

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Securing and Sustaining the Olympic City – Reconfiguring London for 2012 and Beyond<sup>1</sup>**

*Pete Fussey, Jon Coaffee, Gary Armstrong and Dick Hobbs, editors (2011). Ashgate Publishing Limited*

The London Olympics are nearly upon us and this addition to the expanding Olympic text oeuvre takes an interesting and somewhat alternative approach to the subject. The work of four UK based authors, the book features a cross disciplinary review combining urban geography and sociology with criminology and terrorist studies.

London's successful bid to host the Games was of course memorably and tragically followed by the terrorist bombings in the city centre on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005. Since then, security has been one of the most profound and controversial aspects of the Games' planning. This book's emphasis is based around a detailed scrutiny of the security issues facing mega events using the London Olympics as its case study. The global media reach of the Olympics is such that the event commands a heightened risk of terrorist threat while criminality is also expected to be above normal levels due to voluminous, unsuspecting crowds of visitors and the continued economic recession. These issues are explored in the light of their implications on mega event planning, event cost and implementation, community effects and social legacy.

The first part of the book sets the scene. It is rewarding reading indeed, providing a generously researched and often highly entertaining prelude for the detailed exploration of the security issues in Part Two. One excellent chapter compares the legacies of previous games, and assesses overall success based upon their originally expressed objectives. A revealing chapter also reviews the shifting cultural and demographic characteristics of the "outer" East End of London where the Olympic Park is sited, setting its regeneration in the context of its post-war history. A further chapter appraises the fascinating Olympic bid process,



with all its myriad political manoeuvring, and recounts the tale of how the budget inflated rapidly after the bid success.

The second part of the book is its ultimate rationale and is devoted to a detailed analysis of the overlooked and under-researched area of mega event security. The security bill for the Games has of course famously more than quadrupled since 2005. Key themes which emerge include the standardisation of security planning for mega events and the complex technologies of twenty first century “control creep” event surveillance. One of the greatest dangers of course is the possibility that the focus of attention on the Olympic Park will actually displace the core terrorist threat to elsewhere in the city.

The depth of empirical research and critical diagnosis is impressive and the book succeeds resolutely in its objective of presenting the most comprehensive review of the issue to date; this is its defining feature and the characteristic which will set it apart from the body of Olympic and mega event literature.

However its attempt to link the “total security” operation to the long term legacy and physical infrastructure of the Olympic Park is, in my view, less convincing. Security infrastructure impacts on urban design and can indeed contribute to an exclusive form of post-event gentrification of place, but such urban design is a generic feature of global urban regeneration. The notion that post Olympics residential development in and around Stratford will create a sterilised and fragmented community in the long term due to the security needs of a major event will be a controversial one. This however is a minor quibble in the context of a book which is refreshingly bold.

Books written on mega events before they have happened are of course cursed by the speed with which pre-event planning takes place and are always in danger of being perceived as outdated. Since this book was published in mid 2011, the budget for security at the London Olympics has increased again (now to well over £1 billion) and there will now be a greater level of military involvement than originally anticipated. On a positive note, the venues are complete (on time and on budget) and venue legacy plans have been announced, impressing many of the sceptics. Details of the Olympic torch route are now known and, with the exception of ticketing technology hiccups and concerns over transport congestion, the mood around the Games is changing. Even the satirical BBC spoof documentary series “Twenty Twelve” was unable to distract the UK public from its growing sense of confidence about the London Olympics. However, while the planning of the London Games has moved on, the book will be of great value to the planners of the

forthcoming Glasgow Commonwealth Games and future mega sporting events.

This is perhaps not the perfect text for those looking for an overall review of the themes surrounding London 2012. There is little discussion over major issues such as ticketing, venue infrastructure or long term tourism legacy. And indeed sport, the *raison d'être* and ultimately the most important aspect of the Games, is given scant attention. But this was not the book's objective. It is a high quality text which I have no hesitation in recommending to academics, researchers and practitioners in the fields of mega event planning and urban regeneration. Post graduate students will also find this to be rewarding reading if studying planning, regeneration or event management. It is not afraid to be political and provocative, and is blessed with imperious research credentials.

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