The awarding of the 2012 Olympic Games to London is cited as being the catalyst for one of the biggest urban regeneration projects seen in Europe for many years, destined to create a new town the size of Exeter once the Games have finished (ODA, 2006). Whilst the media focus is on the development of the hard infrastructure needed to host the Games, it is the softer legacies and their long term implications that are often overlooked.

**Event Legacy**

Research on the social impacts of events, although limited, is becoming increasingly important (e.g. Waitt, 2001, Fredline et al, 2003, Cashman, 2006). Although such impacts are difficult to quantify, they are often examined through the residents' perceptions of the impacts (Fredline et al, 2003). Such impacts include developing a sense of place and community pride in conjunction with quality of life (Ritchie and Smith, 1991, Cashman, 2006) and the enhancement of social capital, vital in maintaining a productive and lively society. It is often assumed that if the economic benefits of an event are positive, it should therefore follow that the social impacts will also be positive. However, Malfas et al (2004) argue that whilst events may seen attractive through the positive economic benefits they accrue, the social impacts can be negative, particularly when residents are forced to leave their publicly funded housing projects to make way for event infrastructure. They highlight the case of the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games when 9500 units of affordable housing were lost and $350 million in public funds diverted from low-income housing and the social services to fund the Olympic preparation.

**Olympic Event Legacy**

An International Symposium on Legacy of the Olympic Games (1984-2000) was held in 2002 in Barcelona to discuss and explore the various aspects of Olympic Legacy at all levels. One of the findings was that legacy in Olympic terms is crucial in the organization and the final evaluation of Games but that in attempting to define legacy, there are several meanings of the concept. This is especially true because of different translations of the term within the various languages and cultures of the Olympic family [Hiller (2000), for example, prefers to use the word outcomes instead of legacy].

The symposium agreed that legacy is multidisciplinary and dynamic and evolving constantly, therefore whilst being difficult to define it is a local and global concept existing within cities,
regions and nations as well as internationally. (IOC, 2003, p.1). The symposium also discussed and explored various aspects of Olympic legacy at all levels and agreed that there has been insufficient attention given in the past to the outcomes of legacy and identified a great need for research into legacy and in particular that legacy building must start with the decision to bid for the games, (Ritchie, 1987; Cashman, 2006). Sustainable development is paramount within legacy planning in order to protect the environment, and the infrastructure for the games should be beacons of environmentally friendly development, thus satisfying the IOC’s third dimension of environmentalism. In April 2007 press cuttings (Harrison, 2007) reported that the UK bid was beginning to suffer through the lack of guidance and control from a central ‘Legacy Tsar’. The regeneration opportunities would not be maximized until such a role was appointed as “too many agencies and government departments are currently involved with no clear leadership” Clear leadership is required for the 2012 legacy for it to maximize its potential positive benefits and impacts, yet for this to happen it needs to be centrally coordinated.

Social impacts

Traditionally legacy denotes something that ‘kicks in’ as a result of something related happening as it is pre planned to happen at a certain time in the future. Volrath (2005) argues that legacy relates to the aims, motives, meanings and impacts of the Olympic Games but more specifically the results, effects and long-term implications. There are various types of legacy, yet it is only economic and to some extent environmental, physical and technological legacies that can objectively be measured. Psychological, social, cultural and political legacies are more subjective and therefore more difficult to quantify and therefore accurately measure. The social and psychological legacies are sometimes the most valuable (Ritchie, 2000), those that will ‘enhance the long-term well-being or lifestyle of destination residents in a very substantial manner – preferably in a way that reflects the values of the local population (p. 156).

Ritchie (2000) writing after the Calgary and Salt Lake City Olympic Games, suggests that events can provide a short term period of intense excitement for residents of host cities and even nations and long term awareness of the host destination in tourism markets, yet without the proper strategic planning it can be difficult to justify the immense expense involved. He further believes that legacy planning in respect of the Olympics can lead to the attainment of long-term benefits to host destination residents. The city transformations that can be undertaken as a result of hosting mega events depend on the quality of the planning and this will therefore include any housing issues. For a sustainable legacy, all the objectives of the various stakeholders need to be addressed and a holistic approach taken to the development and management of the Olympic facilities. The regeneration dividend should become a blueprint for future Olympic cities.
Olds (1998) writes about the Canadian case studies of Expo ’86 in Vancouver, 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games, and the rejected proposal to host the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Toronto by focusing on the event organizers having to deal with event related housing impacts through forced evictions. He purports that for an effective community force to be heard an organized, strategic and resourceful coalition of community–based groups is vital in order to have the capacity and knowledge base to deal with the complexity of the situation, to act forcefully at whatever level and to formulate diverse strategies in order to take advantages when they arise to seek to achieve common goals. A similar situation also developed in Sydney, with the issue of how best to deal with the homeless population prior to the Games’ commencement. In addition, many people suffered above inflation rent increases on their properties from unscrupulous landlords in order to force them out their homes to capitalize on the money to be made from the Games (Beadnell, 2000).

Special powers were invoked by the Olympic Authorities through Sydney City Council Rangers who were given the powers to remove anyone deemed a nuisance. Hamilton (2000) wrote that Sydney’s newest Olympic Sport was the ‘rent race’, and McWilliams (2000) wrote at the same time that some tenants who had lived for 20 years in the same building were given 60 days notice to move out.

According to Hall (1997) the creation of ‘desirable’ middle-class living conditions is often a precursor for higher property prices and increased rents. In addition there is also the risk of a breakdown in communities’ structure as seen in Barcelona 1992 with the relocation of many of the indigenous communities from the waterfront to several separate sites around the city.

For the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, ‘undesirable’ communities were either relocated away from the Olympic Torch relay route, so as to avoid being filmed by the media and in some places hidden behind a new wall specifically built for this purpose.

**Examples from Barcelona 1992 and Sydney 2000**

The planning of the Barcelona Games of 1992 became part of an overall strategy developed in the post–Franco era of the 1970’s in order to give the city back to the people after years of dictatorship rule and especially to stop the city ‘turning its back on the sea’ (Gold & Gold, 2008, MacKay, 2000). Influential politicians began an extensive programme of opening up spaces and transforming former industrial land into facilities for the Catalan people. One such influential local was Juan Antonio Samaranch, who encouraged Barcelona to apply for the hosting of the
Games to compliment the plans already in place.

The plan was to decentralize the games around the city by upgrading existing sporting facilities and spreading the facilities over four distinct areas. The main site being Montjuic where there was already a stadium, built in 1936, and a swimming pool constructed in 1972. The Diagonal was an existing sporting precinct and Parc de Mar and Vall d’Hebron also had existing facilities (Cashman, 2006). This conscious decision to spread the facilities around meant building a completely new Olympic village within the city, but away from the sporting facilities.

The decision was made to develop the housing on derelict land close to the waterfront which had only limited light industrial use and was large enough to accommodate the building required. Rather than build the minimum facilities required various Spanish architects were commissioned to build blocks of apartments all with different designs that would be suitable for local people to move into post Games. As part of this overall project the opening up of the seafront again, away from industrial use, was completed but not without having to relocate a community of gypsies who had made their home along the waters edge in shanty towns, especially Somorrostro and Camp de la Bota (Walker and Porraz, 2003).

The majority of the gypsies were rehoused in apartment blocks on the periphery of the city and whilst many have remained in these blocks some have returned to living in shanty towns in other parts of town as the only way of life they understand and also through disputes with other residents who disapproved on the gypsies moving in. However the developments in Barcelona continue to this day and rather than the Olympics being a catalyst for urban change (Chalkey and Essex, 1999) they have helped to accelerate plans that have been progressing for the last 30 years. There were no plans post the games to keep any of the newly created housing for social housing, but the city has recognized this need now and in its new developments are stipulating, in some cases, that approximately 25% of new units are available as social housing to be rented (Walliser, 2004) rather than forcing these renters to live on the periphery of the city and thus being socially segregated and polarized (Beckhoven et al, in press).

For the 2000 games, Sydney, in contrast to Barcelona, opted to develop a large urban project on the western edges of Sydney, despite there being many existing sporting facilities around other parts of the city. The original site selected in Moore Park was rejected by the residents, therefore for the 2000 bid Homebush Bay was selected so all the facilities could be contained in one site, with a few small exceptions. The land was similar to that used in Barcelona in that it was derelict with a few small businesses remaining but with no residents who would need to be relocated. The land had been identified for urban renewal in the 1970’s and in the intervening years many businesses including a large abattoir was relocated, losing the local council of
Auburn rental incomes of nearly $1m, which has resulted in cuts in budgets to facilities provided by the local council to their citizens (Cashman, 2006).

The development of the facilities for the Games was closely monitored by Greenpeace and therefore became known as the ‘green games’, thus satisfying the IOC’s third dimension of environmentalism. However, the properties that are now residential suburbs are built on former contaminated soil and the local waters are still polluted, yet they obtain premium prices on the open market. Further extensive developments have taken place around the park thus alienating the poorer social classes even further, but none of the properties have been kept for key workers thus having integrated housing.

There was little post games planning for the facilities and whilst the games gave great hope to the local residents of the nearest suburb of Auburn; they have gained very little from being the nearest community to the Olympic Precinct. Here the local council did not have an open relationship with the Games organizers and thus their role as stakeholders with in the pre and post planning stages was largely ignored (Curtin, 2007). Felli (2004) argues that partnerships in the organizing of the games will only succeed if three basic principles are adhered to; a clear understanding of each parties defined contributions; mutual confidence and understanding through effective monitoring, early identification of problems and risks, sharing information, use of previous games experience, transparency, and commonality of language and competent collaborators sharing common values. Searle (2002) argues that the attraction of new world-class sporting facilities in a country so sports orientated helped gain public support for the new infrastructure developments.

The London Legacy

When London won the bid to host the games on 6th July 2005, the London 2012 games vision was underpinned by the themes of delivering the experience of a lifetime for the athletes, leaving a legacy for sport, benefiting the community through regeneration and supporting the IOC and Olympic movement. The regeneration of the Lower Lea Valley will involve the regeneration of an entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives and works there at present, involving significant social and economic advancement. The bid committee believe this model of social inclusion will open up opportunities for education, cultural and skills development and jobs not just across the London area but also across the whole of the UK (London 2012 Candidate File, 2005a).
The Lower Lea Valley area earmarked for the Olympic Development is derelict and polluted land that has suffered from decades of under investment. The developments will become the biggest regeneration project in Europe in 150 years. The intention within the games legacy is to plan a network of restored waterways and new wildlife habitats to complement the physical infrastructure (London 2012 Candidate File, 2005b). The landscape is industrial and the surrounding communities are some of the most deprived in the country with 40% unemployment in the 5 Olympic boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham, Greenwich, Hackney and Waltham Forest, for example, 50% of children live in poverty in Newham (ODA, 2006). The ODA (2006) say the games will result in a new town the size of Exeter being built in the Lower Lea Valley including 40,000 new homes with priority assigned to key workers, new schools, community and health facilities. New transport links including new roads, enhanced train services, line extensions and new stations in conjunction with improvements to utility infrastructure, including a new and improved sewage system will help to provide sustainable growth and development.

Governance will be a key element with clear rules and accountability being essential before any benefits can be accrued. The Mayor of London has therefore been given Olympic-specific powers eg overriding some existing planning laws. ‘The LDA is the Mayor of London’s agency for sustainable economic growth and is working to build a thriving economy for London’s communities and businesses’ (www.london.gov.uk/londonissues).

The economic benefits are to be realized by The London Development Agency especially in their mission to acquire the land necessary for the building of the Olympic Park. This will include relocation of those businesses and other residents from the site of the park, including the Travellers Park in Waterden Road, The Evangelical Church and the East London Bus Depot. Other players involved within the regeneration programme include the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, The London Thames Gateway Development Corporation and the 5 London Boroughs.

For a sustainable legacy, all the objectives of the various stakeholders need to be addressed and an holistic approach taken to the development and management of Olympic Park. The regeneration dividend from London should become a blueprint for future Olympic cities but only through learning from past Games and the best practices that have emerged through studies of the social impacts of these Games.
We are grateful to Deborah Sadd and Ian Jones of Bournemouth University for permission to use their (2008) paper as the basis for this Ruff guide; to reference the above, and for the complete document with associated references, which has a particular focus on the affected traveller families please download the complete document;


For more on Olympic [soft - human housing and rights] legacy: click here