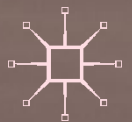




LONDON'S OLYMPIC LEGACY

The Inside Track

GILLIAN EVANS



London's Olympic Legacy

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*For my daughters—valiant warriors well-versed
in the ways of the world—they bring me honour.*

Preface

On the eve of the 2016 Olympic Games, in Rio, this is a book about London's Olympic legacy. I have written it, because I believe that London will become the planning-for-legacy test case city, against which all future Olympic cities will be judged. London has done better than any other host city to plan legacy uses for its Olympic Park, and sporting venues, both in advance of the Games, and in the few years immediately after. However, London still has lessons to learn, even while it also has lessons to teach the world, and especially other future host cities, about how to plan better for Olympic legacy.

Mine is a story about the drama at the heart of London's legacy planning operation between 2008 and 2012, a drama that centres on the fight for the political prestige of the Olympic legacy, and the struggle of a few determined individuals to take seriously and to honour the promises made in the Olympic bid to transform the heart of East London for the benefit of everyone who lives there. The heartening thing was to witness, inside the Olympic Park Legacy Company, the practical power of a vaguely left-wing political idealism inspired by, or in tune with, the promises of Ken Livingstone's Olympic bid, and Tessa Jowell's framing of the legacy challenge.

From the privileged perspective of a researcher on the inside of the planning operation, I capture here, a sense of the unfolding drama as attempts were made in London to harness the juggernaut of Olympic development, and its commercial imperative, to the broader cause of meaningful post-industrial urban regeneration and transformation in the Olympic host boroughs of East London.

The book is very purposefully written for a public audience, because the public deserves to know what happened with their money, what went well, and why, what failed, and for what reason, and who some of the champions of legacy were, and still are. I want the general public to be able to follow me on what is a difficult journey into the heart of a complicated situation, so my language is plain. At the end of each chapter, I include a list of ten suggested readings for those who wish to find out more, and some of those books, or articles, will lead the interested reader further into the considerable body of academic work that now exists about London 2012, and which is also a legacy of the Games.

I make no attempt to be exhaustive in my treatment of the Olympic legacy; there are many themes and issues that I do not cover at all. My focus is very specifically on the life and death of the Olympic Park Legacy Company, which came into existence in 2009, and met its end just before the Games in 2012. I speak here of unsung heroes behind the scenes, and the battle they fought, to hold fast to a set of principles they believed in, even when it often looked like all hope was lost. I describe too some of the scandals and controversies, and I shine a light under the carpet where one or two things have been swept. I do this not to be sensational, but to allow for reflection on how things were done, and what could have been done better. I show how there was nothing straightforward about the attempts to plan for, and deliver an Olympic legacy from the 2012 Games, and despite outward appearances, the whole thing was an experiment, from start to finish, in how to do something that had never in the world been done before.

There is no need for any future host city to reinvent this wheel, and part of the legacy ought to be that host cities learn from each other about how to ensure that the multi-billion pound spectacle of the Olympic Games yields more than the flow of international capital accumulation to cities competing for world-class status through 4 weeks of fabulous

sport. There is the potential, instead, for the development of a new model of twenty-first-century urban transformation in which dispossession, disrespect, and violence towards those people living in relative poverty is rendered globally unacceptable, and replaced by the attempt to solve the problems of urban marginality through an unfailing commitment to regeneration properly conceived.

My hope is that this book will provoke members of the public, policy-makers, academics, students, other host cities, and people who were part of London's Games and legacy-planning operations, to want to add their own perspectives about London's continuously emerging Olympic legacy. I have created a website for this purpose, so that an ongoing archive can be produced and enlivened by the contesting voices whose multitude it was impossible for me to capture. I encourage you to contribute.

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