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*Behind the Event: Governance,
Sustainability, and Social Impacts in
London 2012 Olympics*

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INTRODUCTION

Urban regeneration is one of the most debated and complex arguments of modern studies. In recent decades, as cities across the world have undergone radical transformations, mainly caused by globalisation, technological advancements, climate change and an increasingly social division, a key element that has developed for reshaping the urban landscape was regeneration. Its programs are usually designed as resolutions for the metropolitan deterioration, including the areas of the post-industrial period that have suffered disinvestment, population and ecological degradation. Nevertheless, these implementations are not simply physical and technical; actually, they are deeply political and societal interventions that can determine who will benefit from this urban transformation. Nowadays, urban regeneration has adopted not only these latter abilities, including reshaping urban infrastructure or increasing the city's economy, but also involves itself in global issues, such as sustainability, cultural mediations and global competitiveness, as the physical improvement of each city is then compared to the national welfare both in the city itself and in its citizens.

Within this scenario, mega-events such as the Olympic Games have become symbolic features of this strategic urban revitalization. As a matter of fact, these occurrences present both a period of international introduction, exposure and the possibility of converging private and public resources into the urban innovation planning that generally would be difficult to apply and develop. More specifically, the Olympic Games are frequently pictured as instigators of the urban regeneration of a city, since they temporarily furnish a combination of the government's intention, economic funding and public attention. As a matter of fact, their influence on the territory, their logistical needs and their symbolic resonance most of the time result in extensive reorganisations of entire districts; yet their framework is frequently criticised. This is a consequence of the fact that while some cities were commissioned as the host of the Olympics, and they were successful in translating the Games into enduring benefits, others faced some difficulties with finances, facilities and the deterioration of residents. Therefore, the most important challenge is demonstrating the ability to transform a temporary event into an enduring and inclusive result.

The present dissertation develops one of the most widely acknowledged examples of event-driven regeneration, which is the transformation of East London in connection

with the 2012 London Olympic Games. This occurrence is significantly relevant for its extensive circulation and its initial development as a legacy project, since the London Games were designed for a future perspective of the city and not only for the short-term's benefit.

Furthermore, different from the former editions, which were realised emphasising the image and venues, the London 2012 plan was founded on a broader development of society, economy, and sustainability, particularly regarding one of the most marginalised areas of the United Kingdom's capital. This area, typically known as East London, presented a high percentage of unemployment, precarious housing conditions, ethnic diversity, and local isolation, and was delineated as the primary and principal beneficiary of the Olympic Games, both for its oriented investment and for its enduring advancement.

The motivation that encouraged this analysis derives from the critical evaluation of whether these ambitions have been fulfilled, and since the London case has repeatedly been depicted as a perfect demonstration of legacy design, this thesis also wanted to develop some significant contradictions and issues, especially in this context of social vulnerability. The leading ambition of this paper is to estimate the enduring socio-economic and territorial effects of the London 2012 Olympic-led regeneration framework.

Firstly, this study tries to explain to what extent this programme has reached its pre-established objectives, including the amelioration of fabrics, the creation of job opportunities, the realisation of affordable housing and the promotion of social inclusivity.

Subsequently, this thesis considers the relationship between the regeneration planning and the previous metropolitan dynamics, such as gentrification, marginalisation and inequality. In this way, the ambition is not to provide a fixed assessment, but rather to determine the complexity of these consequences and to consider the circumstances that could ameliorate or interfere with the realisation of a more unbiased urban regeneration.

The methodology assumed is grounded on an analytical synthesis of the current literature, covering academic research, government reports, maps and planning documents. In this way, the combination of different perspectives and a critical review of disparate procedures and interpretations extended over time is furnished. Moreover, most of the time, a chronological order of sources has been adopted to highlight the controversies among discourses, points of view and effective results, mainly during the post-Olympics period.

The structure of the thesis indicates a parallel involvement with the argument, which is framed into three chapters.

The first chapter will present the theoretical and historical scenarios of urban regeneration. Beginning from a definition of the term, it will then develop by introducing the various theoretical approaches to this phenomenon, including environmental requalification, social inclusivity, and political and economic adjustments. Furthermore, the chapter will explore mega-events, particularly their types and role in urban planning, highlighting their initiator task of worldwide cities' revitalisation programmes, since the instillation of these occurrences often justifies extended investment, reshaping metropolitan areas and accelerating infrastructure operations. In conclusion, it will also provide an insight into the previous situation of East London, which will be depicted as the area of the Olympic Games and the one that will receive the major benefits from the regeneration framework.

The second chapter will further examine the case study of London 2012. Firstly, it will describe the project determined, which will be the ground for the regeneration programme, where there will be presented the prior socio-economic and territorial degradation of East London and then the principal consequence of this project, with an introduction to the various venues established for this mega-event. Then, this chapter will present the three main developed issues that the regeneration aimed at improving, which are sustainability, mobility and environment. Finally, it will focus on the relationship between the private investors and the public institutions, which allowed the effective implementation of this urban regeneration. Among these sections, the architectural elements and the arrangement's mechanisms will be underlined, to furnish a more detailed situation regarding the existing conditions, ambitions and effective operations that settled the basis for post-Olympic results.

To conclude, the third chapter will furnish a critical evaluation of the impacts induced by urban renewal observed in the years of the post-Olympic period. This essay is organised in opposite dimensions, so as to present a complete comprehension of both advantages and weaknesses. To present the earliest, it will be provided a general insight on socio-economic, environmental and cultural conditions, which will be implemented during the Olympics, but will also regard the heritage of this mega-event. Then, there will also be explored some intricacies, including displacement, re-evaluation and the

contradictory nuances of social inclusivity, especially developed in the following legacy. In conclusion, it will be underlined the relevant importance of regeneration in both physical and cultural terms to ensure an enduring and renovated space.

Ultimately, the present dissertation reveals a complicated legacy. As a matter of fact, the urban regeneration stemming from the London 2012 Olympic Games delivered different and important transformations, which can be noted as positive, but also as negative. Precisely this dichotomy, between effective improvements and criticised consequences, that attempts to combine metropolitan transformation, social equity and global recognition, will be the central reflection.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Foundations and Urban Context

1.1 Definition and Theories of Urban Regeneration

Before diving into the case of study of the present dissertation, a general introduction to the argument of urban regeneration is needed.

Firstly, it is necessary to provide a definition of the term “urban regeneration”. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, urban regeneration is

“The process of improving derelict or dilapidated districts of a city, typically through redevelopment.”
(*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018).

Indeed, as Roberts & Sykes (2000, pp.16-17-18) and Burdett (2015, p.19) suggest, urban regeneration is a multifaceted process that, over the last few decades, has become a crucial argument in the most disparate contexts, merging interdisciplinary competences, such as the physical redevelopment, economic investment, social inclusion, environmental issues, cultural and political concerns, with the support of both public and private investment. This method aims at ameliorating the living conditions of people in these environments, making them more comfortable, sustainable and inclusive. Additionally, Savino (2015, p. II. 1-II. 2) develops this concept by indicating that the term “urban regeneration” is hedged into various institutional operations and bottom-up practices. This implies that this process is not merely a plan for cities’ transformation, but it involves a different cultural perspective in urban governance, involving different approaches, methods and objectives.

Furthermore, in the last decades, scholars have delineated several theoretical approaches to explore the effects and objectives of urban regeneration. These perspectives guide the intricacy of this area and the numerous consequences, mainly when applied to large-scale projects (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, p. 9).

As mentioned previously, a major component of urban regeneration is the *economic framework*, where this phenomenon is perceived as a reason for the renovation of local economies, specifically regarding employment, tourism and business growth. This economic fundamental is one of the principal reasons for hosting mega events, which are applied to promote infrastructural and economic development. Examples of this approach can be: the valorisation of a territory, through the reconnaissance of a better

position in the ranking of the area, for instance Summer Olympic Games of Atlanta (1996) or the promotion of a nation through a small area, such as Winter Olympic Games of Lillehammer (1994), which presented some uncertainties due to the economic effects that sink rapidly and that strengthens a previously solid area, the so-called “critical mass” effect (Guala, 2002, pp. 743-751). A deeper comprehension of economic regeneration, considering it as a process that enhances employment prospects, business development and long-lasting investment. They affirm that regeneration initiatives should be aligned with economic strategies and that both private and public investment needs to be adjusted to support these contributions. These scholars also consider this renewal not solely but associated with social and environmental objectives (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, pp. 61-85). In short terms, these perspectives constitute the foundation for a sustainable and inclusive regeneration, maintaining the economic fundamental as the primary motivator.

In addition to economic investment, scholars reflected on addressing regeneration policies towards *social inclusivity*. As a result, there’s a discussion that renewal processes should focus on social equity and community involvement, considering that hierarchical approaches could alienate residents unless supported by active involvement. This contribution is seen as possible through community attendance, accessibility of services and the involvement of peripheral groups (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, pp. 109-116).

Additionally, regeneration must promote the advancement of social cohesion and the moderation of fragmentation, otherwise this may increase disparities. Ultimately, this evaluation affirms that social regeneration policies in the urban environment are not only legitimately necessary, but also decisive for the sustainability of these transformation processes (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, pp. 117-128). These perceptions, however, find an empirical counterpart in the examination of East London renewal after the 2012 London Olympics presented by Watt (2013). He critically analyses the experiences of long-term residents, affirming that these projects of revitalization most of the time result in phenomena such as gentrification that deteriorate social cohesion (Watt, 2013, pp. 99-104). This scholar also introduces the risks of displacement (how lower-income residents are pressurized out of their homes and neighbourhoods) (Marcuse, 1986, quoted by Watt, 2013, p. 101), which investigates the psychological and cultural alienation that occurs among established residents, distinguished into those of Carpenters Estate, a council housing estate dealing with a potential demolition and young people settled in a temporary

supported housing unit. These neighborhoods, in fact, experienced a physical renewal, but they no longer represent the identity of these people (Watt, 2013, pp. 100-104). Watt (2013), through interviews and ethnographic inquiry, explains how residents felt towards renewal, that is, a regeneration addressed to outsiders, exemplified by the recurring expression of “it’s not for us”, which demonstrates the disconnection between narratives and real-life perceptions (pp. 104-110). Furthermore, Watt (2013) underlines the expressions of “legacy” and “opportunity” as terms that mark marginalization among long-lasting inhabitants rather than delivering benefits (pp. 110-118). Jointly, these perspectives explore the necessity for socially attentive planning that prioritises the interests of the community in urban regeneration.

Another theoretical approach is the *environmental theory*, which influenced the regeneration process in consideration of climate adaptation and ecological sustainability. Burdett (2015) asserts that this frame of reference should underline green fabrics, an elevated architectural quality and public accessibility to foster an enduring adaptability. In particular, he examines the Olympic and post-Olympic East London situation, presenting how ecological initiatives can ameliorate urban quality and environmental utility (pp. 19-23). To support this point of view, Müller (2015) explores the environmental legacy planning during the London Olympic Games, especially the development of multifunctional public spaces and urban ecosystems. He emphasizes the effects of green factors, for instance, biodiversity involvement and stable landscape governance, on renewal policy to foster wider sustainability purposes (pp. 629-638). In conclusion, aligning these two perspectives establishes the importance of combining environmental operations with the territory’s sustainability ambitions.

An additional theoretical approach is the *cultural theory*, which presents cities as symbolic scenery grounded in symbolic and social values. In this way, Savino (2015) presents urban regeneration as the readjustment of spaces and meanings, combining not only economic dimensions and infrastructures but also urban identity. He states that renewal processes could alter the way places are culturally considered, thus recurring into a collective memory and symbolic capital dimensions (pp. II.1-II.2). This interpretation is analysed to a greater extent by Acierno (2012), who suggests the manner through which revitalization legacies consequential to mega-events can relate cultural aspects with enduring planning procedures. Presenting the London Olympic Games organization, he

debates that the reconfiguration of places can define new urban structures and restore the image of the city, aiming at repositioning the United Kingdom's capital symbolically (Acierno, 2012, pp. 157-163). In this way, cultural regeneration is an important element that presents innovative urban principles combining civic involvement and international recognition.

Lastly, a further theoretical approach is the *political theory*, which develops the administration of regeneration. Generally, this perspective can be seen as the combination of institutions, stakeholders and policy processes that can guarantee the outcome of urban renewal. As an explanation, the House of Commons report (2015) affirms that an efficient renewal requires a mechanism of combined authorities, such as different levels of government, private individuals and committees in open decision-making. In this sense, the regeneration legacy is guaranteed as based on economic and local essentials (pp. 12-14). Moreover, this perspective is further analysed by Roberts & Sykes (2000), who consider institutional competency, policy inclusion and stakeholder involvement as fundamental for a successful regeneration (pp. 129-134). On one hand, they notice that inadequate coordination and ambiguous directives can compromise revitalization procedures; on the other hand, they saw that inclusive structures can enhance willingness and legitimacy (pp. 137-139). Referring to broad events, such as the Olympic Games, the cooperation between institutions and stakeholders was necessary to moderate interests and ensure a steady impact.

In conclusion, urban regeneration is a compound process, defined by multiple theoretical perspectives that underline economic development, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, cultural identity and political institutions. These approaches combined present a model for the interpretation of cities' development through organized interventions. In the following division, it will be presented how mega-events, with a focus on the Olympics, are used as strategic vehicles to instigate the previously mentioned regeneration interventions.

1.2 Mega Events as Tools for Urban Regeneration

1.2.1 Definition and Typologies of Mega Events

If we wanted to introduce the concept of mega events, we could say that they are cultural occurrences of global relevance that go beyond the typical fixtures in terms of

investment, scope and media coverage. More specifically, according to *A Dictionary of Sports Studies*, “mega events” are

“large-scale cultural events that have usually at least a national profile and impact, and often an international one, and that are organized on a larger scale than routine fixtures in the sporting calendar.” (*A Dictionary of Sports Studies*, 2010).

In this regard, Roche (2000) introduces one of the leading sociological interpretations of mega-events, defining them as broad performances that represent modernity through ceremonies of national and cultural identity, as well as global interconnections. More precisely, he distinguishes four types of events: *community events*, local in character and media attention (e.g. Rural Town Event); *special events*, allocated for defined occasions of national and international targets (e.g. Grand Prix); *hallmark events*, related to a regional or national public and occurrence, which is on a regular basis (e.g. the Edinburgh Festival); *mega events*, which are striking in spread, audience and media attention (e.g. Olympics and Expos) (pp. 3-5). Referring to this study, Guala (2002) underlines that these categories are then situated within a wider framework, which is that of *public events*, since they explore wide-ranging topics including urban policy and media affluence (p. 745; Roche, 2000, p. 3). Moreover, he offers a matching but theme-oriented classification that specifically divides mega events into four categories: *religious events*, such as the Jubilees, which increase spiritual identity; *political events*, which provide short-term but evident urban transformations (e.g. the G7); *cultural events*, which imply substantial infrastructural investment (e.g. Festival Cinema); *sporting events*, such as the Olympic Games, which produce a global relevance media attendance and an extensive urban renewal (Guala, 2002, p. 753).

Another perspective is then proposed by Müller (2015), who develops the uncertainty that is often related to mega events. In particular, he suggests four terms of evaluation: *visitor attractiveness*, *mediated reach*, *cost* and *urban transformation*. Through these latter, then, he divides events into *major events*, which have an important extent, but lack in some dimensions; *mega-events*, which are the most common events and provide substantial investment to almost every area; *giga-events*, which are both the largest and the rarest among the others (pp. 628-637).

Similarly to this last perspective, Pane (2023) repositions himself towards the strategic usage of mega events in urban regeneration. As a matter of fact, he sees these occurrences not only as ceremonies of international identity or spectacles, but mostly as functional mediums that can cause investment, integrate private and public measures and alter the image-making of the territory (pp. 9-12). His overview, which combines the ones of the previous scholars, presents the characteristics that better define the categorisation of the events. These qualities are: the *dimension*, which is the ability to attract a great amount of people based on the capacity of the hosting city; the *drawing power*, which is the capacity of drawing the attention of a public grounding on the spread of the event; the *theme*, that define the subject of the events; the *frequency* of the event that describes how often these events occur; the *durability*, which delineate the period that these occasions are performed and the *role of the public*, who can be seen as only spectator or also part of the experience (p. 13).

In conclusion, Pane (2023) states that the frameworks of Roche (2000) and Guala (2002), as previously described, are insufficient due to the advancement of media that depends on technological development (p. 16).

1.2.2 The role of mega events in urban regeneration

As mentioned previously, major events are repeatedly used as an instrument to induce urban regeneration. This deliberate vision of mega events is supported by Roberts & Sykes (2000), who state that the organisation of these occurrences could arouse a broader renewal, only if the urban planning is hedged into a long-term structure (pp. 66-70). In this regard, it could be noted that some cities followed this arrangement, such as Barcelona, Sydney and London, which specifically through the Olympic Games accomplished different urban renovations, including public infrastructure and investment (Smith, 2012, pp. 101-106). Although these positive consequences, it is also important to consider some unconscious effects of this phenomenon, for instance, the dimensions of these events that might not fit into the city, or also the usurpation of communities and businesses, usually occurring when the scheduling of events is restricted (Smith, 2012, pp. 116-122). In this way, the role of urban regeneration could be depicted in three different categories developed in three timeframes: *motivators*, *accelerators* and *models* for completed campaigns (Smith, 2012, p. 101).

Referring to this categorisation, Figure 1 below is a representation of the London Olympic Park, a perfect example of a versatile regeneration, where green infrastructure and institutions have been repositioned to achieve an enduring urban legacy (Acierno, 2012, pp. 164-166).

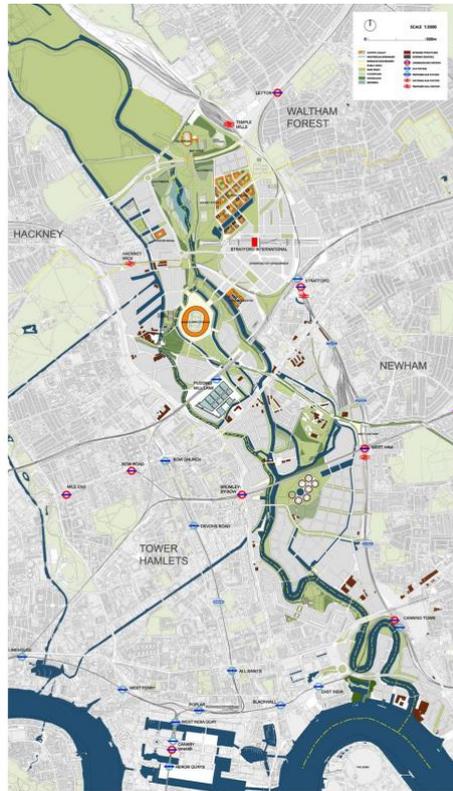


Figure 1: The 2012 London Olympic Park legacy plan (Source: Acierno, 2012, p. 164)

Therefore, these occasions not only encourage a material renewal but also an institutional reconfiguration (Müller, 2015, pp. 630-633). However, due to time limits, international administrations and public government efforts, mega events could also be considered as elements of “*exceptional routine*”, a model through which, rather than using a standard planning approach, the process of decision-making is converged together (Basso, 2017, pp. 22-25). This procedure, if on one hand might assure a certain efficiency, on the other hand, it could endanger public participation and threaten social disparities (Basso, 2017, pp. 28-29). Even though this approach of Basso (2017) is very critical, more recent analyses have underlined how mega events contributed to the integration and inclusion of urban legacies. In this sense, Keçeci (2025) evaluates the 2012 London

Olympic Games as a combined regeneration, underlying the merging ecological organization, public space scheme and mobility.

In short terms, mega events are difficult to define, because they can present different connotations and reach various numbers of spectators. Moreover, according to their structure, they constitute both occasions and hostilities in urban regeneration, so they need to be handled with particular attention to inclusion and enduring legacy. In the following section, we will develop the context of London, more specifically the Eastern area, before the 2012, year of Olympic Games.

1.3 The context of East London before the 2012 Olympics

Before London was assigned as the host city for the 2012 Olympic Games, the Eastern area of the city was characterised by a fractured urban and social scenario grounded on inequalities. As a matter of fact, on one hand, these boroughs experienced economic readjustment, high unemployment percentages and environmental deterioration, on the other hand, they became an opportunity for regeneration because of the reclaiming of land and constructions (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, pp. 21-23). In East London, there was a green area, later depicted for the realisation of the Olympic Park, that presented a pronounced potential for revitalisation, but was historically, socially and physically damaged by the environment, accessibility and poor public services, which was the Lea Valley Green Grid Area, that comprehend Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. This landscape, which was one of the areas chosen for the realisation of the *ELGG (East London Green Grid)*, a project aimed at developing a green infrastructure in East London, realised in concomitance with other frameworks, like the Thames Gateway initiative, was lacking integration with the metropolitan network and needed substantial adjustments before promoting an extensive regeneration (Acierno, 2012, pp. 157-162).

Furthermore, Smith (2012) develops the concept that East London was considered a deprived and unbalanced territory, especially because of de-industrialisation and the wreckage of World War II, which, among the various difficulties, generated pollution. In this context of marginalisation, developing the Olympic Games was seen, as mentioned previously, as an opportunity based on its spatial capacity and the implementation of social inclusivity, especially with the Western part of the capital, and space rebranding

(pp. 104-105). In addition to the socio-political perspective preceding the Olympic Games offered by Smith (2012), a focus on the residents and their sense of exclusion is necessary.

In short terms, many inhabitants of the Clays Lane Estate, who were displaced for the realisation of the Olympics, feared this process of regeneration led by this mega-event since it aroused phenomena that concentrated on external investment rather than on their necessities (Watt, 2013, pp. 100-105). Moreover, Burdett (2015) develops this reflection, presenting the architectural difficulties that could be found in East London before the Olympics. In particular, he noted the lower quality of urban infrastructure and design, which later explained the necessity of renewal planning (pp. 19-21).

In conclusion, the area of East London before 2012 had numerous drawbacks, including fragmentation and limited potential. Therefore, awarding it for the Olympic Games was a decision derived from: the necessity of revitalising an area that could be recognised internationally and the spatial reconfiguration after enduring urban disparities. However, as the previous studies demonstrated, such objectives risked some episodes of gentrification and displacement if not accompanied by inclusive frameworks.

Chapter 2: Arrangement and Implementation of the Urban Regeneration

2.1 The Urban and Infrastructural Project of the 2012 Olympics

The realisation of the 2012 London Olympic Games, which were presented from 27th July to 12th August 2012, enabling this city to become the first one to host three editions of this mega-event: in 1908, 1948 and 2012, stemmed from a strategy centred on the urban and infrastructural regeneration of the Lea Valley Area, one of the city's most neglected districts. Selecting this territory for the Olympics, despite its various drawbacks, including logistical, ecological, and social disruptions, enabled extensive and prompt development that would otherwise have been abandoned (Azzali, 2017, p. 1; Smith, 2012, pp. 103-104). This latter programme regarded the redevelopment of architecture, with a higher quality outline, public places, which were developed more ecologically, and frameworks that covered practical necessities and social ambitions. Through this itinerary, a vibrant area was provided (Burdett, 2015, pp. 20-21; Azzali, 2017, pp. 7-8). One of the leading outcomes of this procedure was the foundation of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, named after the commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II, a 240-hectare territory that could accommodate sporting establishments, green frameworks, residential neighbourhoods and upscale public lands (Acierno, 2012, p. 157; Azzali, 2017, pp. 6-7). This masterplan scheme, led by the London Development Agency and the Olympic Delivery Authority, promoted interconnection, sustainability and embedded land employment and was integrated within the East London Green Grid (ELGG), a 2003 project that wanted to establish a green infrastructure in the East London area, grounding on the versatility of open spaces and oriented to the installation of interrelated districts.

This strategy specifically regarded the revival of the River Lea with its affluents and the development of ecological corridors that affiliate the park with adjacent areas, as revealed by Figure 2 beneath (Acierno, 2012, pp. 156-160).



Figure 2: ELGG (East London Green Grid) Framework Plan (Source: Acierno, 2012, p. 158)

For the first time, some of these manoeuvres guided a territorial and environmental persistence that was absent and allowed an enduring legacy that went beyond the 2012 mega event. Examples of this Olympic-led prospect were: the *London Aquatics Centre*, an indoor forum with a diving pool and two swimming pools, which was projected by Zaha Hadid; the *Olympic Stadium*, conceived by Populous, which was restricted to 54000 seats after the event, and nowadays is used by West Ham Football Club and British Athletics; the *Lea Valley VeloPark*, which is a cycling arena with a velodrome and a racetrack, drawn by Hopkins Architects; the *Copper Box*, created by MAKE Architects, which previously hosted competitions of handball and goalball, while now has multifunctional purposes; the *Lea Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre*, named also Eton Manor, which was delineated by Stanton Williams and has two hockey rinks and ten tennis camps. All of these were established to provide a lasting purpose after the Olympics. In addition to these latter, some other venues were contrarily removed, such as the *Basketball Arena* (Azzali, 2017, p. 7). Following the perspective of Acierno (2012), Burdett (2015) underlined that, unlike previous Olympic editions, the peculiarity of the London Olympic Games was its interest in spatial cohesion and urban conditions, clarified with its focus on the public space (p. 20). In this way, the venues were both

functional for the Games and symbolic, since they conferred a new identity to East London.

This Olympic-led enduring vision was further supported by Allies & Morrison (n.d.), an architectural firm that contributed to the legacy masterplan, as shown by Figure 3 below. They allowed an interconnection between different but interrelated quarters, such as the residential, communal and occupational ones. As a matter of fact, these latter were thought to conform and provide availability, utility and cohesion over time and among various subjects (Allison & Morrison, n.d.).



Figure 3: Olympic Legacy Masterplan overview. (Source: Allison & Morrison, n.d.)

Among the various reasons, the urban regeneration defined for the Olympic Games aimed at reestablishing the connection that was historically endangered between East London and the rest of the capital.

In this sense, the Stratford transport structure, initially marginalized, was remarkably upgraded to evolve into one of the most accessible hubs of the city. These advancements were a transaction of nearly £6.5 billion and regarded both this quarter and its surroundings, involving the Docklands Light Railway and Underground lines. This transport system enabled regional connectivity and the accessibility inside the park (Transport for London, 2011, p. 8).

This coordinated strategy revealed its effects, especially in the years of the post-Olympic phase. Indeed, for the first time in the history of the United Kingdom, the Olympic Park developed into a perfect example of urban regeneration that could combine sports forums, green arenas and infrastructural developments (Azzali, 2017, pp. 7-9). Moreover, the urban and infrastructural project of London 2012, as it was conceived, was an opportunity to present how mega events are interlinked with the urban renovation of their host city; as a matter of fact, regeneration was not activated post-event, but in concomitance with the event itself (Keçeci, 2025).

In short terms, the framework of London 2012 became a model for the further editions, since it presented how a spatial area can convert mega events into enduring urban advancement.

2.2 Sustainability, mobility, and environmental innovations

The London Olympic Games of 2012 constituted an important milestone in combining urban regeneration with specific features, such as sustainability, mobility and environmental innovations, which have become increasingly significant over time. As a matter of fact, during the realisation of this process, combining ecological transformations with its planning delivered the Green Infrastructure Plan, which turned the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park into a polyvalent infrastructure that went beyond the mega event.

Since the major risks feared by the Londoners were the floods over the metropolitan area and the potential rise of the River Thames, this programme provided both restored waterways, broad wetlands, local planting methods and a decontamination of soils through innovative technologies (Acierno, 2012, pp. 156-162).



Figure 4: Rendering of restored rivers and wetlands corridors (Source: Acierno, 2012, p. 163)

Concerning these transformations, there were also some environmental innovations upon buildings and public areas, which are a consequence of the fact that the Olympic Park's planning was focused on enduring flexibility, promoting biodiversity and reducing energy consumption. In this sense, sustainability did not only regard territory and fabrics, but it also had to guarantee post-Olympic Games maintenance, allowing an evolution that could be aligned with climate conditions and green frameworks (Azzali, 2017, p. 11). A demonstration of this affirmation is the fact that sustainability evolved into energy and materials. This meant that the infrastructures of the Olympics were developed through a low-carbon policy, which could combine isolating materials and "smart grid" technology, which monitored the effective amount of consumed energy, to reduce non-renewable energy consumption and operational costs. Moreover, the materials used for the temporary and permanent constructions were adopted because of their eco-friendly impact and recyclability, minimising their waste of energy during the process; for instance, the Lea Valley VeloPark was realised through the adoption of wood taken from certified forests, which could guarantee a thinner venue and reduced energy consumption (Keçeci, 2025).

Turning to the mobility innovations, this mega event delivered a remarkable renovation in transport organization. Firstly, London wanted to distinguish itself from the previous editions, providing an important modal evolution, and indeed, these occurrences

were frequently occupied as platforms to analyse the originality of transport programmes (Guala, 2002, p. 747). Specifically in this context, attention was shifted towards walking, cycling, and mass transit, active means of transportation from one venue to another. An initiative denominated “Active Travel Zones”, which stimulated a “car-free” scheme and encouraged a behavioural rearrangement among the public, also adaptable for the post-Olympic period. To achieve this, guaranteeing better accessibility to the park and the connection between formerly separated neighbourhoods, as demonstrated in Figure 5 underneath, supplementary walking and cycling routes were installed (International Olympic Committee, 2021).



Figure 5: Olympic walking and cycling routes in the Lea River Valley (Source: Public space, 2018)

As can be observed, the 2012 London Olympic Games functioned as an experiment for a combined urban mobility renewal. As a result, this event highlighted the value placed on motorless vehicles and local transit, and facilitated a coordinated operation between transport authorities, urban organisers, and district stakeholders, as we will discover in the subsequent section (Keçeci, 2025).

In conclusion, the environmental structure of the capital in 2012 was made possible by the enhancement of sustainability, mobility, and ecological innovations within

enduring spatial progression, which were considered fundamental features of the area's regeneration, as they provided design originality and a widespread arrangement.

2.3 Governance and stakeholders involved in the regeneration

The London 2012 Olympic Games required an elaborate governance arrangement to ensure the rapid installation of frameworks, the efficient allocation of resources and the accomplishment of lasting regeneration ambitions. Specifically, the defined bureaucratic organisation represented the large-scale and the intricacy of the event, which regarded both the competition itself and the rearrangement of the district. The management, as defined for this event, is related to the aspect that mega events often operate as catalysts for planning unprecedented forms of urban transformation, balancing operational and organisational systems and stakeholder entanglement, facing the edges of standard governance patterns (Guala, 2002, pp. 750-751).

The initial governance level appealed for the organisation of the Olympics was the United Kingdom Government, which extended its supervision throughout the entire event, from the beginning to the post-Olympic legacy. As a matter of fact, the government furnished the political and financial funds needed for the realisation of such a multifunctional event, becoming the main underwriter of the Games' striking success.

This procedure was signed through the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act 2006, which conferred delivery powers and specific tasks to the relevant authorities. Among the various administrators, the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA), constituted in 2006, was the major executive organisation accountable for designing, building and completing the arenas of the Olympic and their related framework. The ODA's assignments didn't solely regard the sporting venues, but also the advancements of the means of transport, the public areas and the environment; all of which contributed to the urban evolution of East London. As a matter of fact, it structured the most available park, offering the opportunity to families with children, people with disabilities or elderly people to experience the Olympics as well as others, providing structural improvements in buildings. Moreover, it always operated under the surveillance of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), guaranteeing the connection between the mega event, the national necessities and the fixed timelines and finances. As a result, including the participation of the central government ensured consistency and union in facing logistical

difficulties and in balancing the foundations from public and private subjects (House of Commons, 2015, p. 1-2, 5).

After the Olympic Delivery Authority, the second layer of governance was the London Development Agency (LDA), the regional development department of the Greater London Authority (GLA), directed by the Mayor of London. The main task of the LDA was arranging the Lea Valley Green Grid Area for regeneration, specifically by obtaining the amount of land necessary for the construction of the Olympic venues and, before this, implementing a decontamination of the soils and a relocation of resources and initial infrastructure machinery. These applications allowed the transmission of the ODA's programme and helped the district turn from a marginalised area into a place for urban renewal. The Mayor of London, through the GLA, operated as a crucial political and vital affiliation between the government priorities and local necessities; in this way, an incorporation of the Olympic Games within other cities' framework, such as the London Plan, during a joint operation with local communities referring to the matters of housing, transportation and socio-economic advancements, was easier (Acierno, 2012, pp. 156-157; House of Commons, 2015, p. 43). As demonstrated, converging metropolitan and district departments in the governance infrastructure enhanced a deeper understanding of borough interactions, even though the participation of the latter remained restricted.

Lastly, another organisation that helped in the renewal procedure was the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC), conceived in 2009 to guarantee that the strength of this event could ensure long-lasting profits to East London. The OPLC's ambition was to guide the legacy left from the event into a varied district, balancing the residential, commercial, ecological and communal advancements (Acierno, 2012, p. 164). In 2012, the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC) became known as the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), becoming the earliest Mayoral Development Corporation of the capital. The evolution of this position enabled it to supervise the organisation, the advancement's direction and the control of the Olympic territory and its adjacent areas. Moreover, it underlined an improvement of urban governance, since it endorsed a connection between the project and its legacy while involving the Mayor of London (House of Commons, 2015, p. 5, 43).

During the design of the Olympic Games, it was also encouraged the engagement of different stakeholders, such as local governors, private investors, community

associations and architectural firms. Combined, they created a polycentric but disjointed model, since it conferred both adaptability in the district organisation and tensions in converging their benefits, such as communal equity and inclusion. Raco (2013) explains this dynamic with the method of “regulatory capitalism”, where the State requires the fabric’s evolution through contracts based on renderings (pp. 176-178). Specifically with the Olympic Games of 2012, the government frequently used these public-private relationships, especially with subjects oriented to the planning of this event. This was the case of Allies & Morrison, as introduced in the previous section, a firm involved in the design of the Games, which cooperated with public institutions to present the Olympic Legacy Masterplan, combining sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity (Allies & Morrison, n.d.). Such partnerships had many advantages, such as technical quality and financial funds, but also presented some disadvantages, for instance, transparency and less public responsibility. This happens because these mega events rely on rapid executions and great value for money rather than prioritising the benefits of the community (Raco, 2013, pp. 191-193). As a result, both the governance structure and the stakeholder engagement presented some criticism. As a matter of fact, inhabitants and local quarters were often excluded from the procedure of decision-making, raising their worries about the democratic framework and the general effects of revitalisation in their neighbourhoods (Watt, 2013, p. 101). The element that mostly limited the opportunity for the residents to express their perplexities, especially in the primary phases of acquisition and design of the territory, was the hierarchical character of the ODA and the LLDC.

These difficulties became even deeper with the displacement of these residents and the arouse of the property values in the adjacent lands that converged into a disagreement between revitalisation purposes and social equity (Watt, 2013, pp. 109-110). Contrarily, Azzali (2017) stated that one of the main advantages of London’s legacy design was its inclusion within the urban evolution planning of the city. As a matter of fact, combining the Games renewal with the capital’s broader arrangements, for instance, the East London Green Grid, as presented by Acierno (2012), the governance administration could guarantee an involvement that provided for a more united urban organisation (p. 10).

In conclusion, the governance involved in the London 2012 Olympic Games presented the difficulties and the occasion of planning an extensive urban regeneration

process during a mega event. On one hand, the centralised government demonstrated a joint and prompt operation; on the other hand, it advanced some concerns about inclusivity, equity and clarity. Overall, this occurrence demonstrated the necessity of effective governance that is given particularly through a cooperation with stakeholders and the nearby communities. In the following chapter, it will be further discussed the tensions during the regeneration process and how they turned out in the post-Olympic legacy.

Chapter 3: Impacts and post-Olympics evaluations

This chapter examines the impacts and post-Olympics evaluations of the regeneration process implemented for the London 2012 Games. It explores the ways in which economic and social innovations transformed the East London district. Drawing on academic studies and institutional reports, this analysis assesses the ongoing advantages and challenges arising from the event's outcome.

3.1 Socio-economic and urban impacts of the regeneration

The urban regeneration initiative established in conjunction with the London 2012 Olympic Games has been perceived as a major strategy with significant socio-economic and metropolitan implications. Given the restricted timeframe of the event, the peculiarity of this framework lay in the fact that the innovations were and still are experienced nowadays, especially in East London. In contrast to previous urban revitalisation policies, these Olympic-led implementations are specifically oriented towards the city's reconfiguration of infrastructure, accommodations, and financial contributions, with the purpose of providing enduring advantages for the capital and its citizens (Burdett, 2015, pp. 19-20).

Firstly, a further consideration of the social and economic perspectives is required. Generally, they are often combined for the realisation of urban renewal, as this process should minimise the percentage of unemployment, ameliorate the accessibility to services and social inclusion, in addition to the assignments mentioned previously. Moreover, these features are typically significant when urban renewal is applied to districts experiencing territorial flaws, where physical deterioration aligns with societal disadvantages, such as poverty and fragile social harmony. In this context, the London Olympics were perceived as an occasion for demonstrating the widespread degeneration of East London, as a way for attempting to include both the restoration of the urban scenery and the removal of social disparities by introducing new occupations, increasing communal mobility and reassembling relationships between deprived communities and the broader capital's system (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, pp. 61-85). Therefore, the Games were associated with wider urban policy ambitions, to alter the image and purpose of this area of London, since it had always been affected by post-industrial shrinkage,

environmental devastation and socio-spatial disconnection (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, pp. 21-23).

Among the various economic effects of the Olympic renewal, one of the most important was the improvement of the real estate market in Stratford and its surrounding neighbourhoods. More specifically, the renovation induced a significant inflation of property values and construction operations, especially those regarding the conversion of the Olympic Village into the East Village housing planning. As can be noticed from Figure 6 below, the quality and modernity of the new residences within the Olympic Park proximity, with particular attention to renewable energy, water recycling techniques, accessibility and the inclusion of green areas, outlines the architectural feature of these houses and the commitment to building adequate and enduring urban places.



Figure 6: Framework of residential buildings in East Village (Source: Ike, 2012)

This innovative residential neighbourhood was planned by Fletcher Priest and is divided into 11 patches with a total of 67 buildings forming a fixed rectilinear grid, which encompasses approximately 2,800 houses, projected with different types of tenures, to provide diversification and affordability. As a matter of fact, 1,400 of these homes were affordable for future residents and the diversification of the layout was intended to present various household types, from singles and couples to larger families. The whole infrastructure was built with particular attention to sustainability and general comfort; in this way, it provided a lower environmental impact and utility costs for inhabitants (Ike,

2012). Despite these positive intentions, it was observed that the ambition of creating a diversified housing tenure, also referred to as “*mixed communities*”, where working-class people could take social and economic advantage from living near middle-class homeowners; a policy that could restrain a homogeneous district while providing an inclusive urban atmosphere, including *shared ownership*, such as partial purchase or rent, *shared equity*, for instance shared ownership or no rent and *intermediate rent*, made of houses that were rented at 70 or 80 per cent of the level of the market (Preece et al., 2020; Sagoe et al., 2020, quoted by Corcillo & Watt, 2022, p. 240), wasn’t effectively achieved.

This was a consequence of the fact that most of the East Village’s estates became of private tenure, therefore creating an inclusive and mixed atmosphere among the neighbourhood turned out to be extremely difficult, even though these features were considered particularly relevant in the revitalisation framework (Corcillo & Watt, 2022, pp. 241-244).

In addition to the residential development outcome resulting from the urban regeneration of the London 2012 Olympics, there were also various innovations regarding employment opportunities and professional advancement in East London. Indeed, employment was also seen as a crucial element for social and economic improvement, not only for its quantitative character, but especially because it could guarantee an enduring revitalisation. As could be noticed, the Olympic framework wanted to integrate both physical and social transformations; thus, job-restricted initiatives of creation and training were integrated to qualify residents, particularly those who were marginalised from official industry markets. In this way, these efforts could generate enduring economic advantages for long-term deprived districts, since they were seen as an opportunity for an inclusive expansion.

These attempts were planned to be merged into the urban structure, not solely through fabrics, but also with relationships among inhabitants and innovative occupational markets, guaranteeing long-lasting integration and economic opportunities rather than evanescent achievements. More in-depth, it can be highlighted that the building phase has resulted in multiple job positions, but the enduring effect relies on whether these achievements advanced into long-lasting labour market inclusivity. However, these changes are not immediate and can be found gradually; for this reason, they require constant governance, which assures an effective demonstration over a long

period of time. Combining these factors, it can be underlined that the inheritance of urban regeneration should be estimated through the availability, durability, integration and quality of job positions. Thereby, the employment effects of the Olympic framework are a feature of its social efficiency and of its capability to ensure long-lasting advantages to East London's communities (Burdett, 2015, pp. 19-23). Another outcome to explore is the inclusion of East London, particularly Stratford, within the broader context of the United Kingdom's capital. This marginalised district, historically plagued by protests and disorder due to high unemployment and crime rates, was transformed into an extended transport hub with the improvement of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR), the expansion of Underground lines, and more widely through the advancement of several cycling and walking infrastructure projects. These improvements can be considered both an opportunity for better accessibility to the Olympic Park at first and then to the eastern part of London, and a socio-economic impact since they provided a broader daily mobility to inhabitants, consolidated commercial investments and partnerships with financial areas, such as the area of Canary Warf, which according to Acierno (2012) was renovated in the '80s, since it could reestablish a historical socio-economic disrupted relationship between the eastern and western part of the capital (p. 162-163). As a result, Stratford was repositioned as a powerful and accessible neighbourhood, with the creation of job positions, retail increase and technological advancement, all of which evidenced an innovative prominence within the capital's socio-economic position (Azzali, 2017, pp. 7-10). This urban inclusivity was also supported by strategic funding in human resources.

Consequently, the development of the Chobham Academy and the installation of the University College London (UCL) East campus, also known as Marshgate, a 35,000 sqm academic building, revealed a dedication to enduring educational and technological innovation; in fact, it aimed at an interdisciplinary learning and research (Stanton Williams, 2023). The transference of the UCL East to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park allowed the integration of higher education within the Olympic legacy. As a matter of fact, this shift not only aimed to redevelop the area but also to reconfigure East London as a knowledge-based urban centre by linking culture and research to a historically isolated borough. Even though this process was presented as a socio-economic motivator to encourage investment, education and job opportunities, it also raised concerns about whether its effects were equally distributed within the entire communities, especially

because many inhabitants were upset about their homes being demolished for the construction of this university (Watt, 2013, p. 108).



Figure 7: University College London (UCL) (Source: Russel Group, 2025)

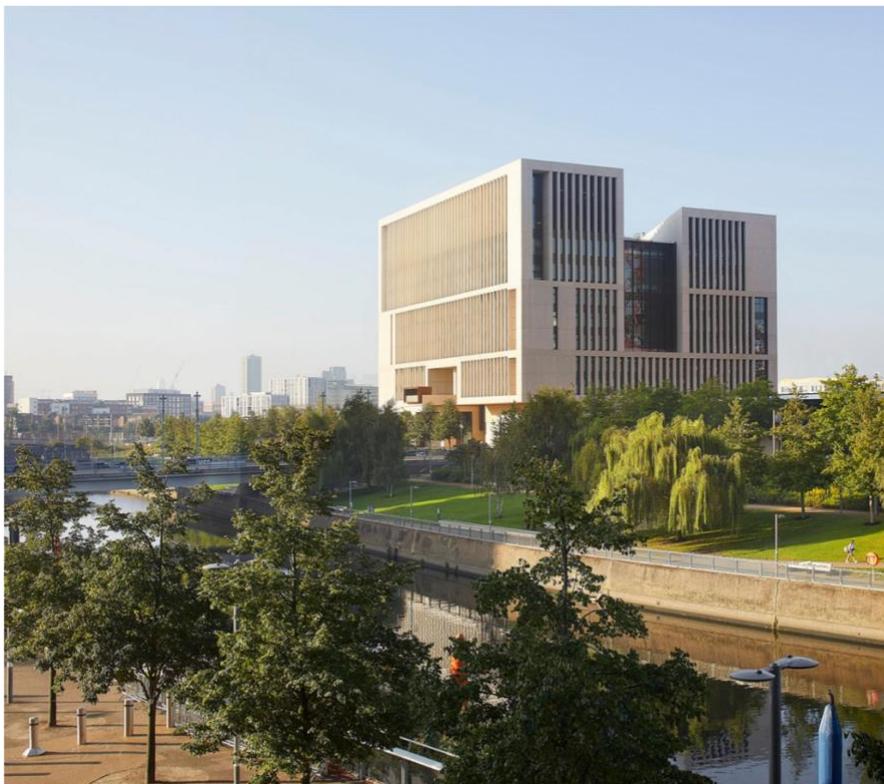


Figure 8: UCL New East London Campus (Source: Stanton Williams, 2023)

Simultaneously, the Chobham Academy, designed around the earlier Athletes' Village, was constructed to favour the indigenous communities in the district of Newham, one of the most deprived of East London, by supplying them with superior education that could cover the former childhood to the latter years of college. This measure had the ambition of reducing social marginalisation and ensuring steady possibilities for young people (House of Commons, 2015, p. 5).



Figure 9: The Chobham Academy (Source: Construction News, 2009)

Together, these institutes had an important socio-economic impact because they had the ambition to deliver to the residents, especially the younger ones, high-quality career directions and advantages from the economic environment of this renovated neighbourhood.

Observing the regeneration from an urban design perspective helped to understand that this project was a multifunctional model, which addressed both social and territorial necessities. The Olympic Park combined houses, sports infrastructures, green environments and communal resources within a unique and versatile background that merged density with habitability. This form of adaptability was the main element that guaranteed enduring benefits for the residents' requirements beyond the mega event.

Different from the previous editions of the Olympics, where their legacy only had a singular function, the London project altogether promoted spatial versatility, allowing structures to conform to various uses, from recreation and residential to commercial and educational; over time, this versatility was made profitable through public investment and stimulated civil strength while assisting in the creation of unified districts. Consequently, this landscape provided support to the realisation of a more socio-economically included

infrastructure (Müller, 2015, pp. 630-634). Lastly, another significant impact of urban regeneration was environmental sustainability. More specifically, the area was requalified through water decontamination, the construction of green pathways and the employment of durable and sustainable building materials. These advancements ameliorated residents' comfort and upgraded East London's position as a model for a sustainable organisation.

They specifically had socially effective results, such as better accessibility to green scenarios, quality of water and air, and the inclusion of ecological designs that improved living conditions and the calibre of metropolitan life, such as the London Stadium, which was designed as lightweight, minimising building waste, and being adaptable for further reuse. In addition, the realisation of parks and green spaces improved interactions and communal involvement in an always-changing urban context, such as the Lea River Park, which merged disconnected ecological areas along the River Lea into a uniform corridor that extended to the Thames (Keçeci, 2025).

Combined, these impacts elucidate how the 2012 London Olympic Games urban regeneration developed multi-dimensional advantages for the capital that went beyond the event and the bare physical transformation. In this context, combining urban framework with residential, economic, educational and environmental adjustments allowed the innovation of East London with an innovative socio-economic scenario, which is more inclusive and interrelated (Burdett, 2015, pp. 19-23; Müller, 2015, pp. 630-633). Although issues like gentrification and social inclusivity grew, as will be explained in the following section, the regeneration project laid the basis for enduring advancements in living conditions and economic opportunities for historically isolated inhabitants (Keçeci, 2025).

3.2 Occurring issues: gentrification and social inclusivity

The 2012 London Olympic Games have been repeatedly depicted as the instigator of an extensive urban regeneration, as they introduced many advantages for the district; nonetheless, they also generated relevant social hostilities, including gentrification and social inclusivity. Although these tensions were not initially predicted, they developed as intricate repercussions of a revitalisation design that aimed to integrate East London into the capital's urban infrastructure. However, they were subsequently embedded into the regeneration strategy itself as consequential phenomena.

At first, social inclusivity was considered a significant starting point of the Olympic heritage. Then, it was perceived as a subsequent manoeuvre rather than a radical policy engagement. In this contradiction, it can be analysed that inclusivity, not always minimises disparity, but can also aggravate it, especially when it is presented in critical and market-oriented ways. Specifically in the atmosphere of East London, inclusivity wasn't delivered equitably to the most isolated communities but, alternatively, was divided following the preferences of middle-class inhabitants and the aspiration of private resources (Roche, 2000, pp. 9-13). Already from the initial phases of this organisation, a significant repositioning that went from redistribution to a market-driven revitalisation was highlighted. This was a consequence of the fact that these projects are often pictured as strategies for upgrading local identities and attracting funding, usually without considering the potential displacement of inhabitants or their vanishment within innovative urban infrastructure. The mechanism adopted by London 2012 wasn't that distant from this scenario, as they promoted mixed-use advancements and housing tenures, which were described as affordable, yet they were revealed to be financially inaccessible for the initial residents of the district (Guala, 2002, pp. 750-751). This contradictory situation of social inclusivity was further accompanied during the post-Olympic phase to the extent that dynamics of gentrification were introduced. This phenomenon was evidenced by the increase in property values, a business refurbishment and socio-demographic alterations; altogether, depriving lower-income classes of adequate assistance. To support this viewpoint, it was underlined that the flagship project designed within the Olympic Park exemplified the system of regulatory capitalism, where, as it was stated in the previous chapter, public revitalisation is led by private prerogatives rather than public benefit. In this context of gentrification, social inclusivity became a rhetorical feature that legitimised a situation that, contrarily, further isolated fixed communities. Thus, a situation of urban regeneration that should have been realised for the welfare of everyone turned out into a revitalisation of the borough of East London for a selected part of the population (Raco, 2013, pp. 185-188).

Moreover, an additional critique of both these issues has been provided in the East Village and its surroundings to underline the controversial commitment to inclusivity and the actual living conditions experienced by residents after the Olympic phase. As a matter of fact, it was analysed that many common and minority inhabitants considered this

Olympic-led revitalisation as a vertical imposition method, which aimed at ameliorating the general circumstances of private investors and further residents rather than undertaking the difficulties of the existing inhabitants. Specifically referring to housing accessibility, although the East Village was referred to as socially assimilated, this adjustment was limited by affordability standards, which prevented earlier homeowners of public estates from acquiring the innovative buildings of the district realised during the regeneration. Following these procedures, the social integration was detached, and the resulting social constitution of this borough was weakened, rather than achieving an inclusive and cohesive territory. Additionally, this critique of social inclusivity and gentrification has further developed the concept of “displacement”, underlining that the urban renewal did not merely dislocate the former inhabitants physically, but also culturally, since they weren’t able to experience the innovative neighbourhood of this area.

Indeed, these residents experienced a feeling of deprivation and disconnection, which stemmed from the revitalisation process that reframed East London in terms of its residents and their sentimental and cultural identities. Therefore, displacement can be correlated with gentrification, which is not only a socio-economic issue of regeneration, but also a cultural and psychological one, since it can alter the identities, the belongings and the ambitions of people, especially of those living in the background of East London (Watt, 2013, pp. 103-110). Referring to the affordability standards within the East Village, a further analysis was provided by Corcillo and Watt (2022), who connected this “affordable housing” theory to the material and symbolic levels of exclusion that occurred during the post-Olympic phase. More specifically, they highlighted how the term “affordable” progressively shifted its meaning, from being used to describe houses realised for lower-income classes to becoming available only for middle-class residents, thus making it unreachable for those whom the revitalisation aimed at upgrading. In this way, these processes, instead of promoting a legitimately mixed district, contributed to the so-called “mixophobic” condition, which pretentiously pursues variety, but only through fixed socio-economic and psychological thresholds (Bauman, 2013, quoted by Corcillo & Watt, p. 246). In short terms, inhabitants were accepted only if they could conform to the expectations of this innovative lifestyle. Creating this critical environment of integration raised another important issue: the employment of social inclusivity to promote a market-led regeneration. This indicates that inclusivity, instead of recognising

structural disparities or ameliorating the conditions of these isolated communities, was often adopted as a rhetorical device that validated operations that increased their exclusion. An example of this contradiction was the East Village, also known as the Athletes' Village. Indeed, its innovative ornaments, infrastructure and public assets were characterised by openness and public welfare; however, the reception of its advantages remained unequal. In addition, governance systems and relationships between the public and private sectors complicated this issue, since multiple areas and services were ruled by private investors, diminishing the chances for democratic responsibility and communal authority (Corcillo & Watt, 2022, pp. 239-246).

In this context, the implementation of social inclusivity during the London 2012 legacy was not an issue in itself, but mainly in its application. As a matter of fact, considering the economic nuance of the term, which is who can afford to live in this rather environment, is reductive and limits its significance, as well as rendering it an element of isolation. Therefore, the experience of East London highlighted an important reflection, which suggested that social inclusivity can happen only with a strategic reorganisation, and in the same way, a mixed community always needs a trace of equity; otherwise, the disparities that urban regeneration aspired to elucidate could increase even more (Watt, 2013, pp. 103-110).

In conclusion, although the 2012 London Olympics inevitably altered East London's urban landscape, the resulting issues of gentrification and social inclusivity complicated the linear pathway to achievement. As a matter of fact, this programme adopted various investment, competitiveness and spectacle initiatives, departing from these existing tensions that altered the delineation of who would take advantage of this mega event and under what circumstances. On the contrary, an accurately inclusive aftermath would have needed both a spatial renewal and a political responsibility towards equity, rearrangement and democratic commitment; features that were dismissed in the pursuit of market fairness and global authority (Raco, 2013, 185-188).

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to investigate the urban regeneration of East London, driven by the 2012 London Olympic Games, considering both the predefined ambitions and the enduring outcomes that have emerged in the years following the event. The focal point of the research was to estimate the socio-economic and spatial effects of urban regeneration planning, and subsequently to investigate the difficulties and conflicts that surfaced within a socially and economically vulnerable area characterised by a broad and market-led urban improvement.

Initially, the objective was to present an exhaustive and critical comprehension of the London 2012 situation by collocating it among academic discussions on urban revitalisation and mega-event infrastructures. Indeed, this ambition required the combination of different perspectives, such as accommodation, occupation, infrastructure, eco-sustainability, education, and social inclusion, combined into an integrated methodical system. Consequently, another important objective of this thesis was to determine whether the responsibilities of the regeneration set in advance were effectively realised, especially those regarding the improvement of living conditions for the area's inhabitants and the development of a wider and inclusive urban environment.

Relating to these ambitions, the results of this study, as it was previously discovered, underline a divided and complex legacy. On the one hand, this explains the fact that this renewal project presented striking fulfilments that have effectively transformed the East London metropolitan landscape. Together, these physical and practical assimilation of the district aligned with the entire capital has developed accessibility, induced recent business and upgraded the public atmosphere. Moreover, considering the socio-economic effects, the regeneration opened to a wider range of job opportunities, both in the period of construction and in the post-Olympic phase. In particular, the transformation of the Olympic Village into the East Village delivered an innovative sequence of modern housing, designed to host different tenures, and the green renovation of the borough allowed better ecological circumstances. Overall, these aspects influence the realisation of a significant urban development, which was combined with the fixed aspirations of the London 2012 planning.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, this paper has also underlined that the achievements of the regeneration were also accompanied by important restrictions and

unconscious repercussions, such as the unequal distribution of benefits derived from the revitalisation programme, which was founded on principles of social inclusion. Other important drawbacks that were highlighted in this paper were the increase of property values, the higher percentage of private tenures in the new housing complex and its market-driven character; all of which induced an area of restricted access for lower-income people. Referring to the socio-demographic section of the district, a phenomenon that transformed it was that of gentrification, which led to a physical and cultural displacement, as it was demonstrated in the previous chapters. Through these phenomena, the ambition of realising effective mixed communities became difficult, especially because the margins of affordability often excluded the segment of the population that the regeneration first aimed at supporting. This situation was further increased due to the chosen governance model, which combined public funding with private investment, which allowed an efficient organisation of resources over the territory but also gave predominance to the interests of the market rather than social integrity. In this way, the regeneration planning of London 2012 reflects the urban situation of nowadays, where extended projects are grounded on issues like inclusivity and public welfare while being restrained within frameworks of competitiveness and investment appeal.

Considering these outcomes, the present dissertation aims to support the academic research by introducing a comprehensive and chronological analysis of the London 2012 heritage. As a matter of fact, this study particularly focuses on the combination of economic, spatial and social overviews with a profound analysis of academic and government sources, so as to highlight that the legacy frameworks are often affirmed, contested and then reinterpreted over time.

Nonetheless, this essay faced some difficulties, because on one hand, adopting a literature-review based thesis presents an analysis based on the viewpoint of pre-existing sources that illustrate an extended view of the topic, while on the other hand, it did not provide innovative empirical data, which could have introduced a deeper insight on the impressions and experiences of the community's residents, or also on the real effects of the environmental landscape, since there was the need to stay focused on the defined research questions.

Though, it would be interesting to observe the adaptation of the latter limitations in future research, since they could apply interactive methods to explore the living

conditions of inhabitants, or the enduring practicability of the infrastructures and institutions settled during the London 2012 regeneration project. For instance, comparing the London Olympics to other mega-event structures could highlight the circumstances under which these structures were able or not to deliver the promised consequences. Or even, due to the ongoing urban changes regarding the environment or the financial crisis, the case of the United Kingdom's capital might be seen as an example for highlighting the endurance of its accomplishments and the versatility of its programme.

In conclusion, the principal outcome of this paper is to underline that the legacy of the London 2012 regeneration project is not merely a bare success or failure. Indeed, it aims to represent the inner issues of event-driven local transformation, including the ability to adapt resources and produce physical change, that were able to renovate the image and the practicality of a district that among many years had been defined as deprived, alongside the introduction of the risks of increasing disparities, such as the displacement and the increasing of the real estate market, and prioritising private interests over the public ones. The combination of these positive and negative elements underlines the tensions of event-led transformation, and they should be evaluated as functional elements of these revitalisation models. Precisely this intricacy is what defines the London 2012 Olympic regeneration as a role model for designers and scholars, since it demonstrates to what extent these renewal projects may or may not succeed on their pre-defined ambitions. Moreover, the importance of this case study is underlined by the fact that it transcends the immediate geographical and historical background. Indeed, in this dissertation, the primary importance of merging physical adjustments with genuine social investment, of conferring an authentic importance to social inclusivity, and of ensuring a long-lasting adherence to fairness, especially when facing the pressures of the market, is underlined. Together, these tensions are not merely recognisable in the case study of London, but also today, since urban regeneration is still capable of affecting the futures of cities across the world.

As a matter of fact, the East London framework presented in this paper was able to present critical guidance in a period where global cities often adopt mega-events and flagship infrastructures as motivators for the revitalisation of their urban landscape, since it furnished a subtle reinterpretation of mega-events as catalysts for urban renewal without introducing the disparities that they initially seek to limit.

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RIASSUNTO

Negli ultimi anni, la rigenerazione urbana rappresenta uno dei temi più articolati e indagati dagli studi contemporanei, in conseguenza del fatto che le città hanno subito varie trasformazioni che sono state influenzate da vari fenomeni, tra cui la globalizzazione, il cambiamento climatico, l'innovazione tecnologica e l'incremento delle disuguaglianze sociali. In presenza di questa situazione, questo fenomeno appare come espediente strategico per affrontare il declino urbano, particolarmente tipico delle aree post-industriali circondate da degrado ambientale, sociale ed economico. Questi interventi generalmente non sono costituiti solamente da modifiche fisiche, ma principalmente da provvedimenti politici e sociali che definiscono coloro che potranno trarre vantaggio da questo processo e coloro che ne potrebbero risultare esclusi. In anni recenti, la rigenerazione urbana ha esteso le proprie competenze comprendendo la sostenibilità, la concorrenzialità globale e la mediazione culturale, in modo da presentare il tenore di vita della capitale inglese come punto di riferimento per un confronto sia a livello nazionale che internazionale.

All'interno di questo contesto, i mega-eventi, come le Olimpiadi, hanno sempre più assunto un ruolo di catalizzatore per la rivitalizzazione urbana di una città. Per l'appunto, queste occasioni permettono di far convergere le risorse pubbliche e private con l'intento di favorire l'attenzione multimediale verso eventi che difficilmente vengono realizzati in tempi brevi. Nonostante questo, la difficoltà principale dei mega-eventi è convertire un evento temporaneo in un beneficio duraturo per il territorio in cui è stato installato, eludendo l'incremento di disparità durante il processo di creazione.

La presente tesi si propone di analizzare il processo di rigenerazione urbana avvenuto in maniera circoscritta nell'area orientale di Londra, in occasione del mega evento delle Olimpiadi del 2012. Questi Giochi sono contemplati come un perfetto esempio di "legacy planning" a lungo termine, soprattutto a spiegazione del fatto che la progettazione non si limitava ad una semplice costruzione di edifici, ma ad un cambiamento più radicale e collettivo, facendo particolare riferimento al distretto dell'East London. Quest'area, infatti, era contrassegnata da elevati tassi di criminalità, disoccupazione, precarie condizioni di vita e abitative, che successivamente, grazie alle Olimpiadi e al relativo processo di rigenerazione, sono state progredite e affinate. Basandosi su un'analisi critica della letteratura preesistente, che comprende documenti

accademici, rapporti istituzionali e mappe, e su una suddivisione della presente tesi in tre capitoli, lo scopo della dissertazione attualmente elaborata è verificare se le ambizioni definite in precedenza alla realizzazione delle Olimpiadi siano state effettivamente raggiunte, valutando i risultati sia in termini sociali, economici, lavorativi e abitativi, ma anche le eventuali criticità emerse soprattutto nella fase post-Olimpica.

Il primo capitolo ha inizialmente introdotto un quadro storico e teorico sulla rigenerazione urbana, definendola come un insieme di operazioni volte a convertire aree degradate e isolate, migliorandone non solo la qualità fisica, ma anche ambientale, sociale ed economica. Successivamente, il centro dell'attenzione è stato rivolto alle aree post-industriali che, a causa delle loro condizioni di deterioramento metropolitano e della cessazione di alcune attività produttive, richiedono ulteriori operazioni ad incremento del loro sviluppo e della loro coesione, rendendo così la rigenerazione urbana un itinerario sia materiale, che politico e sociale.

Di conseguenza, per indicare i fattori che potrebbero causare la rivitalizzazione di una città sono stati presentati i mega-eventi. Questi ultimi, infatti, riescono a far convergere al loro interno risorse pubbliche e private, ad accelerare l'installazione delle infrastrutture e a favorire una vasta attenzione multimediale, in quanto sono perlopiù eventi di grande scala, che favoriscono innovazioni ecologiche, tecnologiche, residenziali, commerciali, della mobilità e dei servizi pubblici. Parallelamente, il capitolo si propone di sottolineare le ripercussioni più frequentemente riscontrate durante la realizzazione di queste occasioni, come l'usurpazione di comunità e di esercizi commerciali, o ancora l'anomalia della dimensione degli eventi rispetto alle capacità di ospitalità della città. In queste situazioni, però, le possibilità di trasformare questi eventi di breve durata in vantaggi permanenti si presentano molto difficili.

Infine, questo primo capitolo ha tentato di presentare nella maniera più esaustiva possibile la condizione precedente al 2012 dell'area orientale di Londra, denominata East London, che comprende i distretti di Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets e Waltham Forest. L'obiettivo è stato quello di fornire l'esempio di un territorio che, a partire dalla Seconda Guerra Mondiale, era stato caratterizzato da un degrado sociale, ambientale ed economico, ma che successivamente si è rivelato il paesaggio ideale sia per una riconfigurazione spaziale, sia per ottenere un riconoscimento a livello internazionale, assicurando così un orientamento multidimensionale alla rivitalizzazione urbana.

Il secondo capitolo propone un approfondimento sulla disposizione e successiva realizzazione del processo di rigenerazione urbana derivata dai Giochi Olimpici di Londra 2012, concentrandosi principalmente sull'area di Lea Valley. Inizialmente, questo territorio era caratterizzato da problematiche ambientali e industriali, da disuguaglianze e da scarsità di infrastrutture; motivi per i quali venne poi selezionata come centro del progetto di riqualificazione, in quanto si è ritenuto che potesse avere un grande potenziale di innovazione. In generale, in questo capitolo, si esamina come questo fenomeno di rigenerazione urbana non abbia comportato solo delle trasformazioni fisiche, ma soprattutto ambientali, urbanistiche e sociali.

Nella prima sezione si sottolinea l'importanza attribuita al Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, considerato il cardine dell'intero cambiamento urbano, con un'estensione di 240 ettari di terreno, e le opere annesse, come gli impianti sportivi, gli spazi verdi e i nuovi complessi residenziali, che insieme costituivano un'occasione per ristabilire i luoghi pubblici, per incrementare i collegamenti al suo interno e per favorire una migliore armonia con i quartieri adiacenti, questo in conseguenza dell'integrazione con l'East London Green Grid e dell'importanza conferita al fiume Lea.

Successivamente, si denota l'attenzione conferita alla sostenibilità ambientale, concretizzata sia nella coordinazione delle risorse che nella pianificazione longeva dell'area, volendo garantire un'eredità a lungo termine che persistesse anche negli anni successivi al mega evento. Nello specifico, la sostenibilità ambientale può essere osservata nella riqualificazione dei corsi d'acqua, dei terreni contaminati, nell'utilizzo di materiali riciclabili, in concomitanza con l'adozione di materiali ecosostenibili, reti energetiche rinnovabili e di una "smart grid", che ha contribuito a ridurre le emissioni e più in generale i costi di realizzazione. In aggiunta, un altro elemento a cui si è prestatato particolare attenzione è stata la mobilità, dove, grazie ad un investimento di 6,5 miliardi di sterline, Stratford, uno dei quartieri più degradati dell'area dell'East London, divenne un fulcro centrale della rete di comunicazione inglese, in quanto si decise di operare un potenziamento alla metropolitana e, in aggiunta, si decise di inserire nuove piste ciclabili e pedonali che potessero collegare l'intero parco.

Infine, il capitolo ha fornito un approfondimento riguardante gli aspetti organizzativi e la struttura di governance e stakeholders che hanno permesso la pianificazione e successivamente l'esecuzione del progetto, attraverso un difficile

coordinamento delle attività degli enti pubblici, privati e dei professionisti, rispecchiando così l'armonia necessaria per integrare le aspirazioni economiche, progettuali e le richieste delle comunità del territorio. Questi aspetti positivi, al contempo però, sono stati affiancati anche da criticità sociali, come l'aumento del valore immobiliare e i cambiamenti demografici che hanno impattato sull'accessibilità all'area.

Per concludere, il terzo capitolo ha presentato un'analisi degli impatti scaturiti dalla rigenerazione urbana nel periodo successivo alle Olimpiadi, definendo innanzitutto gli aspetti positivi ed esponendo successivamente le criticità. In particolar modo, in queste sezioni si indaga sugli effetti socioeconomici, urbanistici, legati principalmente al fenomeno della gentrificazione, e sull'ambigua natura dell'inclusività sociale.

Tra i vari benefici riscontrati nel periodo successivo alle Olimpiadi si osservano una migliore accessibilità, dovuta dalla costruzione di nuovi complessi residenziali, un aumento di opportunità lavorative, osservato anche durante la costruzione del progetto, e di qualità dei servizi pubblici. Inoltre, la riqualificazione dell'area di Lea Valley, un tempo marginata e discontinua, ha permesso la sua integrazione con il resto della città in maniera più omogenea, permettendo così un maggior interesse verso il territorio e una delineata visione futura di sviluppo economico e sociale. Esempio di questa riqualificazione è stata la trasformazione dell'Olympic Village in East Village, che in seguito ha favorito sia la realizzazione di complessi residenziali moderni ed ecologici, di cui si è affrontato l'esempio progettato da Fletcher Priest comprendente di 67 palazzi includenti a loro volta 2.800 abitazioni pensate per diverse tipologie di possibili residenti, situati successivamente in un contesto urbano più efficiente, sia di istituti educativi e tecnologici, tra cui la University College London (UCL) East campus, una sede accademica della UCL di 35.000 metri quadrati installata nell'area dell'East Village, e la Chobham Academy, che insieme hanno incrementato l'inclusione, l'innovazione e le generali condizioni di vita.

Contemporaneamente, però, dall'analisi degli impatti positivi sono emerse alcune importanti criticità. Tra queste, si è approfondito il rincaro dei prezzi delle abitazioni e la predominanza di residenze a proprietà privata, che hanno diminuito la disponibilità abitativa per le categorie sociali meno abbienti, alimentando così fenomeni di gentrificazione e di dislocamento sociale sofferti dai residenti, che hanno vissuto il

processo di rigenerazione urbana come un'imposizione verticale, che a posteriori ha compromesso le loro identità e le loro esigenze.

Tra i vari principi a fondamento della rigenerazione urbana di Londra 2012, è possibile includere anche il principio di inclusione sociale, che è sempre citato nei documenti istituzionali, nonostante i continui contrasti con le dinamiche di mercato e il suo contributo ad un minor senso di appartenenza al territorio da parte dei residenti e ad un maggior pregiudizio sociale. Inoltre, questa gestione degli spazi è stata ulteriormente compromessa a causa della governance sia pubblica che privata, che ha ridotto l'organizzazione democratica compromettendo la resa di equità e coesione nel periodo successivo alle Olimpiadi.

Di fronte a questo contesto, l'intera organizzazione costituita attorno a Londra ha visto la realizzazione di "mixed communities" come un processo più complicato del previsto, in quanto gli aspetti positivi precedentemente menzionati, che dovevano essere degli impulsi per creare una comunità unita, in realtà si sono dovuti confrontare con un sistema di inclusione sociale che era basato sugli interessi dei privati e del mercato e che vedeva l'effettiva integrazione dei residenti solo se conformi a queste nuove condizioni di vita. Tuttavia, alla fine, si è visto come le Olimpiadi del 2012 abbiano effettivamente cambiato il paesaggio dell'East London, in concomitanza ad un'alterazione provocata dai fenomeni di inclusione sociale e di gentrificazione, che hanno reso più complessa l'assegnazione dei conseguenti benefici e sulla base di quali circostanze.

Infine, la conclusione della presente tesi ha riportato i principali risultati ottenuti dall'analisi della rigenerazione urbana dell'East London avvenuta durante i Giochi Olimpici del 2012, evidenziando gli obiettivi precedentemente stabiliti e se posteriormente fossero stati effettivamente realizzati. L'ambizione iniziale è stata quella di valutare gli impatti socioeconomici e urbani della rivitalizzazione, mostrando le difficoltà riscontrate di quest'area vulnerabile. A tal proposito, l'analisi si è basata su documenti accademici preesistenti che trattavano di aspetti residenziali, occupazionali, educativi e ambientali, e gli esiti ottenuti hanno mostrato un'eredità significativa e complessa. Successivamente, ci si è occupati di valutare le tensioni e gli scontri notati legati soprattutto alla distribuzione dei benefici e al mantenimento delle comunità già presenti nel distretto. Di conseguenza, si è fornito un approfondimento dei fenomeni di

gentrificazione e dell'ambigua natura dell'inclusività sociale, che hanno alterato il lineare processo di rigenerazione urbana.

Nonostante tutto, però, si è notato che la rigenerazione urbana di Londra 2012 non può essere valutata solo come un successo o un fallimento, ma piuttosto come un perfetto esempio di rivitalizzazione indotta da un mega-evento, aspetto che ha comportato la realizzazione di una trasformazione non solo fisica, ma anche culturale e politica, costituita anche da criticità, come il dislocamento sociale. In questo caso, la difficoltà principale è stata coordinare un'evoluzione fisica ad una politica di inclusione che fosse duratura e che potesse continuare a garantire una diversità sociale. Per questa ragione, soltanto così la rigenerazione può definirsi come un effettivo miglioramento delle condizioni di vita e non solo come una mera riqualificazione territoriale guidata dall'interesse del mercato. È proprio questa dicotomia tra impatti positivi e negativi ha caratterizzato sia il presente caso di studio, che l'esperienza di molteplici città globali che decidono di usare i mega-eventi come strumento di rigenerazione urbana.