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Stopping Play

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Chicago 2016 Versus Rio 2016: Olympic 'Winners' and 'Losers'

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Critical Olympic Studies

The study of the political and economic aspects of the Olympic Games has increased in the recent years (see Girginov 2010; Lenskyj and Wagg 2012; Giulianotti et al. 2015; Boykoff 2014). These new and markedly critical Olympic studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of the Games (and mega sporting events generally) and their impact on society—particularly on the host city and nation. The study of anti-Olympic campaigns holds a key role in this wider academic research. One of the main reasons that academics/researchers study the anti-Olympic groups and movements around the world is indirectly to investigate the IOC and the Olympic Games themselves. The bulk of the 'anti-Olympic' research projects that have been carried out in this area (notably by the Canadian academics and activists Helen Lenskyj and Christopher Shaw—see

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Lenskyj 2000, 2002, 2008; Shaw 2008) have opened up the discussion about previously neglected aspects of the Games and have shed light on their impact on a huge swathe of the host society. Yet, these findings have rarely been appreciated, or even acknowledged, by the IOC and the local Olympic Games organising committees (LOCOGs). The growing opposition towards the Olympics and, lately, the diminished interest shown by cities in hosting the Games (both summer and winter) demonstrate that the same problems and controversies reappear, and expand to include wider areas of economic and social life. It is evident, after several decades of research into the Games, that the constitution of the IOC, the organisational framework of the Olympics and the strategic planning of the hosting cities/nations, routine promises and assessments notwithstanding, do not result in beneficial social, environmental or economic impacts. On the contrary, as we may conclude from previous research, they may contribute to the widening of economic inequality, facilitate corruption and, thus and bearing in mind the scandals engulfing world football's governing body Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 2015 (Jennings 2015), bring elite sport further into disrepute.

The negative impacts of hosting the Games—gentrification, democratic lack, public money spending—have been well documented in recent years (see Lenskyj 2012; Shin and Li 2013; Giulianotti et al. 2015). In many of these cases, the data that prove these controversial aspects of Olympics have been compiled by anti-Olympic movements or local monitoring groups themselves, which are usually formed to oppose bids and monitor Olympic preparation. Whether the researcher takes part, as an activist, or observes and records the story, this aspect of Olympic research has been proven to be quite significant in our understanding of the Olympic Games and the hosting of their quadrennial events. Through their campaigns these activists, who constitute part of the anti-Olympic groups/movement, have brought to light key questions on fundamental aspects of the life in our societies in relation to the choices that we make. Behind the main arguments posed in every campaign, we can identify key issues in respect of deep-seated economic, political, environmental and social choices. These issues, highlighted by individuals and groups in bidding and hosting cities, usually remain unnoticed, and are often overshadowed by the huge publicity campaigns

that attend the Olympic 'super-spectacle'. It is only until recently that, in some instances, these issues have gained a wider audience and became part of the wider public discussion.

The last three Olympic Games up until the time of writing (Spring 2016)—Athens 2004, Beijing 2008 and London 2012—are important to consider for several reasons. In all three cases the countries involved (their governments and mainstream media especially) embraced the cause and actively engaged in promoting, preparing and organising the Games. Each host city had its own agenda. In the first case, Greece was (at that time) an economically growing country, part of the EU and the Eurozone, aiming to get the rewards of its fiscal adaptation to the Euro, gain leverage and perhaps some self-esteem from hosting the Games in what many Greeks still regarded as their rightful home. Greece was the site of early Olympics, and thus the repository of enduring Olympic mythology (see, for example, Golden, 2012) with Athens having staged the first modern Olympics in 1896. In 2008 China was an emerging world super-power aiming to demonstrate its prowess by hosting the Games in Beijing, and sought to renounce, once and for all, its communist origins and demonstrate its right to be a leading player on the world economic stage. Great Britain, a traditional power both in political and sporting terms, was aiming to re-assert its political and sporting position (Grix and Houlihan 2014), and inspire national pride, by bringing the Games to London in 2012 for a third time. It is history that will decide upon the long-term success of their macro-political ventures, but we can already notice serious concerns over the direct, or short-term, effect which the Olympics had on the lives of local citizens. Notably, most of the data on the consequences of these three Olympiads come from 'anti' groups and individuals, as there was never a meaningful political debate, or a wider discussion about the role of Olympics in these countries. In summary, monitor and activist groups in Athens, Beijing and London all reported three (among several other) key issues, which had negative effects, directly or indirectly, on the lives and future of local habitants: *gentrification*, *democratic lack* and *the questionable dispersal of public funds* (see Zervas 2012; Shin and Li 2013; Giulianotti et al. 2015).

The issue of 'Olympic regeneration', or simply gentrification (broadly speaking, the reconstruction of urban neighbourhoods, which results in

increased property values and the displacing of lower-income families and small businesses), with all its negative consequences (evictions, rise in rents, the privatisation of public space) has been evident in Olympic cities since the 1980s and, more specifically, the Los Angeles Games of 1984 and were highlighted in Helen Lenskyj's (2002) book on the Sydney Olympics of 2000. There is a common practice on the part of local Olympic organisers and their associates, referred to by Giulianotti et al. (2015) as 'festival capitalism', whereby sectors of cities are privatised, commercialised and gentrified, through hosting mega events and, thus, as part of major investment and regeneration projects. This is part of what Brenner and Theodore (2002: 349) have identified as 'the strategic role of cities in the contemporary remaking of political-economic space'.

The precise results of this re-making are usually ambiguous, as we rarely find out what happens to the pre-existing inhabitants and businesses that are affected by the decision to host the Games. In the case of Athens 2004, this issue was addressed, by the Greek anti-Olympic pressure group Anti-2004, with the further expansion of the already densely populated urban area which was a long-standing issue, with long-term effects on the lives of all Athenians. The economic and environmental consequences of urbanisation threatened specifically the medium- and low-income inhabitants of the areas of the city being developed, who did not have proper healthcare, housing and access to green spaces. In particular, the previously industrial Maroussi district, where the Athens Olympic Sports Complex was situated, was developed, via the Olympics, into a space characterised by 'public and private sector offices, international and national hi-tech firm headquarters, banking, private hospitals and insurance firm headquarters, a "festival market place" (cinemas, amusement parks, cafes, restaurants, large scale shopping malls), up-market housing and gated communities' (Maloutas et al. 2009: 19).

In Beijing, the so-called environmental improvement projects targeted the *chengzhongcun*, or villages-in-the-city, inhabited by migrant tenants who far outnumbered local Beijing permanent residents (Shin and Li 2013). According to the same study, approximately 350,000 residents were evicted as a result of the Olympic regeneration projects. In London, subsequently, the consequences of winning the right to host the 2012 Olympics would directly affect those living in the East End, the area

in which the most disadvantaged citizens were located. The building preparation resulted in evictions, relocations and the destruction of public green space. The future of the local residents and of the numerous small businesses in East London was drastically disturbed, with the dramatic increase in the cost of leaving—informal estimates placed annual household churn rate of pre-Olympic London at around 30 % (Giulianotti et al. 2015). As with Athens, this practice of displacement was part of a process already well in train. Writing well ahead of the Games, writer Anna Minton argued that the expropriation and forced migration of the people living in London's East End Dockland area had been taking place since the 1980s, bringing sky scrapers, office blocks, high-end flats and other such spaces, guarded by 24-hour private security (see Minton 2009: 9–14). A review of Minton's book carried the evocative headline 'They stole our streets and nobody noticed' (Behr 2009). Minton's book was re-issued in 2012 with an added chapter, in which she noted that the Olympic Park of 2012 was now a 'private new town, outside of local authority control (Minton 2012: xi–xxviii). The above examples lead to the same conclusion made by most previous researches concerning Olympic cities (see Roche 2002; Lenskyj 2000, 2008; Horne and Manzenreiter 2006).

The second issue raised by activists in the last three Olympics is the lack of transparency and openness in the decision-making processes of organisation and planning. The undemocratic, and sometimes authoritarian, behaviour by or on behalf of the Organising Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOGs) is something that has been witnessed and recorded throughout the Olympic history (Hoberman 1986; Simson and Jennings 1992; Lenskyj 2000). The stories of authoritarianism vary in each case, but they all have a common denominator: *the IOC requirements*. The justification in each instance is that the Olympic organisers and bidding committees are 'forced' to operate in strict privacy, and sometimes above the law, in order to comply with the IOC requirements and tight schedules. But is it permissible for a sporting event that is supposed to bring joy to people and promote unity and peace across international community to require those people to forgo some of their civil rights? And how can the Olympics 'legitimise' a committee to override established rules and legislation? The answer to both questions is the

same: the modern Olympics are constituted on an authoritarian basis by the IOC. Its rules and requirements, set by the Olympic Charter, require and receive the suspension of state laws once the Olympic contract is signed. So, in that context, the OCOGs are 'legitimised'—and bound—to operate outside democratic boundaries. The local organising committees in Athens and Beijing especially, and in London, acted accordingly. In Athens, the state's Supreme Court for civil liberties—'Symvoulío tis Epikratias'—silently ceased dealing with Olympic-related appeals against Olympic decisions. In Beijing several civil codes—and penalties—were introduced to implement 'civilised' behaviour (Shin and Li 2013). These codes aimed to prohibit 'uncultured' behaviour, such as the use of rickshaws, in the city centre and close to Olympic venues. After the Games these restrictions were relaxed. In London, under the terms of the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act of 2006 effectively banned on advertising and street trading (trading on a highway or other public place), and other activities, such as anti-Olympic protest, in the vicinity of Olympic events (James and Osborn 2011).

The third main argument, posed by anti-Olympic campaigners over the recent Olympiads, is the issue of overspending and especially, the allocation of public funding towards 'bread and circuses' rather in social welfare. As figures show, the cost of hosting the Olympic Games has risen dramatically over the last decades. It also increases exponentially between the time the bid was framed and estimates were presented and the time when bills came to be paid (London 2012 is a good example: see Weaver 2006). It has become a common practice—in the same context of 'festival capitalism' (Giulianotti et al. 2015)—that governments facilitate and subsidise public space and amenities in order to attract private investments into the hosting cities. In the case of Athens 2004, the campaigners claimed, and in some cases provided evidence, that some of the public investments for the 2004 Games were not made for Olympics per se, but in order to increase the cash flow to the private sector, resulting in so-called white elephants (for example, taekwondo arena) and purposeless pharaonic complexes (the Olympic village) (See Smith 2012; Bloor 2014). Similarly, in Beijing, the Olympics played a big part in the wider project of *chengzhenhua* (townification). Through this process and via staging the Olympics, Chinese authorities facilitated

and subsidised the urbanisation of wider Beijing, which subsequently led to the so-called Ghost cities of China (see Shepard 2015). In London, the Lea Valley, an area of waterways, gardens and untended open land in London's East End—the most deprived part of the city—was offered to construction companies for large malls and high-spec apartments. In all these cases the Olympics acted as the catalyst to attract private investments and subsequently growth/redevelopment, by transferring public money and space. The hypothesis was that the fruits of these investments would outmatch the initial sacrifice. Sadly for the inhabitants, this hypothesis seems inaccurate in the case of these three cities discussed here. The role of the Olympics in creating a channel for diverting public money into the private sector has been acknowledged in several studies of Olympics. Shaw (2008) has explained the links between the 'Vancouver Organising Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games' (VANOC) and the private sector and noted 'the obvious similarities between the corporate behaviours of wholly discredited multinational corporations, such as Enron and WorldCom', and its 'corporate governance' (2008: 93).

Whether the regeneration/gentrification and privatisation projects are successful, or not, the impact on the working-class citizens is always negative. Contrarily, the profits for the high-end economic elite are guaranteed and increase with each Olympiad. While the Olympic sponsors, partners and affiliated contractors make record profits, the hosting countries and especially the citizens have to deal with the increasing cost of hosting, subsidising and privatising that comes with the Games. An interesting aspect of Olympics which probably is underestimated in the existing research is the fact that they contribute significantly in widening the gap between the rich and the poor in hosting cities. Beyond the costs and impacts of hosting, the Olympics systematically fuel economic inequality, probably the biggest social problem worldwide. A recent study from Brookings Institution on economic inequality in the USA, named Atlanta (the last US city to host the Olympics) as the city with the biggest gap between the rich and the poor (Brookings 2013). Furthermore, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's inequality index, the top 10 countries with the least economic inequality—Scandinavia (3), Benelux (3), Slovenia, Slovakia, Iceland and Czech Republic—have neither hosted nor

bid for the Olympic Games for more than half a century. On the other hand, among the countries with the highest economic inequality are the USA, Greece, Spain, Japan, Turkey, South Korea and the UK (for the UK, see Proud 2015 and *Observer* 2015), the countries that have hosted and/or shown the greatest interest in hosting the Olympics. Of course, I do not suggest that a sporting event that is hosted every four years is responsible for the economic inequality in these countries. The point is that, usually, the choice of bidding for the Olympics, as a means of economic development and ‘regeneration’, is clearly associated with political and economic models that lead to further inequality.

This chapter will now focus on ‘No Games Chicago (NGC)’, a group of individuals that stood politically against the will (and the millions of dollars) of the City of Chicago, US president Barack Obama and some of the world’s most iconic athletes, including Michael Jordan and Ian Thorpe. In their ‘journey’ ‘NGC’ managed to successfully challenge the arguments posed by Chicago Olympic Bidding Committee and spark a debate in the city of Chicago over the future of its citizens. This discussion is a part of an ethnographic research project conducted in 2009. Since Chicago did not get the Games, this particular part of the project came to an end. Now, on the eve of Rio 2016 (instead of Chicago 2016), the significance of the ‘NGC’ campaign is even more relevant. Examining their role I believe contributes to our further understanding both of the Olympics and of the importance of agency in relation to the causal effects of our fundamental choices. There has been massive opposition in Brazil to the hosting of Rio 2016, which follows the protests against the amount of money expended on the FIFA World Cup tournament in 2014 (see Christopher Gaffney’s chapter in this book); it is yet unknown how history will decide on the ‘winners’ and the ‘losers’ of these Games.

No Games Chicago

On 2 October 2009, Copenhagen’s ‘Bella Centre’ conference hall hosted the IOC’s 121st session which would decide the host city for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. The final four candidate cities were Rio de

Janeiro, Chicago, Madrid and Tokyo. The decision to award the Games to Rio de Janeiro did not come as a surprise, given it was favourite amongst the bookies. A big surprise, though, was Chicago’s elimination at the first round, as the city’s bid was also strongly favoured.

Chicago’s plan to host the 2016 Olympiad was premised on the idea of using most of the existing city’s sporting facilities, venues and parks, along with the creation of new ones, all in close proximity to each other, thus creating a highly concentrated cluster of event locations close to the city centre represented by the slogan ‘A Games in the heart of the city’ and which was used in the Chicago 2016 official promotional brochures. By that, the organisers were promising easily accessible venues for the spectators and the athletes. The 2016 Chicago bid was launched on the initiative of the city’s mayor, Richard Daley, scion of the Chicago’s leading political family and the son of a previous mayor of the city, who believed that, apart from the obvious benefits, the Olympics could bring major investments in Chicago. This increased investment would contribute to improving the city’s poor economic situation and help to counterbalance its budget’s deficit. According to the official ‘bid book’, the Chicago Games would create a profit of around \$500 million, and they would also give a long-term boost to the city’s economy, through investments and tourist development. More specifically, according to Chicago 2016’s bid book, most of the Olympic facilities would be located close to the city’s waterfront, using existing buildings and parks and through a major regeneration project that would improve some of the city’s most stagnated parts. In addition to the use of existing facilities, a temporary Olympic stadium would be built in Washington Park, on city’s Southside, and a cycling track built in Douglas Park, in the western part of the city. The questionable choice of utilising city’s parks for building the required Olympic venues was justified by Olympic campaigners as a cost-effective and less bureaucratic way to obtain the required permits, as parks were under the authority of the city’s Public Park District.

Apart from these facilities, the organisers proclaimed that the Olympics in Chicago would utilise ‘the Olympic Movement’s power to unite all humanity’ (a now routine Olympic claim—see Giardina et al. 2012) and would ‘help America reach out to build and renew bridges of friendship with the world’. Additionally, the Chicago 2016 Olympics would

create a legacy, which would 'inspire young people to reach for a better life' (Chicago2016). All these proclamations were, of course, little different from those used by the other three bidding candidates: Rio 2016 was proposing that the Games would be held within the city's boundaries, would create short- and long-term financial profits and would inspire Brazilian youth (Rio2016 2009). The Madrid 2016 bid was also a plan for an inner-city Olympics that would result in financial benefits and would inspire the Spanish nation's youth (Madrid2016 2009) and, unsurprisingly, Tokyo 2016 was promising 'the most compact and efficient Olympics ever', 'in the heart of the city' (Tokyo2016 2009), which would create profit and economic benefits and would inspire the youth of Japan. All these puffed-up, pompous declarations were the same, or very similar, to those used by London 2012, Beijing 2008, and Athens 2004.

So, why was Chicago's bid recognised as a strong favourite if all other bids were promising very similar things? Beyond the standard bid books, documents and Olympic plans, Chicago's bid was supported by some of the most eminent American personalities with global profile. Amongst the most notable were Oprah Winfrey, the African American media personality and businesswoman, voted many times as one of the most influential persons of the planet by the Time magazine; basketball player Michael Jordan, one of the most recognised sports personalities in the world; swimmer Michael Phelps, already, at 24, the holder of 18 Olympic gold medals; and lastly and most importantly, the US president Barack Obama. In the last case, Obama's support for his hometown's bid was not just the typical backing offered by a US president. Obama's global impact, as a personality and a political figure, was probably Chicago's 2016 'joker card', by which the organisers were hoping to cover the bid's weaknesses, either in infrastructure (which favoured Madrid), or in culture (which, given the attractiveness of tourist spots such as Copacabana Beach, favoured Rio).

Back in Copenhagen, five days before the IOC's decision, the delegations started arriving at the Danish capital. At that point, all four candidate cities were competing in a head-to-head race, with Chicago and Rio having a slight advantage according to experts and booking agencies (according to the bookmakers Chicago was a clear favourite with 8/11, followed by Rio 7/4, Madrid and Tokyo on 12/1). Outside of

Chicago itself, the press (global, US and European) was generally taking an uncommitted stance. No one at that time was willing to risk a prediction. BBC's, Matt Slater (2009), was noting:

...The IOC's heart calling for Copacabana but its head is worrying about crime and passing up the riches on offer in Chicago, a confusion that might just let in Madrid or Tokyo. Could that decision be made a little easier by the presence in Copenhagen of the world's most powerful man? Can Barack, Chicago's top trump, risk so much political capital on anything other than a slam dunk? (Slater 2009)

And then, four days before the IOC's decision, on 28 September, 'the world's most powerful man' decided to go to Copenhagen to speak in front of the IOC on behalf of the Chicago 2016 bid. The news of Obama's visit to Copenhagen changed the ambience drastically in favour of Chicago. Even the city's appearance changed: the shops were selling shirts labelled 'Copenhagen loves Obama' and American flags; people were talking about his arrival, where he would go, what he would say. Most of the global press covering the announcement to be made in Copenhagen estimated that this last-minute call from the US president was a decisive turn towards a Chicago win. *The Guardian's* correspondent Owen Gibson (2009) admitted a day before the final decision: '...Obama's arrival appears to have given momentum back to Chicago'. And on the day of the decision Gibson noted: 'Obama's late, perfectly timed decision to attend the vote has robbed Rio's attempt to make Olympic history by bringing the Games to South America for the first time of crucial momentum' (Gibson 2009a, 2009b).

On the afternoon of 2 October 2009, in the central square of Copenhagen, the scene was set for the 'Olympic countdown'. The presenter announced the first two cities that had failed to receive sufficient votes to go forward in the competition to host the 2016 Olympics: Tokyo and Chicago. In fact, Chicago was the first city to be knocked out, having got the least votes in the first round (18 votes for Chicago, 22 Tokyo, 26 Rio and 28 Madrid; source: IOC). The Games were, eventually, awarded to Rio de Janeiro. But what happened to the favourite? How did Chicago failed even to pass the first round? Why were the predictions so wrong?

While the members of Chicago 2016 bid committee were preparing their presentation to the IOC and waiting for President Obama, four Chicagoans were roaming the streets of Copenhagen in order to deliver a different message. Tom, Martin, Rhoda and Jason were the representatives of a group called 'NGC'. This group was undertaking their final activities in a campaigning coalition that was formed by several citizens of Chicago who had come together to oppose the city's 2016 Olympic bid. 'NGC's' campaign was launched in January 2009 at a public forum about the Chicago 2016 bid, and since then, they had actively opposed the idea of bringing the Olympics to Chicago. They organised a series of events (including protests and public meetings) across the city of Chicago and actively attempted to start a dialogue with Chicago 2016 and the IOC.

The reasons why NGC were opposing their city's bid were explained in their website and leaflets, which they were trying, at any given opportunity, to pass to the IOC and anyone else interested (NGC 2009a, 2009b). Their message was fully in line with contemporary anti-Olympic critiques. Tom Tresser, a leading light in NGC, argued that the Games would bankrupt the city, destroy public parks, displace poor and working-class families from neighbourhoods next to the venue sites, and provide dollars to Mayor Daley's political machine, such as to bring the 'destruction of independent politics for a generation'. The state, county and city were all financially broke and having to cut back on essential services; the Games would make money, as they always did, but only for the IOC, construction companies, consultants and corporate sponsors. NGC called instead for funds to be spent on health clinics, schools, public transit and roads and on improving and expanding public parks and services (Tresser 2009).

In the end, NGC accused Mayor Daley of being utterly corrupt and acting with authoritarian and undemocratic behaviour. Most of all, the NGC's campaign was aimed at starting a debate, within Chicago, on the utility of the Olympic Games, and ultimately to challenge Mayor Daley and his 'Machiavellian' practices. NGC suggested that they were representing around half of the Chicago population, which had not approved the city's bid and which had never been asked about it.

NGC campaign focused its strategy on two main goals: directly communicate and try to convince the individual IOC members not to vote

for Chicago, and to limit the level of Chicagoans public support towards the 2016 bid. To achieve these two goals NGC members worked both within the Chicago area and abroad. On three separate occasions members of NGC attempted to meet with IOC delegates and present them with their arguments as to why Chicago should not be awarded the Olympic Games. The first attempt was in April 2009, when the IOC's evaluation team came in Chicago to inspect the bid. NGC activists attempted to greet the IOC delegation on several occasions and demonstrated opposite their hotel. That was the first major breakthrough for the campaign, as although they did not get the opportunity to address the IOC members directly, they did manage to gain the necessary local media attention and publicise their main concerns to a wider audience. In June of the same year, members of NGC travelled to Lausanne along with Chicago 2016, as a counter-delegation to visit the IOC headquarters. At that visit they delivered their 'book of evidence, a box full of documents supporting their claims on 'Why Chicago should not get the Games', to the IOC. They successfully managed to meet high-ranking officials and requested to meet the IOC president himself, to explain him their arguments. According to the NGC members, they received an assurance that their 'book of evidence' would be distributed to all the IOC members and would be considered in parallel with the official Chicago 2016 bid book. The same three members, along with a fourth member who worked simultaneously for Chicago 2016, were the ones who visited Copenhagen on the eve of IOC decision not to award the Games to Chicago. For the final 70 days prior to the IOC decision day, on 2 October 2009, NGC activists were sending daily newsletters to the IOC members updating their evidence and facts from Chicago.

In Chicago the NGC members focused their efforts on raising awareness about the negative aspects of Chicago 2016 bid and sought to limit its public support. Apart from the traditional ways of campaigning—holding demonstrations, forums, open events—the NGC group was probably the first anti-Olympic movement that fully utilised what was (at that time an emerging) social media. Apart from regularly updating its Facebook page, the group utilised Twitter, by posting daily news, streaming their events live through Myspace and waged a 'virality' war against the official Chicago 2016 campaign over whose news would come up

first in digital search engine listings. According to polls conducted by the IOC in Chicago, public support towards the bid dropped from 67 % in spring 2009, to 47 % in September 2009 (a month before the decision) with 84 % of Chicagoans disapproving the use of public funds for the Olympics (*Chicago Tribune* 2009). One likely influence on this drop in public support is the NGC campaign, given that they were the leading source of opposition to the bid.

'NGC' attempted to open the discussion on an issue that concerns every society; its right to take part in the decision-making process. They encountered a well-organised team of politicians, businessmen and PR experts who constituted the official 'Chicago 2016' bid and despite the problems, the prohibitions and the closed doors they encountered throughout their campaign, they succeeded in getting their voice heard. Following in the wake of similar notable social movements that opposed the Olympic Games in their city, umbrella groups such as 'Bread Not Circuses' in Toronto (Lenskyj 2000) and 'No Games 2010' in Vancouver (Shaw 2008), NGC provided invaluable information about the potential mega-event to local organisers and the community, wherever megaevents are planned, or hosted. Beyond its academic significance, the case of Chicago 2016 bid reveals how grassroots activity, if uniting around a single cause, despite the lack of financial and personal resources and limited communication channels, can take on, and beat, a very powerful organisation (IOC), its supporters and the world's most powerful man (US president Barack Obama).

Conclusion

The development of a critical research approach to hosting major sporting events and more specifically on the biggest event of them all, the Olympic Games, has significantly informed our understanding and explanation of the essence of the Olympics and Olympism. The contribution of critical Olympic studies in the field of critical sport studies has been noteworthy: arguably starting in the early 1980s with Tomlinson and Whannel's *Five Ring Circus* (1984), in the 1990s (Simson and Jennings 1992; Jennings 1996), through to the 2000s with the notable works of Helen Lenskyj (2000, 2002, 2008), to the plethora of papers,

chapters and books over recent years. Today, the displacement of people in order to host Beijing 2008 (Broudehoux 2012) and the link between hosting the 2004 Olympics and the depth of Greece's subsequently economic collapse (Karamichas 2012; Zervas 2012) do not seem paradoxical and can be analysed through the lens of critical Olympic studies. We owe much to those academics who write against the mainstream, and more importantly, to those individual activists in the hosting and bidding cities, who stand against the Olympic machine, its authoritarianism and censorship. Those who form activist groups and coalitions and raise their voices against the Olympic Industry embody the Marxian notion of 'praxis'—acts which shape and change the world.

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