

Sociology of sport

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Sociology of Sport Huw Lewis B. A. (Hons) Sport and Recreation Management
May 2009 “ Discuss the likely impacts of London 2012 upon UK sport and society critically considering its likely legacy for all levels of British society. ”

The current global economic problems have produced immense anxiety amongst the public and as per the reports from developing and developed countries many people already have started to cut down their expenses upon leisure activities. The recession is so severe that many people have already lost their jobs with many others afraid of losing theirs in the near future. Most countries, worldwide have cut back their expenditures on non productive sectors in order to overcome the current challenges, with this in mind and the spiralling cost of London 2012, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) states that “ Britain is justified in spending £9. 3 billion on the London 2012 Olympics despite the worst recession since World War Two” (Despite Crisis, 2009) The proposed London Olympics in 2012 is then, going to be a costly affair for Britain and its tax payers especially given the current recession. Even in stable economic conditions most of the earlier Olympiads have not produced the desired results in terms of revenue and sustainability of facilities once the event comes to a close. Sidney 2000 and Los Angeles 1984 are however exceptions to the rule and the question is whether London 2012 can follow in their footsteps. With three year left until London 2012 many concerns have already been aired amongst sociologists and economists regarding the expenditure of such a huge amount in conducting a big event under the current crisis scenario and the repercussions that may well entail after this Olympiad has finished. This paper analyzes the pros and cons of London 2012 through the lenses of the global economic crisis and

covers the likely impacts upon British society. Legacy of London Olympics “ Organisers and government officials hope the Olympics will transform the economically depressed London borough of Newham, which features Stratford and the Lower Lea River Valley. The Newham Council has offered their unequivocal support, particularly citing the proposed 9, 000 new homes at the Olympic Park with revamped healthcare and educational facilities, and the building of the Olympic Park itself. ” (London Olympics 2012, 2009)

Social life standards near the Olympic park will be improved. The opportunity to interact with different people from different countries during 2012 will improve cultural awareness within the community. Infrastructure and general community life will benefit, the locals of the borough near the Olympic village will have access to modern facilities, new housing, roads and improved public transport which can be utilised during and most importantly after the event. Again, new stadiums and sporting facilities will be embraced during the Olympics with overwhelming potential to provide an improved quality of life post 2012, amateur and professional sport along with concerts and other events can be hosted at such venues, this in turn could create sustainability, improving job opportunities and the local economy. “ The bid committee believes that the Olympics will create 12, 000 new jobs, with the possibility of many of them going to East Londoners. ” (London Olympics 2012, 2009) Many people have lost their jobs because of the current recession and hence the offered 12000 new jobs will be a substantial boost for the east London public. Furthermore, indirect job prospects and businesses in near proximity will definitely improve as most of the tourists visiting London 2012 will have good spending habits, hence industry will

benefit from the multiplier effect that the Olympics will generate. " The council also hopes that the Olympic Games will provide " role models for our young people in what is the youngest community in Britain" and " radically improve the image of East London and its residents." (London Olympics 2012, 2009) One of the largest beneficiaries of the Olympic movement is the youth of the country who will benefit in a direct and indirect manner. British children and young adults will have an opportunity to watch the superstars of athletics live in action on home turf. This will potentially inspire children to emulate such idols and motivate the youths to concentrate more on sports activities which will bring glory to the country in sports competitions of the future. Furthermore, youths who were interested in other antisocial activities like crime, drug addiction and alcohol addiction may change their habits and concentrate more on improving their physical activities. Obesity and other related health issues are big problems faced by a large proportion of the population within Britain irrespective of children, youths or the elderly. Lack of physical activities is being cited as the main reason for ill health and lack of self esteem amongst the public by experts. London 2012 will help improve the motives for physical activities hence, public health will be improved. Many diseases like, high blood pressure, Cholesterol, diabetics etc can be controlled by increased physical activities and the Olympics will help the public in getting the much needed motivation to combat such ailments. Other major advantages of London 2012 Olympics will be; to make the UK a world-leading sporting nation, to regenerate the heart of East London, to inspire a generation of young people, to make the Olympic Park a blueprint for sustainable living, to demonstrate the UK is a creative, inclusive,

welcoming place to live, visit and to conduct business. (London 2012 Olympic Legacy Action Plan, 2008) Arguments against London Olympics 2012 Critiques of the London Olympics believe that the proposed expenditure of £9.3b from the pockets of the taxpaying public in a non productive sector is definitely not a wise move by the British government. Apart from the 1984 Los Angeles (produced a profit of \$232.5 with 60% funding athlete development) and 2000 Sydney Olympics (8.5m visitors per year since the event, catering for 35,000 residents, employees and students daily), the event costs more than it returns to the host city. (Olympic Pros & Cons, Nd) The propaganda associated with each Olympiad is immense hence the public will consider hosting an Olympics as an achievement. The politicians or the administration want to prove that they are capable of conducting such a big event in order to boost their image and to obtain votes. They will never usually seek lessons from previous games held or think about the long term problems associated with the immense spend upon hosting the Olympics. The focus is short term benefits which will satisfy the public since the majority will not think in terms of future impacts at the time of the event, thus the public will be mesmerised by the hype produced and will be caught up in the moment, thus ignorant to future problems such as sustainability of the Olympic village. "The apparent economic growth of the host city is in fact the effect of expenditure switching, i. e. gain for one sector or place in expense of others" (Olympic Pros & Cons, Nd) Most people believe that Olympics will change the face of the city which is hosting the competition. The government will concentrate more on the Olympic villages and will spend more on infrastructure developments of these areas. But in

reality, such increased spending on these areas will be at the expense of others areas such as investing in grass root level of sports. The government will be forced to cut down the expenditure on other activities in other areas of the country which are necessary for economic growth, thus, the immense concentration of government focus on the Olympics will most certainly neglect the needs of other important issues. " Accelerated development required in hosting the Olympic Games disrupts the long term town planning of the city and result in a long term negative effect" (Olympic Pros & Cons, Nd) The focus will be entirely on the success of the Olympics games, so most of the planning processes will be in line with short term needs of the Olympics rather than the long term needs of the public. In other words, most of the facilities incorporated with the Olympics will become useless after the event is complete. For example, as what happened after Athens 2004, sporting facilities and the luxurious hotel chains made for the purpose of Olympic visitors and the local public may become useless after the event is over. The buildings and other facilities will remain simply as monuments of the event rather than anything else. During the event overcrowding and traffic congestion can cause the royal wedding effect where people stay away from the host city and if no plans are in place to sustain the development then the community will quickly degenerate. Impacts of the current economic climate upon the 2012 Olympics London has plenty of options in terms of sporting venues, but the biggest concerns surround the two public-private sector projects in the Olympic Park – the estimated one billion pound athletes' village and the 400 million pound media centre. An inability to secure bank loans could result in a possible shortfall of up to £250

million, Olympic authority's state. The slump in property prices, which could damage the chances of recouping money from the athletes' village after the Games, has also resulted in the number of post-Olympics apartments being reduced from 4, 200 to 3, 000. The deal with the private sector to build the media and broadcast centre is also in doubt. The 1. 3 million square-foot area may have to be scaled back post-Games because an anchor tenant cannot be found. (UK's Olympic plans run into credit chaos, 2008) The real estate sector is another major area affected by the current recession and the chances of selling out the buildings after the game are low. The London Olympic committee is already worried of such things and were forced to reduce the number of new building construction for the event. London already has more than enough sports facilities to accommodate the 2012 Olympics and hence the new facilities could be seen as a financial waste. Securing loans for the spending in the real estate sector is also difficult under the current economic scenario as banks are reluctant in granting loans. " We do not know what the real impact of the credit crunch will be with the economy, though past experience shows it will be severe, but you could argue it is the classic prescription for Keynesian economics [pic] – large public work projects at a time of unemployment. "(UK's Olympic plans run into credit chaos, 2008) Large public projects at the time of unemployment may be an answer in economic terms to deal with the economic crisis, but these projects must be on the productive sectors in order to sustain the economic development. The investments in big stadiums and hotel chains cannot be considered as a productive investment if they are unable to attract public interest after the event. London has ample facilities

in these departments and the new build may either destroy the older ones or may themselves fail to attract the required public interest. In any case the economy will be affected because of the huge investment in non productive sectors. " Both London 2012 and Vancouver 2010 Winter Games are now in serious financial trouble. The government's announcement that it has approved a bail-out worth almost £500m is tangible evidence that delivering Games won in the rosy economic climate of 2005 is going to be grim work. " (Dowdinsk, 2009)

Relation between London Olympics and Marxist Conflict Theory ' Marx believed that everything of value in society results from human labour. Thus, he saw working men and women as engaged in making society, in creating the conditions for their own existence. Economic exploitation leads directly to political oppression, as owners make use of their economic power to gain control of the state and turn it into a servant of bourgeois economic interests.' (McClelland, 2000)

Karl Marx has defined the working class as the creators of society. Only the working class will be able to contribute heavily to the society through their physical efforts. For example, most of the activities in the construction sectors in the London Olympics 2012 will heavily depend on the working class. The administration will succeed in preparing the much needed infrastructure facilities for the Olympics because of working class involvement. On the other hand these working class will be the least beneficial ones as far as the gains of the Olympics is concerned. Most of the activities and facilities offered by the Olympic village will be too expensive, thus, they will never benefit during or after 2012. " For Marx, conflict theory was a way to study the social control that the rich have over the masses. Further, he believed that one society or

organisation only functions in order to try and better their social situation, which usually results in some type of social upheaval. Social change that occurs as a result of a revolt effectively alters society as a whole. " (Marx Conflict theory, Nd) Most of the facilities offered by Olympics are intended for the upper and middle class alone, working class people may not get an opportunity to enter into the Olympic village or stay in an Olympic hotel because of lack of funds he or she may have. Any social changes which are happening in a society should affect the entire society, however the elitist nature of the Olympics does not accommodate this theory. Structural functionalism and London Olympics 2012 Structural-Functionalists believe that sports serve important functions in our society and should be justly rewarded. In fact, a sports team is a microcosm of the broader society, where everyone learns their roles and contributes to the broader running of the system (winning games). People who are not as qualified or talented should not make it to the elite levels that the London Olympic will portray, and those who do must have the best character, discipline, and skill level of all competing athletes. " Sports serve the ritualistic function of keeping society bonded and people (fans and teams) in solidarity with each other. " (Structural-functionalism, Nd) Structural functionalists believe that sports have a definite role in holding society together. Nationalism is strongly associated with all sports events especially the Olympics, hence the love towards the country will be developed immensely through sports activities. For example, we are daily witnessing the enthusiasms exhibited by the spectators of international sports events between different countries. In fact these events are a way of relaxing the immense stress associated with many

other activities of the current human life. " Functionalist analysis looks on social systems as having certain needs, and society as a system of social structures (economic, legal, educational, gender structures). If the needs are being met, then it is the social structures that meet these needs. "

(Functionalism and Parsons, 1999) Commercialism, Globalisation, Massification and Media power in relation to London 2012 Commercial interests are always inevitable, wherever the massification or thick public gathering occurs. Business people always look for the masses to spread their commercial interests through advertisements. Media power is so strong that it is not possible for the public to escape the constant reception and manipulation of goods and messages via sport, especially modern day Olympiads. Furthermore, innovative techniques are being introduced in all the audio visual and print Medias in order to capitalise on the mass assembled to watch the sports events like Olympics. (Maguire, 1999)

Commercialism is associated with every international sports event like the Olympics and globalisation has made things easier for the business interests of the corporate people in an event like London 2012. Since the Olympics attracts the participation of every country in the world, the main theme of globalization, collective growth under one roof, can be met with ease. Any country can utilise the possibilities of hosting an Olympics for their own business interests and London 2012 will be no different. Conclusion The London 2012 Olympic Games has created many waves of concerns regarding the economical impacts it can produce under the present scenario. Nobody has ever doubted about the need of sports in human life, but the expenditure associated with Olympics Games must be reduced and must be streamlined

for more productive works, thus the planning must concentrate on long term goals rather than the short term ones if society is to benefit. Money which is taken from other areas to fund this event will surely have repercussions upon society and this must be irrevocably avoided. Again, London 2012 must shy away from an elitist attitude and be inclusive of all levels of society but most importantly as the eyes of the world watch it is imperative that the games create a brand which encapsulates British culture and creates a sustainable, employment generating and economy boosting future beyond 2012 where the massive investment of £93b is not wasted but indeed utilised for the benefit of not only London but of the nation where international tourist and business will visit in years to come. This sustainability, if achieved must be careful not to destroy existing areas of London and work in unison with them to create a multiplier effect for British society, if this is achieved there is no reason why quality of life in the UK should not improve. However, as Athens 2004 proved if the focus is solely on the event itself and not the long term benefit then the potential to enhance the lives of the nation will be lost and could very easily make the UK and London 2012 a laughing stock.

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