateurs and professionals, celebrated, if that is the word, from 1806 until 1963 in the annual match at Lords between Gentlemen and Players. Rugby still has two codes, Rugby Union played (in England) by the middle class and Rugby League by the working class in the north, though this boundary too has become more permeable in recent years, and the idea of a merger between the two codes is now discussed. The variant class structures of the peripheral

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13 I am indebted to Bruce Jerram for pointing this out to me.
nations of the British Isles, compared with the south of England in particular, were also expressed through participation in sports, Rugby Union being more democratic in Wales, and golf in Scotland, than its counterparts in the Home Counties.

Thus there is a lot to understand from differences between sports, and changes in them from one epoch and generation to another. But this should not be thought of in terms of a decline from a past ‘golden age’, which only seems luminous from the point of view of a world of hierarchy and deference. The days in England when various annual matches between Eton and Harrow Schools, or between teams from Oxford and Cambridge universities, were peaks in the annual sporting year, no doubt had their appeal, but few now see this as a lost paradise. The annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race does however survive as a national spectacle, thanks to television, though like other elite achievements a rowing Blue has now become a step in a career as a virtually professional oarsman for many crew members, both British and foreign.

‘The Olympic Movement’, in this context, is remarkable for its adaptability to changing circumstances and opportunities, as subsequent chapters in this book on the Olympic Games of recent years show. But the Olympic Movement has its own specificities in this respect. It is an umbrella for many different sports, each of them with its own national and international federations. Only athletics, what is sometimes called track and field, has a fully global appeal, many of the other sports represented being pulled along by the interest which track and field events bring to the Games as a whole.

The fact that the Olympics is a display case for many different sports, many of them weak in their global appeal and following, gives it a distinctive institutional character. It is much more than the sum of its parts. One might describe it as a holding company whose brand is much more powerful than that of its component members.14 This makes the Olympics particularly dependent on its relations with states and governments, with the global corporations who provide sponsorship, and with the national and international media organisations who provide most of its audiences and thus ultimately its funding streams.

Because the leaders of the Olympic Committee are dependent on national governments to provide host cities for the four-yearly Games, the Olympics was always liable to be influenced by political pressures, and by the climate of international relations at any given time. Thus there was the role of the Nazis in seeking to shape the climate of 1936 Berlin Games; the conflicts surrounding the Moscow Olympics at the height of the Cold War (which some

14 Compare this situation with that of soccer in Europe, in which many fans would prefer to watch and support their multinational club sides than their own national team. However the European and World Cups do retain their drawing power, in spite of this.
nations including the United States boycotted) and the successful adoption of the Olympics by Barcelona as a symbol of a rising city and quasi-nation (Catalonia) within newly democratic Spain, now a member of the European Union. The narrative of negotiation between the Olympic Movement and its agencies, and the governments and societies among whom it has to find partners, is always specific to each case. The question posed for political economy and sociology of the Olympic Games is how to describe and explain differences of these kinds.

Recent decades have seen a longer-term development in the nature of the Games which reflects an increase in the power of markets over that of states, as a general fact of life. ‘Globalisation’ has been described in many different ways, some of them obscuring more than revealing its realities, but undoubtedly one of its essential concomitants has been the increasing sway of markets over the powers of states in the world. One of the leading theorists of globalisation, Manuel Castells (1998), has argued that the weakening of nation-states, and the larger and more rapid flow of finance, commodities, people and information across their boundaries has made it possible for new kinds of trans-national agency to come into being, and to become major sources of power in the modern world. In the new ‘network society’, as Castells has called it, such agencies, operating in spaces between the jurisdiction of national governments, have multiplied. Multinational corporations like the major sponsors of the Olympic Games, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like Amnesty International or Médecins Sans Frontières, and criminal organisations or mafia trafficking in drugs or illegal migrants, are three such organisational types. Another consists of entities such as FIFA, Formula One Motor Racing, or the International Olympic Committee. In the world of global sports, such entities can be more formally representative in their structures (international sporting federations normally represent their national associations in some constitutional way), or they can be more commercial. Although the rules of Formula One are set and maintained by a federation of a kind, much power seems to reside in the owner of the event’s name or ‘brand’, Bernie Ecclestone, who is able to ‘franchise’ Formula One races to tracks based in different nations, for commercial advantage both to the sport and to himself as its dominant figure. The Olympics, by contrast, though now heavily enmeshed with many kinds of global business, is committed by its traditions, and by its wish to preserve its status as embodiment of the intrinsic values of sport, to maintaining some distance from the commercial. This is expressed in its insistence on decorum and restraint in the ‘commercialisation’ of the Games, via advertising and sponsorship. It is held to be acceptable and indeed necessary, to draw incomes from many markets, and to permit

15 The controversy which in early 2008 surrounded the reputation of the president of the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile) gave another illustration of the broader societal force fields within which these international sports are located.
the promotion of products of many kinds, but this is meant to be in a way which does not overshadow or vulgarise the Olympic idea. Thus one Games which was deemed to have been excessively ‘commercial’ in temper, Atlanta in 1996, is widely regarded as a negative example, providing lessons of what has to be avoided in future. This, of course, requires the International Olympic Committee to ensure that governments are strongly committed to the Games, providing alternatives in their support and in funding to what would otherwise be the excessive domination by the market place.

So here is the ‘globalisation’ of major sports, such that they have come to operate in an international market which connects tourism, commercial, sponsorship, media coverage and governmental support in great concentrations of resources and capital. Such a system also changes the balance of powers within sports of the different classes who are engaged in them. In the era when sports were mainly a pursuit of the young generation of leisured classes, rewards were primarily rendered in terms of honour and status, and perhaps access to privileged positions, not material reward. The ‘amateur’ tradition, and the proscription of ‘professional sportsmen’ from participating in the Games, preserved a monopoly of access by the leisured classes to the celebrity that came from achievement in sports. To allow sports to become a means by which individuals could earn high material rewards threatened an established status order, and was at first resisted. One remembers the uneasy compromises in some sports, such as cricket, where professionals were allowed to compete, and earn modest incomes, but at first only under the governance and captaincy of amateurs.

But as sports became an element of a more consumption-driven culture, and especially when media coverage vastly enlarged the numbers of people who could watch, and thus increased the flows of funding into them, social relations within major sports changed. Where earnings from sporting success had been limited, both by the small pool of available resources, and from the limits to access and reward imposed by the ‘amateur’ code, in the new era of commercialised mass sport, earnings for the most successful became virtually limitless. The value of the most outstanding performers to their teams, owners, and even sponsoring nations, became extraordinary, and they and their agents are now able to exact the full market price for their talents.

As success became achievable on a larger scale, through international competition supported by global media coverage, so the returns for success to teams were also vastly increased. The consequence was a throughgoing ‘professionalisation’ of every aspect of top-level sporting activity, including recruitment, training, marketing, public relations, the exploitation of associated property, etc. Indeed, in England several of the most successful football clubs have become companies listed on the Stock Exchange, one kind of corporate enterprise. Another aspect of this phenomenon as we have said is the exceptional rewards now won by the most talented and successful, compared with other performers who reach a reputable professional standard.
This concentration of the highest rewards at the very top arises from the global extension of markets and thus of the flows of resources that are attracted and extracted by the market leaders. Global communication and distribution gives rise to new economies of scale, such that the investment in the brand of a football team or individual footballer (Manchester United or David Beckham) can be recouped through a much larger and wider consumption of its various ‘products’ (many of which are spin-offs, virtual or symbolic connections) than was the case when ‘distribution’ was confined to more local or even national markets. This phenomenon leads to exceptionally unequal reward structures in many cultural fields, including fiction (even children’s fiction, in the case of Harry Potter), rock music, and architecture. The institution of prizes in fields of art makes them similar to competitive sports in that ‘victory’ in a context, or relative success, comes to be valued as a measure of quality in itself. The publicity accorded to comparative viewing or sales figures – ‘best-sellers’ of various kinds – has a similar effect, encouraging people to purchase and admire products for no better reason than that large numbers of other people do so.

Exceptionally high rewards given to those at the very top are growing across the board in marketised societies. They are not confined to spheres of activity in which leading products, or leading personalities, can be sold to global audiences and thus attract additional income streams. It seems unlikely that there is a genuine market in most chief executive positions in the private sector, and certainly not the public sector, yet the gap between the rewards of those occupying top positions in virtually all fields relative to the average of their employees has grown by multiples. The change may be assigned to culture and ideology as much as to any tangible link between such rewards and performance. Those in a position to make decisions about relative remuneration come to share a belief that it is necessary to keep up with high earnings or differentials elsewhere. Members of these elite groups also use their power to set top-level rewards to look after their collective interests.

Sports, and other branches of the entertainment industry, are now one of the most visible manifestations of this ‘winner-take-all’ phenomenon. They thus contribute significantly to the legitimation of the equation of competitive success with enormous wealth. One of the functions of sport is indeed to offer societies ideals of achievement for public emulation. Thus the equation of a sportsperson’s success by reference to the fortune they earn and the life-style they become able to afford, has an influence beyond sport. It seems surprising that the level and breadth of support of people for professional sport has remained undiminished by the ascent of the top echelon of its stars into a world of exceptional wealth and the celebrity that tends to go with it. But, as with the highly-visible life-style of Hollywood film stars of an earlier era, this extravagant success and exotic lifestyle seems to lead not to disenchantment with formerly relatively ‘ordinary’ and familiar heroes, but rather to give a new reason for admiring them. In societies where opportunities for great
upward mobility are indeed highly limited, sporting heroes offer images of possibility for everyone, illusory as these may be. Such vicarious identification upholds the legitimacy of this unequal state of affairs. The negative feelings and ambivalence that are bound also to be part of the picture also find full expression within the modern cultures of sport – indeed in all spheres of highly visible success – in the sudden withdrawal of sympathy for disgraced heroes, or those who fail to meet the excessive expectations placed on them. Managers of the English football team may be paid an inordinate amount of money, but they are quickly caricatured as ‘turnips’ or as monsters of greed if they fail.

One of the unfortunate aspects of a culture in which the position of winner in the largest competition available is the only things that matters, is that it takes value away from more mundane achievements, and the enjoyment of a sport for its own sake. Where positions in league tables, or in the Formula One driver’s championship, or in golf’s Orders of Merit (whose measure is indeed prize-money earned) count for most, the meaning of particular events is lessened. There is, as they say, ‘nothing to play for’. Even more diminished in the public mind are the performances that take place at lower levels or in lesser leagues. Thus television audiences for top national and international sporting events become ever larger, while participation in sport stagnates, and the population of television-viewers grows obese.

It is an indication of how protean and adaptable the institution and culture of the Olympic Games has been that it has been able to adapt so easily and seamlessly to this new, globalised, market environment. The abandonment of the rule that only amateurs could compete was accepted as self-evidently inevitable by the Olympic movement, even though the integrity of the value of Olympic sport had previously been held to depend on its being uncontaminated by money. A new order of status and power, founded on competitive success and monetary reward, has replaced the aristocratic order which formerly dominated the Olympics in particular. In reality of course this was always an order of inculcated culture and aspiration, as well as of inherited privilege. Team sports were believed to be significant educators in virtues desirable for those destined to exercise authority. These were leadership (and followership), cooperation with peers, acceptance of codes of rules which opponents (and inferiors) might then be induced to follow by example, modesty in success (in order not to provoke resentment from the defeated), dignity in defeat. Given the decline of a social order founded on explicit signs of social difference and hierarchy (dress, accent, tastes) it is unsurprising that such sporting codes are no longer what they were, and that more emphasis is now given to the achievements of exceptional individual performers. The new order is one of sporting meritocracy, in which in popular sports the successful can achieve high rewards. Although the Olympic tradition holds that the important thing is not winning but taking part (this is one of de Coubertin’s best-remembered aphorisms) the adaptability of the Olympic brand is such that it has been well able to adapt to the success-oriented culture of modern market society.