

**Event-Led Urban Transformation and Urban
Governance in a Globalized Context—A
Comparative Study of the London 2012 and Beijing
2008 Olympic Games**

Jen-Shin Yang*

Abstract

Hosting mega-events has long been regarded as a strategic tool for cities to establish a global presence, attract investment, and catalyze urban development. In an era of globalization, such events function not merely as arenas for sporting competition and cultural demonstration but as spaces where local and global forces intersect with local governance. Cities compete to stage these global events as a means to reposition themselves within transnational networks of resources, attention, and reputation. Yet, while the most conspicuous effect of hosting mega-events is the enhancement of global visibility, the more enduring consequence often lies in the acceleration of urban transformation—reshaping infrastructure, governance structures, and civic identity. Event-led urban transformation thus provides a compelling justification for shifting political agendas,

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reorganizing institutional priorities, and reallocating urban resources.

This study investigates how local aspirations for event-led urban transformation affect the governance arrangements of host cities in a globalized context. It adopts the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games as comparative case studies. The two cities are similar in scale and ambition but differ significantly in socio-political systems, urban planning traditions, and governance cultures. Through this comparison, the study explores how global norms of event delivery—such as standardized organizational frameworks, branding logics, and legacy discourses—interact with local institutional particularities. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with event planners, government officials, and community actors, as well as questionnaire surveys with local residents, this study identifies the tension between localized particularities and globalized homogeneity.

The findings suggest that while globalized event models on the surface satisfy host cities' needs for enhancing global visibility and accelerating urban transformation, they simultaneously flatten local characteristics and shrink space for alternative imaginary of governance. In both London and Beijing, the pursuit of a "world-class" image led to the marginalization of certain communities and priorities, revealing how global competitiveness can erode social inclusivity. The analysis argues

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that delivering mega-events in urban governance is not only a contestation between the globalized template and localized needs, but also a test stone for the host city's governability—the ability to leverage the opportunity and squeeze the most juice out of the mega-event.

By situating the delivery of mega-events within the context of globalization, this study highlights the need for critical reflection on who defines the urban agenda and who benefits from event-led transformations. Cities must clearly identify the give and take—who gives, and who takes—when welcoming mega-events to town, ensuring that the pursuit of global visibility does not eclipse the pursuit of local well-being.

Keywords: globalization, mega-event, Olympic Games, urban governance, urban regeneration

I. Introduction

In an era of globalization, hosting mega-events is attractive for cities to secure competitive advantages in inter-urban competition. Mega-events are inherent to 'dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance'¹, so the publicity effects for host cities are almost certain. Publicity is often required by cities at various scales. Take the Olympics as an example, global cities like London, Tokyo, and Paris do not need a boost from mega-events to raise global awareness, yet still bid for the hosting rights so that they can stay 'active and keep their profile up with other global cities'.²

Beyond publicity, the transformation of urban space is a strongly advocated post-event legacy. Mega-projects, such as building stadiums and improving infrastructure, are frequently initiated or accelerated by staging mega-events. Since a global event is coming to town, it is necessary to revamp the urban landscape to impress and accommodate global spectators; since there is a definite deadline to meet, resources must flow into the locality in a timely manner. Consequently, the social, economic, and physical transformation associated with mega-events can be

¹ M. Roche, *Mega-events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (Routledge, 2000).
<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tJapCUz-9QcC>.

² Noam Shoval, "A New Phase in the Competition for the Olympic Gold: The London and New York Bids for the 2012 Games," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24, no. 5 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9906.00146>,

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justifiably accelerated .

As a result, the hosting of mega-events has been a globalized practice since the 1980s, the time when the paradigm of urban governance has shifted from managerialism to entrepreneurialism.³ The multiple dimensions of governability can be effectively demonstrated in the delivery of mega-events. From bidding for the hosting right to the closing ceremony, it demands an urban governor to solicit public support, attract investment, mitigate political tensions, enhance visibility, and maneuver resources, etc. Governability is easily associated with the spectacle of mega-events and the event-led legacy. The legacy of urban transformation, more directly, is even more of a solid, visible proof of governability.

However, recent editions of the Olympic Games have raised questions about the distribution of claimed advantages. Furthermore, the inequitable allocation of event-led benefits may exacerbate social polarization rather than mitigate it ⁴. The construction of the Olympic aspirations could have a significant impact not only on the extent to which the claimed legacy could

³ David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The transformation in urban governance in late capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/490503>.

⁴ H. Zhang, "Study on the Economic and Social Impacts of Using Mega-events for Urban Regeneration," *Communications in Humanities Research* 23 (2023): 164, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/23/20230894>.

be realized but also on the priority in the city's agenda-setting and, more profoundly, on the direction the city would be led. Thus, this study poses the following question: *How does the construction of aspirations for an event-led urban transformation impact the urban governance of host cities?*

To answer the question, the event-led intangible and tangible urban transformations are adopted as the analytical approach; the former refers to social and economic transformations, and the latter to the transformation of the built environment. The London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympics serve as case studies. By dissecting the intangible and tangible urban transformations, the two cities' respective governing performance in terms of the realization of promised legacy and the distribution of costs and benefits can be summarized and evaluated.

In the following sections of the paper, the backgrounds of the two cases and the methods for data collection are first elaborated, followed by the results and discussion of the findings. By identifying the differences and similarities between the two cases, the paper concludes with a comprehensive appraisal of the impacts and implications of event-led urban transformation for urban governance.

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II. Case Background and Methodology

A. Case background

The London 2012 Olympics, including the Paralympic Games, took place from 27th July to 9th September 2012. A vital vision of the Games was to ‘benefit the community through regeneration’⁵, with Lea Valley, the poorest area in London⁶, serving as the focal point for both the event and the regeneration efforts. The Olympic area encompassed six East London boroughs—Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Greenwich, and Waltham Forest. To seize the opportunity to regenerate East London, the host boroughs formed a loose alliance known as the Host Boroughs Unit.

The London 2012 Olympics were seen as a catalyst for East London regeneration, but the decision to bid remained contentious until 2003. Amid economic austerity and with Wembley Stadium already under construction, the Culture Media and Sport Committee questioned the government's prudence. The committee also noted divided local opinions on hosting the Games in East London. Some borough officials saw the Games as essential for improving transport infrastructure, echoing Mayor Ken Livingstone's view that the Olympics would secure government funding for East End development. However, local community

⁵ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London 2004), 17.

⁶ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

groups opposed such a ‘concerted local authority stance’, arguing that the Lea Valley was ‘a tranquil and precious green lung’, not ‘derelict land needing restoration’⁷.

Despite the disputes, there was a strong feeling that London should participate in the bid for the 2012 Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) tends to choose host cities on different continents rotationally, and the 2012 Olympics were expected to be a European Games. In the oral evidence submitted on 14th and 15th January 2003, the then Secretary of State for DCMS, Tessa Jowell, expressed her view about why London should participate in the bid:

‘[It] is in East London that you get the synergy between the space required for Olympic development and the planned regeneration ... [Also] 2012 will be a European Games and after that the IOC will move to another continent.’⁸

That is, 2012 would be a ‘now-or-never’ opportunity for the UK to host the Olympics. A week after the Committee’s report was published, the Cabinet decided that the Government would back a London bid.

⁷ Culture Media and Sport Committee, A London Olympic Bid for 2012, HC268, 14 (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2003).

⁸ Culture Media and Sport Committee, Short A London Olympic Bid for 2012, 23.

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On 6th July 2005, the IOC awarded London the right to host the 2012 Olympics. London's success was primarily due to two key points. The first is the bid's emphasis on 'excellence without extravagance'⁹ and the commitment to use existing and temporary facilities wherever possible. London's Candidature File promised that new structures would 'fill significant gaps in London's sports infrastructure'¹⁰. According to the IOC's evaluation, only 55% (18 out of 33, Table 1) of the competition venues were either under construction or awaiting construction when London bid in 2005.

Table 1: Construction status of venues

Total sports venues to be used	Existing		Under construction or planned, irrespective of the Games	Games dependent	
	No work required	Work required		Under construction or planned (permanent)	Under construction or planned (temporary)
33	13	2	6	3	9

The other key point in London's Olympic bid was its strong connection to the East London regeneration project. The bid aligned with the Olympic movement's goal of combating social exclusion 'through participation in sport', emphasizing the development of sports infrastructure in marginalized areas (IOC-

⁹ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 19.

¹⁰ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 11.

Sport and Environment Commission 1999:26). Given concerns about the Olympic brand image being associated with extravagance and elitism, London's focus on social responsibility resonated with the IOC's intentions for host cities.

The Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics took place from 8th to 24th August 2008, and the Paralympic Games from 6th to 17th September. 'New Beijing, Great Olympics' was the motto of the Beijing 2008 Olympics stated in the Candidature File, which demonstrated Beijing's ambition to use the Games to 'speed up its modernization and integration into the international community'¹¹. It was not implicit that Beijing wanted to seize the Olympic brand to leverage the branding process for Beijing and China. From this perspective, compared to London's inward focus on East London regeneration and Britain's sports legacy, Beijing's bid presented a more extensive display of outward showcasing.

Winning the right to host the 2008 Olympics was crucial for China. After narrowly losing to Sydney in its bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games, Beijing was determined to succeed in its second attempt. The slogan 'One World, One Dream' elevated Beijing's bid to a highly symbolic level, closely tied to national pride. This connection between the bid and nationalism is evident in the overwhelming public support. Gallup and IOC's polls showed

¹¹ Committee Beijing Olympic Games Bidding, Beijing 2008 Candidature File, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Beijing 2000), 3

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that 94.9% and 96.4% of citizens, respectively, supported Beijing's bid ¹², far outpacing its competitors.

Beijing strategically chose Wali Village (窪里鄉) in northern Beijing as the primary Olympic site to enhance its bid's chances. The area, initially reserved for stadium construction due to its proximity to the 1990 Asian Games athletes' village, briefly became a lucrative zone for developers and the urban elite, touted as 'the foreigners' zone' (新浪房产). However, rapid, poorly planned development led to its decline, turning it into a rural-urban fringe with decayed conditions and unsafe neighborhoods. By the early 2000s, the fact that the area had housed cheap accommodations and illegal immigrant workers made large-scale land appropriation easier since the clearance of such urban villages had been part of Beijing's redevelopment plan.¹³

While pragmatism prevailed, Beijing's Candidature File emphasized the full integration of the Olympic Games into its existing development plans. Unlike London's 'excellence without extravagance' approach, Beijing committed fully to funding the

¹² BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid* (Beijing: 北京體育大學出版社, 2010), 119.

¹³ Hyun Bang Shin, "Life in the shadow of mega-events: Beijing Summer Olympiad and its impact on housing," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 2, no. 2 (2009): 134.

Games¹⁴. The city promised ‘brand new and exciting venues’ in the then-mayor’s letter to the IOC¹⁵. The IOC’s evaluation report indicated that 59% (22 out of 37) of Beijing’s competition venues were under construction or awaiting construction when its bid was submitted in 2001¹⁶.

Compared to London’s Candidature File, which put a great weight on East London regeneration, Beijing was much more outward-focused. Table 2 compares the backgrounds of the London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympics.

¹⁴ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Beijing, 2000), 71.

¹⁵ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2.

¹⁶ I. O. C. Evaluation Commission, *Report of the Ioc Evaluation Commission for the Games of the Xxix Olympiad in 2008*, International Olympic Committee (Lausanne, 2001),

http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_299.pdf.)

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Table 2: A comparison of the backgrounds of the cases

	London 2012 Olympics	Beijing 2008 Olympics
Main stage	Lower Lea Valley, East London	Wali Village, North Beijing
Area characters of the main stage	London's poorest and most disadvantaged area	Farmland and urban-rural fringe, which had been reserved for hosting the Olympics since the 1990s
Degree of public support	Some disputes between levels of government and the local community	Supported by over 90% of citizens
What inspires the bid?	• The 2012 Olympics would be a European one – a 'now-or-never' opportunity for the UK • The synergy of the Games and East London regeneration	• Losing the first Olympic bid to Sydney in 1993 resulted in a firm resolution for the second bid • Accelerating Beijing's modernization and integration into the international community
% of venues waiting to be built	55%, 18 out of the total 33	59%, 22 out of the total 37
How was the Olympic legacy portrayed?	Benefiting the local community of East London	Integral to the modernization of Beijing

B. Methodology

This study compares two cities with different social conditions and political regimes but similar scales to examine the impact of the Olympic Games. The appreciation of the similarities and differences between cases traverses the study. Comparing

cities of similar scale ensures a balanced basis for comparing their respective resource allocation and aspired legacies, while their differing contexts help assess whether globalizing forces, such as the Olympics, flatten local particularities. Therefore, how the same Olympic process has been paved by two completely diverse cities and whether the disparities lead to similar or different interpretations can be analyzed and revealed.

Theoretically, such a comparison also enriches theory by transcending parochialism, fostering cross-context discussions, and enabling a cross-national evaluation of the Olympics. If a comparative study is potentially able to destabilize the matter-of-fact but problematic democracy/autocracy, capitalist/socialist, developed/underdeveloped, and Western/non-Western dichotomies, this study may contribute to this mission through the selection of two cases as dichotomized as possible in terms of the above criteria.

As to data collection, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were conducted in both London and Beijing.¹⁷ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants who worked in Games-led regeneration/development, ranging from central and local civil servants to people in academia,

¹⁷ London interviews were conducted from mid-April 2013 to January 2014. questionnaire survey from mid-August to September 2013. Beijing interviews were conducted from mid-March to June 2014. questionnaire survey from May to June 2014.

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LOCOG/BOCOG,¹⁸ and NGOs. In London and Beijing, six and five interviews were conducted respectively.

In London, interviews included individuals involved in organizing planning applications for the Games (LON-01), drafting East London regeneration frameworks (LON-02), coordinating post-Games legacy from the central government (LON-03), managing local regeneration progress (LON-04), a social activist questioning the necessity for London to host the Games (LON-05), and a specialist in stakeholder relations at London Legacy Development Corporation (LON-06). In Beijing, interviews focused on those ensuring construction compliance (BEI-01), planning and managing Olympic venues (BEI-02), as well as experts in Chinese urban regeneration (BEI-03, BEI-04), and a former village cadre who handled communication during Games-led land expropriation (BEI-05).

While semi-structured interviews explore insiders' perceptions, the *qualitative questionnaire survey* effectively gauged the attitudes of ordinary people most affected by the Olympics' delivery and legacy. Qualitative surveys, unlike quantitative ones, focus on understanding the diversification

¹⁸ LOCOG stands for the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and BOCOG for Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games.

within a population¹⁹. Both qualitative questionnaires and interviews aim for data saturation, achieved through comprehensive information gathering.

In London, a questionnaire survey was conducted at public venues to gather opinions from local residents. Respondents were exclusively local residents, so their views would not be diluted by those of others. Each survey of respondents in London took five to 15 minutes, depending on how much information they were willing to share. During the street survey, I asked respondents each question, identified the response option that was closest to their answer, and then confirmed with the respondent whether this was the option that best described their opinion. Respondents were encouraged and prompted to elaborate and clarify their views. Respondents' answers were recorded, and their additional opinions were noted on each questionnaire. 126 valid samples were collected through the street survey in London.

Conducting the questionnaire survey in Beijing differed significantly from the London experience. Attempts to replicate a street survey failed due to potential respondents' cautious attitudes towards strangers. In fact, when it came to the difficulties of conducting street survey, several Beijing

¹⁹ Harrie Jansen, "The logic of qualitative survey research and its position in the field of social research methods" (paper presented at the Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 2010).

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interviewees opinionated that considering the land expropriation of Beijing's Olympic site, as mentioned above, started in the 1990s for the preparation of the Asian Games, randomly asking people on the street, even in the Olympic neighborhood, could not be considered a good means to access the residents affected by the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Beijing fieldwork was conducted in 2014, 6 years after the Beijing Olympics, but more than 20 years after the beginning of land appropriation. Within the two decades, the composition of the residents had changed to a certain extent, and chances are they had already moved and scattered. As a result, replicating a street survey in Beijing like that in London is neither feasible in practice nor desirable in methodology.

Fortunately, I was later introduced to a property management company that employed former residents of Beijing's Olympic site.²⁰ These employees, responsible for maintaining the Olympic Park's infrastructure, were more approachable and provided a viable alternative for conducting the survey. The property management company employees were ideal respondents for my study, as they had lived in the area for some time and were directly affected by the Olympics. Concerning the respective

²⁰ Before the Chinese government acquired the land in Wali Village for the Olympics, the area was primarily for farming, with residents working in agriculture-related occupations. The acquisition left many residents homeless and jobless. To address this problem, the government established a property management company and offered employment contracts to the displaced residents, who were then employed as security guards, cleaners, or gardeners in the Beijing Olympic Park.

scenario of the two cases, the replication of data collection methods in Beijing might not be an ideal option. Designating the property management company as the site for a questionnaire survey, on the contrary, might well help to obtain useful and meaningful data. I therefore distributed questionnaires in late March 2014 to the employees with the help of acquaintances. While circumstances did not permit a face-to-face survey, it, on the other hand, ensured anonymity and the authenticity of responses without concerning identity disclosure. Eventually, I received 39 completed questionnaires, with two respondents providing their contact details for further discussion. The responses were diverse rather than uniformly positive, indicating the effectiveness of data collection.

Adopting a qualitative approach, this study triangulated data from interviews, questionnaire surveys, and secondary sources, including Olympic candidature files, policy papers, and proceedings of selective committees. These data were compiled, disassembled, and reassembled through a systematic coding process, that is, initial coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis. Firstly, initial coding was conducted by segmenting the data and assigning descriptive codes. This was followed by axial coding, which allowed a higher level of abstraction by identifying relationships among codes and reorganizing them into several 'axes'. Lastly, these axes functioned to inform thematic analysis, in which the following themes emerged:

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- Level of engagement with the Olympic Games
- Costs and benefits of hosting the Olympic Games
- Promised legacies of the Olympic Games
- Land expropriation and displacement
- Social transformation after hosting the Games (such as feeling safe and friendly)
- Improvement of the built environment

These themes served as the framework for generating interpretations and drawing inferences for the study.

III. Results and Discussion

A. The intangible: Social and economic transformation

(A) London - Achieving Convergence

Convergence, closing the socio-economic gap between East London and the rest of the city within 20 years²¹, is the fundamental rationale for London to host the Olympics. Putting resources for the marginalized and the disadvantaged also echoed the social responsibility that the IOC intended to impose on the Olympic host cities. As a result, the bidding team of London pointedly accentuated the regeneration projects and the positive

²¹ Unit Growth Borough, "London's Growth Boroughs," accessed 27 December, 2014, <http://www.growthboroughs.com>.

legacies for the local neighborhood in the Candidature File. The Olympics were framed as a catalyst for East London regeneration, aiming to create ‘a legacy for the community’ and stimulate ‘vital economic regeneration’ in areas of multiple deprivation²². It is therefore not surprising that whether convergence was achieved has been scrutinized.

However, one interviewee warned that this could be an illusion. ‘Convergence will automatically happen in terms of numbers’ through the gentrification process led by “new people moving in” (LON-02). Another interviewee from the Growth Boroughs Unit acknowledged gentrification as ‘inevitable’ and not necessarily negative, emphasizing the need to ensure that existing deprived residents benefit from the opportunities created by economic growth (LON-04).

Against this background, the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) was designed as ‘a response from the host boroughs and their partners’ to deliver ‘the promise of [the Olympic] legacy benefits for communities’²³. As a political document, the SRF aims ‘to stir the politicians into some sense of responsibility’ for the regeneration of the host boroughs (LON-02). In other words, keeping the Olympic regeneration

²² BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

²³ Boroughs The Host, *Strategic Regeneration Framework- An Olympic legacy for the host boroughs*, 10 (Hackney Design & Print, 2009).

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legacy at a high political profile gave birth to SRF. The SRF's Action Plan of 2011-2015 further grouped the measures taken to achieve convergence into three broad themes²⁴: creating wealth, reducing poverty, supporting healthier lifestyles, and developing successful neighborhoods. The subsequent paragraphs are organized around three broad themes to examine the social and economic transformation driven by London's Games.

1. Creating wealth and reducing poverty

This is the theme that reveals a mixed picture. Figure 1 shows that the gap in 'economically active people in employment' between the host boroughs and London in general, the key measure of the theme, shrank from 2009 to 2012 but then widened in 2013²⁵. The theme's indicators associated with pupils or teenagers also present a relatively promising outlook. Nevertheless, other indicators of the theme look paler, such as the unemployment rate, median earnings for full-time workers, and the working-age population qualified to at least Level 4^{26,27}.

²⁴ Boroughs The Host, "Convergence framework and action plan 2011- 2015," (2011).

²⁵ Boroughs The Host, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," (2013): 44; Boroughs The Host, Boroughs "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," (2014): 52.

²⁶ Boroughs The Host, Equivalent to the 1st year of a bachelor's degree.

²⁷ Boroughs The Host, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 44; Boroughs The Host, "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," 52.

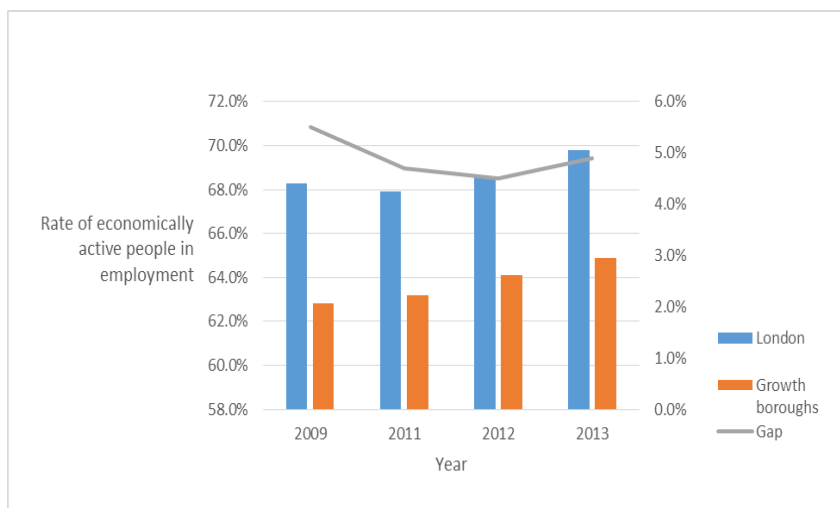


Figure 1: People in employment

Source: The Host Boroughs (2013, 44; 2014,52)

2. Supporting healthier lifestyles

The theme of life expectancy shows a positive trend from 2009 to 2012, but reveals mixed results across individual indicators. Key indicators such as obesity levels in Year 6 school children, recommended adult activity levels and inactivity rates are less promising,²⁸ contradicting the goal of fostering grassroots sports and a lifelong sporting habit.²⁹ Despite a notable

²⁸ The Host Borough, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 45; The Host, "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," 53.

²⁹ HM Government and Mayor of London, *Inspired by 2012: The legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games*, 21 (London: Cabinet Office, 2013).

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increase in weekly sporting activity nationally from 2005 to 2013, disparities in obesity levels among school children between the host boroughs and the rest of London persisted or worsened.

3. Developing successful neighborhoods

The final theme examines crime reduction, which showed a slight decrease of 0.4 points in violent crime levels per 1,000 population.³⁰ My street survey in the host boroughs reflected similar findings, with 14.3% of respondents noting improved neighborhood safety post-Olympics, while others observed no significant change. Among those who felt safer, some reported increased comfort with walking the streets or going out at night, which they had previously avoided.

Regarding social and economic transformation, reducing poverty emerged as the most persistent issue. The widening unemployment gap underscored the imperativeness of substantial changes to boost prosperity³¹. Echoing the examination results, an interviewee emphasized the need to equip residents with skills to benefit from local job opportunities as a vital element of the Games-led regeneration (LON-06).

³⁰ The Host Borough, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 46; The Host, "Convergence annual report 2013- 2014," 54.

³¹ The Host Borough, "Convergence annual report 2012- 2013," 18.

(B) Beijing - Speeding up Modernization

Unlike the London 2012 Olympics, which prioritized East London regeneration, Beijing's Olympic vision did not focus on renewing dilapidated neighborhoods or addressing social deprivation. Instead, Beijing's slogan, 'New Beijing, Great Olympics'³², reflected its ambition to join the 'world city roster'³³. The Games were seen to accelerate modernization and international integration, emphasizing 'Green Olympics, High-tech Olympics, and People's Olympics'³⁴. These concepts highlighted Beijing's goals for environmental sustainability, technological advancement, and cultural development. The following discussion explores these dimensions and assesses Beijing's progress in modernization in the delivery of the Games.

1. Green Olympics – environmental dimension

The Green Olympics, committed to providing a clean environment and improving Beijing's air quality, was a central promise of the event. Beijing vowed to provide a 'nice and clean environment' for the athletes and spectators and ensured that the Games would operate in an eco-friendly manner.³⁵ The change in

³² BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 3.

³³ Li Zhang and Simon Xiaobin Zhao, "City branding and the Olympic effect: A case study of Beijing," *Cities* 26, no. 5 (2009): 251..

³⁴ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 3.

³⁵ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 53.

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air quality in the 2000s is presented in Figure 2, which reveals an upward tendency in general, notably increasing in the year before the Olympic Games were staged and then reaching a plateau from 2009 to 2011. The apparent improvement in air quality only occurred at the peak time of the Games preparation: two years before the Games.

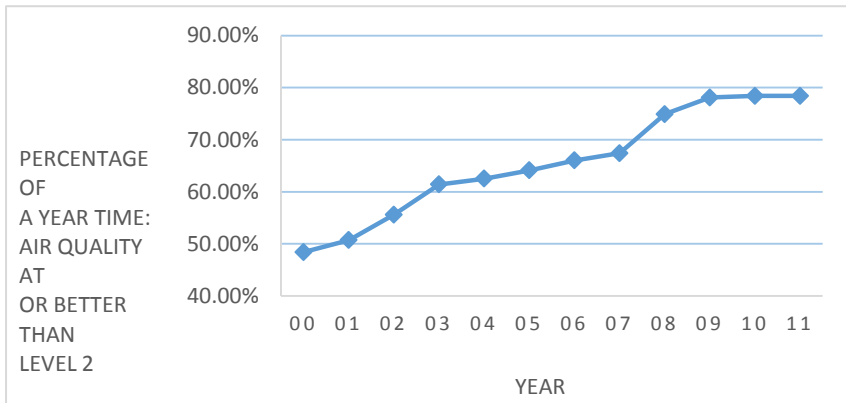


Figure 2: Air quality at or above level 2 in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

The air quality in Beijing remains a huge health concern for its citizens. Adding insult to injury, a 2015 documentary by Chinese journalist Chai Jing, titled *Under the Dome*, further provoked uproar for exposing the severity of air pollution in Chinese cities. The documentary aroused public suspicion of the issue because it documented ‘how little leverage they have with

public and private industry to enforce anti-pollution laws' and how environmental regulations have been 'steamrolled in China's industrial expansion'³⁶.

2. High-tech Olympics – economic and industrial dimensions

Hosting cities hope that the Olympic Games will provide an economic stimulus, and Beijing likewise had expectations of the 'Olympic economic boom'.³⁷ Figure 3 presents Beijing's regional GDP and annual rate increase from 2000. The undulating line in the graph presents a general upward trend pattern for the annual rate between 2000 and 2004, reaching a peak of 14.5% in 2007 and then experiencing a significant drop of 5.4% in 2008; afterwards, the yearly increase rate fell between 7.3% and 9.1%. An Olympic economic boom indeed occurred during the preparation years, but the effects faded away almost immediately after the closing ceremony.

³⁶ Ben Beaumont-Thomas, "Smash-hit Chinese pollution doc Under the Dome taken offline by government," updated 10 March 2015, 2015, accessed 3 May, 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/mar/09/chinese-pollution-documentary-under-the-dome-taken-offline-government>.

³⁷ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 300.

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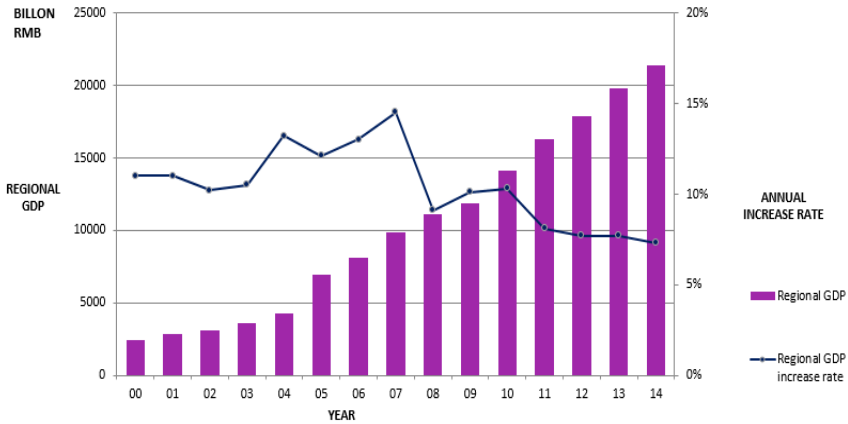


Figure 3: Regional GDP and annual growth rate in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

Beijing hoped for more than an overall economic boost but focused on the domains that particularly contributed to its modernization trajectory. Two of the industries focused on were ‘the telecommunications and information technology industries’, which had enjoyed ‘rapid growth’ and were expected to ‘be further enhanced by hosting the Games’.³⁸ Figure 4 illustrates the incremental expenditure growth in Beijing’s research and development.

³⁸ BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2, 5.

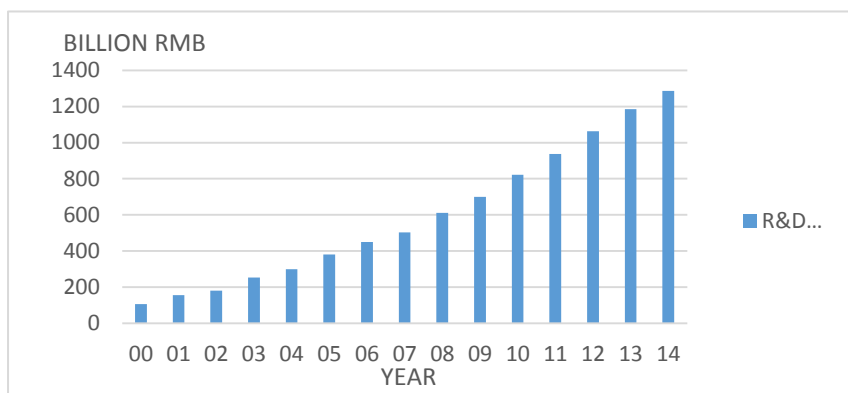


Figure 4: Research and development expenditure in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics

3. People's Olympics – civil dimension

In the People's Olympics dimension, Beijing portrayed itself as 'home for a time-honored oriental civilization'. It emphasized the Chinese philosophy of harmony in promoting cultural exchanges³⁹. The Beijing Olympics claimed to successfully promote the culture of volunteering and make the city more welcoming for citizens and visitors. The spirit of volunteering was designated as the spiritual legacy of the Beijing Olympics⁴⁰. As of 2012, a database of the Beijing Volunteer Foundation listed 1.53

³⁹ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 23.

⁴⁰ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 268.

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million registered volunteers.⁴¹

Another ambition for Beijing was to elevate China from a ‘sports country’ to a ‘sports power’⁴² by hosting the Olympics. As Figure 5 shows, compared to 2000, data from 2005 indicate an increase in weekly exercise habits among urban citizens in Beijing and a decrease among their rural counterparts, highlighting a notable divergence in exercise patterns. Despite this, by 2012, the proportion of Beijing citizens engaging in weekly exercise had reached 82.9%⁴³. This increase in mass sports participation is attributed to the Olympics and was seen by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as crucial to Beijing’s modernization and cultural development.

⁴¹ 北京商报, "以志愿者精神诠释北京精神 (Interpreting the spirits of Beijing with the spirits of volunteering)," 2012, accessed 10 May, 2015, <http://www.beijing2008.cn/city/voluntaryservice/volunteersaction/20120718/3718.shtml>.

⁴² BODA Beijing, "Study on the Promotion of Mass Fitness and Recreation in Beijing and the Improvements in the Level of Service for Public Sports," 2011, accessed 10 May, 2015, http://www.beijing2008.cn/Hot_Event/activities_2010/bjculture/olympicspeech/ltwj/yjbg/20120729/3745.shtml.

⁴³ BODA Beijing, "Study on the Promotion of Mass Fitness and Recreation in Beijing and the Improvements in the Level of Service for Public Sports."

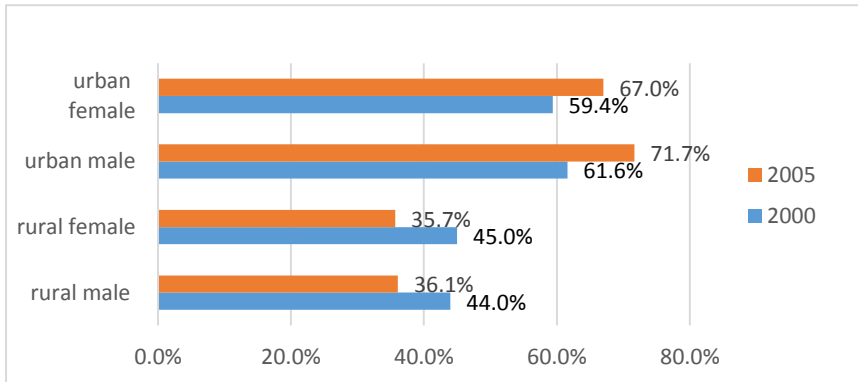


Figure 5: Citizens engaging in a weekly exercise habit in Beijing

Data source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Sports

B. The tangible: Built environment transformation

The transformation of the built environment is a crucial aspect of urban regeneration. Such tangible improvements serve to address community needs and provide visible achievements for politicians. Host cities often use the Olympics to catalyze and enhance physical regeneration and development. This section is dedicated to examining the regeneration in London and development in Beijing, highlighting a similar discourse of justification despite the cities' contrasting contexts.

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(A) *London - Games-Led Regeneration*

As one of the five themes⁴⁴ of the London 2012 Olympic legacy, the regeneration of East London was always at the center of public attention and dispute. London's Candidature File described the Olympic Games as a:

major catalyst for change and regeneration in East London, especially the Lea Valley, leveraging resources, spurring timely completion of already programmed infrastructure investment and leaving a legacy to be valued by future generation.⁴⁵

The language used and the message transmitted here epitomize how hosting mega-events has been justified in the past three decades by event promoters. Whether the justification withstands testing, nevertheless, demands closer inspection.

1. Change for the better, change for whom?

As shown in the following figure, my street survey in East London revealed that 34.1% of respondents believed transportation infrastructure had improved since London won the Olympic bid, and 53.2% noted an increase in recreational amenities.

⁴⁴ The five themes of the legacies of the London 2012 Olympics were sports and healthy living, regeneration of East London, economic growth, bringing communities together, and the legacy of the Paralympics (Government and Mayor of London 2013)

⁴⁵ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

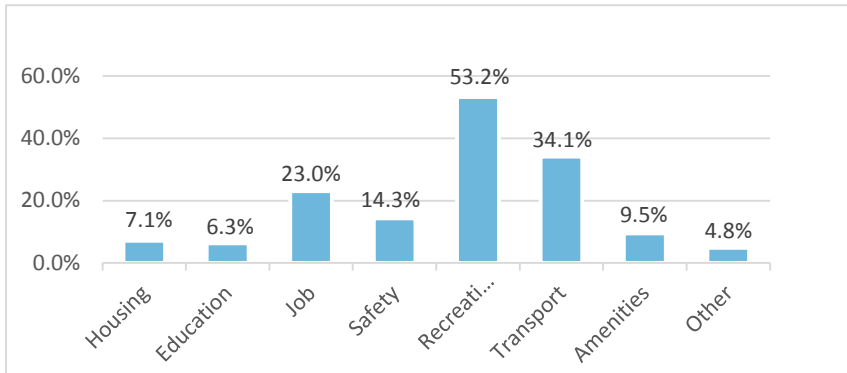


Figure 6: Dimensions that have changed for the better after London won the bid

The Government and some local authorities in the host boroughs insisted that staging the Games in the Lea Valley had been necessary for improving the area's transportation infrastructure. When considering the transport improvement brought about by the Games, an interviewee indicated the synergy between staging the Games and the progressive transportation changes; 'the improvement of public transport [in Stratford] was not appreciated before the Olympics, but it is now' (LON-01).

Regarding recreational amenities, survey respondents noted improvements, including increased facilities and enhanced attractiveness. However, this raises the question of who benefits: better transportation links serve locals and visitors, while recreational amenities reflect a decision on who the target clients

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are. Many respondents cited Westfield Stratford City⁴⁶ as a major improvement, but it was perceived as catering more to outsiders than locals, with minimal positive spill-over effects on surrounding businesses. Some respondents felt Westfield, described as an ‘island’, might have harmed local small businesses by creating competition and not fostering broader economic activity.

2. The cost efficiency of hosting the Games

That the host borough's area has needed redevelopment can hardly be denied. These environmental, economic, and social predicaments create a hotbed for widespread deprivation, which leaves the locals with a difficult life and a bleak outlook. An interviewee viewed the disadvantageous position of people in East London as ‘morally not right’ while the other side of London enjoyed the fruits of economic success (LON-02).

Despite that, the Culture Media and Sport Committee report highlighted divergent local opinions on staging the Olympics in the East End, with debates focused on the scale and methods of regeneration.⁴⁷ While tackling deprivation is broadly supported, opinions vary on the appropriateness of the Olympic scale for redevelopment. An interviewee put a question mark on ‘the scale

⁴⁶ A shopping center opened in 2011. It is also part of London's regeneration project, Stratford City, which aimed to transform the ‘fridge mountain’, the home of discarded white goods, into a multi-functional urban hub through staging the London 2012 Olympic Games.

⁴⁷ Culture Media and Sport Committee, Short A London Olympic Bid for 2012, 5.

of the Olympic process'; a smaller scale of redevelopment may better serve the area (LON-05). The street survey also revealed that 48.4% considered the Olympics an effective regeneration tool for East London, though only 31.7% saw it as the best approach (Figure 7). Many respondents viewed the Olympics as an effective but costly means of regeneration, questioning whether more direct and cost-effective alternatives might have been preferable.

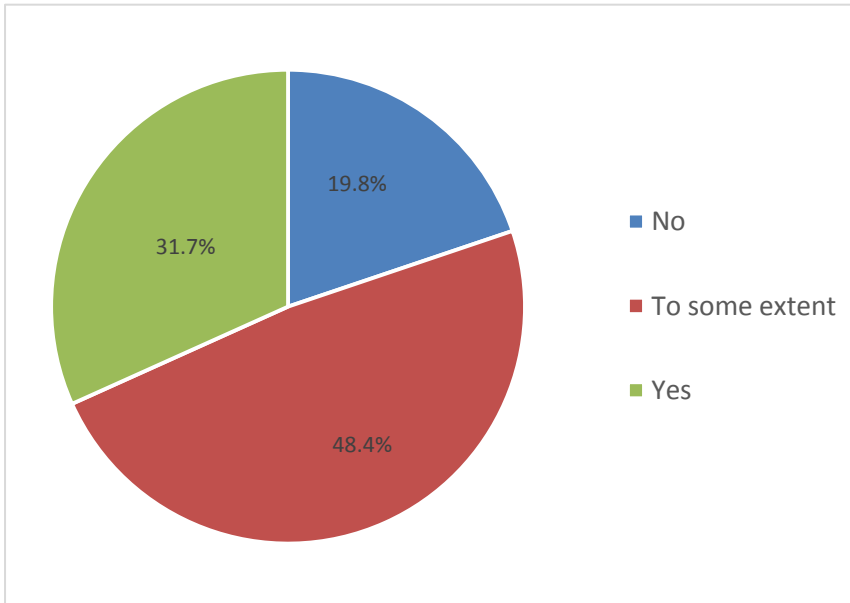


Figure 7: Whether staging the Games was the best way for East London regeneration

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(B) Beijing - Games-Led Development

Securing the 2008 Summer Olympics was crucial for China; as one interviewee noted, ‘We had tasted failure once before and could not afford to lose again’ (BEI-02). Physical development was, hence, not a primary goal; Beijing's need to win the bid outweighed it. Furthermore, China's construction boom predated the Olympic bid, with significant development occurring across primary and secondary cities in China . Nonetheless, the Olympics allowed Beijing to focus municipal and national resources on enhancing its development capacity⁴⁸.

1. Modernization and beautification

Hosting the Olympics marked a significant leap forward in Beijing's urban infrastructure as the city sought to join ‘the lineup of world cities’⁴⁹. The necessity of ‘high-end facilities’ for Beijing was argued by one interviewee. According to him, ‘it is necessary to newly build them and make them permanent’ (BEI-01). From 2001 to 2007, Beijing's road network expanded from 2,500 km to 4,500 km, and six new subway lines were added,

⁴⁸ Hyun Bang Shin, "Looking back and ahead: Lessons from the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games," 2012, accessed 28 November, 2013, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/looking-back-2008-beijing-olympic-games-shin/>.

⁴⁹ Neil Brenner and Roger Keil, *The global cities reader* (Psychology Press, 2006), 277.

increasing the total to eight by 2008⁵⁰. All five interviewees noted significant improvements in the city's infrastructure following the Olympics.

In addition to infrastructure improvement, Beijing undertook extensive beautification efforts to present its best face to the world. Traditional, spacious courtyard living for one family had evolved into slums crammed with four or five households, which was the target of the Chinese government's 'substantial slum-clearance program'⁵¹. The evacuation of residents peaked during Olympic preparations, with an estimated 165,000 people affected annually by demolitions or relocations, double the rate from 1991 to 1999⁵². Beijing's 'paradoxical status as a market economy led by an authoritarian state'⁵³ facilitated the rapid execution of standard operation procedures of land acquisition for delivering mega-events, namely a pipeline of demolition, eviction, compensation and relocation.

The CCP faced the risk of social unrest due to its aggressive

⁵⁰ BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*, 186.

⁵¹ Nicolai Ouroussoff, "Lost in the New Beijing: the old neighborhood," *New York Times*, 2008, accessed 16 August, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/27/arts/design/27ouro.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁵² Deanna Fowler, *One World, Whose Dream?: Housing Rights Violations and the Beijing Olympic Games* (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), 2008).

⁵³ Anne Broudehoux, "Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2007): 389.

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actions, leading Hu Jintao, upon his 2004 inauguration, to implement ‘a series of measures to address mounting tensions and appease social discontent’⁵⁴. Maintaining stability was crucial for the CCP, particularly during the Olympics. These measures seemingly mitigated tensions, with many affected residents viewing their inconvenience and displacement as ‘a worthy sacrifice’⁵⁵. The former chief village cadre of the current national stadium site recalled his communications with villagers in this context.

At first, residents were hesitant, not because of opposition to the Olympics, but because they were emotionally attached to the land. However, after some negotiation, they supported the event without excessive demands. Many now feel proud that the Olympic Park was once their home. They feel a deep connection to such a significant event and are eager to share that story with others. (BEI-05)

As the chief cadre responsible for negotiations between villagers, the demolition company, and the municipal government, his views may be biased. Another interviewee offered a more practical perspective, suggesting that local residents dealt with land expropriation by calculating their potential gains:

⁵⁴ Broudehoux, "Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis," 389.

⁵⁵ Broudehoux, "Spectacular Beijing: the conspicuous construction of an Olympic metropolis," 389.

People weighed the pros and cons of resisting versus cooperating with the government. When competing against the Chinese Communist Party, as seen in the Olympics, the chances of winning were slim. But if they were dealing with private developers, how long they could hold out as a "nail house" often determined how much compensation they could eventually get. (BEI-03)

2. Demolition, conservation, and more demolition

The rapid pace of mass demolition leading up to the Beijing Olympics not only fueled social discontent but also sparked conflict between the CCP, cultural conservationists, and international media. As shown in Figure 8, hutongs disappeared at an unprecedented rate during the two decades from the 1990s, when major construction projects began, to the 2000s, when Beijing was preparing for the Games.

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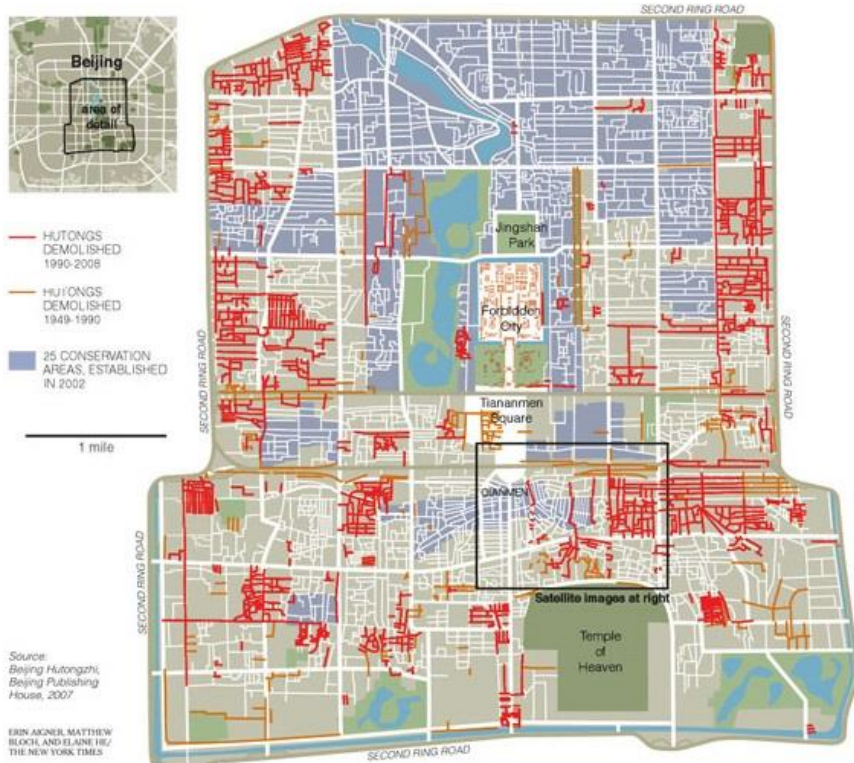


Figure 8: Map of demolished hutongs

Source: Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2008. "Lost in the New Beijing: the old neighborhood." New York Times. Accessed 16 August 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/>

With pressure from conservationists, both domestically and internationally, and to maintain an immaculate image for the Beijing 2008 Olympics, the CCP had no alternative but to slow down the pace of demolition. In 2004, 15 historic conservation

districts were newly listed⁵⁶ to limit their reconstruction only when the original design was retained; demolition and expansion were forbidden unless the structures were illegal⁵⁷. While this shift to cultural conservation appeared more neighborhood-friendly, it was argued that such efforts often facilitated the revalorization of historic quarters, leading to an incongruous mix of restored buildings and modern establishments catering to tourists. What is worse, designating conservation areas paradoxically accelerated demolition elsewhere, as the redevelopment of non-listed areas was deemed justifiable.⁵⁸

IV. Conclusion

This section is divided into two parts: a comparison highlighting their differences and similarities, as well as a concluding appraisal of the impact of event-led urban transformation on urban governance.

⁵⁶ The list is the Conservation Planning of 25 Historic Areas in Beijing Old City, initially announced in 1990.

⁵⁷ Deanna Fowler, *One World, Whose Dream?: Housing Rights Violations and the Beijing Olympic Games*, 22.

⁵⁸ Hyun Bang Shin, "Urban conservation and revalorisation of dilapidated historic quarters: The case of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing," *Cities* 27, Supplement 1, no. 0 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.03.006>, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275110000600>; Yue Zhang, "Steering Towards Growth: Symbolic Urban Preservation in Beijing, 1990-2005," *The Town Planning Review* 79, no. 2/3 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.2307/40112754>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40112754>.

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A. Comparison: Differences and similarities

To facilitate the comparison, the following table summarizes the findings of the two cases.

Table 3: Games-led intangible and tangible transformations

Category	London 2012 Olympics	Beijing 2008 Olympics
What is the primary legacy to achieve?	Convergence of East and other areas of London	Modernization of Beijing to catch international standards
What function does the Games provide?	Catalyzing and synergizing East London regeneration	Beautifying Beijing's urban landscapes and upgrading infrastructure
Evaluation of <u>social and economic transformation</u> ?	• Creating wealth and reducing poverty • Supporting healthier lifestyles • Developing successful neighborhoods	• Green Olympics • High-tech Olympics • People's Olympics
Evaluation of <u>built environment transformation</u>	• Skepticism about who benefits • Skepticism about whether regeneration through the Games is the optimal approach	• The beautification of the urban landscape • The cycle between demolition and conservation

The London 2012 and Beijing 2008 Olympic Games began with diverse aspirations: London aimed to converge the gap between its host boroughs and the rest of the city through regeneration, while Beijing sought to modernize and showcase

China. Despite contextual differences reflecting their social and political conditions, the broader patterns in both cases reveal similarities. Based on the comparison between the two cases, the differences and similarities can be derived.

Difference A. Convergence as opposed to modernization

The regeneration of East London was a central aspect of the London 2012 Olympics, serving as the primary rationale for domestic political support. The Olympics were framed as essential for converging the gap between the host boroughs and the rest of London, making their regeneration seem unattainable without the Games. London's successful bid was closely linked to this emphasis on social and community benefits, aligning with the Olympic brand's focus on humanity and its values.

In contrast, Beijing's primary aim was not urban regeneration but modernization. While the Olympics did accelerate improvements, Beijing focused on enhancing infrastructure and sports venues rather than merely boosting resources. The drive for modernization was rooted in aligning Beijing with global standards of what a modern city should be, rather than addressing immediate material needs.

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Difference B. Prudence as opposed to extravagance

During the London 2012 Games, scrutiny focused on cost-effectiveness amid austerity, with concerns about the stadium's environmental impact and its temporary nature. The emphasis was on ensuring that benefits would be distributed to the local community through a post-Games legacy. However, despite East London's regeneration being the primary justification for hosting the Games, the scale of the Games may have exactly diluted the goal of local improvements. As multiple interviewees and questionnaire respondents mentioned, smaller-scale regeneration efforts might have been more effective if the east regeneration were genuinely the purpose for hosting the Games, not the other way around. Taking such kind of cost-effectiveness considerations into account, economic prudence was, therefore, a key theme in London's approach.

In contrast, Beijing's delivery was characterized by grandeur and extravagance, exemplified by the £64 million spent on the opening ceremony compared to London's £27 million⁵⁹. The focus was on showcasing China's global reputation with a lavish and meticulously executed event, reflecting China's intent to present a 'real China' to the world. In addition to the budget scale, this desire was also epitomized by accentuating meticulousness

⁵⁹ Jonathan Grix, "Sport Politics and the Olympics," *Political Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2013): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-9302.12001>.

and precision in the delivery of the Games. Therefore, cost-effectiveness considerations were basically off the table.

Similarity A. Olympic Games: an exogenous but befitting essentiality

The necessity of hosting the Olympics to achieve host cities' regeneration and development goals is similarly elaborated in both cases. Official documents, such as the Candidature Files, describe the Games as integrating seamlessly into existing municipal plans, either accelerating regeneration (London) or upgrading and expanding urban development (Beijing).

Two key assumptions underpin this narrative. First, despite criticisms that mega-events disrupt local life and the social and political texture of the host city⁶⁰, both London and Beijing portrayed the Olympics as enhancing rather than disrupting urban governance. The Games were depicted as complementing and integrating with existing plans rather than causing fundamental shifts in resource allocation or agenda setting. Second, while both cities had pre-existing plans for regeneration or development, and while the Games were not a disruptive intrusion for host cities' urban plans, the Games were portrayed as a necessary condition

⁶⁰ Solmon J. Greene, "Staged cities: mega-events, slum clearance, and global capital," *Yal Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 6 (2003).; John Horne, "The Four 'Knowns' of Sports Mega - Events," *Leisure Studies* 26, no. 1 (2007/01/01), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360500504628>.

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for achieving the desired scale and impact. London's Candidature File argued that without the Games, East London regeneration would be slower and less ambitious.⁶¹ Similarly, Beijing's Candidature File and subsequent reports emphasized that the Games accelerated Beijing's modernization drive, aligning with its ongoing development efforts.⁶² In a nutshell, the Games were portrayed as exogenous yet befitting, accelerating but not redirecting urban development. However, this framing generated an ironic outcome: it legitimized extraordinary governance interventions as instruments of national and urban advancement, while downplaying how the Games reshaped decision-making processes, reset temporal priorities, and redefined the relationship between the state and urban space.

Similarity B. A mixed picture in legacy realization

Despite their contrasting social and political contexts, both London 2012 and Beijing 2008 present mixed legacies. Official narratives highlight the significant benefits of hosting the Games, but local skepticism persists. In London, while the host boroughs have seen regeneration, questions persist about whether the Olympics were the most effective approach and whether gentrification could genuinely benefit locals. The promise of convergence is thus questionable. In Beijing, measurable

⁶¹ BOA, *London 2012 Candidature File*, 1, 23.

⁶² BOBICO, *Beijing 2008 Candidature File*, 2; BOCOG., *Bid document and analysis: Passion behind the bid*.

improvements were evident during the Games but were short-lived, lasting only until the event's closure. The extensive demolition and displacement involved in Beijing's modernization process undermine the long-term value of these changes.

Both cities claimed that the Olympics aimed to benefit their populations. Still, evaluations through interviews and surveys reveal a gap between the official statistics and the lived experiences of local residents. State-led narratives of success coexisted with localized experiences of displacement, exclusion, and uneven benefit.

B. Concluding remarks: The dual nature of mega-events narrative and urban governance

Mega-events bring about a grand scale of visitor attractiveness and awareness, media reach and lucrativeness, public budget and private investment, and urban transformation and development.⁶³ A city's visibility, competitiveness, and symbolic status are closely crystallized in an event of weeks. Hosting a mega-event such as the Olympic Games is therefore utilized as a strategic instrument for cities competing in a globalized world. Anticipated economic, social, and

⁶³ Martin Müller, "What makes an event a mega-event? Definitions and sizes," *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 6 (2015/11/02), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.993333>.

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infrastructural legacies of decades are commonly invoked to justify the substantial resources involved and the urban agenda rearranged. Yet, as this study has shown, globalization's promise of uniform benefits is misleading: while the Olympics are marketed as a universal catalyst for renewal, empirical evidence suggests that the 'regeneration punch' frequently fails to materialize and may, in certain contexts, even contribute to forms of 'deep urban decomposition'.⁶⁴ While upgraded infrastructure and renewed urban spaces can constitute tangible post-event legacies, the rapid transformation demanded by global mega-event standards tends to prioritize spectacular, high-profile investments at the expense of more routine but socially significant policy areas. As a result, hosting a mega-event like the Olympics may well generate multiple forms of value, but those benefits are unevenly distributed across social groups.

By examining the Olympic legacies of London 2012 and Beijing 2008, this study has analyzed how global narratives of Games-led transformation shape urban governance within distinct socio-political contexts. Despite their divergent institutional arrangements, political traditions, and constructed Olympic aspirations, both cities framed the Olympics in remarkably similar terms before staging—an essential yet seamless extension that complemented existing urban strategies rather than fundamentally disrupting them. This convergence reflects the relations between

⁶⁴ Ed Hammond, "A Marathon, Not a Sprint," *Financial Times* (London) 2011.

the influence of globalized governance templates and the legitimacy conferred. Magnified development, exceptional measures, compressed decision-making processes, and redefined priorities are rendered politically intelligible and broadly acceptable.

The findings illuminate a space for a comprehensive appraisal of governance performance, which can be perceived through two dimensions. The first is the realization of promised legacies, a dimension that examines whether the economic, social, and infrastructural legacies articulated before the Games were materialized and sustained. Secondly, the distribution of costs and benefits brings attention to who gained from these transformations and who bore the costs. The costs involve the burdens of land expropriation, inhabitant displacement, social disruption, and resource diversion. Taking these two dimensions together, the implications for governance can be revealed. The focus has thus shifted from whether the Games produced substantial urban transformation to whether these changes benefit the public and the cities as a whole. Empirical findings of the study suggest that both London and Beijing were left with mixed legacies, at times clouded by controversy. Official evaluations emphasized measurable achievements and symbolic success, yet interviews and survey findings revealed persistent gaps between these assessments and the lived experiences of local residents. These discrepancies problematize claims that the Games were

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primarily hosted for the people, participated in by the people, and utilized to improve the lives of the people.

Rather than offering a normative critique of such political rhetoric, this study has sought to expose its dual nature. Globally legitimized discourses of development enabled host cities to pursue accelerated urban transformation, but they also masked the differentiated costs borne by various social groups. Recognizing this duality does not imply that cities should abandon competition to host mega-events. Instead, it underscores the importance of clearly identifying, across different policy domains, both the beneficiaries of event-led transformation and those adversely affected by it. Only through such clarity can stakeholders more fully assess the trade-offs of staging global spectacles and engage in more informed discussions about the long-term value for the cities.

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