

# The field configuring power of Olympic Games: Exploring London 2012

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## STARTING POINT OF THE SESSION

### A typology of events

- Size: Big vs. small
- Impact: weak vs. strong “field mandate” (Lampel/Meyer)
- Field phase: emergence vs. maturity (ibid.)
- Type of interrelatedness between field and event
  - Events-within-fields
  - Events-affecting fields



## AIM AND SUBJECT OF THE PRESENTATION

- (1) *To disentangle the field configuring dynamic of Olympic Games*
- (2) *Focusing on a widened perspective of field-event relations*
  - *Timescales*
  - *Field conditions prior to the event*
- (3) *Two stories about London 2012 (at least)*



## RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

### A case study of the London Olympics 2012

- Organization of Olympics preparation, staging and legacy of Olympics
- Focus on the organizational ecology of the construction program
- Involved researchers: Gernot Grabher/Joachim Thiel
- As yet: 35 interviews with professionals and stakeholders

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Field configuring events literature

- “Tournament ritual” (Anand/Jones 2008)

### Project organization literature

- Short term/long term-interplay (Davies/Brady 2000, Swan et al. 2010, Grabher 2002, 2004; Grabher/Ibert 2010)

### Organizational Institutionalism

- “Institutional carriers” (Scott 2003)



## THE TOURNAMENT RITUAL: OLYMPIC GAMES WITHIN THE SPORTS-FIELD

### (1) A big brother of the Booker Prize?

- Rituals (e.g. the torch, opening ceremonies)
- Creation of prestige and symbolic values (e.g. winners, host places and nations)
- Artefacts that underpin the symbolic values (e.g. medals, medal rankings)
- Transformation of symbolic values (e.g. sponsoring contracts, sports funding budgets)



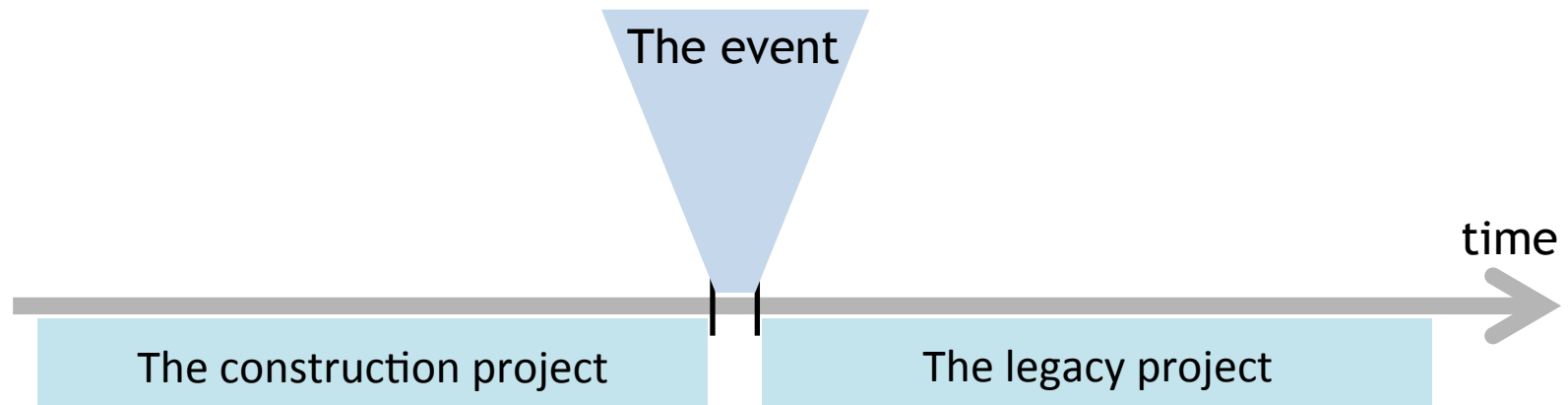
## THE TOURNAMENT RITUAL: OLYMPIC GAMES WITHIN THE SPORTS-FIELD

### (2) The specific features of Olympic Games

- A mobile event
  - the event-configuring power of place
- A public event
  - The more public, the bigger the transformation potential of the symbolic capital
- A long-term event
  - A permanently operating body (IOC)
  - Strong event-related interim activities (e.g. count-downs, torch relay)
  - Enormous infrastructural efforts beforehand



## DIFFERENT TIMESCALES OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES





## THE PROJECT PERSPECTIVE: MOBILIZATION AND BEYOND

### (2) Coping with openness: *buffering* and *filtering*

- *Organizational* buffers through secondment from CLM parent firms and strategic partners
- *Temporal* buffers through pro-active action
- Personal networks as *external* filters
- *Internal* filtering through rigorous performance management
- The “Olympics effect” (Mackenzie/Davies 2011) as facilitator



## THE PROJECT PERSPECTIVE: MOBILIZATION AND BEYOND

### (3) The flipside of openness: the need for organizational coherence

- Focus on organizational culture (e.g. people strategy, collaborative atmosphere)
- Quest for an organizational equilibrium (“a balance between C, L and M”)
- Supporting factors
  - Again: the “Olympics effect”
  - The temporary nature (“a clean sheet of paper”)



## THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: A REWARDING EPISODE?

### (1) Olympics as opportunity and risk

- Expected enhancement of reputational and social capital
- Career perspectives tied to project success (“failure was not an option”)
- Temporary jobs also possible dead ends in volatile economic climate



## THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: A REWARDING EPISODE?

### (2) Patterns of success

- Career culmination (part of ODA senior management, non-executive management, LOCOG executives)
- Breakthrough of a new management elite
  - in public enterprises
  - in construction and project management business
- Leverage for internal advancement in parent companies
- Stepping stone within a series of major projects
- Transition to the legacy body



## THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: A REWARDING EPISODE?

### (3) Risky positions

- Less prominent jobs (“not among the TOP 50”)
- Misallocations between the strategic orientation of the project and the parent firm (e.g. planners in a construction company)
- Local boroughs’ task forces (“this kind of work is expensive”)



## THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE: OLYMPICS AS INDUSTRIAL POLICY

### (1) Modernization needs of the UK construction industry

- Major reports (Latham 1994, Egan 1998) with proposals for innovation
- Olympic construction program implemented important elements
  - “the intelligent client”
  - “commitment to people”
  - the NEC contract as an enabler for a collaborative culture



## THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE: OLYMPICS AS INDUSTRIAL POLICY

### (2) Transformation vehicles

- Learning processes initiated across the value chain, regarding both
  - core construction and project management activities
  - additional innovative “priority themes” (e.g. health and safety, sustainability, equality)
- Spill-overs through career paths and networks
- Codification and dissemination of lessons learnt: the “learning legacy” project



## THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE: OLYMPICS AS INDUSTRIAL POLICY

### (3) Selective transformation

- Mainly insiders and already successful players benefit
  - The economic climate does not allow room for growth of all
  - Successful career trajectories lead into successful organizations
- The real winners are the consultancies that underpin their global expansion





## CONCLUSION

### The management of resource mobilization

- Mobilization through recruitment into temporary organizations
- Filtered and buffered through permanent firms and personal networks
- Conceptual implications: Reconsidering the nexus between projects and firms
  - Usual patterns: projects-as-firms, projects-within-firms, projects-between-firms (see Davies/Brady 2000, Hobday 2000)
  - Mega-event pattern: project-shielded-by-firms



## CONCLUSION

### The impact of the Olympics

- Another Olympics effect: a path upwards for selective groups
  - Those in prominent and/or very specialized positions
  - The firms involved in planning, consultancy and construction
- Economic downturn and subsequent austerity measures hinder a wider spreading of success
- Exclusion of boroughs from upwards momentum likely to jeopardize the regeneration and legacy agenda

